

# News story: Perceptions of A levels and GCSEs in England: wave 15

Highlights from the survey:

## **Perceptions of GCSEs, AS and A levels**

1. Confidence in the GCSE, AS and A level systems is significantly higher than in previous years. Levels of trust and confidence in the maintenance of standards have also improved.
2. Overall figures show that, compared to last year and previous waves, significantly higher proportions of stakeholders agreed that GCSEs “are a trusted qualification” (65% to 72%), that “standards are maintained year on year” (30% to 40%), and that “marking of GCSEs is accurate” (26% to 38%).
3. A significantly higher proportion of stakeholders also agreed that “AS and A level standards are maintained year on year” (37% to 47%), and that “the marking of AS and A levels is accurate” (31% to 41%).
4. Around twice as many young people agreed than disagreed that GCSE and AS and A level marking was accurate. The net proportion of teachers in agreement was also larger for both sets of qualifications than in previous years.

## **Perceptions of GCSE reform**

1. The proportion of stakeholders who, in autumn 2016, were aware of the new 9 to 1 grading system was significantly higher than in wave 14. However, this improving picture of understanding is unlikely to reflect current levels of awareness, as Ofqual has since undertaken a wide-ranging communications and engagement campaign to raise awareness and understanding of the new grading system.

## **National Reference Test**

1. The first National Reference Test was undertaken in England in February and March this year. The data suggest that in November last year about half of surveyed head teachers were aware of the test. Ofqual, and its delivery partner NFER, have since provided more information to schools, so these results are unlikely to be a true reflection of the current picture. Awareness and familiarity of the test is expected to improve as more schools are engaged with it over coming years.

## **Review of marking and appeals**

1. Parents, young people and the general public strongly agreed that the systems used by schools and colleges to challenge GCSE, AS and A level results in England are fair. Teachers were also more likely to agree than disagree.
2. There was no change in the proportion of stakeholders who were aware of the review of marking, moderation and appeals systems compared with last year, and head teachers remained the group with the highest claimed awareness, at 75%.
3. When asked about whether they felt that they had adequate information about exam boards' review of marking, moderation and appeals systems, overall more stakeholders disagreed (45%) than agreed (28%).
4. Awareness of the systems for appealing vocational qualification results was much lower, with only half of head teachers and a quarter of teachers responding that they knew about the process.

## **Special consideration, reasonable adjustments and malpractice**

1. Head teachers and teachers agreed by significant margins that they have adequate information about the arrangements and adjustments available for eligible GCSE, AS and A level students. They also agreed that it is fair, and that the right adjustments are made for the right students.
2. They also strongly agreed that they have adequate information about what constitutes malpractice and to whom it should be reported and that allegations are fairly investigated.

Commenting on today's release, Michelle Meadows, Deputy Chief Regulator, Ofqual, said:

We are pleased that confidence in GCSEs, AS and A levels is improving. This bears out anecdotal feedback we have had from stakeholders about how we have engaged the sector with the reform programme and other changes we have introduced.

This is one of many positives reflected in the report.

We continue to be in period of major reform and many of the systems and processes surveyed in this report are currently changing. There

will inevitably be a period of bedding in as teachers and schools become more familiar with the changes. This is certainly true of the National Reference Test.

We also know that since this research was carried out we have done even more work around the new 9 to 1 grading structure, so the current position is likely to be better than reported here, but it still encouraging to see the figures increasing from this time last year.

Read the [full Official Statistics](#).