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Official Statistics

# Appeals for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2021

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## 1. Introduction

This report presents figures for the number of appeals made during summer 2021 in England for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications. It also gives information on the provisional number of qualification grades challenged and changed due to those appeals. These figures are provisional as at 16 November 2021 when the data was submitted by awarding organisations to Ofqual. The final number of appeals, grades challenged and changed are expected to change and will be published at a later date.

On 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister announced that <u>exams in summer 2021</u> could not go ahead as planned, as part of new national restrictions in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. On 13 January 2021, the Secretary of State asked Ofqual to <u>jointly consult on alternative arrangements to award grades</u>. The consultation with the Department for Education ran between 15 and 29 January 2021 and received over 100,000 responses. Having considered the

centre type

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responses to the consultation and having had regard to the Secretary of State's direction, it was decided that students taking GCSE, AS and A levels in England, should be <u>awarded grades based on teacher assessment</u>.

As part of Ofqual's General Qualifications Alternative Awarding Framework, every student had the right to appeal their grade if they so wished in summer 2021. Before a grade was submitted, teachers should have made students aware of the evidence they were using to assess them on which their grade was based. Students would have had the opportunity to confirm the evidence was their own work and make their teachers aware of any mitigating circumstances they believe should have been taken into account.

If a student believed there had been an error, centres should have undertaken an initial process review to check all its processes were followed correctly and no errors were made. This was referred to as a centre review. If the centre found an error that they judged would have affected the grade, they could submit a revised grade to the awarding organisation.

If the student still believed there to be an error, they would ask their centre to submit an appeal to the awarding organisation for them. The awarding organisation would check that the centre followed its own processes and awarding organisation requirements as well as reviewing the evidence used to form their judgement and providing a view as to whether the grade awarded was a reasonable exercise of academic judgement on the grounds requested by the student. The awarding organisation also checked if they made an administrative error where any concerns about this were raised.

If the awarding organisation found the grade was not reasonable, it would determine the alternative grade and inform the centre.

In cases of disagreement between the centre and the awarding organisation, or if the student disagreed with the centre or the awarding organisation, the case could be referred to Ofgual's Examinations Procedure Review Service (EPRS). The awarding organisation's decision on the grade following appeal would stand unless the EPRS found that the awarding organisation had made a procedural error.

Appeals on the ground of academic judgement did not lead to adjustments in grades where the original grade was a reasonable exercise of academic judgement supported by the evidence. Grades could remain the same or go up or down as the result of an appeal.

A centre would only have reported a centre review to the awarding organisation if the centre had identified an administrative or procedural error in determining a student's grade, which resulted in a request to the awarding organisation to change the student's grade. Instances where the centre did not identify an administrative or procedural error were not reported to the awarding organisation. As a result, in this bulletin only centre reviews where the centre identified a procedural or administrative error can be reported on, which means that the total number of centre reviews undertaken and grades challenged are undercounted.

An appeal on a student's grade can be made on multiple grounds. Appeals that are made on multiple grounds are counted as one appeal received because the overall appeal has the same identifier.

Due to the exceptional nature of the assessment and appeals process in summer 2021, direct comparisons of appeals in summer 2021 and previous years will not be valid and should not be made.

## 2. Details

The main findings in the provisional number of appeals for GCSE, AS and A level in summer 2021 in England were:

- 1. Overall, 17,490 of the 6.0 million grades certified for GCSEs, AS and A levels were challenged (0.3% of all grades certified)
- 2. Overall, 6,000 of the 6.0 million grades certified for GCSEs, AS and level were changed as part of an upheld appeal in summer 2021 (0.1% of all grades certified)
- 3. There were 16,000 appeals received in summer 2021.
- 4. There were 5,760 appeals upheld in summer 2021.
- 5. The most common ground for an appeal was unreasonable exercise of academic judgement.
- 6. Most upheld appeals resulted in a grade change.

# 3. Total number of appeals received, upheld and leading to a grade change

For summer 2021 the <u>standard post-results service</u> was not available as students had not taken awarding organisation marked exams and there was a <u>new appeals process</u>, which consisted of two stages. The appeal could have been upheld at either a centre review or an appeal to the awarding organisation, and this may have led to a change in the qualification grade involved. If an appeal which progressed to the awarding organisation was not upheld but was upheld at a centre review, the appeal as a whole is reported as upheld.

In summer 2021, a student who believed an error had been made when determining their grade would submit an appeal to their centre, so that they could check whether an administrative or procedural error had been made. If a centre

did find an error in the grade submitted, it could submit a revised grade for the awarding organisation to consider. If a centre did not believe an error had been made and the student still felt that there was an error in their result, the centre would appeal to the awarding organisation on the student's behalf.

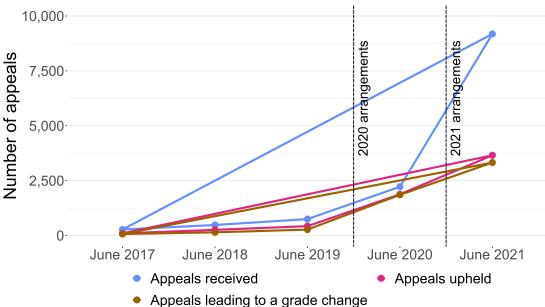
A centre would only have reported a centre review to the awarding organisation if the centre had identified an administrative or procedural error in determining a student's grade, which resulted in a request to the awarding organisation to change the student's grade. Instances where the centre did not identify an administrative or procedural error were not reported to the awarding organisation. As a result, in this bulletin only centre reviews where the centre identified a procedural or administrative error can be reported on, which means that the total number of centre reviews undertaken and grades challenged are undercounted.

Due to the exceptional nature of the assessment and appeals process in summer 2021 and <u>summer 2020</u>, direct comparisons of appeals in summer 2021 and previous years are not valid and should not be made.

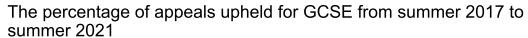
### **3.1 GCSE**

The number of appeals received, appeals upheld and appeals leading to grades changed has increased sharply for GCSE in summer 2021. This reflects the different nature of the assessment and appeal arrangements in summer 2021. When students take awarding organisation set and marked exams, most concerns about grades awarded are considered through reviews of marking, not appeals. Reviews of marking were not available in summer 2020 and summer 2021 because students did not take awarding organisation set and marked exams.

The number of appeals received, appeals upheld and appeals leading to grades changed for GCSE from summer 2017 to summer 2021



The percentage of appeals upheld has decreased for GCSE in summer 2021 reflecting the different nature of the assessment and appeal arrangements in summer 2021 compared to previous years.



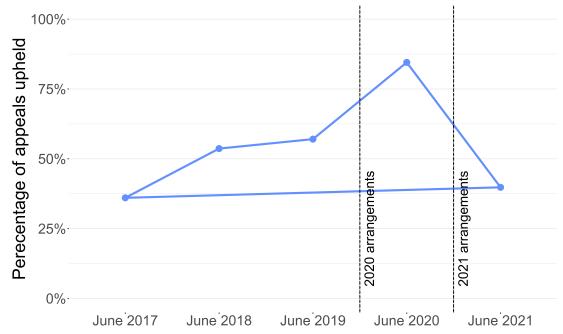


Table 1: The number of appeals received, appeals upheld and appeals leading to a grade change at GCSE from summer 2017 to summer 2021

Exam Series	Appeals received	Appeals upheld	% of appeals upheld	Appeals leading to a grade change
Summer 2017	270	100	36%	65
Summer 2018	480	255	54%	145
Summer 2019	745	425	57%	270
Summer 2020	2,220	1,875	85%	1,855
Summer 2021	9,180	3,655	40%	3,320

The number of GCSE appeals increased from 2,220 in summer 2020 to 9,180 in summer 2021. The number of appeals upheld increased from 1,875 in summer 2020 to 3,655 in summer 2021 and the number of appeals upheld which led to a

grade change has increased from 1,855 in summer 2020 to 3,320 in summer 2021.

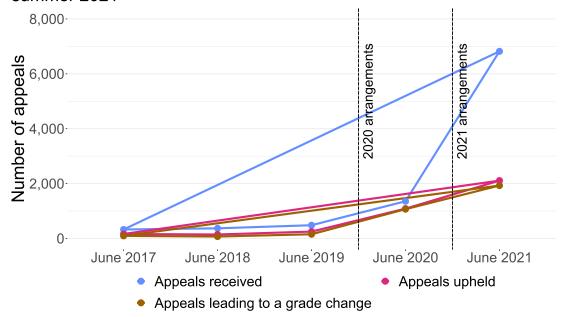
The percentage of appeals upheld in summer 2021 (where 40% appeals were upheld) has decreased compared with summer 2020 (where 85% appeals were upheld).

The changes between summer 2020 and summer 2021 reflect the difference in the assessment and appeal arrangements in summer 2021. Direct comparisons between years are not valid and should not be made.

## 3.2 AS and A level

The number of appeals received, appeals upheld and appeals leading to grades changed has increased sharply for AS and A level in summer 2021 reflecting the different nature of the assessment and appeal arrangements in summer 2021. When students take awarding organisation set and marked exams, most concerns about grades awarded are considered through reviews of marking, not appeals. Reviews of marking were not available in summer 2020 and summer 2021 because students did not take awarding organisation set and marked exams.

The number of appeals received, appeals upheld and appeals leading to grades changed for AS and A level from summer 2017 to summer 2021



The percentage of appeals upheld has decreased for AS and A level in summer 2021 reflecting the different nature of the assessment and appeal arrangements in summer 2021.

# The percentage of appeals upheld for AS and A level from summer 2017 to summer 2021

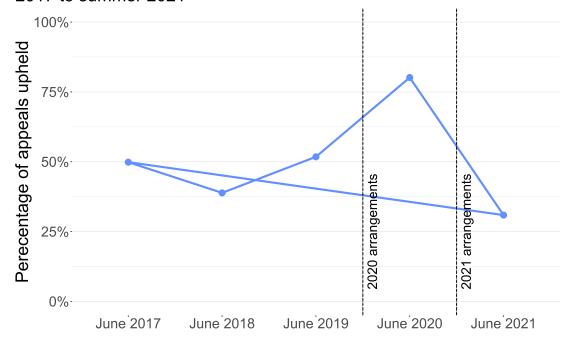


Table 2: The number of appeals received, appeals upheld and appeals leading to a grade change at AS and A level from summer 2017 to summer 2021

Exam Series	Appeals received	Appeals upheld	% of appeals upheld	Appeals leading to a grade change
Summer 2017	325	160	50%	95
Summer 2018	370	145	39%	70
Summer 2019	480	250	52%	150
Summer 2020	1,355	1,085	80%	1,065
Summer 2021	6,820	2,105	31%	1,930

The number of AS and A level appeals increased from 1,355 in summer 2020 to 6,820 in summer 2021. The number of appeals upheld increased from 1,085 in summer 2020 to 2,105 in summer 2021 and the number of appeals upheld which led to a grade change has increased from 1,065 in summer 2020 to 1,930 in summer 2021.

The percentage of appeals upheld in summer 2021 (where 31% appeals were upheld) has decreased compared with summer 2020 (where 80% appeals were upheld).

The changes between summer 2020 and summer 2021 reflect the difference in the assessment and appeal arrangements in summer 2021. Direct comparisons between years are not valid and should not be made.

## 4. Nature of appeals

In summer 2021 an appeal could be <u>made on grounds of procedural errors</u>, <u>administrative errors</u>, <u>or on grounds that the grade reflected an unreasonable academic judgement</u>.

A procedural error might have been identified by a centre following a student's request for a centre review. A centre might have identified as part of a centre review that it made an administrative or procedural error in connection with a teacher assessed grade.

If the student still believed there to be an error, they would ask their centre to submit an appeal to the awarding organisation for them. The appeal could be made on the basis that there was a procedural error, an administrative error or a grade reflects an unreasonable exercise of academic judgement by the centre. An appeal on unreasonable exercise of academic judgement could be made on the following grounds:

- 1. that the centre's judgement as to the evidence which should be used to determine a teacher assessed grade was unreasonable, or
- 2. that the centre's judgement as to the teacher assessed grade indicated by the evidence it selected was unreasonable.

Appeals on the grounds of academic judgement could only be considered by awarding organisations and not by centres.

An appeal on a student's grade can be made on multiple grounds. In this section each ground for appeal is counted separately. This means the total number of appeals in this section will not match the total number of appeals reported elsewhere.

These grounds for appeals did not exist in previous years and therefore comparisons on the nature of appeals of summer 2021 with previous years are not possible.

### **4.1 GCSE**

Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement - determination of grade was the most common ground for GCSE appeal in summer 2021 with 4,975 appeals.

# Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement - determination of grade Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement - selection/range of evidence

Nature of GCSE appeals for summer 2021

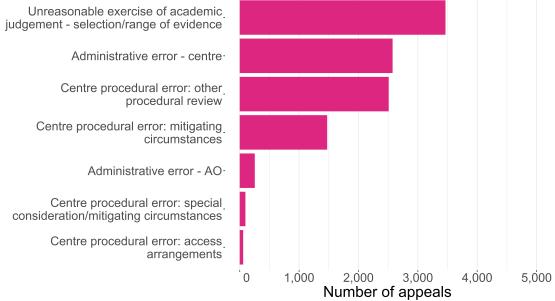
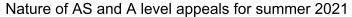


Table 3. Nature of GCSE appeals in summer 2021

Nature of appeal	Number of appeals received
Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement - determination of grade	4,975
Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement - selection/range of evidence	3,465
Administrative error - centre	2,575
Centre procedural error: other procedural review	2,510
Centre procedural error: mitigating circumstances	1,475
Administrative error - Awarding Organisation	255
Centre procedural error: special consideration/mitigating circumstances	95
Centre procedural error: access arrangements	60

### 4.2 AS and A level

Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement - determination of grade was the most common ground for AS and A level appeal in summer 2021 with 4,245 appeals



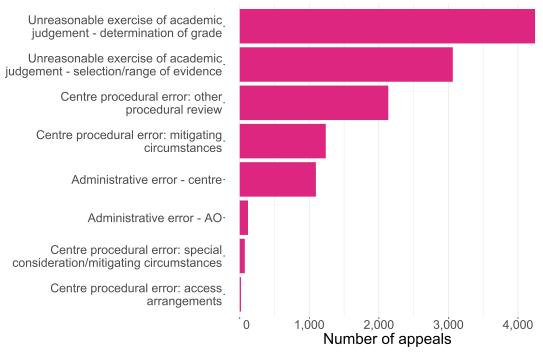


Table 4. Nature of AS and A level appeals in summer 2021

Nature of appeal	Number of appeals received
Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement - determination of grade	4,245
Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement - selection/range of evidence	3,065
Centre procedural error: other procedural review	2,135
Centre procedural error: mitigating circumstances	1,235
Administrative error - centre	1,095
Administrative error - Awarding Organisation	120
Centre procedural error: special consideration/mitigating circumstances	75
Centre procedural error: access arrangements	20

# 5. Centre reviews and appeals to the awarding organisation

For summer 2021 the <u>standard post-results service</u> was not available as students had not taken awarding organisation marked exams and there was a <u>new appeals process</u>, which consisted of two stages.

- If a student believed there had been an error, centres should have undertaken
  an initial process review to check all its processes were followed correctly and
  no errors were made. This was referred to as a centre review. If the centre
  found an error that they judged would have affected the grade, they could
  submit a revised grade to the awarding organisation.
- If the student still believed there to be an error after a centre review, they would ask their centre to submit an appeal to the awarding organisation for them. The awarding organisation would check that the centre followed its own processes and awarding organisation requirements. It would also review the evidence used to form their judgement and provide a view on whether the grade awarded was a reasonable exercise of academic judgement. The awarding organisation also checked if they made an administrative or procedural error where any concerns about this were raised.

Due to the differences of the summer 2021 assessment and appeals process comparisons with previous years are not possible.

In summer 2021, around 96% of all centre reviews received resulted in a grade change and around 8% of all appeals to the awarding organisation received resulted in a grade change. Overall, in summer 2021, around 33% of all appeals received resulted in a grade change. Because only centre reviews where centres identified a procedural or administrative error can be reported, the percentage of appeals resulting in a grade change will be affected. This means that the total number of centre reviews undertaken is undercounted. As a result, the percentage of centre reviews leading to a grade change will most likely be inflated.

The nature of appeals received and appeals resulting in a grade change for summer 2021

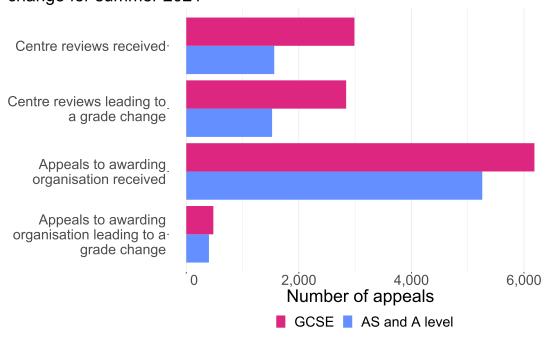


Table 5. The nature of appeals received and appeals resulting in a grade change for summer 2021

Qualification level	Number of centre reviews	Centre reviews leading to a grade change	Number of appeals to AOs	Appeals to AOs leading to a grade change
GCSE	2,990	2,840	6,185	480
GCE	1,565	1,525	5,260	405

As at 16 November 2021, there were 10 GCSE appeals and 10 AS and A level appeals where the outcome of the appeal was pending the <u>Examinations</u> <u>Procedure Review Service</u>.

## 6. Grades challenged and changed

In summer 2021, a single appeal represented one qualification grade being challenged. An upheld appeal may or may not result in a change to the associated qualification grade. The number of appeals received may not be mirrored in the number of grades challenged or changed because students are awarded two grades for GCSE combined science.

Because only centre reviews where the centre identified a procedural or

administrative error can be reported, the number of grades challenged will be affected. This means that the total number of grades challenged may be undercounted.

Additionally, a student may be involved in more than one appeal. In summer 2021, there were 12,740 GCSE and AS and A level candidates whose grades were involved in an appeal.

Overall, 17,490 of the 6.0 million grades certified for GCSEs, AS and A levels were challenged in summer 2021 (0.3% of all grades certified) and 6,000 of the 6.0 million grades certified for GCSEs, AS and level were changed as part of an upheld appeal in summer 2021 (0.1% of all grades certified).

There were 10,300 grades challenged and 3,955 grades changed for GCSE and 7,190 grades challenged and 2,045 grades changed for AS and A level in summer 2021.

# The number of grades challenged and changed in summer 2021 for GCSE and AS and A level

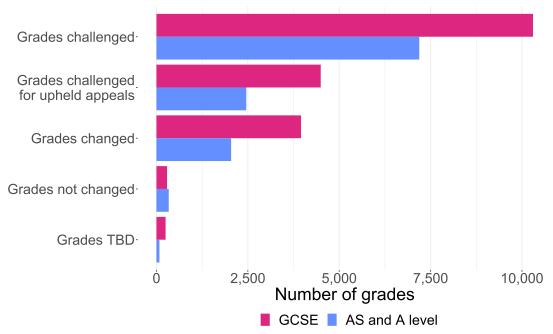


Table 6. The number of grades challenged and changed in summer 2021 for GCSE, AS and A level

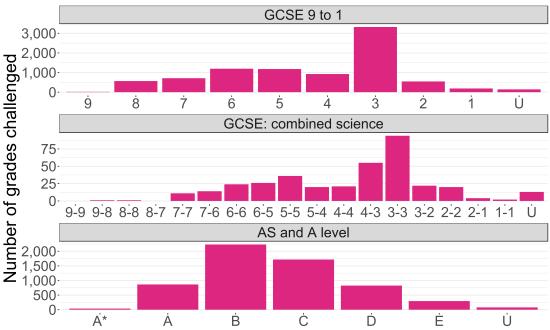
Qualification level	Grades awarded	Grades challenged	Grades challenged for upheld appeals	Grades changed	Grades not changed
GCSE	5,199,190	10,300	4,495	3,955	290
AS and A	802,525	7,190	2,455	2,045	335

At the time when data was reported to Ofqual, there were 330 grades from upheld appeals where either the post appeal grade had yet to be determined or the original grade was unknown.

# 7. Grades challenged at appeal in summer 2021

Grade 3 was the most contested grade for GCSE 9 to 1, grade 3-3 the most contested grades for GCSE: combined science and grade B the most contested grade for AS and A level.

Grades challenged at appeal in summer 2021 for GCSE 9 to 1, GCSE: combined science and AS and A level



Source: <u>Table 7: Data tables for appeals for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2021</u>

## 8. Grade changes for upheld appeals

In this section the magnitude of grade changes made following an upheld appeal in summer 2021 are reported. A small number of upheld appeals were for students who were not originally given a grade or where a student's grade had not been determined after an appeal was upheld. These instances are not reported in

## **8.1 GCSE**

Where an appeal was upheld and grades are known, 93% of GCSE grades challenged had a grade change of one or more grade in summer 2021.

Grade changes for grades challenged from upheld appeals at GCSE

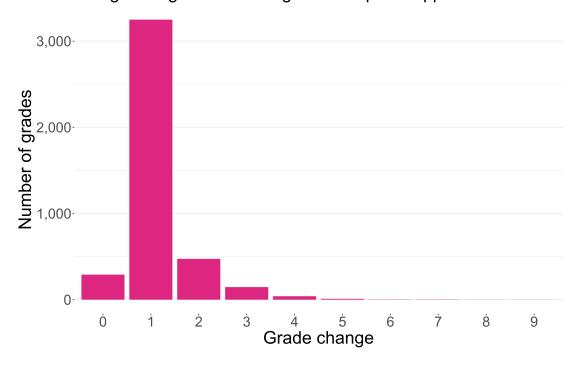


Table 7. Grade changes for grades challenged from upheld appeals at GCSE in summer 2021

Grade change for upheld appeals	Number of grades	% of grades
Grade change of 0	290	7 %
Grade change of 1	3,250	77 %
Grade change of 2	475	11 %
Grade change of 3	145	3 %
Grade change of 4	40	1 %
Grade change of 5	10	0 %
Grade change of 6	Fewer than 5	0 %
Grade change of 7	Fewer than 5	0 %

Grade change of 8	Fewer than 5	0 %
Grade change of 9	Fewer than 5	0 %

Overall, in upheld appeals (and where grades were known), 7% of GCSE grades challenged in upheld appeals did not result in a qualification grade change in summer 2021. Among those GCSE grades that were challenged in upheld appeals, 77% of grades changed by one grade and 15% changed by two or more grades in summer 2021.

As at 16 November 2021, there were 250 grades challenged for upheld appeals where grades where unknown or to be determined. These grades are not reported in this section.

### 8.2 AS and A level

Where an appeal was upheld and grades known, 86% of GCE grades challenged had a grade change of one or more grade in summer 2021.

Grade changes for grades challenged from upheld appeals at AS and A level

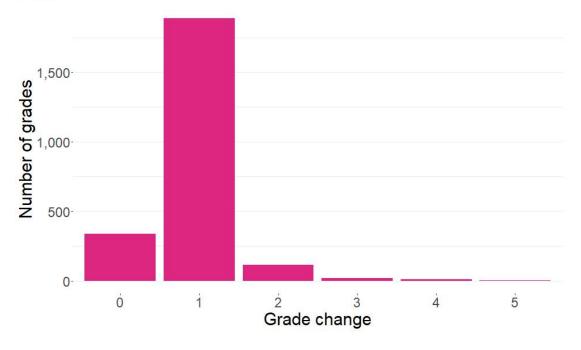


Table 8. Grade changes for grades challenged from upheld appeals at AS and A level in summer 2021

Grade change for upheld appeals	Number of grades	% of grades
Grade change of 0	335	14 %

1,890	80 %
115	5 %
20	1 %
10	1 %
Fewer than 5	0 %
	115 20 10

Overall, in upheld appeals (and where grades were known), 14% of AS and A level grades challenged in upheld appeals did not result in a qualification grade change in summer 2021. Among those AS and A level grades that were challenged in upheld appeals, 80% of grades changed by one grade and 7% changed by two or more grades in summer 2021.

As at 16 November 2021, there were 80 grades challenged for upheld appeals where grades where unknown or to be determined. These grades are not reported in this section.

## 9. Appeals received by centre type

Centre type is obtained from the <u>NCN register that OCR manage on behalf of the Joint Council for Qualifications</u>. Centre types reported in this bulletin are correct as at 12 August 2021.

## **9.1 GCSE**

For GCSEs the majority of appeals received, appeals upheld, grades challenged and changed were for secondary non-selective, maintained schools or centres.

Appeals upheld, grades challenged and changed for different centre types at GCSE

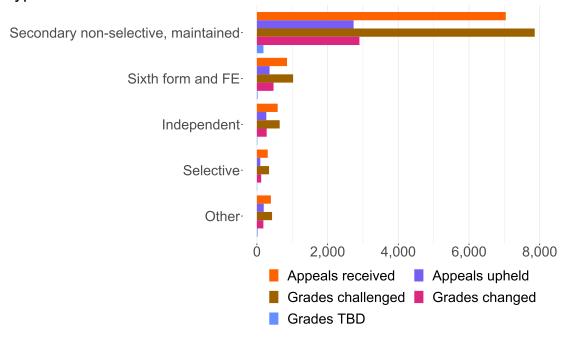


Table 9. Appeals received, appeals upheld, grades challenged and grades changed for different centre types at GCSE in summer 2021

Centre type	Appeals received	Appeals upheld	Grades challenged	Grades changed	Grades TBD
Secondary non- selective, maintained	7,040	2,735	7,860	2,900	185
Sixth form and Further Education	850	360	1,025	470	20
Independent	590	265	645	275	15
Selective	305	95	345	120	10
Other	395	195	430	185	20

## 9.2 AS and A level

Similar to GCSE, for AS and A level the majority of appeals received, appeals upheld, grades challenged and changed were for secondary non-selective, maintained schools or centres.

# Appeals upheld, grades challenged and changed for different centre types at GCE

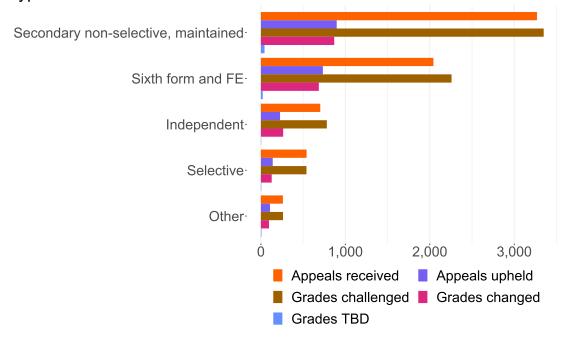


Table 10. Appeals received, appeals upheld, grades challenged and grades changed for different centre types at AS and A level in summer 2021

Centre type	Appeals received	Appeals upheld	Grades challenged	Grades changed	Grades TBD
Secondary non- selective, maintained	3,270	900	3,350	870	45
Sixth form and Further Education	2,045	735	2,260	685	20
Independent	705	225	780	265	Fewer than 5
Selective	540	140	540	130	5
Other	260	110	260	95	5

## 10. Appeals received by region

### **10.1 GCSE**

For GCSE the largest share of appeals received, appeals upheld, grades challenged and grades changed are from London and the South East.

Appeals received, appeals upheld, grades challenged and grades changed by English region for GCSE

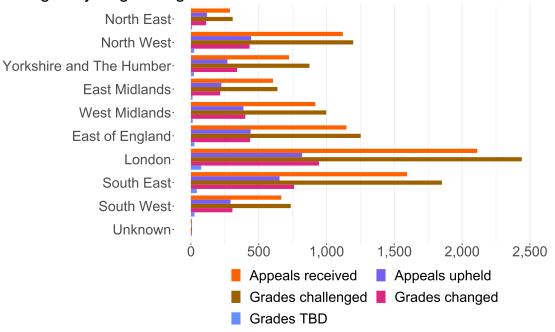


Table 11. Appeals received, appeals upheld, grades challenged and grades changed for different England regions at GCSE in summer 2021

Region	Appeals received	Appeals upheld	Grades challenged	Grades changed	Grades TBD
North East	290	120	310	110	10
North West	1,120	445	1,195	430	25
Yorkshire and The Humber	725	270	875	340	20
East Midlands	605	225	640	215	10
West Midlands	915	385	1,000	400	15
East of England	1,145	440	1,250	435	25
London	2,110	820	2,440	945	75
South East	1,595	655	1,850	760	45
South West	665	290	735	305	25

Unknown	10	5	10	5	0

### 10.2 AS and A level

For AS and A level the largest share of appeals received, appeals upheld, grades challenged and grades changed are from London and the South East.

Appeals received, appeals upheld, grades challenged and grades changed by English region for AS and A level

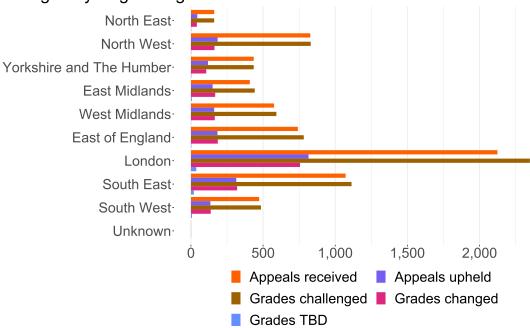


Table 12. Appeals received, appeals upheld, grades challenged and grades changed for different England regions at AS and A level in summer 2021

Region	Appeals received	Appeals upheld	Grades challenged	Grades changed	Grades TBD
North East	160	45	160	40	Fewer than 5
North West	825	185	830	165	Fewer than 5
Yorkshire and The Humber	435	120	435	105	Fewer than 5
East Midlands	410	150	440	170	5

575	160	590	165	Fewer than 5
740	185	780	185	Fewer than 5
2,125	815	2,350	755	35
1,070	315	1,115	320	20
475	135	485	135	5
Fewer than	Fewer	Fewer than	Fewer than 5	0
	740 2,125 1,070 475 Fewer than	740 185  2,125 815  1,070 315  475 135  Fewer than Fewer	740     185     780       2,125     815     2,350       1,070     315     1,115       475     135     485	740       185       780       185         2,125       815       2,350       755         1,070       315       1,115       320         475       135       485       135         Fewer than       Fewer Fewer than       Fewer

## 11. Contextual information

This report presents data on requests for centre reviews and appeals made to awarding organisations for summer 2021. The qualifications covered in this report are GCSE and AS and A level qualifications in England. The figures presented here are provisional as at 16 November 2021 when data was submitted to Ofqual by the awarding organisations.

Appeals were made at the subject level and, if related to the same issue, may cover more than one grade. In summer 2021 an appeal could be <u>made on grounds of procedural and administrative errors, or on grounds of unreasonable academic judgement</u>.

A procedural error might have been identified by a centre following a student's request for a centre review or by the awarding organisation where the student's grounds of an appeal raise procedural issues. A centre might have identified as part of a centre review that it made an administrative error in connection with a teacher assessed grade.

If the student still believed there to be an error, they would ask their centre to submit an appeal to the awarding organisation for them. The appeal could be made on the basis that there was a procedural error, an administrative error or a grade reflects an unreasonable exercise of academic judgement by the centre. An appeal on unreasonable exercise of academic judgement could be made on the following grounds:

- 1. that the centre's judgement as to the evidence which should be used to determine a teacher assessed grade was unreasonable, or
- 2. that the centre's judgement as to the teacher assessed grade indicated by the evidence it selected was unreasonable.

Appeals on the grounds of academic judgement could only be considered by

awarding organisations and not by centres.

A centre would only have reported a centre review to the awarding organisation if the centre had identified an administrative or procedural error in determining a student's grade, which resulted in a request to the awarding organisation to change the student's grade. Instances where the centre did not identify an administrative or procedural error were not reported to the awarding organisation. As a result, in this bulletin only centre reviews where the centre identified a procedural or administrative error can be reported on. This means that the total number of centre reviews having been undertaken and grades challenged are undercounted.

Due to the exceptional nature of the assessment and appeals process in summer 2021, direct comparisons of appeals in summer 2021 and previous years are not valid and should not be made.

Further information on this release is available in the <u>background information as</u> <u>well as data tables</u> accompanying this report.

## 12. User 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 <a href="mailto:data.analytics@ofgual.gov.uk">data.analytics@ofgual.gov.uk</a>.

Head of profession: Nadir Zanini

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