

Perceptions of qualifications in England: wave 19

News story

The results of Ofqual's annual survey on perceptions of AS, A levels, GCSEs and Applied General qualifications in England.



Ofqual has today (29 April 2021) published [wave 19 of the annual perceptions of AS, A levels, GCSEs and Applied General qualifications in England survey](#).

This information, published annually as official statistics, was carried out by the research organisation YouGov on our behalf.

These regular survey outputs allow us to understand changes and variations in general perceptions of qualifications among learners, parents, employers, teachers, headteachers, higher education institutions, and the general public.

This year to capture the extraordinary nature of the events and arrangements put in place in 2020 as a response to the pandemic, a separate set of questions specific to 2020 was also introduced.

A report outlining perceptions of vocational and technical qualifications will also be published prior to summer awarding.

Composite confidence in GCSE, AS, A level and Applied General qualifications in general

1. There was an increase in overall composite confidence in GCSEs, AS and A levels, and Applied General qualifications in general between waves 18 and 19.
2. General, overall composite confidence was highest for AS and A level qualifications, followed by GCSEs and Applied General qualifications, in that order.

General perceptions of GCSEs

1. In comparison with wave 18, there was an increase in the overall level of agreement that, in general, GCSEs are well understood by people (62% to 69%), while agreement that they are trusted qualifications remained broadly consistent (75%).
2. Overall levels of agreement that, in general, GCSE standards are maintained year-on-year increased (41% to 45%), as did the perception that, in general, the marking of these qualifications is accurate (39% to 46%) in comparison with wave 18.

General perceptions of AS and A levels

1. Compared to wave 18, there was an increase in the overall level of agreement that, in general, AS and A levels are well understood by people (59% to 63%). There was also an increase in the level of agreement that, in general, the marking of AS and A levels is accurate (42% to 49%).
2. In most cases, however, levels of agreement with statements regarding AS and A levels in general have remained broadly consistent in comparison with wave 18. In wave 19, approximately eight in ten respondents (82%) agreed that, in general, AS and A levels are trusted qualifications and half (50%) agreed that, in general, AS and A level standards are maintained year-on-year.

General perceptions of Applied General qualifications

1. Overall, 16% of respondents in wave 19 agreed that, in general, Applied General qualifications are well understood by people. This was an increase in comparison with wave 18.
2. In total, 38% of respondents in wave 19 agreed that, in general, Applied General qualifications are good preparation for further study. This was an increase compared with each of the previous waves
3. In wave 19, 45% of respondents agreed that, in general, Applied General qualifications are good preparation for work. This was an increase compared with each of the previous waves

Comparison of general perceptions of GCSEs, AS and A levels, and Applied Generals

1. Comparable to previous waves, in general, respondents expressed the highest levels of trust in AS and A levels, followed by GCSEs and then Applied General qualifications.
2. Respondents indicated higher levels of agreement that, in general, standards are maintained year-on-year for AS and A levels, followed by GCSEs. Agreement levels for both of these were much higher than for Applied General qualifications.
3. Respondents were most likely to agree that, in general, Applied General qualifications are good preparation for work, with higher levels of agreement than for AS, A levels and GCSEs.

Perceptions of the qualifications system in 2020

1. Asking respondents to think specifically about their perceptions of qualifications in 2020 rather than just their more general outlook exposed the impact that the changes in 2020 had on perceptions of qualifications in that year. In 2020, these qualifications appear to be perceived as less understood, trusted and consistent in standards.
2. Teachers and head teachers of Applied General qualifications were equally likely to say they were aware of the appeals against results process in place for Applied General qualifications in 2020 as they were of the normal process.
3. Respondents were less aware of the modified appeals against results process in place for GCSE, AS and A level results in 2020 than they were about the usual process
4. Teachers and head teachers who teach GCSEs, AS or A levels were less likely to agree that they had adequate information about what constituted malpractice in 2020 in comparison with their more general awareness of the system.

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