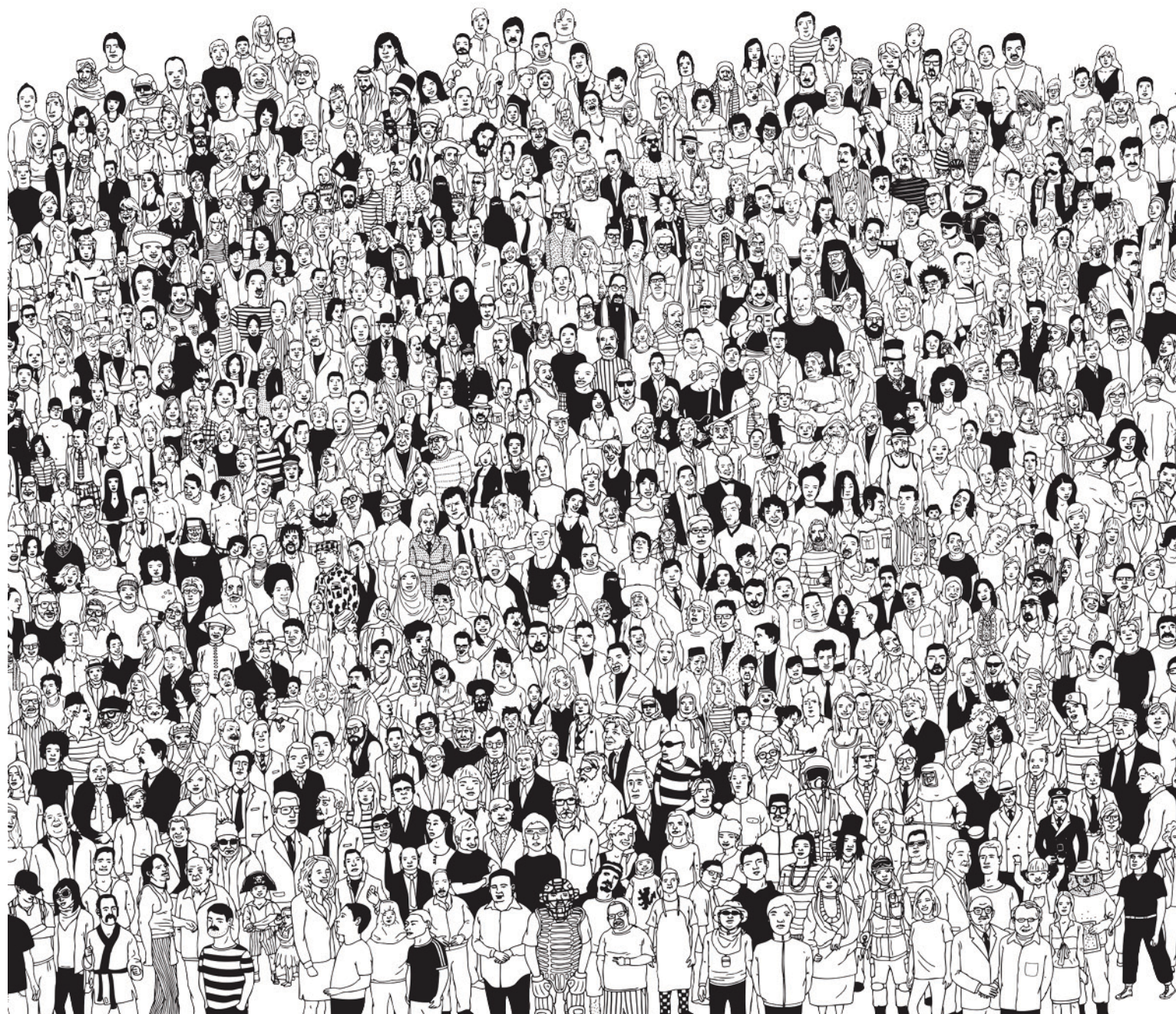


Perceptions of A Levels, GCSEs and Other Qualifications in England – Wave 14

An Ofqual commissioned report

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Executive summary

1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This report presents the findings of the 14th wave of the Perceptions Survey.
- 1.1.2 The research was commissioned by Ofqual and conducted by YouGov. The aim of this research project was to investigate head teachers, teachers', students', parents', the general public's, employers' and Higher Education Institutions' (HEIs) perceptions and levels of confidence in qualifications and the examination system in England.
- 1.1.3 The survey follows the approach adopted in wave 13 and was conducted using an online methodology. The fieldwork was conducted between 12 January 2016 and 26 February 2016. The final achieved sample for each of the target groups was as follows:
- 281 head teachers
 - 697 teachers of GCSE, A level and other academic¹ and vocational qualifications² offered to those aged 15 to 19 (referred to throughout this report as teachers).
 - 338 young people, defined as those aged 15 to 19 who are studying/have studied/will study A levels and/or GCSEs and/or an academic qualification defined as the Level 1/2 certificates (commonly known as International GCSEs), the International Baccalaureate, BTECs (Level 1/Level 2 or Level 3), the Pre-U and other academic qualifications (including vocational and applied).
 - 259 parents/carers of students who are taking or who have just taken A levels, GCSEs and/or other academic qualifications (including vocational and applied).
 - 253 academic professionals³ who had knowledge about the process of offering applicants a place on an undergraduate course at their institution, referred to throughout this report as HEIs (Higher Education Institutions).

¹ Ofqual defines academic qualifications as qualifications that are assessed by formal examinations and moderated coursework

² Ofqual defines vocational qualifications as qualifications that are taught in schools and colleges that prepare students for a particular type of job

³ This sample consisted on academics and a small number of admission staff. Please see the technical appendix for a description of the sample profile

- 274 senior/middle managers who worked for an organisation that has recruited young people (aged 16 to 25) in the past 12 months (referred to throughout this report as employers).
- 1,033 members of the public.

1.1.4 The final achieved samples were structured to be representative of the relevant target populations. However, while the sampling approach aimed to identify groups of participants that were representative, given that a survey of this kind only captures the views of those involved, throughout this report, responses attributed to groups (for example, teachers, parents etc.) reflect only those respondents included in the study.

2 Perceptions of GCSEs

Overall perceptions

- 2.1.1 A majority of stakeholders continued to agree that GCSEs are well understood by people and are a trusted qualification. This represents seven out of ten stakeholders (more than 65%) who agreed that GCSEs are well understood by people.
- 2.1.2 Seven out of ten head teachers (70%) agreed that ‘GCSEs are well understood by people’, compared to 83% in wave 13. The proportion of teachers who agree that ‘GCSEs are a trusted qualification’ has increased from 57% in wave 13 to 63% seen in this wave.
- 2.1.3 Over half of stakeholders (58%) continued to agree that ‘there is too much change in the GCSE system’. Head teachers (84%) and teachers (79%) were significantly more likely than any other group to agree with the statement.

Skills and preparation

- 2.1.4 Six out of ten stakeholders (62%) agreed that ‘GCSEs are good preparation for further study’. Over a third of stakeholders (35%) agreed that ‘GCSEs are good preparation for work’, with a similar proportion (36%) disagreeing. The perceptions of all groups on these statements have remained unchanged from wave 13.

Confidence

- 2.1.5 Stakeholders were more likely to agree (34%) than disagree (18%) ‘that compared to last year they are less confident in the GCSE system’.

- 2.1.6 Head teachers and teachers remained least likely to believe that ‘GCSE standards are maintained year on year’, with 49% of head teachers and 40% of teachers stating their disagreement with the statement. Head teachers were significantly more likely than any other group to disagree that ‘GCSE standards are maintained year on year’. Teachers and head teachers also remained significantly more likely than any other group to state that ‘compared to last year they are less confident in the GCSE system’.
- 2.1.7 In this wave of the research we found that the proportion of all groups who agreed that ‘compared to last year that they have less confidence in the GCSE system’ has remained unchanged, indicating no increase in levels of confidence but no deterioration either.
- 2.1.8 Overall a quarter of stakeholders (25%) agreed that ‘compared to last year the accuracy of marking of GCSEs has deteriorated’. This is unchanged from wave 13. Stakeholder views on the accuracy of the marking of GCSEs remained mixed. Three out of ten stakeholders (28%) agreed that ‘the marking of GCSEs is accurate’ compared with a quarter of stakeholders (26%) who disagreed.
- 2.1.9 Head teachers remained significantly more likely than any other group to disagree with the statement that the marking of GCSE is accurate. These findings remain unchanged from the results of the previous wave of this research and in line with previous waves before that.

GCSE reform

- 2.1.10 Overall stakeholders remained more likely to agree than disagree that ‘GCSEs needed reform’. Four out of ten (41%) stakeholders agreed that ‘GCSEs needed reform’ and three out of ten (28%) disagreed. These perceptions were unchanged from wave 13. Head teachers (51%) and teachers (48%) were strongest in their agreement that ‘GCSEs needed reform’, being significantly more likely to report this than young people (30%), parents (36%) and the general public (37%).
- 2.1.11 Six out of ten stakeholders (58%) were aware of the new 9-1 grading scale for GCSEs. The vast majority of head teachers and teachers were aware of the new 9-1 grading scale for GCSEs, with their levels of awareness significantly higher than any other group. By far the lowest levels of awareness of the new 9-1 grading scale for GCSEs were seen amongst employers (29%) and the general public (22%).

- 2.1.12 Four out of ten stakeholders (39%) agreed that ‘the move to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing at GCSE’ and 34% disagreed. A third of stakeholders (35%) agreed that ‘the removal of tiering (where possible) is a bad thing’, with three out of ten (30%) in disagreement that it is a bad thing. These perceptions from stakeholders were unchanged from wave 13 of this research.
- 2.1.13 On par with the wave 13 findings, six out of ten (57%) head teachers agreed that ‘the removal of tiering (where possible) is a bad thing’. This was significantly higher than the level of agreement from any other group.
- 2.1.14 Overall a similar proportion of stakeholders agreed and disagreed that ‘the reduction in teacher assessments in GCSE is a good thing’. Around four out of ten (42%) were in agreement and closer to a third in disagreement (36%). These perceptions were unchanged from the views offered in wave 13.
- 2.1.15 Teachers were strongest in their agreement that ‘the reduction in teacher assessment in GCSE is a good thing’. In contrast, young people and parents were more likely than other groups to disagree that ‘the reduction in teacher assessment in GCSE is a good thing’. The perceptions remained unchanged in comparison to wave 13.

3 Perceptions of A levels

Overall perceptions

- 3.1.1 Levels of agreement that ‘A levels are well understood by people’ were consistent with wave 13, with nearly two thirds (63%) of stakeholders agreeing with this statement.
- 3.1.2 Consistent with wave 13, levels of trust in A level qualifications were high, with a strong majority of all groups in agreement that they are a trusted qualification. The level of trust that teachers have in A levels increased, with 85% having said they feel they’re a trusted qualification compared with 79% in wave 13.
- 3.1.3 The findings reported here indicate that the strengths of an A level qualification are that it is a ‘trusted qualification’ and ‘well understood by the people’. These findings were the same as in wave 13.
- 3.1.4 Half of stakeholders (52%) agreed that ‘there is too much change in the A level system’. Consistent with wave 13 both head teachers and teachers were most likely to agree that ‘there is too much change within the A level system’, with head teachers significantly more likely to agree than teachers (74% compared with 66%).

Skills and preparation

- 3.1.5 As in wave 13, a majority of stakeholders (77%) agreed that ‘A levels are good preparation for further study’. Head teachers (85%), teachers (84%), employers (83%) and HEIs (62%) were strongest in their agreement.
- 3.1.6 There was no majority consensus about whether or not ‘A levels are good preparation for work’ from any group, similar to the results in wave 13

Time constraints

- 3.1.7 A third of stakeholders (33%) agreed that the exam period for ‘A levels is too congested’; this is in comparison to a quarter (25%) who disagreed. These perceptions were unchanged from wave 13 of this research series.
- 3.1.8 In comparison with wave 13, however, head teachers were significantly less likely to disagree that ‘the exam period for A levels is too short/congested’ (40% compared with 30% in wave 14).

Confidence

- 3.1.9 Nearly four in ten stakeholders (37%) agreed that ‘A level standards are maintained year on year’, with a quarter (26%) in disagreement. These perceptions were unchanged from wave 13.
- 3.1.10 Stakeholders were more likely to agree (34%) than disagree (18%) that ‘compared to last year the accuracy of marking of A levels has deteriorated’. In contrast stakeholders were more likely to agree (31%) than disagree (23%) that ‘the marking of A levels is accurate’. These perceptions were unchanged from wave 13.
- 3.1.11 Consistent with wave 13, head teachers were significantly more likely (42%) than all other groups to agree that ‘compared to last year the accuracy of marking of A levels has deteriorated’. Head teachers were also significantly more likely (39%) than all other groups to disagree that ‘the marking of A levels is accurate’.

A level reform

- 3.1.12 In wave 14 stakeholders were slightly less likely compared to wave 13 to disagree that ‘A levels needed reform’. Compared to wave 13 the proportion of stakeholders who disagreed that ‘A levels needed reform’ fell slightly from 32% in wave 13 to 29% in this wave of the research.

3.1.13 Four out of ten (40%) stakeholders agreed that ‘the move to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing at A level’, slightly higher than the proportion who disagreed (32%). Similarly, four out of ten stakeholders (37%) agreed that ‘the advantages of decoupling AS from A level outweigh the advantages’, higher than the proportion who disagreed (25%). In addition, four out of ten stakeholders (42%) agreed that ‘the reduction in teacher assessment in some A level subjects is a good thing’, with a third (33%) offering disagreement. All of these perceptions on different aspects of A level reform were unchanged from wave 13.

4 Perceptions of alternative qualifications

4.1.1 International A levels and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme remained the alternative qualifications most commonly considered of equivalent challenge to A levels. The majority of all sample groups agreed that International A levels are of equivalent challenge to A levels. The International Baccalaureate Diploma was also considered to be of equivalent challenge to A levels by the majority of all groups.

4.1.2 BTECs (Level 3) qualifications were less likely to be considered of equivalent challenge to A levels (four out of ten stakeholders agreed with this). The perceptions of BTEC (Level 3) qualifications has changed compared to wave 13. The proportion of all stakeholders who disagreed that BTECs (Level 3) qualifications are equivalent in challenge to A levels fell from 47% in wave 13 to 43% in this wave.

4.1.3 There was broadly consistent agreement that Level 1/2 certificates (more commonly known as International GCSEs) are equivalent in challenge to GCSEs, with 56% of all stakeholders in agreement. Across all stakeholders there has been an increase in the proportion who agree that BTEC (Level 1/Level 2) qualifications are of equivalent challenge to GCSEs (42% in wave 14 compared with 38% in wave 13).

4.1.4 There was strong agreement from all stakeholders that International A levels, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme and the Pre-U are good preparation for further study.

4.1.5 Six out of ten (58%) stakeholders agreed that BTECs (Level 3) are good preparation for further study. Parents (70%), employers (69%), head teachers (65%) and the general public (64%) offered the strongest agreement that BTEC (Level 3) qualifications are good preparation for further study. These levels of agreement were significantly higher than those of teachers (55%), young people (54%) and HEIs (53%).

- 4.1.6 Overall there was a consistent view from stakeholders, including HEIs, that International A levels, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme and the Pre-U are valued as highly as A levels by Higher Education (HE). In contrast stakeholders disagreed that BTECs (Level 3) and Cambridge Technicals (Level 3) qualifications are valued as highly as A levels by HE.

Introduction

1 Background

1.1.1 This report presents the findings of wave 14 (2016) of the Perceptions Survey. This research project was commissioned by Ofqual and the research was conducted by YouGov.

Context

1.1.2 Since being established, Ofqual has continued research originally commissioned by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority, which annually assesses teachers', parents', students' and the general public's perceptions of the A level examination system. This large-scale research survey is unique in providing a wide overview of perceptions of general and other qualifications from the users of these qualifications.

1.1.3 Previous waves of the survey have explored perceptions of A levels from 2003 to 2013 and, since 2004, perceptions of GCSEs. Since 2011, the research has included questions about other academic and vocational qualifications for 15 to 19 year olds.

1.1.4 This research has been conducted during a period of reform and change in the education system. Recent reform can be traced back to the publication of the government white paper 'The Importance of Teaching'⁴ (2010) which proposed reforms to both A levels and GCSEs.

1.1.5 More recently, and important to the context in which wave 14 of the Perceptions Survey was undertaken, was the reform of qualifications and the delivery of new qualifications being phased in from September 2015.

1.1.6 The requirement of this project was to collect evidence from representative samples of stakeholders to ensure that Ofqual gains robust insight into current perceptions of qualifications.

Geographical coverage

1.1.7 Ofqual regulates general and vocational qualifications in England. The focus of this research was to gain the perceptions of head teachers, teachers, young people, parents, employers, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the general public in England. Samples of these groups were drawn from within England only.

⁴ The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper 2010 (Department for Education)
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf

Users of statistics

1.1.8 The annual Perceptions Survey is a long running measure of perceptions of the qualifications system. Some of the users of the statistics produced in wave 14 are the Department for Education, Education Select Committee, awarding organisations, media, subject associations and teaching unions.

Related statistics and publications

1.1.9 A number of other statistical releases and publications relate to this one:

- Statistical First Release: Revised GCSE and Equivalent Results in England, 2014 to 2015,⁵ published by the Department for Education. This covers students' achievements in GCSEs and the equivalent regulated qualifications in schools at the end of Key Stage 4
- Statistical First Release: A Level and other Level 3 Results 2014 to 2015 (Revised),⁶ published by the Department for Education. This provides information on achievements in advanced level examinations

User feedback

1.1.10 Ofqual is running a rolling series of online surveys to make sure its statistical releases meet your needs. Ofqual would like to invite you to take part in the online survey for this release. <http://ofqual.Perception-Survey.sgizmo.com/s3/>

1.1.11 It will take about ten minutes to complete the online survey. Your responses will remain entirely confidential in any reports published about the survey. If you have any questions or would prefer a paper or large-type copy of the survey, please contact us at: statistics@ofqual.gov.uk.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2014-to-2015>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-level-3-results-2014-to-2015-revised>

2 Research objectives

2.1.1 The aim of this research project was:

- To investigate head teachers', teachers', students', parents', the general public's, employers' and HEIs' perceptions and levels of confidence in qualifications and the examination system.

2.1.2 The objectives of the research were to investigate head teachers', teachers', students', parents', the general public's, employers' and HEIs':

- overall perceptions and confidence in qualifications taken by young people, particularly A levels, GCSEs and other academic and vocational qualifications delivered in schools
- confidence in qualifications' standards and the examination system, both in its implementation and regulation.

3 Methods and data limitations

Overview of method

3.1.1 Wave 14 of the Perceptions Survey was carried out by YouGov, on behalf of Ofqual. The survey was conducted online using YouGov's proprietary survey system. This mirrors the approach adopted in wave 13 (2015) of the Perceptions Survey and offers comparability in the mode of data collection.

3.1.2 The fieldwork was conducted between 12 January 2016 and 26 February 2016.

Sampling

3.1.3 The sampling of participants was designed with a view to achieving respondent samples that were representative of the wider population. Fuller details of this sampling procedure and its effectiveness are provided in Appendix B.

3.1.4 The final achieved sample for each of the target groups was as follows:

- 281 head teachers

- 697 teachers of GCSE, A level and other academic⁷ and vocational qualifications⁸ offered to those aged 15 to 19 (referred to throughout this report as teachers)
- 338 young people, defined as those aged 15 to 19 who are studying/have studied/will study A levels and/or GCSEs and/or an academic qualification defined as Level 1/2 certificates (more commonly known as International GCSEs), the International Baccalaureate, BTECs (Level 1/Level 2 or Level 3), the Pre-U and other academic qualifications (including vocational and applied)
- 259 parents/carers of students who are taking or who have just taken A levels, GCSEs and/or other academic qualifications (including vocational and applied)
- 253 academic professionals⁹ who had knowledge about the process of offering applicants a place on an undergraduate course at their institution (referred to throughout this report as HEIs)
- 274 senior/middle managers who worked for an organisation that has recruited young people (aged 16 to 25) in the past 12 months (referred to throughout this report as employers)
- 1,033 members of the public

3.1.5 The final achieved samples were structured to be representative of the relevant target populations. We therefore conclude that based upon the sampling procedures the samples delivered for head teachers, teachers, the general public, parents, students, HEIs and employers were of high quality. However, while the sampling approach has aimed to identify groups of participants that are representative, given that a survey of this kind only captures the views of those involved, throughout this report, responses attributed to groups (for example, teachers, parents etc.) reflect only those respondents included in the study.

⁷ Ofqual defines academic qualifications as qualifications that are assessed by formal examinations and moderated coursework

⁸ Ofqual defines vocational qualifications as qualifications that are taught in schools and colleges that prepare students for a particular type of job

⁹ This sample consisted on academics and a small number of admission staff. Please see the technical appendix for a description of the sample profile

Questionnaire design

- 3.1.6 The wave 14 questionnaire was designed by Ofqual in conjunction with the YouGov project team. The survey covered themes explored in previous waves of the research, namely, perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and other qualifications and the systems that deliver them. The themes and evidence gathered by this survey are comparable with previous waves of the Perceptions Survey and very limited changes were made to the final questionnaire.
- 3.1.7 More or less, the same set of questions were posed to each sample group with a small number of attitudinal statements only deemed relevant to employers and HEIs respectively. A copy of the core questionnaire is available alongside publication of this report.

Guidance on analysis

- 3.1.8 The research was undertaken with seven different sample groups. These data have been combined into one 'all' group named as 'stakeholders' in the text of this report. The data for each sample group have been combined and weighted so that each group represents an equal proportion within the total number.
- 3.1.9 Throughout this report, percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Due to rounding, percentages may not always add up to 100%. The report summarises the data for each question using charts and tables. The data have not been replicated in full for each question across each sample group, the intention of this report is to summarise the main themes in the data and not produce a full replication of the entire data collected.
- 3.1.10 The survey contained a series of statements that were asked against a 5-point agreement scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree) with a don't know option. In presenting the data in this report the agree and disagree figures have been used. Where shown agree is an aggregation of strongly agree and agree and disagree is an aggregation of strongly disagree and disagree.
- 3.1.11 Each section of the report firstly compares differences across sample groups for each of the questions asked to all groups. Statistically significant differences between the sample groups are highlighted in the narrative, and in red text within the figures.

- 3.1.12 Reported differences are based on significance testing and the effective base acknowledges the sample sizes of each sub-group to assess whether the differences reported are true differences between the sub-groups who responded to the surveys. Where the terms 'significant' or 'significantly' are used this refers to the fact that the difference between the data points are statistically significant as tested at the 95% confidence level. Not all statistically significant differences have been identified and care has been taken to use more reliable base sizes of over 50 respondents. This is YouGov's approach to all research deliverables.
- 3.1.13 Where deemed relevant the individual sections feature a 'spotlight' section on each sample group. The purpose of these sections is to highlight differences in the data within each of the sample groups. The research project was not designed to provide representative samples of each of these sub-groups (for example teachers in Academy schools or boys and girls). Therefore, some caution is advised when interpreting these findings. The spotlight sections present the views of those who responded to the surveys and are indicative findings that may not be representative of the wider population of these sub-groups.
- 3.1.14 Within the spotlight sections different characteristics within the samples are used to highlight differences. Please see Appendix C for a glossary of the terms used.
- 3.1.15 Below each figure an 'effective base' is quoted, which differs from the sample sizes given above. These numbers are a product of the data weighting procedure that is applied (see Appendix B) and are the base used for statistical analysis.

Section 1: Perceptions of GCSEs

The first section of this report focuses on respondents' overall perceptions of GCSE qualifications.

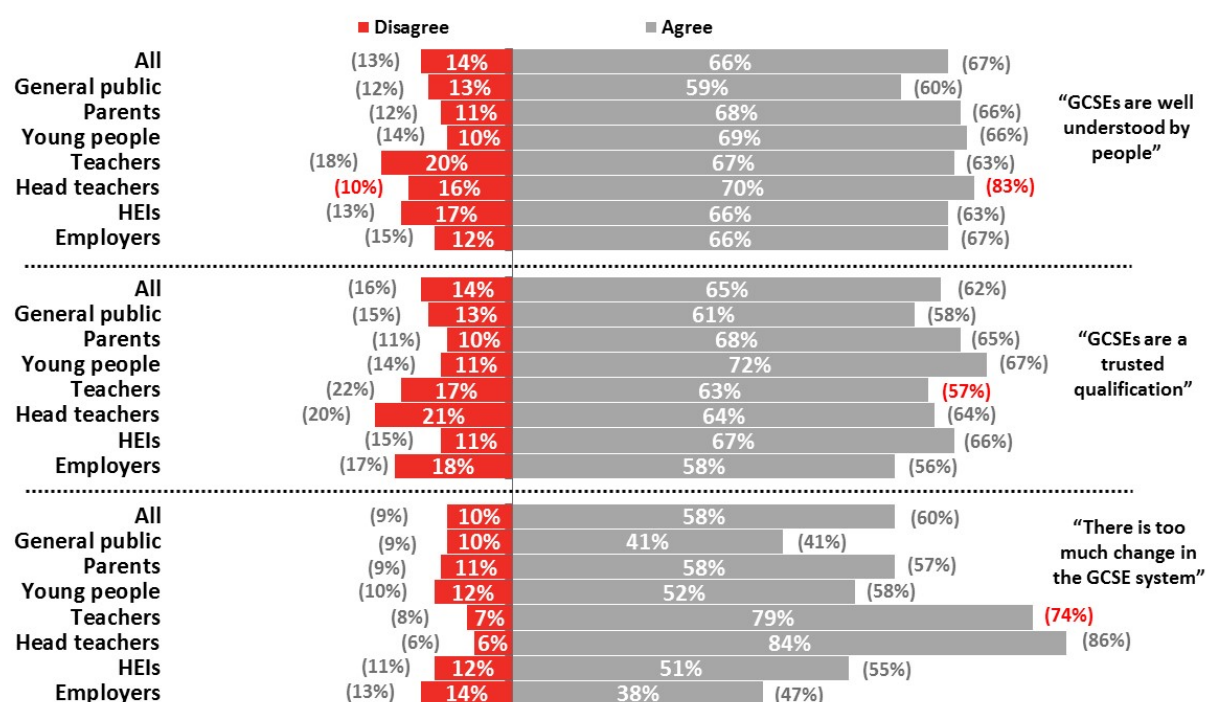
4 Overall perceptions of GCSEs

- 4.1.1 Levels of agreement that GCSEs are well understood by people remained unchanged from wave 13, with seven out of ten stakeholders (66%) in agreement that 'GCSEs are well understood by people' (figure 1). A similar proportion of stakeholders (65%) also agreed that 'GCSEs are a trusted qualification', this was also unchanged from wave 13 when 62% of stakeholders agreed. Only 14% disagreed that 'GCSEs are well understood by people'.
- 4.1.2 The overall findings that GCSEs are well understood and a trusted qualification echoed the findings of previous waves of the Perceptions Survey.
- 4.1.3 Although the majority were in agreement that 'GCSEs are well understood by people', the general public were least likely to agree, with six out of ten in agreement, a significant difference from the other groups surveyed.
- 4.1.4 Seven out of ten head teachers (70%) agreed that 'GCSEs are well understood by people'. While this was a strong majority in agreement, the level of agreement fell by 13 percentage points from wave 13, when 83% of head teachers agreed that 'GCSEs are well understood by people'. There have not been any significant changes in opinion from the other groups.
- 4.1.5 The majority of all groups agreed that 'GCSEs are a trusted qualification', although the level of this agreement differed. Young people (72%) and parents (68%) offered the highest levels of agreement. These groups were significantly more likely to agree that 'GCSEs are a trusted qualification' than the general public (61%), and employers (58%).
- 4.1.6 Nearly two in three head teachers (64%) agreed that 'GCSEs are a trusted qualification', on par with the levels of agreement from teachers (63%). Although head teachers (21%), teachers (17%) and employers (18%) were most likely to offer disagreement that 'GCSEs are a trusted qualification', significantly higher than the levels of disagreement from the other groups.
- 4.1.7 Compared with wave 13 of the Perceptions Survey the proportion of teachers who agreed that 'GCSEs are a trusted qualification' increased from 57% to the 63% in this wave.

4.1.8 A majority of stakeholders (58%) agreed that ‘there is too much change in the GCSE system’. Head teachers (84%) and teachers (79%) stood out, being significantly more likely than any other group to agree that there is too much change. The general public (41%) and employers (38%) were least likely to agree that ‘there is too much change in the GCSE system’.

4.1.9 These findings showed that concerns over the amount of change in the qualification system remained high. The proportion of teachers who agreed that there is too much change in the GCSE system increased in wave 14 compared with wave 13 (rising from 74% in wave 13 to 79% in wave 14).

Figure 1: Overall perceptions of GCSEs



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

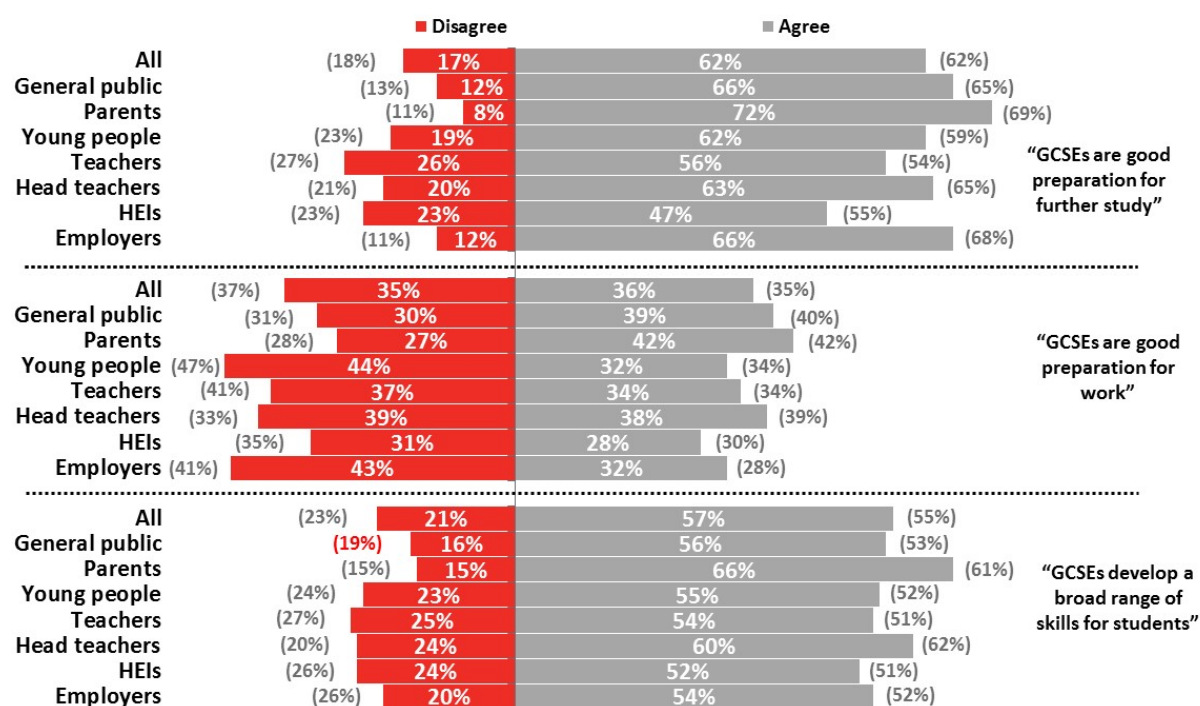
Note: All respondents were shown a 5-point agreement scale. Agree is an aggregation of strongly agree and agree and disagree an aggregation of strongly disagree and disagree. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

5 Skills and preparation

5.1.1 Six out of ten stakeholders (62%) agreed that ‘GCSEs are good preparation for further study’. In contrast just over a third of stakeholders (35%) agreed that ‘GCSEs are good preparation for work’ with a similar proportion (36%) disagreeing (figure 2). These views were unchanged from the results seen in wave 13.

- 5.1.2 Parents were significantly more likely than young people, head teachers, teachers and HEIs to believe that ‘GCSEs are good preparation for further study’ (72% compared with 62%, 63%, 56% and 47%, respectively). Of all groups HEIs were least likely to agree that ‘GCSEs are good preparation for further study’.
- 5.1.3 Compared to the perception that ‘GCSEs are good preparation for further study’, levels of agreement that ‘GCSEs are good preparation for work’ were lower for all groups, with no majority consensus offered from any group.
- 5.1.4 Parents and the general public were significantly more likely than HEIs, teachers, young people and employers to agree that ‘GCSEs are good preparation for work’. Four out of ten parents (42%) and members of the general public (39%) agreed that ‘GCSEs are good preparation for work’ compared with 28% of HEIs, 34% of teachers, 32% of young people and 32% of employers.
- 5.1.5 Employers and young people were significantly more likely to disagree than agree that ‘GCSEs are good preparation for work’. While 32% of employers and 32% of young people believed that ‘GCSEs are good preparation for work’, 43% of employers and 44% of young people did not.
- 5.1.6 The perceptions of all groups related to whether GCSEs are good preparation for further study or for work remained unchanged from wave 13 of this research.
- 5.1.7 Parents were more likely than any other group to agree that ‘GCSEs develop a broad range of skills’. Parents consistently demonstrated their support for the value of GCSEs, with two thirds (66%) agreeing that ‘GCSEs develop a broad range of skills for students’.

Figure 2: Skills and preparation



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

6 Time constraints

6.1.1 There were mixed views from all groups as to whether they thought ‘the exam period for GCSEs is too short/congested’, with no majority consensus offered (figure 3).

Overall a third of stakeholders (32%) agreed that ‘the exam period for GCSEs is too short/congested’ and a similar proportion disagreed (33%).

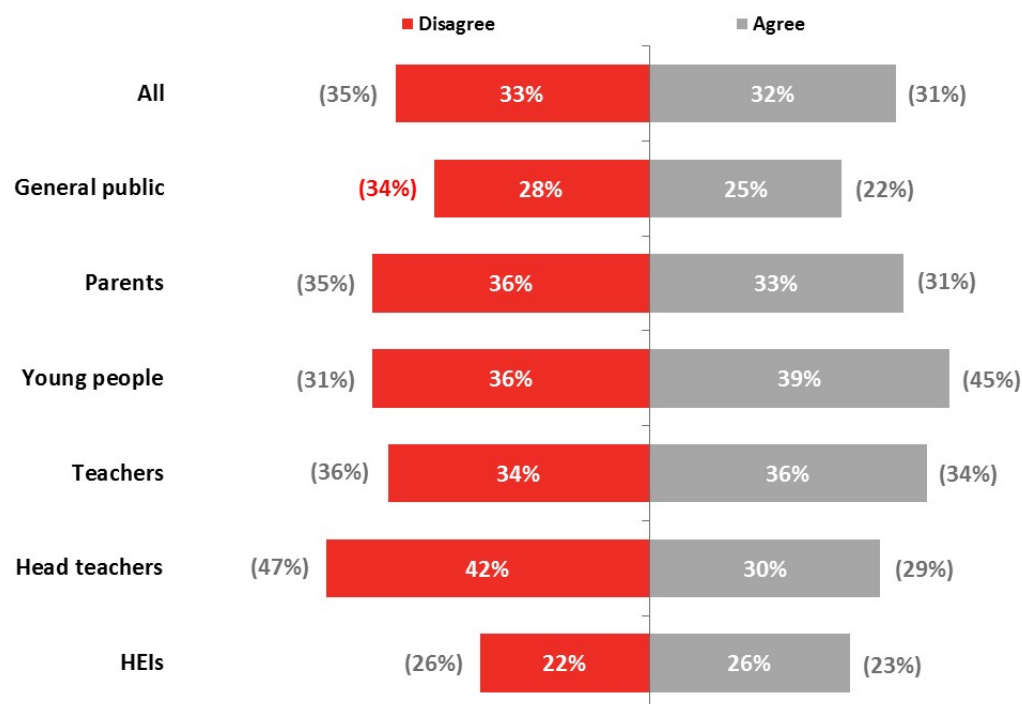
6.1.2 The perceptions of whether the exam period for GCSEs is too short/congested remained broadly unchanged from wave 13, with only the general public showing a change in opinion. The public were less likely to disagree in this wave (28%) compared to wave 13 (34%).

6.1.3 Young people displayed the highest levels of agreement when it came to feeling that ‘the exam period for GCSEs is too short and/or congested’, with 39% having said they believed this to be true.

6.1.4 In opposition to this view, two fifths of head teachers (42%) indicated they do not believe the exam period is too short/congested. They were significantly more likely to state this opinion than HEIs, teachers and the general public.

6.1.5 Among the general public, there was more uncertainty around whether or not the exam period is too short/congested, with 26% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and another 20% who reported they did not know.

Figure 3: “The exam period for GCSEs is too short/congested”



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

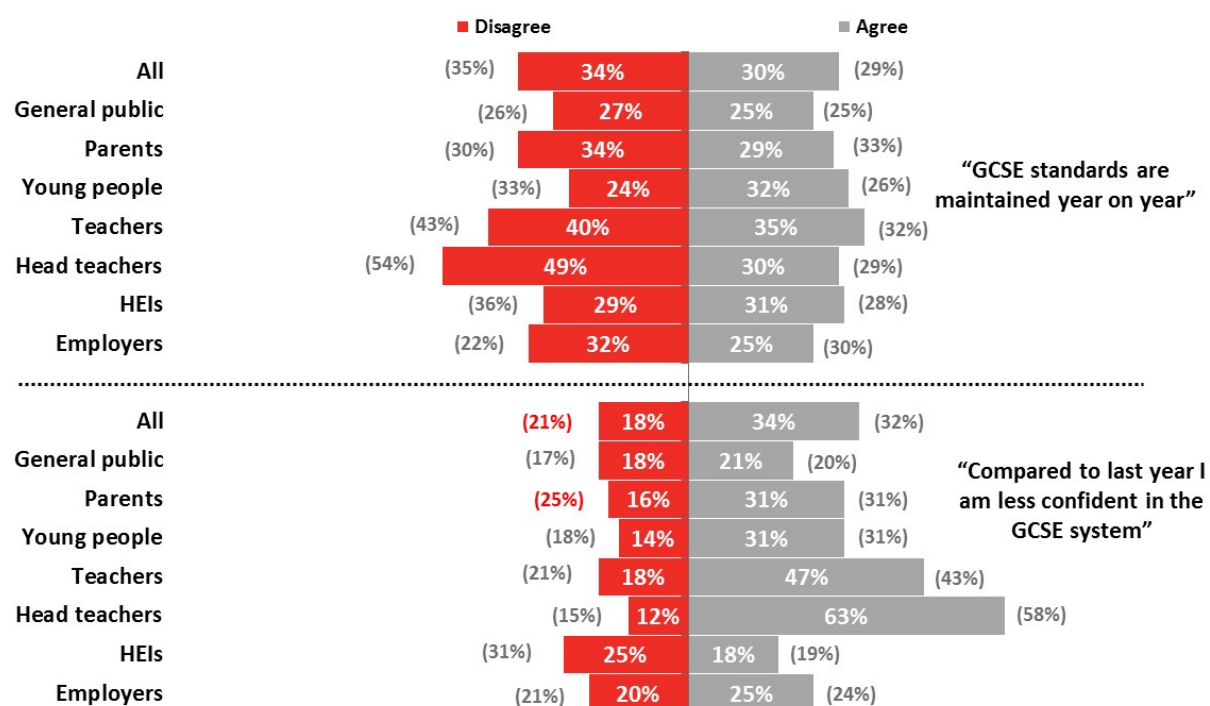
Note: All respondents were shown a 5-point agreement scale. Agree is an aggregation of strongly agree and agree and disagree an aggregation of strongly disagree and disagree. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

7 Confidence in GCSEs

7.1.1 In this wave of the research we found that the proportion of stakeholders who agreed that ‘compared to last year that they have less confidence in the GCSE system’ has remained unchanged, indicating no increase in levels of confidence but no further deterioration either (figure 4).

- 7.1.2 A third of stakeholders (34%) disagreed that ‘GCSE standards are maintained year on year’, with three out of ten (30%) in agreement. These perceptions were unchanged from wave 13. Stakeholders were more likely to agree (34%) than disagree (18%) that ‘compared to last year they are less confident in the GCSE system’. The proportion of stakeholders who agreed was unchanged compared to wave 13, but the proportion that disagreed with the statement fell from 21% to 18% in wave 14.
- 7.1.3 Head teachers and teachers remained least likely to believe that ‘GCSE standards are maintained year on year’, with 49% of head teachers and 40% of teachers indicating their disagreement with the statement. Head teachers were significantly more likely than any other group to disagree that ‘GCSE standards are maintained year on year’.
- 7.1.4 Young people (32%) were more likely than the general public and employers to agree that ‘GCSE standards are maintained year on year’. Similar levels of agreement were indicated by HEIs and parents.
- 7.1.5 Teachers and head teachers also remained significantly more likely than any other group to agree that ‘compared to last year they are less confident in the GCSE system’. Head teachers were particularly likely to feel this way, with a majority (63%) stating their agreement. Among teachers, nearly half (47%) agreed that they are less confident in the GCSE system than last year. Both groups were significantly more likely to agree than disagree that ‘compared to last year they are less confident in the GCSE system’.
- 7.1.6 HEIs were most likely to say they are not less confident in the GCSE system than they were last year, with a quarter (25%) stating their disagreement. They were the only group more likely to disagree than to agree (19%) with the statement.

Figure 4: Confidence in GCSE standards and the system



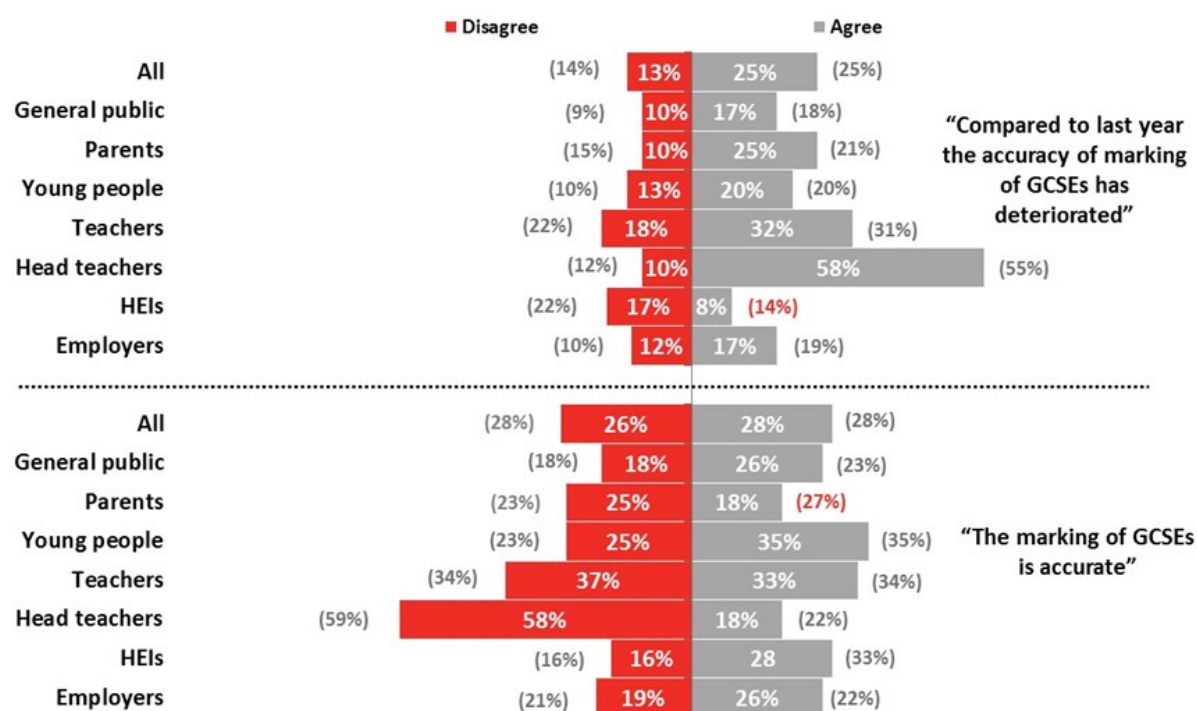
Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

7.1.7 Overall a quarter of stakeholders (25%) agreed that ‘compared to last year the accuracy of marking of GCSEs has deteriorated’, this was unchanged from wave 13. Stakeholder views on the accuracy of the marking of GCSEs remained mixed (figure 5). The proportion of stakeholders who agreed (28%) was similar to the proportion who disagreed (26%) that ‘the marking of GCSEs is accurate’.

7.1.8 Head teachers remained significantly more likely than any other group to disagree that the marking of GCSEs is accurate. These findings were unchanged from the results of the previous wave of this research and were in line with previous waves before that.

Figure 5: Confidence in marking of GCSEs



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

7.1.9 Three in five head teachers (58%) disagreed that ‘the marking of GCSEs is accurate’. In comparison, teachers were split in their opinion. One third (33%) of teachers agreed but a similar proportions disagreed (37%).

7.1.10 Young people were more positive than negative in their view of the accuracy of GCSE marking. A third of young people (35%) agreed that ‘the marking of GCSEs is accurate’, significantly higher than the level of agreement from head teachers, parents, general public and employers.

7.1.11 When asked on a similar topic to consider whether or not they believed the accuracy of the marking of GCSEs has deteriorated in the last year, head teachers were once again significantly more likely than any other group to have agreed that this had happened. Head teachers were most likely to offer agreement that ‘the marking of GCSEs has deteriorated in the last year’, with more than half (58%) agreeing. Among teachers, nearly one third (32%) agreed that ‘the marking of GCSEs has deteriorated in the last year’, significantly higher than the 18% of teachers that disagreed.

Spotlight on teachers

- Overall, teachers who teach GCSE qualifications were more likely than those who do not teach GCSE qualifications to have supported statements regarding the benefits and positive attributes of GCSEs.
- Current GCSE teachers were more likely than those who don't teach GCSEs to agree that:
 - GCSEs are well understood by people (69% compared with 56%)
 - GCSEs are a trusted qualification (68% compared with 41%)
 - GCSEs are good preparation for further study (59% compared with 45%)
 - GCSEs are good preparation for work (37% compared with 18%)
 - GCSEs develop a broad range of skills for students (58% compared with 39%)
- In contrast, teachers who teach GCSE qualifications were also more likely than those who do not teach GCSEs to have agreed that there is too much change in the GCSE system (83% compared with 65%)

Spotlight on young people

- Girls were more likely than boys to report that they agreed that GCSEs are a trusted qualification, with 78% of girls in agreement compared with 66% of boys
- Young people aged 14 to 15 were much more likely than those aged 16 to 17 and 18 to 19 to agree that:
 - GCSEs are good preparation for further study, with 80% of those aged 14 to 15 year olds in agreement compared with 58% of those aged 16 to 17 and 49% of those aged 18 to 19.
 - GCSEs are good preparation for work (50% among those aged 14 to 15-, compared with 23% among those aged 16 to 17 and 18 to 19).

Spotlight on parents

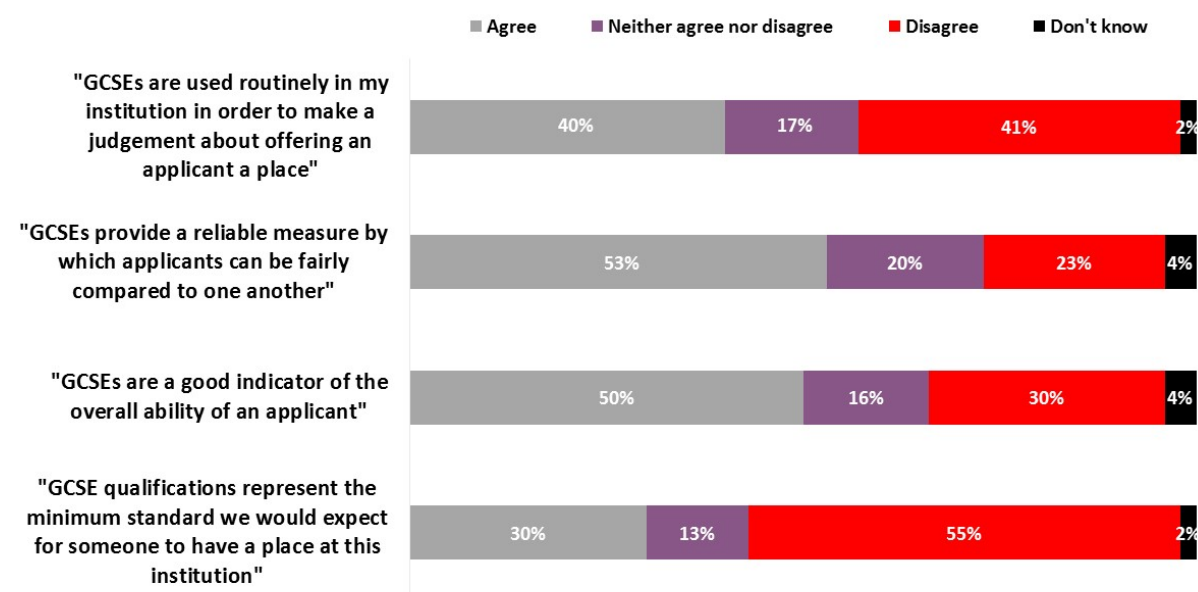
- Parents from a higher social grade¹⁰ (ABC1) were more likely than those from a lower social grade (C2DE) to agree that:
 - GCSEs are well understood by people (75% of ABC1s compared with 59% of C2DEs)
 - GCSEs are a trusted qualification (73% of ABC1s compared with 61% of C2DEs)
 - GCSEs develop a broad range of skills for students (75% of ABC1s compared with 56% of C2DEs)

Spotlight on higher education

- One in two HEIs (50%) reported that they believe GCSEs are a good indicator of the overall ability of an applicant (figure 6)
- Alongside reports of GCSEs being a good indicator of overall ability, a small majority of HEIs (53%) indicated they feel GCSEs provide a reliable measure by which applicants can be fairly compared to one another
- Four out of ten HEIs (40%) reported that GCSEs are used routinely in their institution to make judgements about offering an applicant a place
- As might be expected, HEIs do not generally regard GCSEs as sufficient as a minimum standard for entry to HE with less than one-third (30%) of HEIs reporting that GCSE qualifications represent the minimum standard they would expect someone to have at their institution.

¹⁰ Please see glossary for a description of these classifications

Figure 6: Perceptions of GCSEs among Higher Education institutions



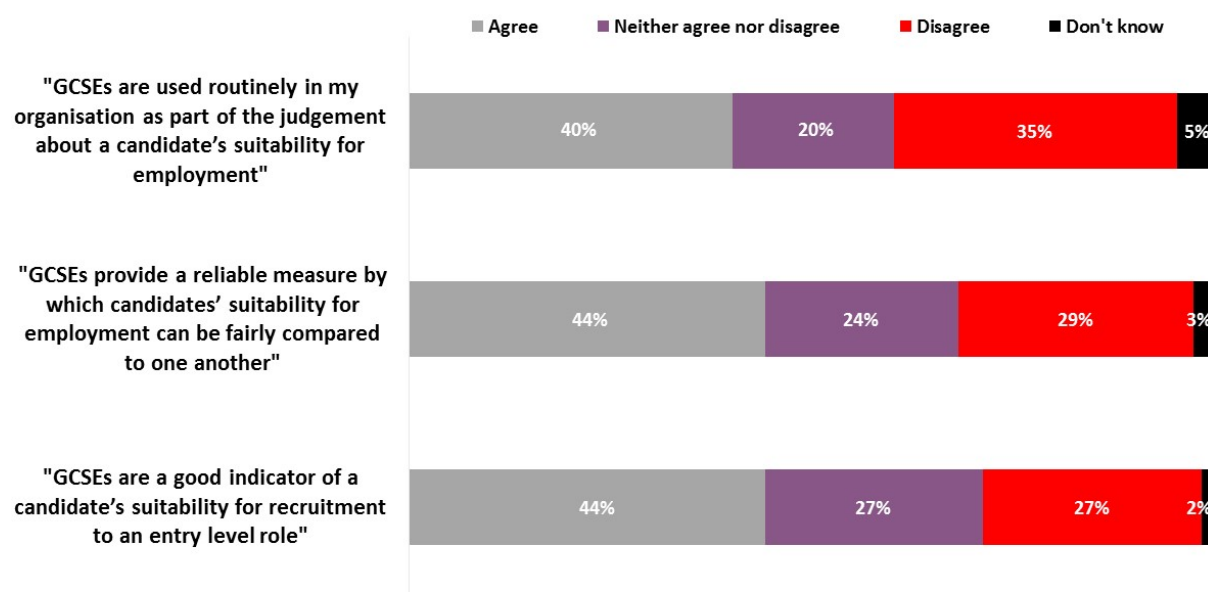
Effective base: HEIs 228

Note: All 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.

Spotlight on employers

- Just over two fifths of employers (44%) agreed that GCSEs are a good indicator of a candidate's suitability for recruitment to an entry level role (figure 7). This proportion is on par with the proportion of HEIs who reported that GCSEs are a good indicator of the overall ability of an applicant (48%)
- Similar proportions agreed that GCSEs provide a reliable measure by which candidates' suitability for employment can be fairly compared to one another (44%) and that they are used routinely in their organisation for judgement about a candidate's suitability for employment (40%)

Figure 7: Perceptions of GCSEs among employers



Effective base: Employers 265

Note: All 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.

Spotlight on the general public

- Young adults aged 16-29 (32%) were most likely to agree that GCSE standards are maintained year on year when compared with those aged 30-50 years old (27%) and 51+ years old (21%)
- Young people were also most likely to agree that the marking of GCSEs is accurate, with 39% of 16-29 year olds agreeing compared with 28% of those aged 30-50 years old and 18% of those aged 51+
- Young adults displayed more negative attitudes towards the value of GCSEs - they more frequently disagreed that GCSEs are good preparation for further study (21%) and work (44%) than older adults (10% and 33% among 30 to 50 year-olds; 9% and 21% among people aged 51+)

Section 2: Perceptions of GCSE reform

7.1.12 The second section of this report looks at perceptions around GCSE reforms.

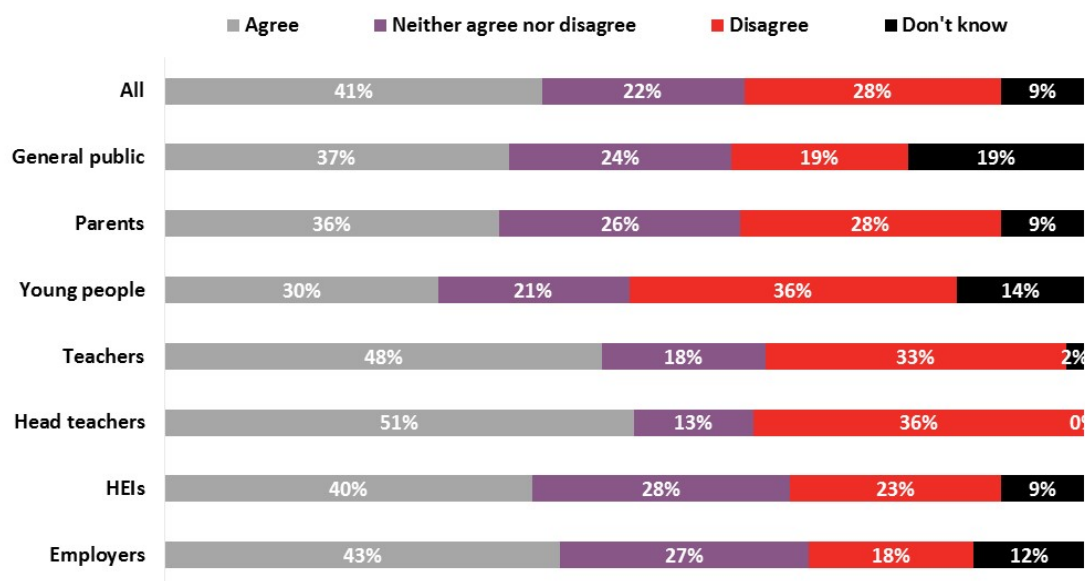
8 The need for GCSE reform

8.1.1 Stakeholders were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that ‘GCSEs needed reform’. Four out of ten (41%) stakeholders agreed that ‘GCSEs needed reform’ and three out of ten (28%) disagreed (figure 8). These perceptions were unchanged from wave 13.

8.1.2 Head teachers (51%) and teachers (48%) were strongest in their agreement that ‘GCSEs needed reform’, being significantly more likely to indicate this than young people (30%), parents (36%) and the general public (37%).

8.1.3 The pattern of responses from all groups on whether they agreed or disagreed that GCSEs needed reform remained unchanged from wave 13.

Figure 8: “GCSEs needed reform”



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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.

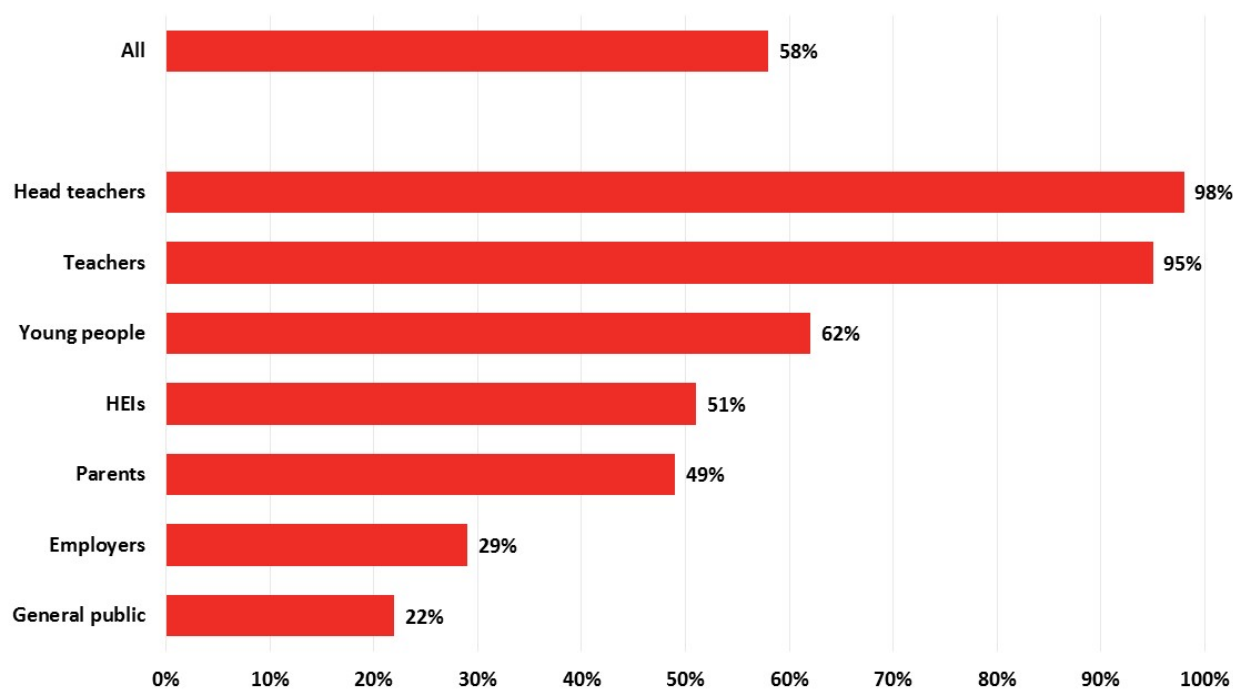
9 New 9-1 grading scale

9.1.1 Overall six out of ten stakeholders (58%) were aware of the new 9-1 grading scale for GCSEs (figure 9). The vast majority of head teachers and teachers were aware of the new 9-1 grading scale for GCSEs, with their levels of awareness significantly higher than any other group.

9.1.2 Six out of ten young people (62%) were aware of the new 9-1 grading scale with a third (32%) reporting that they were not aware. This level of awareness in young people was significantly higher than the levels of awareness in parents, who were evenly split between those who were aware of the new 9-1 grading system (49%) and those who were not aware (49%).

9.1.3 By far the lowest levels of awareness of the new 9-1 grading scale for GCSEs were seen amongst employers and the general public. Three out of ten employers (29%) and a fifth of the public (22%) reported that they were aware of the new 9-1 grading scale for GCSEs.

Figure 9: Are you aware of the new 9-1 grading scale to be used in new GCSEs? – Proportion aware



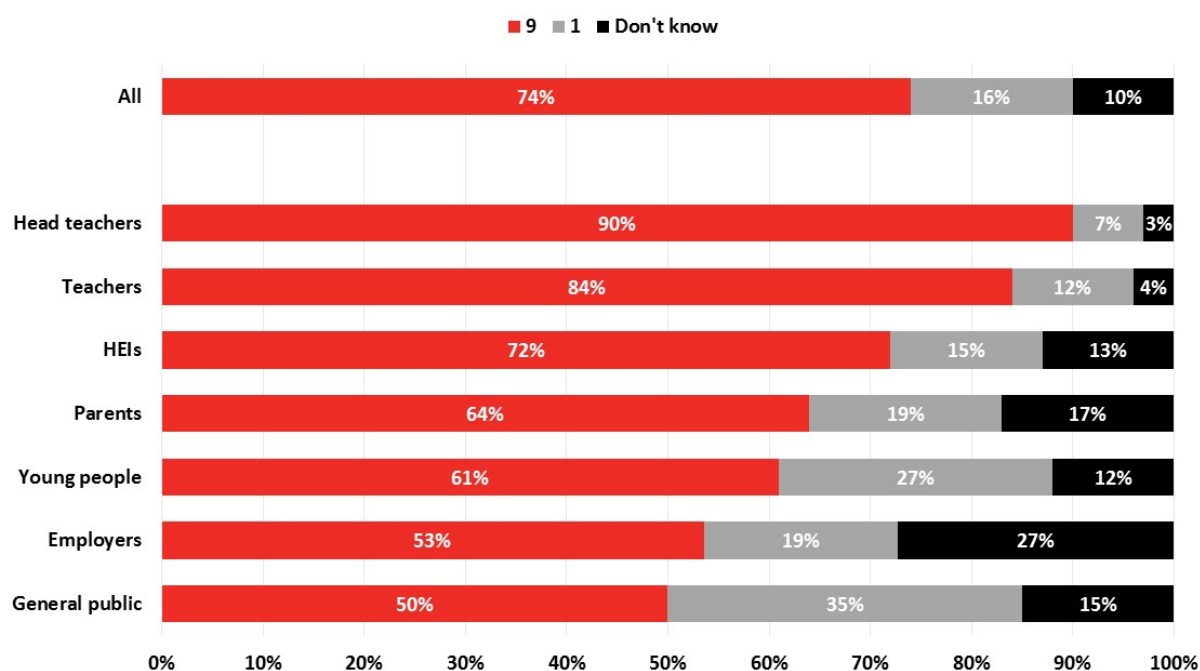
Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

9.1.4 Of those aware of the new grading scale, three quarters of all stakeholders (74%) reported that grade 9 was the best grade that students can achieve under the new grading system (figure 10).

9.1.5 Nine out of ten head teachers (90%) and eight out of ten teachers (84%) correctly identified that a grade of 9 was the best grade that students can achieve under the new grading system, the highest levels of understanding of the new grading system.

9.1.6 The majority of HEIs (72%), parents (64%) and young people (61%) also identified 9 as the highest grade that students could achieve. The general public had the lowest levels of understanding of the new grading system for GCSEs, half (50%) identified grade 9 and a third (35%) grade 1 as the highest grade that students can achieve.

Figure 10: Based on your understanding of the 9-1 grading scale, what is the best grade that students can get?



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents aware of new grading scale (General public 221; Parents 126; Young people 209; Teachers 663; Head teachers 277; HEIs 124; Employers 81)

9.1.7 Of those who were aware of the new 9-1 grading system for GCSEs, head teachers (59%) and teachers (51%) were most likely to know that a grade of 5 is the lowest grade that the Department for Education will consider to be a good pass. A third of students (32%) knew this (table 1).

9.1.8 Levels of understanding of what the Department for Education would consider to be a good pass were low for the other groups surveyed.

Table 1: Based on your understanding of the 9-1 grading scale, what is the lowest grade that the Department for Education will consider to be a good pass?

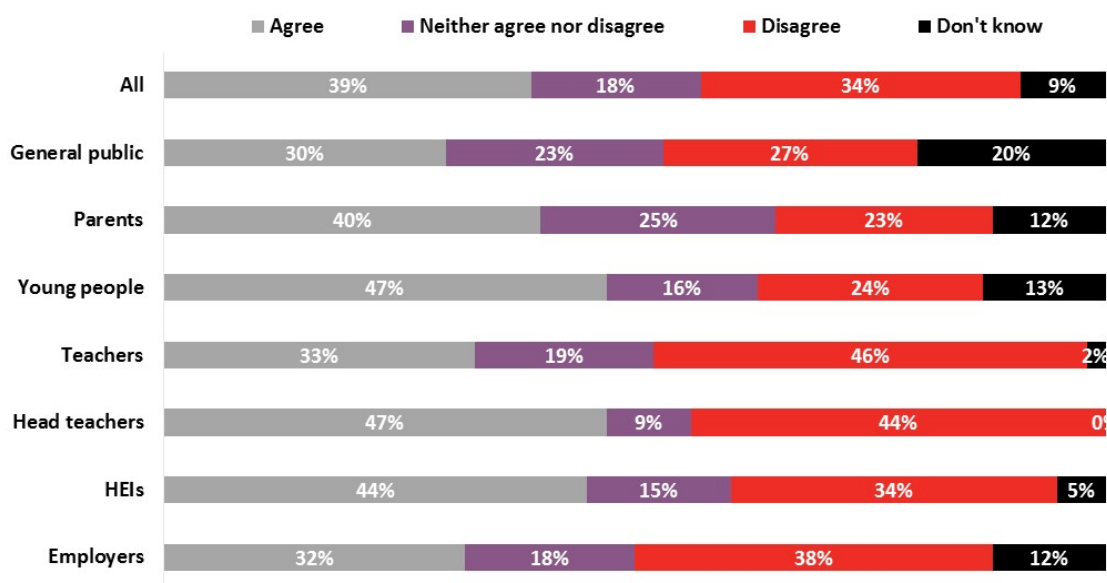
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Don't know
All	3%	0%	2%	19%	40%	10%	2%	1%	2%	20%
General public	2%	1%	7%	22%	24%	7%	5%	0%	4%	28%
Employers	7%	2%	3%	8%	16%	13%	6%	1%	6%	38%
Young people	4%	0%	2%	15%	32%	15%	5%	2%	3%	22%
Parents	7%	2%	4%	11%	23%	13%	2%	0%	5%	34%
HEIs	1%	0%	5%	19%	27%	8%	4%	3%	0%	32%
Teachers	2%	0%	1%	21%	51%	11%	1%	0%	1%	12%
Head teachers	3%	0%	0%	27%	59%	7%	0%	0%	0%	5%

Effective base: All respondents aware of new grading scale (General public 221; Parents 126; Young people 209; Teachers 663; Head teachers 277; HEIs 124; Employers 81)

10 Linear end of course assessments

- 10.1.1 Four out of ten stakeholders (39%) agreed that ‘the move to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing at GCSE’ and 34% disagreed (figure 11). These perceptions were unchanged from wave 13 when 40% of stakeholders agreed that the move to linear end of course assessment was a bad thing.
- 10.1.2 Young people and parents were more likely to agree than disagree that ‘the move to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing at GCSE’. In contrast teachers were more likely to disagree than agree that ‘the move to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing at GCSE’. Other groups offered similar levels of agreement and disagreement.
- 10.1.3 Remaining unchanged from wave 13, head teachers were equally likely to agree as they were to disagree that ‘the move to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing at GCSE’. Half of head teachers (47%) reported that they agreed that ‘the move to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing at GCSE’, with just over two fifths (44%) disagreeing.

Figure 11: ‘The move to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing at GCSE’



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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.

11 Tiering

11.1.1 A third of stakeholders (35%) agreed that ‘the removal of tiering (where possible) is a bad thing’, with three out of ten (30%) in disagreement that it is a bad thing (figure 12). These perceptions from stakeholders were unchanged from wave 13 of this research.

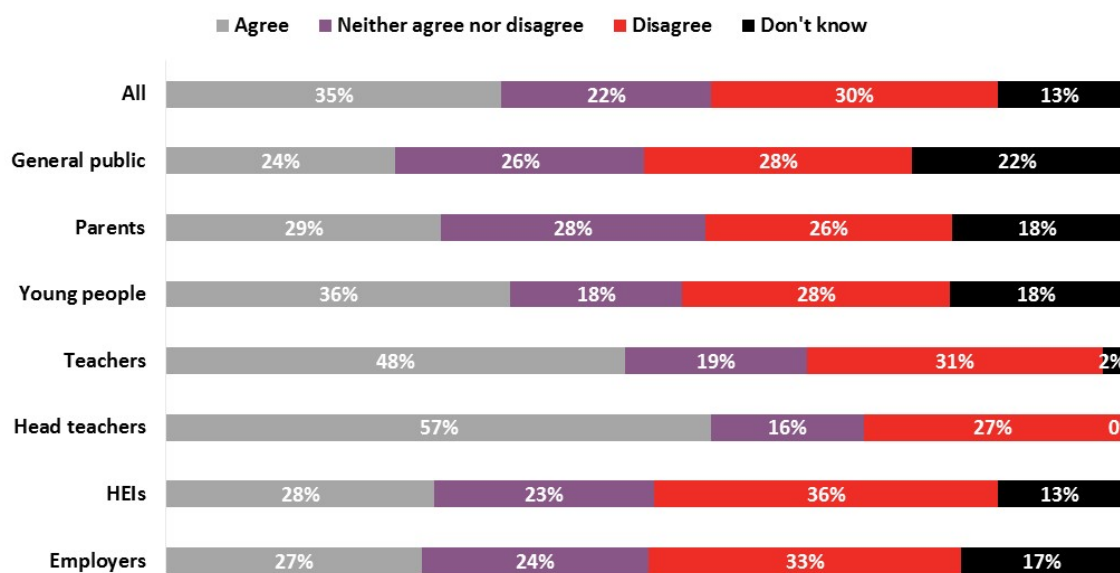
11.1.2 Head teachers, teachers and young people were more likely to agree than disagree that ‘the removal of tiering (where possible) is a bad thing’. However, amongst the general public, parents, HEIs and employers there is a sizeable proportion who neither agreed nor disagreed or did not know.

11.1.3 On par with the wave 13 findings, six out of ten (57%) head teachers agreed that ‘the removal of tiering (where possible) is a bad thing’. This was significantly higher than the level of agreement from any other group.

11.1.4 HEIs were more likely to disagree than agree that ‘the removal of tiering (where possible) is a bad thing’. Two fifths of HEIs (28%) agreed that the removal of tiering is a bad thing compared with 36% who disagreed.

11.1.5 Views from parents, employers and the general public were much more mixed with no consensus offered as to whether ‘the removal of tiering (where possible) was a bad thing’.

Figure 12: ‘The removal of tiering (where possible) is a bad thing’



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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.

12 Teacher assessment

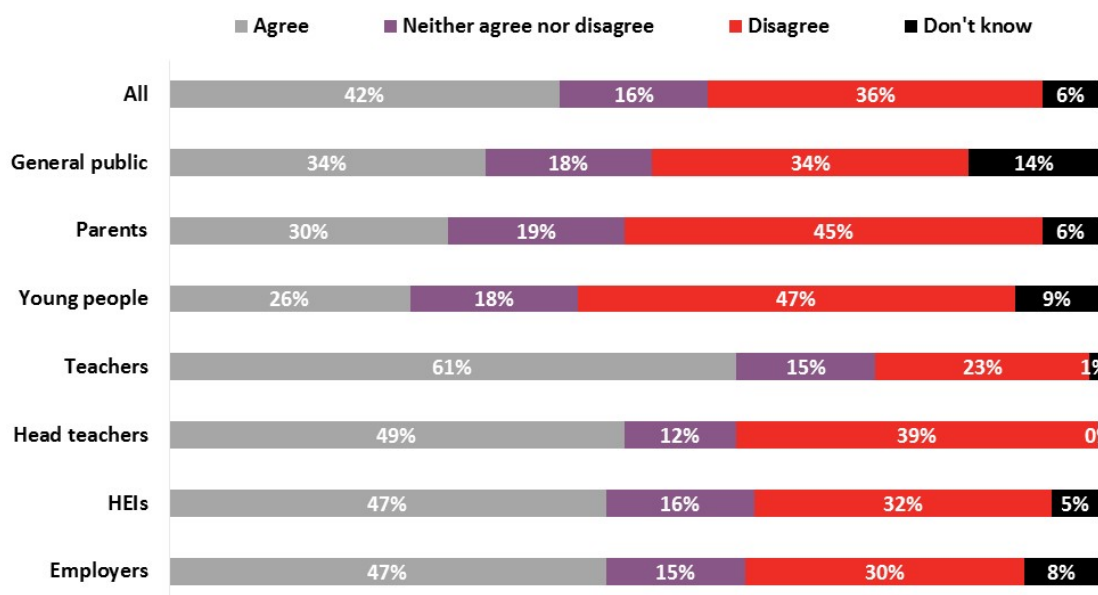
12.1.1 Overall similar proportions of stakeholders agreed and disagreed that ‘the reduction in teacher assessments in GCSE is a good thing’ (figure 13). Around four out of ten (42%) were in agreement and in disagreement (36%); these perceptions were unchanged from the views offered in wave 13.

12.1.2 Teachers were strongest in their agreement that ‘the reduction in teacher assessment in GCSE is a good thing’. In contrast, young people and parents were more likely than other groups to disagree that ‘the reduction in teacher assessment in GCSE is a good thing’.

12.1.3 Six out of ten teachers (61%) agreed that ‘the reduction in teacher assessment in GCSE is a good thing’, compared to 23% who disagreed. A fifth of teachers (22%) strongly agreed that ‘the reduction in teacher assessment in GCSE is a good thing’, significantly higher than the proportion that strongly agreed from any other sample group.

12.1.4 Half of employers (47%) and HEIs (49%) agreed that ‘the reduction in teacher assessment in GCSE was a good thing’, with both being significantly more likely to agree than disagree.

Figure 13: ‘The reduction in teacher assessment in GCSE is a good thing’



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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.

Spotlight on teachers

- Teachers who had experience of teaching GCSEs were twice as likely to agree that ‘GCSEs needed reform’ compared to the teachers who did not teach GCSEs (37% compared to 16%)
- Three out of five teachers from independent/private schools (61%) disagreed that the move to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing at GCSE, significantly higher than the level of disagreement from teachers in Local Authority (LA) maintained schools (44%) and academies (46%)

Spotlight on young people

- Two thirds of young people aged 14 to 15 (64%) and three quarters of those aged 16 to 17 (75%) were aware of the new 9-1 grading scale to be used in new GCSEs, significantly higher than the proportion of those aged 18 to 19 (48%) who reported this

Section 3: Perceptions of A levels

The third section of this report focuses on perceptions of A level qualifications.

13 Overall perceptions of A levels

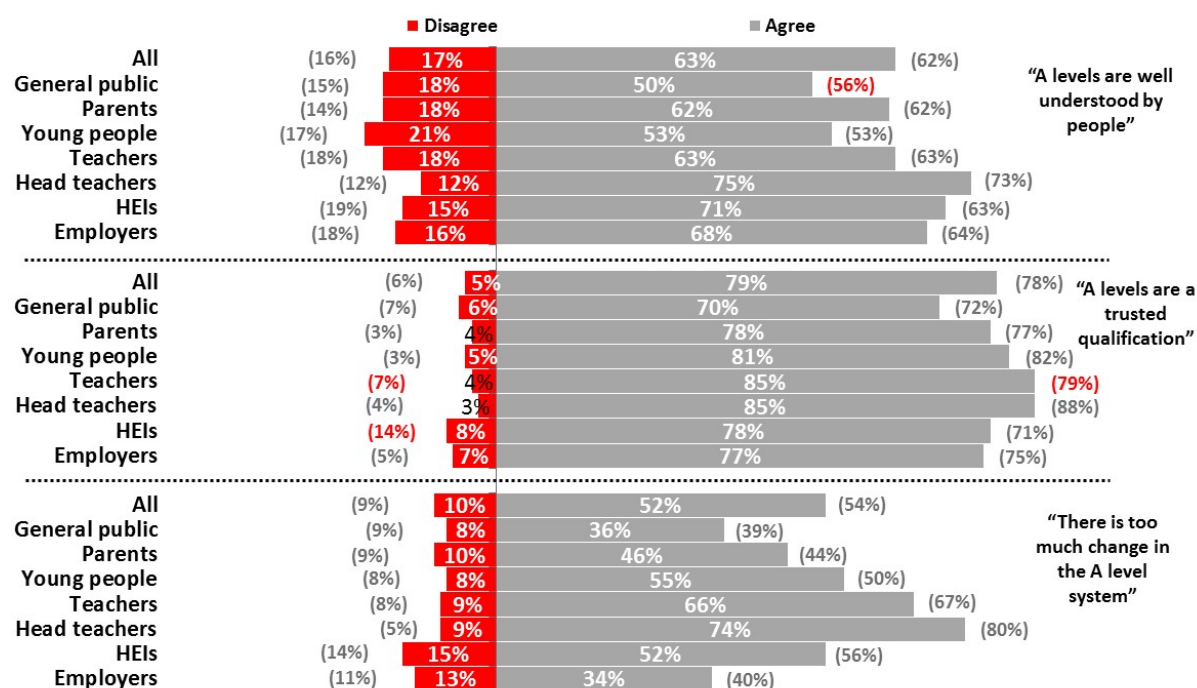
13.1.1 Levels of agreement that ‘A levels are well understood by people’ were consistent with wave 13, with nearly two thirds (63%) of stakeholders agreeing with this statement (figure 14).

13.1.2 There was consistent agreement that ‘A levels are well understood by people’, with a majority of all groups agreeing with this statement. Head teachers were significantly more likely than other groups, with the exception of HEIs and employers, to agree that ‘A levels are well understood by people’; 75% stated this compared with 71% of HEIs, 68% of employers, 63% of teachers, 62% of parents, 53% of young people and 50% of the general public.

13.1.3 Parents were far more likely than young people to agree that ‘A levels are well understood by people’ (62% compared with 53%) as were employers (68%) compared with the general public (50%).

13.1.4 Compared to wave 13, there was a decrease in the proportion of the general public who believed that A levels are well understood, declining from 56% to 50%.

Figure 14: Overall perceptions of A levels



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

13.1.5 Consistent with wave 13, levels of trust in A level qualifications were high, with a strong majority of all groups in agreement that 'A levels are a trusted qualification'. With the exception of young people, head teachers and teachers were significantly more likely than all other groups to believe that 'A levels are a trusted qualification'; 85% in both groups stated this compared with 78% of parents and HEIs, 77% of employers and 70% of the general public. Just over eight out of ten (81%) young people agreed that 'A levels are a trusted qualification'.

13.1.6 Findings indicate that there has been a shift in the perceptions of HEIs regarding the trustworthiness of A levels compared to wave 13. They had previously been significantly more likely than all other groups to disagree that A levels are a trusted qualification, and this was no longer the case in wave 14. While 14% disagreed that 'A levels are a trusted qualification' in wave 13, only 8% stated this in wave 14.

13.1.7 An increase in trust in A levels has also been demonstrated among teachers, with 85% stating that they feel they are a trusted qualification, compared with 79% in wave 13. The findings reported here indicate that the A level qualification is ‘trusted’ and ‘well understood’ by people are in line with previous waves of this research that established that the same strengths of the A level qualification.

13.1.8 Half of stakeholders (52%) agreed that ‘there is too much change in the A level system’. Consistent with wave 13, both head teachers and teachers were most likely to agree that there is too much change within the system, with head teachers significantly more likely than teachers to agree (74% compared with 66%). The other groups were considerably less likely to agree; 55% of young people, 52% of HEIs, 46% of parents, 36% of the general public and 34% of employers.

Spotlight on teachers

- Teachers who teach A levels were more likely than those who do not teach A levels to agree that A levels are well understood by people; 71% compared with 52%
- Levels of trust in A levels were consistently high across those who teach different types of qualifications, although teachers who teach A levels were more likely than those who do not to agree that A levels are a trusted qualification; 89% compared with 79%
- Teachers who teach A levels were far more likely than those who do not to agree that there is too much change in the A level system. Just under eight in ten (73%) of those teaching A levels stated this compared with 54% of those who do not teach A levels.

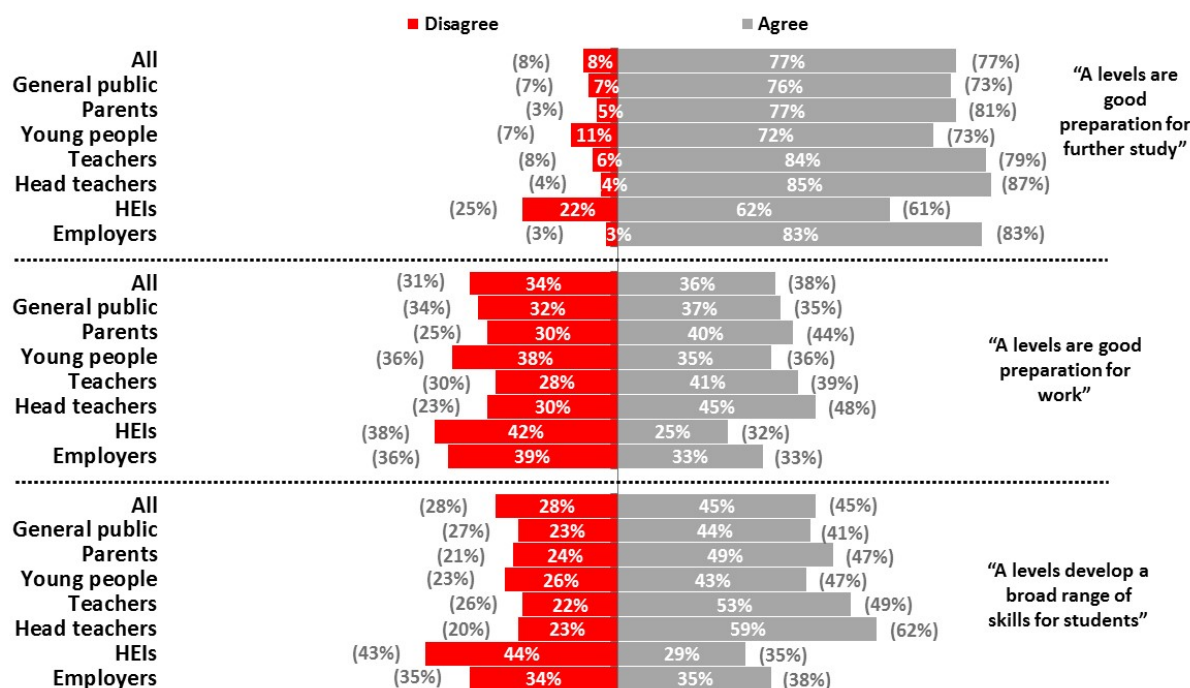
14 Skills and preparation

14.1.1 Respondents were asked to provide their perceptions of whether A levels develop a good range of skills for students and whether A levels are good preparation for further study or work.

14.1.2 A majority of stakeholders (77%) agreed that ‘A levels are good preparation for further study’ (figure 15). Head teachers (85%), teachers (84%) and employers (83%) were strongest in their agreement. These groups were significantly more likely than parents (77%), the general public (76%), young people (72%) and HEIs (62%) to agree that ‘A levels are good preparation for further study’.

14.1.3 Just as in wave 13, while still a relatively small proportion, HEIs were significantly more likely than all other groups to disagree that ‘A levels are good preparation for further study’. A fifth of HEIs disagreed (22%) compared with 11% of young people, 7% of the general public, 6% of teachers, 5% of parents, 4% of head teachers and 3% of employers.

Figure 15: Skills and preparation



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

14.1.4 Views were more mixed as to whether A levels are good preparation for work, much like in wave 13. There was no majority consensus about whether or not A levels are good preparation for work from any group.

14.1.5 Head teachers, teachers and parents were strongest in their agreement that A levels are good preparation for work. All of these groups were more likely to agree than disagree.

14.1.6 Head teachers continued to express higher levels of positivity towards the value of A levels. Head teachers were significantly more likely than all other groups, with the exception of teachers, to agree that A levels develop a broad range of skills for students; 59% stated this compared with 53% of teachers, 49% of parents, 44% of the general public, 43% of young people, 35% of employers and 29% of HEIs.

14.1.7 Unlike the other groups, HEIs were more likely to disagree (44%) than to agree (29%) that A levels develop a broad range of skills for students. In contrast, head teachers, teachers, parents, young people and the general public much more commonly agreed with the statement, as opposed to disagreeing.

14.1.8 The general public demonstrated less opposition than in the previous wave to the suggestion that A levels develop a broad range of skills for students, with 23% disagreeing compared with 27% in wave 13.

Spotlight on teachers

- Teachers who teach A levels were more likely than those who do not teach A levels to agree that they develop a broad range of skills for students; 60% compared with 42%.

Spotlight on young people

- Younger students aged 14 to 15 were most likely to agree that A levels are good preparation for work; 49% of those aged 14 to 15 compared with 29% of those aged 16 to 17 and 26% of those aged 18 to 19.

15 Time constraints

15.1.1 A third of stakeholders (33%) agreed that ‘the exam period for A levels is too congested’, this is in comparison to a quarter (25%) who disagreed (figure 16). These perceptions were unchanged from wave 13 of this research series.

15.1.2 Nearly half (44%) of young people felt ‘the exam period for A levels is too short/congested’. This perception was more prevalent amongst young people than among any other group, with the exception of teachers (41%).

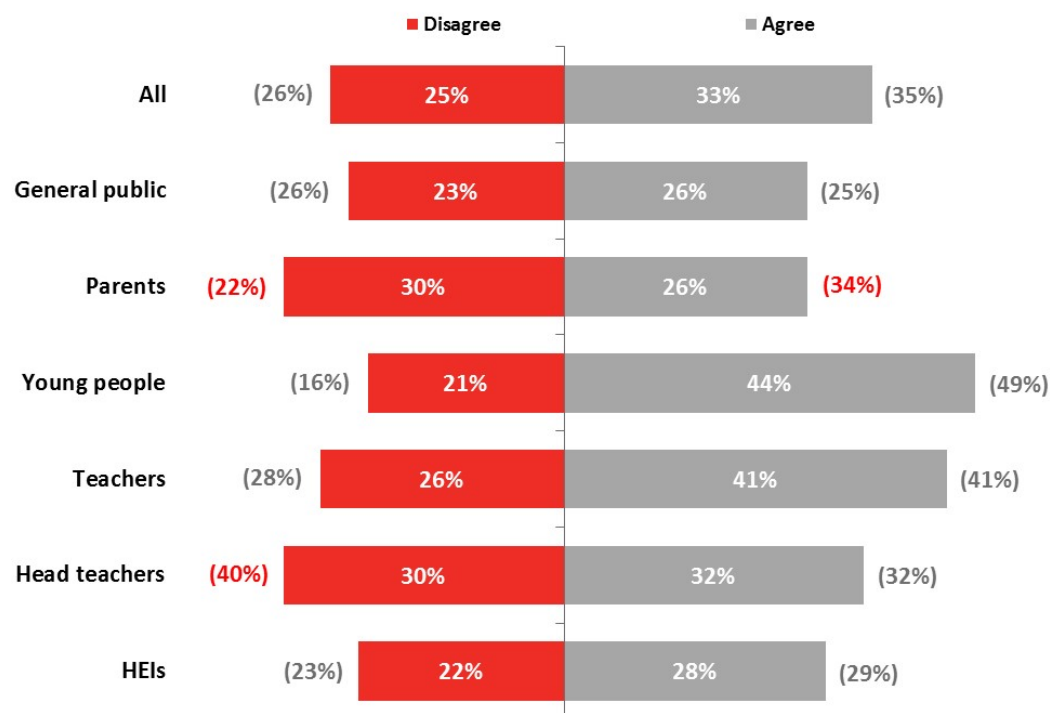
15.1.3 Head teachers (32%), HEIs (28%), the general public (26%) and parents (26%) were significantly less likely than young people to believe that ‘the exam period for A levels is too short/congested’.

15.1.4 Further, head teachers and parents were most likely to disagree that ‘the A level exam period is too short/congested’ (30%). Nevertheless, both groups were still relatively equally split between agreement and disagreement with the suggestion.

15.1.5 In comparison with wave 13, head teachers were significantly less likely to disagree that ‘the exam period for A levels is too short/congested’ (40% compared with 30% in wave 14).

15.1.6 The perceptions of parents, conversely, have moved in the opposite direction. While 34% agreed with the statement in wave 13, only 26% were in agreement a year later in wave 14.

Figure 16: “The exam period for A levels is too short/congested”



Effective base: All respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

16 Confidence in A levels

16.1.1 Nearly four in ten stakeholders (37%) agreed that ‘A level standards are maintained year on year’, with a quarter (26%) in disagreement (figure 17). These perceptions were unchanged from wave 13.

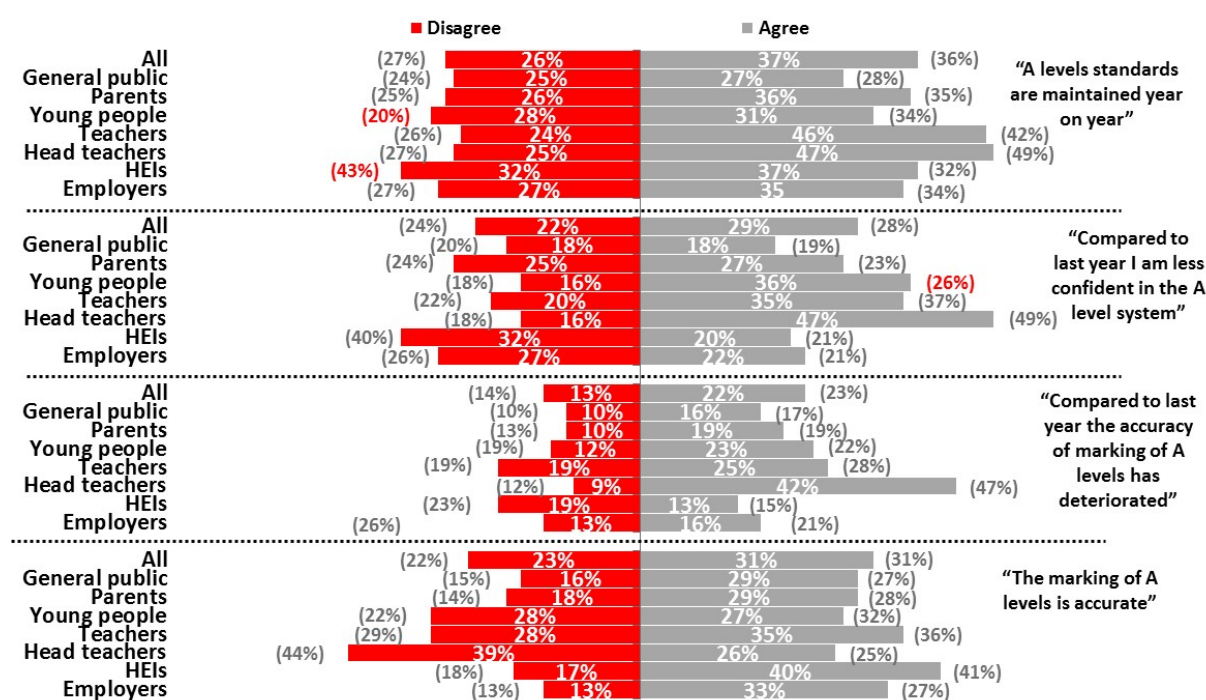
16.1.2 Stakeholders were more likely to agree (34%) than disagree (18%) that ‘compared to last year the accuracy of marking of A levels has deteriorated’. Although stakeholders were also more likely to agree (31%) than disagree (23%) that ‘the marking of A levels is accurate’. These perceptions were unchanged from wave 13 of this research.

16.1.3 Head teachers and teachers were significantly more likely than all other groups to agree that ‘A level standards are maintained year on year’; 47% and 46%, respectively, compared with 37% of HEIs, 36% of parents, 35% of employers, 31% of young people and 27% of the general public.

16.1.4 At the other end of the spectrum, HEIs most commonly disagreed that ‘A level standards are maintained year on year’; 32% compared with 28% of young people, 27% of employers, 26% of parents, 25% of head teachers and the general public, and 24% of teachers. However, this contrast was much less distinct than in wave 13, when 43% of HEIs disagreed with the statement.

16.1.5 Compared to wave 13, young people were more likely to disagree that A level standards are maintained year on year (20% compared with 28% in wave 14).

Figure 17: Confidence in the A level system



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

- 16.1.6 In contrast to their view that A level standards are maintained (and consistent with wave 13), head teachers were significantly more likely than all other groups to agree that ‘compared to last year the accuracy of marking of A levels has deteriorated’; 42% compared with 25% of teachers, 23% of young people, 19% of parents, 16% of the general public and employers, and 13% of HEIs.
- 16.1.7 As demonstrated in wave 13, HEIs and teachers were most likely to disagree that ‘compared with last year the accuracy of marking of A levels has deteriorated’; 19% for both groups compared with 13% of employers, 12% of young people, 10% of parents and the general public, and 9% of head teachers.
- 16.1.8 Head teachers were also significantly more likely than all other groups to disagree that ‘the marking of A levels is accurate’; 39% compared with 28% of teachers and young people, 18% of parents, 17% of HEIs, 16% of the general public and 13% of employers. This trend was consistent with wave 13.
- 16.1.9 HEIs and teachers continued to demonstrate more positivity towards the marking of A levels by being more likely than most other groups to agree that it is accurate; 40% and 35%, respectively, compared with 33% of employers, 29% of parents and the general public, 27% of young people and 26% of head teachers.
- 16.1.10 In line with perceptions of A level standards and the quality and accuracy of marking, head teachers were significantly more likely than all other groups to agree that ‘compared with last year they are less confident in the A level system’, with nearly half (47%) stating this. This was also the case in wave 13.
- 16.1.11 Teachers and young people also supported head teachers’ perceptions, with more than one third (35% and 36% respectively) in agreement that ‘compared with last year they are less confident in the A level system’.
- 16.1.12 Young people were significantly more likely than in wave 13 to say they are less confident in the A level system compared to last year (36% compared with 26% in wave 13). This could potentially be linked to the increase observed in their disagreement with the suggestion that ‘A level standards are maintained year on year’.
- 16.1.13 At the other end of the spectrum, HEIs were most likely to disagree that ‘compared with last year they are less confident in the A level system’ (32%), followed closely by employers (27%) and parents (25%).

16.1.14 The general public were equally split between agreeing and disagreeing that they are less confident in the A level system compared to last year (18% on both sides). They more commonly indicated that they did not have an opinion either way (44%) or that they were unsure (20%).

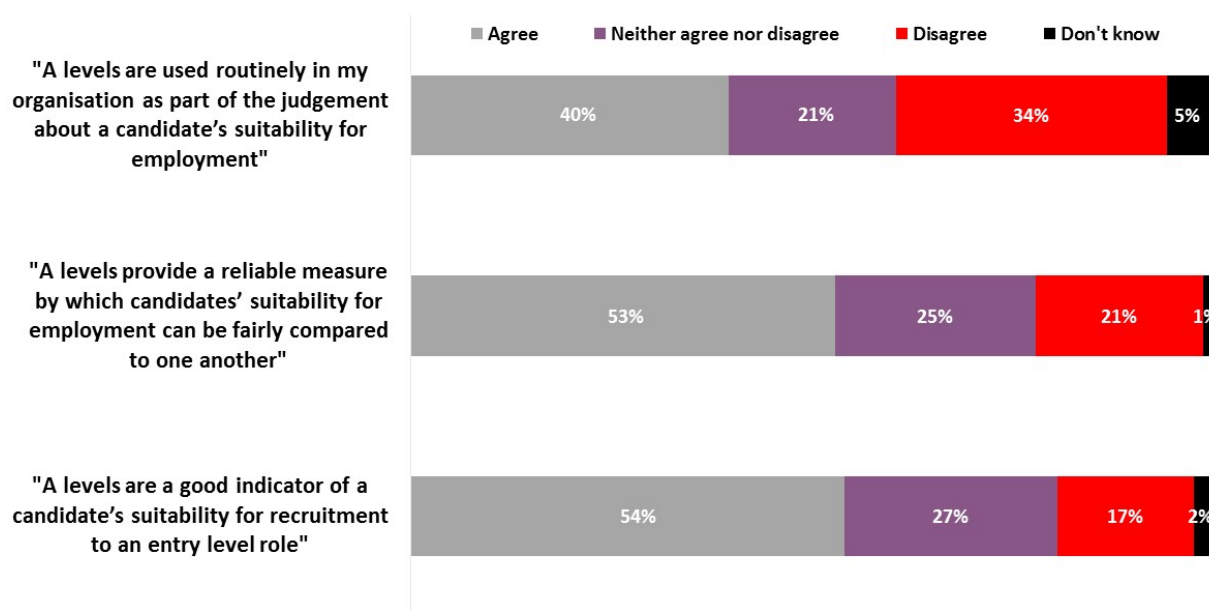
Spotlight on teachers

- Those teaching A levels were significantly more likely than those who were not teaching A levels to agree that:
 - A level standards are maintained year on year; 55% compared with 34%
 - The marking of A levels is accurate; 38% compared with 30%
 - Compared with last year I am less confident in the A level system; 40% compared with 28%
 - Compared with last year the accuracy of marking of A levels has deteriorated; 32% compared with 14%

17 A levels and employment – employer perceptions

- On par with wave 13, four in ten (40%) employers stated that A levels are used routinely in their organisations as part of the judgement about a candidate's suitability for employment, compared with a third (34%) who disagreed (figure 18)
- Roughly one in two (53%) employers agreed that A levels provide a reliable measure by which candidates' suitability for employment can be fairly compared to one another, significantly higher than the one in five (21%) who disagreed
- While the proportion who agreed that A levels provide a reliable measure by which candidates' suitability for employment can be fairly compared to one another has stayed consistent with wave 13, there was a significant decrease in the proportion who disagreed that A levels provide a reliable measure of candidates' suitability for employment (21% compared with 30% in wave 13)
- Similarly, approximately one in two (54%) employers agreed A levels are a good indicator of a candidate's suitability for recruitment to an entry level role, significantly higher than the one in five (17%) who disagreed

Figure 18: Candidate suitability



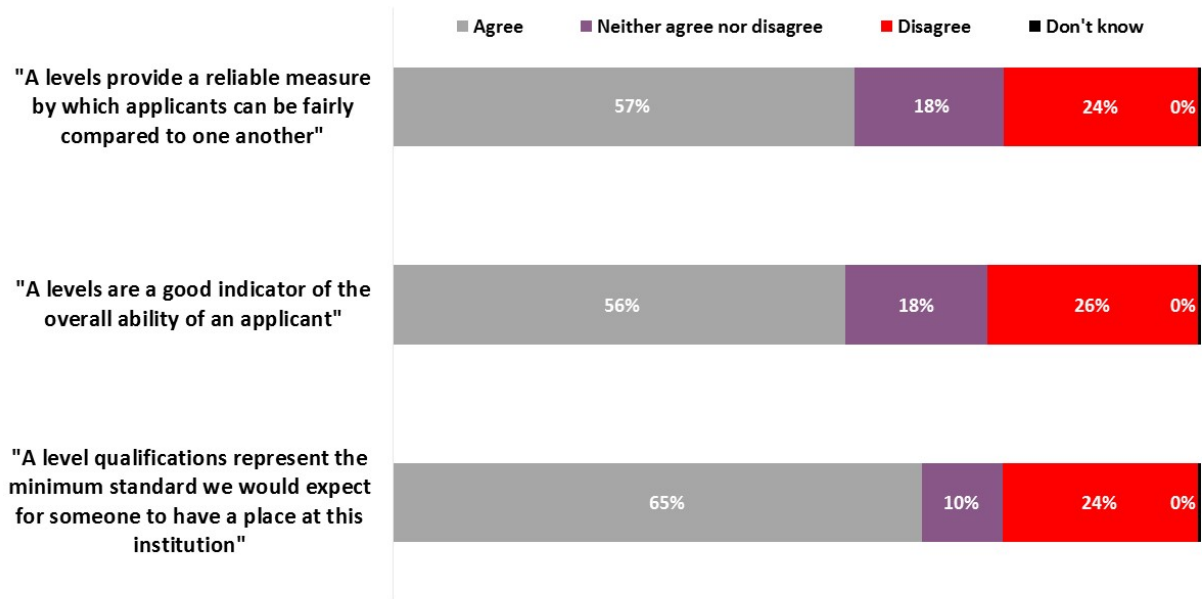
Effective base: All employers (265)

Note: All 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.

18 A levels and university applications – HEI perceptions

- More than half (57%) of HEIs agreed that A levels provide a reliable measure by which applicants can be fairly compared to one another, while one quarter (24%) disagreed (figure 19)
- Consistent with wave 13, a majority (56%) of HEIs agreed that A levels are a good indicator of the overall ability of an applicant, significantly higher than the one in four (26%) who disagreed
- Two thirds (65%) of HEIs agreed that A level qualifications represent the minimum standard they would expect for someone in order to have a place at their institution, compared with one in four (24%) who disagreed; since wave 13, HEIs were significantly more likely to disagree with this suggestion (24% compared with 17% in wave 13)

Figure 19: A levels and HE applications



Effective base: All HEIs (228)

Note: All 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.

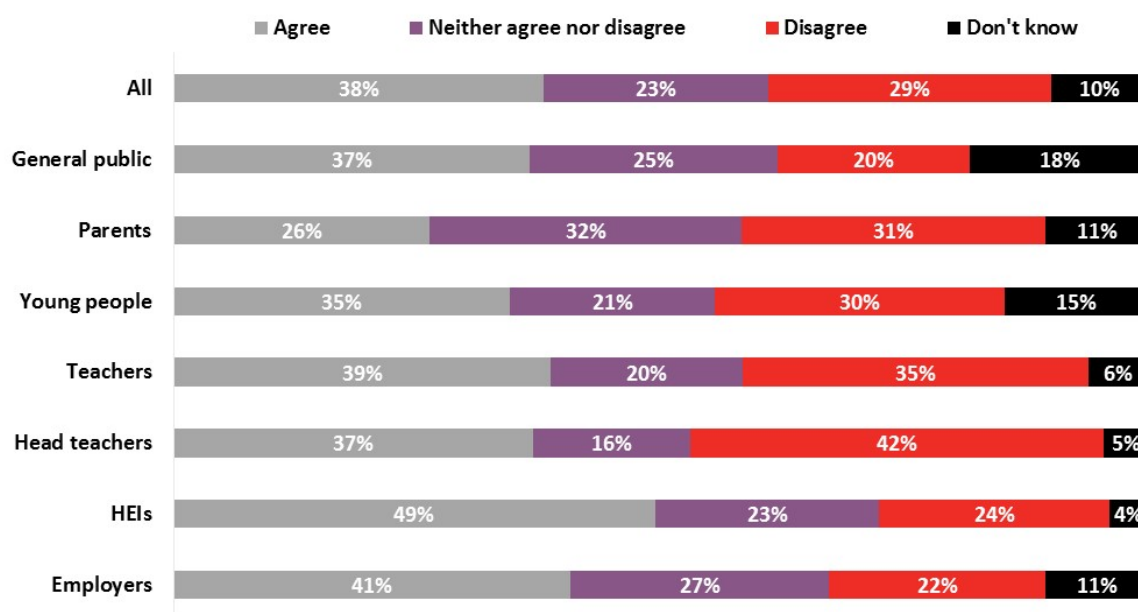
Section 4: Perceptions of A level reform

The fourth section of this report looks at perceptions around A level reform.

19 The need for A level reform

- 19.1.1 Compared to wave 13 the proportion of stakeholders who disagreed that ‘A levels needed reform’ fell from 32% in wave 13 to 29% in this wave of the research (figure 20).
- 19.1.2 HEIs were significantly more likely than all other groups, with the exception of employers, to feel that ‘A levels needed reform’, with half (49%) in agreement in comparison with 41% of employers, 39% of teachers, 37% of head teachers and the general public, 35% of young people and 26% of parents. This was more or less on par with wave 13.
- 19.1.3 At the other end of the spectrum, school staff were starkest in their disagreement with the suggestion that ‘A levels needed reform’; two in five head teachers (42%) and one third of teachers (35%) disagreed that ‘A levels needed reform’.
- 19.1.4 Findings demonstrate that compared to wave 13, employers were more likely in wave 14 to agree that ‘A levels needed reform’, with the proportion who agreed increasing from 32% to 41%.
- 19.1.5 As found in wave 13, parents, employers and the general public were generally less likely to express a view on whether A levels needed reform. Parents, employers and the general public were more likely than teachers and head teachers to neither agree nor disagree that ‘A levels needed reform’ (32% among parents, 27% among employers, and 25% among the public).

Figure 20: “A levels needed reform”



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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.

20 Linear end of course assessment

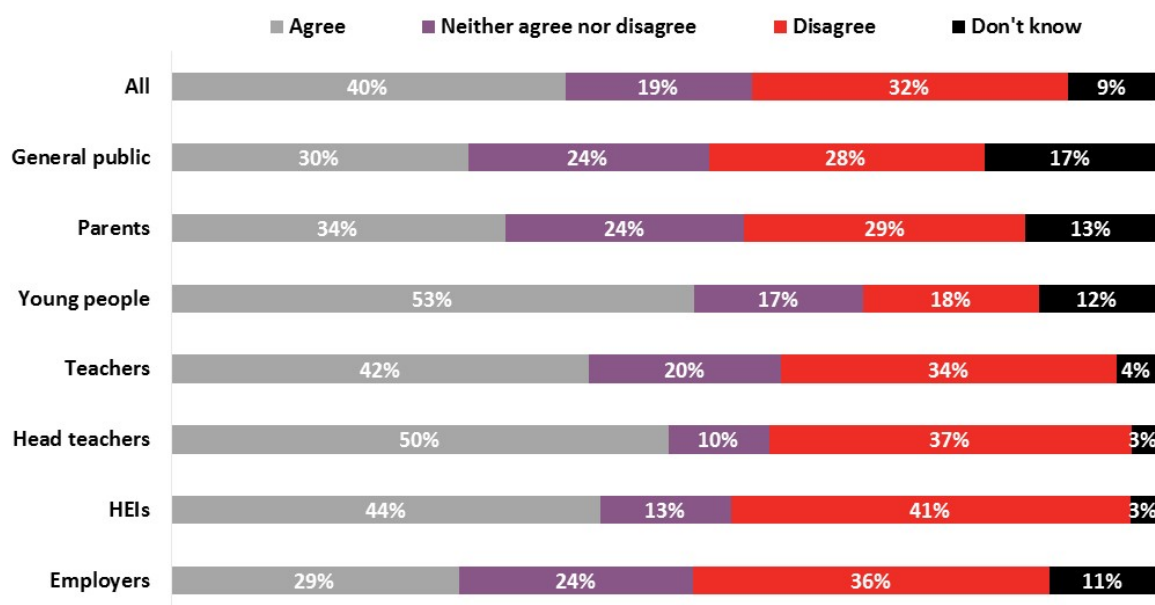
20.1.1 Four out of ten (40%) of stakeholders agreed that the ‘move to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing at the A level’, slightly higher than the proportion who disagreed (32%) as shown in figure 21. These perceptions were unchanged from wave 13.

20.1.2 As in wave 13, the groups closest to the school system, young people, teachers, head teachers and HEIs, – were most likely to feel the ‘move to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing at the A level’. This perception was especially prevalent amongst young people, with more than half agreeing (53%). Following closely behind, 50% of head teachers, 44% of HEIs and 42% of teachers were in agreement. Each of these groups more often agreed than disagreed that the ‘move to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing at the A level’.

20.1.3 However, there appeared to be a certain degree of uncertainty on this issue among HEIs, who were almost equally divided in their opinions on the suggestion that moving to linear end of course assessment at A level is a bad thing, with 44% agreeing and 41% disagreeing.

20.1.4 Consistent with their perceptions of the general need for A level reform, parents, employers and the general public were also more likely to express indecision about whether the move to linear, end course assessment is a bad thing, with one in four (24%) saying they neither agreed nor disagreed among each group.

Figure 21: “The move to linear, end of course assessment is a bad thing at A level”



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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.

21 Decoupling the AS from A level

21.1.1 Four out of ten stakeholders (37%) agreed that the ‘disadvantages of decoupling the AS from the A level outweigh the advantages’, higher than the proportion who disagreed (25%) as shown in figure 22. These perceptions were on par with those identified in wave 13.

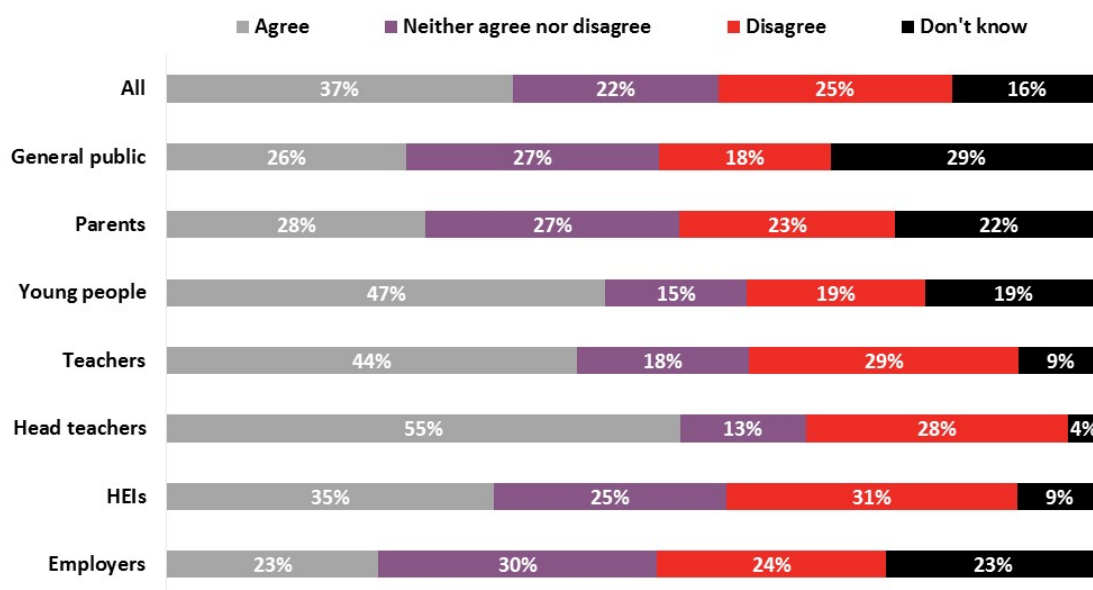
21.1.2 Head teachers were more likely than any other group to feel that the ‘disadvantages of decoupling the AS from A level outweigh the advantages’, with more than half (55%) stating their agreement. While this is consistent with wave 13 overall, there was a decrease in the proportion of head teachers who were in strong agreement with the statement (26% compared with 37% in wave 13).

21.1.3 Young people and teachers also expressed relatively high levels of agreement that the ‘disadvantages of decoupling the AS from A level outweigh the advantages’, with nearly half stating this (47% and 44% respectively). Both groups were significantly more likely to agree than to disagree.

21.1.4 Parents, employers and the general public, who could arguably be considered to be more distanced from the system, continued to be more likely than other groups to report a neutral stance on the issue of decoupling the AS from A level. These groups were significantly more likely than head teachers, teachers and young people to say that they neither agreed nor disagreed that the ‘disadvantages of decoupling the AS from A level outweigh the advantages’ (30% among employers and 27% among parents and the general public).

21.1.5 HEIs were also more often neutral than head teachers, teachers and young people about the consequences of decoupling the AS from A level, with one in four (25%) reporting they neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 22: “The disadvantages of decoupling the AS from the A level outweigh the advantages”



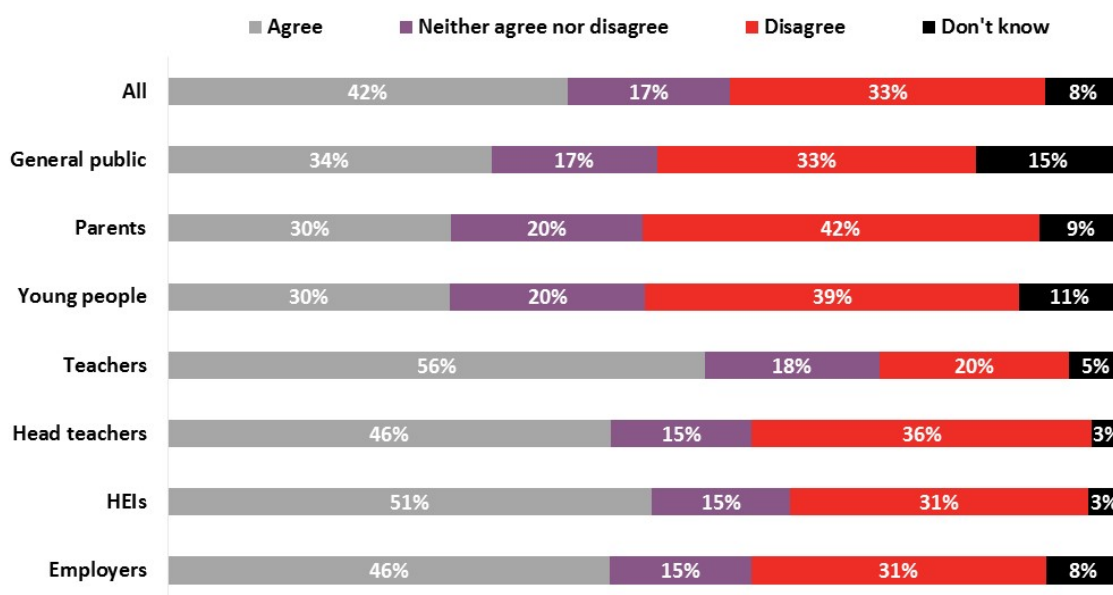
Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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.

22 The reduction in teacher assessment

- 22.1.1 Perceptions of whether the ‘reduction in teacher assessment in some A level subjects is a good thing’ remained unchanged from wave 13. In this wave 42% agreed and 33% disagreed that the reduction in teacher assessment in some A level subjects is a good thing (figure 23).
- 22.1.2 Consistent with wave 13, teachers, head teachers and HEIs demonstrated the highest levels of agreement with the suggestion that the ‘reduction in teacher assessment in some A level subjects is a good thing’. Teachers were the most likely to agree, with a majority (56%) stating their support. Roughly half of head teachers (46%) and HEIs (51%) also agreed that it is a good thing to reduce teacher assessment in some A level subjects.
- 22.1.3 Young people, parents and the general public were significantly less likely than the other groups to support the suggestion, with approximately one third agreeing that this reduction is a good thing (30% among young people and parents, and 34% among the general public).
- 22.1.4 Parents reported levels of disagreement very similar to those of young people, with 42% and 39%, respectively, saying they disagreed that it is a good thing to reduce teacher assessment in some A level subjects.
- 22.1.5 Nearly half of employers (46%) agreed that ‘the reduction in teacher assessment in some A level subjects is a good thing’. Since wave 13, this figure increased significantly from 36%.

Figure 23: “The reduction in teacher assessment in some A level subjects is a good thing”



Effective base: Wave 14 all respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

Note: All 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.

Spotlight on teachers

- Equal proportions of teachers who teach A level qualifications agreed and disagreed that A levels needed reform (41%); those who do not teach A levels were less likely to disagree that they needed reform (27%)
- A level teachers also more commonly felt that the reduction in teacher assessment is a good thing (60% compared with 50% among teachers who did not teach A level), that moving to linear end of course assessment is a bad thing (48% compared with 34% among teachers who did not teach A level), as well as that the disadvantages of decoupling the AS from the A level outweigh the advantages (53% compared with 30%)

Section 5: Perceptions of alternative qualifications

The fifth section of this report focuses on perceptions of alternative qualifications.

23 Awareness of alternative qualifications

23.1.1 Table 2 shows levels of awareness of different types of alternative qualifications amongst different groups. BTECs (Level 1/Level 2) and BTECs (Level 3) had the highest level of awareness across all groups surveyed.

Table 2: Awareness of alternative qualifications by sample group

	All	HEIs	Young People	Head teachers	Teachers	Parents	General public	Employers
BTECs (Level 1/2)	79%	73%	76%	90%	89%	81%	72%	74%
BTECs (Level 3)	78%	88%	71%	88%	84%	76%	67%	73%
Cambridge Nationals (Level 1/2)	20%	14%	13%	55%	37%	9%	7%	8%
Cambridge Technicals (Level 3)	15%	13%	9%	37%	25%	6%	5%	7%
International A levels	35%	53%	28%	51%	41%	25%	21%	26%
International GCSEs	48%	49%	42%	88%	75%	32%	22%	26%
The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme	60%	89%	36%	71%	64%	48%	45%	66%
The International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme	20%	27%	12%	41%	19%	13%	12%	18%
The Pre-U	19%	23%	17%	46%	27%	7%	5%	5%
Extended Project Qualification	35%	44%	39%	74%	53%	17%	10%	6%
None of these	9%	3%	13%	2%	3%	11%	18%	11%

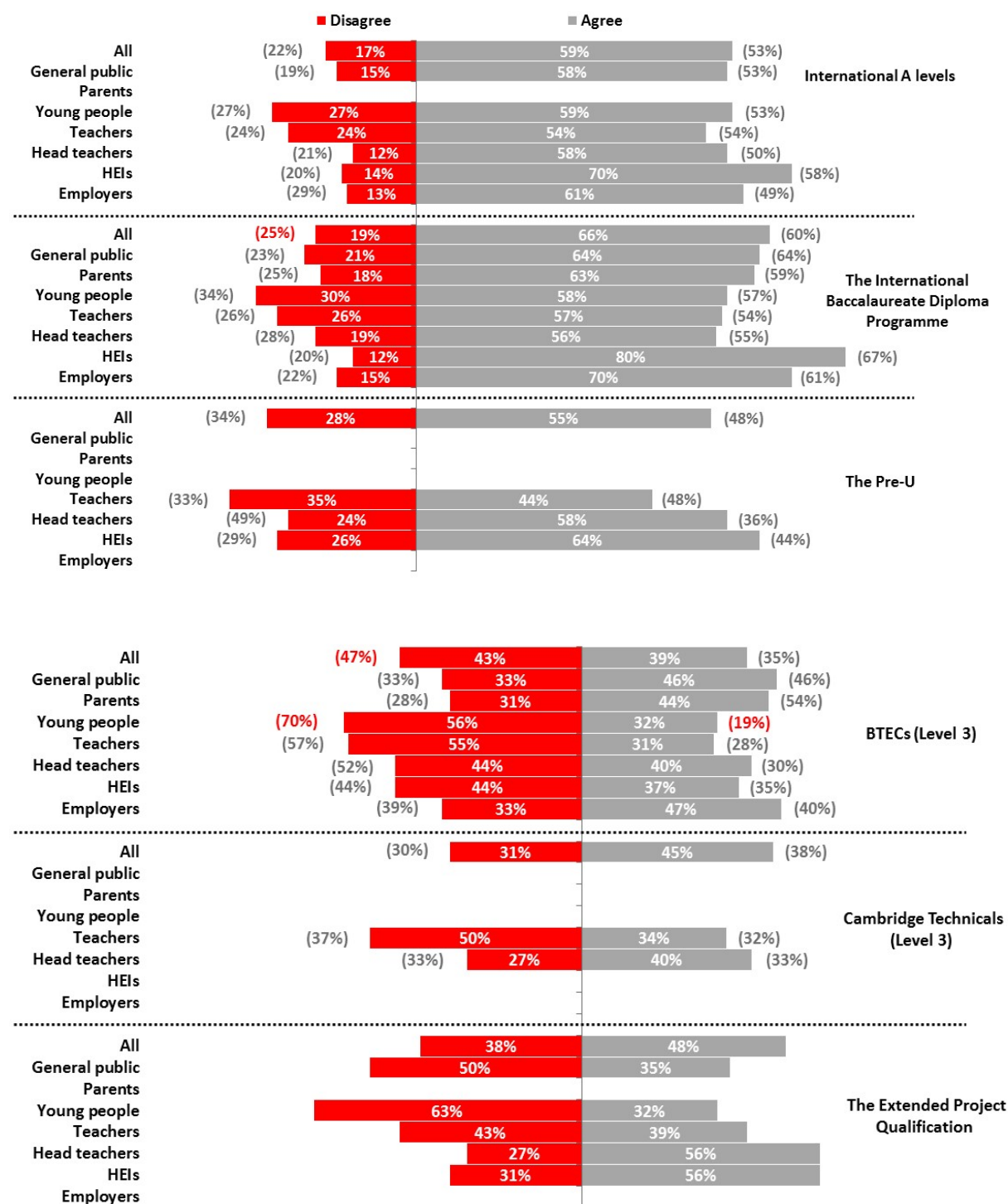
Effective base: All respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228; Employers 265)

23.1.2 The awareness of different types of qualifications was used as a base to ask a set of questions about their level of challenge, preparation for further study and value.

24 Equivalence of challenge of alternative qualifications compared with A levels

24.1.1 Figure 24 shows the level of agreement that different types of qualification are of equivalent challenge to A levels. Although these questions were only asked to those respondents who reported they were aware of these qualifications, a sizeable minority reported that they did not know if they agreed or disagreed with each statement. For this reason, the data in the charts and text has been rebased to exclude 'don't knows'.

Figure 24: Level of agreement and disagreement that alternative qualifications are of equivalent challenge to A levels



Effective base: Varies for each statement based upon level of awareness of each sample group. Only sample groups with an effective base over 50 are shown

Note: Data rebased to exclude don't know

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

The Extended Project Qualification was not asked about in wave 13.

24.1.2 International A levels and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme were most consistently considered of equivalent challenge to A levels.

24.1.3 A majority of all sample groups agreed that **International A levels** are of equivalent challenge to A levels. HEIs were the most likely to agree that International A levels are of equivalent challenge (70%) and were significantly more likely to report this than teachers and parents.

24.1.4 The **International Baccalaureate Diploma** was also considered to be of equivalent challenge to A levels by a majority of all groups. Eight out of ten (80%) HEIs stated they agreed, significantly higher than the level of agreement from young people, head teachers, teachers, parents and the public. The proportion of HEIs agreeing that the International Baccalaureate Diploma is of equal challenge to A levels has increased since wave 13 of this research, when 67% of HEIs agreed.

24.1.5 Awareness of the **Pre-U** was low amongst young people, parents, employers and the general public. Of those who offered an opinion, a majority of HEIs (64%) and head teachers (58%) were in agreement that the Pre-U is equivalent in challenge to A levels and significantly more likely to report this than teachers (44%).

24.1.6 The proportion of all stakeholders who disagreed that **BTECs (Level 3)** qualifications are equivalent in challenge to A levels fell from 47% in wave 13 to 43% in this wave.

24.1.7 There were a series of significant differences between sample groups' agreement and disagreement that these qualifications are equivalent in challenge to A levels. Young people and teachers were significantly more likely than any other group to disagree that BTECs (Level 3) are equivalent in challenge to A levels. However, the proportion of young people who disagreed that BTECs (Level 3) are equivalent challenge to A Levels fell since wave 13 when 70% disagreed.

24.1.8 Parents, employers and the general public reported lower levels of disagreement and higher levels of agreement that BTECs (Level 3) are equivalent in challenge to A levels.

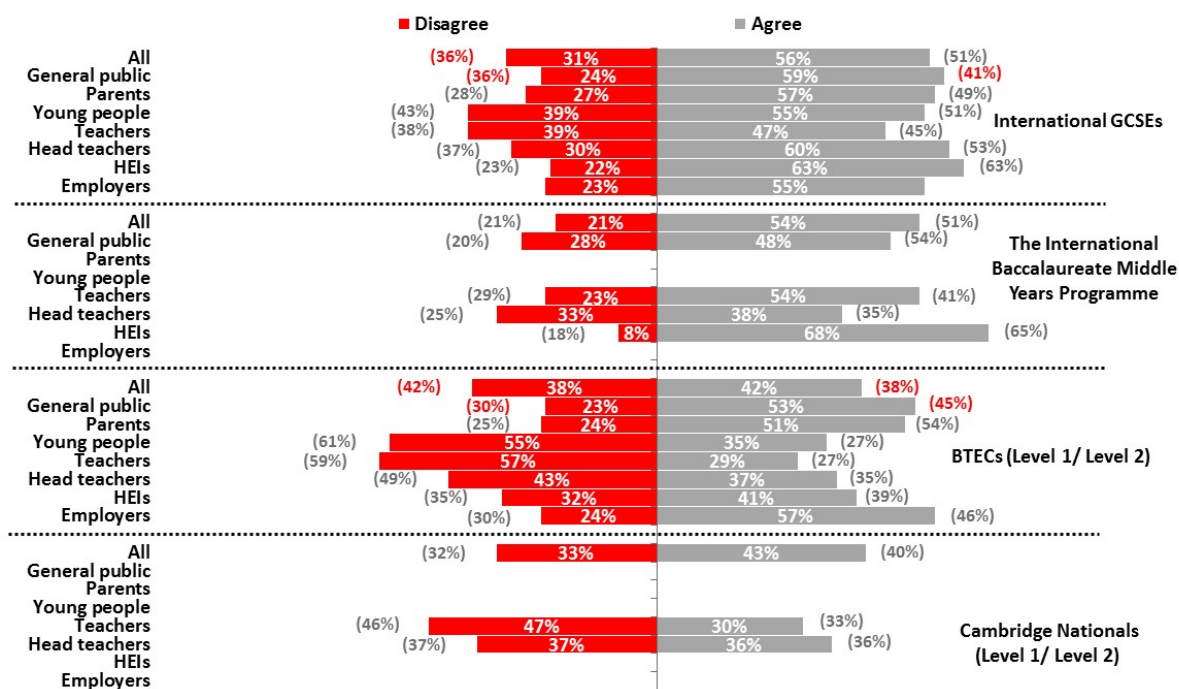
24.1.9 Of those teachers and young people who disagreed that BTECs (Level 3) are equivalent in challenge to A levels, the vast majority of each group felt that BTECs (Level 3) were lower in challenge to A Levels (93% of teachers and 94% of young people).

- 24.1.10 Awareness of **Cambridge Technicals (Level 3)** was very low, with only one in ten or less young people (9%), employers (7%), parents (6%) and the general public (5%) aware of them. The sample size for these groups and for HEIs was too low to analyse their perception of the challenge of Cambridge Technicals (Level 3) qualifications.
- 24.1.11 Head teachers and teachers, who had higher awareness of Cambridge Technicals (Level 3) were mixed in their opinion of whether they agreed or disagreed that Cambridge Technicals (Level 3) were of equivalent challenge to A levels. Four out of ten head teachers (40%) agreed and a smaller proportion (although not a statistically significant difference) disagreed (27%). A higher proportion of teachers disagreed (50%) that Cambridge Technicals (Level 3) were of equivalent challenge to A levels while 34% agreed.
- 24.1.12 With regards to the **Extended Project Qualification**, young people (63%) were significantly more likely than head teachers (27%), HEIs (31%) and teachers (43%) to disagree that the Extended Project Qualification was of equivalent challenge to A Levels.
- 24.1.13 Nine out of ten (94%) young people who disagreed that the Extended Project Qualification was of equivalent challenge to A Levels felt that the Extended Project Qualification was lower in challenge.

25 Equivalence of challenge of alternative qualifications compared with GCSEs

- 25.1.1 Figure 25 shows the level of agreement that different types of qualification are of equivalent challenge to GCSEs. Although these questions were only asked to those respondents who reported they were aware of these qualifications a sizeable minority reported that they did not know if they agreed or disagreed with each statement. For this reason, the data in the charts and text has been rebased to exclude 'don't knows'.

Figure 25: Level of agreement that alternative qualifications are of equivalent challenge to GCSEs



Effective base: Varies for each statement based upon level of awareness of each sample group. Only sample groups with an effective base over 50 are shown

Note: Data rebased to exclude don't know

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

25.1.2 There was broadly consistent agreement that **Level 1/2 certificates (commonly known as International GCSEs)** are equivalent in challenge to GCSEs, with 56% of all stakeholders in agreement. Teachers and young people were the groups that offered the highest levels of disagreement that Level 1/2 certificates (commonly known as International GCSEs) are equivalent in challenge to GCSEs (39%), with both groups being significantly more likely than HEIs, parents, the public and employers to disagree.

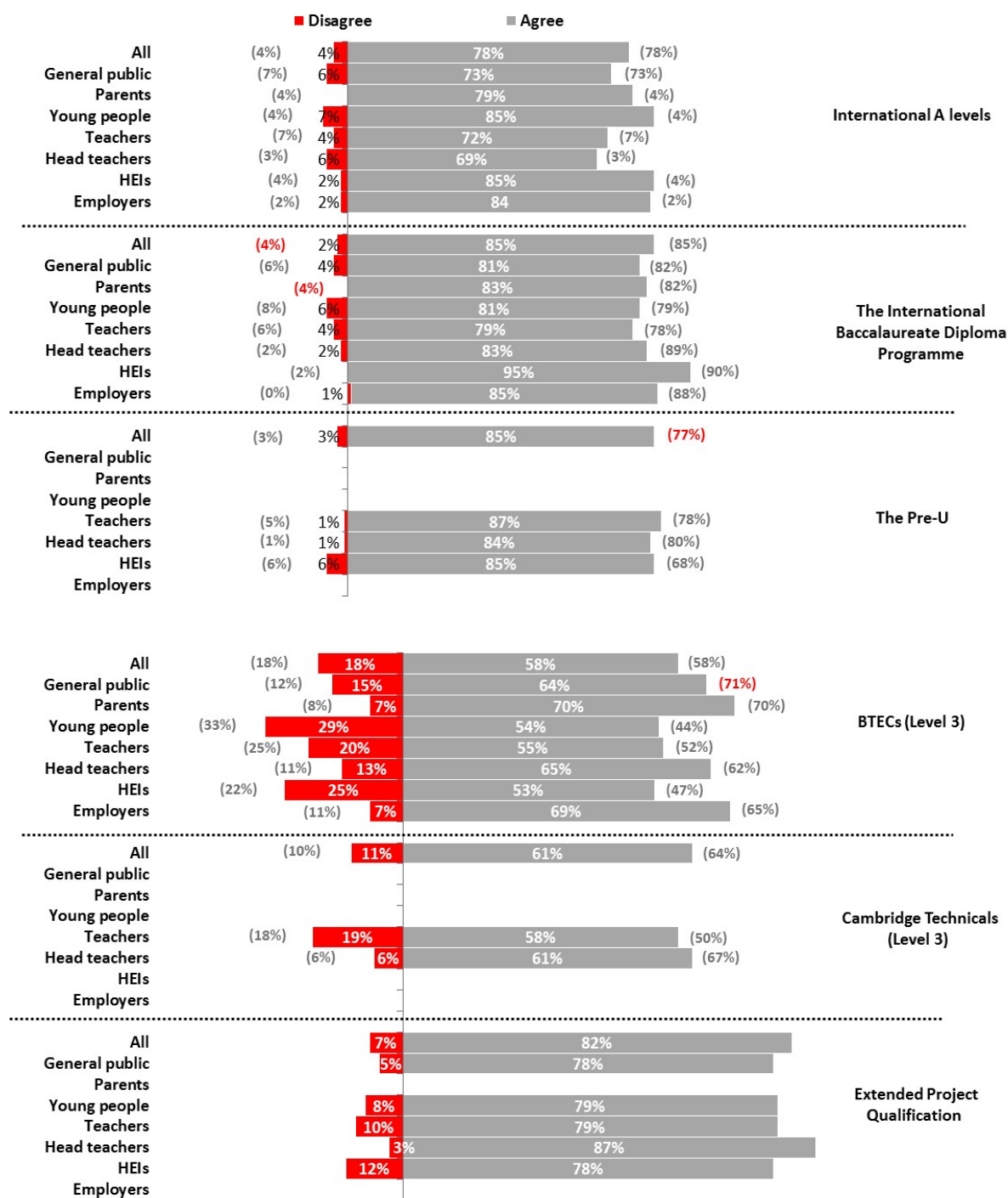
25.1.3 Awareness of the **International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme** and the ability to offer an opinion was low for parents, young people and employers. HEIs (68% agreed) were strongest in their agreement that the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme is equivalent in challenge to GCSEs. Head teachers were much more mixed in their views and were significantly more likely than HEIs to disagree that the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme is equivalent in challenge to GCSEs.

- 25.1.4 Awareness of **BTEC (Level 1/ Level 2) qualifications** was high for all groups. From all stakeholders there has been an increase in the proportion who agree that BTEC (Level 1/ Level 2) qualifications are of equivalent challenge to GCSEs (42% in wave 14 compared with 38% in wave 13).
- 25.1.5 Young people, teachers and head teachers were significantly more likely than HEIs, employers, parents and the general public to disagree that BTEC (Level 1/ Level 2) qualifications are of equivalent challenge to GCSEs.
- 25.1.6 Six out of ten young people (55%) and teachers (57%) disagreed that BTEC (Level 1/ Level 2) qualifications are of equivalent challenge to GCSEs, as did four out of ten head teachers (43%). Whereas half of parents (51%), the general public (53%) and six out of ten employers (57%) agreed that BTEC (Level 1/ Level 2) qualifications are of equivalent challenge to GCSEs.
- 25.1.7 Of those young people, head teachers and teachers who disagreed that BTEC (Level 1/ Level 2) qualifications are of equivalent challenge to GCSEs, the vast majority felt they were lower in challenge (96% of head teachers and teachers and 94% of young people).
- 25.1.8 Awareness of **Cambridge National (Level 1/ Level 2) qualifications** and the ability to offer an opinion was again low for HEIs, young people, parents, the general public and employers. Head teachers were equally split in their view of Cambridge Nationals (Level 1/ Level 2) qualifications, with 36% in agreement that Cambridge National (Level 1/ Level 2) are of equivalent challenge to GCSEs and 37% in disagreement.
- 25.1.9 In contrast teachers were more likely to disagree than agree that Cambridge National (Level 1/ Level 2) are of equivalent challenge to GCSEs with five out of ten (47%) in disagreement and three out of ten (30%) in agreement.

26 Preparation for further study

- 26.1.1 Figures 26 and 27 show the level of agreement that different types of qualification are good preparation for further study. Although these questions were only asked to those respondents who reported they were aware of these qualifications a sizeable minority reported that they did not know if they agreed or disagreed with each statement. For this reason, the data in the charts and text has been rebased to exclude 'don't knows'.

Figure 26: Level of agreement that alternative qualifications are good preparation for further study (1)



Effective base: Varies for each statement based upon level of awareness of each sample group. Only sample groups with an effective base over 50 are shown

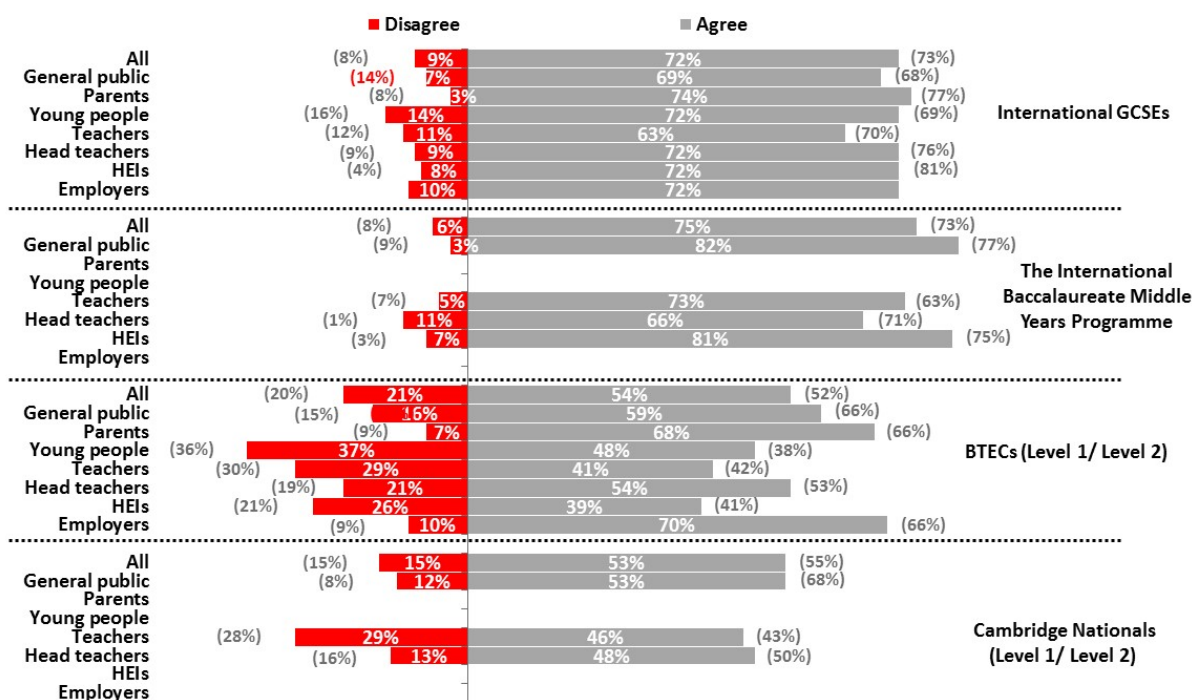
Note: Data rebased to exclude don't know

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

The Extended Project Qualification was not asked about in wave 13

- 26.1.2 There were strong levels of agreement from all groups that **International A levels** are good preparation for further study. HEIs (85%), young people (85%) and employers (84%) were strongest in their agreement.
- 26.1.3 Similarly, there was also strong agreement from all groups that **the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme** is good preparation for further study. HEIs (95%) were particularly strong in their agreement, significantly higher than the level of agreement offered from all other groups.
- 26.1.4 Levels of awareness and the ability to offer an opinion on the **Pre-U** were low for young people, parents, the general public and employers. A majority of head teachers (84%), teachers (87%) and HEIs (85%) were in agreement that the Pre-U was good preparation for further study.
- 26.1.5 There was a more mixed view as to whether **BTEC (Level 3) qualifications** are good preparation for further study. Parents (70%), employers (69%), head teachers (65%) and the general public (64%) offered the strongest agreement that BTEC (Level 3) qualifications are good preparation for further study. These levels of agreement were significantly higher than those levels offered by teachers (55%), young people (54%) and HEIs (53%).
- 26.1.6 The proportion of the general public who consider BTEC (Level 3) qualifications good preparation for further study fell from wave 13 when 71% of the public agreed that BTEC (Level 3) qualifications are good preparation for further study.
- 26.1.7 Levels of awareness and the ability to offer an opinion on the **Cambridge Technicals (Level 3)** were low for young people, parents, the general public, HEIs and employers. Six out of ten teachers (58%) and head teachers (61%) agreed that Cambridge Technicals (Level 3) are good preparation for further study.
- 26.1.8 There were strong levels of agreement from all groups that **the Extended Project Qualification** is good preparation for further study, with very consistent findings across all sample groups.

Figure 27: Level of agreement that alternative qualifications are good preparation for further study (2)



Effective base: Varies for each statement based upon level of awareness of each sample group. Only sample groups with an effective base over 50 are shown

Note: Data rebased to exclude don't know

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

26.1.9 A majority of all groups agreed that **Level 1/2 certificates (commonly known as International GCSEs)** are good preparation for further study. Similarly, there was also consistent agreement that the **International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme** is good preparation for further study. Eight out of ten members of the general public (82%) and of HEIs (81%) agreed that the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme is good preparation for further study.

26.1.10 In line with previous findings there was a difference in opinion between groups on whether **BTECs (Level 1/ Level 2)** are good preparation for further study. The strongest levels of agreement that BTECs (Level 1/ Level 2) are good preparation for further study came from parents (68%) and employers (70%), with these groups being more likely to have offered agreement than all other groups.

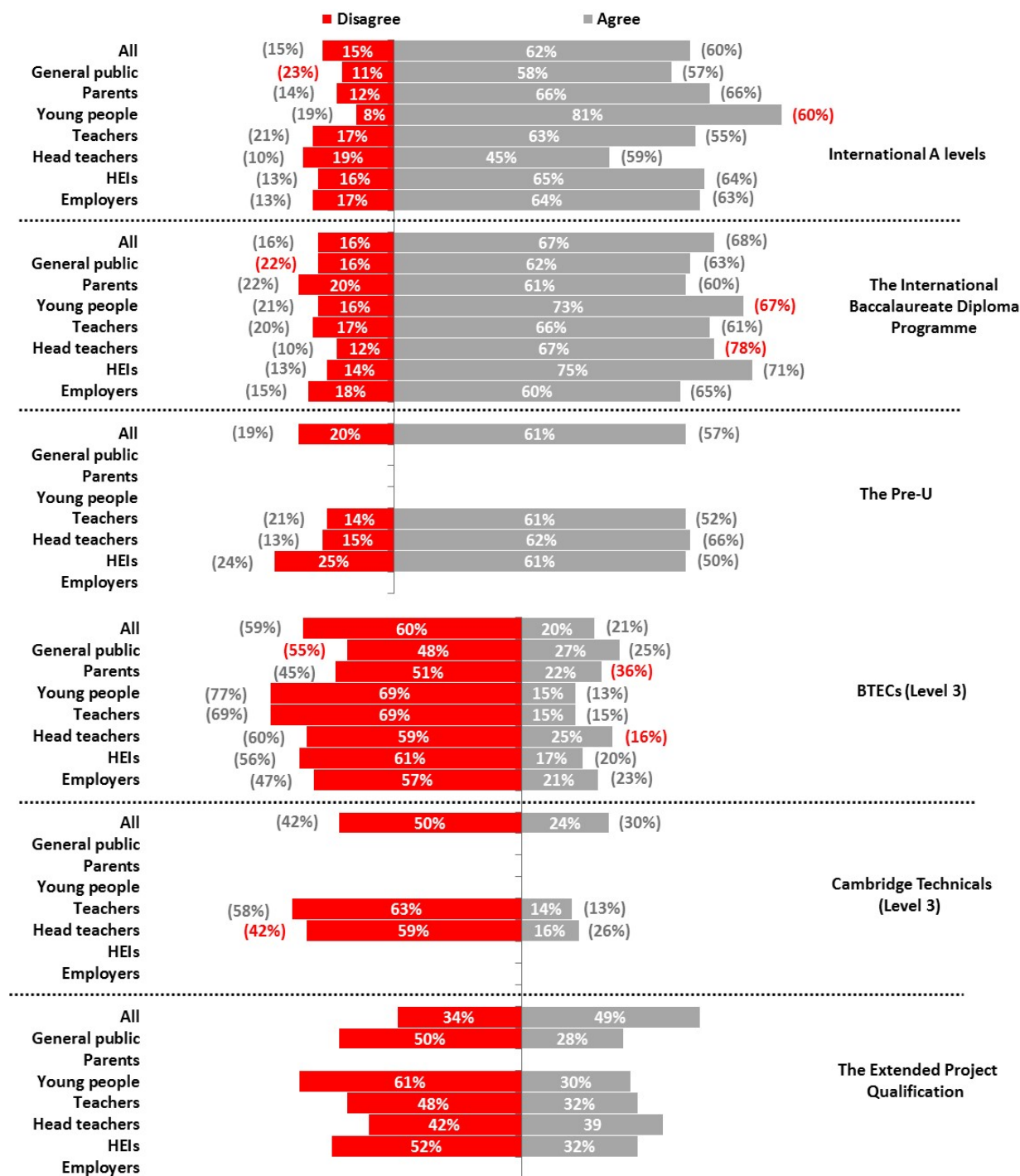
26.1.11 In contrast, young people and teachers were more likely to disagree that BTECs (Level 1/ Level 2) are good preparation for further study. Four out of ten young people (37%) and three out of ten teachers (29%) disagreed, significantly higher than the proportions of head teachers (21%), the general public (16%), employers (10%) and parents (7%) who disagreed that BTECs (Level 1/ Level 2) are good preparation for further study.

26.1.12 Levels of awareness and the ability to offer an opinion on the **Cambridge Nationals (Level 1/ Level 2)** were low for young people, parents, HEIs and employers. Similar proportions of the general public (53%), head teachers (48%) and teachers (46%) agreed that Cambridge Nationals (Level 1/ Level 2) are good preparation for further study.

27 Perceptions on whether alternative qualifications are valued as highly as A levels by Higher Education

27.1.1 Figure 28 shows the level of agreement that different types of qualification are valued as highly as A levels by HE. Although these questions were only asked to those respondents who reported they were aware of these qualifications a sizeable minority reported that they did not know if they agreed or disagreed with each statement. For this reason, the data in the charts and text has been rebased to exclude 'don't knows'.

Figure 28: Level of agreement that alternative qualifications are valued as highly as A levels by Higher Education



Effective base: Varies for each statement based upon level of awareness of each sample group. Only sample groups with an effective base over 50 are shown

Note: Data rebased to exclude don't know

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

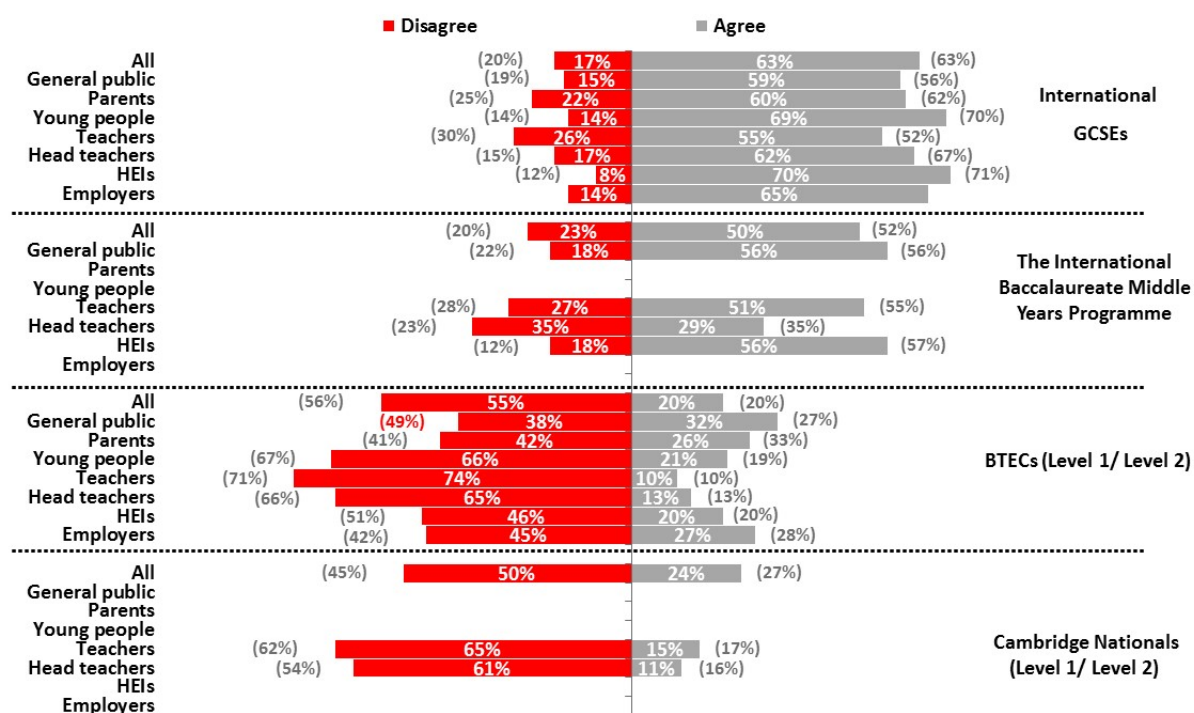
- 27.1.2 There was consistent agreement from the majority of all groups apart from head teachers that **International A levels** are valued as highly as A levels by HE. Young people were strongest in their agreement, with eight out of ten in agreement.
- 27.1.3 Young people were significantly more likely in this wave than in wave 13 to agree that International A Levels are valued as highly as A Levels by HE (60% agreed in wave 13 compared to 80% in this wave). Although some caution is advised due to small base sizes for this group.
- 27.1.4 Following a similar pattern there was also consistent agreement from a majority of all groups that the **International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme** is valued as highly as A levels by HE. Seven out of ten HEIs (75%) agreed that the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme is valued as highly as A levels by HE, one in ten (14%) disagreed.
- 27.1.5 The proportion of head teachers that agreed that the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme is valued as highly as A levels by HE fell to 67% from 78% in wave 13 of this research.
- 27.1.6 Levels of awareness and the ability to offer an opinion on the **Pre-U** were low for young people, parents, the general public and employers. There were no significant differences in the perceptions of HEIs, head teachers and teachers with six out of ten in agreement that the Pre-U is valued as highly as A levels by HE.
- 27.1.7 All groups were significantly more likely to disagree than agree that **BTEC (Level 3)** qualifications are valued as highly as A levels by HE. A majority of HEIs, young people, teachers, head teachers and employers disagreed that BTECs (Level 3) are valued as highly as A levels by HE.
- 27.1.8 Of those who disagreed that BTEC (Level 3) qualifications are valued as highly as A Levels by HE over 90% or higher of all groups felt that BTEC (Level 3) qualifications are valued lower by HE.
- 27.1.9 Levels of awareness and the ability to offer an opinion on the **Cambridge Technicals (Level 3)** were low for young people, parents, HEIs, the general public and employers. Where a reliable sample of head teachers and teachers were able to provide a view it was perceived that Cambridge Technicals (Level 3) are not valued as highly as A levels by HE.

27.1.10 With regards to the **Extended Project Qualification** HEIs, young people, teachers and then general public were more likely to disagree than agree that the Extended Project Qualification is valued as highly as A levels by HE. In contrast head teachers were split between agreeing (39%) and disagreeing (42%) that the Extended Project Qualification is valued as highly as A levels by HE.

28 Perceptions on whether alternative qualifications are valued as highly as GCSEs by Higher Education

28.1.1 Figure 29 shows the level of agreement that different types of qualification are valued as highly as GCSEs by HE. Although these questions were only asked to those respondents who reported they were aware of these qualifications a sizeable minority reported that they did not know if they agreed or disagreed with each statement. For this reason, the data in the charts and text has been rebased to exclude 'don't knows'.

Figure 29: Level of agreement that alternative qualifications are valued as highly as GCSEs by Higher Education



Effective base: Varies for each statement based upon level of awareness of each sample group. Only sample groups with an effective base over 50 are shown

Note: Data rebased to exclude don't know

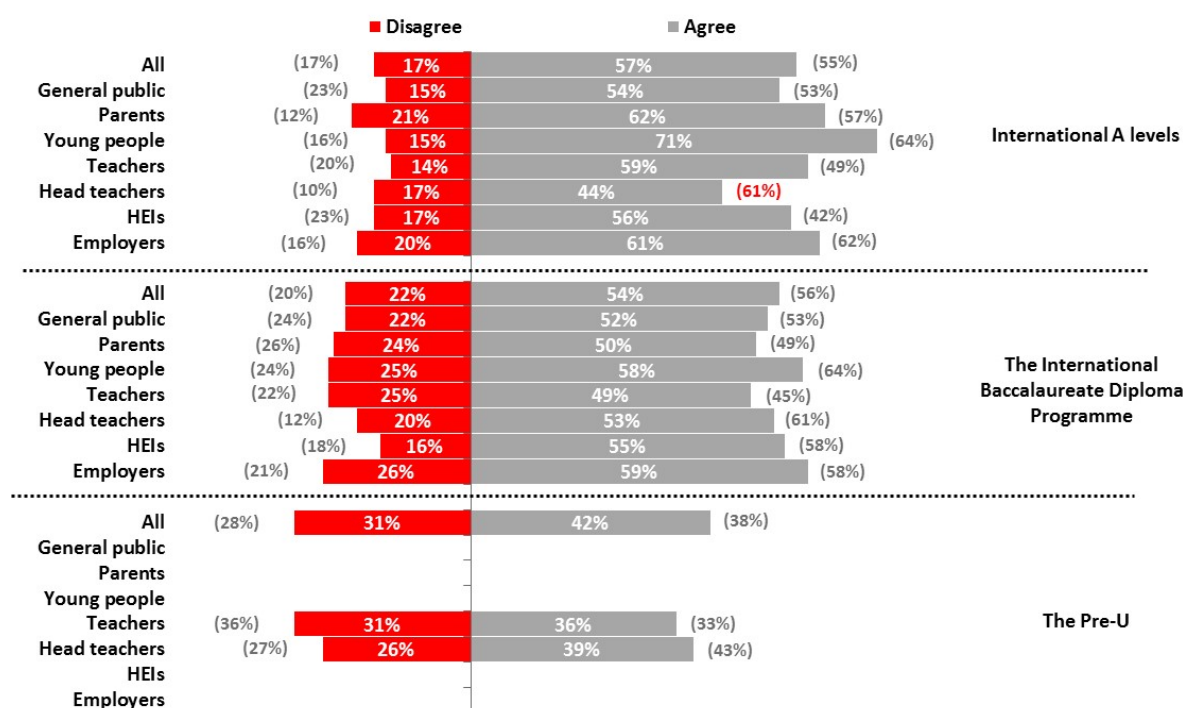
Note: All respondents were shown a 5-point agreement scale. Agree is an aggregation of strongly agree and agree and disagree an aggregation of strongly disagree and disagree. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

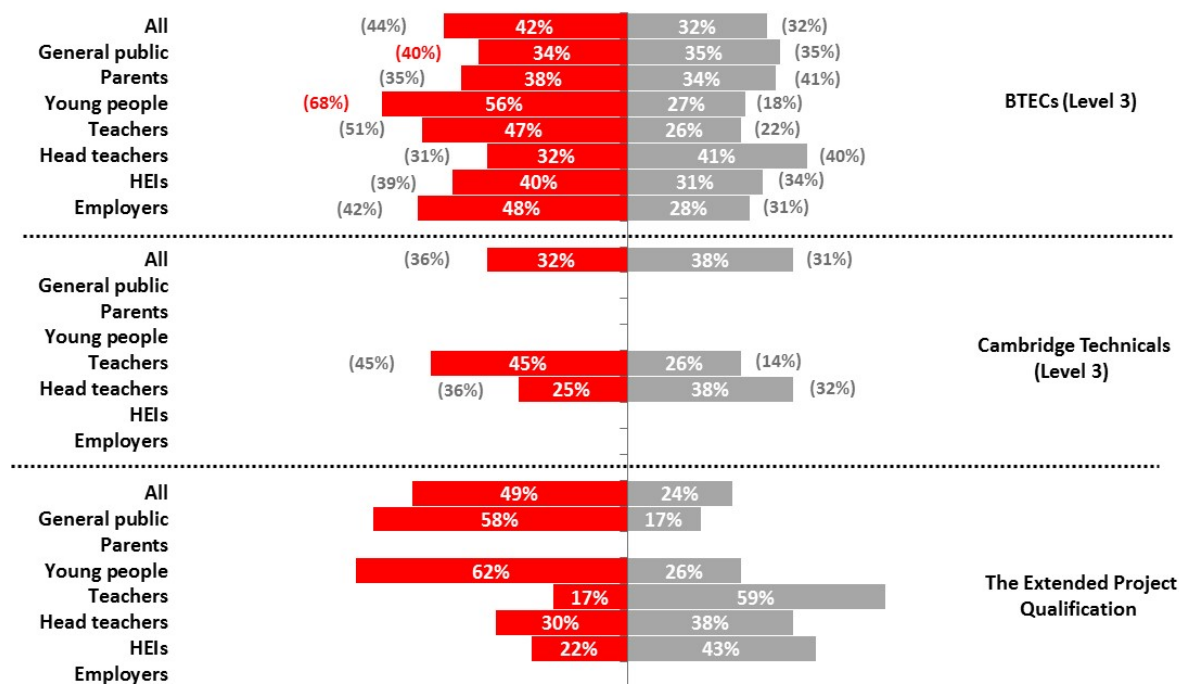
- 28.1.2 There was a consistent view from a majority of all groups that **Level 1/2 certificates (commonly known as International GCSEs)** are valued as highly as GCSEs by HE. HEIs (70%) and young people (69%) were strongest in their agreement and significantly more likely than teachers (55%) to agree that Level 1/2 certificates (commonly known as International GCSEs) are valued as highly as GCSEs by HE.
- 28.1.3 A quarter of teachers (26%) disagreed that Level 1/2 certificates (commonly known as International GCSEs) are valued as highly as GCSEs by HE, significantly higher than the levels of disagreement reported by head teachers (17%), the general public (15%), young people (14%) and HEIs (8%).
- 28.1.4 Teachers, HEIs and the general public were more likely to agree than disagree that the **International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme** is valued as highly as GCSEs by HE. Head teachers' views were more mixed in this area, being equally likely to agree (29%) or disagree (35%) that the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme is valued as highly as GCSEs by HE.
- 28.1.5 Young people, teachers and head teachers were consistent in their disagreement that **BTECs (Level 1/ Level 2)** qualifications are valued as highly as GCSEs by HE. Seven out of ten teachers (74%), head teachers (65%) and young people (66%) disagreed that BTECs (Level 1/ Level 2) are valued as highly, significantly higher than the proportions of HEIs (46%), employers (45%), parents (42%) and the general public (38%) who reported this.
- 28.1.6 The proportion of the general public who disagreed that BTEC (Level 1/ Level 2) qualifications are valued as highly as GCSEs by HE fell from wave 13 of this research when half (49%) of the public disagreed.
- 28.1.7 From those who disagreed that BTEC (Level 1/ Level 2) qualifications are valued as highly as GCSEs by HE there was very strong consensus that BTEC (Level 1/ Level 2) qualifications are valued lower by HE.
- 28.1.8 Again, levels of awareness and the ability to offer an opinion on the **Cambridge Nationals (Level 1/ Level 2)** were low for young people, parents, HEIs and employers. Teachers (65%) and head teachers (62%) were consistent in their view that that Cambridge Nationals (Level 1/ Level 2) are not valued as highly as GCSEs by HE.

29 Perceptions on whether alternative qualifications are valued as highly as A levels by employers

29.1.1 Figure 30 shows the level of agreement that different types of qualification are valued as highly as A levels by employers. Although these questions were only asked to those respondents who reported they were aware of these qualifications, a sizeable minority reported that they did not know if they agreed or disagreed with each statement. For this reason, the data in the charts and text has been rebased to exclude ‘don’t knows’.

Figure 30: Level of agreement that alternative qualifications are valued as highly as A levels by employers





Effective base: Varies for each statement based upon level of awareness of each sample group. Only sample groups with an effective base over 50 are shown

Note: Data rebased to exclude don't know

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

The Extended Project Qualification was not asked about in wave 13.

29.1.2 Six out of ten employers (61%) agreed that **International A levels** are valued as highly as A levels by employers. Head teachers (44%) were less likely than young people (71%), parents (62%) and teachers (59%) to agree that international A levels are valued as highly as A levels by employers.

29.1.3 The proportion of head teachers who agree that International A Levels are valued as highly as A levels by employers fell significantly since wave 13 of this research when 61% were in agreement.

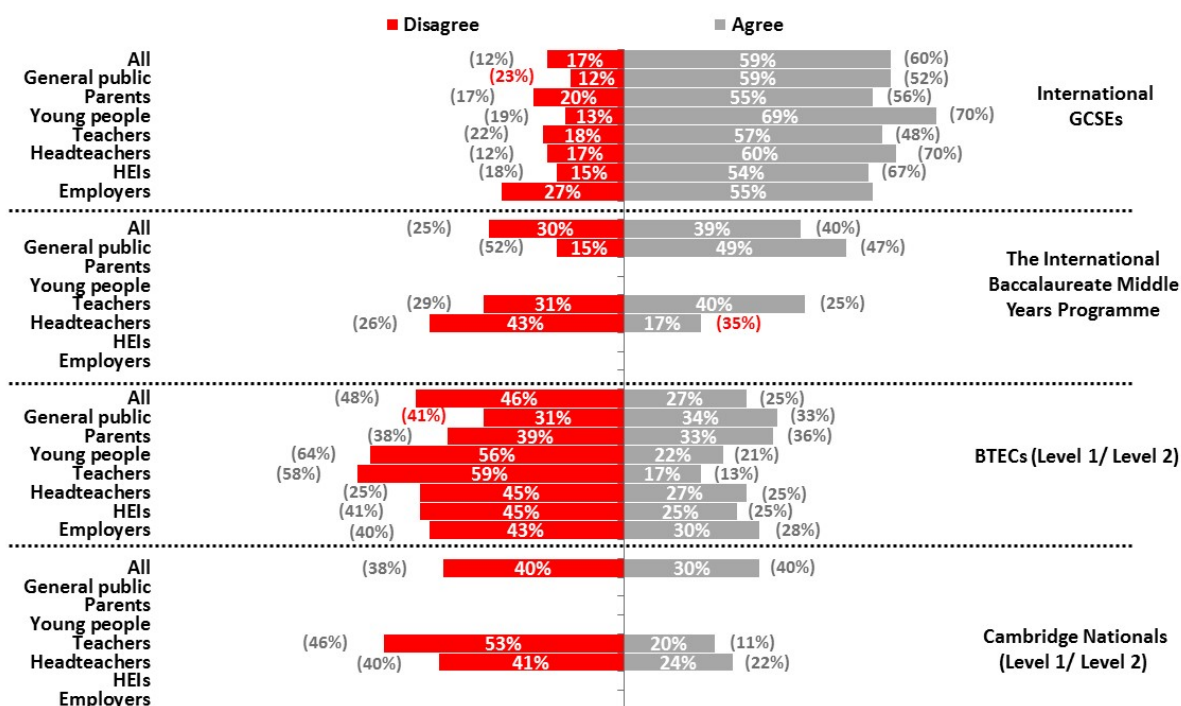
29.1.4 A majority of young people, the general public, head teachers, HEIs and employers all agreed that the **International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme** is valued as highly as A levels by employers. Teachers and parents were also significantly more likely to agree than disagree that the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme is valued as highly as A levels by employers.

- 29.1.5 Sample sizes only allowed the views of head teachers and teachers to be analysed in relation to the **Pre-U**. As in wave 13, for both head teachers and teachers there was a degree of uncertainty. 36% of teachers agreed, 31% disagreed and 33% neither agreed nor disagreed that the Pre-U is valued as highly as A levels by employers. In comparison, four out of ten head teachers (39%) agreed and 26% disagreed with 34% neither agreeing nor disagreeing.
- 29.1.6 Levels of agreement that **BTECs (Level 3)** qualifications are valued as highly as A levels by employers were lower than International A levels or the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. Young people, employers and teachers were significantly more likely than head teachers and the general public to disagree that BTECs (Level 3) are valued as highly as A levels by employers.
- 29.1.7 The proportion of young people who agree that BTEC (Level 3) qualifications are valued as highly as A levels by employers fell to 56% since wave 13 of this research when 68% were in agreement.
- 29.1.8 With regards to the **Extended Project Qualification** young people (62%) and teachers (59%) were more likely than head teachers (38%) and HEIs (43%) to disagree that the Extended Project Qualification is valued as highly as A levels by employers.
- 29.1.9 Of those young people who disagreed that the Extended Project Qualification is valued as highly as A Levels by employers, 99% of them felt that the qualification was valued lower by employers.

30 Perceptions on whether alternative qualifications are valued as highly as GCSEs by employers

- 30.1.1 Figure 31 shows the level of agreement that different types of qualification are valued as highly as A levels by employers. Although these questions were only asked to those respondents who reported they were aware of these qualifications, a sizeable minority reported that they did not know if they agreed or disagreed with each statement. For this reason, the data in the charts and text has been rebased to exclude 'don't knows'.

Figure 31: Level of agreement that alternative qualifications are valued as highly as GCSEs by employers



Effective base: Varies for each statement based upon level of awareness of each sample group. Only sample groups with an effective base over 50 are shown

Note: Data rebased to exclude don't know

Note: All 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. Wave 13 data shown in brackets - a figure in red denoting a statistically significant difference between wave 14 and wave 13.

30.1.2 **Level 1/2 certificates (commonly known as International GCSEs)** remain the alternative qualification most likely to be perceived as being valued as highly as GCSEs by employers. Seven out of ten young people (69%) agreed that Level 1/2 certificates (commonly known as International GCSEs) are valued as highly as GCSEs by employers, significantly higher than the six out of ten (57%) of teachers who reported this.

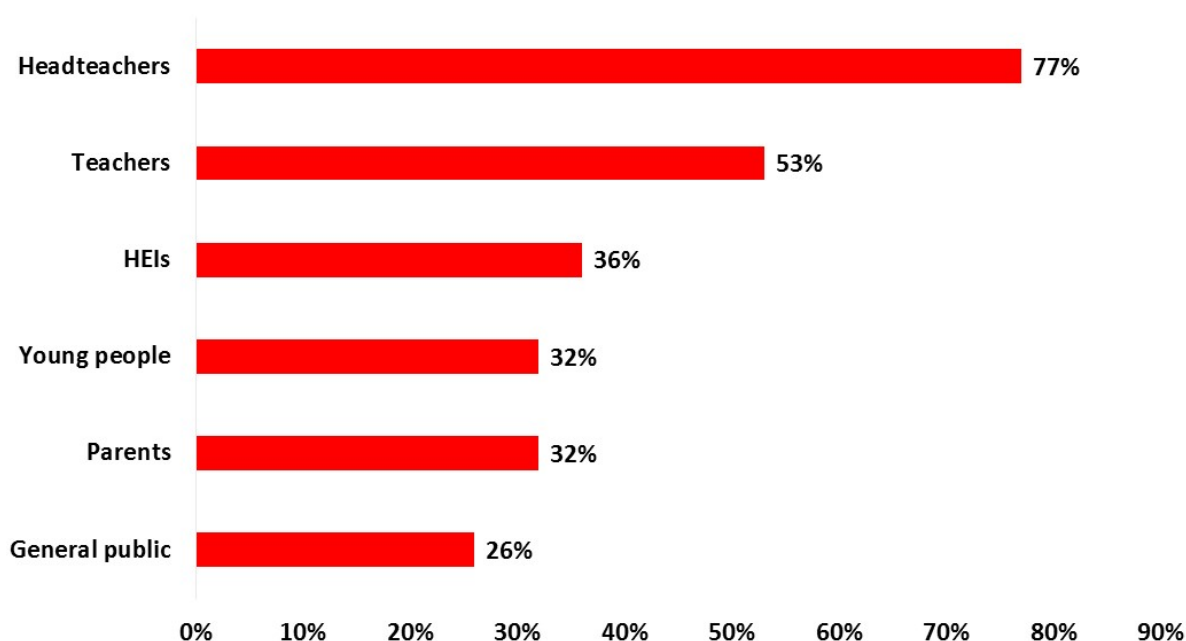
30.1.3 From those groups where base sizes allow a reliable comparison, views were mixed as to whether the **International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme** is valued as highly as GCSEs by employers. One in two members of the general public (49%) agreed that the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme is valued as highly as GCSEs by employers, as did a similar proportion of teachers (40%).

- 30.1.4 However, teachers (31%) and head teachers (43%) were significantly more likely than the general public (15%) to disagree that the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme is valued as highly as GCSEs by employers.
- 30.1.5 Three out of ten employers (30%) reported that **BTECs (Level 1/Level 2)** are valued as highly as GCSEs by employers, with four out of ten (43%) disagreeing. Young people and teachers were significantly more likely than head teachers, parents, the general public and employers to disagree that BTECs (Level 1/ Level 2) are valued as highly as GCSEs by employers.
- 30.1.6 The general public's perception that BTECs (Level 1/ Level 2) are not valued as highly as GCSEs by employers fell from wave 13. In wave 13, 41% of the public disagreed that BTECs (Level 1/ Level 2) are valued as highly as GCSEs by employers, which fell to 31% in this wave.
- 30.1.7 Teachers and head teachers were significantly more likely to disagree than to agree that **Cambridge Nationals (Level 1/Level 2)** are valued as highly as GCSEs by employers.

Appendix A – Additional data

30.1.8 Two additional questions were asked relating to the Enquires about Results and Appeals system. The results of these are shown in figures 32 and 33 below. Head teachers were significantly more likely than any other group to report that they were aware of the Enquiry about Results and Appeals system for GCSE and A level results. In contrast, half of teachers (53%) were aware and so were a third of parents (32%) and young people (32%).

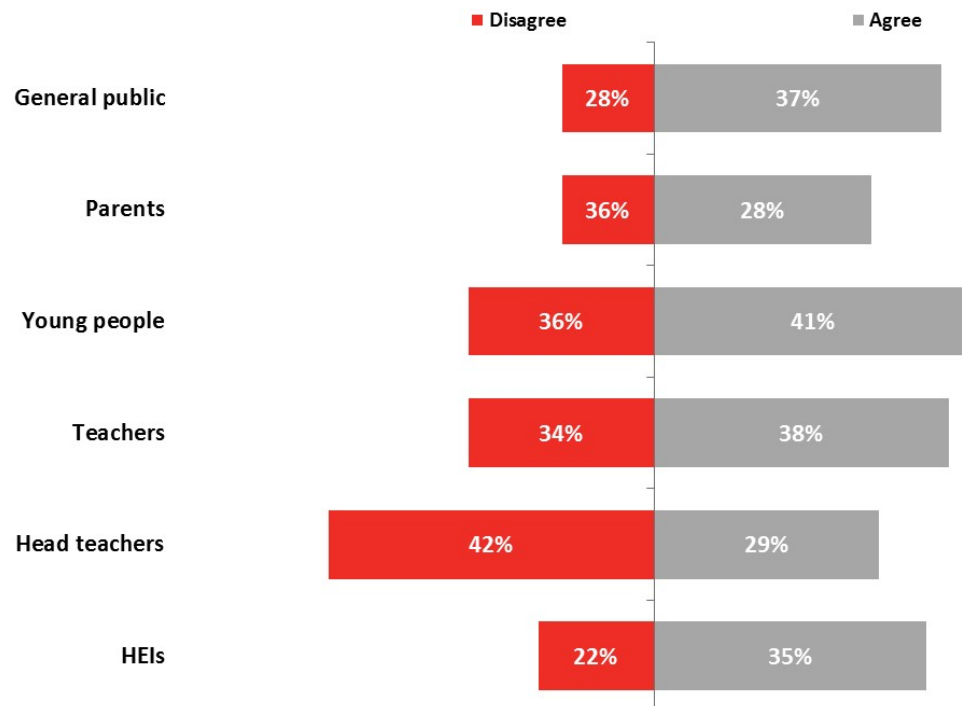
Figure 32: Awareness of the Enquiry about Results and Appeals system for GCSE and A level results; proportion who reported yes (aware)



Effective base: All respondents (General public 991; Parents 259; Young people 306; Teachers 544; Head teachers 252; HEIs 228)

30.1.9 Head teachers had higher awareness of the appeals system and were significantly more likely to disagree than other groups that the enquiry and appeals system is fair. In contrast teachers (38%) and young people (41%) were significantly more likely than head teachers to have agreed that the enquiry and appeals system is fair.

Figure 33: Levels of agreement and disagreement that the enquiries about results / appeals system is fair



Effective base: All respondents (General public 264; Parents 83; Young people 90; Teachers 292; Head teachers 200; HEIs 80)

Note: All 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.

Appendix B – Technical report

Appendix B outlines the composition of the achieved sampling and additional information on the methods adopted in wave 14.

Head teachers and teachers sample

Sample coverage

The sample was designed to be a representative sample of head teachers/deputy heads and teachers of A levels, GCSEs and other academic and vocational qualifications in secondary schools and colleges across England. This provided coverage across the following types of establishment:

- local authority maintained schools
- Academy and Free schools
- independent schools
- FE colleges and sixth form centres

To make sure that the survey was representative of establishments teaching qualifications for 14- to-19 year olds, only certain types of schools/colleges were eligible for the survey. Eligible types of schools and colleges matched the definition used in previous years of the survey, that is, secondary and middle-deemed-secondary schools, academies teaching key stage 4/post-16, independent schools teaching key stage 4/post-16, and post-16 institutions.

Sample frame

The samples of head teachers and teachers were drawn from two sources.

1. Education Company Education list

Firstly, contacts in schools were drawn from the Education Company's Education List. Containing over 5 million education data profiles, including 400,000 named teachers and lecturers including email addresses, and details and profiles of more than 100,000 schools' profiles, this list is the most accurate and comprehensive education data set available anywhere in the UK.

This was used as a database to select contacts in schools to be surveyed. As data is held on school characteristics, this allowed us to develop a sample that was representative of school size, type and region. Sample targets were set and the total sample was structured to meet the proportions relevant to the school population in England. The database contained named contacts with generic school email addresses that allowed the survey to be targeted at specific subject teachers in the specified schools.

2. YouGov Panel

The research was also conducted via teachers and head teachers registered to the YouGov panel, who have consented to participate in research with YouGov. A quota sampling approach was adopted to the sample drawn from the YouGov panel to ensure broad representativeness by school type, size and region.

Sample selection

The sample was selected to ensure the representativeness of the results in line with the school and teacher population in England. The sample frame was designed using the Department for Education (DfE) School Capacity and the Edubase data¹¹. The sample frame was stratified by the following variables:

- school type (maintained, academy, special school / PRU, independent)
- English region

To maintain consistency with the sampling approach adopted in wave 13 two samples were drawn that differed in characteristics between the head teacher (senior leader) sample and the teachers' sample. Whilst drawing a sample of schools was appropriate for the head teacher survey, it was decided that in order to examine the views of a representative sample of teachers in England, this would require selecting multiple teachers working at the larger establishments. This meant that, as with the wave 13 survey, the sampling design for the teacher survey took account of the number of teachers working in each school/establishment.

Using the Education List database, a random stratified sample of school contacts was drawn in line with the above parameters. The sample drawn was compared with the DfE school population statistics to ensure they were broadly in line. In total a sample of 8,000 school contacts that matched the sample criteria was drawn at random from the Education List database.

The head teacher sample was drawn at random from the list of eligible schools. As previously discussed the teacher sample was drawn to take into account the numbers of teachers at different types of establishment and multiple teacher contacts were included for schools of a larger size.

Alongside the sample drawn from the Education List database a random sample of 4,000 head teachers (senior leaders) and teachers from the YouGov panel was contacted to take

¹¹ <http://www.education.gov.uk/edubase/home.xhtml>

part in the research. These respondents were contacted at random to take part and sampled to be proportionate to the school population and the teacher population.

Achieved sample size and weighting

The unweighted achieved sample size and breakdown of the samples by key characteristics is shown in table 3 below. Alongside this the weighted base and weight factors applied are also shown.

The unweighted base shows the number of completed surveys and the weighted base the adjustments that have been made to correct for any sample bias. The largest weight factor demonstrates where the weighting has had a greater impact due to the unweighted based being lower than what would be expected in a representative sample.

Table 3: Achieved sample size by role and school type

	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Teachers - School type	697	697		
Local Authority maintained school	190	188	0.5	1.5
Academy	333	307	0.5	1.4
Independent school	94	63	0.3	1.4
FE college/ sixth form	47	125	1.5	4.0
Other	33	14	0.2	0.6
Head teachers- School type	281	281		
Local Authority maintained school	64	73	0.9	1.6
Academy	148	115	0.6	1.0
Independent school	46	67	1.1	1.9
FE college	22	22	0.8	1.3
Other	1	3	2.8	2.8

Public, parents and young people's samples

Sample coverage

The public, parents and students sample was drawn from the YouGov online research panel of 400,000 adults who have consented to participate in research with YouGov.

Three distinct samples were drawn. These were:

- A nationally representative survey sample of 16 plus adults in England - this was sampled to be representative of the adult population in England using YouGov's English weighting profile of age interlocked with gender, region and social grade
- A survey sample of young people aged 14- to-19 who were just about to take, were currently taking or had recently taken A-Levels, GCSEs and other academic and vocational qualifications - this was sampled to be representative of England by gender, age within the age range and region using England representative statistics
- A survey sample of parents of young people who met the 'student' criteria defined above - this was sampled to be representative of parents by gender, social grade and English region

Sample frame

The samples of members of the public, parents' and students were drawn from the YouGov panel. Over the last ten years, YouGov has carefully recruited a panel of over 400,000 UK adults to take part in our surveys.

Sample selection

The samples were selected to ensure the representativeness of the results in line with the actual population of each sample group in England.

For nationally representative samples, YouGov draws a sub-sample of the panel that is representative in terms of age and gender combined, social class and region, and invites this sub-sample to complete a survey.

YouGov has a proprietary, automated sampling system that invites respondents based on their profile information and how that aligns with targets for surveys that are currently active. Respondents are automatically, randomly selected based on survey availability and how that matches their profile information.

Achieved sample size and weighting

The achieved sample size and breakdown of the public, parents and students samples by key characteristics and associated weighting factors is shown in table 4, 5 and 6 below.

The unweighted base shows the number of completed surveys and the weighted base the adjustments that have been made to correct for any sample bias. The largest weight factor demonstrates where the weighting has had a greater impact due to the unweighted base being lower than what would be expected in a representative sample.

Table 4: Summary of achieved public sample and weighting scheme

	Public sample		Public sample	
	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
	1003	1003		
Region				
North East	53	52	0.7	2.0
North West	135	134	0.7	1.9
Yorkshire and the Humber	106	103	0.7	1.9
East Midlands	90	93	0.7	1.9
West Midlands	107	103	0.7	1.9
East of England	116	114	0.7	1.9
London	152	155	0.8	2.0
South East	167	176	0.8	2.1
South West	107	103	0.7	1.9
Age and gender				
Male 16-24	71	83	1.0	1.3
Male 25-39	133	124	0.8	1.1
Male 40-54	123	134	0.9	1.3
Male 55+	173	165	0.8	1.2
Women 16-24	40	72	1.5	2.1
Women 25-39	153	124	0.7	1.0
Women 40-54	138	134	0.8	1.2
Women 55+	202	196	0.8	1.2
Social grade				
ABC1	651	599	0.7	1.7
C2DE	382	434	0.8	2.1

Table 5: Summary of achieved parents sample weighting scheme

	Parents sample		Parents sample	
	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
	259	259		
Region				
North East	13	13	1.0	1.0
North West	34	34	1.0	1.0
Yorkshire and the Humber	26	26	1.0	1.0
East Midlands	24	23	1.0	1.0
West Midlands	26	26	1.0	1.0
East of England	29	28	1.0	1.0
London	38	41	1.1	1.1
South East	43	41	1.0	1.0
South West	26	26	1.0	1.0
Gender				
Male	124	124	1.0	1.0
Female	135	135	1.0	1.1
Social grade				
ABC1	143	142	1.0	1.1
C2DE	116	117	1.0	1.1

Table 6: Summary of achieved young people sample and weighting scheme

	Young people sample		Young people sample	
	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
	338	338		
Region				
North East	8	17	1.7	3.0
North West	39	44	0.8	1.5
Yorkshire and the Humber	39	34	0.7	1.3
East Midlands	35	30	0.7	1.2
West Midlands	27	34	1.1	1.5
East of England	50	37	0.6	1.1
London	49	54	0.9	1.6
South East	65	54	0.6	1.2
South West	26	34	1.0	1.9
Gender				
Male	147	169	0.8	3.0
Female	191	169	0.6	1.7
Age				
14-15 year olds	127	113	0.6	2.1

16-17 year olds	93	113	0.8	3.0
18-19 year olds	118	113	0.6	2.2

Employer sample

Sample coverage

The employer sample was designed to be representative of the English business population by organisation size and sector. The sample definition ensured that only those in middle management and above roles, with the ability to answer on behalf of their organisation were eligible to take the survey. A further criterion was added to ensure that each employer had recruited a young person aged 16- to-24 in the last 12 months.

Sample frame

The employer sample was drawn from the YouGov business panel which contains over 9,000 senior decision makers and 8,000 employees with decision making responsibility for HR / personnel within their organisation.

Sample selection

The sample was selected to ensure the representativeness of the results in line with the business population in England using the following criteria drawn from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) Business Population Statistics.

- Employer size; proportionate number of employers in the 2- to-9, 10- to-49, 50- to-99, 100- to-249 and 250+ employee size band brackets; this was calculated using the percentage on employment that each size band represents rather than the number of enterprises within each
- Sector; broad sector coverage was ensured across the private, public and third/voluntary sectors

Achieved sample size and weighting

The achieved sample size and breakdown of the employer sample by key characteristics and associated weighting factors are shown in table 7 below.

The unweighted base shows the number of completed surveys and the weighted base the adjustments that have been made to correct for any sample bias. The largest weight factor demonstrates where the weighting has had a greater impact due to the unweighted based being lower than what would be expected in a representative sample.

Table 7: Summary of achieved employer sample and weighting scheme

	Employer sample	Employer sample
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	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
	274	274		
Size				
2-9 employees	27	38	1.2	1.5
10-49 employees	43	38	0.7	0.9
50-99 employees	16	16	0.9	1.1
100-249 employees	29	19	0.6	0.7
250+ employees	159	162	0.9	1.1
Sector				
Private sector	192	200	0.7	1.5
Public sector	63	58	0.6	1.3
Third/voluntary sector	19	16	0.6	1.2

HEI sample

Sample coverage

The HEI sample was designed to be representative of the English university population by university type. The type of university was drawn from official Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) statistics and universities who responded to the survey were grouped into the following categories:

- Russell group
- Other old
- Post 1992/new
- Other HEI

The sample definition ensured that only those in academic roles with responsibility for and knowledge of the admissions process were eligible to complete the survey.

Sample frame

The HEI sample was drawn from two sources:

- The YouGov education panel
- HEIs with contacts drawn from the Oscar Research data base of public sector contacts - Oscar Research are the UK Public Sector database specialists. They research and provide the largest, and most accurate, database of Government and Public Sector contacts and organisations in the UK

Sample selection

The samples were selected to ensure the representativeness of the results in line with the university population in England by university type. No further restrictions were placed on the sample but throughout the fieldwork period responses were monitored by job role and subject specialism to ensure broad coverage across these factors.

Achieved sample size and weighting

The achieved sample size and breakdown of the HEI sample by key characteristics and associated weighting factors is shown in table 8 below.

The unweighted base shows the number of completed surveys and the weighted base the adjustments that have been made to correct for any sample bias. The largest weight factor demonstrates where the weighting has had a greater impact due to the unweighted base being lower than what would be expected in a representative sample.

Table 8: Summary of achieved HEI sample and weighting scheme

	HEI sample		HEI sample	
	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
	253	253		
Size				
Russell group	80	48	0.6	0.6
Other old	45	46	1.0	1.0
Post 1992/New	109	125	1.1	1.1
Other HEI	19	34	1.8	1.8

Appendix C – Glossary

Base size: The number of respondents answering the question.

BTEC: These are qualifications offered across a range of vocational subjects and levels including business studies and engineering. For the purposes of this survey, these qualifications are included as part of the grouping termed ‘alternative qualifications’.

Effective base: When sampling is undertaken, it creates a ‘design effect’ that can impact the reliability of the information collected. The effective base size is the base size that is left when removing this effect. It is used for significance testing.

General (academic) qualifications: For the purpose of this survey, this type of qualification includes the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A level).

- The GCSE is an academic qualification awarded in a specified subject, generally taken in a number of subjects by students aged 14 to 16 in secondary education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- The A level is an academic qualification offered by educational bodies in the UK to students completing secondary or pre-university education. At present, the qualification is generally studied for over two years and split into two parts, with one part studied in each year. The first part is known as the Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and was previously known as the Advanced Supplementary, with the same abbreviation. The second part is known as the A2 level. The AS is a qualification in its own right, and the AS combined with the A2 level forms the complete A level qualification.
- Reformed AS qualifications are different to the existing AS specifications in that the results of the reformed AS qualification do not count towards a student’s final A level grade as they do now. As such, there is no requirement for students to enter the AS qualification in a given subject, even if they intend to study the full A level. Reformed AS specifications are available for the first time to be awarded in summer 2016 in 13 subjects: art & design, biology, business, chemistry, computing, economics, English language, English language and literature, English literature, history, physics, psychology and sociology. Reformed AS qualifications in the other subjects will be introduced for 2017 and 2018.

Grading: The process of grouping students into overall performance categories. Currently, the system for GCSEs and A levels awards a grade of A* (highest), A, B, C, D, E, F, G. Reformed GCSEs will follow a different grading system of 9 to 1, with 9 being the highest grade. For more information on this new grading system, see the Ofqual website.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/your-qualification-our-regulation-gcse-as-and-a-level-reforms>

IB: International Baccalaureate, a qualification studied by those aged 16 to 19, in which students learn six subjects: three at a standard level and three at a higher level. The qualification also includes an extended essay element. For the purposes of this survey, this qualification is included as part of the grouping termed ‘other academic qualifications’.

Level 1/Level 2 qualifications: regulated qualifications studied by 14 to 16 year olds as an alternative to a GCSE. For the purposes of this survey, these qualifications are included as part of the grouping termed ‘other academic qualifications’.

Level of qualifications: Qualifications are assigned a level from Entry then Level 1 through to Level 8: Entry includes entry-level certificates and foundation learning tier pathways.

- Level 1 includes GCSEs graded D to G, the Foundation Diploma and Level 1 NVQs, Key Skills, Functional Skills and BTEC awards.
- Level 2 includes GCSEs graded A* to C, the Higher Diploma and Level 2 NVQs, Key Skills, Functional Skills and BTEC awards.
- Level 3 includes AS/A levels, the Advanced and Progression Diplomas and Level 3 NVQs, Key Skills and BTEC awards.
- Level 4 includes certificates of higher education, Level 4 NVQs, Key Skills and BTEC Professional Awards.
- Level 5 includes diplomas of higher education, foundation degrees, the Higher National Diploma and BTEC professional awards.
- Level 6 includes bachelor degrees, graduate certificates, the National Diploma in Professional Production Skills and BTEC advanced professional awards.
- Level 7 includes master’s degrees, postgraduate certificates and BTEC advanced professional awards.
- Level 8 includes doctorates.

Marking: The process of giving a student credit for their right answers according to the requirements set out in a mark scheme.

Other academic qualifications: For the purposes of this survey, these qualifications include Level 1/Level 2 qualifications, the International Baccalaureate and the Pre-U. They are defined as qualifications that are taught in schools and colleges to young people aged 14 to 19 that include academic content but are not GCSEs or A levels.

Pre-U: The Pre-U is a qualification for 16 to 19 year olds designed as an alternative to the current A level qualification. For the purposes of this survey, this qualification is included as part of the grouping termed ‘other academic qualifications’.

Rebasing: This is the process of recalculating percentages for a question with some respondents removed from the total base. For example an approach is to remove those people who did not know from the percentage calculation and rebase to just those who offered an opinion.

Sample frame: The way that the population is structured before a sample for the survey is drawn.

Sampling tolerances: When using a sample for a survey rather than surveying the whole population, results can be expected to differ slightly. The difference between the two is known as the sampling tolerance and is established by ascertaining the standard deviation. For the purposes of this survey, the tolerance (or confidence level) used is at the 95% level.

Social grade: A system of demographic classification originally developed by the National Readership Survey to classify readers, but now used as a standard for market research. ABC1 is classified as the highest social grade and C2DE classified as the lowest social grade.

Statistically significant: If a result is termed statistically significant, it is unlikely to have occurred randomly. The process of determining whether a result is statistically significant is known as significance testing.

Stratified sample: A sample that has been divided into subgroups, for example, regions or type of institution. These subgroups may all consist of equal numbers or some might be higher or lower than others.

Vocational qualifications: These are qualifications that are taught in schools and colleges that prepare students for a particular type of job.

Weighting: The process of making some respondents in a survey more or less important than others to accurately reflect their position in the population being surveyed.

Appendix D – Questionnaires

The questions that were asked of each group of respondents are available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/perception-of-a-levels-and-gcses-wave-14>.

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