

OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Reviews of marking and moderation for GCSE, GCE and Project: summer 2018 exam series

Background information accompanying statistical
release

13 December 2018

The logo for Ofqual, consisting of the word "ofqual" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters "o" and "q" are underlined with a thick white horizontal bar. The logo is positioned in the bottom left corner of a blue triangular graphic that points towards the bottom right of the page.

ofqual

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Information about the statistics

Purpose

In this release, Ofqual presents data on all reviews of marking, reviews of moderation and administrative error reviews (collectively referred to as 'reviews' and formerly known as 'enquiries about results') requested for all GCSE and GCE (AS and A level) assessments as well as Project assessments taken during the summer 2018 exam series. Data on Project reviews have been included for the first time in this release.

Geographical coverage

This report presents data on the number of reviews requested in England. Five exam boards offer GCSE and GCE qualifications in England:

- AQA Education (AQA)
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), until 2015
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Pearson Education Ltd. (Pearson)
- WJEC-CBAC Ltd. (WJEC)

All of these exam boards apart from CCEA also offer Project qualifications. In addition, Project qualifications are also offered by City & Guilds.

Description

The review of marking process

Every year, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), a membership organisation of 8 providers of qualifications, including the four exam boards in England offering general qualifications, publish [information and guidance](#) for schools and colleges on making use of the post-results services for the relevant exam series. The *GCSE and GCE Qualification Level Conditions and Requirements* (the Conditions) published by Ofqual outline the requirements for reviews of marking, reviews of moderation, and administrative error reviews that exam boards must follow for GCSE ([A* to G](#) and [9 to 1](#)), A level and AS ([legacy](#) and [reformed](#)) and [Project](#) qualifications.

If a student is concerned that an error has occurred when their assessment material has been marked, then they can ask the exam board to review the marking. At the moment, exam boards only accept review requests through schools and colleges¹ and require consent from the student to request reviews of marking and administrative error reviews. Private students are the exception; the Conditions require exam boards to accept review requests directly from private students.

A whole qualification (eg GCSE biology) will comprise a number of assessments, for example, one or more examinations, coursework or controlled assessment tasks.

¹ Although the Conditions allow the exam boards to choose whether to extend review requests to individual students, they have decided not to.

Reviews are requested for each assessment individually and not for the qualification as a whole. Often reviews are requested for multiple assessments that a student has taken for one qualification. This is why the total number of qualification grades challenged is always lower than the total number of reviews of marking. Reviews of moderation are different, as one review involves a number of students (see explanation [below](#)). However, the vast majority of reviews requested are reviews of marking and so, overall, the number of grades challenged is always lower than the number of reviews requested.

In some cases, multiple reviews are requested for the same assessment, for example, an administrative error review may be requested and then a review of marking. Where an assessment is made up of more than one part (known as subcomponents) and a student must complete all subcomponents to complete the assessment (for example, an exam with a multiple-choice element and a written element), a review can be made on an individual subcomponent in some cases.

If the review shows that marking or administrative errors have been made and the student's result is incorrect, the exam board is required to change the mark to correct the error. In some cases, this may affect the overall qualification grade, which will then also be adjusted. Grades can be adjusted downwards as well as upwards². Exam boards charge a fee if qualification grades are not changed following review, or, for a review of moderation, if the original school or college marks are not reinstated.

The Conditions state that exam boards must set their own timescales within which they should complete reviews and report the outcome and for GCE and GCSE qualifications they must do so within the timeframe of 'key dates' we have prescribed. These provide a common minimum window for centres and/or students, and allow exam boards to set common dates if they wish – which they have so far all chosen to do. The dates the exam boards have chosen to set are detailed in the sections on each type of review below.

Each exam board offers three post-results services for reviewing exam papers and internal assessment:

- An administrative error review for an individual assessment ("Service 1")
- A review of marking for an individual assessment ("Service 2")
- A review of moderation of the school or college's internal assessment using the sample of students' work that was used in the initial moderation ("Service 3").

Administrative error review of an individual student's script

The exam board checks the script to make sure that every question has been marked and the total number of marks awarded for that script is correctly added up and recorded and no error has occurred. This year exam boards stipulated that schools and colleges must have requested this service by 20 September 2018. The deadline set by exam boards by which they must notify schools and colleges about the outcomes of administrative error reviews is 10 calendar days from the date of receipt.

² For administrative error reviews and reviews of marking, grades have been adjusted downwards as well as upwards since 2001. For reviews of moderation, grades can only be confirmed or raised although this might be subject to change in future years.

Review of marking for an individual assessment

A reviewer considers the marking of the original examiner to determine, in respect of each task in the assessment for which marks could have been awarded, whether the marking included any marking error(s). The exam board also does a full administrative error review if this has not been previously requested for the assessment.

Exam boards typically operate two priority levels:

- Non-priority – exam boards stipulated that schools and colleges must have requested this by 20 September 2018.
- Priority – schools and colleges can request this if the student's place at further or higher education depends on the outcome of a review or if a quick response is desired³. Exam boards stipulated that requests for a priority service 2 review must have been submitted by 23 August 2018 for GCE qualifications and 30 August 2018 for GCSE qualifications.

The deadline set by exam boards by which they must notify schools and colleges about the outcomes of reviews of marking is 20 calendar days for the non-priority service and 15 calendar days for the priority service from the date of receipt.

Review of moderation of the school or college's internal assessment using the sample of students' work

This service is not available for individual students as the review of moderation is usually undertaken on a sample of students' work to judge if there were any errors with the initial moderation or with any adjustments made to the centre's original marks as a result of the moderation.

The exam board reviews the initial moderation to make sure that the moderation was carried out correctly and in accordance with the marking criteria and/ or if there were any errors made in any adjustments made to the centre's original marks as a result of the moderation. If an error in the moderation process is found it is corrected. Exam boards stipulated that this service must have been requested by 20 September 2018. The deadline set by exam boards by which they must notify schools and colleges about the outcomes of reviews of moderation is 35 calendar days from the moderator receiving the original sample of work from the school or college.

Appeals

If a school or college has requested a review but is still dissatisfied with the outcome, it can make an appeal to the exam board. The exam boards offer a two-stage appeals process. There is also a final stage available through the [Examination Procedures Review Service](#). A report presenting the data on appeals for the summer 2018 exam series will be published by Ofqual in Spring 2019.

³ All exam boards offer priority reviews of marking for GCE assessments. However, for GCSE assessments only Pearson and WJEC offer this service at the moment.

Context

When considering the data presented in this release, it is important to note a number of recent changes to qualifications and requirements for marking reviews that are likely to have impacted on these figures.

Changes to the review of marking process

In August 2016, Ofqual introduced Conditions which specify the requirements for reviews of marking and moderation that exam boards offering qualifications in England must follow. The key changes to the review of marking process following the introduction of the Conditions were as follows:

- A mark must only be changed following an administrative error review, a review of marking or a review of moderation if an error occurred, and the reason for this must be recorded.
- Exam boards must have their own review processes and publish these.
- Exam boards are required to train reviewers (including those undertaking reviews of moderation) prior to undertaking reviews and monitor their performance as reviewers.

These new requirements are likely to have impacted the number of reviews requested and the outcomes of the reviews from summer 2016 onwards.

Qualification reform

GCSEs and GCEs have been undergoing major reform (see [here](#) for more information and a timetable of the reforms). The first reformed AS qualifications were awarded in summer 2016, and the first reformed GCSE and A level qualifications were awarded in summer 2017. This year, the majority of GCSE and GCE certifications were in reformed qualifications.

In 2018, GCSE combined science (dual award) replaced GCSE science and GCSE additional science which were two separate qualifications. Combined science is graded on a 17-point grading scale from 9-9 to 1-1. To allow comparison to previous years, these grades have been counted separately in the combined science statistics. Therefore, if a review of marking is requested for a combined science qualification, this is counted as two grades challenged. Any grade changes resulting from reviews of marking are also counted separately. For example, a grade change from 3-3 to 4-4 is counted as two grade changes of one grade. A grade change from 3-3 to 5-4 is counted as one grade change of two grades and one grade change of one grade. In line with JCQ's [results day publications](#) and our [Entries for GCSE, AS and A level](#) Official Statistics publication, we have double counted the certifications for combined science in the data tables accompanying this release (table 7).

In England, all reformed qualifications are linear meaning that all exam assessment is taken at the end of the course during the summer exam series⁴. Changes to the structure of qualifications following reform are likely to have impacted upon the number of reviews requested. Generally, reformed GCSEs have a higher number of exams. For example, in English language, students generally now take two exam

⁴ Although English language and mathematics resits are available in the November series.

papers rather than one. This increase in the number of exams is likely to lead to an increase in the number of reviews of marking and administrative error reviews requested from summer 2017 onwards.

Reformed GCEs either have the same number or fewer assessments than the qualifications they have replaced. For example, A level chemistry used to comprise six assessments but reformed qualifications have three. For reformed qualifications, AS qualifications no longer form part of the A level and the decoupling of these qualifications has resulted in fewer students taking reformed AS qualifications. These structural changes have resulted in a substantial reduction in the number of GCE assessments taken in England in the summer series over the last few years – from 5.3 million in 2015 to 2.8 million in 2018. As fewer assessments have been taken, this will naturally mean that fewer reviews will be requested. Furthermore, as AS and A levels are reported together in this report, caution should be taken when comparing GCE reviews over time. This is because the number of A levels awarded has remained fairly consistent over the past few years but the number of AS qualifications awarded has declined from 1,180,615 in summer 2016 to 670,015 in summer 2017 and 273,950 in summer 2018 (see our [Entries and Late Entries](#) report for more information).

Schools and colleges are more likely to switch exam boards during periods of reform when new qualifications are available for first teaching. Changes in market share will impact on the number of review requests each exam board receives and this should be borne in mind when comparing figures across years for each exam board. To aid interpretation of the data, figures for the number of GCSE and GCE certifications and assessment entries broken down by exam board are presented in Table 1 of the accompanying data tables.

Undertakings from exam boards

In December 2017, we accepted an [undertaking](#) from the exam board AQA regarding its reviews of marking and moderation, as AQA identified that it had failed to secure full compliance with the Conditions relating to reviews of marking and moderation in summer 2017. In July 2018, we accepted a similar [undertaking](#) from the exam board OCR, which recognised that its approach to compliance with the Conditions relating to reviews of marking and moderation in summer 2017 was not sufficiently robust. This is likely to have impacted the figures for 2017.

GCSE resit policy

Since August 2015, full time students who have not achieved a grade C/4 or above in GCSE (or Level 1/ Level 2 certificate) in English/English language and mathematics must continue studying these subjects in order to be funded post-16. This change may have resulted in an increase in reviews submitted in these subjects from 2015. Furthermore, the summer 2017 series was the last opportunity for students to resit legacy versions of GCSE qualifications in English/English language and mathematics. Therefore, more requests were likely to have been submitted in respect of students who did not achieve a grade C in these legacy qualifications in 2017 than in previous years.

Accountability reform

It is possible that changes to performance measures may have had an impact on the number of reviews requested by schools and colleges from summer 2016 onwards. As part of changes to the [secondary accountability system announced in 2013](#), Progress 8 and Attainment 8 became key measures of performance in England in 2016 for all state-funded secondary schools and those colleges that offer KS4 education.

Progress 8 captures the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school. It is a type of value-added measure, which means that pupils' results are compared to the results of other pupils nationally with similar prior attainment. The greater the Progress 8 score for a school, the more progress pupils at that school make on average compared to other pupils nationally with similar starting points.

Attainment 8 measures the achievement of a pupil across 8 qualifications including mathematics and English, three qualifications that count in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) measure and three further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or any other government approved non-GCSE qualifications. Grades achieved in mathematics and English are double weighted. For English, if students have taken both English language and English literature GCSEs, the highest grade that each student achieves counts towards the measure and this is double weighted but the other English qualification may still count in Progress 8 overall (single weighted).

Progress 8 and Attainment 8 replaced the 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics headline measure and expected progress measures. The new measures take into account progress and attainment across the full grade range and so there is now less focus on achieving a 4/C or above. It is therefore possible that this change could result in a wider range of GCSE grades being challenged.

The introduction of Attainment 8, along with the large migration from Level 1/ Level 2 certificates to GCSEs in summer 2017, is likely to have contributed to the large increase in the number of certifications in GCSE English language and English literature from summer 2017 onwards (see Table 7 in the accompanying data tables). We would expect a greater number of reviews of GCSE assessments being requested from summer 2017 onwards as more assessments are being taken.

Changes in higher education

Changes in higher education over the last few years may have led to a reduction in the number of reviews requested at GCE.

Controls on the number of students that universities are able to recruit were lifted in 2016 meaning that universities are no longer penalised for admitting more students than planned. As a result, universities may have been more flexible about taking students who had not met their offer from summer 2016 and so fewer students may have challenged their GCE grades.

The proportion of 18-year-old university applicants from England, Wales and Northern Ireland receiving offers for university places that are unconditional of their A level results has steadily been increasing in [recent years](#), from 0.4% in 2013 to 7.1% in 2018. An increase in unconditional offers may lead to a decrease in the number of

GCE assessment reviews requested as a student's university place is not dependent on their grades.

Data source

Data used in this release was submitted to Ofqual by AQA, CCEA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC. City & Guilds received no review requests for their Project qualifications and so did not submit a data return this year.

Prior to summer 2016, the exam boards provided aggregated data on reviews to Ofqual. This means that the figures reported for 2014 and 2015 were calculated by each exam board and Ofqual calculated the totals reported across all exam boards. However, from the summer 2016 series onwards, the exam boards have started to provide disaggregated data according to each review received. Therefore, all figures starting 2016 onwards have been calculated by Ofqual.

The change in data collection highlighted that one awarding organisation mistakenly included data for qualifications other than GCEs and GCSEs (such as Level 1/ Level 2 certificates) in their data returns from 2010 to 2015. These are not included in data reported for the subsequent years but remain in the 2014 and 2015 data so comparisons over time should be treated with caution. For example, removal of these qualifications from the 2016 data resulted in a drop of approximately 1.5% of GCSE reviews and 1.0% of GCSE grades challenged and changed.

The change in data collection has enabled Ofqual to conduct further analyses on reviews such as exploring patterns of review requests across subjects. Corresponding data tables only report figures back to summer 2016 as this is when the data was first collected.

Data for AS and A levels is presented jointly as GCE.

Data on the total number of GCE and GCSE unit/component entries and qualification certifications presented in Table 1 of the [data tables accompanying this release](#) is collected every exam series from exam boards in a separate data return. Data on the number of Project certifications presented in Table 15 is also collected as part of this return. Data on the number of qualification certificates awarded in each subject presented in Table 7 and 8 was supplied by the JCQ and is published in their [GCSE](#) and [AS and A level](#) results day reports.

Limitations

Reviews are conducted on individual assessments and so it is possible to request more than one review for a single qualification that a student has taken. It is therefore possible that, where more than one review has been requested for the same student and qualification, more than one service may have been used. For example, consider a student who has taken GCSE biology and whose school has decided to request a review for two assessments that the student has taken for this qualification. The school may decide to submit both assessments for a review of marking or they may decide to submit one assessment for an administrative error review and one assessment for a review of marking.

Breaking down the number of grades challenged and changed by service becomes problematic when schools submit more than one assessment for the same student and qualification to more than one review service. In the example given above, only

one grade is challenged but two services are used to do so. Counting the grade challenged in both administrative error review and review of marking figures would mean double counting it, which would be incorrect. Therefore, in the breakdown of reviews requested and grades challenged and changed by service, students who have had their grades challenged through more than one service have not been included in the grades challenged and changed figures. These students are however included in all other figures reported and Tables 5 and 6 in the data tables published along with the report include a breakdown of the number of grades challenged and changed through multiple services by exam board. This information is only available from 2016 onwards due to the different way in which data was collected previously as mentioned earlier. In previous years, the exam boards counted grades challenged and changed through multiple services in different ways but all allocated them to one service type so the figures for 2015 are included within the different service types. Only a small number of grades challenged (around 1%) are challenged through more than one service.

When a review of moderation is requested for a unit by a centre, the exam boards provide us with data for all the students in the centre who took the unit, regardless of the outcome of the review. However, prior to summer 2017, if the review of moderation did not result in a change in outcome, WJEC only provided us with data for the sample of students whose work was initially moderated (and therefore re-moderated). If the review of moderation resulted in a change in outcome then they supplied us with data for all the students in the centre who took the unit. WJEC changed their reporting from summer 2017 onwards and now provide us with data for all students regardless of the outcome. This difference in reporting does not affect the number of reviews of moderation reported across years as these reviews are counted at centre level and not student level. However, it does affect the number of grades challenged – these figures will be lower for WJEC than they would have otherwise been.

Ofqual cannot guarantee that the data collected are correct, although it expects exam boards to send correct data. Summary data is sent to exam boards for checking and confirmation. The figures reported in this release reflect the status of reviews at the data cut-off date - 10 November 2018. Prior to 2017, the data cut-off date was a week later and so there may be a slight difference in the number of completed reviews reported from 2017 due to the data being collected a week earlier.

Revisions

Once published, data are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or to correct an error.

Confidentiality and rounding

To ensure confidentiality of the published accompanying data, figures have been rounded to the nearest 5. If the value is less than 5, it is represented as 0~ and 0 represents zero reviews, grade challenged or grades changed.

As a result of rounded figures, the percentages (calculated on actual figures) shown in tables may not necessarily add up to 100.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance procedures are carried out as explained in the [Quality Assurance Framework for Statistical Publications](#) published by Ofqual to ensure the accuracy of the data and to challenge or question it, where necessary. The publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

Status

These statistics are classified as official statistics.

Related publications

A number of other statistical releases and publications relate to this one:

- [GCSE and Equivalent Results in England 2017 to 2018](#) (Provisional): this Statistical First Release published by the Department for Education covers students' achievements in GCSEs and the equivalent regulated qualifications in schools at the end of key stage 4.
- [A Level and other 16 to 18 Results: 2017 to 2018](#) (Provisional): this Statistical First Release published by the Department for Education provides information on achievements in advanced level examinations.

For any related publications for qualifications offered in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland please contact the respective regulators - [Qualifications Wales](#), [CCEA](#) and the [Scottish Qualifications Authority \(SQA\)](#).

Useful links

- [Report and data tables](#) accompanying this release
- [Definitions](#) of important terms used in this release
- [Policies and procedures](#) that Ofqual follow for production of statistical releases

Feedback

We welcome your feedback on our publications. Should you have any comments on this statistical release and how to improve it to meet your needs, please contact us at statistics@ofqual.gov.uk.



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