

Reviews of marking and moderation for GCSE and GCE: summer 2017 exam series

Background information accompanying statistical
release



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Contents

Information about the statistics.....	3
Purpose.....	3
Geographical coverage.....	3
Description.....	3
The review of marking process.....	3
Administrative error review of an individual student’s script.....	5
Review of marking for an individual assessment.....	5
Review of moderation of the school or college’s internal assessment using the sample of students’ work.....	6
Appeals.....	6
Context.....	6
Changes to the review of marking process.....	6
Qualification reform.....	7
GCSE resit policy.....	9
Accountability reform.....	9
Changes in higher education.....	10
Data source.....	10
Limitations.....	11
Revisions.....	12
Confidentiality and rounding.....	12
Quality assurance.....	13
Status.....	13
Related publications.....	13
Statistical policies.....	14
Glossary.....	14
Useful links.....	14
Feedback.....	14

Information about the statistics

Purpose

In this release, Ofqual presents data on all reviews of marking, reviews of moderation and administrative error reviews (collectively referred to as 'reviews' and formerly known as 'enquiries about results') requested for all GCSE and GCE (AS and A level) assessments taken during the summer 2017 exam series.

Geographical coverage

This report presents data on the number of reviews requested in England. Reports published in previous years included data for students in Wales and Northern Ireland as well. As such, historical figures in this year's report reflect England only data and may therefore differ from previously published figures.

For this, and all other releases for the academic year 2016/17, Ofqual will publish separate data tables for students in Wales and Northern Ireland without commentary, in addition to data tables and report for England. This is following a [transition arrangement](#) with Qualifications Wales (the regulator in Wales) and CCEA (the regulator in Northern Ireland) whereby the responsibility for publishing data for students in Wales and Northern Ireland for the academic year 2017/18 and beyond has been passed to Qualifications Wales and CCEA respectively.

Five exam boards offer GCSE and GCE qualifications in England, Wales and/or Northern Ireland:

- AQA Education (AQA)
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Pearson Education Ltd. (Pearson)
- WJEC-CBAC Ltd. (WJEC)

Description

The review of marking process

Every year, the GCSE and GCE exam boards publish information and guidance for schools and colleges on making use of the post-results services for the relevant exam series. The *GCSE and GCE Qualification Level Conditions and Requirements* (the Conditions) outline the requirements for reviews of marking, reviews of moderation, and administrative error reviews that exam boards must follow for GCSE ([A* to G](#) and [9 to 1](#)) and A level and AS ([legacy](#) and [reformed](#)) qualifications.

If a student is concerned that an error has occurred when their assessment material has been marked, then they can ask the exam board to review the marking. At the

moment, exam boards only accept review requests through schools and colleges¹ and require consent from the student. Private students are the exception, the Conditions require exam boards to accept review requests directly from private students.

A whole qualification (eg, GCSE biology) will comprise a number of assessments, for example, one or more examinations, coursework or controlled assessment tasks. Reviews are requested for each assessment individually and not for the qualification as a whole. Often reviews are requested for multiple assessments that a student has taken for one qualification. In some cases, multiple reviews are requested for the same assessment, for example, an administrative error review may be requested and then a review of marking. Where an assessment is made up of more than one part (known as subcomponents) and a student must complete all subcomponents to complete the assessment (for example, an exam with a multiple choice element and a written element), a review can be made on an individual subcomponent in some cases.

In 2017, 49% of students whose qualification grades were challenged had more than one review submitted for that qualification. This is why the total number of qualification grades challenged is always lower than the total number of reviews of marking. Reviews of moderation are different, as one review involves a number of students (see explanation [below](#)). However, the vast majority of reviews requested (99%) are reviews of marking and so, overall, the number of grades challenged is always lower than the number of reviews requested.

If the review shows that marking or administrative errors have been made and the student's result is incorrect, the exam board will change the mark to correct the error. In some cases, this may affect the overall qualification grade, which will then also be adjusted. Grades can be adjusted downwards as well as upwards². Exam boards charge a fee if unit/component or qualification grades are not changed following review, or, for a review of moderation, if the original school or college marks are not reinstated. For a review of marking or administrative error review, if marks are changed but the mark change does not lead to a change in unit/component or qualification grade then the exam boards charge a fee for carrying out the review.

The Conditions state that exam boards must set their own timescales within which they should complete reviews and report the outcome. This year exam boards have

¹ Although the Conditions allow the exam boards to choose whether to extend this to individual students but this year they have decided not to.

² For administrative error reviews and reviews of marking, grades have been adjusted downwards as well as upwards since 2001. For reviews of moderation, grades can only be confirmed or raised although this might be subject to change in future years.

applied different timescales for reviews than they have done in previous years and these are detailed below.

Each exam board offers three post-results services for reviewing exam papers and internal assessment:

- An administrative error review for an individual assessment (“Service 1”)
- A review of marking for an individual assessment (“Service 2”)
- A review of moderation of the school or college’s internal assessment using the sample of students’ work that was used in the initial moderation (“Service 3”).

Administrative error review of an individual student’s script

The exam board checks the script to make sure that every question has been marked and the total number of marks awarded for that script is correctly added up and recorded and no error has occurred. Exam boards stipulated that schools and colleges must have requested this service by 21 September 2017. The deadline set by exam boards by which they must notify schools and colleges about the outcomes of administrative error reviews is 10 calendar days from the date of receipt.

Review of marking for an individual assessment

A reviewer considers the marking of the original examiner to determine, in respect of each task in the assessment for which marks could have been awarded, and in respect of the assessment as a whole, whether the marking included any marking error(s). The exam board also does a full administrative error review if this has not been previously requested for the assessment.

Exam boards typically operate two priority levels:

- Non-priority – exam boards stipulated that schools and colleges must have requested this by 21 September 2017.
- Priority – schools and colleges can request this if the student’s place at further or higher education depends on the outcome of a review³. Exam boards stipulated that requests for a priority service 2 review must have been submitted by 24 August 2017.

The deadline set by exam boards by which they must notify schools and colleges about the outcomes of reviews of marking is 20 calendar days for the non-priority service and 15 calendar days for the priority service from the date of receipt.

³ All exam boards offer priority reviews of marking for GCE assessments, at the moment, only Pearson offer this service for GCSE assessments.

Review of moderation of the school or college's internal assessment using the sample of students' work

This service is not available for individual students as the review of moderation is usually undertaken on the same sample of students' work that was used in the initial moderation.

The exam board reviews the initial moderation to make sure that the moderation was carried out correctly and in accordance with the marking criteria. If an error is found it is corrected. Exam boards stipulated that this service must have been requested by 21 September 2017. The deadline set by exam boards by which they must notify schools and colleges about the outcomes of reviews of moderation is 35 calendar days from the moderator receiving the original sample of work from the school or college.

Appeals

If a school or college has requested a review but is still dissatisfied with the outcome, it can make an appeal to the exam board. The exam boards offer a two-stage appeals process. There is also a final stage available through the [Examination Procedures Review Service](#). A report presenting the data on appeals for the summer 2017 exam series will be published by Ofqual in March to April 2018.

Context

When considering the data presented in this release, it is important to note a number of recent changes to qualifications and requirements for marking reviews that are likely to have impacted on these figures.

Changes to the review of marking process

In August 2016, Ofqual withdrew the [GCSE, GCE, Principal Learning and Project Code of Practice](#) for GCSEs and GCEs (the Code) and introduced Conditions which specify the requirements for reviews of marking and moderation that exam boards offering qualifications in England must follow. These requirements were introduced following consultation in [December 2015](#) and [May 2016](#), resulting in changes to the review process that was previously set out in the Code.

The main aim of changing the review of marking process was to make sure any errors in marking GCSEs and GCEs are found and corrected, in a way that is fair to all students, and that marks are not otherwise changed.

The key changes to the review of marking process are as follows:

- A mark must only be changed following an administrative error review, a review of marking or a review of moderation if an error occurred, and the reason for this must be recorded.

- Exam boards must have their own review processes and publish these.
- Exam boards are required to train reviewers (including those undertaking reviews of moderation) prior to undertaking reviews and monitor their performance as reviewers.

The review of marking requirements set by [Qualification Wales](#) for qualifications taken in Wales and set by CCEA Regulator for qualifications taken in Northern Ireland are similar to those set by Ofqual. These new requirements are likely to have impacted the number of reviews requested and the outcomes of the reviews from summer 2016 onwards in England and Wales and from summer 2017 in Northern Ireland.

Qualification reform

GCSEs and GCEs have been undergoing major reform in [England](#). In September 2015, schools in England started teaching the first tranche of reformed subjects, including three GCSE 9-1 subjects (English language, English literature and mathematics) and thirteen GCE subjects (art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English literature, English language and literature, history, physics, psychology and sociology). GCSEs and A levels in these subjects were first awarded this summer, AS qualifications were first awarded in summer 2016. AS qualifications in the second tranche of reformed GCE subjects (ancient languages, dance, drama and theatre, geography, French, German, Spanish, music, physical education and religious studies) were first awarded this summer.

In England, all reformed qualifications are linear meaning that all assessment is taken at the end of the course during the summer exam series. The governments of Wales and Northern Ireland have retained the unitised structure in some GCSEs, and schools and colleges are able to enter students for exams in the winter exam series in some subjects. In [Wales and Northern Ireland](#), AS exams can be taken at the end of the AS course or alongside the A2 units at the end of the A level course.

Changes to the structure of qualifications following the reform are likely to have impacted upon the number of reviews requested in England. Generally, reformed GCSEs have a higher number of exams. For example, in English language, students generally now take two exam papers rather than one. This increase in the number of exams is likely to lead to an increase in the number of reviews of marking and administrative error reviews requested. At GCSE, there has been a 14 percentage point increase in the number of students for whom more than one review was requested for the same qualification, from 36% in 2016 to 50% in 2017. This increase is most pronounced in English/English language where there has been a 52 percentage point increase in the number of students for whom more than one review was requested for their English/English language GCSE, rising from 12% in 2016 to

64% in 2017. There was also a large increase in English literature where the number of students for whom more than one review was requested rose from 44% in 2016 to 67% in 2017. These structural features, and the importance of these qualifications for school accountability measures, are likely to have impacted upon the number of reviews requested.

Furthermore, there has been a substantial increase in the number of students certificating in English/English language and English literature this summer compared to last. This is due to changes in accountability measures and the migration of students from Level 1/ Level 2 certificates to GCSE (see [below](#) for a detailed explanation). The number of certifications in English/English language has risen by 49%, from 454,340 in summer 2016 to 678,450 in summer 2017. The number of certifications in English literature has risen by 47%, from 372,620 in summer 2016 to 545,945 in summer 2017 (see Table 7 in the [data tables accompanying this release](#)). The combination of the increase in the number of students taking English/English language and English literature this summer and the increase in the number of students for whom more than one review per qualification was requested is the main driver of the 44% increase in the number of GCSE reviews this summer. Increases in the number of English/English language and English literature reviews requested accounted for 75% of the absolute difference in the number of GCSE reviews requested between summer 2016 and 2017.

Reformed GCEs either have the same number or fewer assessments than the qualifications they have replaced. For example, A level chemistry used to comprise six assessments but reformed qualifications have three. For reformed qualifications, AS qualifications no longer form part of the A level⁴ and the decoupling of these qualifications has resulted in fewer students taking reformed AS qualifications. These structural changes have resulted in a substantial reduction in the number of GCE assessments taken in England in the summer series over the last two years – from 5.3 million in 2015 to 4.3 million in 2016 and 3.8 million in 2017. As fewer assessments have been taken, this will naturally mean that fewer reviews will be requested.

Schools and colleges are more likely to switch exam boards during periods of reform when new qualifications are available for first teaching. Changes in market share will impact on the number of review requests each exam board receives and this should be borne in mind when comparing figures across years for each exam board. To aid interpretation of the data, figures for the number of GCSE and GCE certifications and

⁴ In Wales and Northern Ireland, reformed AS qualifications contribute 40% of the total marks of the full A level. Non-reformed AS qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland continue to contribute 50% of the total marks of the full A level.

assessment entries broken down by exam board are presented in Table 1 of the accompanying [data tables](#).

GCSE resit policy

Since August 2015, full time students who have not achieved a grade C/4 or above in GCSE (or Level 1/ Level 2 certificate) English/English language and mathematics must continue studying these subjects in order to be funded post-16. This change may have resulted in an increase in reviews submitted in these subjects from 2015. Furthermore, the summer 2017 series was the last opportunity for students to resit legacy versions of GCSE qualifications in English/English language and mathematics. Therefore, more requests are likely to be submitted in respect of students who did not achieve a C in these subjects this year than in previous years.

Accountability reform

It is possible that changes to performance measures may have had an impact on the number of reviews requested by schools and colleges following the summer 2016 and 2017 series.

As part of changes to the [secondary accountability system announced in 2013](#), Progress 8 and Attainment 8 became key measures of performance for all state-funded secondary schools and those colleges that offer KS4 education in England in [2016](#). They replaced the 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics headline measure, and expected progress measures. The new measures take into account progress and attainment across the full grade range and so there is now less focus on achieving a C/4 or above.

Progress 8 captures the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school. It is a type of value-added measure, which means that pupils' results are compared to the results of other pupils nationally with the same prior attainment. The greater the Progress 8 score for a school, the more progress pupils at that school make on average compared to other pupils nationally with similar starting points.

Attainment 8 measures the achievement of a pupil across 8 qualifications including mathematics and English, three qualifications that count in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) measure and three further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or any other approved non-GCSE qualifications. Grades achieved in mathematics and English are double weighted. For English, if students have taken both English language and English literature GCSEs, the highest grade that each student achieves counts towards the measure and this is double weighted. The introduction of this measure, along with the migration from Level 1/ Level 2 certificates to GCSEs mentioned below, is likely to have contributed to a 47% increase in the number of certifications in GCSE English Literature this year (see Table 7 in the [data tables accompanying this release](#)).

From summer 2017, Level 1/ Level 2 certificates (also known as international GCSEs) were not included in [performance tables](#). Consequently, many centres who previously entered students to Level 1/ Level 2 certificates have this year entered them to GCSEs instead. This mainly affects English language and English literature and has contributed to a 3% rise in GCSE certifications this year – from 4.98 million in summer 2016 to 5.14 million in summer 2017 (see Table 1 in the [data tables accompanying this release](#)). As mentioned earlier, we would expect a greater number of reviews of GCSE assessments being requested this year compared to last because more assessments are being taken.

Changes in higher education

Changes in higher education over the last few years may have led to a reduction in the number of reviews requested at GCE.

Controls on the number of students that universities are able to recruit were lifted in 2016 meaning that universities are no longer penalised for admitting more students than planned. As a result, universities may have been more flexible about taking students who hadn't met their offer in 2016 and 2017 and so fewer students may have challenged their GCE grades.

The proportion of 18-year-old university applicants from England, Wales and Northern Ireland receiving offers for university places that are unconditional of their A level results has steadily been increasing in recent years. Between 2008 and 2013 less than 1% of these applicants received unconditional offers, this rose to 1.4% in 2014, 2.5% in 2015 and 3.9% in 2016⁵. An increase in unconditional offers may lead to a decrease in the number of GCE assessment reviews requested as a student's university place is not dependent on their grades.

Data source

AQA, CCEA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC provide data on reviews requested for all GCSE and GCE (all full courses, short courses, applied and double awards) assessments taken during the summer series in England, Wales and Northern Ireland on an annual basis. Data also include other UK regions, such as the Isle of Man, and overseas entries.

Prior to summer 2016, the exam boards provided aggregated data on reviews to Ofqual. This means that the figures reported for 2014 and 2015 were calculated by each exam board and where totals are reported across all exam boards, Ofqual has calculated these using the data provided. From the summer 2016 series onwards, the exam boards have and will continue to provide Ofqual with data for each review

⁵ UCAS, 2017 data had not been released at the time of publication.

received. Therefore, all the 2016 and 2017 figures reported have been calculated by Ofqual.

The change in data collection highlighted that one awarding organisation included data for qualifications other than GCEs and GCSEs (such as Level 1/ Level 2 certificates) in their data returns from 2010 to 2015. These are not included in the 2016 and 2017 data presented in the accompanying report and tables, but remain in the 2014 and 2015 data so comparisons over time should be treated with caution. Removal of these qualifications from the 2016 data resulted in a drop of approximately 1.5% of GCSE reviews and 1.0% of GCSE grades challenged and changed. Removal of these qualifications from the 2017 data resulted in a drop of approximately 0.9% of GCSE reviews and 0.8% of GCSE grades challenged and changed.

The change in data collection has enabled Ofqual to conduct further analyses on reviews such as exploring patterns of review requests across subjects. These analyses are reported for the first time in this release. Corresponding data tables published separately will only report figures back to summer 2016 as this is when the data was first collected.

Data on the total number of GCSE and GCE unit/component entries and qualification certifications presented in Table 1 of the [data tables accompanying this release](#) is collected every exam series from exam boards in a separate data return. Data on the number of qualification certificates awarded in each subject presented in Table 7 and 8 was supplied by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) and is published in their [GCSE](#) and [AS and A level](#) results day reports.

Limitations

Reviews are conducted on individual assessments and so it is possible to request more than one review for a single qualification that a student has taken. It is therefore possible that, where more than one review has been requested for the same student and qualification, more than one service may have been used. For example, consider a student who has taken GCSE biology and whose school has decided to request a review for two assessments that the student has taken for this qualification. The school may decide to submit both assessments for a review of marking or they may decide to submit one assessment for an administrative error review and one assessment for a review of marking.

Breaking down the number of grades challenged and changed by service becomes problematic when schools submit more than one assessment for the same student and qualification to more than one review service. In the example given above, only one grade is challenged but two services are used to do so. Counting the grade challenged in both administrative error review and review of marking figures would mean double counting it, which would be incorrect. Therefore, in the breakdown of

reviews requested and grades challenged and changed by service, students who have had their grades challenged through more than one service have not been included in the grades challenged and changed figures. These students are however included in all other figures reported and Tables 5 and 6 in the data tables published along with the report include a breakdown of the number of grades challenged and changed through multiple services by exam board. This information is only available for 2016 and 2017 due to the different way in which data was collected previously as mentioned earlier. In previous years, the exam boards counted grades challenged and changed through multiple services in different ways but all allocated them to one service type so the figures for 2014 and 2015 are included within the different service types. Only a small number of grades challenged (1.3%) are challenged through more than one service.

When a review of moderation is requested for a unit by a centre, the exam boards provide us with data for all the students in the centre who took the unit, regardless of the outcome of the review. However, prior to summer 2017, if the review of moderation did not result in a change in outcome, WJEC only provided us with data for the sample of students whose work was initially moderated (and therefore re-moderated). If the review of moderation resulted in a change in outcome then they supplied us with data for all the students in the centre who took the unit. WJEC changed their reporting from summer 2017 onwards and now provide us with data for all students regardless of the outcome. This difference in reporting does not affect the number of reviews of moderation reported across years as these reviews are counted at centre level and not student level. However, it does affect the number of grades challenged – these figures will be lower for WJEC than the other exam boards for the years 2014 to 2016.

Ofqual cannot guarantee that the data sent are correct, although it expects exam boards to send correct data. Summary data is sent to exam boards for checking and confirmation. The figures reported in this release reflect the status of reviews at the data cut-off date - 10 November 2017. In previous years, the data cut-off date was a week later and so there may be a slight difference in the number of completed reviews reported due to the data being collected a week earlier this year.

Revisions

Once published, data are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or to correct an error.

Confidentiality and rounding

To ensure confidentiality of the published accompanying data, figures have been rounded to the nearest 5. If the value is less than 5, it is represented as 0~ and 0 represents zero reviews, grade challenges or grades changed.

As a result of rounded figures, the percentages (calculated on actual figures) shown in any tables may not necessarily add up to 100.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance procedures are carried out as explained in the [Quality Assurance Framework for Statistical Publications](#) published by Ofqual to ensure the accuracy of the data and to challenge or question it, where necessary. Ofqual continuously manages this process by:

- ensuring that data providers are clear about what is required of them – a process helped by ensuring that providers are fully consulted during the initial design phase and for any subsequent change;
- reminding all providers (if appropriate) that, as a condition of them being regulated, all data must be completely accurate;
- being alert to unexpected changes in the data submitted by comparing individual returns over time from the same provider;
- actively challenging any unexpected results with the data providers; and
- having a proportionate data-auditing framework in place, allowing for auditing of providers' information collection, collation and delivery processes as necessary.

The publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

Status

These statistics are classified as official statistics.

Related publications

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

- [Reviews of marking and moderation resulting in grade changes of two grades or more](#): this report published by Ofqual provides an overview of the data relating to qualification grade changes of 2 grades or more for GCSEs, AS, and A levels in England, in summer 2017.
- [GCSE and Equivalent Results in England 2016 to 2017](#) (Provisional): this Statistical First Release published by the Department for Education covers students' achievements in GCSEs and the equivalent regulated qualifications in schools at the end of key stage 4.
- [A Level and other 16 to 18 Results: 2016 to 2017](#) (Provisional): this Statistical First Release published by the Department for Education provides information on achievements in advanced level examinations.

Statistical policies

The [policies and procedures](#) that Ofqual follow for production and release of its statistical releases are available publicly.

Glossary

Definitions of important terms used in this release are [available online](#).

Useful links

The [report and data tables](#) accompanying this release are available separately.

Feedback

We welcome your feedback on our publications. Should you have any comments on this statistical release and how to improve it to meet your needs, please contact us at statistics@ofqual.gov.uk.

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us at publications@ofqual.gov.uk if you have any specific accessibility requirements.



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