

# Appeals for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2018 exam series

Annual

Published: 11 April 2019

Coverage: England

Official statistics

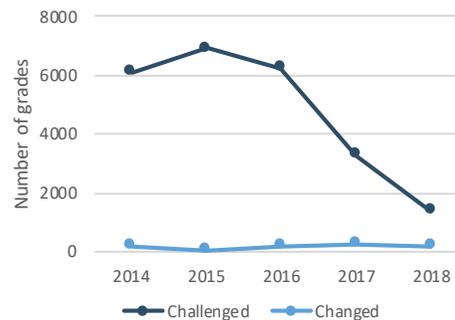
This release presents the number of appeals made following the summer 2018 exam series and the number of qualification grades challenged and changed due to those appeals. Only a very small proportion of grades are challenged at appeal annually.

## Few grades changed due to appeal

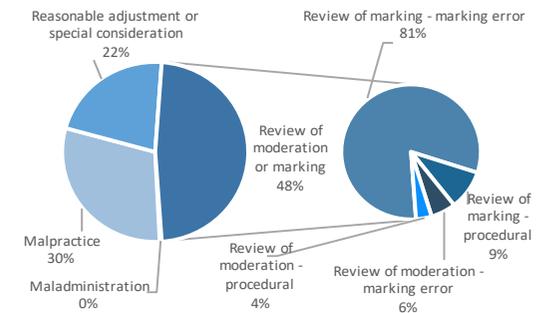
**0.003%**

of the 6.2 million qualification grades certified in summer 2018 were changed as a result of an appeal.

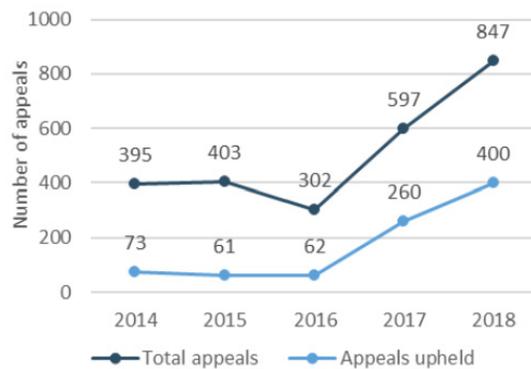
## Fewer grades challenged



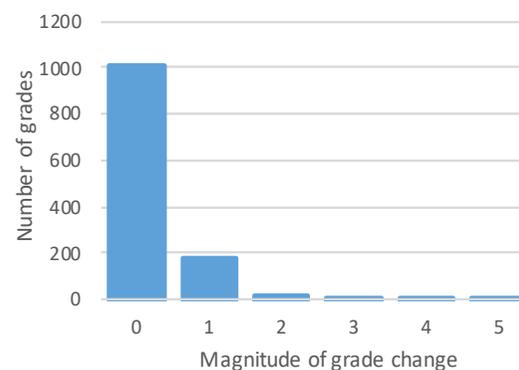
## Marking error is the most common reason for appeals



## Appeals submitted and upheld continue to rise



## Most upheld appeals result in no grade change



## A small proportion of appeals go to appeal hearings

**4%**

of preliminary appeals progressed to appeal hearing.

Appeals received, upheld and leading to a grade change	3
Nature of appeals	4
Preliminary appeals and appeal hearings	5
Grades challenged and changed	6
Completion within exam boards' target timescales	7
Grades challenged at appeal	8
Raw mark changes for upheld appeals	9
Grades changed for upheld appeals	10

**Head of Profession:** Vikas Dhawan  
**Email:** [statistics@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:statistics@ofqual.gov.uk)  
**Published:** 11 April 2019  
**Ofqual:** 19/6493/1

Comments and feedback are welcome

## Appeals

This report presents data on requests for preliminary appeals and appeal hearings made to exam boards for the summer 2018 GCSE and GCE (AS & A level) exam series in England.

Appeals can be submitted if a school or college is unsatisfied with the result of a review of marking, review of moderation, a malpractice decision, or the outcome of a reasonable adjustment or special consideration request. Appeals are made at the exam component level and, if related to the same issue, may cover more than one candidate. The [JCQ guide](#) to the awarding bodies' appeals process describes two steps for appeals:

- preliminary appeal (previously 'stage 1' appeal): a review by a senior exam board member who has not previously been involved with the particular case;
- appeal hearing (previously 'stage 2' appeal): applicants and awarding bodies present their case to the panel of three or more members, one of which must be independent of the exam board.

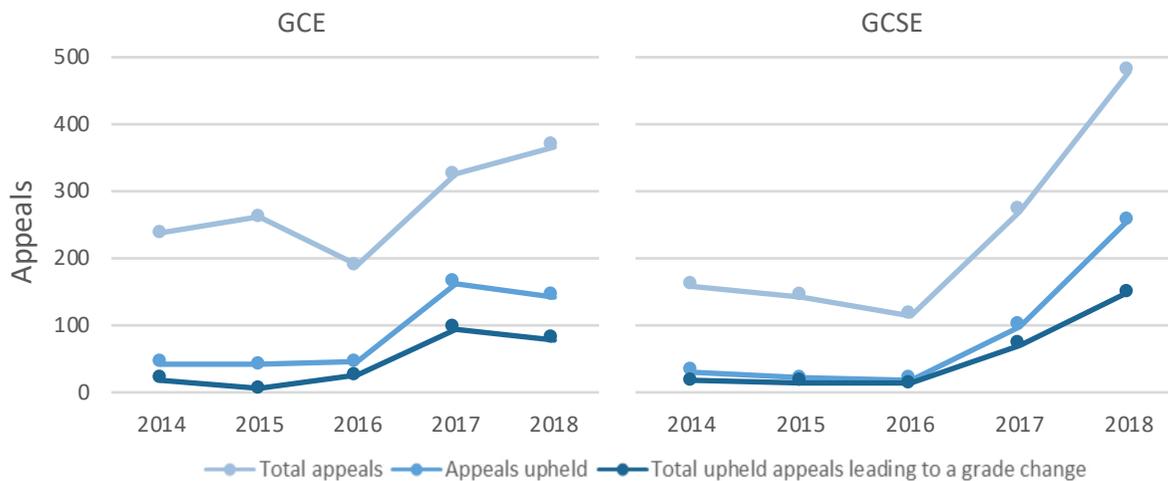
Following a pilot in 2016, [new grounds](#) for appeal were introduced in 2017 for all GCE subjects, and in 2018 for GCSE English language, English literature and mathematics, where the school or college believes there still to be a marking error following a review of marking or review of moderation or that a further error was made at the review stage. The pilot found that the additional grounds of appeal provided a better opportunity for errors in marking to be identified and corrected. The introduction of a new ground is likely to have resulted in an increase in the number of appeals in 2017 and 2018 compared to previous years. The new ground for appeal is to be extended to all remaining GCSEs in 2019.

Further information on this release is available in the [background information](#) as well as [data tables](#) accompanying this report.

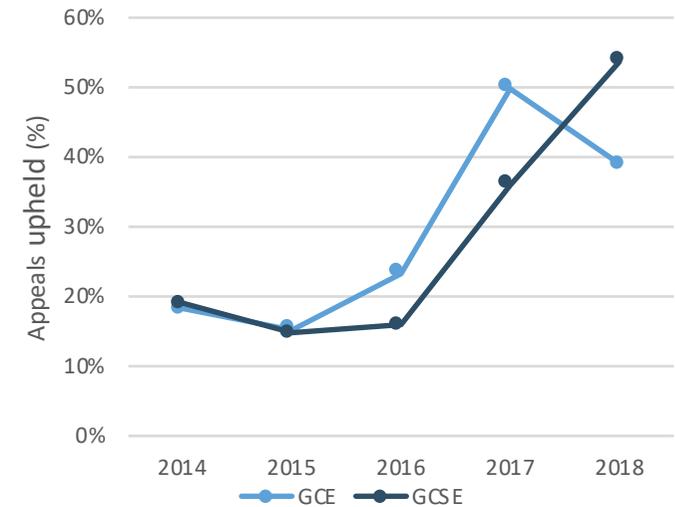
# Appeals received, upheld, and leading to a grade change

An appeal may be submitted by a centre if they are dissatisfied with the result of a review of marking or moderation or if they wish to contest the outcome of a reasonable adjustment or special consideration request, or a malpractice decision. An appeal can represent one candidate, or several, if related to the same potential issue. The appeal may be upheld at either a preliminary appeal or an appeal hearing, and this may lead to a change in one or more qualification grades involved. If an appeal which progresses to an appeal hearing is not upheld but was upheld as a preliminary appeal, the appeal as a whole is reported as upheld<sup>1</sup>. The data shown below contains appeals of all natures to all exam boards.

**Total appeals received, upheld and appeals which led to a grade change**



**Proportion of appeals which were upheld**



Note: Comparisons with previous years should be treated with caution. For 2014 to 2016, only WJEC submitted appeals figures including malpractice and reasonable adjustments/special consideration. In 2017 and 2018 all exam boards included figures for appeals submitted for these reasons, and since 2016 there have been revisions to the range of grounds for appeal, leading to an increase in the number of appeals submitted in these years.

## GCE

The number of GCE appeals increased from 325 to 368, whereas the number of appeals upheld, and of appeals leading to a grade change decreased. The proportion of GCE appeals which were upheld this year (39%) has decreased, having previously increased in 2016 and 2017.

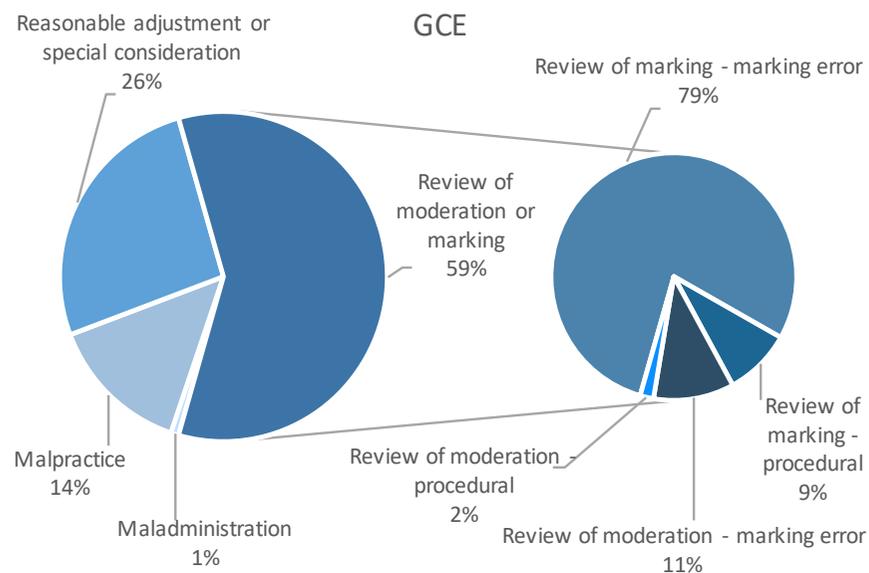
## GCSE

The number of GCSE appeals increased from 272 to 479. This is mostly due to further increases in appeals related to malpractice and review of marking (marking error) compared to 2017. The number of appeals upheld, and leading to a grade change also increased. The proportion of appeals upheld this year (54%) has continued to rise.

<sup>1</sup>. On a few occasions this may include some appeals which were upheld at the preliminary stage, but the centre were not satisfied with the outcome. Underlying figures are reported in tables 1 and 2 in the accompanying data.

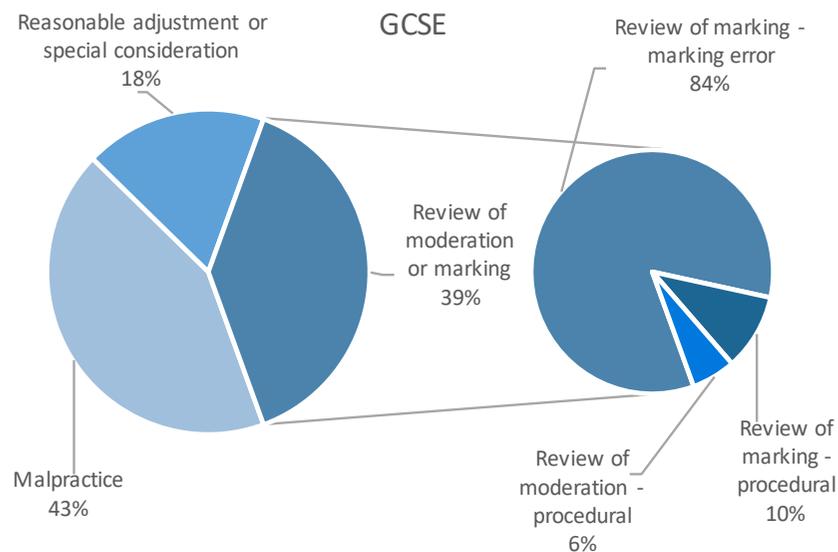
## Nature of appeals

An appeal can be made for a range of reasons: to contest the result of a review of marking or a review of moderation, or to contest a malpractice decision or a decision on reasonable adjustments or special consideration. In 2016, new grounds for appeals were piloted where an appeal could be made on the grounds of a marking error. In 2018, these grounds were applicable to all GCE subjects and to GCSE English language, English literature and maths.



### GCE

The largest single category for GCE appeals was against a marking error from a review of marking. This is a relatively new ground for appeal, available for all subjects since 2017. The number of appeals related to a review of moderation has declined compared to last year. This may be because reformed A levels include less non-exam based assessment.



### GCSE

Appeals to contest malpractice decisions were the single largest appeal category at GCSE. In 2018, the recently introduced grounds for appeal in GCE were extended to English language, English literature and Maths GCSEs for the first time, leading to more appeals in these subjects than in previous years.

Note: Underlying figures are reported in table 5 in the accompanying data.

## Preliminary appeals and appeal hearings

A preliminary appeal is a review by a senior exam board member who has not been previously involved in the individual case. As a result of a preliminary appeal, the case might or might not be upheld. If the applicant is unsatisfied with the result of the preliminary appeal, they may decide to progress to an appeal hearing, where applicants and exam boards present their case to the panel. An appeal panel consists of 3 or more members, at least one of which is independent (i.e. has not been an employee, examiner, committee or board member of the exam board in the previous 5 years). In 2018, new grounds for appeal to be considered under these arrangements (that schools and colleges can appeal on the basis that there was a marking or moderation error) were introduced for GCSE English language, English literature and maths, resulting in a marked increase in the number of appeals received in these subjects.

### GCE

Exam Series	Appeals received			Appeals leading to a grade change		Preliminary appeals	Appeal hearings	Percentage of appeals progressing	Preliminary appeals	Appeal hearings
	Preliminary appeals	Appeal hearings	Percentage of appeals progressing	Preliminary appeals	Appeal hearings					
2014	236	18	8%	18	0	159	8	5%	17	0
2015	261	17	7%	5	0	142	13	9%	14	0
2016	188	14	7%	25	0	114	11	10%	13	0
2017	325	21	6%	95	0	272	22	8%	70	0
2018	368	12	3%	78	0	479	22	5%	147	0~

### GCSE

### GCE

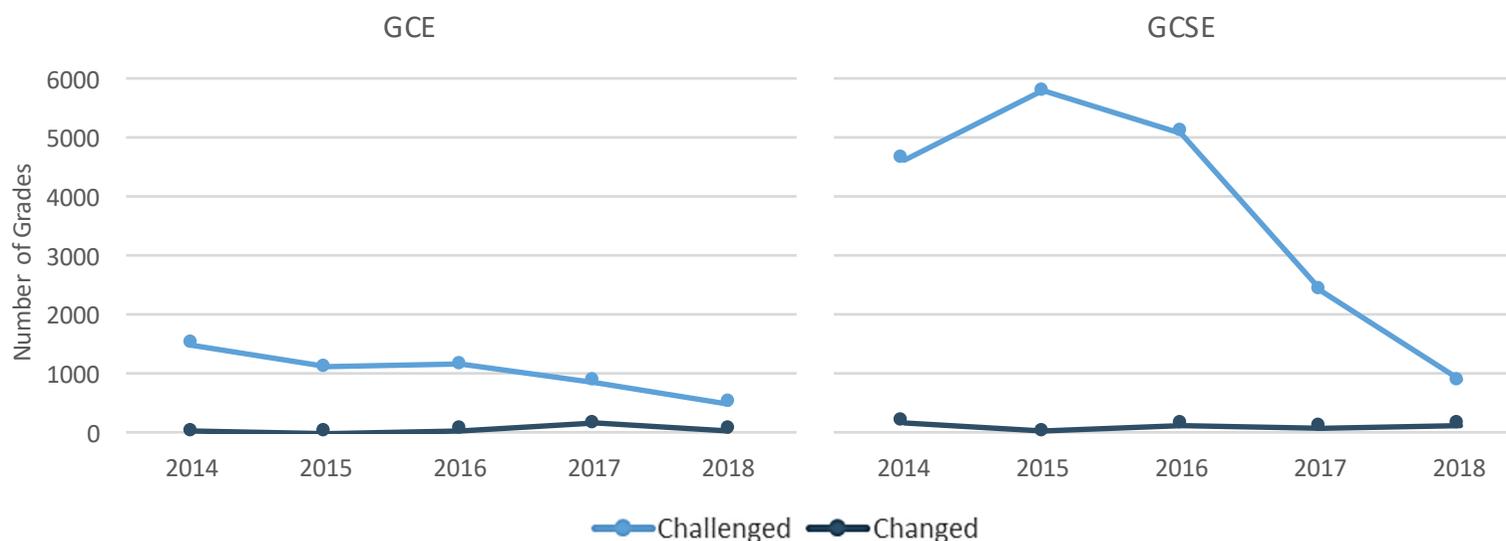
The proportion of GCE preliminary appeals progressing to an appeal hearing (3%) has fallen, as has the proportion of preliminary appeals which led to a change of grade (21%). No appeal hearings have resulted in a change of qualification grade. This has been the case for the last 5 years.

### GCSE

The proportion of GCSE preliminary appeals progressing to an appeal hearing (5%) has decreased since last year. A greater number of preliminary appeals has resulted in the same number of hearings. In contrast the proportion of preliminary appeals which led to a grade change (31%) has risen.

## Grades challenged and changed

A single appeal may represent one or more qualification grades which are being challenged, e.g. when a centre appeals its results for a moderated component taken by a number of its students. An upheld appeal may result in all, a subset or none of the associated qualification grades to change. A candidate may be involved in more than one appeal. In 2018, there were 1,338 candidates whose grades were involved in an appeal. Approximately 0.003% of the 6.2 million grades certified in summer 2018 were changed as a result of an appeal.



### GCE

The number of qualification grades challenged at GCE in 2018 was 514, a decrease of 41% compared to 2017, despite the number of appeals increasing. This is because this year, on average, appeals tended to include fewer candidates than they have done previously, possibly due to the reduction in the number of moderated components as a result of reform. The decrease in the number of grades which were changed as a result of an appeal (from 171 to 56), indicates that an appeal at GCE was somewhat less likely to either be successful, or (if successful) less likely to result in a grade change this year. This is at least in part a reflection of the decline in the percentage of submitted appeals that were upheld, compared to last year.

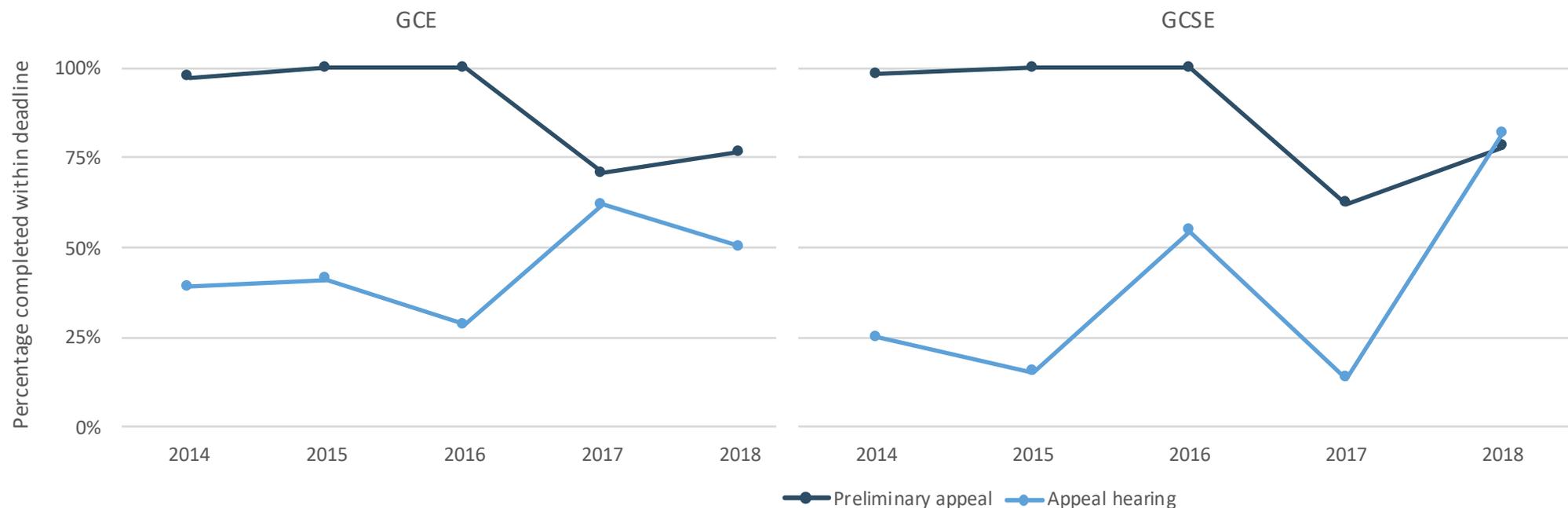
### GCSE

The number of grades challenged for GCSEs in 2018 was 889, a decrease of 63% since 2017. This is due to centres submitting fewer candidates, on average, in each appeal, possibly because increased access to previously unavailable information (such as scripts and/or script marks) allows any appeal submission to be more targeted, as well as the reduction in the number of moderated components as a result of reform. Despite the decline in the number of grades challenged, the number of GCSE grades changed due to an appeal increased this year from 92 to 144.

Note: Underlying figures are reported in tables 1 and 2 in the accompanying data.

## Completion within exam boards' target timescales

In 2018 the exam boards maintained the target timescale introduced in 2017 - five weeks to complete a preliminary appeal from the receipt of the application, and 10 weeks to complete an appeal hearing from the receipt of a request for an appeal hearing. Prior to 2017, the target timescale for completion was 50 days for either a preliminary appeal or an appeal hearing. Due to the change in the target timescale to complete appeals, conclusions regarding comparisons over time should be treated with caution. Note, for 2018, there are 5 GCE and 2 GCSE appeals which are still in progress at the time of this release, which might or might not be completed within the target timescale.



### GCE

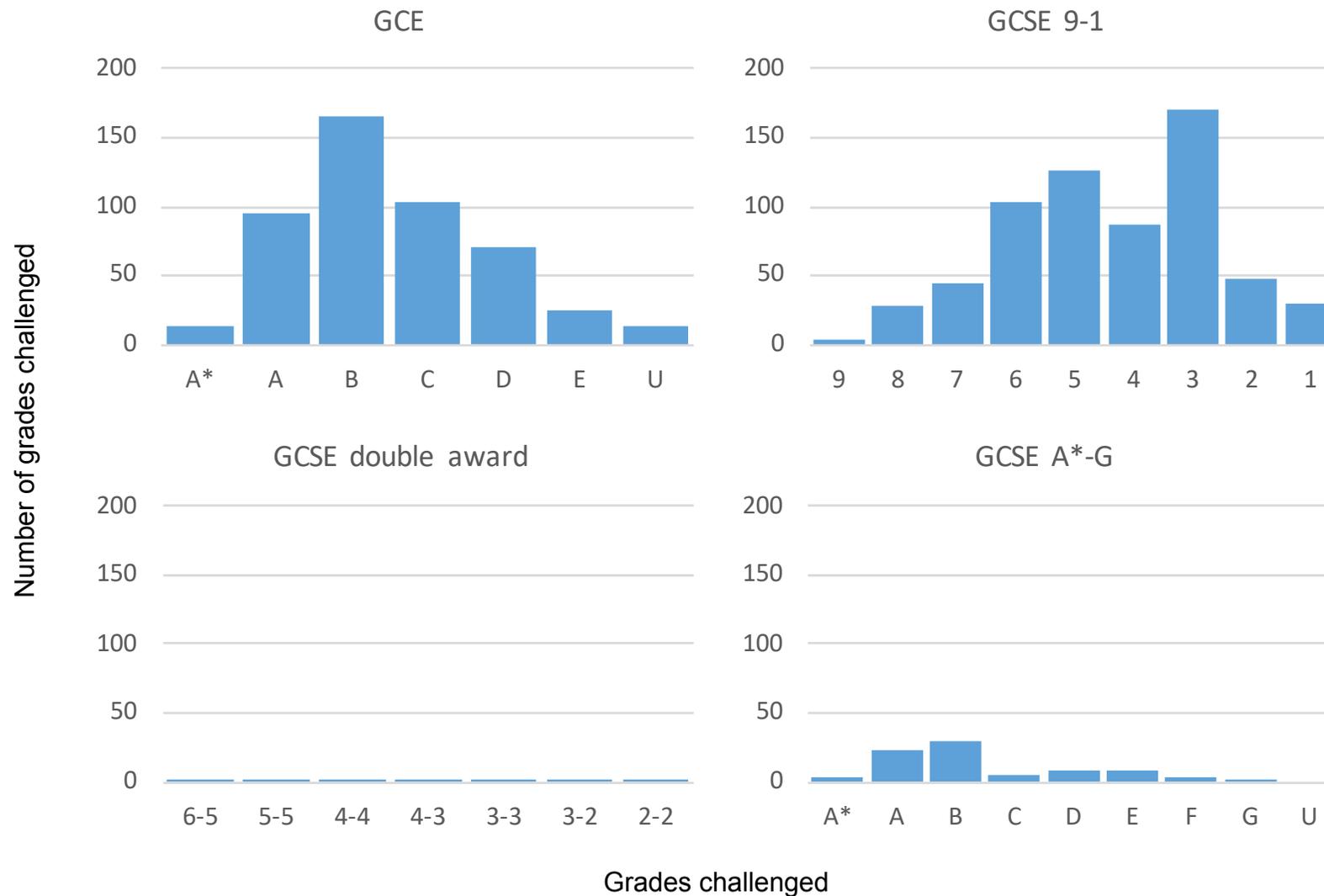
The proportion of GCE preliminary appeals completed within the target timescale (77%) has increased by 6 percentage points, while the proportion of appeal hearings completed within the target timescale (50%) has declined by 12 percentage points. The median number of days to complete a GCE appeal was 28 days, up from 23 in 2017.

### GCSE

The proportion of GCSE preliminary appeals (78%) and appeal hearings (82%) completed within the target timescale increased by 16 and 78 percentage points respectively. The median number of days to complete a GCSE appeal was 21 days, down from 28 days in 2017.

Note: Underlying figures are reported in table 3 in the accompanying data.

# Grades challenged at appeal



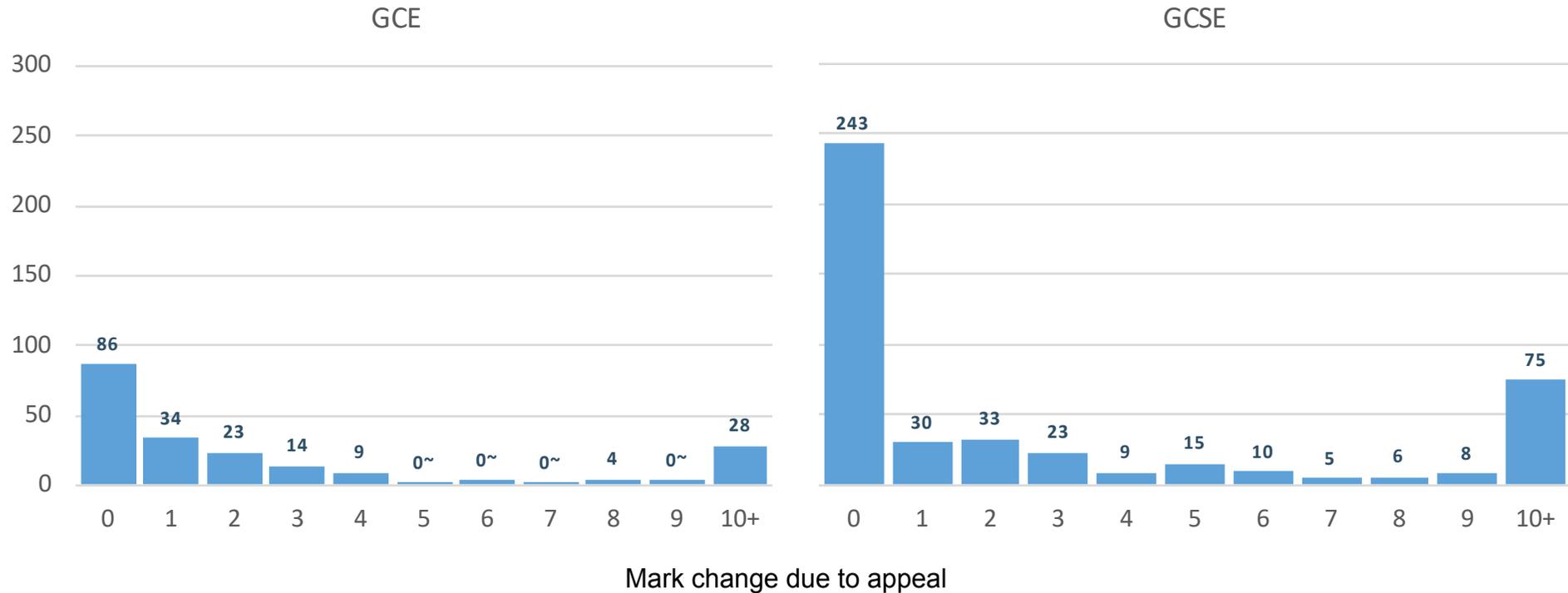
For GCE qualifications, grade B was the most contested grade. For GCSE qualifications, grade 3 was the most contested numerical grade, and grade B was the most contested alphabetical grade.

Note: Underlying figures are reported in table 6 in the accompanying data.

# Raw mark changes for upheld appeals

The charts below show the distribution of changes to the raw marks following appeals that were upheld.

Note that all mark changes of 10 marks or more have been combined into a single category in the charts given below.



## GCE

59% of upheld appeals resulted in additional marks being given, down from 82% in 2017. The most common result was no change in marks (41%), followed by an increase of 1 mark. No appeal led to a decrease in the marks. Mark changes of 5 or more marks (around 20% of all mark changes) were predominantly from appeals on the grounds of marking errors, or to contest a malpractice decision.

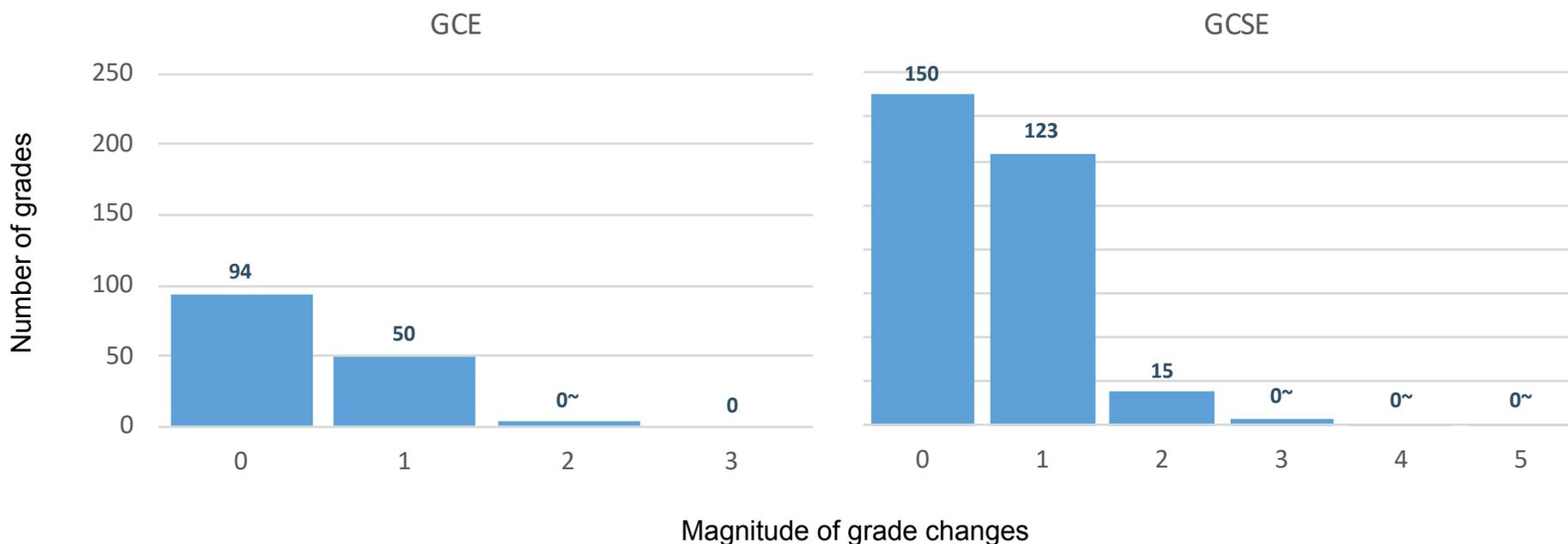
## GCSE

47% of upheld appeals resulted in additional marks given, up from 20% in 2017. The most common result was no change in marks (53%), followed by an increase of 2 marks. Mark changes of 5 or more marks (around 32% of all mark changes) were predominantly from appeals on the grounds of a review of marking or to contest a malpractice decision.

Note: Underlying figures are reported in table 7 in the accompanying data. Figures between 1 and 3 are denoted as 0~.

## Grades changed for upheld appeals

The charts below show the magnitude of grade changes made following an upheld appeal in 2018. An upheld appeal may lead to a change of marks awarded to a candidate, which in turn may lead to a change of the qualification grade awarded to that candidate. A small number of upheld appeals were in respect of candidates who were not originally given a grade. This might happen, for example, due to a malpractice investigation resulting in disqualification which was then appealed and upheld. Those cases do not appear in these graphs.



### GCE

The majority of grades challenged in upheld appeals for GCE (64%) did not result in a qualification grade change. 34% resulted in a grade increase of one grade, and a very small number of appeals led to an increase of 2 grades. There were no grade decreases as the result of an appeal.

### GCSE

Just over half of grades challenged in upheld appeals for GCSE (51%) did not result in a qualification grade change. Some qualification grades increased by one grade (42%) and a smaller number of cases (7%) resulted in an increase of multiple grades.

Note: Underlying figures are reported in table 8 in the accompanying data. Figures between 1 and 3 are denoted as 0~.



© Crown Copyright 2019

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated.

To view this license, visit

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/)

or write to

Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London  
TW9 4DU

Published by:



Earlsdon Park  
53-55 Butts Road  
Coventry  
CV1 3BH

0300 303 3344  
[public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk)  
[www.gov.uk/ofqual](http://www.gov.uk/ofqual)

**April 2019**

**Ofqual/19/6493/1**