

[News story: Ofqual reports relating to GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2018](#)

Ofqual has today (Thursday 13 December) published its review of GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2018, providing an overview of the exam boards' planning, administration and marking which supported the series, along with a summary of the awarding process and what happened post-results.

2018 was the biggest year of reform, and most exams taken this summer were in reformed qualifications. We conclude that the 2018 summer series was successful, well planned, and effectively delivered. In recent years, exam results have been stable, and this trend continued. Variability in school and college results this summer was similar to previous years, suggesting that teachers and students responded well to the considerable reforms.

The majority of entries in 2018 were for reformed qualifications. Entries for GCSEs and A levels remained broadly stable. In line with recent trends, entries for AS subjects fell by almost 60% from 659,880 in 2017 to 269,090 in 2018. This is largely because new AS qualifications are stand-alone qualifications in England (meaning students do not have to take an AS as part of a reformed A level).

During the exam series, [14.7 million scripts were generated by 1.3 million students](#). As in previous years, the vast majority of exam papers were error free. Where errors did occur, none was sufficiently serious to have had a significant impact on students. There were fewer security breaches and incidents of malpractice, reflecting work undertaken by exam boards to strengthen procedures.

Chief Regulator, Sally Collier, said:

Against the backdrop of major reform, the 2018 exam series was successfully delivered, with marking completed and results announced on time. Security breaches and incidents of malpractice fell and exam boards better applied our rules around reviews of marking and moderation. We will be working with the exam boards on follow-up actions to drive further improvements in 2019.

The number of GCSE and A level grades challenged and changed fell in 2018 compared to the previous summer, according to official statistics published today. The data also indicate that nearly two-thirds of reviews resulted in no mark change, an increase from 2017. The reasons given for grade changes when they did occur this year are more consistent with the appropriate application of our rules regarding reviews of marking and reviews of moderation as introduced in 2016.

Official statistics of malpractice in the summer 2018 GCSE, AS and A level series, published today, show there were fewer incidents of malpractice. The

number of malpractice penalties issued to students has remained stable since 2017. The main reason for penalties continues to be unauthorised materials – particularly mobile phones – in the examination room. Staff and centre malpractice penalties have both decreased. These falls are encouraging in the context of the significant communications and engagement campaign we, and the exam boards, conducted this summer. We are planning further activity, alongside exam boards, to support exams officers in tackling the problem of students retaining their mobile phones during examinations.

We monitor GCSE, AS and A level awards each summer to make sure, so far as possible, that there is a level playing field for students. One of the ways that we do this is to make sure that the grade standards in a subject are comparable, so that it is not easier or more difficult to get a particular grade with one exam board than with another. Across all awards in summer 2018, we concluded that the exam boards had maintained appropriate standards and that grade standards within each subject were aligned.

We have published more information about the operation of this year's tests. This was the second year of the National Reference Test (NRT) (following the Preliminary Reference Test in 2016). The tests, in English language and maths, are taken by students in a sample of schools and they provide additional evidence about students' performance over time in those subjects. In 2017 we benchmarked the NRT against GCSE results in English language and maths, so that in future years we can compare student performance with the 2017 baseline. Results from the 2018 NRT show an increase in performance in maths and a slight decrease in English, although in English the differences are not statistically significant. The improvement in maths is in line with what we might expect to see as schools get used to the new qualifications. We have been clear that we would not use the NRT results in awarding in summer 2018. From 2019 onwards the NRT results will provide an additional source of evidence for awarding decisions in GCSE English language and maths.

We have published analysis of the variability over time in the relationships between grades for the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and other variables (including GCSE grades) that could potentially influence students' performance on EPQ. Findings indicate that there might have been modest grade inflation in EPQ grade outcomes, particularly since 2014. We are planning to do further work to assess grade standards in EPQs over time.

In summer 2018 we enhanced our analytics apps to show variability in school and college GCSE and A level results and launched an interactive map of England showing results in different subjects by grade and county. We have now added a further app to our suite, which provides new data and functionality, showing [GCSE](#) and [A level](#) entries and results by subject and year.