



Official Statistics

Background information for appeals for GCSE, AS/A level and Project qualifications: 2019/20 academic year

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1. Purpose

In this release, Ofqual presents data on all appeals requested for all GCSE and GCE (AS and A level) and Project qualifications during the 2019/20 academic year.

The exam series covered include all exam series where the qualifications were available: November 2019 and June 2020 for GCSE qualifications, June 2020 for GCE qualifications and November 2019, January 2020 and June 2020 for Project qualifications.

The term 'appeals' refers to all initial reviews and independent reviews requested during summer 2020 as well as all preliminary appeals and appeal hearings requested prior to summer 2020.

Please note that, due to the exceptional nature of the appeals process in summer 2020, direct comparisons of appeals in 2019/20 and previous years are not valid and need to be treated with caution.

2. Geographical coverage

The accompanying report presents data on the number of appeals in England. Four exam boards offer GCSE, GCE and Project qualifications in England:

- AQA Education (AQA)
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Pearson Education Ltd. (Pearson)
- WJEC-CBAC Ltd. (WJEC/Eduqas)

Whilst ASDAN and City and Guilds also offer Project qualifications, no appeals were reported for their qualifications.

3. Appeals in summer 2020

Exams were cancelled in summer 2020 following the closure of schools and colleges to most students, as part of the response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As part of the [exceptional arrangements for exam grading and assessment in 2020](#), students ultimately [received the higher of a centre assessed grade or calculated grade for GCSE, AS and A level](#).

For summer 2020 results, the [standard post-results services](#) were not available. Following consultation, we published the [grounds on which a school or college could submit an appeal to an exam board](#) in summer 2020.

A school or centre could appeal to an exam board if they had evidence of an administrative error, such as where the exam board did not apply its procedures properly and fairly or where the data used by the exam board to calculate results contained an error. Examples of the sorts of errors that the data could contain include the following:

- the head of centre had evidence that the school or college made a mistake when submitting the centre assessment grades to the exam board
- the head of centre had evidence that the exam board introduced an error into the centre assessment grade data submitted to it or when it communicated a grade
- the exam board used the wrong data when statistically standardising some students' results

A student could not appeal because they disagreed with their school's or college's professional judgement of the grade the student would most likely have achieved if exams had taken place. However, if a student thought their grade might have been affected by wrongdoing or a lack of care taken by their school or college (malpractice or maladministration), including if they had evidence of bias or discrimination that student could ask the awarding organisation to investigate.

These instances were not considered appeals, rather they were a malpractice or maladministration complaint and are covered in our [Malpractice in GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2020 exam series report](#). Guidance on the kinds of evidence that would have been considered for this purpose is available in our [student guide to appeals, malpractice & maladministration complaints: summer 2020](#).

If a school or college had evidence that it made a mistake when it submitted information to the exam board about its judgement of a student's likely grade, it could take that evidence to the exam board. The exam board would need to understand how the school or college made a mistake that resulted in the head of centre making an incorrect declaration.

If the exam board was satisfied that the evidence showed the school or college made a mistake and that the school or college should therefore have submitted a different judgement, it could change the grade awarded. The exam boards put in place a two-stage appeals process:

1. An initial review, in which a suitable member of an exam board's staff checked the relevant data, procedure or process depending on the nature of appeal.
2. An independent review. If a centre was not satisfied with the outcome of the initial review, they had 14 calendar days from the outcome to request an independent review. The independent review was carried out by an independent decision maker (for example someone who has not been directly employed by the awarding body, was not an examiner or moderator working for the awarding body and was not connected to the awarding body in any other way).

The exam boards had 5 calendar weeks to complete an initial review and an independent review within 5 calendar weeks from the receipt of the request for an independent review. In some cases, appeals are not resolved in the target timescale. Sometimes, this occurs to allow a fair appeal hearing with appropriate evidence, or for individuals to be present from both the school or college and the exam board.

Due to the exceptional nature of the appeals process in summer 2020, direct comparisons of appeals in summer 2020 and previous years are not valid and need to be treated with caution.

4. Appeals in exam series prior to summer 2020

If a school or college was not satisfied with the result of a review of marking, review of moderation, a malpractice decision, or a judgement on reasonable adjustment or special considerations, and/or if they believed the exam board had made a procedural error, it could make an appeal to the exam board.

The GCSE and GCE Qualification Level Conditions and Requirements (the Conditions) covering GCSE [A* to G](#) and [9 to 1](#) and A level and AS [legacy](#) and [reformed](#) qualifications also require exam boards to accept appeals requests directly from private students. An appeal could be in relation to the outcomes of one or more candidates, if they were all thought to have been affected by the same issue.

Schools and colleges could submit appeals regarding an exam board's decisions about malpractice if they believed the exam board did not follow its procedures, the decision was unreasonable given existing evidence, the sanction was disproportionate or if new evidence came to light. Schools and colleges could also submit appeals related to reasonable adjustments and special consideration if they believed the exam board did not follow its procedures.

The exam boards put in place a 2-stage appeals process:

1. A preliminary appeal (formerly referred to as a 'stage 1' appeal) is a review of the case by a senior member of the exam board who has not been involved previously with the particular case.
2. An appeal hearing (formerly referred to as a 'stage 2' appeal) involves applicants and exam boards presenting their case to a panel, which the exam board convenes. The panel comprises at least 3 members, 1 of whom must be independent (that means someone who is not, and has not at any time during the previous 5 years, been a member of the board or its committees, or an employee or examiner at the exam board). A school or college can request an appeal hearing only after going through a preliminary appeal.

Although Ofqual's Conditions do not require it, in 2017, exam boards committed to completing a preliminary appeal in 5 calendar weeks and an appeal hearing in 10 calendar weeks from the receipt of the request for an appeal hearing (previously the target was 50 days for either process). This was extended in 2019 so the target timescale for a preliminary appeal was 6 calendar weeks and an appeal hearing remained 10 calendar weeks. As with the appeal arrangements for summer 2020, in some cases appeals are not resolved in the target timescale. Sometimes, this occurs to allow a fair appeal hearing with appropriate evidence, or for individuals to be present from both the school or college and the exam board.

5. The Examination Procedures Review Service

If a school or college is still dissatisfied with the outcome following an appeal, it can apply to the [Examination Procedures Review Service \(EPRS\)](#) within 21 days of receiving the appeal outcome from the exam board. The EPRS is provided by Ofqual.

Ofqual reviews each application and arranges a review hearing if appropriate. Ofqual looks at whether the exam board has followed the appropriate procedures and used them properly and fairly.

If the exam board has not followed its own procedures or has not secured the outcomes required by Ofqual's regulations, the application to EPRS may be upheld. Exam boards must give due regard to the outcome of EPRS hearings, both in respect of results issued to the candidate making the application and, where appropriate, other potentially affected results.

6. Data source

AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC/Eduqas provide data on appeals requested for all GCSE and GCE (AS and A level) assessments taken during the summer series in England on an annual basis. Data on Project qualifications was only collected from 2017/18 onwards.

7. Limitations

Ofqual cannot guarantee that the data sent 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 appeals at the data cut-off date of the 26 February 2021.

8. 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.

9. Confidentiality and rounding

The number of appeals and grade changes have been rounded to the nearest 5 to preserve confidentiality. The figures between 1 and 4 have been denoted as 0- and 0 represents zero rounded. Total values of rows or columns are calculated using unrounded figures; the sum of rounded figures may differ from the total reported. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. As a result of rounded figures, the percentages (calculated on actual figures) shown in any tables may not necessarily add up to 100.

10. 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. Publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

11. Status

These statistics are classified as Official Statistics.

12. Related publications

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

- [Malpractice for GCSE and A level: summer 2020 exam series](#): this statistical release published by Ofqual provides an analysis of the malpractice cases and sanctions for GCSE, AS and A levels in summer 2020 exam series
- [Provisional appeals for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2020](#): this statistical release published by Ofqual provides an analysis on provisional appeals for GCSE, AS and A levels in summer 2020 exam series

13. Useful links

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

14. 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 data.analytics@ofqual.gov.uk.

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