Variability in A level results for schools and colleges 2016-2018

August 2018

Ofqual/18/6408

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 2017/2018 and in 2016/2017 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 12 subjects[1] are being awarded in England for the first time. Last summer, new A level qualifications in 13 subjects[2] were 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 14[3] of the reformed subjects. This includes mathematics where the reformed A level is available after one year of study, alongside the legacy specifications in mathematics. It is worth noting that the majority of entries this summer for mathematics are for the legacy specifications.[4]

[1] Ancient languages (Classical Greek, Latin), dance, drama and theatre, geography, mathematics, modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish), music, physical education, religious studies. Reformed A level mathematics is available after one year of study

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

[3] We have only included subjects that have at least 10,000 entries from at least 100 schools and colleges with at least 20 students in both 2017 and 2018

[4] The charts with 2018 data for A level mathematics include students from both the reformed and legacy specifications

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.[5] We have also looked at the variation for students in year 13 only (18-year-old students).[6] 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 2017/2018 graph shows a mean difference of 1%, this means that on average schools and colleges included in the analyses have increased their percentage of candidates achieving an A* or A by 1% in 2018 compared to 2017.

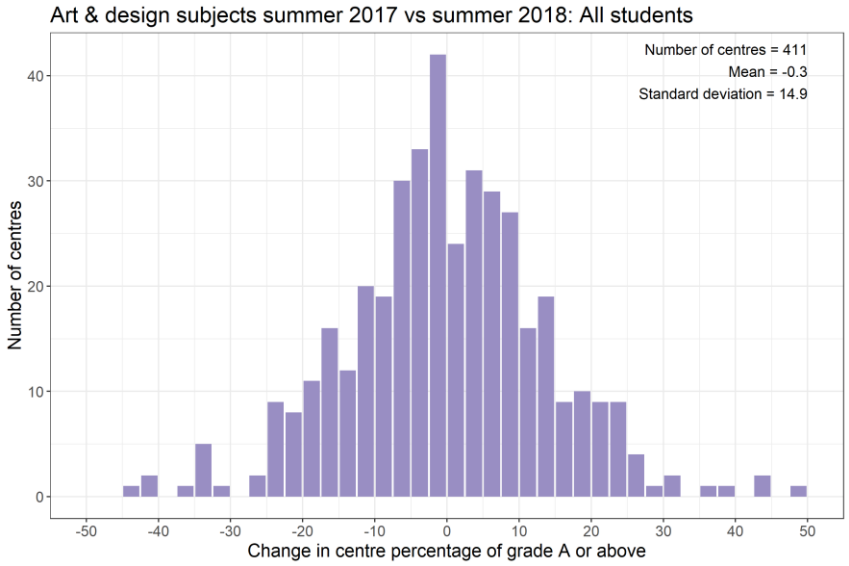
More centre variability graphs can be seen using our online application http://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk. Here the graphs are 'interactive' such that users can explore centre variability:

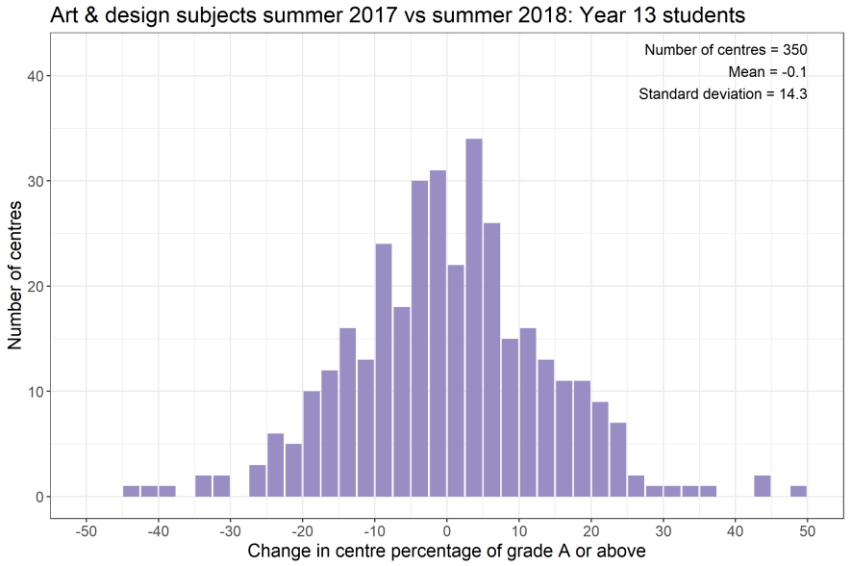
- within different subjects
- for various sizes of centres
- for only centres with stable (similar sized) cohorts from one year to the next

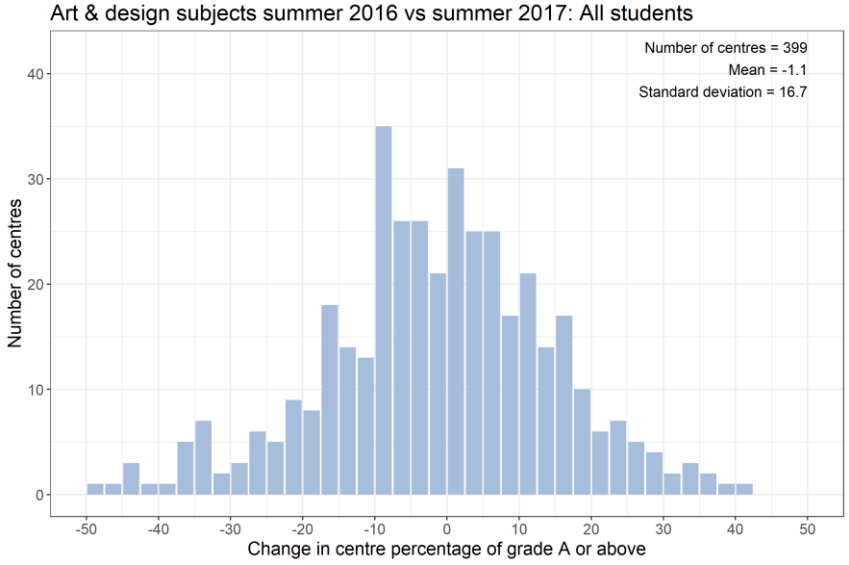
[5] Note that, although the same scales are used for the y axis on each of the graphs within a subject, the scales do vary **between** subjects

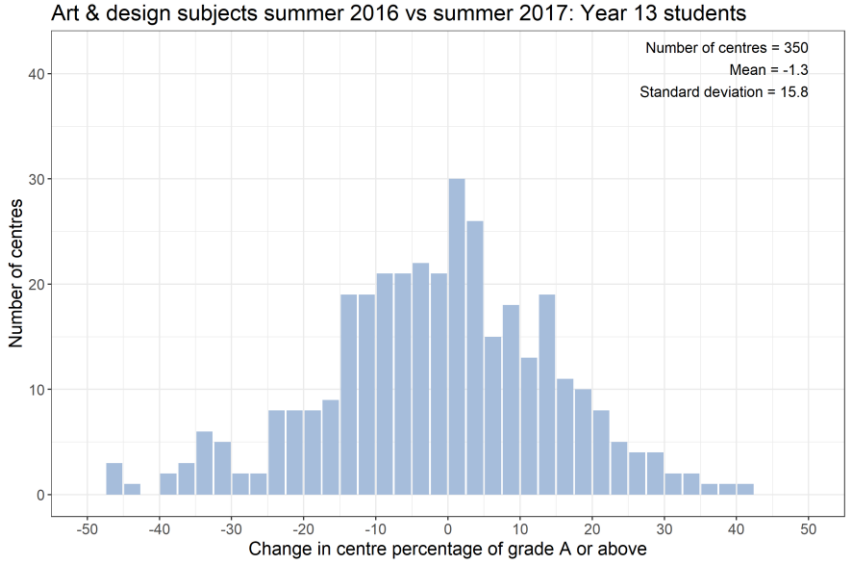
[6] Note that the number of schools/colleges is slightly lower in the Year 13 only graphs, because we have only included schools and colleges with 20 or more year 13 students.

A level art & design









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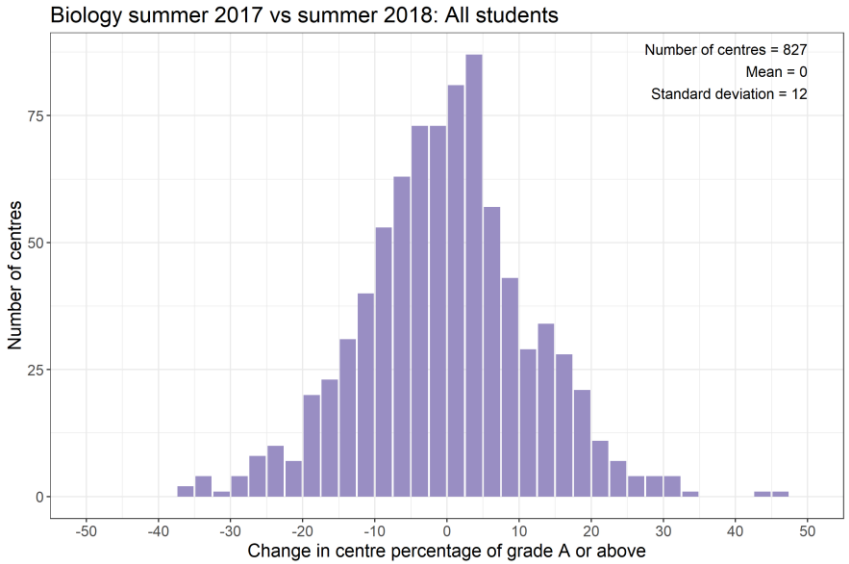
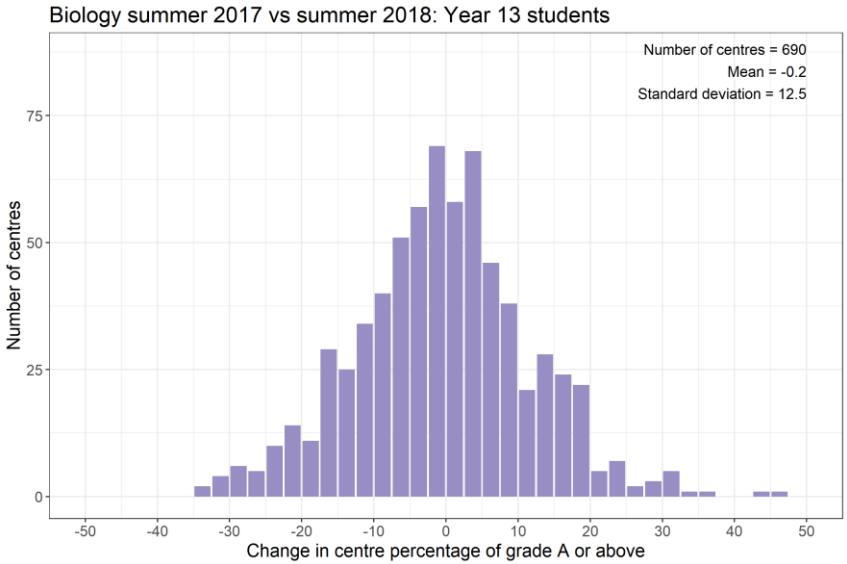
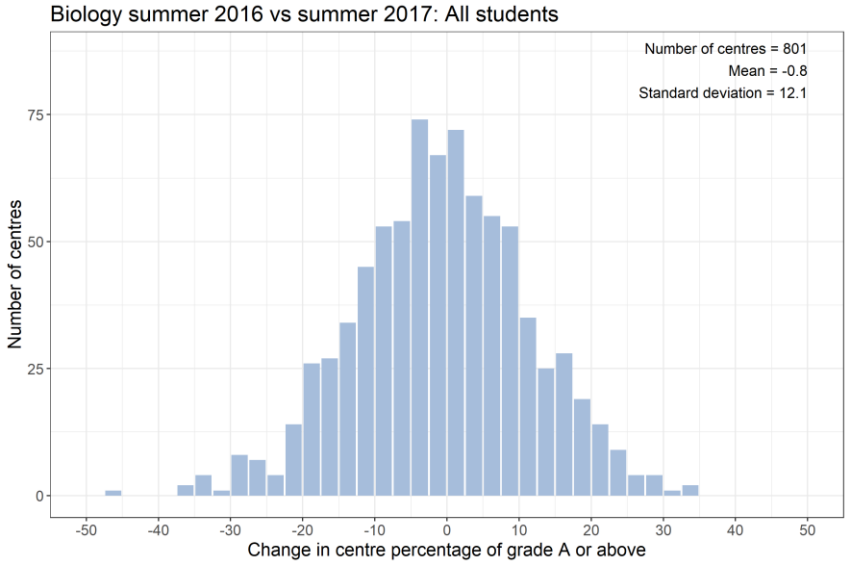
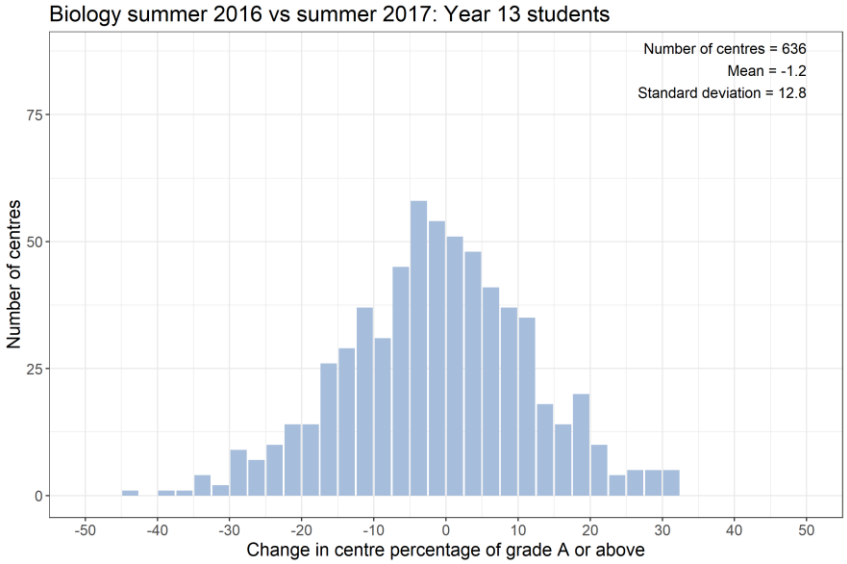
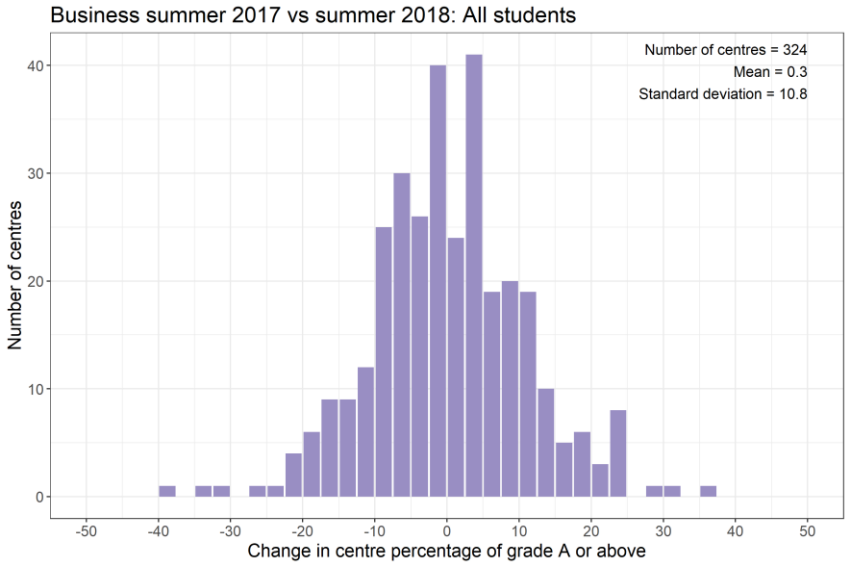


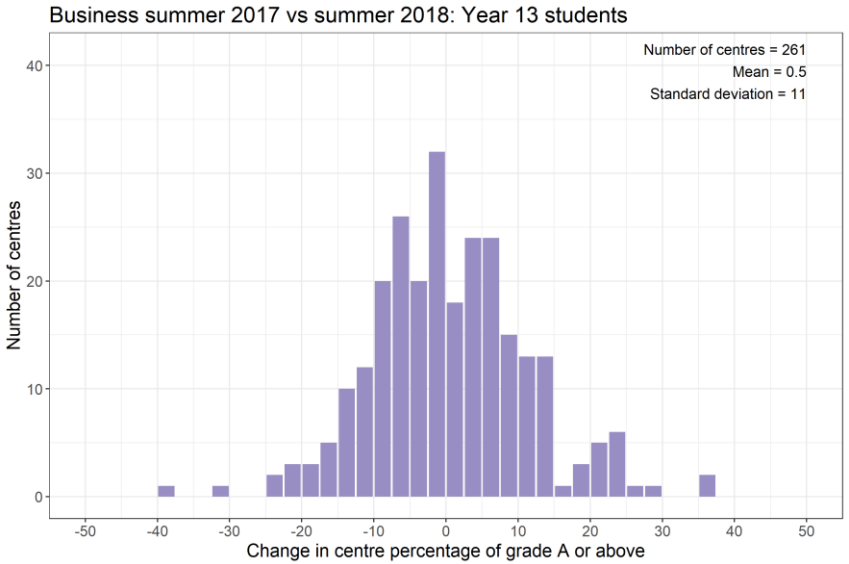


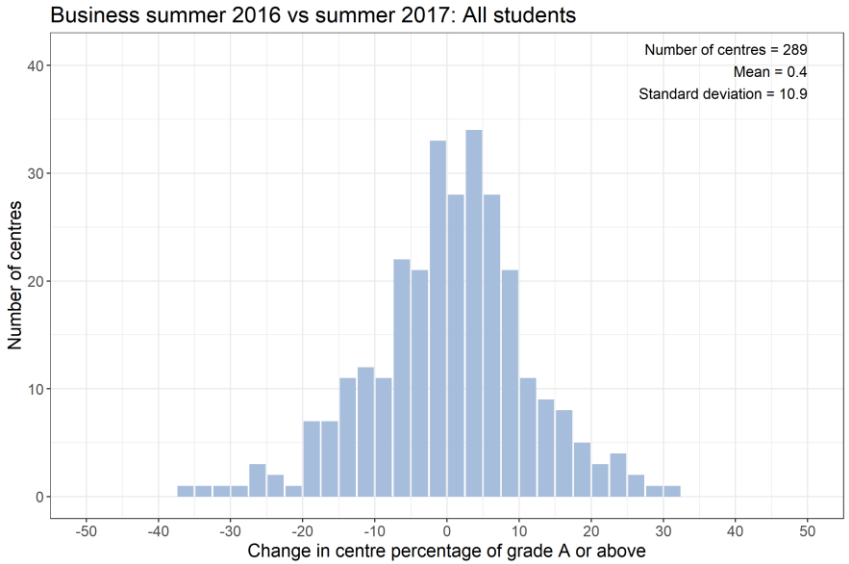


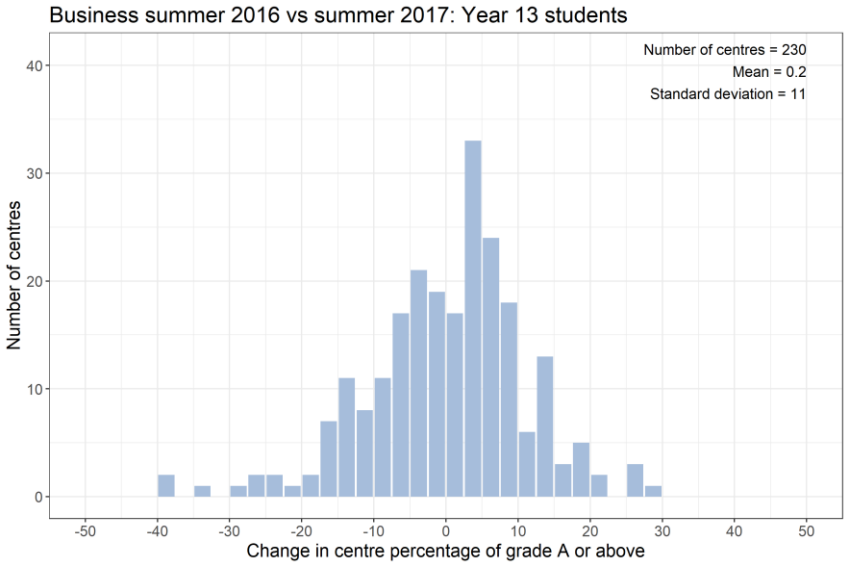


A level business









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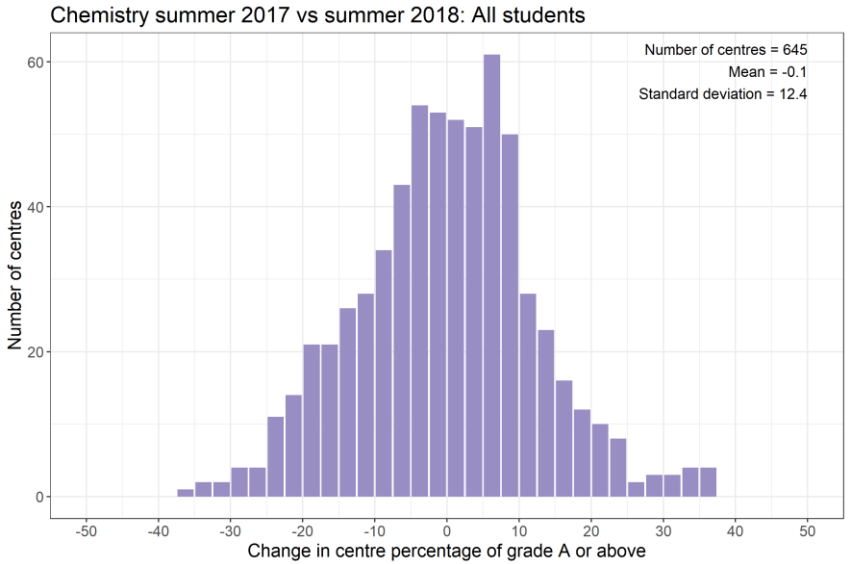

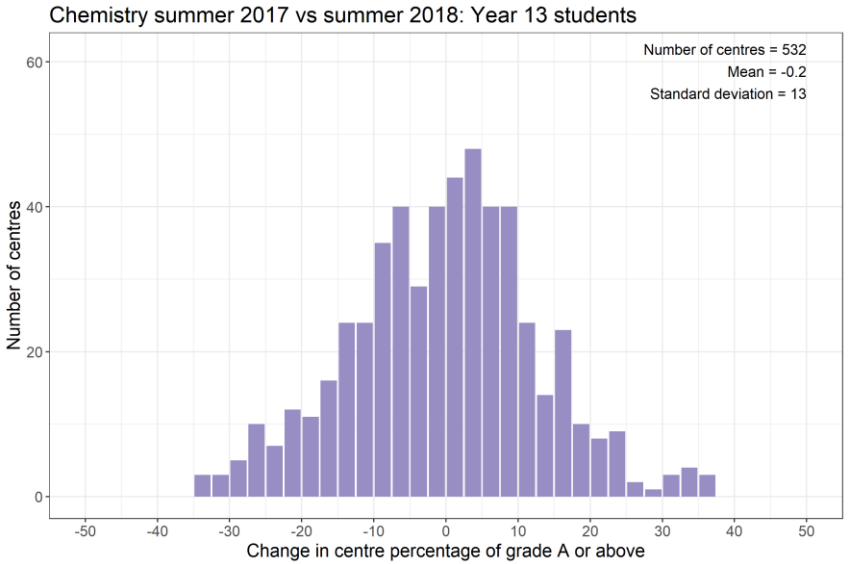

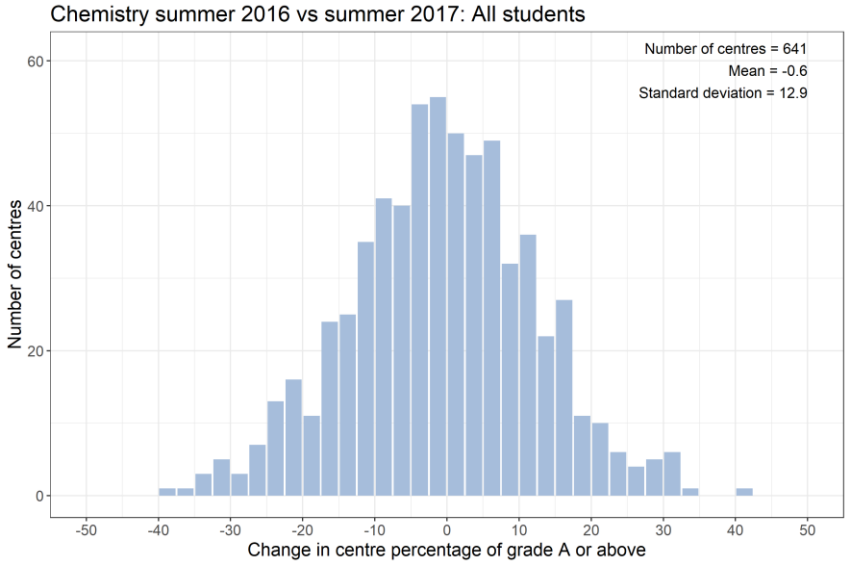

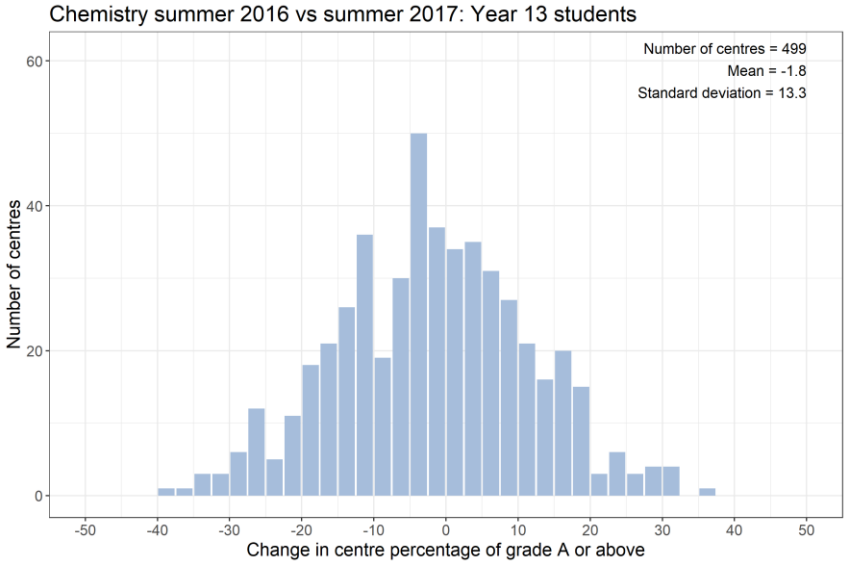

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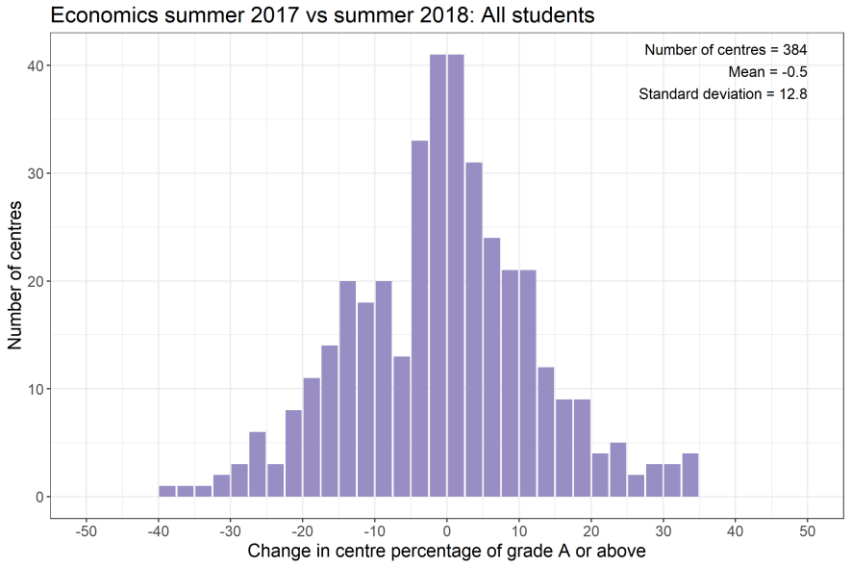
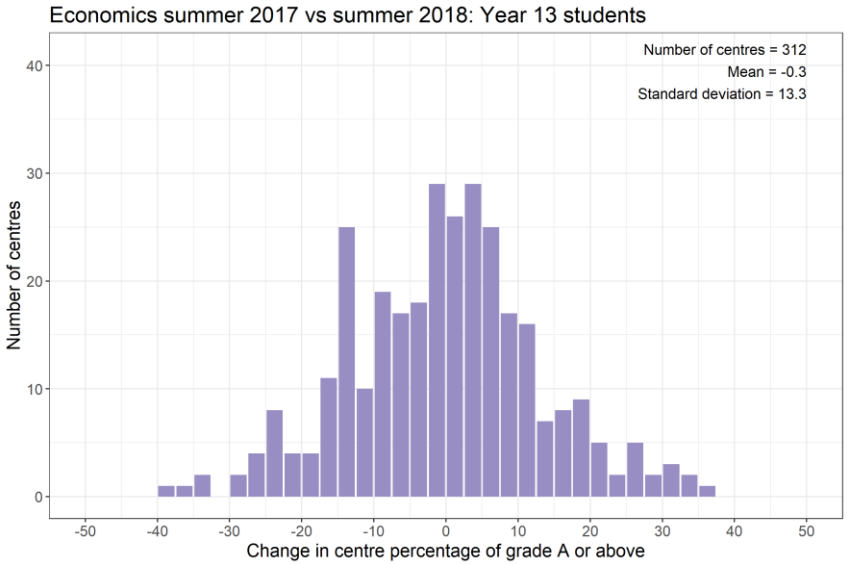
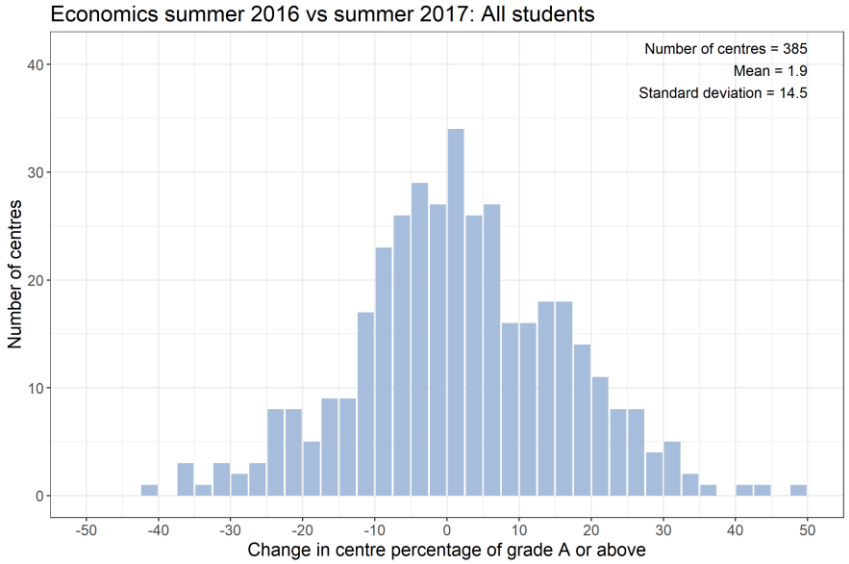
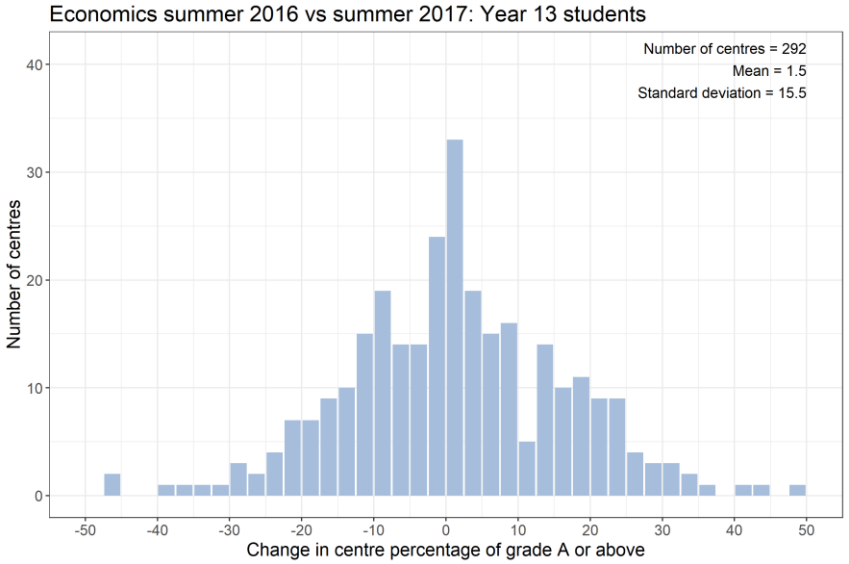
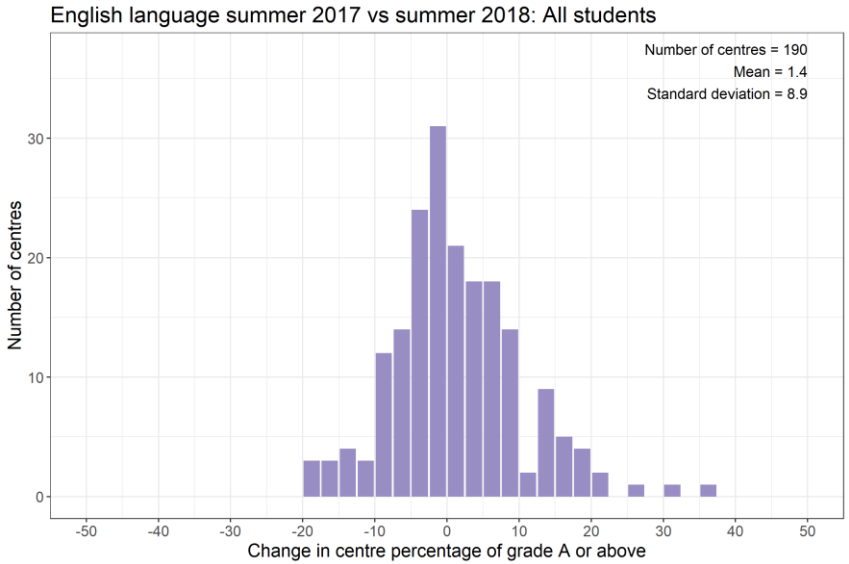


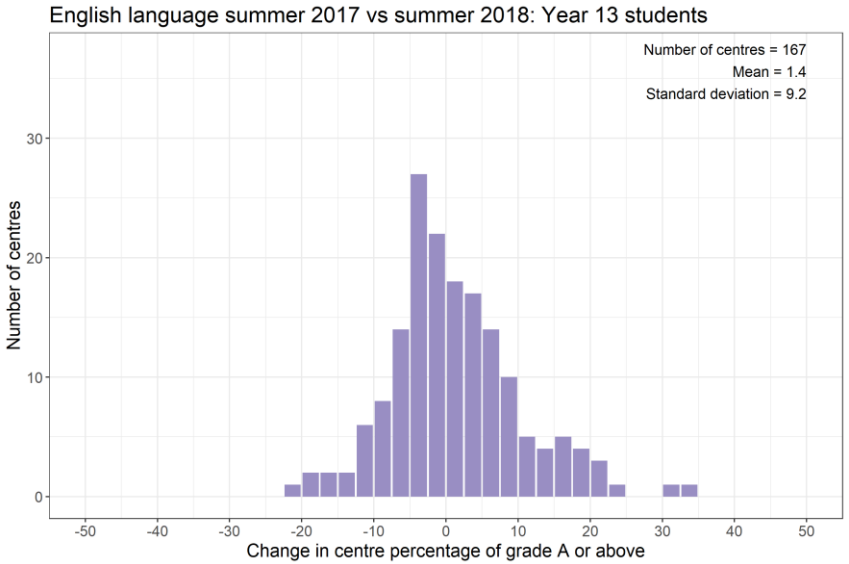


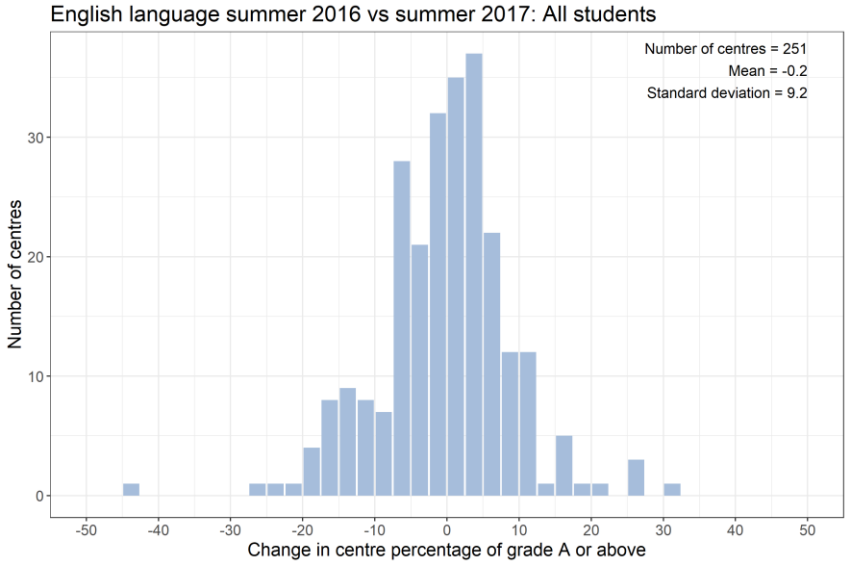


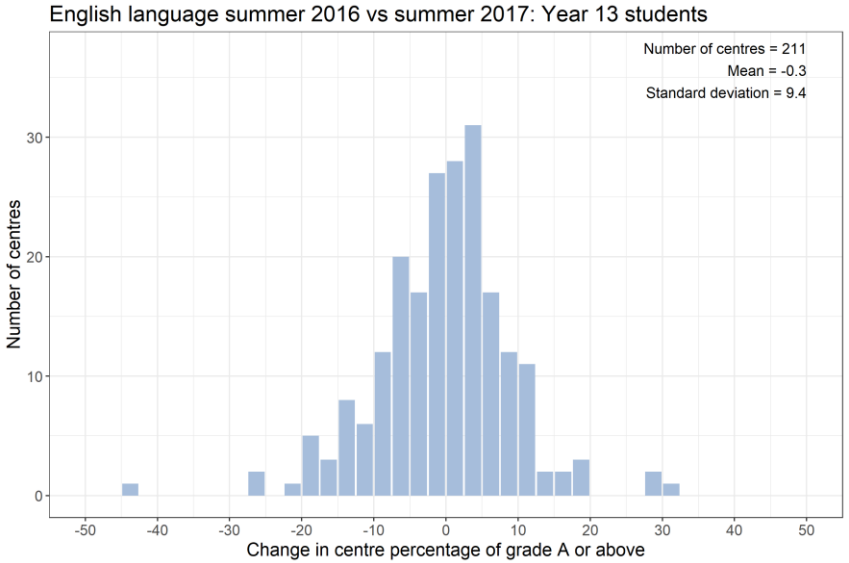


A level English language

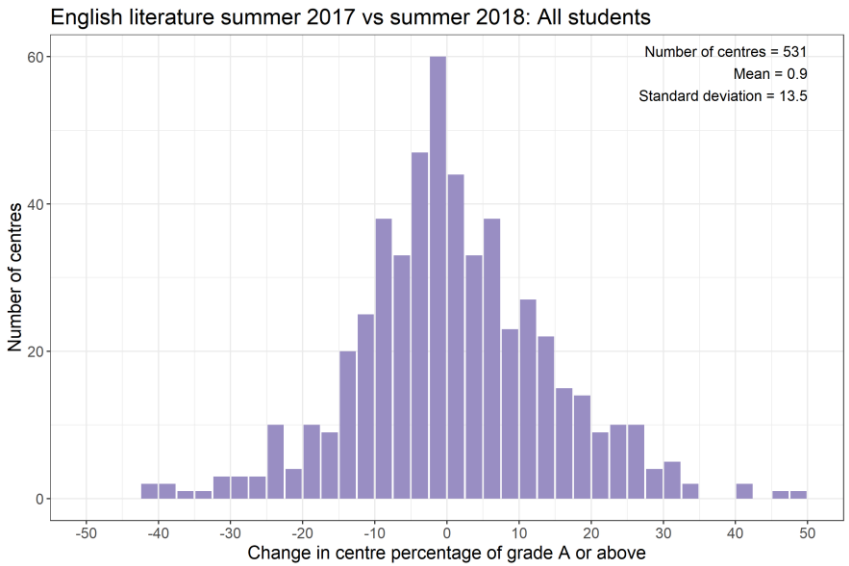


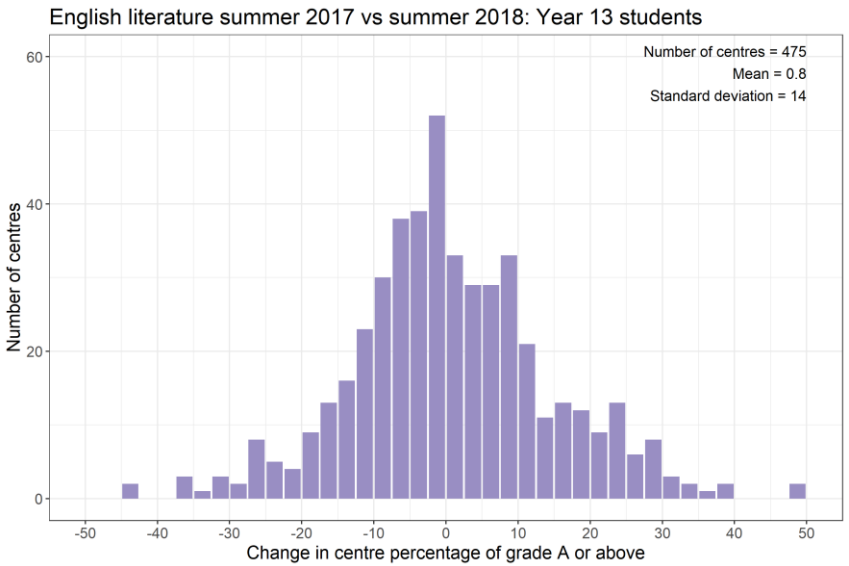


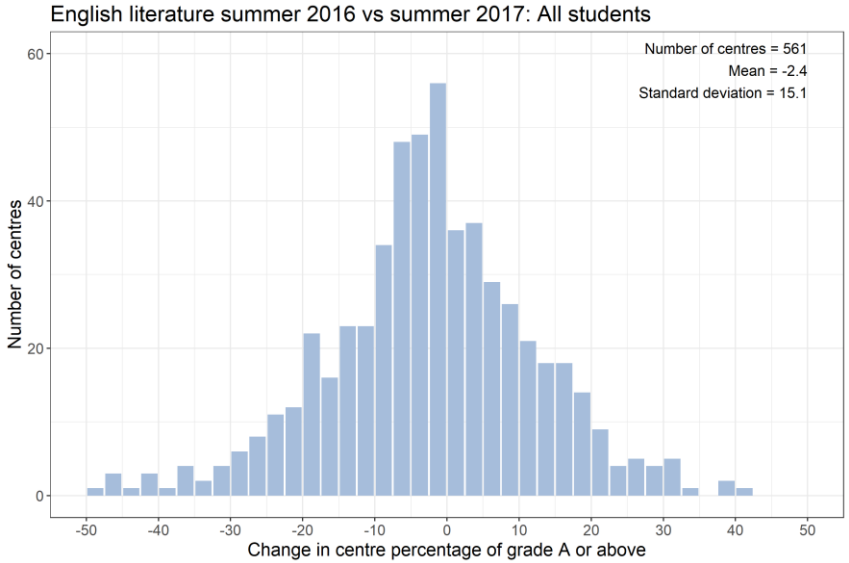


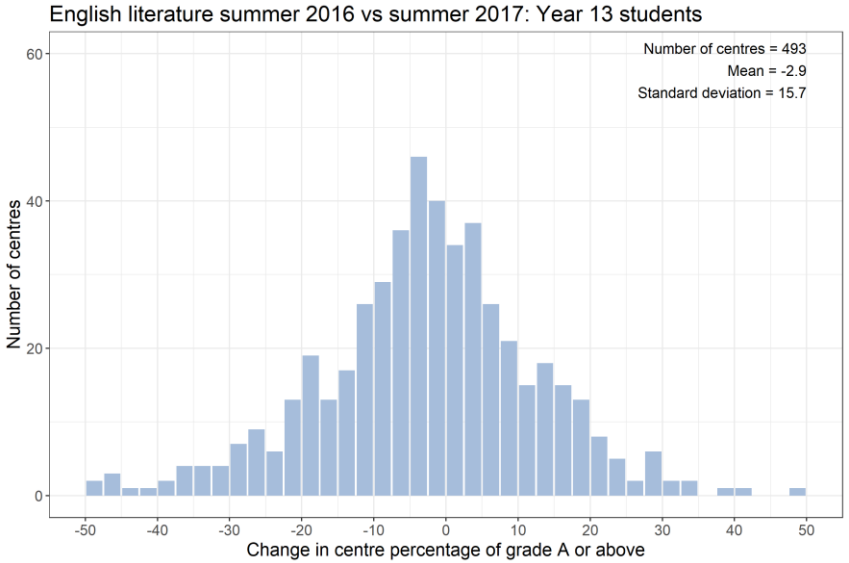


A level English literature

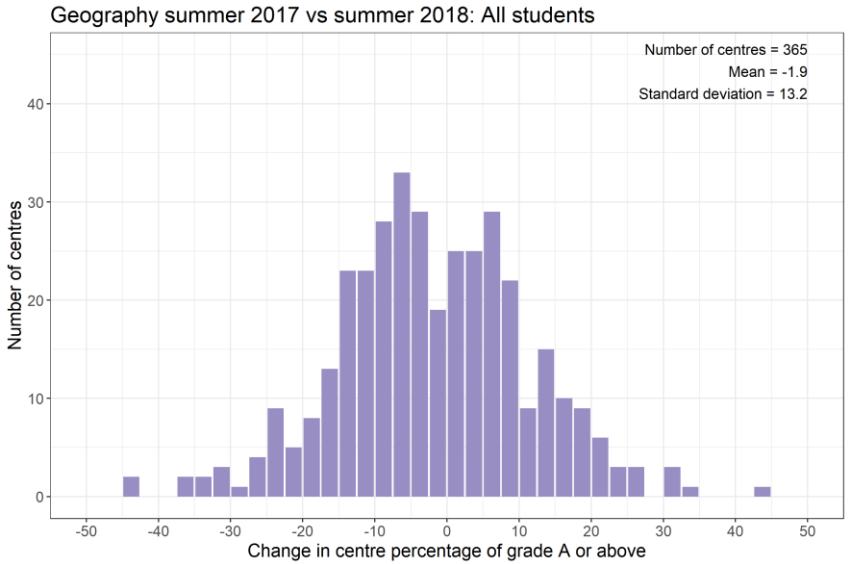


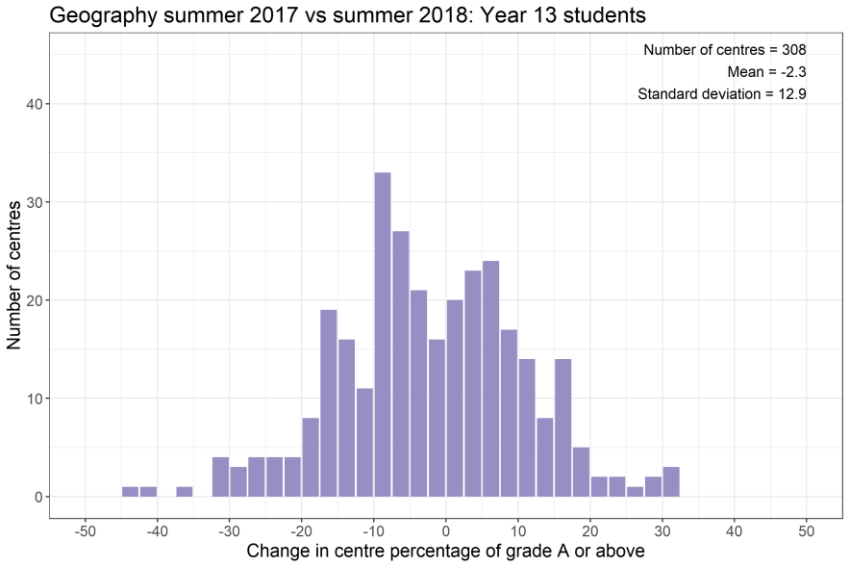


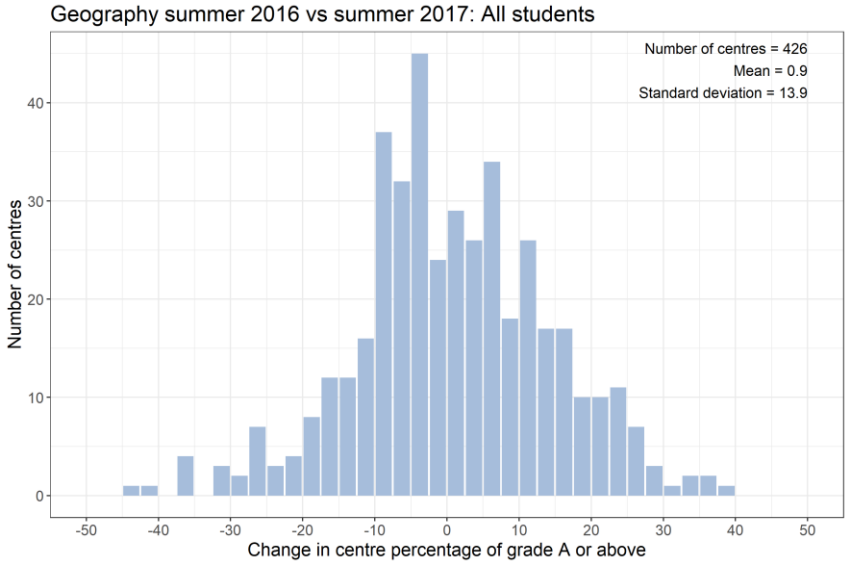


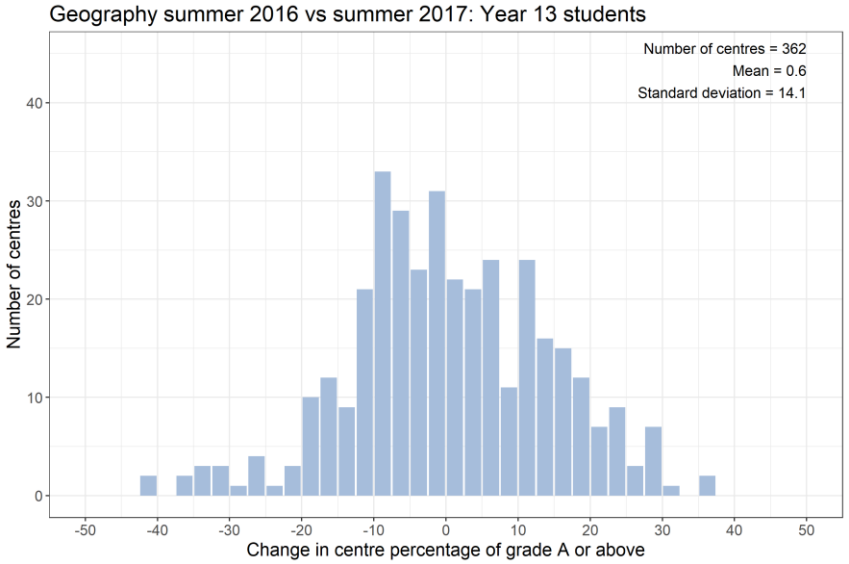


A level geography

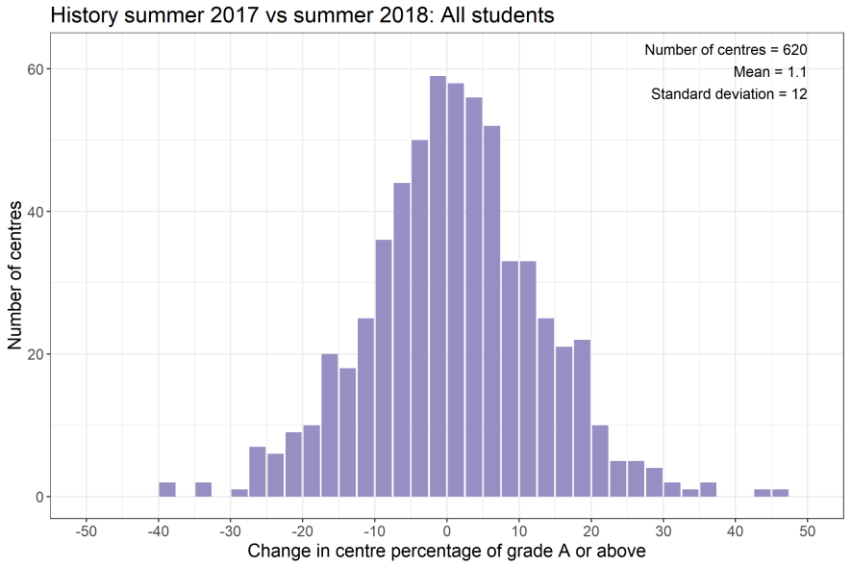


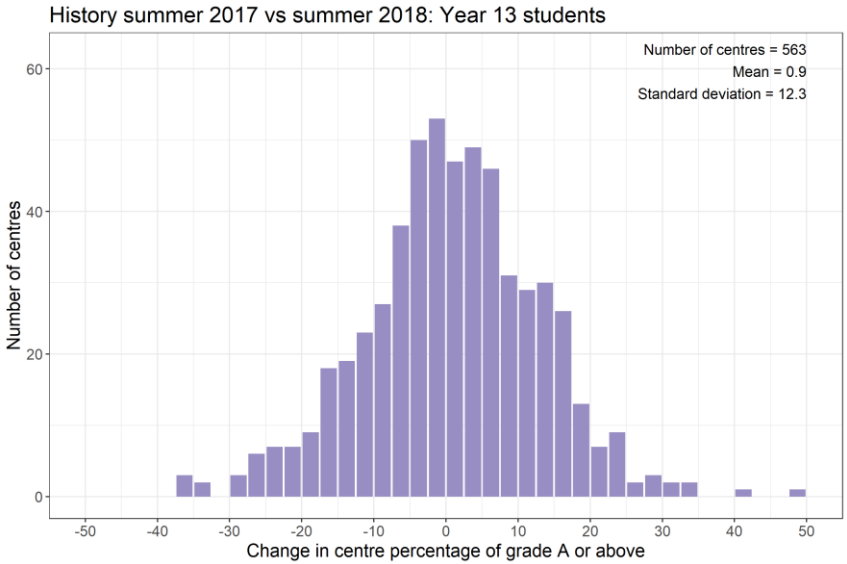


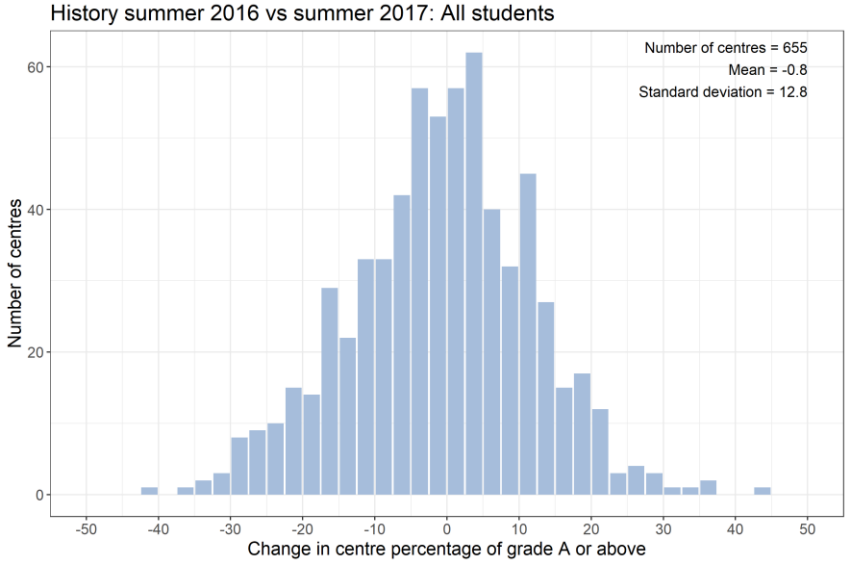


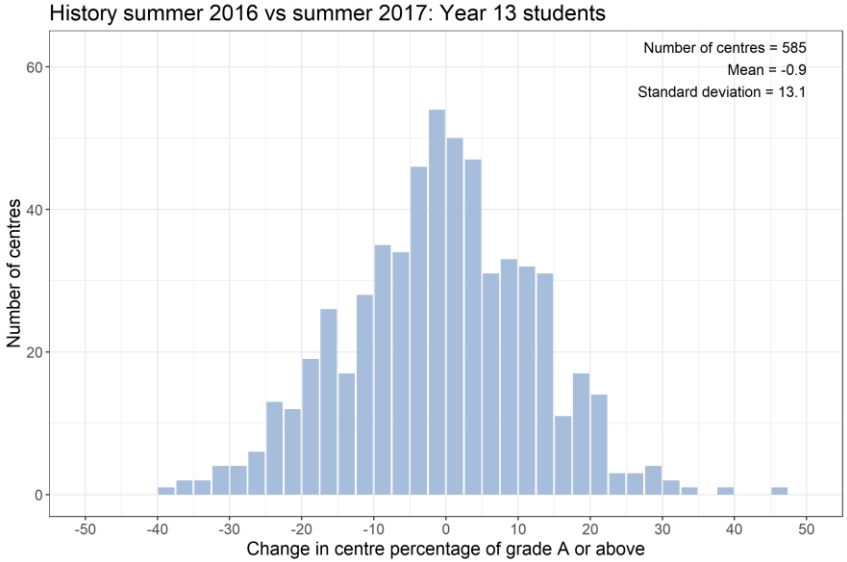


A level history

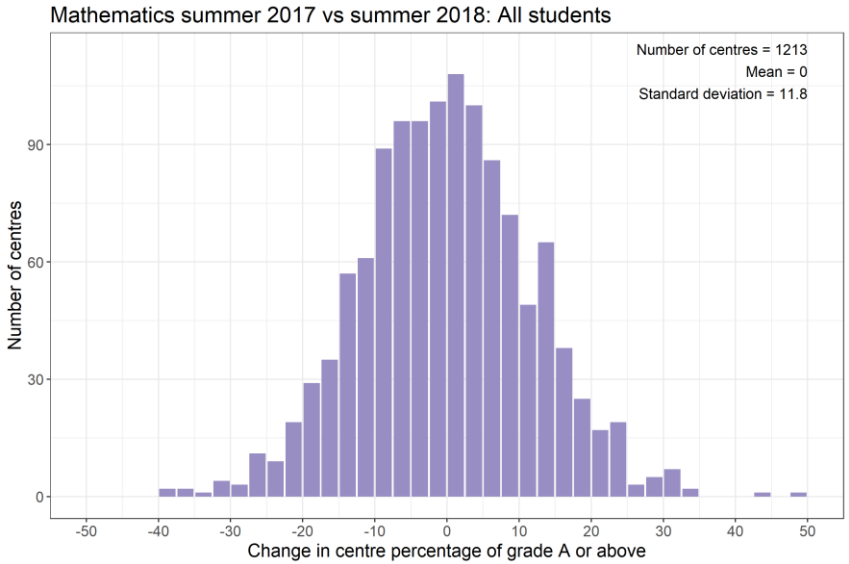


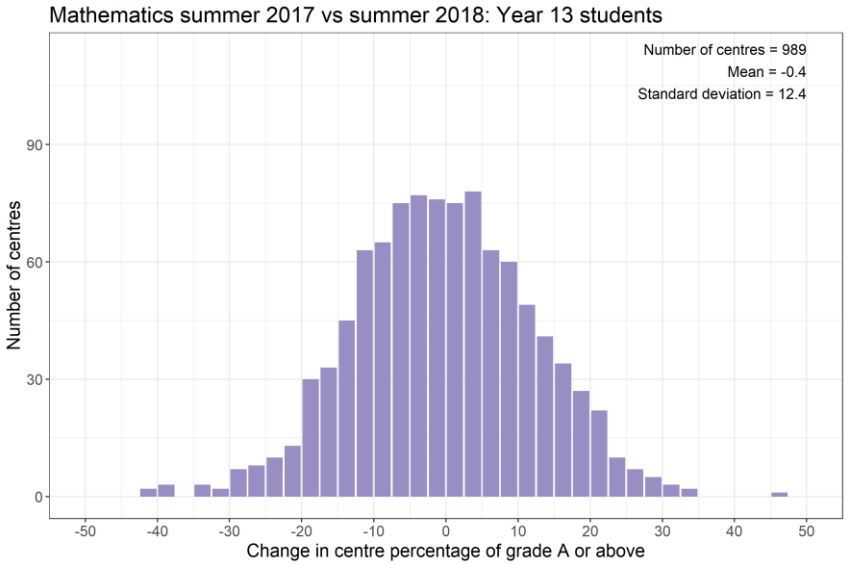


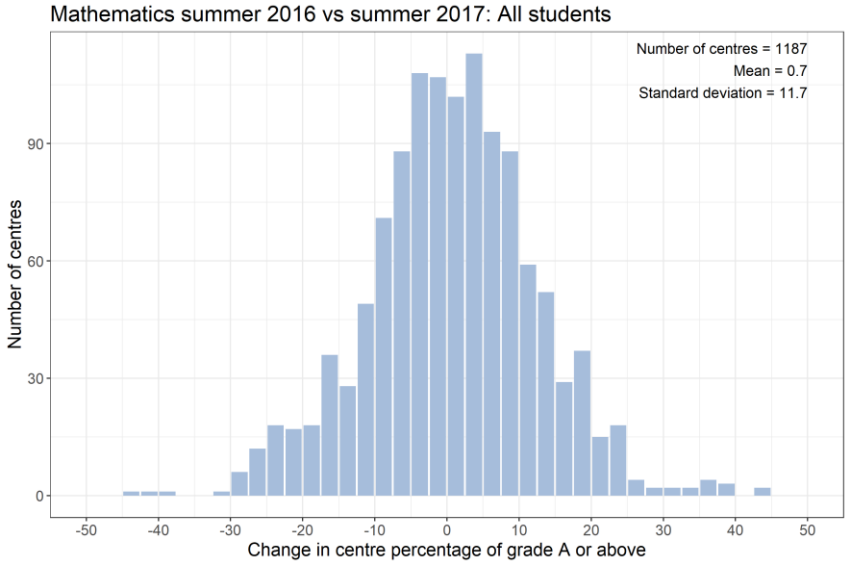


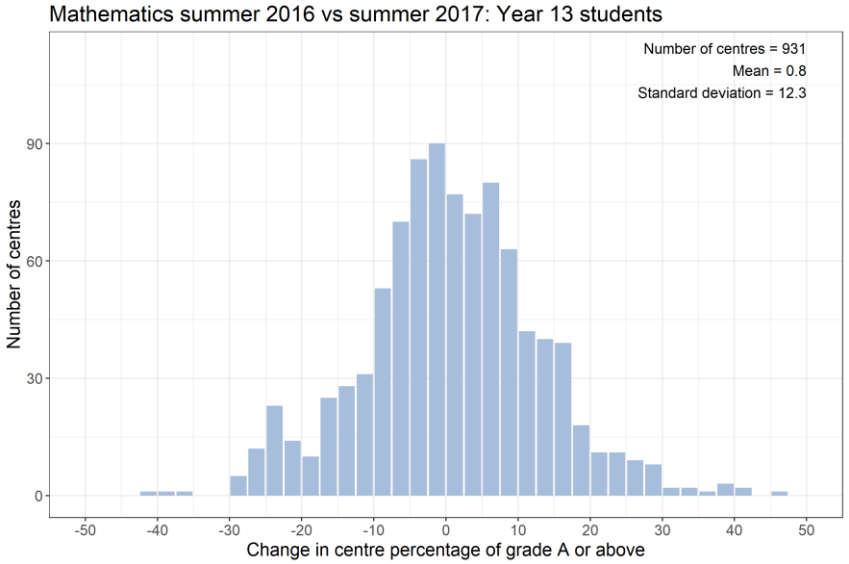


A level mathematics









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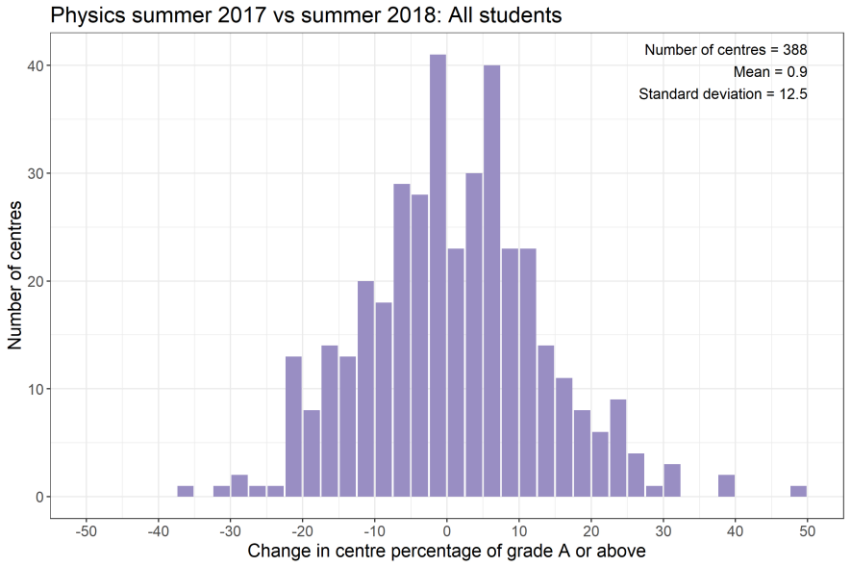
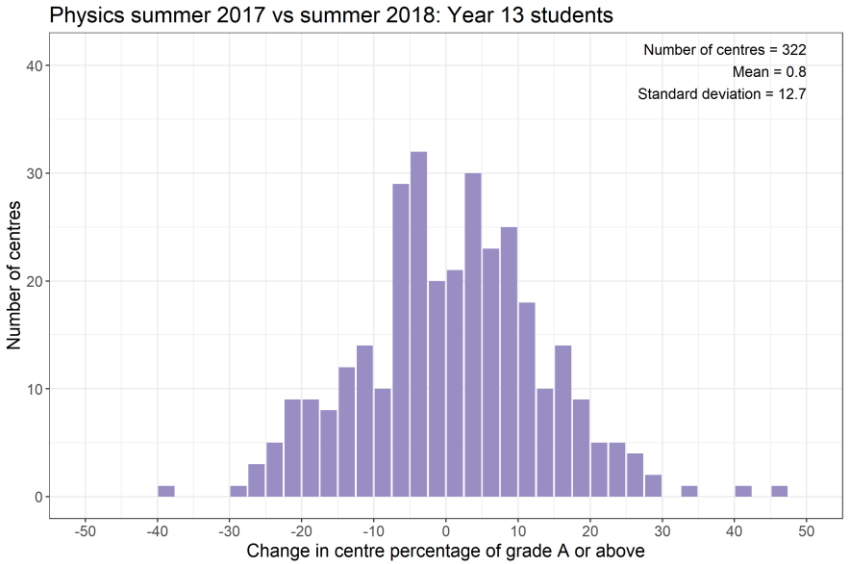
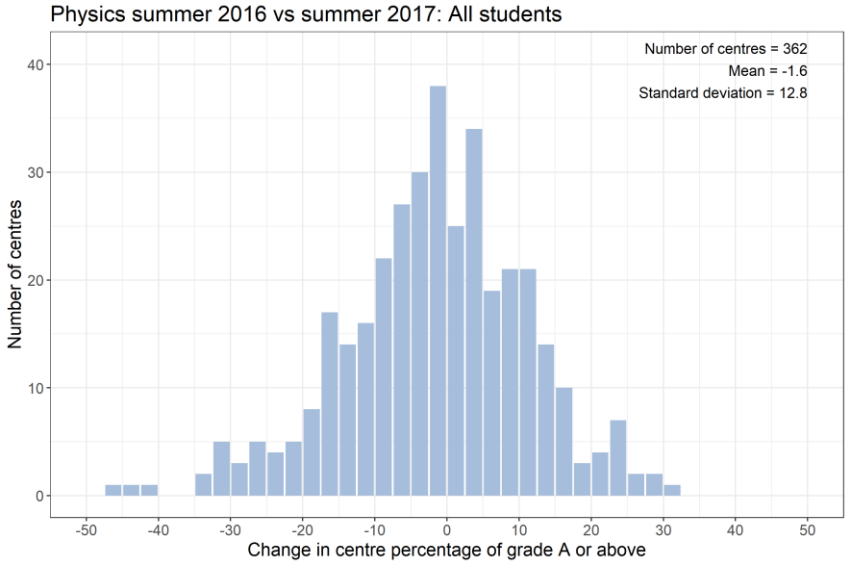
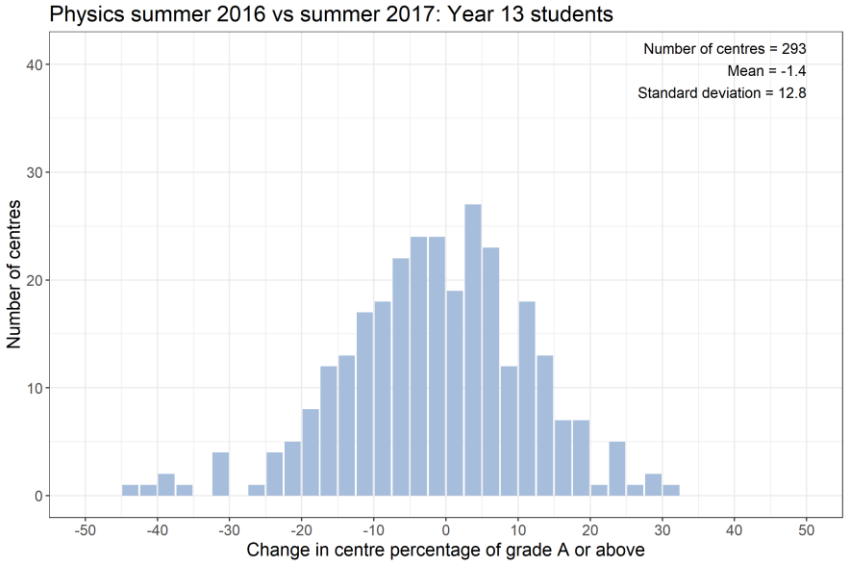
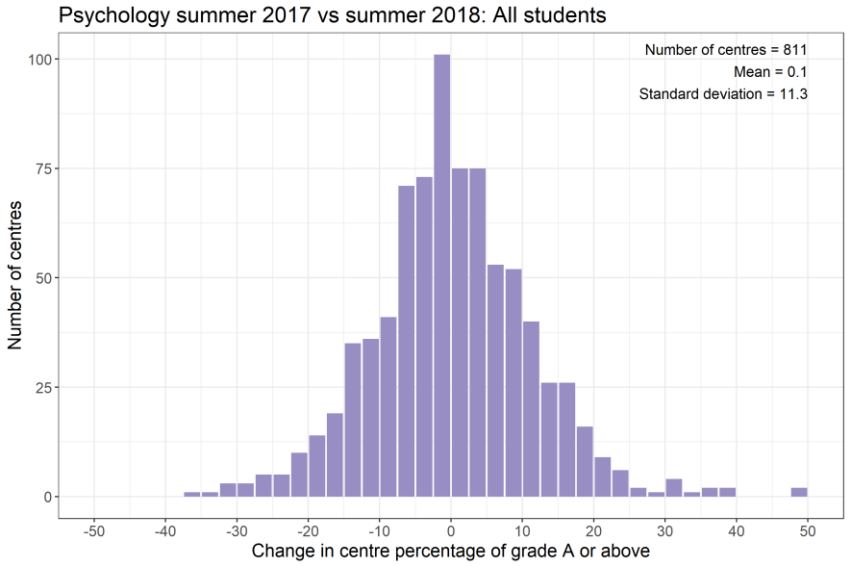


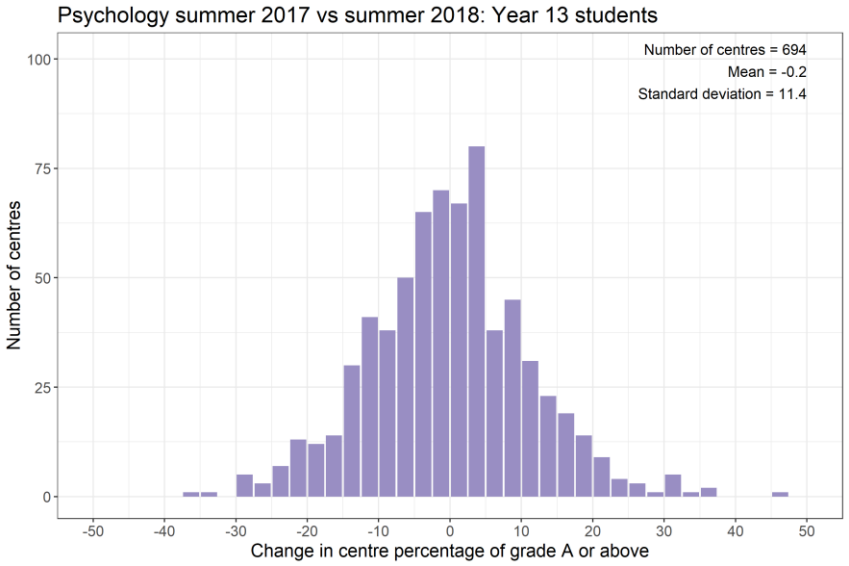


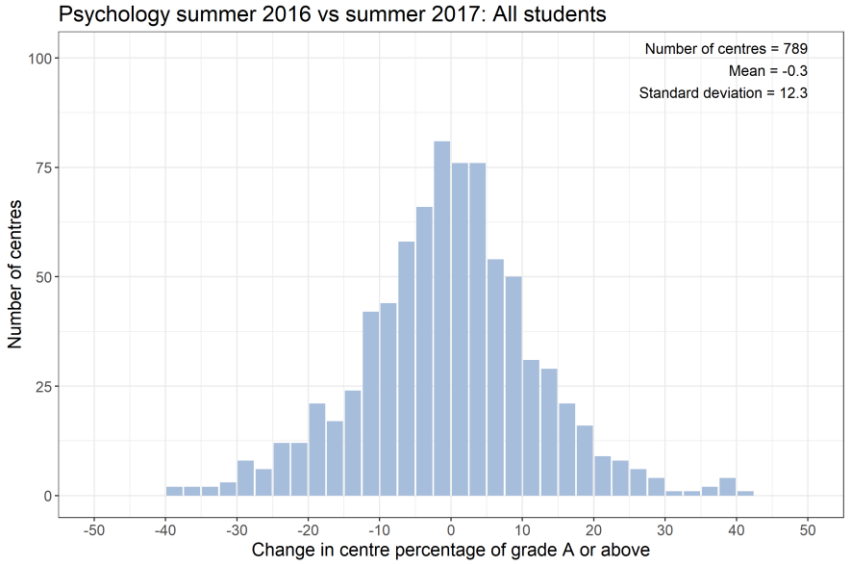


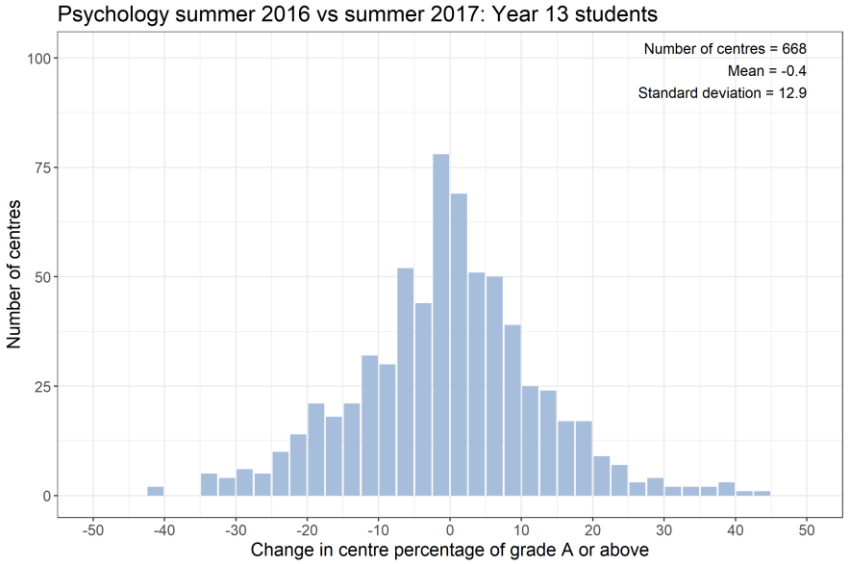


A level psychology

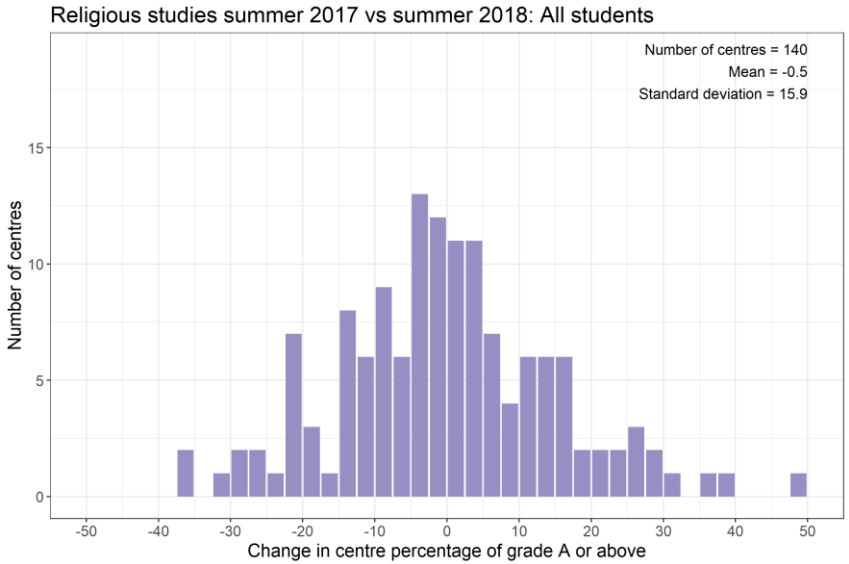


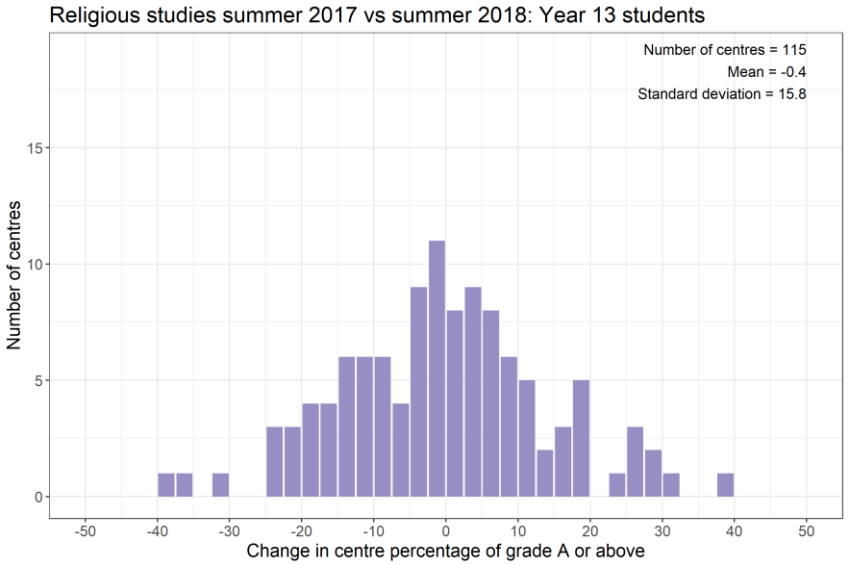


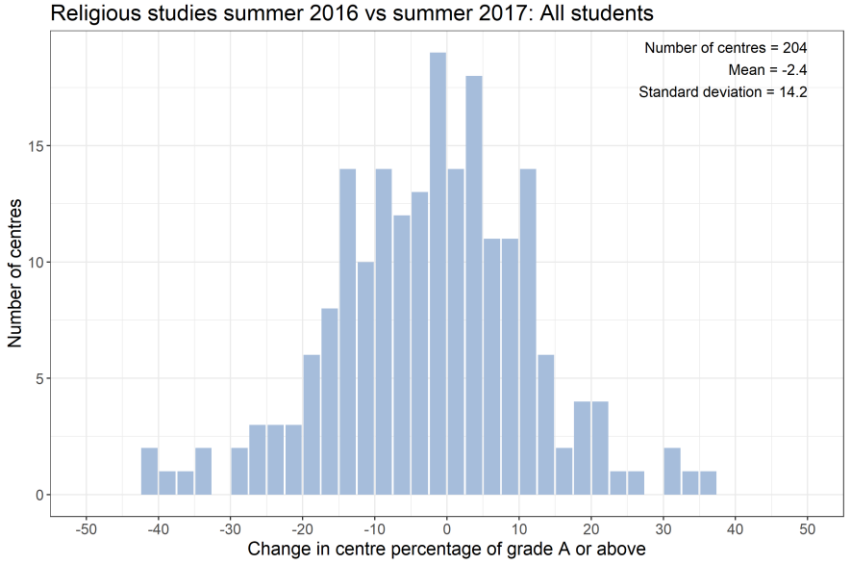


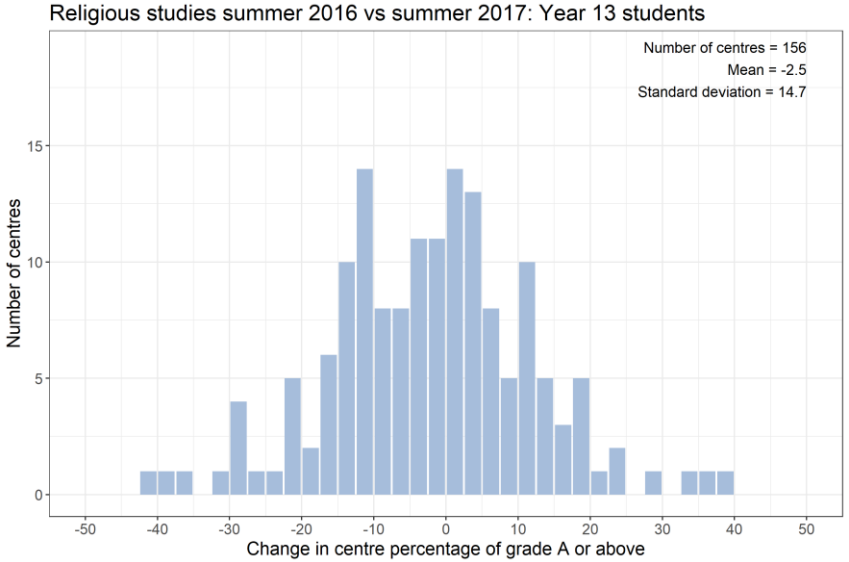


A level religious studies









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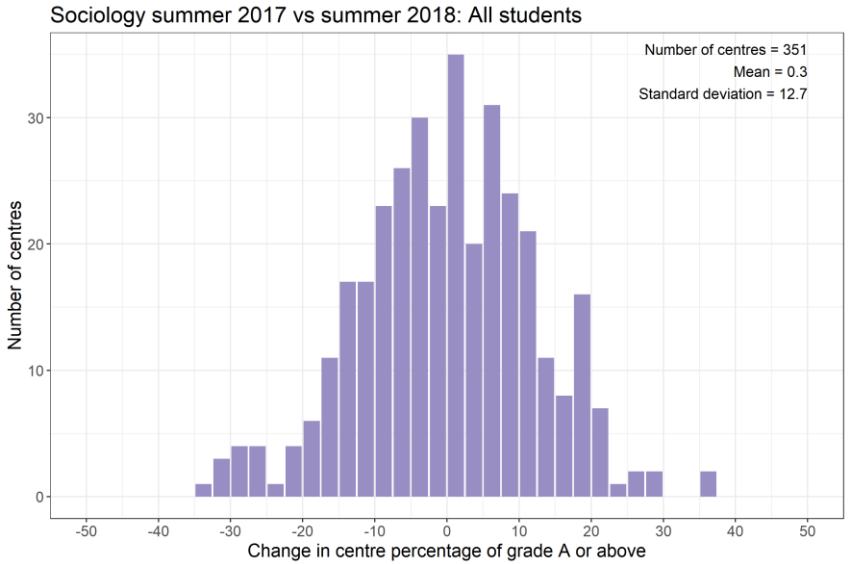

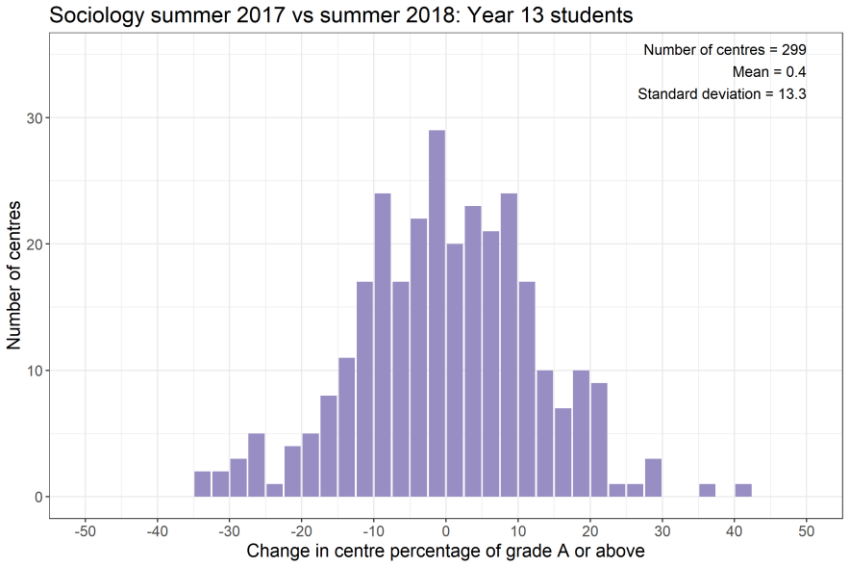

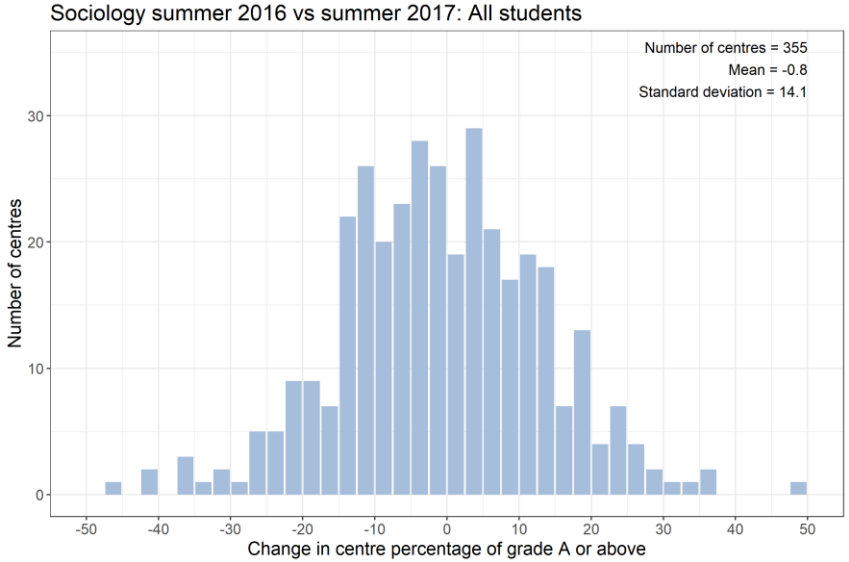

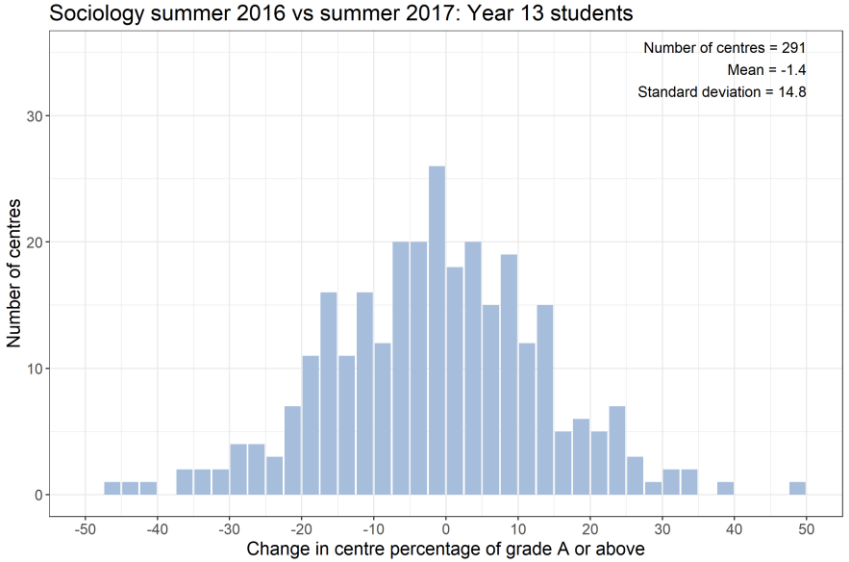

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