



Official Statistics

Background information for appeals for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2021

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1. Purpose

In this release, Ofqual presents data on all centre reviews and appeals to awarding organisations (collectively referred to as ‘appeals’) requested for all GCSE, AS and A level qualifications during summer 2021.

2. Geographical Coverage

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

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

3. Appeals in summer 2021

On 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister announced that [exams in summer 2021 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 [jointly consult on alternative arrangements to award grades](#). [The consultation](#) with the Department for Education ran between 15 and 29 January 2021 and received over 100,000 responses. Having considered the 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 awarded grades based on teacher assessment](#).

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 on which their grade was based. Students had the opportunity to confirm the evidence was their own work. They also made their teachers aware of any mitigating circumstances they believed should have been considered.

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

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 a procedural error, an administrative error or a grade reflecting unreasonable exercise of academic judgement by the centre. An appeal on unreasonable exercise of academic judgement could be made on the following grounds:

- that the centre's judgement as to the evidence which should be used to determine a teacher assessed grade was unreasonable, or
- 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 were only considered by awarding organisations and not by centres.

Awarding organisations aimed to complete appeals as soon as possible. They prioritised appeals for students applying to higher education who did not get their firm choice (for example, the offer they accepted as their first choice) and wished to appeal an A level or other Level 3 qualification result.

The awarding organisations aimed to complete Stage Two of the appeals process (the awarding organisation appeals stage) within 42 calendar days of the receipt of the application. Due to the nature of appeals in summer 2021, awarding organisations may have required additional input from centres, and it wasn't always possible for them to meet this target.

The timescales for Stage One of the appeals process (the centre review) were suggested timescales to enable centres to submit appeals to the awarding organisation within the deadlines set out in [section 9 in the Joint Council for Qualifications guidance](#).

Centres may have set their own deadlines for centre reviews. Priority appeals that weren't submitted to the awarding organisation by 23 August 2021 were still prioritised. Awarding organisations processed them as promptly as possible. There was, however, a risk they were not completed in time for those with a higher education place dependent on the outcome of the appeal.

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

4. The Examination Procedures Review Service

In summer 2021, if student was still dissatisfied with the outcome following an appeal, they could apply to the [Examination Procedures Review Service \(EPRS\)](#). They had to do this 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.

5. 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.

6. 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 16 November 2021.

7. 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.

8. 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 “Fewer than 5” and 0 represents zero value. 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.

9. 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.

10. Status

These statistics are classified as Official Statistics.

11. Related publications

The following publication is related to this one:

- [Malpractice for GCSE and A level: summer 2021 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 2021 exam series

12. 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

13. Feedback

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