

Commentary on Enquiries about Results for GCSE and A level

Provisional Statistics for Summer 2014 Exam Series



We know that many schools and colleges are concerned about marking quality. This year we have seen more reports in the media of large grade changes – where results change by more than one grade. When we reported on quality of marking¹ we found that marking was generally good but that there were mistakes. Large grade changes undermine confidence in the system and are unacceptable.

We are responding to recent concerns by publishing provisional data today on the volume of enquiries about results (EARs) and the grade changes that arise from those enquiries. EARs are still in progress, and so the data are not complete. Updated final data will be published in December. We are also requiring more analysis from exam boards to find out whether the quality of marking has deteriorated.

The provisional figures show that, compared with this time last year, the proportion of grades that have been changed following a review has increased from 18.2 to 19.1 per cent, and the number of EARs has also increased – up 56 per cent at GCSE and 34 per cent at A level.

At A level, the proportion of grades changed following a review of the original marking ('service 2') has remained fairly constant: 20.5 per cent this year compared with 20.4 per cent in 2013. At GCSE the proportion of grades that have been changed following a review of marking has increased from 19.3 per cent in 2013 to 20.2 per cent this year.

We expected to see more EARs submitted this year because the change to linear GCSEs and the removal of the January AS/A level series meant far more exam scripts – an extra 2.4 million overall – were marked this summer. Some schools have told us that the changes to the system this year (the move to linear assessments, changes to GCSE English and changes to performance tables to count only the first

¹ www.ofqual.gov.uk/documents/quality-of-marking-final-report

entry) have put more pressure on GCSE results this year. The much greater rise in GCSE EARs may be a result of that increased pressure.

These numbers are concerning but they don't tell us whether the quality of marking is better or worse than in previous years. Some of the grade changes might be a result of very small mark changes (often just one mark). We want to establish what this year's EAR data tell us about the quality of marking this summer. The provisional data do not tell us that. To find out, we have required the boards to provide us with more information on the causes of grade changes: for example, whether they are due to system errors, work not being marked or because the mark scheme has been wrongly applied.

We have also required exam boards to look more closely at large grade changes – those where the result changes by more than one grade. We want to know what causes those as well as whether there are more this year; whether they are caused by grades being too 'narrow', whether there are problems with particular papers or examiners, or whether there are features of the mark schemes that make large changes more likely. Once we know what the causes are, we can judge what action the boards should take to address these issues. We will report on the results of these analyses, and the final EARs data, in December.

We are taking other steps to improve the marking system. We are:

- analysing this year's EARs data and requiring more information from exam boards;
- improving the EARs and Appeals system to make it more simple, transparent and fair;
- developing better ways for exam boards to measure and report on quality of marking in future;
- identifying best practice in mark scheme design;
- requiring exam boards to upgrade action plans on quality of marking;
- requiring exam boards to improve their monitoring of markers as they mark;
- evaluating the effectiveness of marker training.

For more information on these steps, see:

[*Enquiries about Results for GCSE and A level: Provisional Statistics for Summer 2014 Exam Series*](#)

[Ofqual's Work on Quality of Marking](#)

[Ofqual's Work on Quality of Marking – slides](#)