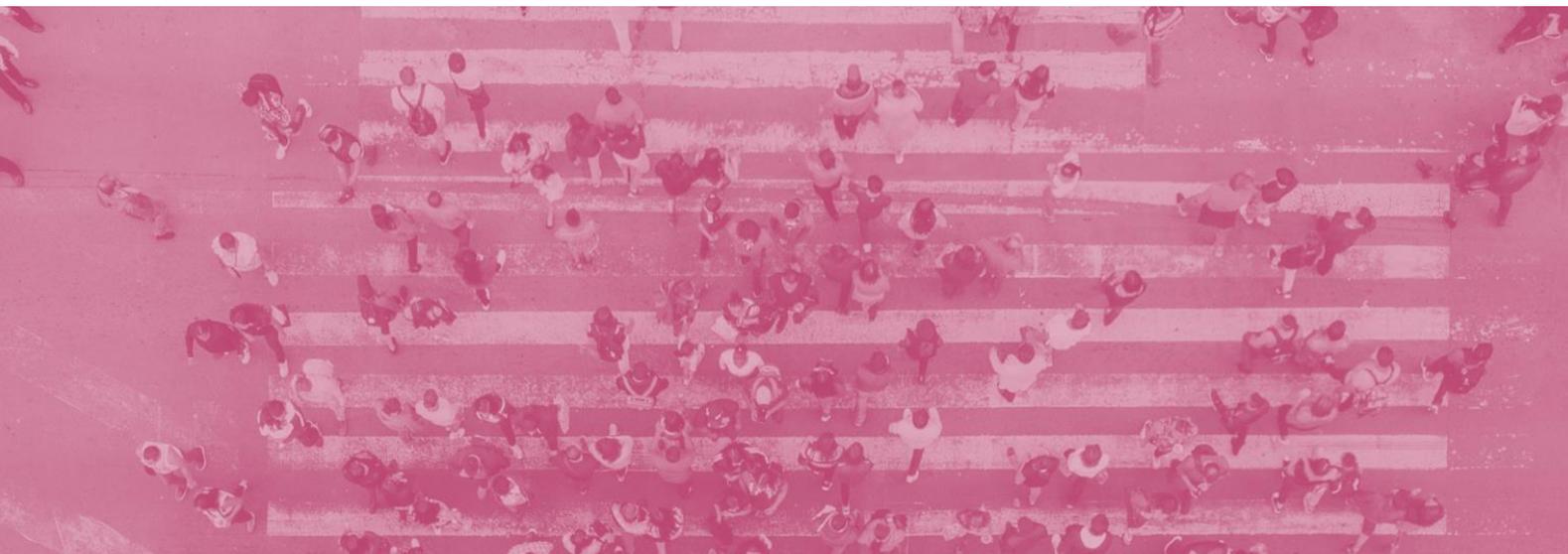


Ofqual Public Sentiment 2021

October 2022

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Overview

Purpose and design

This report presents the findings of a study commissioned by Ofqual and conducted by YouGov, which explored perceptions around the arrangements for assessing and grading students in 2021. This report should be read alongside the [background information document](#) for detailed information on the method, samples and processes. A report of public perceptions for qualifications that Ofqual regulates can also be found in [Ofqual's published Annual Perceptions Surveys, of which wave 20](#) also looks at views for qualifications in 2021. A brief overview of the purpose, design and method is provided in this report.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, alternative arrangements were put in place for assessments and grading in 2021. The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) commissioned YouGov to undertake a series of surveys to track perceptions of the arrangements for assessments and grading in 2021. Survey fieldwork took place over four waves between March to September 2021, collecting initial perceptions in wave 1 (March), pre-assessments perceptions in wave 2 (May), post-assessments perceptions in wave 3 (July) and post-results perceptions in wave 4 (September). Respondents comprised representative samples of key stakeholder groups: senior leaders in schools, teachers, students, parents, employers, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the general public.

The objective of the research was to explore public and stakeholder perceptions and confidence in relation to arrangements for assessments and grading in England in 2021, for a range of qualifications: GCSEs; A levels; BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Professional qualifications; Tech Awards and Tech Levels; and Functional Skills. The research was conducted in response to the fact that changes to assessments were instated as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Specifically, the survey explored issues related to:

- Awareness of arrangements for grading students in 2021;
- Views on grades in the context of 2021 and in the context of ‘before the pandemic’, about issues related to utility and dependability of grades, and indications of proficiency;
- Views about teacher judgements;
- Views about the arrangements for appeals in 2021; and
- Overall perceptions of confidence.

Note that all questions reported here were asked in the respective waves in 2021. This means perceptions relating to the context of ‘pre-pandemic’ were captured in 2021, and therefore captured *reflections* of a time before the pandemic. Also note that when the report refers to survey questions that ask about ‘this year’, this is referring to 2021.

The final achieved samples were structured to be representative of the relevant target populations. While the sampling approach aimed to identify groups of participants who were representative, it should be acknowledged that responses attributed to stakeholder groups reflect only those respondents included in the study. The surveys took a repeated cross-sectional approach, such that different respondents took part in the surveys over the waves. Over 3,000 respondents took part in each wave. Tables 1 and 2 show base sizes for each stakeholder group and the number of respondents who answered questions about the qualifications we asked about, respectively. For further information on the base sizes for each question, please refer to the accompanying data tables.

Table 1: base sizes for each stakeholder group.

Wave	Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)	Students	Senior Leaders	Teachers	Parents	The General Public	Employers	All stakeholders
Wave 1	345	631	537	582	604	429	405	3,533
Wave 2	165	606	360	586	602	411	434	3,164
Wave 3	180	606	489	415	613	454	497	3,254
Wave 4	373	605	438	554	606	549	440	3,565
Total	1,063	2,448	1,824	2,137	2,425	1,843	1,776	13,516

Table 2: total base sizes across all stakeholder groups for those who were selected to answer about each qualification.

Wave	GCSEs	A levels	Functional Skills	BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications	Tech Awards and Tech Levels	Professional qualifications
Wave 1	1,560	1,902	678	1,156	664	616
Wave 2	1,470	1,613	634	1,081	599	528
Wave 3	1,510	1,689	613	1,096	609	565
Wave 4	1,559	1,920	688	1,171	675	654
Total	6,099	7,124	2,613	4,504	2,547	2,363

A note on understanding findings

The surveys generated a large amount of data and findings. For simplicity and to aid understanding, in this report we often refer to ‘levels of confidence’. This refers to the overall interpretation that can be gleaned from the findings when taking into account the context of the question, rates of agreement and rates of disagreement with a survey statement. We also refer to ‘levels of uncertainty’ throughout the report, which reflects the use of the ‘don’t know’ or ‘neither agree nor disagree’ response options. Throughout the report, all references to differences in findings between data points refer to statistically significant differences.

Summary of key findings

Overall, stakeholders reported lower confidence for qualifications taking place in 2021 than those taking place before the pandemic. This was the case for all of the qualifications we asked about, including those that did not see large changes to their arrangements in 2021, such as functional skills qualifications and professional qualifications. Generally, perceptions of qualifications before the pandemic remained consistent, while comparatively, they fluctuated somewhat over the four waves when thinking about 2021. This particularly occurred at the tracking mid-points, where confidence generally waned a little, but often recovered in the post-results wave. There were also some instances in which confidence for the arrangements in 2021 decreased over the tracking period, whilst increases in confidence over the waves were extremely rare. Stakeholders also more commonly reported uncertainty around qualifications when responding about the 2021 context, compared with the pre-pandemic context.

Overall, confidence was highest among teachers and senior leaders, likely reflecting the role that those working in education played in the grading process and their knowledge of this. Confidence tended to be lower among students, which could be a result of them being directly impacted by many of the decisions around the arrangements for grading. Other stakeholder groups demonstrating lower levels of confidence were employers and the general public.

The analyses identified some specific aspects of the arrangements for assessment and grading in the 2021 context that stakeholders were concerned about or were confident about. These are outlined here, starting with aspects that stakeholders were most concerned about.

Aspects of the arrangements in 2021 that stakeholders were most concerned about

Bias in 2021. Issues of bias had the lowest levels of confidence when thinking about both before the pandemic and 2021 contexts, compared with other elements explored in the survey. This was also one of the themes with the most significant difference in perceptions when comparing 2021 to pre-pandemic, where stakeholders were much less likely to perceive grades as being free from bias in 2021.

Teacher judgement in practice in 2021. Overall confidence in teacher judgements was relatively high compared to other issues explored across the survey. Interestingly, stakeholders felt confident that teachers had the *expertise* to grade their students, although they were less confident that they would grade them accurately in reality, i.e. that they would grade neither too harshly nor too generously. For some measures, levels of confidence declined between the initial perceptions and the post-results waves. This was particularly the case for whether they ‘trust teachers to not grade too harshly nor too generously’, and for whether ‘teachers had the relevant expertise or support to assess students effectively’. These drops in confidence were most strongly evident among parents and the general public.

Reliability and comparability of grades in 2021. Similar to bias, confidence that grades would be reliable and comparable across schools and colleges was much lower when thinking about 2021 in general, in comparison with perceptions about grades pre-pandemic.

Students getting the grades they deserved in 2021. Half of stakeholders indicated agreement that students overall would get, or got, the grades they deserved in 2021. Parents, teachers and senior leaders had the strongest levels of agreement. Stakeholders were also asked to think about students from different backgrounds or contexts. With the exception of ‘students from advantaged backgrounds’, there was generally much less confidence that students from other contexts, particularly for private candidates and

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students from disadvantaged backgrounds, would get (or got) the grades they deserved. Confidence about this issue declined over the tracking period.

GCSE and A Levels 2021. Responses indicate that confidence in GCSEs and A Levels was particularly impacted by the context of the pandemic. Levels of confidence about the pre-pandemic context for A levels and GCSEs were higher than for BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Professional qualifications; Tech Awards and Tech Levels; and Functional Skills. However, GCSEs and A Levels had the most significant difference in confidence when comparing perceptions about the pre-pandemic context with 2021.

Aspects of the arrangements that stakeholders were confident about

Clarity of the arrangements for grading in 2021. The vast majority of respondents agreed that it was clear to them how students were graded in 2021, after reading a description of this.

Vocational and technical qualifications in 2021. Although lower levels of average confidence for 2021 were recorded for all of the qualifications we asked about, there was less of a difference between perceptions of the pre-pandemic and 2021 contexts for vocational and technical qualifications, in comparison with general qualifications.

Utility of grades in 2021: Issues related to utility of grades, such as grades being good indicators of a student's aptitude to study and potential for success in their future career, was also an area that showed resilience to decreased confidence in 2021. When comparing perceptions for 2021 with those for before the pandemic, there was a relatively smaller difference in confidence compared with issues related to dependability of grades, such as reliability and comparability.

Findings

In this report we present the findings across seven main sections:

- Overarching measures of confidence for the arrangements for assessing and grading students in 2021
- Perceptions about the clarity of the arrangements for grading in 2021
- Specific measure of confidence relating to utility and dependability of grades in the contexts of before the pandemic and in 2021
- Perceptions about proficiency associated with grades in the contexts of before the pandemic and 2021
- Perceptions about teacher judgements
- Perceptions about whether students would receive the grades they deserved in 2021
- Perceptions about the process for appeals in 2021

Under these sections we first introduce the questions that stakeholders were asked, highlighting the differences in wording across the waves, which are largely changes in tense (note that the full suite of questions respondents were asked are appended in the [background information document](#)). We then go through the findings related to those questions. Findings are first presented at the level of ‘all stakeholders’ and ‘all waves’ combined – under the heading “What did stakeholders report overall?”. We then look at trends in perceptions over the 4 waves, and finally explore views across stakeholder groups. Note that the data for individual stakeholder groups are largely not charted in this report, but all associated data is reported in the accompanying [data tables](#).

Overarching measures of confidence for the arrangements for assessing and grading students in 2021

The questions we asked stakeholders

In order to measure overall confidence in the arrangements for assessments in 2021, all stakeholders were asked their perceptions on whether the arrangements for grading students that were in place were as good as could be given the circumstances, and overall, whether students were graded fairly in 2021.

The specific question wording is set out below. The square brackets indicate where different iterations of text were placed, as well as any wave-dependent changes.

- “[If everything goes to plan, students will be (W1-W3); Overall, students were (W4)] graded fairly in 2021”.
- “The arrangements for grading students that [are in place are as good as can be (W1-W3); were in place were as good as could be (W4)] given the circumstances”.

For example, in wave 1 we asked: "If everything goes to plan, students will be graded fairly in 2021." Whereas, in wave 4 we asked: "Overall, students were graded fairly in 2021."

These questions were asked to all stakeholders.

What did stakeholders report overall?

Overall, half of stakeholders (52%) were confident that the arrangements for grading students that were in place were as good as could be given the circumstances. A similar proportion (46%) agreed that students would be/were graded fairly in 2021.

Were there any differences across waves?

For both statements, there was a decrease in confidence over the 4 waves.

For example, there was a small (but statistically significant) decrease in the proportion agreeing that the arrangements for grading students that were in place were as good as could be given the circumstances (see figure 1), from 54% in the initial perceptions wave to 50% in the post-results wave. This was coupled with an increase in uncertainty in the post-results wave (from 6% to 8%). The proportion disagreeing remained broadly comparable over time.

In keeping with the observed decrease in confidence that the arrangements in place were as good as they could be, there was a marked decrease in confidence that students were graded fairly in 2021 (see figure 2). Among stakeholders overall, this fell from 49% agreeing to 41% between the initial perceptions and post-results waves. This was coupled with an increase in the proportions disagreeing (27% to 31%) and saying they were not sure (6% to 9%).

Were there any differences between stakeholders?

At an overall level (looking at all waves combined) agreement with both statements was highest among teachers, senior leaders and parents, likely reflecting the role that those working in education played in the grading process. Confidence was lowest among students; throughout the research, students tended to report lower levels of confidence, which could be a result of them being directly impacted by many of the decisions around the arrangements for grading.

Confidence that the arrangements in place were as good as they could be was highest among parents (59% agreement) and senior leaders (55%), and lowest among students (46%). Around half (49%) of the general public agreed with this, with the highest level of uncertainty (14% vs. 6% average).



Overall, senior leaders and teachers, who consistently demonstrated higher levels of confidence, were most likely to agree that students were graded fairly in 2021 (55% and 51% in Wave 4 respectively). However, it is notable that three in ten of both of these stakeholder groups disagreed. Confidence among the other stakeholder groups was lower, particularly among students (43% agreement), the general public and HEIs (both 39% agreement). Mirroring confidence in the arrangements, the general public were the group most likely to be uncertain (14% vs. 7% average). The drop in confidence that students were graded fairly in 2021 from the initial perceptions to post-results wave was a result of shifting confidence among many of the stakeholder groups: the general public, parents, employers, HEIs and students. Most notably, among the general public, levels of agreement decreased from 46% to 30% and among parents, decreased from 58% to 45%.

Figure 1. The arrangements for grading students that [are in place are as good as can be (W1-W3); were in place were as good as could be (W4)] given the circumstances

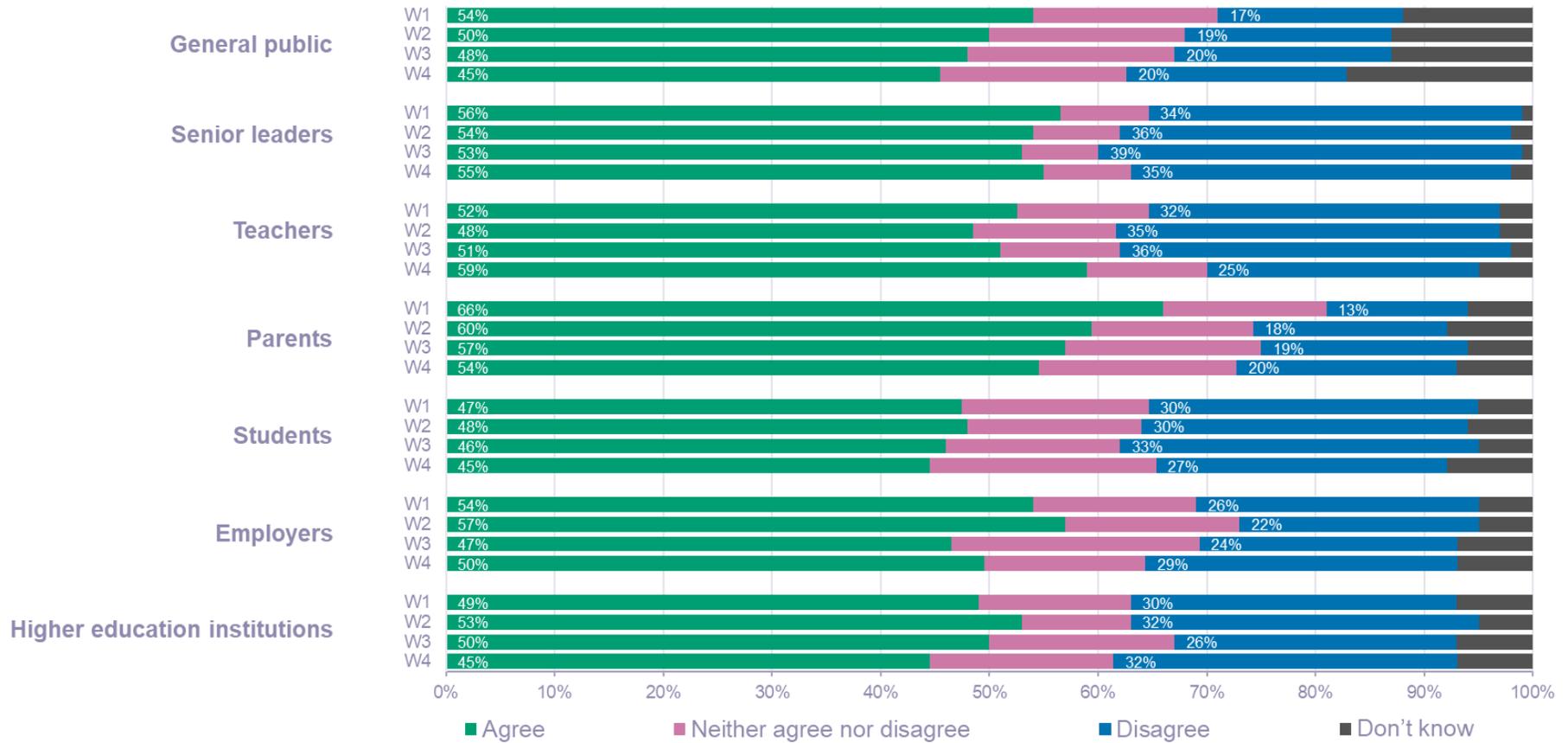
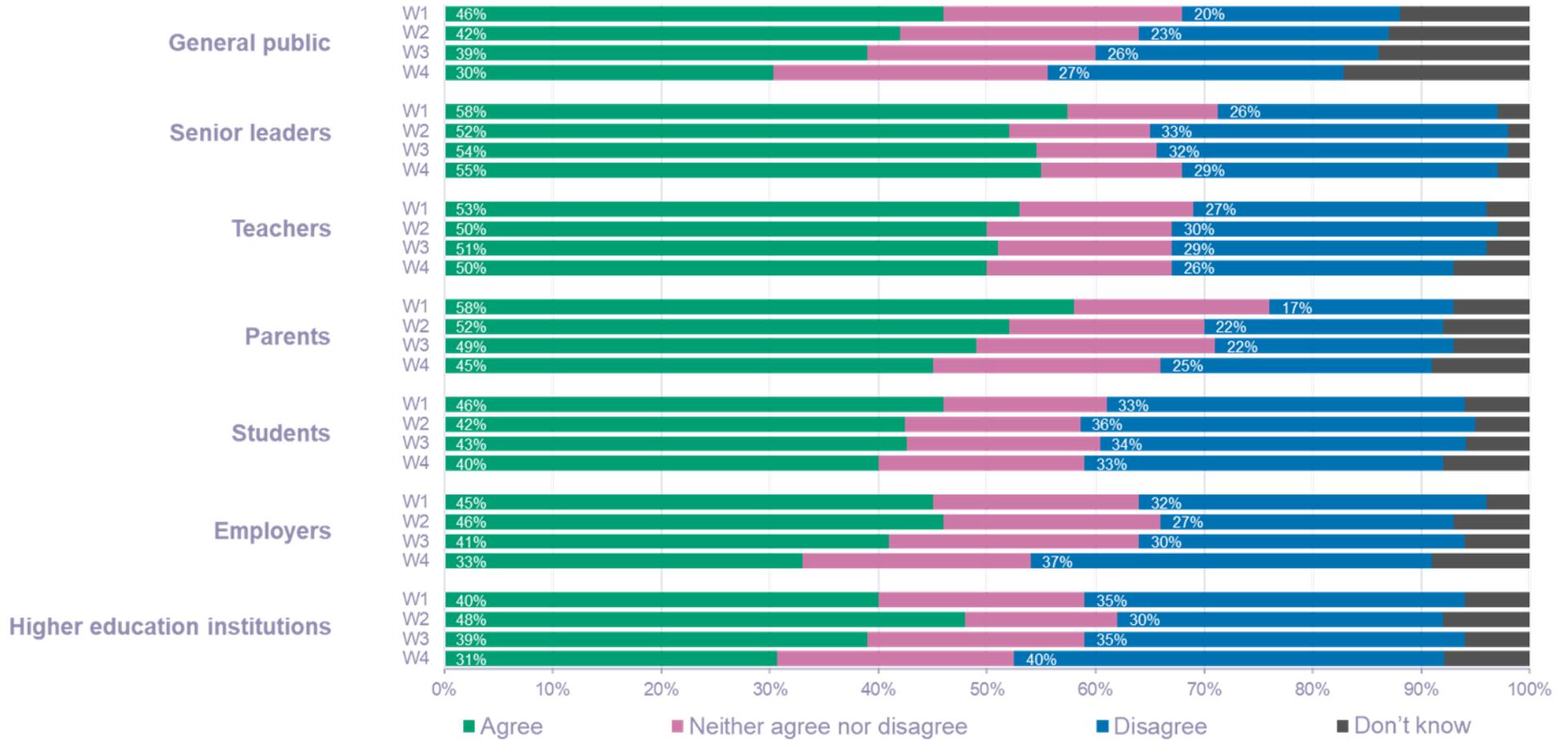


Figure 2. [If everything goes to plan, students will be (W1-W3); Overall, students were (W4)] graded fairly in 2021



Perceptions about the clarity of the arrangements for grading in 2021

The question we asked stakeholders

In order to measure the clarity of the arrangements for grading in 2021, all stakeholders were shown a page of text describing the grading process, which outlined what grades were based on, the role of teachers and awarding organisations, and the process for quality assurance.

The specific question wording is set out below. The square brackets indicate where different iterations of text were placed, as well as any wave-dependent changes. All stakeholders were asked this question.

- “It is clear to me how students [will be (W1-W3); were (W4)] graded this year”

What did stakeholders report overall?

On average, we found that the vast majority of stakeholders (78%) agreed that it was clear to them how students were graded in 2021 after reading the introductory text. Only around one in ten (11%) disagreed. Confidence was high among all stakeholder groups during the tracking period, with over seven in ten agreeing across each of the waves.

Were there any differences across waves?

Agreement that the arrangements for grading students were clear remained relatively stable over time – 78% in the initial perceptions wave and 79% in the post-results wave (see figure 3).

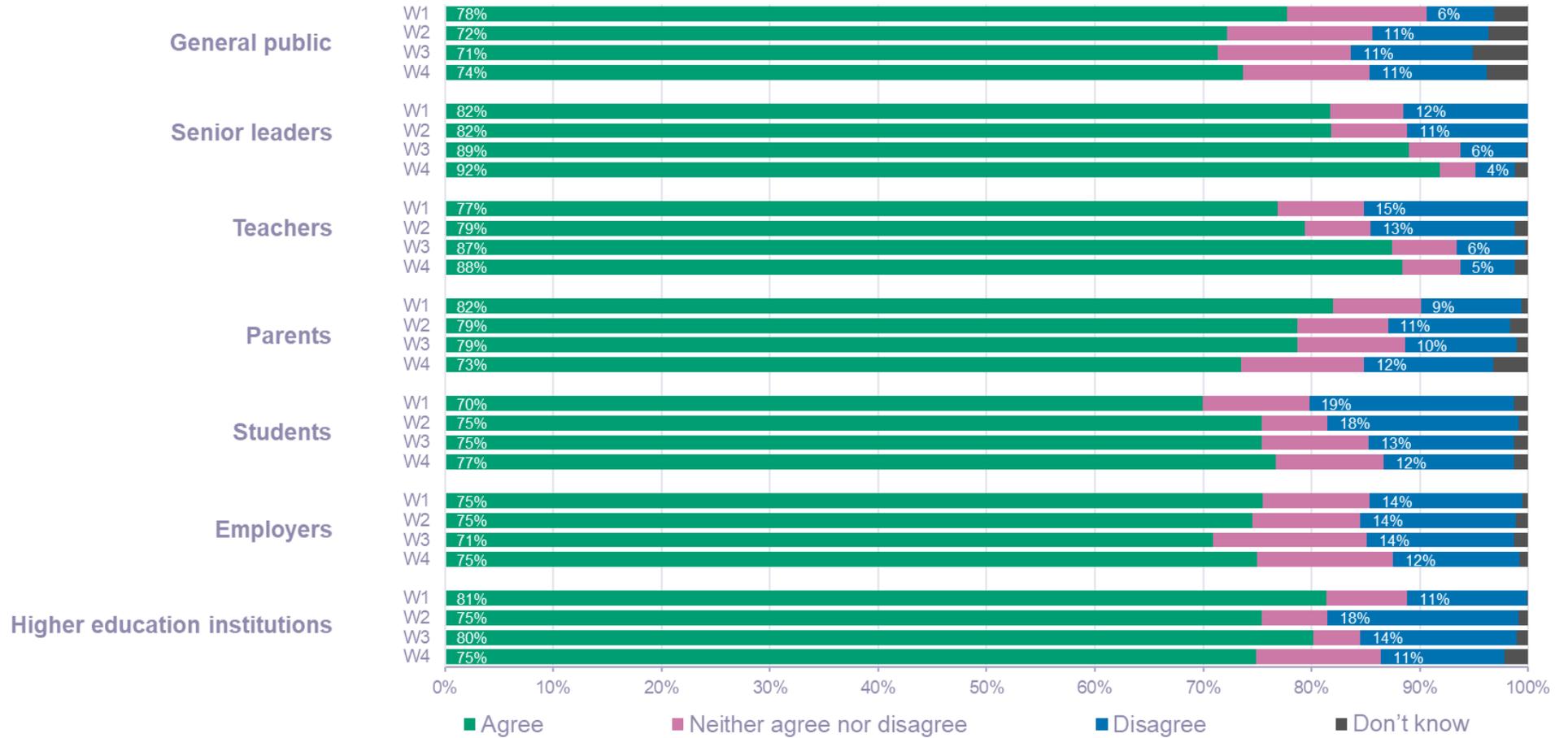
Among teachers and senior leaders, who can be expected to be knowledgeable of the grading process, agreement increased between the initial two waves and the final two waves. For example, among teachers levels of agreement increased from 77% in the initial perceptions wave to 88% in the post-results wave. For senior leaders, agreement increased from 82% to 92%. Agreement that the grading process was clear also increased among students from the initial perceptions wave (70%) to the post-results wave (77%). However, this pattern was not seen among all stakeholder groups. Among parents, agreement that the grading process was clear decreased between the initial perceptions and post-results waves (from 82% to 73%).

Were there any differences between stakeholders?

At an overall level (looking at all waves combined) agreement was highest among senior leaders (86%) and teachers (83%), likely reflecting the role that those working in education played in the grading process, and their knowledge of this. Agreement was lowest among students, employers and the general public (all 74%), though this figure remains high. The data by stakeholder groups is not shown in the figures in this section, but can be found in the [data tables](#).

For all stakeholder groups, disagreement with the statement about clarity of the grading process was low. For example, one in ten (10%) teachers and senior leaders (8%) said that they disagreed it was clear to them how students were graded in 2021. This was the same for the general public (10%), with slightly higher but still relatively low levels of disagreement among students (15%).

Figure 3. It is clear to me how students [will be (W1-W3); were (W4)] graded this year



Specific measures of confidence relating to utility and dependability of grades

The questions we asked stakeholders

The survey presented respondents with a series of 11 statements around specific indicators of confidence in the grades generated through arrangements for assessments across two contexts: ‘before the pandemic’ and ‘in 2021’. These 11 statements explored the following themes relating to grades: reliability, bias, comparability, usefulness as measures of knowledge, usefulness for university admissions, usefulness for job recruitment, fairness, trust, aptitude for studying in general, aptitude for studying specific subjects, and the potential for success in students’ future careers. Each statement was presented to respondents in relation to six qualifications types: GCSEs; A levels; Functional Skills; BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Awards and Tech Levels; and Professional¹ qualifications². For the purposes of this analysis, levels of agreement with these statements were interpreted as levels of confidence.

Stakeholders were only asked to respond about qualifications they were aware of. If respondents were aware of both GCSEs and A levels, they were only shown the 11 statements for one of these qualification types (selected at random). Following this, respondents were asked about vocational and technical qualifications: Functional Skills; BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational

¹ Licence to Practise / competency / professional / proficiency qualifications (ie those equivalent to GCSE and A Level, but not degree level), collectively referred to in these reports as ‘professional qualifications’

² Respondents were shown a 5-point agreement scale. Agree is an aggregation of strongly agree and agree and disagree an aggregation of strongly disagree and disagree.

qualifications; Tech Awards and Tech Levels; and Professional qualifications. If they were aware of more than one, they were only shown the set of 11 statements about one of these qualifications (selected at random). The allocation was designed to ensure a relatively even response coverage across all qualifications.

This section of the survey generated a significant amount of data. We have therefore broken down the analyses into several parts. This chapter of the report begins by exploring the data at a high level: looking at trends across the four waves of the research by the theme of the question, by qualification and also by stakeholder group. Following this, and for completeness, we provide a more in-depth analysis of each of the statements within this section of the survey.

Trends by theme

In the case of all 11 themes, average levels of confidence in qualifications across the different stakeholder groups and waves were lower when considering the arrangements in 2021 compared with thinking back to perceptions about before the pandemic. However, the degree of difference varied from one theme to another (see figure 4). The themes that saw a smaller difference in confidence between pre-pandemic perceptions and perceptions about 2021 were issues related to utility of grades: qualifications being good indicators of a student's aptitude to study and potential for success in their future career, as well as being useful for judging what a student is capable of.

Meanwhile, there were five themes that stood out as having the greatest differences in average levels of confidence when comparing 2021 to pre-pandemic perceptions. These were issues related to dependability: fairness, qualifications being reliable, trusted by people, free from bias and comparable across all schools/colleges. These were also the four themes to which the lowest levels of overall confidence were attributed when thinking about the 2021 context.



Average levels of confidence in qualifications being free from bias and comparable across all schools/colleges consistently had the lowest ranking when thinking about both contexts: pre-pandemic and 2021. Meanwhile, reliability and trust saw a difference in ranking when comparing pre-pandemic perceptions with 2021; pre-pandemic, they were among the themes with the highest levels of confidence associated. For trust in particular, there was a stark difference in responses for the context of pre-pandemic and 2021, with trust in grades being lower for the context of 2021.

Average confidence in qualifications in 2021 across these 11 themes remained relatively consistent over the course of the four waves (see figure 5). In most cases only marginal fluctuations occurred.

However, there was a slight gradual decrease in confidence that qualifications would be fair to students at the pre and post-assessment waves, which then rose back to the initial level recorded in the post-results wave. For some other themes there were marginal dips in confidence during the pre and post-assessment waves, but these were not statistically significant. For each theme, average levels of confidence were roughly equivalent when comparing initial perceptions to the post-results wave.

Figure 4. Net agreement by theme, all stakeholders and waves combined

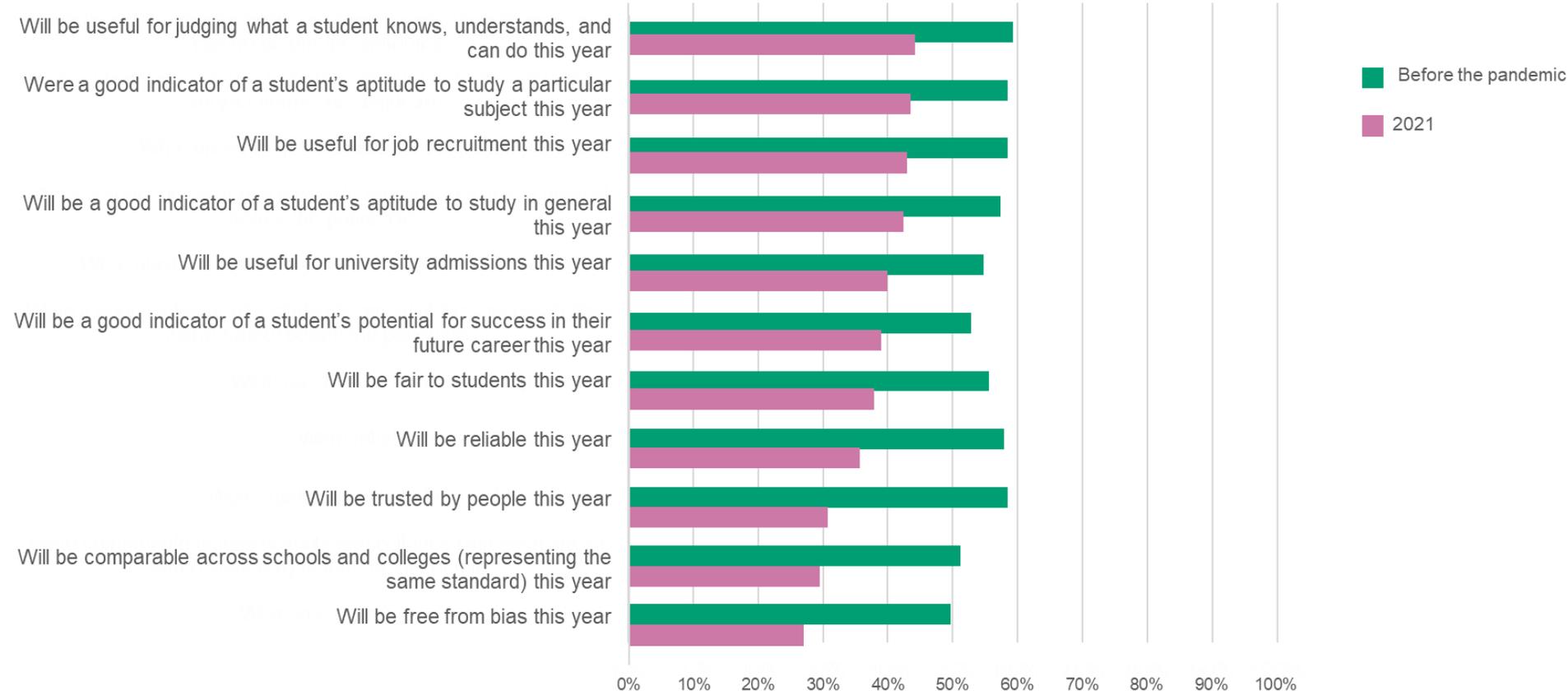
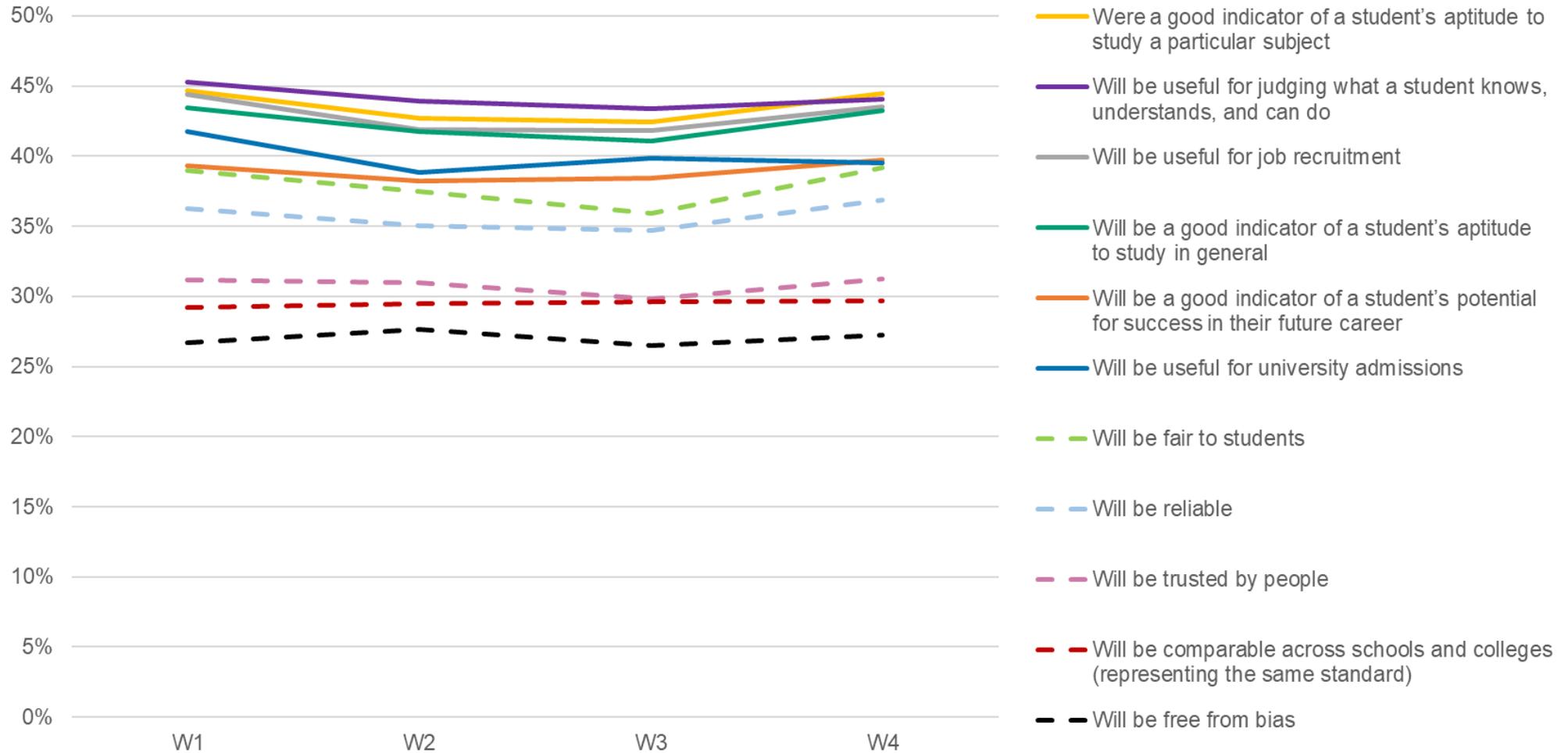


Figure 5. Net agreement by theme for the 2021 context, all stakeholders and qualifications combined



Note for interpretation: the themes represented by dotted lines are those related to dependability and the themes represented by solid lines are those related to utility of grades.

Trends by type of qualification

Compared with perceptions of the arrangements for assessments before the pandemic, average confidence in the context of each of the six qualification types we asked about was lower when stakeholders were thinking in the context of 2021.

When reporting in relation to Pre-pandemic, average confidence in A levels and GCSEs was higher than in BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Professional qualifications; Tech Awards and Tech Levels; and Functional Skills (see figure 6). However, A levels and GCSEs had the greatest differential in average confidence when comparing pre-pandemic perceptions to perceptions about 2021, with average confidence in A levels and GCSEs in the context of 2021 recorded at similar levels to those in the other qualifications.

When comparing pre-pandemic perceptions and perceptions about 2021, average confidence in BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; and Professional qualifications was moderately lower when thinking about 2021. For Tech Awards and Tech Levels and Functional Skills there was a smaller (but still statistically significant) difference in confidence, with confidence being lower in 2021 than pre-pandemic.

As seen in the analysis by individual theme, average overall confidence in the six qualifications remained relatively stable across the four waves of research in the context of 2021 (see figure 7). The exception to this is for Tech Awards and Tech Levels, where there was a slight decrease in confidence in the post-assessment wave compared with initial and pre-assessment perceptions. In the post-results wave, average confidence in Tech Awards and Tech Levels rose back up towards levels recorded in the earlier waves. For the other qualification types, there were mainly only marginal fluctuations over time.

Figure 6. Net agreement by qualification, all themes and waves combined

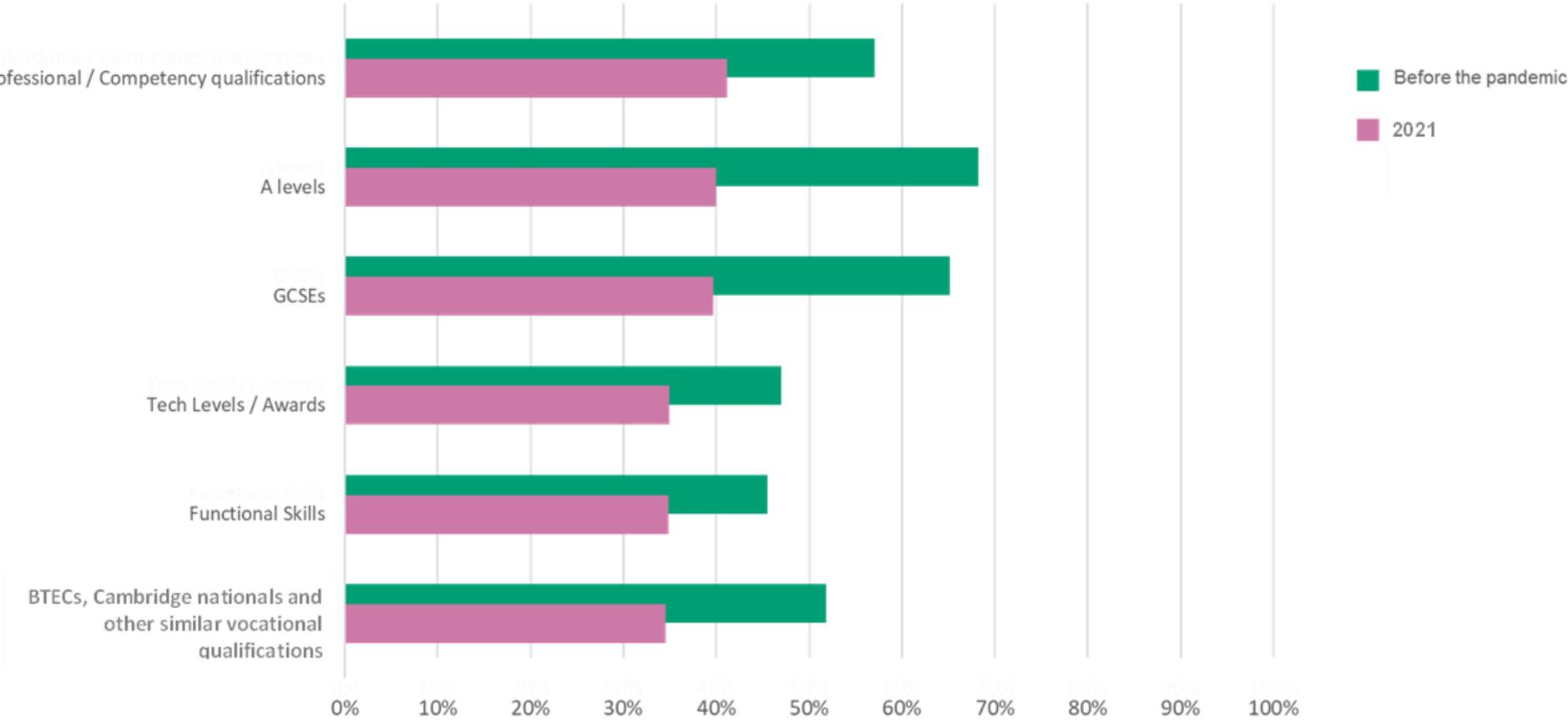
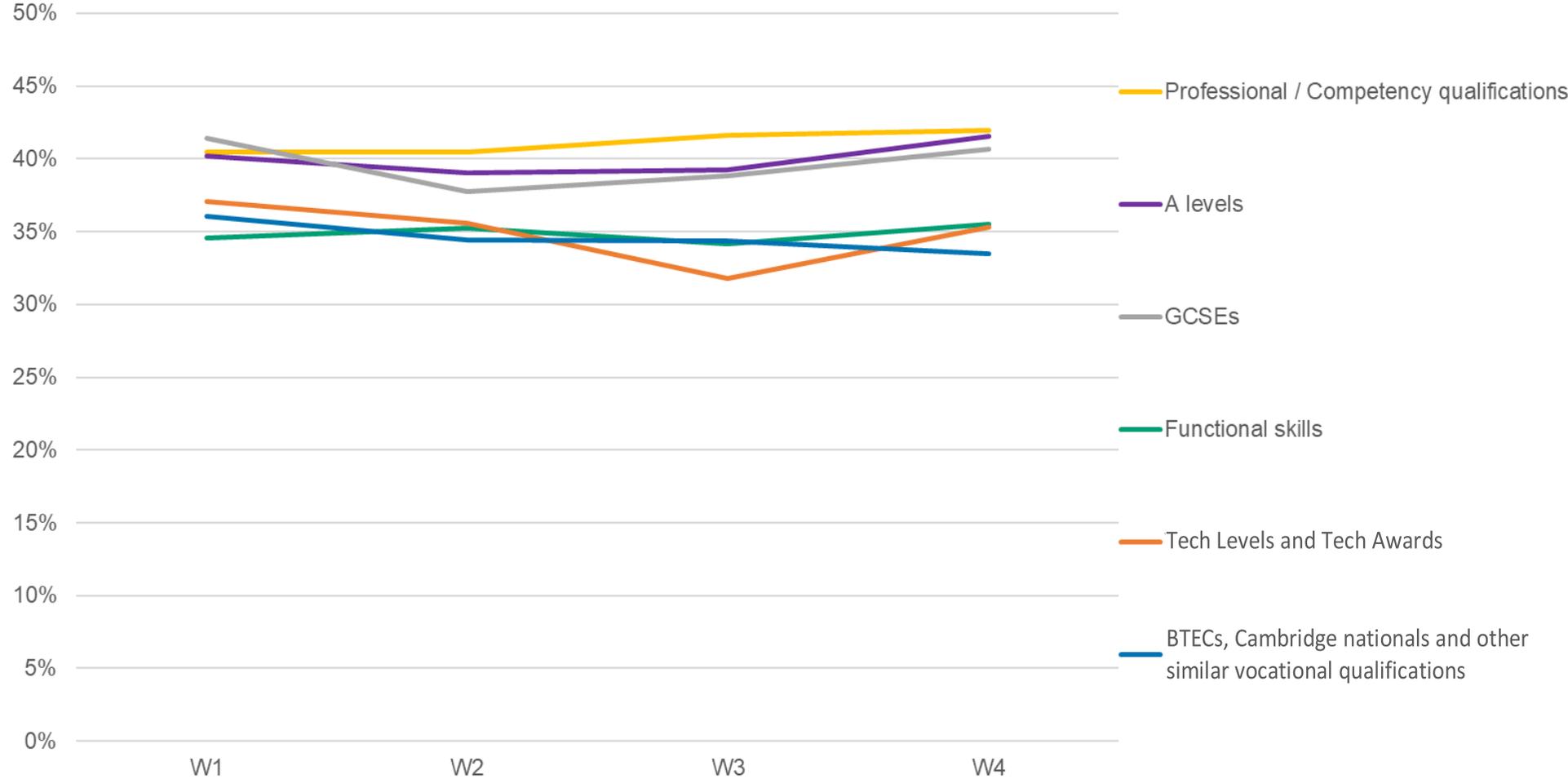


Figure 7. Net agreement for the context of 2021 by qualification, all themes combined





Trends by stakeholder

This section examines stakeholders' overall confidence in each qualification. This analysis is conducted using a composite confidence measure, which was developed as a means of quantifying overall confidence in qualifications and exploring changes between waves.

The composite confidence measure was calculated based on the 11 themes: reliability, bias, comparability, usefulness as measures of knowledge, usefulness for university admissions, usefulness for job recruitment, fairness, trust, aptitude for studying in general, aptitude for studying specific subjects, and the potential for success in students' future careers. It was calculated separately for the contexts of before the pandemic and 2021.

These 11 themes were presented to respondents as separate statements within a scale-based question, which ranged from strong agreement to strong disagreement. The questions were asked separately for each of the six qualifications examined. Based on respondents' selections, responses were assigned a score between 1 and 5 for each of the eight criteria. 'Don't know' responses were excluded from the calculation. Ultimately, an average overall confidence score was calculated for each stakeholder group and qualification type.

For more information on the scoring system and calculation method, please see the accompanying [Background Information document](#).

Differences between stakeholder groups

The following analyses explores the composite confidence measures across stakeholder groups and over the four waves of research. The data for the following narrative can be found in Figures 8 to 13, and Tables 3 to 8.

When looking at composite confidence in qualifications averaged across the four waves of research, the groups who were most and least confident tended to vary somewhat depending on the qualification and whether this was asked in the context of pre-pandemic or 2021 (see Tables 3 to 8). When thinking about the context of 2021, in the case of most qualifications, parents tended to have slightly higher composite confidence than other groups and students tended to have slightly lower composite confidence than others. However, note that these differences should often be treated only as indicative as they are not statistically significantly different to all other stakeholder groups (see the [data tables](#) for further details of significant comparisons).

Looking at average composite confidence in GCSEs and A levels, when it came to perceptions about the pre-pandemic context there tended to be a similar ranking in confidence by stakeholder group. Senior leaders, teachers, employers and parents tended to have higher levels of composite confidence than the general public, students and HEIs. These differences were statistically significant for senior leaders and teachers in particular.

Meanwhile, when looking at average composite confidence in GCSEs and A levels about 2021, parents tended to rank slightly higher than other groups. These differences tended to be statistically significant when compared against teachers, employers and students for GCSEs, and against employers, students, the general public and HEIs for A levels. Otherwise, differences between groups were marginal. In general, students tended to have lower average composite confidence in GCSEs and A levels when thinking about 2021 than various other groups.

For Functional Skills, Tech Awards and Tech Levels and Professional qualifications, there tended to be slightly less variation in levels of average composite confidence for the context of 2021 between the stakeholder groups, although students tended to have lower composite confidence than some other groups - as seen with other qualifications. There were few significant differences or trends observed in the context of 2021 for these three qualification types. For perceptions about the pre-pandemic context, it remained that there were few trends or differences to report in composite confidence in Functional Skills, Tech Awards and Tech Levels and Professional qualifications.

When looking at average composite confidence in BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications, there tended to be some similarities in trends between perceptions about the pre-pandemic context and the 2021 context. In both cases, on average, parents were among those with the highest composite confidence and HEIs among those with the lowest. Otherwise, differences between stakeholder groups were marginal.

HEIs tended to be among those with the lowest average composite confidence in BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; and Functional Skills and in the context of 2021, while among those with the highest average composite confidence in Professional qualifications. The differences in composite confidence between stakeholder groups for Functional Skills and Professional qualifications, however, were not statistically significant.

Trends across the waves

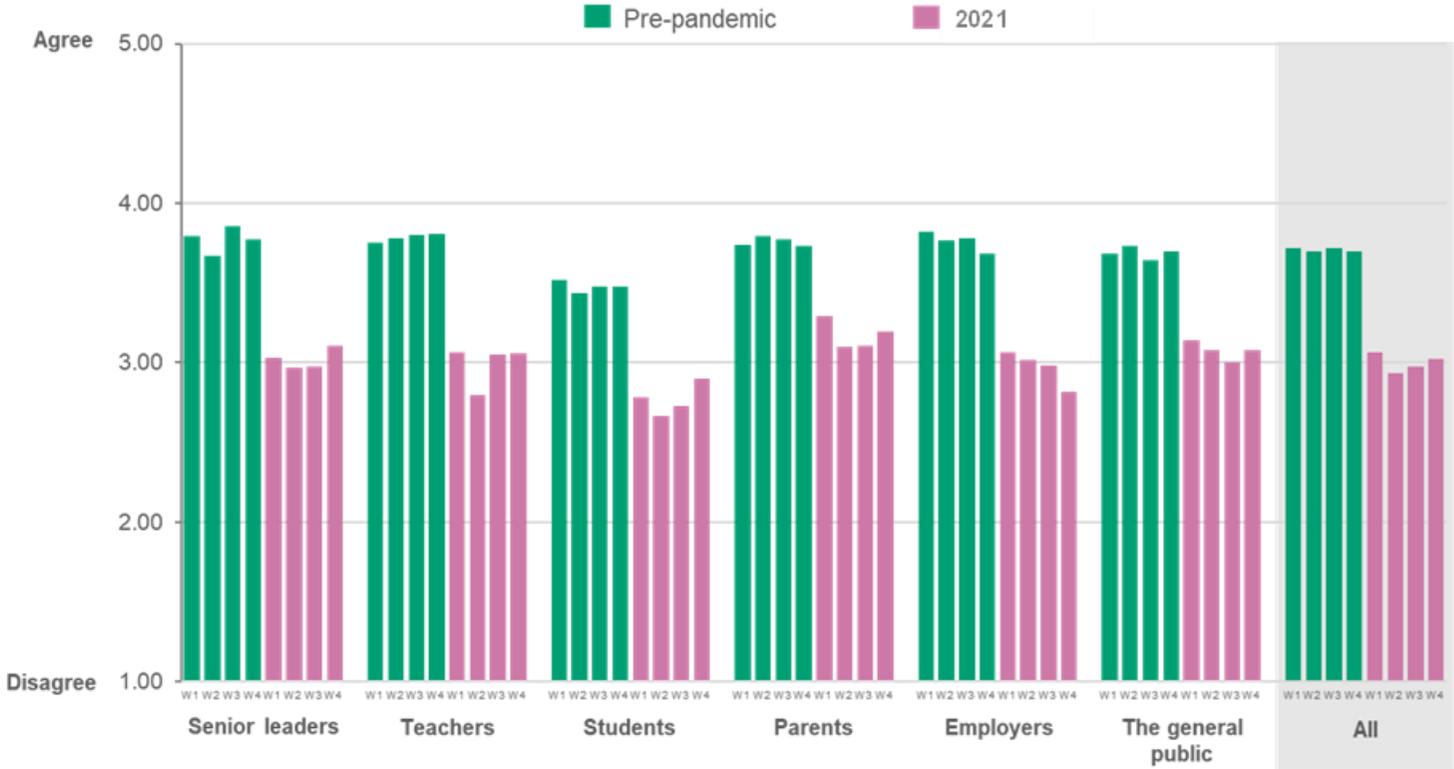
When examining changes in composite confidence by stakeholder group between the waves of research, some trends emerged. We present these trends across the waves by qualification. Note that the statistically significant differences in perceptions are reported in the [data tables](#) and the narrative provided here.

GCSEs

When thinking about the context of 2021, composite confidence in GCSEs decreased among teachers and parents when comparing initial perceptions to those recorded pre-assessment. For teachers, confidence recovered post-assessment and was sustained post-results, whereas this was not the case for parents. There was also a gradual decline in confidence in GCSEs among employers over the course of the four waves. Meanwhile, among students there was a gradual increase in confidence observed between the pre-assessment and post-results waves.

Looking at perceptions in the context of pre-pandemic, there were no significant shifts apart from a slight increase in confidence among senior leaders between the pre and post-assessment waves. For further information see figure 8.

Figure 8. Composite confidence in GCSEs



Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neither agree nor disagree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly disagree = 1. 'Don't know' responses have been excluded. HEIs were not asked about GCSEs.

Table 3. Four-wave average composite confidence score: GCSEs

Composite confidence score: four-wave average	Senior leaders	Teachers	Students	Parents	Employers	The general public	All
Pre-pandemic	3.77	3.79	3.48	3.76	3.76	3.69	3.71
2021	3.02	2.99	2.77	3.17	2.97	3.07	3.00

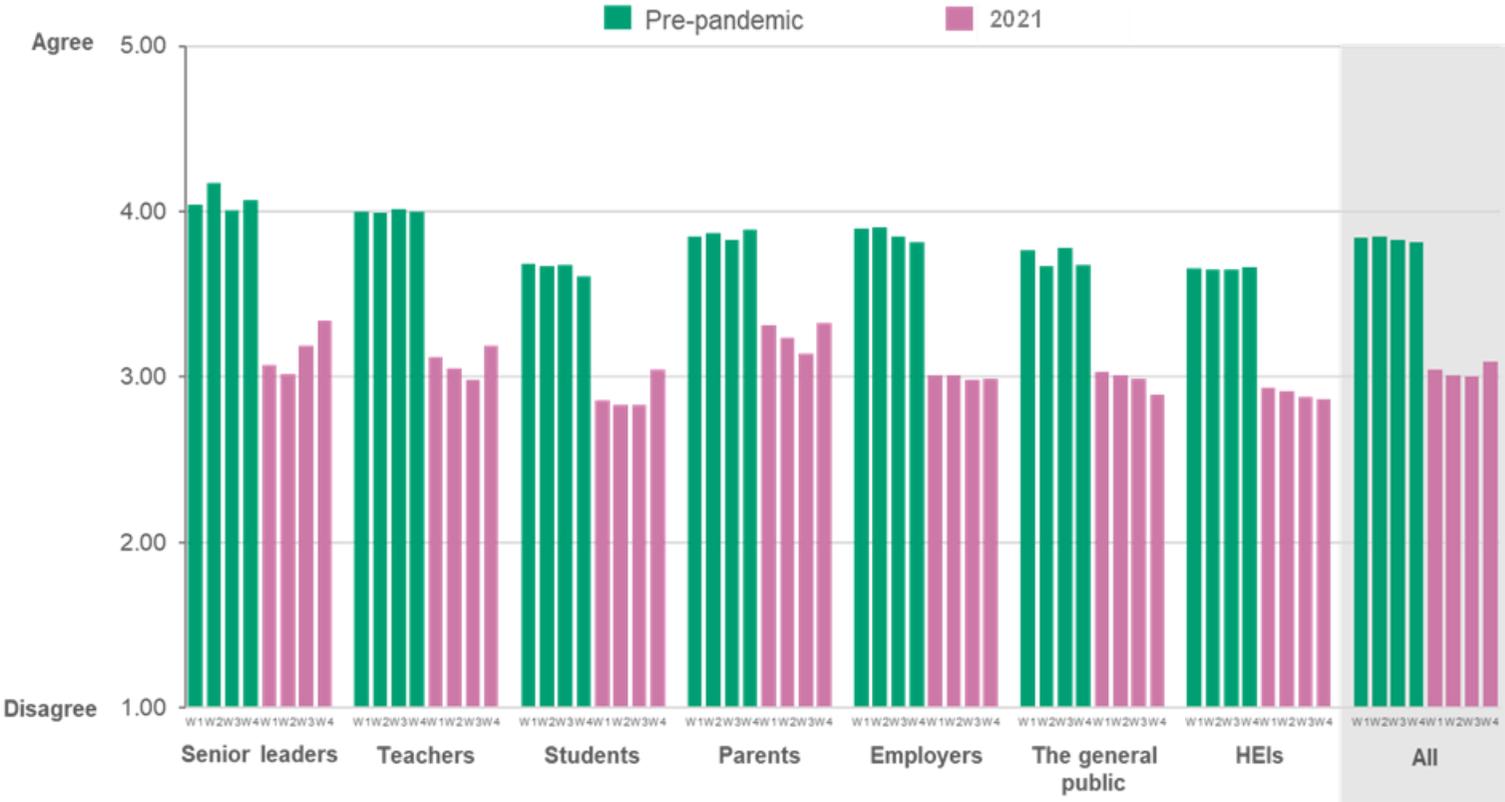
A levels

Contrary to their consistent levels of confidence in GCSEs when thinking about 2021, among senior leaders, there was a gradual rise in confidence in A levels for the context of 2021 between the pre-assessment and post-results waves. Teachers and students also reported increasing levels of confidence for the context of 2021, in both cases between the post-assessment and post-results waves.

Conversely, among parents there was a gradual decrease in confidence for the context of 2021 between their initial perceptions and the post-assessment wave, however this recovered in the post-results wave to initial levels recorded.

As seen with GCSEs, composite confidence regarding pre-pandemic perceptions was mostly consistent over time. However, there was a decrease in confidence in A levels among senior leaders between the pre and post-assessment waves. For further information see figure 9.

Figure 9. Composite confidence in A levels



Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neither agree nor disagree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly disagree = 1. 'Don't know' responses have been excluded.

Table 4. Four-wave average composite confidence score: A levels

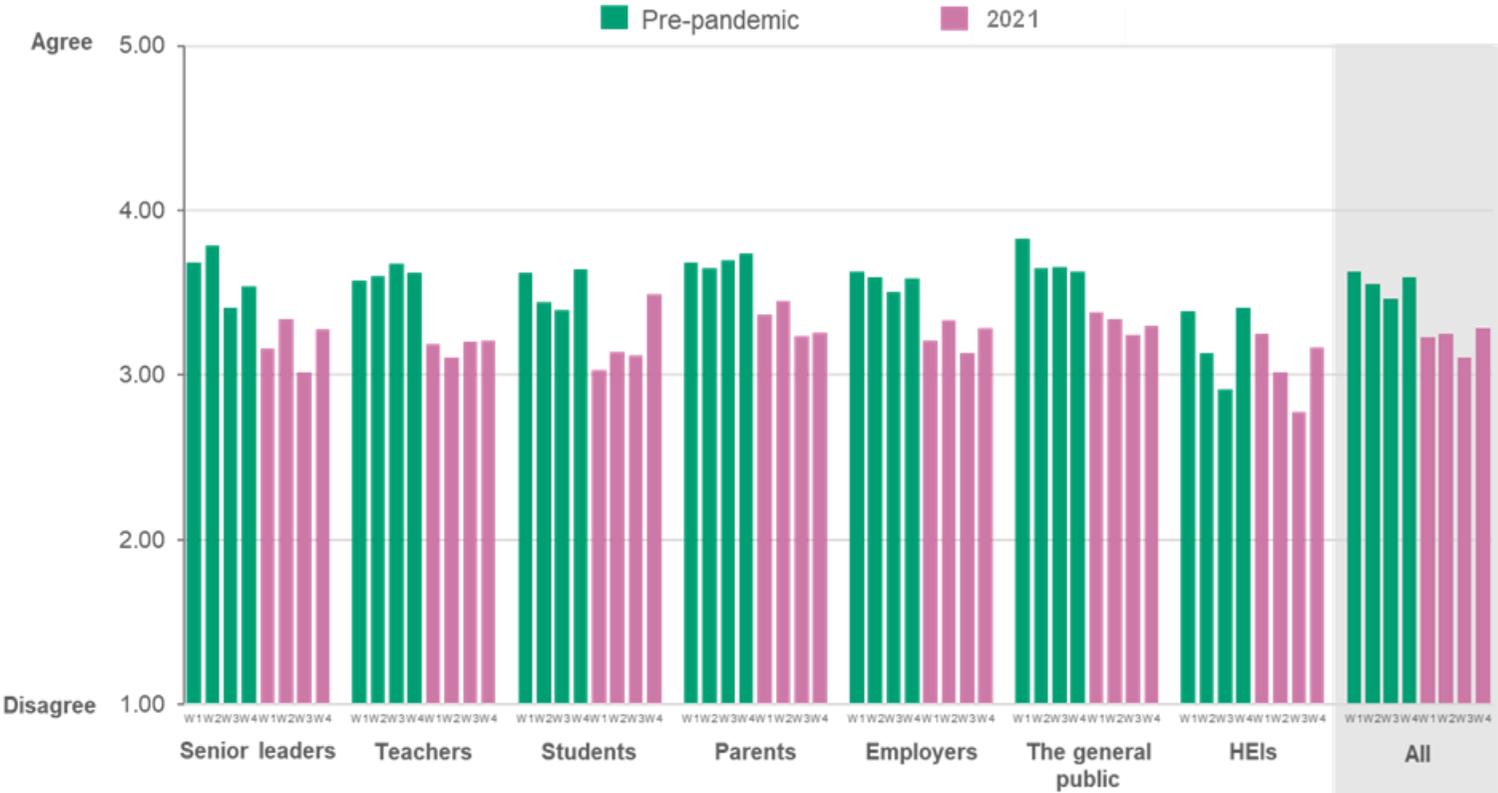
Composite confidence score: four-wave average	Senior leaders	Teachers	Students	Parents	Employers	The general public	HEIs	All
Pre-pandemic	4.07	4.00	3.66	3.86	3.86	3.73	3.65	3.83
2021	3.16	3.09	2.89	3.25	3.00	2.98	2.90	3.04

Functional Skills

Among most stakeholder groups, there was relative consistency in composite confidence in Functional Skills across the waves for the context of 2021. However, there was an increase in confidence observed for HEIs between the post-assessment and post-results waves, where confidence returned to the initial perceptions level after having decreased gradually through to the post-assessment wave. Meanwhile, among students there was a gradual overall increase in confidence recorded between the initial perceptions and post-results waves.

In the case of perceptions about the pre-pandemic context, there were no significant movements apart from a gradual decrease in HEIs' confidence between their initial perceptions and the post-assessment wave, which then recovered in the post-results wave. This trend for HEIs mirrored what was observed for perceptions for the context of 2021. For further information see figure 10.

Figure 10. Composite confidence in Functional Skills



Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neither agree nor disagree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly disagree = 1. 'Don't know' responses have been excluded.

Table 5. Four-wave average composite confidence score: Functional skills

Composite confidence score: four-wave average	Senior leaders	Teachers	Students	Parents	Employers	The general public	HEIs	All
Pre-pandemic	3.61	3.62	3.52	3.69	3.58	3.69	3.21	3.56
2021	3.20	3.18	3.20	3.33	3.24	3.32	3.05	3.22

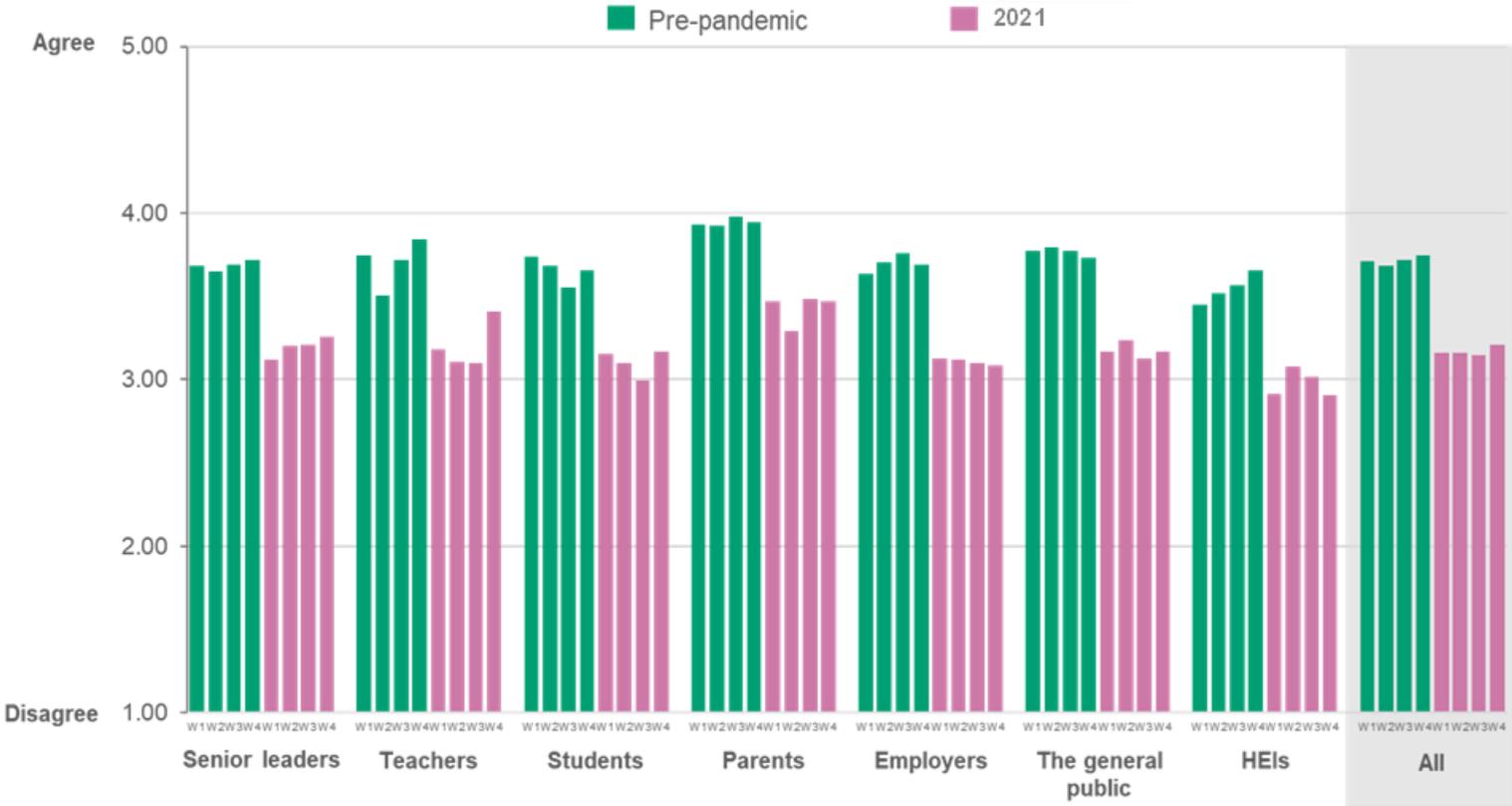
[BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications](#)

There were no statistically significant shifts in composite confidence in BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications for the context of 2021 among any stakeholder group. However, some changes were observed when considering perceptions about the pre-pandemic context.

Teachers and HEIs demonstrated increasing levels of pre-pandemic confidence in BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications. For HEIs this occurred gradually from the point of their initial perceptions to the post-result wave, whereas for teachers the increase was observed gradually between the pre-assessment and post-results waves.

Meanwhile, a gradual decrease in composite confidence in BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications was recorded for students about the pre-pandemic context between their initial perceptions and the post-assessment wave, beyond which their confidence returned to the level recorded in the pre-assessment wave. For further information see figure 11.

Figure 11. Composite confidence in BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications



Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neither agree nor disagree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly disagree = 1. 'Don't know' responses have been excluded.

Table 6. Four-wave average composite confidence score: BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications

Composite confidence score: four-wave average	Senior leaders	Teachers	Students	Parents	Employers	The general public	HEIs	All
Pre-pandemic	3.68	3.70	3.66	3.95	3.70	3.77	3.55	3.72
2021	3.20	3.20	3.11	3.43	3.11	3.18	2.98	3.17

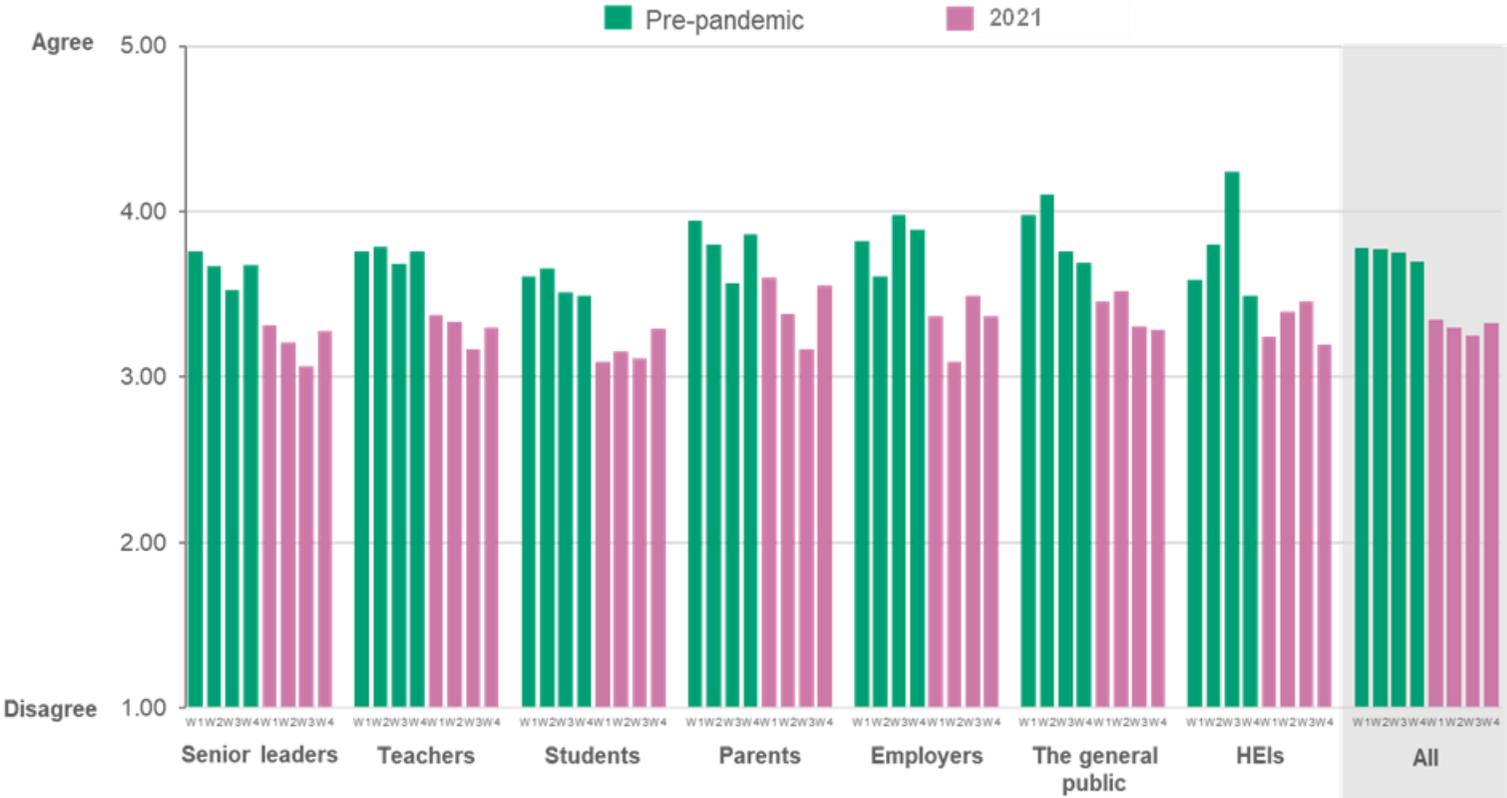
Tech Awards and Tech Levels

Composite confidence in Tech Awards and Tech Levels remained relatively consistent for the context of 2021 for most stakeholder groups. The exceptions to this are parents and employers.

Among parents there was a gradual decrease in confidence about 2021 observed between their initial perceptions and the post-assessment wave, which then recovered post-results. Meanwhile, employers demonstrated increased confidence in Tech Awards and Tech Levels between the pre and post-assessment waves when thinking about 2021, which were similar to levels in the post-results wave. Interestingly, similar trends were observed for parents and employers when examining their pre-pandemic perceptions.

In relation to perceptions about the pre-pandemic context, there was also a gradual decrease in confidence among the general public between the pre-assessment and post-results waves. Conversely, HEIs demonstrated gradually increasing confidence when comparing their initial pre-pandemic perceptions to the post-assessment wave, although in the post-results wave their confidence decreased to the initial recorded level. For further information see figure 12.

Figure 12. Composite confidence in Tech Awards and Tech Levels



Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neither agree nor disagree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly disagree = 1. 'Don't know' responses have been excluded.

Table 7. Four-wave average composite confidence score: Tech Awards and Tech Levels

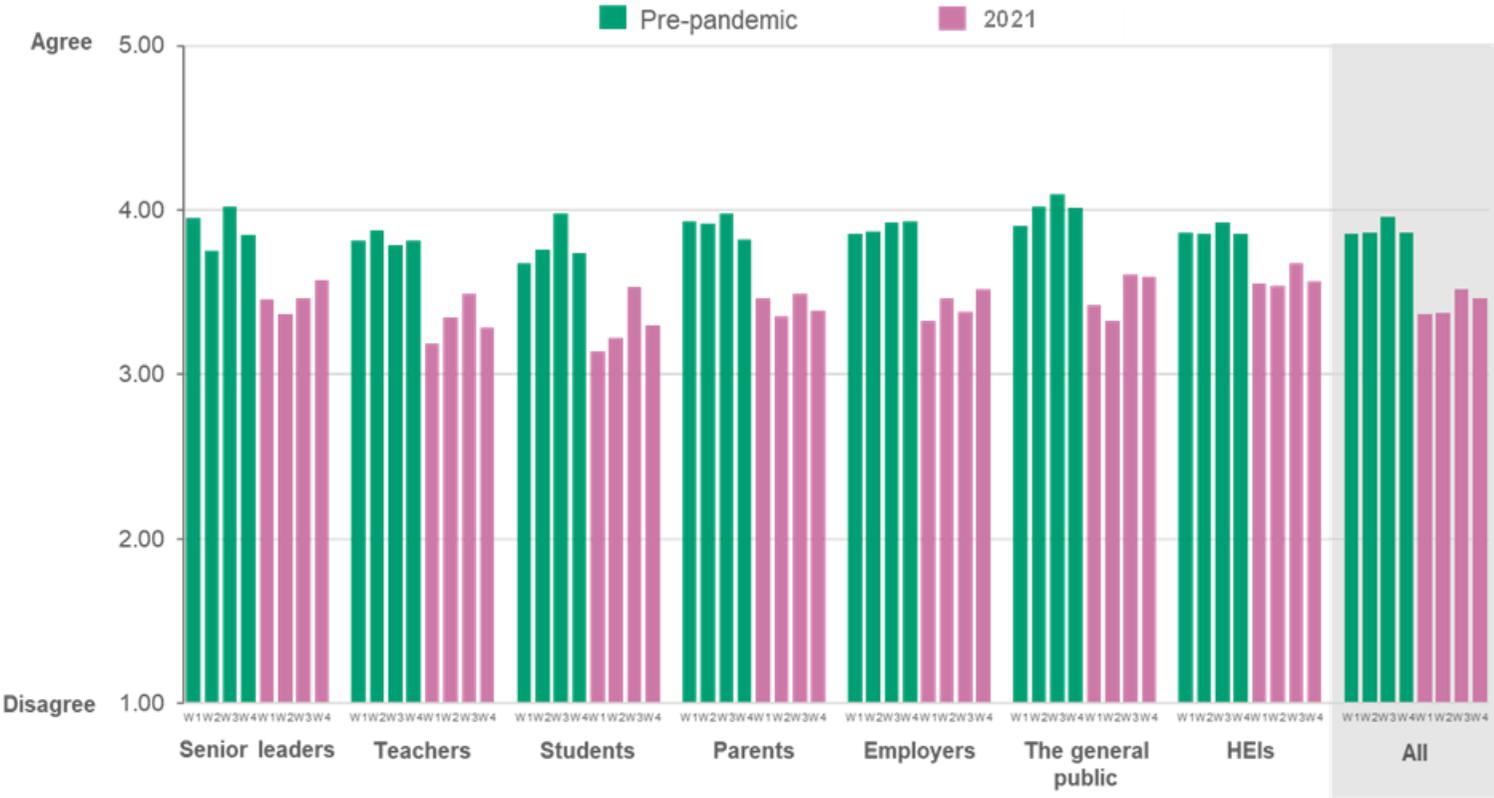
Composite confidence score: four-wave average	Senior leaders	Teachers	Students	Parents	Employers	The general public	HEIs	All
Pre-pandemic	3.66	3.75	3.57	3.79	3.82	3.88	3.78	3.75
2021	3.22	3.29	3.16	3.42	3.33	3.39	3.32	3.31

Professional and competency qualifications

For the context of 2021, composite confidence in Professional qualifications remained relatively stable for most stakeholder groups despite some marginal fluctuation. Among students, however, there was a gradual increase in confidence when comparing their initial perceptions to the post-assessment wave, which then returned to similar levels recorded in the earlier waves. A similar trend was also observed for students' perceptions about the pre-pandemic context.

Looking at perceptions for the pre-pandemic context, much like with students, there was a gradual increase in the general public's confidence in Professional qualifications between the initial perceptions and the post-assessment wave. There were no other significant changes in pre-pandemic perceptions among stakeholder groups. For further information see figure 13.

Figure 13. Composite confidence in Professional qualifications



Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neither agree nor disagree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly disagree = 1. 'Don't know' responses have been excluded.

Table 8. Four-wave average composite confidence score: Professional qualifications

Composite confidence score: four-wave average	Senior leaders	Teachers	Students	Parents	Employers	The general public	HEIs	All
Pre-pandemic	3.89	3.83	3.79	3.91	3.90	4.01	3.87	3.89
2021	3.46	3.33	3.30	3.43	3.42	3.49	3.58	3.43

Perceptions of qualifications in the contexts of pre-pandemic and in 2021 – in-depth analysis by theme

Overview

This section of the report details the results for ‘All’ stakeholders combined for each of the 11 themes. A breakdown of responses across the range of in-scope qualifications and comparisons across the contexts of in 2021 and ‘before the pandemic’ is provided across each of the four waves of research. The analyses within this section build upon those in previous sections of this chapter, and are provided for completeness.

The data is provided by theme, and across two charts per theme. Statistically significant changes in the data are reported within the text attributed to each figure. For statements related to dependability of grades see figures 14 to 19, 26 to 29. For statements related to the utility of grades see figures 20 to 25, 30 to 35.



Overall, the data indicates that stakeholders had lower confidence about the utility and dependability of grades in the context of 2021 compared with the pre-pandemic context. Generally, perceptions of qualifications before the pandemic remain consistent while comparatively, agreement levels fluctuate somewhat when thinking about 2021. This particularly occurs at the tracking mid points, although some are shown to recover, or exceed initial perceptions in the post-results wave. The data also indicates that stakeholders more commonly report uncertainty for statements in the 2021 context, compared with those about the pre-pandemic context.

Figure 14. Grades were reliable before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] reliable this year (i.e. in 2021) – GCSEs, A Levels, Functional Skills

After a declining trend in the earlier waves, agreement that A Level grades would be reliable in the 2021 context increased significantly between the post-assessment and post-results phases.

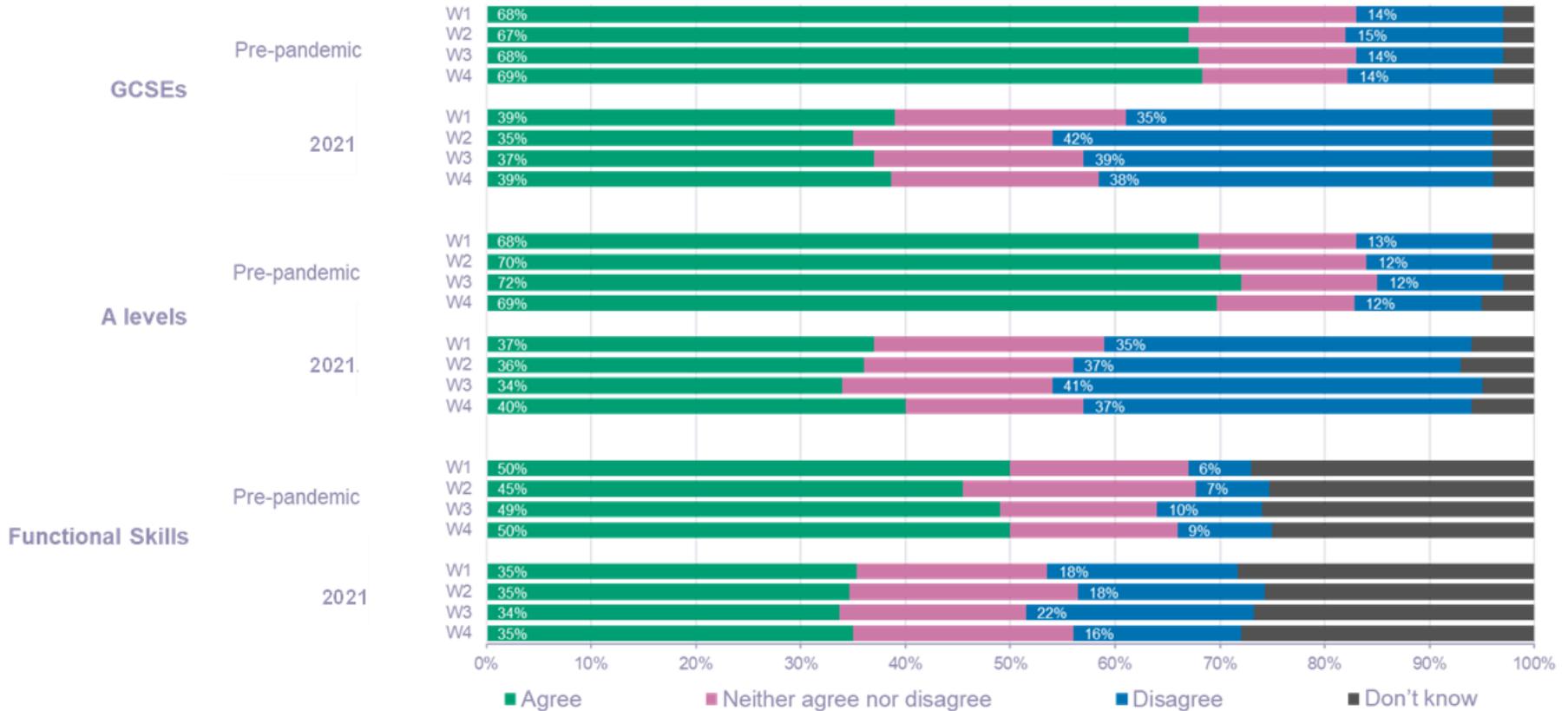


Figure 15. Grades were reliable before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] reliable this year (i.e. in 2021)” – BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Levels and Tech Awards; Professional qualifications

Agreement that grades in Tech Awards and Tech Levels would be reliable in the 2021 context declined significantly post-assessment compared to the initial perceptions phase, however confidence was regained in the post-results phase.



Figure 16. Grades were free from bias before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] free from bias this year (i.e. in 2021) – GCSEs, A Levels, Functional Skills

Confidence in Functional Skills grades fluctuated mid-way through tracking; disagreement that they would be free from bias in the 2021 context increased significantly in the post-assessment phase, although it returned to comparable levels in the final wave.



Figure 17. Grades were free from bias before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] free from bias this year (i.e. in 2021) – BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Levels and Tech Awards; Professional qualifications

For Tech Award and Tech Level grades, agreement that they were free from bias in both pre-pandemic and 2021 contexts dipped in the post-assessment wave. This was mainly due to increased uncertainty, rather than an increase in disagreement.



Figure 18. Grades were comparable across schools and colleges before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] comparable across schools and colleges (representing the same standard) this year (i.e. in 2021) – GCSEs, A Levels, Functional Skills

Confidence in GCSE and A level grade comparability remained consistent when thinking about the 2021 context. However, when thinking about the pre-pandemic context, disagreement increased in the post-results waves.

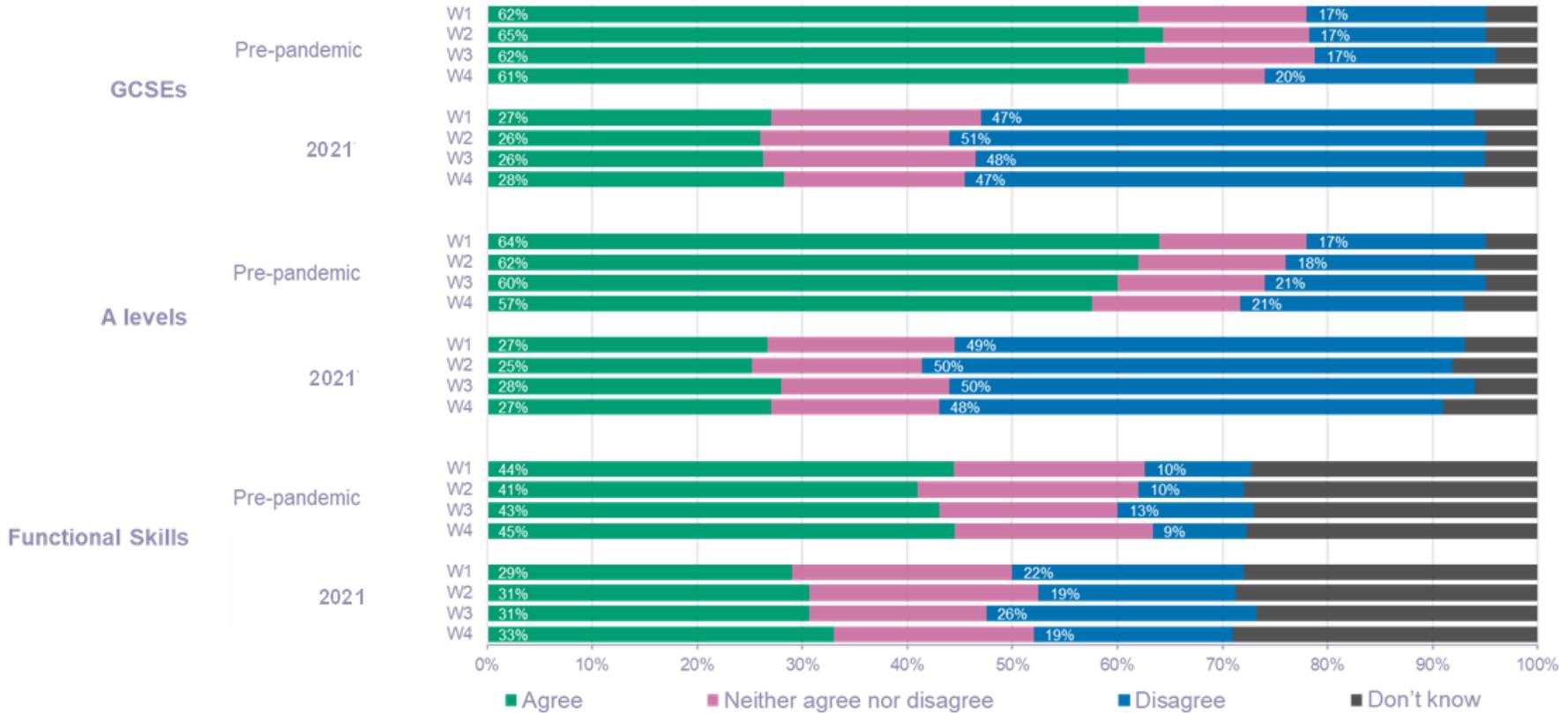


Figure 19. Grades were comparable across schools and colleges before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] comparable across schools and colleges (representing the same standard) this year (i.e. in 2021) – BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Levels and Tech Awards; Professional qualifications

Agreement for grade comparability in BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications in the pre-pandemic context dropped significantly in the post-results phase, while all others remained consistent.



Figure 20. Grades were useful for judging what a student knows, understands, and can do before than pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] useful for judging what a student knows, understands, and can do this year (i.e. in 2021) – GCSEs, A Levels, Functional Skills

Confidence that GCSEs in the 2021 context would be useful for judging what a student knows, understands, and can do dipped mid-tracking, however a significant increase between post-assessment and post-results phases meant confidence equalled levels seen in the initial perceptions phase.



Figure 21. Grades were useful for judging what a student knows, understands, and can do before than pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] useful for judging what a student knows, understands, and can do this year (i.e. in 2021) – BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Levels and Tech Awards; Professional qualifications

Agreement that grades in BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications were useful for judging what a student knows, understands, and can do in the 2021 context significantly declined between the initial perceptions and post-results phases. Confidence for Tech Awards and Tech Levels declined in the post-assessment phase for both the 2021 and pre-pandemic contexts.



Figure 22. Grades were useful for university admissions before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] useful for university admissions this year (i.e. in 2021) – GCSEs, A Levels, Functional Skills

Overall, there was declining agreement that A Level grades in the 2021 context would be useful for university admissions. Despite consistent agreement, Functional Skills saw increased disagreement in the post-assessment phase in both the pre-pandemic and 2021 contexts.

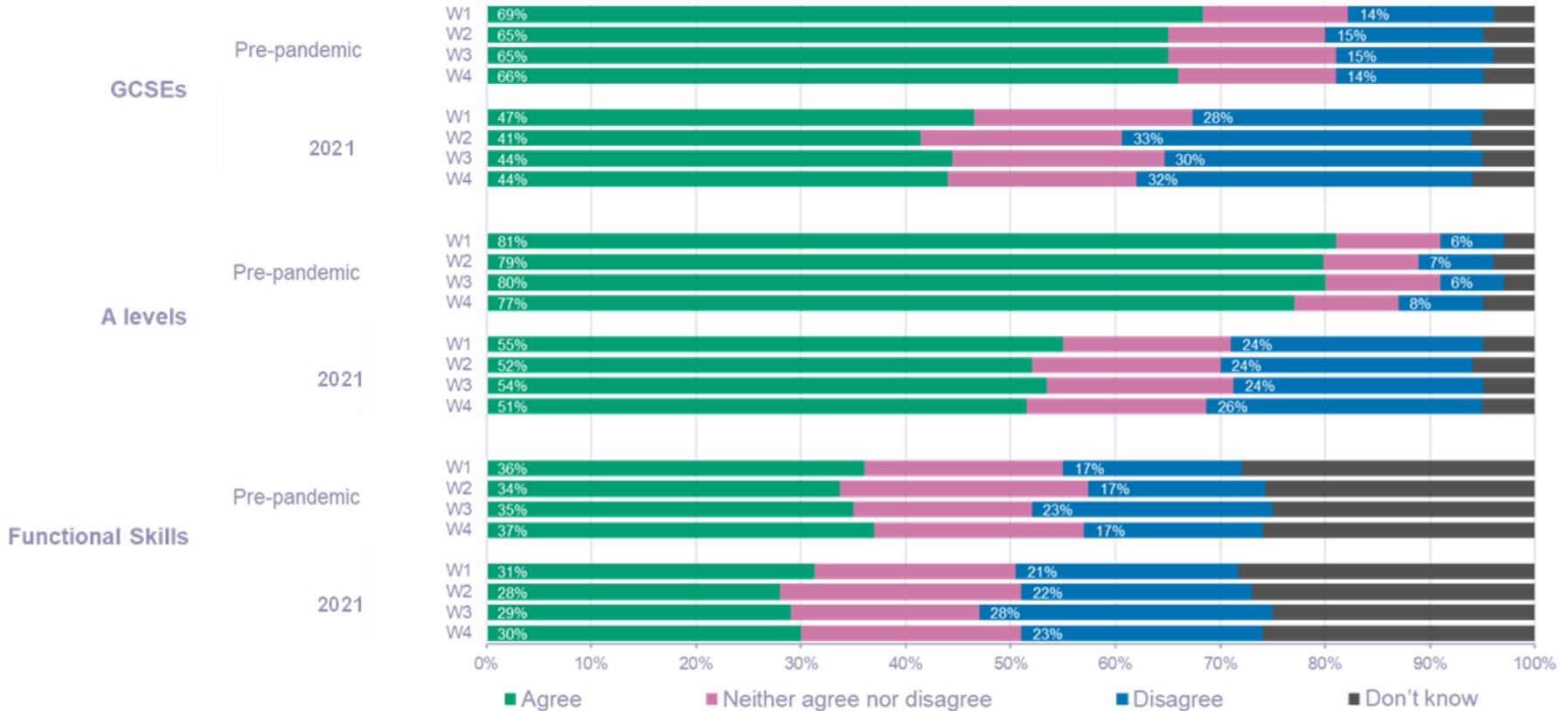


Figure 23. Grades were useful for university admissions before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] useful for university admissions this year (i.e. in 2021) – BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Levels and Tech Awards; Professional qualifications

Agreement that grades in BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications would be useful for university admissions in the 2021 context declined over the tracking period. While Professional qualifications agreement remained consistent for the 2021 context, disagreement decreased significantly.



Figure 24. Grades were useful for job recruitment before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] useful for job recruitment this year (i.e. in 2021) – GCSEs, A Levels, Functional Skills

Overall, agreement that grades for all qualifications were useful for job recruitment remained consistent between the start and end of tracking. There was a decline in agreement in the pre-assessment phase in the 2021 context, but this was recovered in the subsequent waves.



Figure 25. Grades were useful for job recruitment before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] useful for job recruitment this year (i.e. in 2021) – BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Levels and Tech Awards; Professional qualifications

In the 2021 context, confidence that Tech Award and Tech Level grades were useful for job recruitment declined following the first phase, however agreement increased significantly in the post-results phase, alongside declining levels of those reporting ‘neither agree nor disagree’.



Figure 26. Grades were fair to students before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] fair to students this year (i.e. in 2021) – GCSEs, A Levels, Functional Skills

Agreement that GCSE and A Level grades would be fair in the 2021 context saw significant increases in the post-results phase, for GCSEs this brought confidence in line with levels seen at the beginning of tracking, while A level confidence surpassed initial perceptions' levels.



Figure 27. Grades were fair to students before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] fair to students this year (i.e. in 2021) – BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Levels and Tech Awards; Professional qualifications

Agreement that grades in Tech Awards and Tech Levels would be fair dipped in the post-assessment phase for both the pre-pandemic and 2021 contexts, however this recovered in the post-results phase to similar levels as initial perceptions.



Figure 28. For Grades were trusted by people before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] trusted by people this year (i.e. in 2021) – GCSEs, A Levels, Functional Skills

Despite remaining stable when thinking about grades in the 2021 context, agreement that A level grades were trusted before the pandemic declined in the post-results phase.



Figure 29. Grades were trusted by people before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] trusted by people this year (i.e. in 2021) – BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Levels and Tech Awards; Professional qualifications

Agreement that Tech Award and Tech Level grades were trusted declined between the start and end of tracking for both the 2021 and pre-pandemic contexts, with the largest decline in the post-assessment phase.



Figure 30. Grades were a good indicator of a student’s aptitude to study a particular subject before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] a good indicator of a student’s aptitude to study a particular subject this year (i.e. in 2021) – GCSEs, A Levels, Functional Skills

Agreement that GCSE grades in the 2021 context were a good indicator of aptitude to study a particular subject initially dropped in the pre-assessment phase but returned to similar levels as in the initial phase for the rest of tracking.

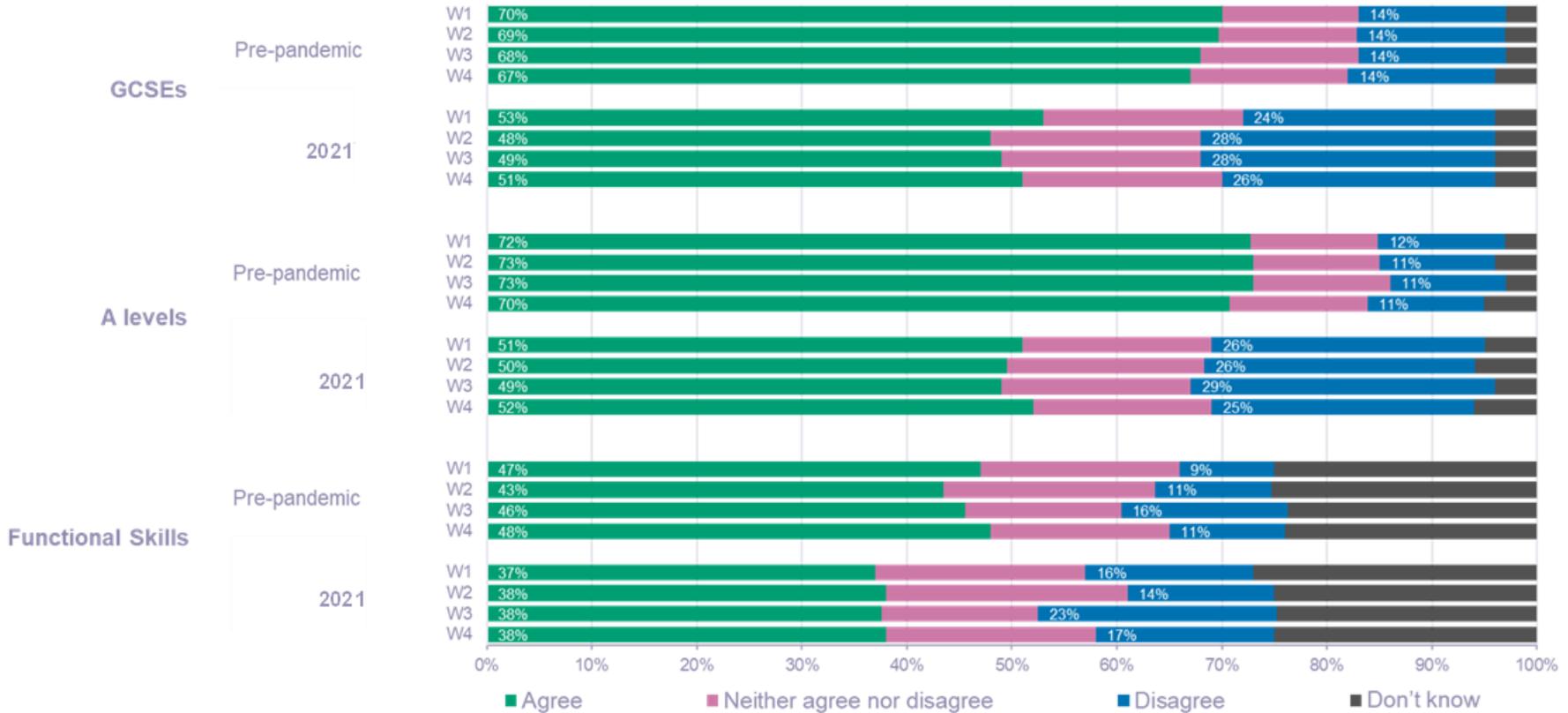


Figure 31. Grades were a good indicator of a student’s aptitude to study a particular subject before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] a good indicator of a student’s aptitude to study a particular subject this year (i.e. in 2021) – BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Levels and Tech Awards; Professional qualifications

Despite incremental shifts, confidence in grades for BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Awards and Tech Levels; and Professional qualifications being a good indicator of aptitude to study a particular subject remained stable.



Figure 32. Grades were a good indicator of a student’s aptitude to study in general before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] a good indicator of a student’s aptitude to study in general this year (i.e. in 2021) – GCSEs, A Levels, Functional Skills

As with aptitude to study a particular subject, confidence that GCSE grades in 2021 were a good indicator of a student’s aptitude to study in general initially declined in the pre-assessment phase, although agreement at the end of tracking levelled that from the initial perceptions phase.



Figure 33. Grades were a good indicator of a student’s aptitude to study in general before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] a good indicator of a student’s aptitude to study in general this year (i.e. in 2021) – BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Levels and Tech Awards; Professional qualifications

Confidence in grades for Tech Awards and Tech Levels being a good indicator of a student’s aptitude to study in general decreased in the post-assessment phase, although this was only significant for the pre-pandemic grades.



Figure 34. Grades were a good indicator of a student’s potential for success in their future career before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] a good indicator of a student’s potential for success in their future career this year (i.e. in 2021) – GCSEs, A Levels, Functional Skills

Agreement that A Level grades in 2021 would be a good indicator of potential success in their future career increased between the initial perceptions and post-results phases.

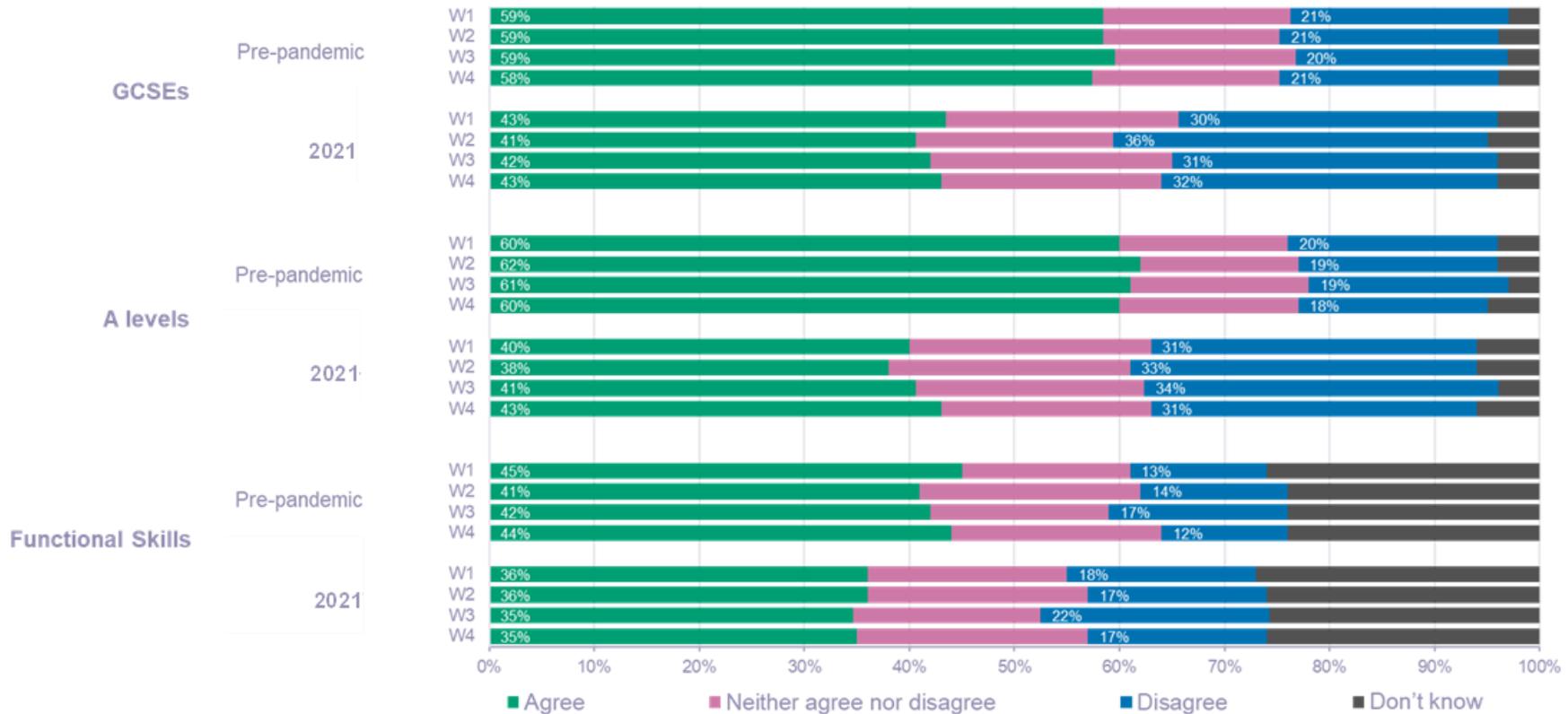


Figure 35. Grades were a good indicator of a student’s potential for success in their future career before the pandemic; [will be (W1-W3); are (W4)] a good indicator of a student’s potential for success in their future career this year (i.e. in 2021) – BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Levels and Tech Awards; Professional qualifications

Despite minor fluctuations, confidence in grades for BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Awards and Tech Levels; and Professional qualifications remained stable across tracking.



Perceptions about proficiency associated with grades

The questions we asked stakeholders

We gathered perceptions about proficiency associated with different grades, both in the contexts of before the pandemic and in 2021. For A Levels, Functional Skills; BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Awards and Tech Levels; and Professional qualifications, we asked stakeholders to what extent they thought a pass indicated a satisfactory understanding of a subject. For GCSEs, the question was slightly different to reflect differences in the way that grades are used for this qualification; we asked to what extent they thought a GCSE grade 4 indicated a good understanding of a subject. Stakeholders were only asked to respond about qualifications they were aware of ([see page 20 for more details](#)).

The specific question wording is set out below. The square brackets indicate where different iterations of text – depending on the qualification, grade and quality of understanding – were placed, as well as any wave-dependent changes.

- “In pre-pandemic times, a [qualification] [grade] (equivalent of an old [grade]) indicated that a student has a [good or satisfactory] understanding of the subject.”
- “This year, a [qualification] [grade] (equivalent of an old [grade]) [will indicate (W1-W3); indicates (W4)] that a student has a [good or satisfactory] understanding of the subject.”

What did stakeholders report overall?

For all of the qualifications, confidence that a pass indicated proficiency was much higher when thinking about pre-pandemic times, in comparison to in 2021.

For the majority of qualifications, around two in five stakeholders were confident that a pass (or a grade 4 for GCSE) in 2021 indicated proficiency in a subject (see figure 36). Whilst there was some of the highest levels of confidence in proficiency associated with a grade 4 at GCSE, the largest difference in confidence when comparing pre-pandemic to 2021 contexts was recorded for this qualification: across all waves close to six in ten agreed that a grade 4 in the pre-pandemic context indicated a good understanding of the subject, compared to close to four in ten agreeing this was the case when thinking about 2021.

Overall confidence that a pass indicated proficiency in the subject was lowest in A Levels, across both pre-pandemic and 2021 contexts. This was also the only qualification where levels of disagreement were higher than levels of agreement, which was in relation to 2021: close to five in ten disagreed that an A level pass (grade E) indicates that a student has a satisfactory understanding of the subject, whilst three in ten agreed.

Were there any differences across waves?

For grades in the context of pre-pandemic, agreement tended to be consistent across each of the four waves (see figures 36 and 37). For example, for GSCEs, 59% agreed in the initial perceptions wave and 60% in the post-results wave (remaining stable in the middle waves). The only exception to this was Functional Skills where perceptions of proficiency became more positive, with agreement increasing from 51% in the pre-assessment wave to 58% post-results.

When thinking about proficiency in the context of 2021, for a couple of qualifications there was a dip in confidence that recovered in the post-results wave. This occurred for GCSEs and Tech levels and Tech Awards. For GCSEs, confidence waned in the pre-assessment wave from over four in ten (43%) agreeing with the statement in the initial wave, to slightly under (38%). This recovered in the following waves. For Tech Levels and Tech Awards, confidence waned in the post-assessments wave (37%), and was regained in the final post-results wave (42%).

For BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications, there was an overall decrease in confidence that passes in these qualifications would indicate satisfactory understanding of the subject in the 2021 context, from 45% agreeing with the statement in the initial perceptions wave, to 40% in the post-results wave (see figure 37).

For other qualifications, there were some numerical fluctuations in the responses (as can be seen in figure 36) although these are not statistically significant.

Were there any differences between stakeholders?

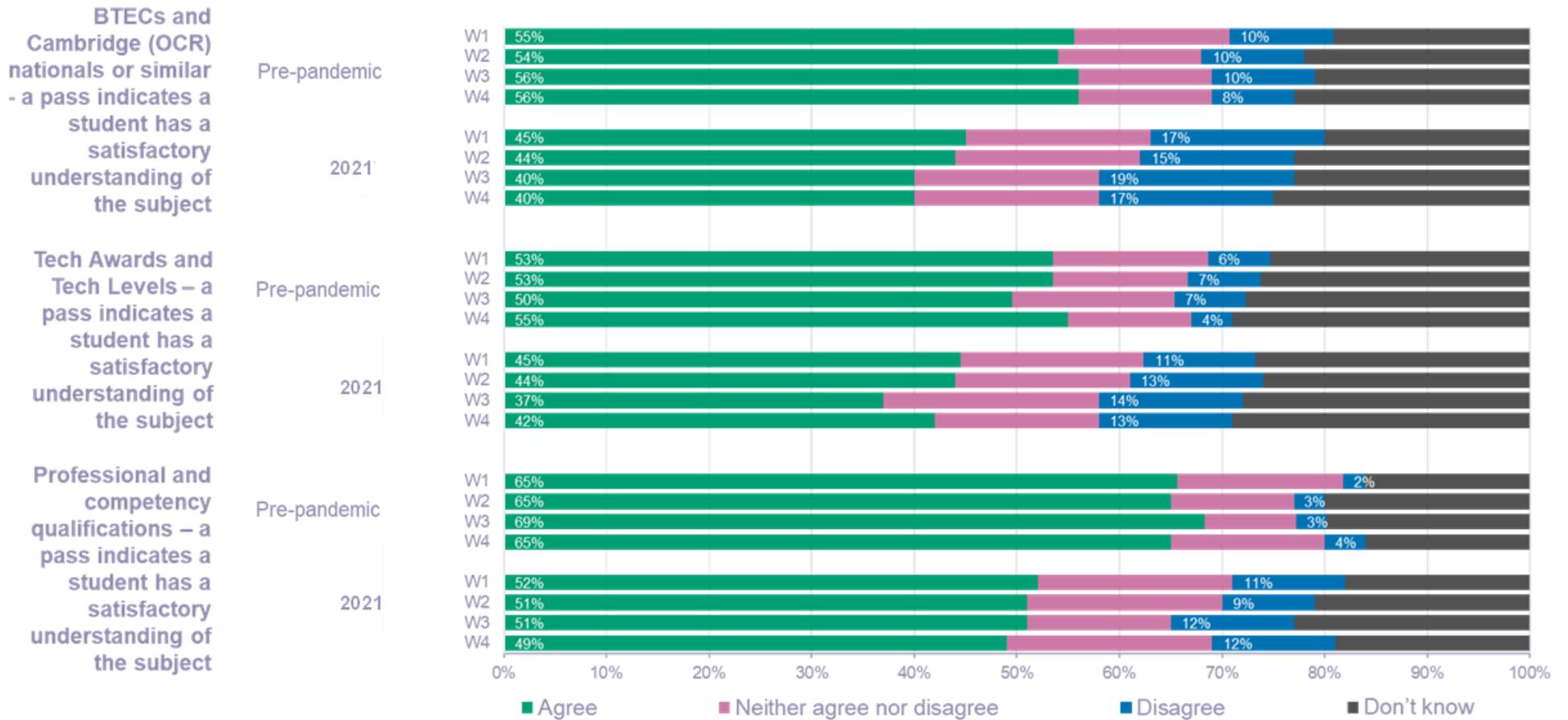
There was also a dip in confidence for the 2021 context about passes in Tech Levels and Tech Awards, from 45% to 37% agreement with the statement. At the stakeholder level, there is no clear driver of this. Actually, a decline in agreement from the initial perceptions wave to the post-results wave was seen across many stakeholder groups: parents (59% to 45%), general public (63% to 43%) teachers (39% to 21%). While no stakeholders experienced a statistically significant increase in agreement in the final wave, incremental increases across most of the groups led to a significant shift at an overall level, leading to the recovery of confidence observed at the overall level.

For BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications, we observe a decrease in confidence around the proficiency of grades for this qualification, when thinking about the 2021 context. This was predominately driven by parents, who saw declining agreement between the initial perceptions (59%) and post-results (48%) waves; and employers, who saw a significant decline between the pre-assessment (48%) and post-results (35%) waves.

Figure 36. Perceptions about proficiency: GCSEs, A Levels, Functional Skills



Figure 37. Perceptions about proficiency: BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications; Tech Awards and Tech Levels; and Professional qualifications



Perceptions about teacher judgements

The questions we asked stakeholders

In 2021, grades for GCSEs; A levels; and BTECs, Cambridge nationals and other similar vocational qualifications were based on teachers' assessments. Teachers based assessment grades on what a student knew, understood and could do at time of the assessment and were only based on the content a student had been taught. Awarding organisations were required to provide teachers with exam questions and mark schemes to use to help grade their students, although it was not compulsory for teachers to use these. Schools and colleges were required to check and confirm the accuracy of the teacher assessment grades for all students before submitting the grades to the awarding organisation.

Perceptions of the efficacy of teacher judgements in the 2021 context was assessed by examining public agreement on a variety of aspects, including beliefs that teachers have sufficient expertise in assessing students to have graded them accurately; that teachers would be provided sufficient support and guidance to enable them to grade students accurately; that teachers would have enough evidence for each student to enable them to grade students accurately; and trust that teachers would grade students neither too harshly nor too generously. All stakeholders were asked about teachers' perceptions generally, and not related to a particular qualification.

The specific question wording is set out below. The square brackets indicate where different iterations of text – depending on any wave on wave changes – were placed. All stakeholders were asked these questions.

- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding teachers' assessments this year?
 - "I believe that teachers have sufficient expertise in assessing students to grade them accurately"
 - "I believe that teachers [will be (W1-W3); were (W4)] provided with sufficient support and guidance to enable them to grade students accurately"
 - "I believe that teachers [will have (W1-W3); had (W4)] enough evidence for each student to enable them to grade students accurately"
 - "I trust that teachers [will grade (W1-W3); graded (W4)] students neither too harshly nor too generously"

What did stakeholders report overall?

Overall, stakeholder confidence in teacher judgements was reasonably high. This was particularly evident when thinking about teachers having sufficient expertise or evidence to grade accurately; over the four waves, more than six in ten agreed that teachers had sufficient expertise, and over half agreed that teachers had enough evidence to enable them to grade students accurately. Comparatively, four in ten agreed that teachers would have the support and guidance needed, and even though the majority felt teachers had the expertise to grade students accurately, under half trusted that teachers would grade students neither too harshly nor too generously.

Were there any differences across waves?

Stakeholder confidence did vary somewhat (see figure 38): between the first initial perceptions wave and the final post-results wave confidence in teacher judgements declined. For the statements related to teachers' expertise, trust in teachers' grading, and support teachers received to undertake the grading, this decline in confidence mainly occurred between the pre and post-assessment waves, and despite an increase in confidence in the final wave that teachers have the support needed, at the end of tracking confidence in the three statements sat significantly below the first wave (64% for expertise; 46% for trust; 39% for support). However, while expertise

and trust saw corresponding increases in disagreement in the post-results wave, this was not mirrored when looking at whether teachers had sufficient support. Indeed, in post-results wave disagreement that teachers would have sufficient support is in line with levels reported at the initial perceptions wave (33% and 34% respectively).

Confidence that teachers would have the evidence necessary to enable accurate grading dropped in the pre and post-assessment stages however, an uplift in the final post-assessment stage meant confidence met levels seen in the first wave (57%).

Correspondingly, after seeing consistent levels from the initial perceptions to the post-assessment wave, this statement saw declining disagreement between the post-assessment (27%) and post-results waves (24%).

Were there any differences between stakeholders?

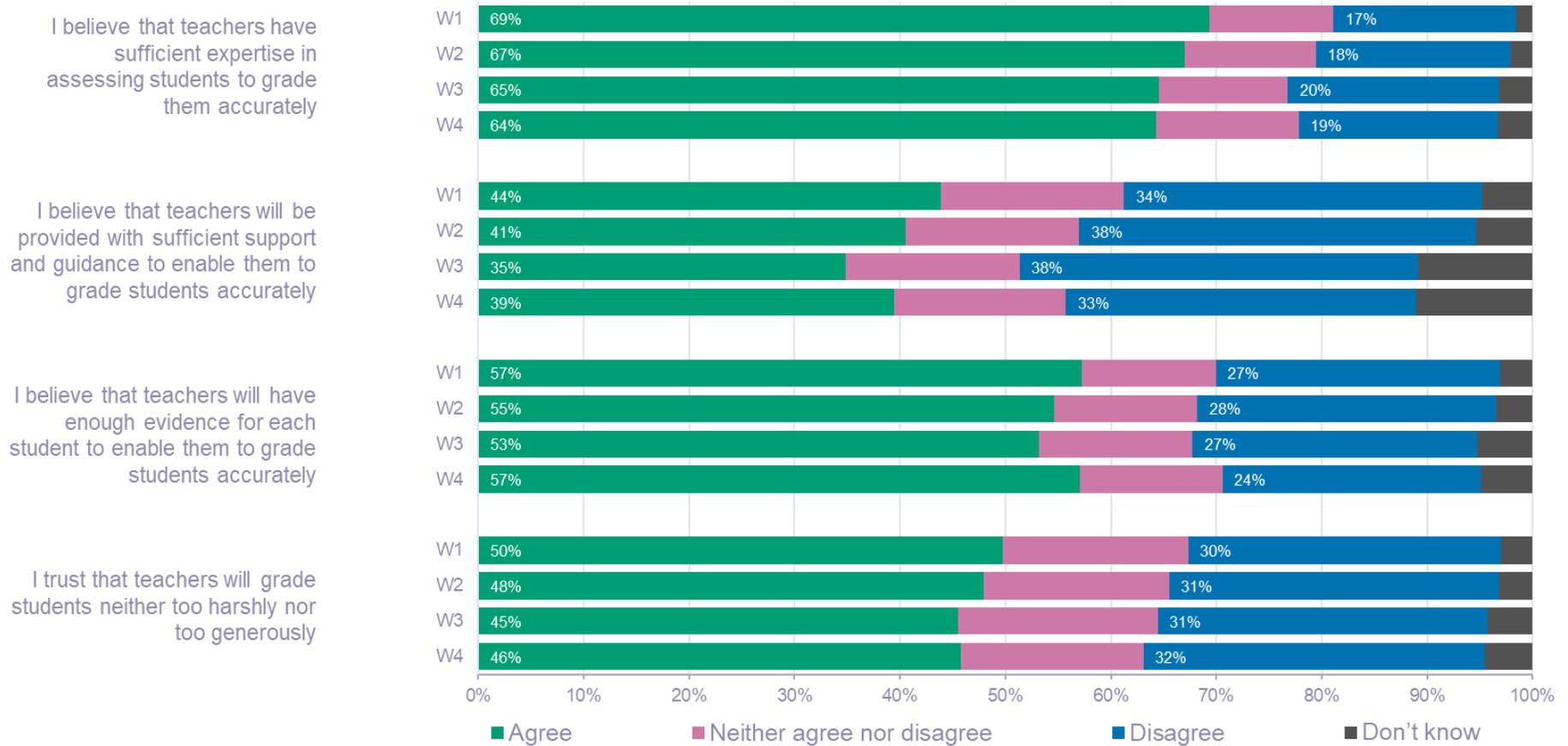
Overall confidence varied across individual stakeholder groups; teachers and senior leaders demonstrated the most confidence in teacher judgements while the general public reported the lowest levels of agreement. The data by stakeholder groups is not shown in the figures in this section, but can be found in the data tables.

In the post-results wave, eight in ten teachers (79%) and senior leaders (80%) agreed that teachers had the expertise in assessing students to grade them accurately, with confidence being largely consistent over tracking. This was also the case for students whose agreement was stable throughout the waves at around six in ten throughout. Conversely, parental confidence in the expertise of teachers started high in the initial perceptions wave (70%) and dropped to below average in the final wave (62%). A similar pattern was also evident for the those working in higher educational institutions and the general public, with declining agreement from 59% to 52% between the first and final wave.

Declining confidence among the general public was also evident in relation to the support offered to teachers; agreement dropped from 43% to 32% between the initial perceptions and post-results waves, although this is most likely as a result of lack of knowledge with the proportion reporting they 'did not know' increasing from 9% to 22%. For students, parents and senior leaders, confidence also dropped significantly between the start and end of tracking, mainly as a result of a decline between the pre and post-assessment waves and although there were increases in the final post-results wave this was not enough to offset previous drops in confidence. The mid-tracking reduction in confidence was also evident for teachers, in the pre and post-assessment waves just under four in five (38%) agreed there would be enough support, however following this confidence increased to 45%, in line with levels seen for teachers at the start of tracking.

Trust that teachers would not grade too harshly nor too generously remained consistent and relatively high among teachers, senior leaders, parents, and students. However, for the audiences with possibly less exposure to the process, confidence declined. The general public saw a drop in the post-assessment wave, which was not recovered in the post-results wave, leaving their confidence below that in the initial perceptions wave (38% versus 46%). This was also seen among those working in higher education institutions, with 36% agreeing in the final wave compared to 45% in the first wave.

Figure 38. Perceptions about teacher judgements



Perceptions that students would get the grades they deserve in 2021

The questions we asked stakeholders

Confidence that students would get the grades they deserve was measured by first assessing respondents' overall attitude to this statement. We then replicated this question, asking instead about specific groups of students: those from advantaged or disadvantaged backgrounds; those with special educational needs; disabled students; students of a minority ethnic background; adult learners and private learners.

The specific question wording is set out below. The square brackets indicate where different iterations of text – depending on any wave on wave changes – were placed. All stakeholders were asked these questions.

- “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding teachers’ assessments this year?
 - I believe that students [will generally get (W1-W3); generally got (W4)] the results they [deserve (W1-W3) deserved (W4)] this year”
- “Thinking now about different types of students, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the following [will generally get (W1-W3); generally got (W4)] the results they [deserve (W1-W3) deserved (W4)] this year”:
 - Students from advantaged backgrounds
 - Students from disadvantaged backgrounds
 - Students with Special Educational Needs
 - Disabled students
 - Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnicity students
 - Adult learners
 - Private candidates”



What did stakeholders report overall about whether students would generally get the grades they deserved in 2021?

First we look at perceptions about whether students in general would get the grades they deserved in 2021. Perceptions about students from specific backgrounds and contexts are explored below.

At an overall level, half of the stakeholders surveyed agreed that students would generally get the grades they deserved in 2021. For most individual stakeholder groups, agreement with this statement sat at around two in five (for students, those working at higher education institutions, employers and the general public). Parents' agreement sat slightly higher at half, while teachers and senior leaders continued to exhibit increased confidence and drive the average agreement, with six in ten teachers and two thirds of senior leaders agreeing.

Were there any differences across waves?

Despite fluctuation for individual stakeholder groups, when thinking about teachers' assessments at an overall level, the perception that students would get the grades deserved remained consistent across tracking, with close to half each wave agreeing that this would be the case, and three in ten disagreeing (see figure 39).

Were there any differences between stakeholders?

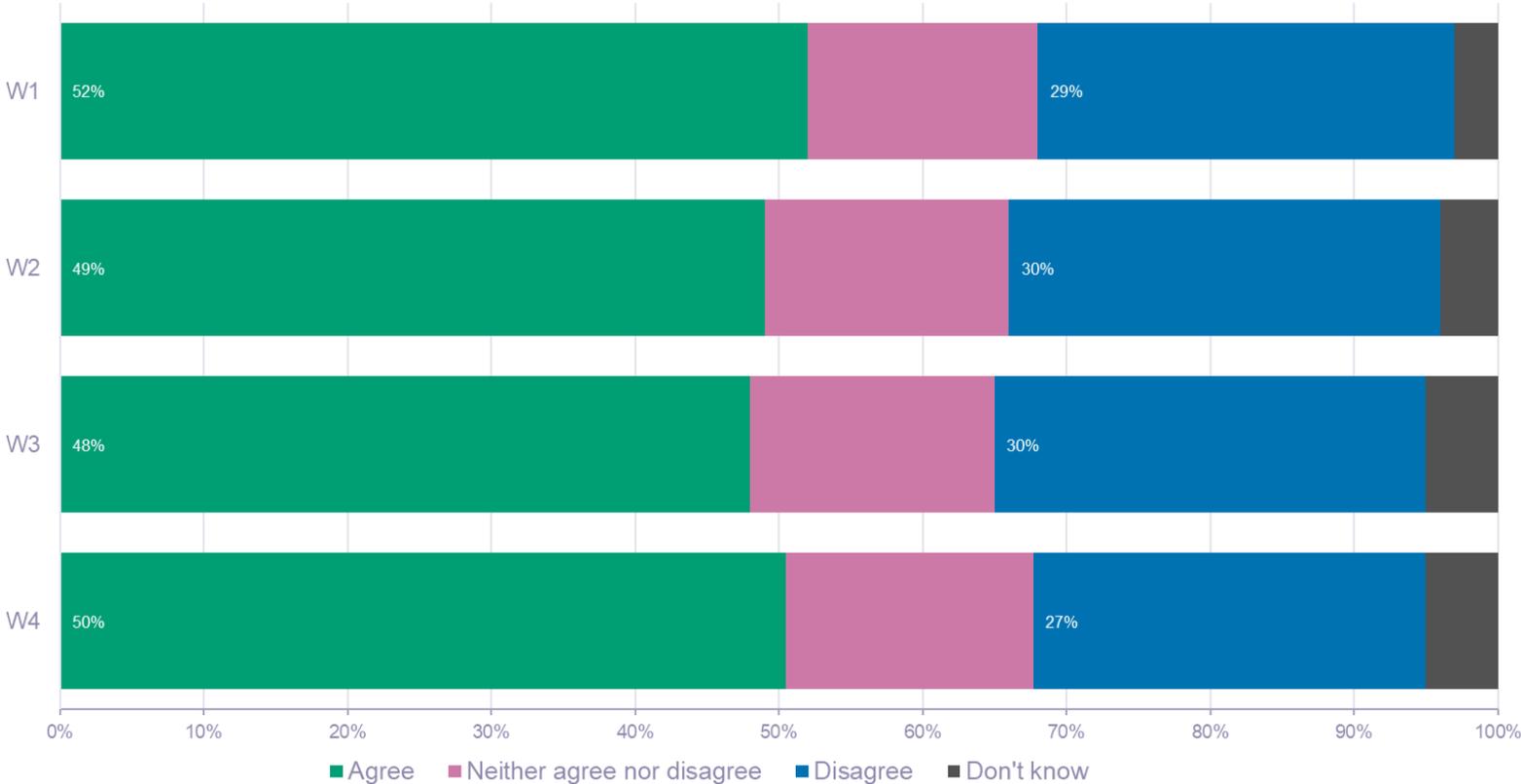
Overall, students remained one of the stakeholders with the lowest confidence throughout tracking that students will get the results they deserve in 2021. The data by stakeholder groups is not shown in the figures in this section, but can be found in the data tables.



As well as reporting some of the lowest confidence, students also saw decreased agreement in this statement between the initial perceptions and pre-assessment (from 45% to 38%) waves. However, the post-results wave saw a shift in agreement leading students' confidence to sit significantly higher in the final wave (50%) compared to midway through tracking. While in the first three waves of tracking students' agreement and disagreement had been evenly split, in the post-results wave, alongside increasing agreement students also saw a corresponding decline in disagreement, from 41% in the post-assessment wave to 33% in the post-results wave.

This pattern was also somewhat mirrored by teachers; agreement dipped in the middle waves (57%), to increase to just over six in ten in the post-results wave (63%). Comparatively, confidence declined for the general public. This mainly occurred between the pre and post-assessment waves (43% agreement versus 38%) and while there was no change for neither agreement nor disagreement in the final wave, uncertainty increased with the proportion who reported 'don't know' increasing from 10% to 15%.

Figure 39. Perceptions that students [will generally get the results they deserve this year (i.e. in 2021) (W1-W3); or generally got the results they deserved this year (i.e. in 2021) (W4)]



What did stakeholders report about students from different backgrounds and contexts getting grades they deserved in 2021?

While stakeholders feel that, at an overall level, students would get, or got, the grades they deserved in 2021, when asked to think about students from specific backgrounds and in specific contexts, confidence was on average much lower.

Stakeholders were most confident that students from advantaged backgrounds will get the grades they deserve, with one half agreeing. Confidence drops somewhat when thinking about adult learners, students from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnicity backgrounds, disabled students and students with special educational needs; around a third agreed that these groups will get the grades they deserve. Confidence was lowest for private candidates and students from disadvantaged backgrounds; both seeing agreement of around three in ten.

Despite stakeholders reporting comparable levels of confidence for private candidates and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, there was a discrepancy in disagreement when looking at these two student contexts. Two in five disagreed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds will get the grades they deserve, the highest disagreement reported for any student context. Conversely, around a quarter disagreed that this will be the case for private candidates, instead this group sees an increased proportion of those reporting they don't know, particularly in the post results wave (see figure 40).

Were there any differences across waves?

For all student contexts, there were decreases in confidence between the initial perceptions and post-results waves. Highest confidence was reported for advantaged students getting the grades they deserved; however, this was also the context that saw the

greatest decline over the waves. While just more than half agreed (55%) in the first three waves that students from advantaged backgrounds would get the grades they deserved, this dropped to close to four in ten (39%) in the post-results wave.

At the end of tracking, around one quarter agreed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds (27%), disabled students (27%), adult learners (27%) and private candidates (25%) would get the grades they deserved – these were the lowest levels of agreement seen across the different student contexts.

For the majority of student contexts, the declining agreement was driven by a large shift between the post-assessment and post-results waves. The only exception to this being disadvantaged students. For all student contexts, in the post-result wave there were significant increases in uncertainty as to whether they got they grades they deserved.

Were there any differences between stakeholders?

As seen previously when thinking about students overall, teachers and senior leaders generally had the highest confidence that students would get the grades they deserved, across most students contexts. In the post-results wave, the only groups these stakeholders did not report higher than average agreement for were adult learners and private candidates. Instead, for these types of learners they were more likely than average to select that they did not know. The data by stakeholder groups is not shown in the figures in this section, but can be found in the data tables.

For advantaged students, senior leaders were the only group to have a majority agreeing that these students would get the grades they deserved in the post-results wave (55%). This was despite a statistically significant decline in agreement experienced by all stakeholders between the post-assessment and post-results wave for advantaged students. The decline was particularly evident

among the general public, those working in higher education institutions, and employers, whose agreement dropped from just under a half to three in ten in the post-results wave (31%, 31% and 33%, respectively).

This was similarly the case for disadvantaged students, although comparatively, agreement for this group was steadier. The general public, those working in higher education institutions, and employers had the lowest confidence levels in the post-results wave as to whether disadvantaged students got the grades they deserved (20%, 18% and 24% agreement, respectively). For the general public, agreement that disadvantaged students would get the grades they deserved was consistent over the first three waves of tracking. However, agreement dropped significantly in the final wave for this stakeholder group, who instead increased reporting uncertainty, from 16% post-assessment selecting 'don't know' to 26% post-results.

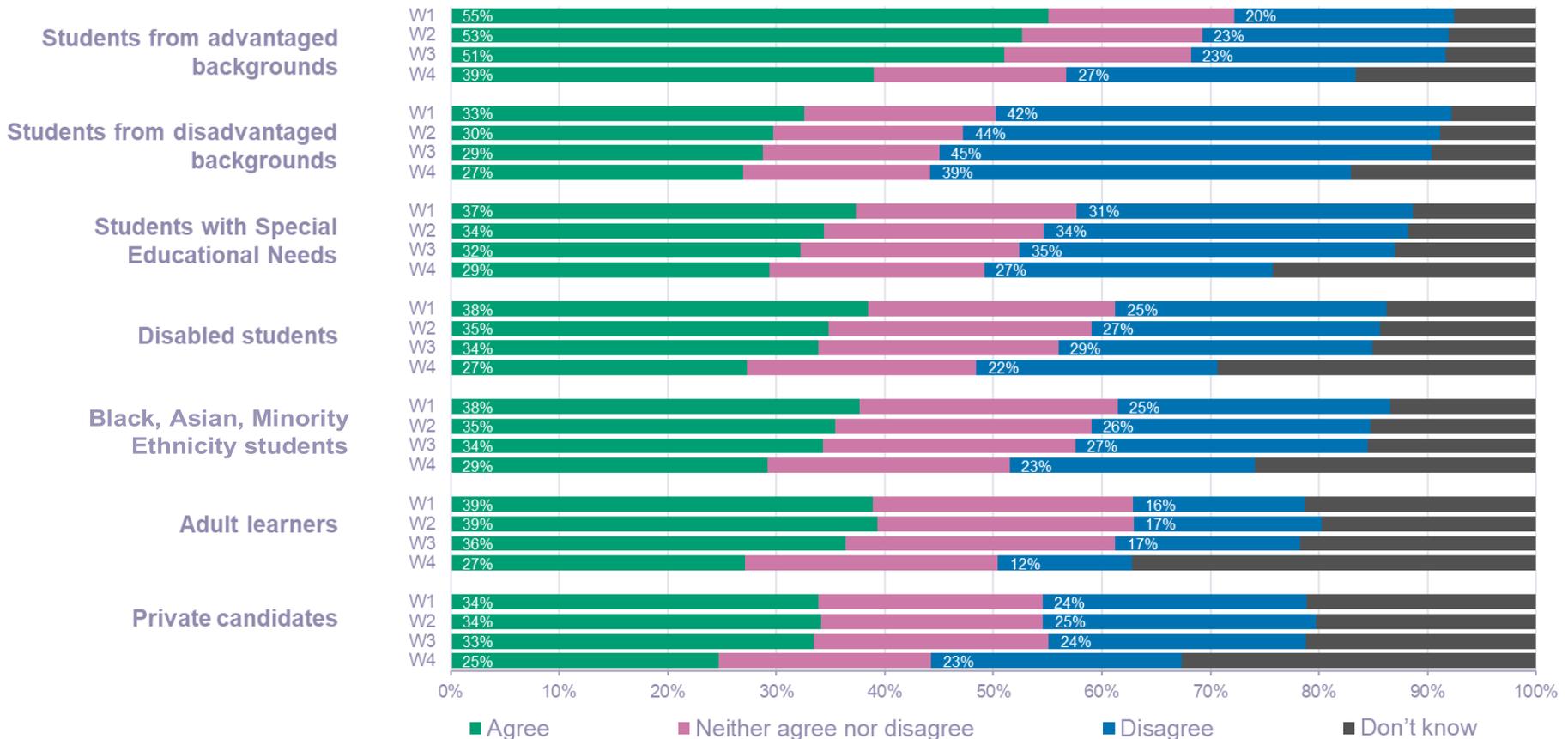
Confidence for students with Special Educational Needs and disabled students also dropped in the post-results wave. For students with Special Educational Needs this was most evident among the general public, who saw a decline in agreement from 27% to 20% between the post-assessment and post-results waves. The decline in agreement for disabled students' grades during this period was most evident in parents (from 38% to 27%), employers (35% to 26%) and the general public (28% to 19%). All groups saw a corresponding increase in the proportion reporting they did not know. Teachers and senior leaders also experienced increased uncertainty about disabled students' grades; the proportion reporting they did not know was significantly higher in the post-results wave compared to any other wave for both groups.

For adult learners and private candidates, all stakeholder groups reported a decrease in confidence, and increase in uncertainty, that these students got the grades they deserved in the post-results wave.

There was also a decline in confidence that students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds would get the grades they deserved, with the largest decrease occurring between the post-assessment and post-results wave. This was mainly driven by the

general public (from 29% to 20% agreement) and employers (from 33% to 26% agreement). Teachers and senior leaders' also contributed towards this decline, but this was mainly through incremental decreases, wave on wave.

Figure 40. Perceptions that students [will generally get the results they deserve this year (i.e. in 2021) (W1-W3); or generally got the results they deserved this year (i.e. in 2021) (W4)] – students from different backgrounds and contexts



Perceptions around the process for appeals in 2021

The questions we asked stakeholders

Perceptions of appeals were assessed by exploring public agreement on various statements, including whether the appeals process was fair. All stakeholders were shown some introductory text, explaining the appeals process and in which circumstances grades would be changed. Following this, all stakeholders were asked the questions below.

The specific question wording is set out below. Note that there were no changes to the wording for these questions across the waves.

- “I am confident that incorrect grades as a result of a procedural error will be corrected.”
- “I am confident that significant errors of professional judgement by the school or college will be corrected.”
- “It is right that marginal differences of professional opinion about a particular grade will not be addressed by the appeals process.”
- “In general, the appeals process is fair.”

What did stakeholders report overall?

Overall, around half were confident in the appeals process (see figure 41). This was the case when thinking about whether incorrect grades as a result of procedural error will be corrected (53%) and whether significant errors of professional judgement by the school or college will be corrected (51%). A slightly lower proportion of stakeholders agreed that, in general, the appeals process was fair (43%). And around one in five (21%) disagreed with this statement, whilst a similar number neither agreed nor disagreed.

Were there any differences across waves?

For the majority of statements, confidence in the appeals process remained fairly stable over time.

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In the initial perceptions wave, four in ten (45%) agreed that, in general, the appeals process was fair. This was consistent with post-results findings. Confidence that significant errors of professional judgement would be corrected has also remained fairly stable over time (levels of agreement at initial perceptions were 53% and at post-results were 52%).

Were there any differences between stakeholders?

In general, senior leaders and teachers had the most confidence in the appeals process, whilst students tended to have the least. At an overall level, over half (56%) of senior leaders agreed that the appeals process was fair, with 51% of teachers thinking the same. This could be a result of their knowledge and involvement in the process. Students, who are most impacted by the appeals process, were less likely to agree it was fair, with agreement levels at 37%. This was similar to perceptions among parents (39%) and the general public (38%). The data by stakeholder groups is not shown in the figures in this section, but can be found in the data tables.

Whilst at an overall level, confidence that the appeals process was fair has remained relatively stable, among senior leaders, there was an increase in levels of agreement from the initial perceptions to post-results wave from 54% to 64%. There was not an increase in confidence in the other statements relating to the process around appeals among this group.

Senior leaders were also most likely to be confident that incorrect grades as a result of procedural error will be corrected, with seven in ten (71%) agreeing with this. Teachers were also more likely than average to be confident in this (64% agreement vs. 53%). This is much higher than agreement levels among students (47%) and the general public (45%), who were the least confident about this aspect of the appeals process.

For the majority of statements, confidence among the general public remained broadly comparable over time. However, from the initial perceptions to the post-results wave, there was a decrease in confidence that incorrect grades as a result of a procedural error will be



corrected (agreement levels decreased from 50% to 41%). There was also a decrease among employers (from 50% agreement to 41%).

The most stark differences in confidence among senior leaders and students are apparent when looking at agreement with the statement 'it is right that marginal differences of professional opinion about a particular grade will not be addressed by the appeals process'. Whilst 74% of senior leaders agreed with this, only 32% of students did.

Figure 41. Perceptions of appeals

In general, the appeals process is fair

It is right that marginal differences of professional opinion about a particular grade will not be addressed by the appeals process.

I am confident that significant errors of professional judgement by the school or college will be corrected.

I am confident that incorrect grades as a result of a procedural error will be corrected.

