

Background Information for: Perceptions of AS and A levels, GCSEs, and Applied General qualifications in England – Wave 19

An Ofqual commissioned report

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The logo for YouGov, featuring the word "YouGov" in a bold, red, sans-serif font. A small registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the top right of the letter "v".

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Introduction

Background

This document accompanies the findings of wave 19 (2020 to 2021) of the Perceptions Survey and should be read alongside the Perceptions of AS,A levels, GCSEs and Applied General qualifications in England – [wave 19 report](#). This project was commissioned by Ofqual and managed by YouGov. The design template for charts used in the report was provided by Ofqual.

Context

Ofqual regulates general and vocational qualifications in England. Ofqual collects and utilises insight on perceptions of qualifications and the qualifications system from the range of stakeholders that work with and use them.

Ofqual has continued (the survey was originally commissioned by the QCA in 2003) to annually assess teachers', parents', students', the general public's, employers' and higher education institutions (HEIs)' perceptions of the A level examination system and, since wave 4 (2005), perceptions of the GCSE system. Starting in wave 16 (2017), the research has also assessed perceptions of Applied General qualifications. This large-scale survey is unique in providing a wide overview of perceptions of general and other qualifications from the users of these qualifications.

The first part of the survey focussed on eight measures of confidence in the GCSE system, and AS and A level system. These measures, selected through data analysis by Ofqual¹, have all been asked in directly comparable ways since wave 13, and the current wave of the Perceptions Survey, allowing for comparisons of up to seven years to be made. Since wave 16, the survey was expanded to collect data on the same eight measures for Applied General qualifications as well. The data from these measures have been analysed collectively to form a composite measure of confidence in the GCSE, AS and A levels, and Applied General qualifications that can be tracked in future waves.

The second part of the survey asked a series of questions on different topics that covered questions on: the review of marking, moderation and appeals against results for GCSEs, and AS and A levels; special consideration and reasonable adjustments for GCSEs, and AS and A levels; malpractice for GCSEs, AS and A levels, and Applied General qualifications; appeals against results for Applied General qualifications; and innovations in administering assessments onscreen.

The outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the resulting lockdowns since March 2020 has had a multitude of impacts on the education sector in England. For significant parts of 2020, schools and colleges in England were shut down for most pupils, exceptions being vulnerable children and children of critical workers, and there was a shift to remote and online learning for almost all students. Given the unusual and unprecedented circumstances of the year, the summer 2020 exam series in England was cancelled. Students were awarded the grade their school or college estimated was the grade they would most likely have achieved in their exam (centre assessment grades) or a moderated grade, whichever was higher. Additionally, there was an exceptional Autumn

¹ See Appendix A for more details of this analysis

2020 exam series in order to allow individuals to sit an exam that had been due to take place in Summer 2020. Given the uniqueness of 2020, the survey included a 2020-specific section to gauge perceptions of GCSEs, AS and A levels, and Applied General Qualifications based solely on that year. Where the original perceptions questions were asked upfront in the survey, respondents were asked to think about each of these qualifications generally and were informed that a 2020 section would follow later in the survey. These modifications were made to strengthen our ability to track key measures over time despite this exceptional year.

Geographical coverage

Ofqual regulates general and vocational qualifications in England. The focus of this project was to gain the perceptions of head teachers², teachers, young people, parents, employers, HEIs and the general public in England. Samples of these groups were drawn from England.

Related statistics and publications

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

- [Statistics on key stage 4 results](#), including GCSEs published by the Department for Education
- [Statistics on the attainment of people aged 16 to 19 years](#), including exam results and performance tables published by the Department for Education

User feedback

Ofqual welcomes your comments or suggestions on this version of the Perceptions Survey and how to improve future versions. Please write to Ofqual at data.analytics@ofqual.gov.uk.

Project objectives

The objectives of the project were to investigate head teachers², teachers', students', parents', the general public's, employers' and HEIs':

- Overall, general perceptions and confidence in GCSE, AS and A level, and Applied General qualifications taken by young people; and
- Perceptions of a number of topical aspects of the qualifications system for GCSEs, AS and A levels, and Applied General qualifications'; and
- Perceptions of the qualifications system specific to 2020.

Methods and data limitations

Overview of method

Wave 19 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 since wave 13 (2014) of the Perceptions Survey.

² The head teachers sample consists of head teachers and deputy head teachers.

The fieldwork was conducted between 25th November and 22nd December 2020, which is a comparable fieldwork period to waves 15, 16, 17 and 18.

Sampling

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 A.

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

- 282 head teachers (including deputy head teachers³)
- 698 teachers of GCSE, A level and other academic⁴ and vocational qualifications⁵ offered to people aged 14 to 19 years (referred to throughout this report as teachers)
- 275 young people, defined as those aged 14 to 19 years who are studying and/or have studied and/or will study AS and A levels and/or GCSEs and/or an academic qualification defined as functional skills, Level 1/2 certificates (e.g. Pearson Level 1/2 BTECs and OCR Cambridge National Certificates), Level 3 tech levels (e.g. Pearson Level 3 BTECs and OCR Cambridge Technical Certificates) or Applied General qualifications
- 278 parents or carers of students who are taking or who have just taken AS and A levels, GCSEs and/or other academic qualifications described above
- 268 academic professionals⁶ 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)
- 258 senior or middle managers who worked for an organisation that has recruited young people (aged 16 to 25 years) in the past 12 months (referred to throughout this report as employers)
- 1,019 members of the public

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. While the sampling approach has aimed to identify groups of participants that are representative, given that a survey of this kind captures the views only of those involved, throughout this report, perceptions attributed to stakeholder groups (for example, teachers, parents etc.) are inferred from those who took part in the survey.

³ Collectively referred to throughout the report as head teachers.

⁴ Ofqual defines academic qualifications as qualifications that are assessed by formal examinations and moderated coursework.

⁵ Ofqual defines vocational qualifications as qualifications that are taught in schools and colleges that prepare students for a particular type of job.

⁶ This sample consisted of academics and a small number of admissions staff. Please see Appendix A for a description of the sample profile.

Survey design

The wave 19 survey was designed in conjunction with the YouGov project team. The survey covered themes explored in previous waves of the survey, namely, perceptions of qualifications and awareness of changes to the qualification system.

The design of the wave 19 survey was very similar to wave 18. A copy of the questions included in this wave of the Perceptions Survey is available in Appendix B.

As noted previously, however, the wave 19 survey included a 2020-specific section to gauge perceptions of the qualifications system based solely on that year and respondents were informed of this at the start of the survey. For this wave, a new introduction was added preceding the annual tracking questions letting respondents know that these questions related to their general perceptions and not to any specific exam series. The survey pilot phase was used as an opportunity to assess whether the addition of this introduction would impact our ability to compare results over time. To carry this out, the pilot survey sample was split so that half saw the new introduction and half did not. Although based on small samples, the pilot indicated that the new introduction did not have a significant bearing on the results.

Composite confidence measure

The first section of the report presents a composite confidence measure, which was developed as a means of quantifying overall confidence in GCSE, AS and A level, and Applied General qualifications, and exploring any changes over time.

Method

The composite confidence measure was calculated based on eight criteria: understanding, trust, maintenance of standards, preparation for further study, preparation for work, skill development, accuracy in marking, and value for money. The first seven criteria have been measured since wave 14, while ‘value for money’ was measured for the first time in wave 17.

These criteria were presented to respondents as eight separate statements within a scale-based question, which ranged from strong agreement to strong disagreement. These questions were asked separately for GCSE, AS and A level, and Applied General qualifications. Based on respondents’ selections, responses were assigned a score between 1 and 5 for each of the eight criteria. ‘Don’t know’ responses were excluded from the calculation. The scoring system is detailed below.

- Strongly agree = 5
- Agree = 4
- Neither agree nor disagree = 3
- Disagree = 2
- Strongly disagree = 1

Next, an average of the individual scores for the eight criteria was calculated for each respondent, which represents the overall confidence measure. This was done separately for GCSE, AS and A level, and Applied General qualifications.

Finally, an average of the overall scores for all respondents was calculated to produce one confidence measure per stakeholder, for each of GCSE, AS and A level, and Applied General qualifications. An average of these stakeholder confidence measures was produced to give an overall confidence measure. This method has been applied to the data since wave 13 and allows the comparison of confidence levels over time. The current survey compares overall confidence levels over the five most recent waves of the Perceptions Survey.

Guidance on analysis

The survey was undertaken with seven different sample groups. These data have been combined into one 'All' group referred to as 'stakeholders' in the text of this report. Data for each sample group have been combined and weighted so that each group represents an equal proportion within the 'stakeholder' group.

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 intention of this report is to summarise the main themes in the data and not produce a full replication of the entire data collected.

Percentages are typically described throughout the report as number of out ten (e.g. three in ten stakeholders). However, instances where a percentage figure falls roughly evenly in between two factors of ten (e.g. 25%), a more accurate description has been adopted (e.g. one quarter) or it is simply written as is without an accompanying descriptor.

Reported differences are based on statistical significance testing as tested at the 95% confidence level. Whenever a difference between waves or groups within the sample is reported, this refers to a statistically significant difference. Additionally, where an apparent shift over the time period between waves 15 and 19 has not been addressed in the commentary or the charts, this is due to it not being a statistically significant difference between the two waves.

For the charts reporting proportions of 'Agree' and 'Disagree' responses, 'Don't know' responses are not included in the figure. As such, proportions may not add up to 100%.

Section-specific background information

Section 1: Perceptions of the qualifications system in 2020

All stakeholders were asked to report their levels of agreement with five of the statements used in the composite confidence measure with regards to GCSE, AS and A level, and Applied General qualifications in 2020: understanding, trust, maintenance of standards, preparation for further study and preparation for work. The section compares these 2020-specific levels of agreement with the same measures for the qualifications in general. The section also explores perceptions of appeals against results and malpractice thinking specifically about 2020 and how this compared to general perceptions.

Section 2: Composite confidence measure of qualifications in general

Measures of Stakeholder confidence were calculated separately for GCSEs, AS/A Levels and Applied General qualifications. All stakeholders were asked to report their levels of agreement with eight statements for GCSE, AS/A level, and Applied General qualifications in general relating to: understanding, trust, maintenance of standards, preparation for further study, preparation for work, skill development, accuracy in marking, and value for money. The composite confidence measure was calculated based on stakeholders' levels of agreement with the eight statements.

Section 3: General perceptions of GCSEs

All stakeholders were asked to report their levels of agreement with the eight statements used in the composite confidence measure with regards to GCSE qualifications in general.

Section 4: General perceptions of AS and A levels

All stakeholders were asked to report their levels of agreement with the eight statements used in the composite confidence measure with regards to AS and A level qualifications in general.

Section 5: General perceptions of Applied General qualifications

All stakeholders were asked to report their levels of agreement with the eight statements used in the composite confidence measure with regards to Applied General qualifications in general.

Section 6: The review of marking and moderation, and appeals against GCSEs, and AS and A levels

A range of post-results services are currently available to schools and colleges who have concerns about the marks awarded to their students. These services include a clerical check, a review of marking/moderation, and access to marked scripts for some qualifications. If a centre or private candidate is not happy with the outcomes of the review of marking or moderation, they can submit an appeal for these results. Collectively these services are called Reviews of Marking and Moderation, and Appeals (ROMMA).

Section 7: Special consideration and reasonable adjustments for GCSE, and AS and A level qualifications

[Special consideration](#) is an adjustment to the way in which an examination or assessment is taken, or a post-exam adjustment to a student's mark or grade to reflect temporary injury, illness or other indisposition at the time of the exam/assessment.

Awarding organisations have a duty to make [reasonable adjustments](#) for disabled⁷ students taking their qualifications and are made in cases where a student who is disabled would be at a substantial

⁷ Being disabled under the Equality Act 2010 is defined as having a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on the ability to do normal daily activities.

disadvantage in comparison with someone who is not disabled in an assessment. An example of this would be providing a Braille paper.

Those head teachers and teachers who teach GCSEs, or AS or A levels were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with statements about special consideration and reasonable adjustments for GCSEs, and AS and A levels.

Section 8: Malpractice for GCSE, and AS and A level qualifications

Any breach of the regulations that might undermine the integrity of an exam constitutes [malpractice](#). Those head teachers and teachers who teach GCSEs, or AS or A levels were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with statements about malpractice for GCSEs, and AS and A levels.

Section 9: Appeals against results for Applied General qualifications

Like for GCSE, and AS, and A level qualifications, if a centre or private candidate is not happy about the results of a review of marking or moderation for Applied General qualifications they can submit an appeal for these results.

Section 10: Malpractice for Applied General qualifications

Like for GCSE, and AS and A level qualifications, any breach of the regulations that might undermine the integrity of an exam constitutes [malpractice](#). Those head teachers and teachers who teach Applied General qualifications were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with statements about malpractice for Applied General qualifications.

Section 11: Innovations

This section explores innovations in the role technology might have in assessments. In particular, stakeholders are asked about their views regarding assessments administered onscreen (e.g. exams taken on screen rather than using pen and paper).

Glossary

Applied General qualifications:

‘Applied General’ is a term used to describe a range of level 3 qualifications that meet DfE requirements for performance tables. These include, but are not restricted to, Pearson BTEC Level 3 Applied qualifications and OCR Cambridge Level 3 Applied Certificates.

Base size:

The number of respondents answering the question.

Effective base:

When sampling is undertaken, it creates a ‘design effect’ that can impact upon 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:

Ofqual defines academic qualifications as qualifications that are assessed by formal examinations and moderated coursework. These include GCSE, and AS and A level qualifications.

Marking:

The process of giving a student appropriate credit for their responses according to the requirements set out in a mark scheme.

Sample frame:

The way that the sample population is structured before recruiting a sample for the survey is drawn.

Statistically significant:

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

Vocational and technical qualifications:

This term encompasses qualifications that are not ‘general’. These normally have a more vocational focus, and can include qualifications designed to support the development of practical skills in English, maths and ICT (functional skills qualifications) as well as technical, professional or occupational qualifications.

Weighting:

The process of correcting for imbalances in the sample to accurately reflect the composition of the population being surveyed.

Appendix A – Technical report

Appendix A outlines the composition of the achieved sampling and additional information on the methods used in wave 19.

A table for each sample group is included in this appendix breaking down the achieved unweighted samples by key characteristics. 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.

Head teachers and teachers sample

Sample coverage

The sample was designed to be a representative sample of head teachers or deputy head teachers and teachers of AS and 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 represented establishments teaching qualifications for people aged 14 to 19 years, only certain types of schools and colleges were eligible for the survey. Eligible types of schools and colleges matched the definitions used in previous years of the survey. That is, secondary and middle-deemed-secondary schools, academies teaching key stage 4 and/or post-16, independent schools teaching key stage 4 and/or post-16, and post-16 institutions.

Sample frame

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

1. Education Company contact database

Firstly, contacts in schools were drawn from the Education Company's database of publicly available education sector contacts. This list is the most accurate and comprehensive education dataset available anywhere in the UK. It contains over 5 million education data profiles, including 400,000 named teachers and lecturers, and details and profiles of more than 100,000 schools.

The Education Company's database was used 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 contains named contacts with generic school email addresses. This allowed the survey to be targeted at specific subject teachers in the specified schools.

2. YouGov Panel

The survey was also conducted using teachers and head teachers registered to the YouGov panel, who have consented to participate in surveys with YouGov. A quota sampling approach was used on 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 based upon [official government statistics on the school and teacher population](#). The sample frame was stratified by the following variables:

- School type (maintained, academy, special school, pupil-referral unit (PRU), independent)
- English region

To maintain consistency with the sampling approach used since wave 13 of the Perceptions survey two samples were drawn that differed in characteristics between the head teacher sample and the teacher 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 the sampling design for the teacher survey took account of the number of teachers working in each school or establishment.

Using the Education Company database, a stratified random 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 Company database.

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

Alongside the sample drawn from the Education Company database a random sample of 4,000 head teachers and teachers from the YouGov panel was contacted to take part in the survey. 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 1 for teachers and Table 2 for headteachers. Alongside this the weighted base and weight factors applied are also shown.

Table 1: Achieved sample size for teachers by school type

School type	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Local Authority maintained school	116	98	0.5	1.2
Academy	331	335	0.6	1.3
Independent school	113	126	0.7	1.6
FE college/ sixth form	109	126	0.7	1.5
Other	29	14	0.3	0.6

Table 2: Achieved sample size for head teachers by school type

School type	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Local Authority maintained school	62	48	0.5	1.0
Academy	150	169	0.8	1.5
Independent school	11	39	2.5	5.0
FE college/ sixth form	42	17	0.3	0.5
Other	17	8	0.4	0.6

There was a slightly lower response from head teachers in independent schools than in recent waves. Although this group was boosted as much as possible through the YouGov panel, we needed to adjust for their representation with weighting more than for other variables. As a result, the weighting efficiency was slightly lower for head teachers in comparison with other stakeholder groups, although still within an acceptable range.

Public, parents and young people’s samples

Sample coverage

The public, young people and parents samples were drawn from the YouGov online panel of over 1 million adults who have consented to participate in surveys with YouGov.

Three distinct samples were drawn. These were:

1. A nationally representative survey sample of adults aged 16 years or over 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-economical classification.
2. A survey sample of young people aged 14 to 19 years who were just about to take, were currently taking or had recently taken AS, A levels and/or GCSEs and/or an academic qualification defined as functional skills, Level 1/2 certificates, Level 3 tech levels or Applied General qualifications - this was sampled to be representative of England by gender, age within the age range and region using England representative statistics.
3. A survey sample of parents/carers of young people who met the ‘student’ criteria defined above - this was sampled to be representative of parents by gender, social-economical classification and English region.

Sample frame

The samples of members of the public, parents’ and young people were drawn from the YouGov panel. Over the last nineteen years, YouGov has carefully recruited a panel of over 1 million 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 young people samples by key characteristics and associated weighting factors is shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

Table 3: Summary of achieved public sample and weighting scheme by region

Region	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
North East	49	51	0.9	1.2
North West	131	132	0.8	1.2
Yorkshire and the Humber	101	102	0.8	1.2
East Midlands	89	92	0.9	1.2
West Midlands	116	102	0.7	1.0
East of England	114	112	0.8	1.2
London	157	163	0.9	1.3
South East	168	163	0.8	1.2
South West	94	102	0.9	1.3

Table 4: Summary of achieved public sample and weighting scheme by age and gender

Age and gender	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Male 16-24	70	69	0.8	1.1
Male 25-39	115	127	0.9	1.2
Male 40-54	137	122	0.7	1.0
Male 55+	161	181	0.9	1.3
Female 16-24	73	65	0.7	1.0
Female 25-39	138	127	0.8	1.0
Female 40-54	132	125	0.8	1.1
Female 55+	193	203	0.9	1.2

Table 5: Summary of achieved public sample and weighting scheme by social-economical classification

Social-economical classification	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
ABC1	567	550	0.7	1.2
C2DE	452	469	0.8	1.3

Table 6: Summary of achieved parents sample weighting scheme by region

Region	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
North East	14	14	0.9	1.1
North West	35	36	0.9	1.2
Yorkshire and the Humber	28	28	0.9	1.1
East Midlands	23	25	1.0	1.3
West Midlands	35	31	0.8	1.0
East of England	33	31	0.8	1.0
London	41	42	0.9	1.2
South East	45	44	0.9	1.1
South West	24	28	1.1	1.4

Table 7: Summary of achieved parents sample weighting scheme by gender

Gender	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Male	125	136	0.9	1.4
Female	153	142	0.8	1.1

Table 8: Summary of achieved parents sample weighting scheme by social-economical classification

Social-economical classification	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
ABC1	151	150	0.8	1.4
C2DE	127	128	0.8	1.4

Table 9: Summary of achieved young people sample and weighting scheme by region

Region	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
North East	14	14	0.7	1.1
North West	33	36	0.8	1.3
Yorkshire and the Humber	29	28	0.7	1.1
East Midlands	28	25	0.7	1.1
West Midlands	27	30	0.9	1.4
East of England	31	30	0.8	1.2
London	37	41	0.9	1.3
South East	46	44	0.7	1.1
South West	30	28	0.7	1.1

Table 10: Summary of achieved young people sample and weighting scheme by gender

Gender	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Male	134	137	0.8	1.4
Female	141	138	0.7	1.3

Table 11: Summary of achieved young people sample and weighting scheme by age

Age	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Aged 14 to 15 years	113	92	0.7	1.0
Aged 16 to 17 years	82	92	0.9	1.3
Aged 18 to 19 years	80	92	1.0	1.4

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 years 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 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 5 below.

Table 12: Summary of achieved employer sample and weighting scheme by size

Size	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
2-9 employees	23	37	1.6	1.8
10-49 employees	42	37	0.9	1.0
50-99 employees	18	18	1.0	1.1
100-249 employees	27	18	0.7	0.7
250+ employees	148	147	1.0	1.1

Table 13: Summary of achieved employer sample and weighting scheme by sector

Sector	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Private sector	194	195	0.7	1.6
Public sector	46	44	0.7	1.0
Third/voluntary sector	18	18	0.7	1.8

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 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 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 6 below.

Table 14: Summary of achieved HEI sample and weighting scheme by size

Size	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Russell group	75	51	0.7	0.7
Other old	40	48	1.2	1.2
Post 1992/New	119	133	1.1	1.1
Other HEI	34	36	1.1	1.1

Appendix B – Survey

The following questions relate to your perceptions of GCSEs, A levels and Applied General qualifications **in general**, and not specific to any exam series. Note that there is a separate section on 2020 after these questions.

Perceptions of A level qualifications

This first section asks about your perceptions of AS/A level qualifications.

Question type: *Grid*

[q4] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [q4_1] AS/A levels are well understood by people
- [q4_2] AS/A levels are trusted qualifications
- [q4_3] AS/A level standards are maintained year-on-year
- [q4_4] AS/A levels are good preparation for further study
- [q4_5] AS/A levels are good preparation for work
- [q4_6] AS/A levels develop a broad range of skills for students
- [q4_7] The marking of AS/A levels is accurate

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
 - <2> Agree
 - <3> Neither agree nor disagree
 - <4> Disagree
 - <5> Strongly disagree
 - <98> Don't know
-

Schools and colleges paid the exam boards around £60 per student for each AS qualification, and around £100 per student for each A Level qualification (Source: Ofqual 2020).

Question type: *Grid*

[q4_new] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Statement

- [q4_new_1] AS/A levels offer “value for money”

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree

- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know

Perceptions of GCSE qualifications

This section asks about your perceptions of GCSE qualifications.

Question type: *Grid*

[q6] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [q6_1] GCSEs are well understood by people
- [q6_2] GCSEs are trusted qualifications
- [q6_3] GCSE standards are maintained year-on-year
- [q6_4] GCSEs are good preparation for further study
- [q6_5] GCSEs are good preparation for work
- [q6_6] GCSEs develop a broad range of skills for students
- [q6_7] The marking of GCSEs is accurate

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know

Schools and colleges paid the exam boards around £40 per student for each GCSE qualification (Source: Ofqual 2020).

Question type: *Grid*

[q6_new] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Statement

- [q6_new_1] GCSEs offer “value for money”

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
 - <2> Agree
 - <3> Neither agree nor disagree
 - <4> Disagree
 - <5> Strongly disagree
 - <98> Don't know
-

Question type: *Single*

[q_review1_new] Are you aware that there is a process of reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals for GCSE and AS/A level results?

Answer options

- <1> Yes
 - <2> No
-

The following questions are about the process of reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals for GCSEs and AS/A level results.

A range of post-results services are currently available to schools and colleges who have concerns about the marks awarded to their learners. These services include a clerical check, a review of marking and access to marked scripts for some qualifications.

Question type: *Dyngrid*

If [q_review1_new] - Yes is selected [if q_review1_new == 1]

[q_review2] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [q_review2_1] The process of reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals for GCSE results is fair
- [q_review2_2] The process of reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals for AS/A level results is fair

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know

Question type: *Single*

If [q_review1_new] - Yes is selected [if q_review1_new == 1]

[Q_review3_dynamic_new] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Statement

- [Q_review3_dynamic_new_1] I have adequate information about the process of reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals for GCSE and AS/A level results

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
 - <2> Agree
 - <3> Neither agree nor disagree
 - <4> Disagree
 - <5> Strongly disagree
 - <98> Don't know
-

The following questions are about special considerations and reasonable adjustments for GCSEs and AS/A levels.

Question type: *Dyngrid*

Base: *Teachers and head teachers who teach GCSEs or AS/A levels*

[GQ1] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Please click on the icon if you want to see an explanation. Please click the icon again to remove the explanation)

Statements

- [GQ1_1] I have adequate information about the arrangements that are available for a GCSE or AS/A level student who is eligible for special consideration
- [GQ1_2] In the current special consideration system, the right arrangements are made for the right GCSE and AS/A level students
- [GQ1_3] Special consideration makes the qualification system fairer for all GCSE and AS/A level students
- [GQ1_4] I have adequate information about the adjustments that are available for a GCSE or AS/A level disabled student who is eligible for reasonable adjustments
- [GQ1_5] Currently, the right reasonable adjustments are made for the right GCSE and AS/A level disabled students

- [GQ1_6] Reasonable adjustments make the qualification system fairer for all GCSE and AS/A level students

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know

The following questions are about malpractice in GCSEs and AS/A levels.

Question type: *Dyngrid*

Base: *Teachers and head teachers who teach GCSEs or AS/A levels*

[GQ2] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [GQ2_1] I have adequate information about what constitutes malpractice for GCSEs and AS/A levels
- [GQ2_2] I know to whom I should report an incident of malpractice for GCSEs and AS/A levels
- [GQ2_3] I am confident that incidents of malpractice are fairly investigated for GCSEs and AS/A levels
- [GQ2_4] I am confident malpractice is properly reported when it happens in GCSEs and AS/A levels

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know

The next few questions are about Applied General qualifications.

Applied General qualifications include, but are not restricted to, Pearson BTEC Level 3 Applied qualifications and OCR Cambridge Level 3 Applied Certificates. They are taught in schools and colleges at level 3 (key stage 5) and are identified by the Department for Education as 'Applied Generals' for the purpose of performance table reporting.

Question type: *Grid*

[Q8] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [Q8_1] Applied General qualifications are well understood by people
- [Q8_2] Applied General qualifications are trusted qualifications
- [Q8_3] Applied General qualifications standards are maintained year-on-year
- [Q8_4] Applied General qualifications are good preparation for further study
- [Q8_5] Applied General qualifications are good preparation for work
- [Q8_6] Applied General qualifications develop a broad range of skills for students
- [Q8_7] The marking of Applied General qualifications is accurate

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know

Schools and colleges paid the exam boards on average, around £150 per student for each Applied General qualification (Source: Ofqual 2020).

Question type: *Grid*

[q8_new] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Statement

- [q8_new_1] Applied General qualifications offer “value for money”

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
 - <2> Agree
 - <3> Neither agree nor disagree
 - <4> Disagree
 - <5> Strongly disagree
 - <98> Don't know
-

Question type: *Single*

Base: Teachers and head teachers who teach Applied General qualifications in schools or colleges

[Q9] Are you aware of the appeals against results process for Applied General qualifications in schools and colleges?

Answer options

- <1> Yes
- <2> No

The following questions are about appeals against results in Applied General qualifications.

Question type: *Grid*

If [Q9] - Yes is selected [if Q9 == 1]

[Q10] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [Q10_1] I have adequate information about the appeals against results process for Applied General qualifications taught in schools and colleges
- [Q10_2] I am confident that appeals are dealt with fairly for Applied General qualifications in schools and colleges

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know

The following questions are about malpractice in Applied General qualifications.

Question type: *Dyngrid*

Base: Teachers and head teachers who teach Applied General qualifications in schools or colleges

[Q11] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [Q11_1] I have adequate information about what constitutes malpractice for Applied General qualifications taught in schools and colleges
- [Q11_2] I know to whom I should report an incident of malpractice for Applied General qualifications taught in schools and colleges
- [Q11_3] I am confident that incidents of malpractice for Applied General qualifications taught in schools and colleges are fairly investigated
- [Q11_4] I am confident malpractice is properly reported when it happens in Applied General qualifications taught in schools and colleges

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know

The following questions are about examinations taken onscreen (as opposed to traditional pen and paper exams).

Question type: *Dyngrid*

[Q12] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [Q12_1] Onscreen examinations (e.g. exams taken on a computer) in GCSE and AS/A level qualifications would be *_fairer for students_* than existing pen and paper examinations
- [Q12_2] Onscreen examinations (e.g. exams taken on a computer) in GCSE and AS/A level qualifications would be *_more manageable for schools and colleges_* than existing pen and paper examinations

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree

- <98> Don't know
-

The following questions relate to your perceptions of GCSEs, A levels and Applied General qualifications since schools and colleges in England were shut down in response to the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020.

The summer 2020 exam series in England was cancelled due to the measures put in place in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Students were awarded the grade their school or college estimated was the grade they would most likely have achieved in their exam (centre assessment grades) or a moderated grade, whichever was higher.

Additionally, there is an exceptional Autumn 2020 exam series which will take place in order to allow individuals to sit an exam that had been due to take place in Summer 2020.

Perceptions of A level qualifications

This section asks again about your perceptions of AS/A level qualifications. For this part of the survey, please think specifically about perceptions you have had between March 2020 and now.

Question type: Grid

[q4_2020] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [q4_2020_1] AS/A levels in 2020 were well understood by people
- [q4_2020_2] AS/A levels in 2020 were trusted qualifications
- [q4_2020_3] AS/A level standards were maintained in 2020
- [q4_2020_4] AS/A levels in 2020 were good preparation for further study
- [q4_2020_5] AS/A levels in 2020 were good preparation for work

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know

Perceptions of GCSE qualifications

This section asks again about your perceptions of GCSE qualifications. For this part of the survey, please think specifically about perceptions you have had between March 2020 and now.

Question type: *Grid*

[q6_2020] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [q6_2020_1] GCSEs in 2020 were well understood by people
- [q6_2020_2] GCSEs in 2020 were trusted qualifications
- [q6_2020_3] GCSE standards were maintained in 2020
- [q6_2020_4] GCSEs in 2020 were good preparation for further study
- [q6_2020_5] GCSEs in 2020 were good preparation for work

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
 - <2> Agree
 - <3> Neither agree nor disagree
 - <4> Disagree
 - <5> Strongly disagree
 - <98> Don't know
-

Question type: *Single*

[q_review1_2020] The appeals process for GCSE and AS/A level results was different from usual in 2020. There was no Reviews of Marking/Moderation stage this year. The appeals process was the only way for students or centres to get their results reconsidered if they were not satisfied with their grades. Were you aware that this was the appeals against results process in place for GCSE and AS/A level results in 2020?

Answer options

- <1> Yes
 - <2> No
-

The following questions are about the appeals against results process for GCSEs and AS/A levels in 2020. Please think specifically about perceptions you have had between March 2020 and now.

Question type: *Dyngrid*

If [q_review1_2020] - Yes is selected [if q_review1_2020 == 1]

[q_review2_2020] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [q_review2_2020_1] The appeals against results process for GCSEs in 2020 was fair
- [q_review2_2020_2] The appeals against results process for AS/A levels in 2020 was fair

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
 - <2> Agree
 - <3> Neither agree nor disagree
 - <4> Disagree
 - <5> Strongly disagree
 - <98> Don't know
-

Question type: *Single*

If [q_review1_2020] - Yes is selected [if q_review1_2020 == 1]

[Q_review3_dynamic_2020] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Statement

- I had adequate information about the appeals against results process for GCSEs and AS/A levels in 2020

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
 - <2> Agree
 - <3> Neither agree nor disagree
 - <4> Disagree
 - <5> Strongly disagree
 - <98> Don't know
-

The following questions are about malpractice in GCSEs and AS/A levels in 2020, as the types of malpractice in 2020 differed from usual. Please think specifically about perceptions you have had between March 2020 and now.

Question type: *Dyngrid*

Base: *Teachers and head teachers who teach GCSEs or AS/A levels*

[GQ2_2020] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [GQ2_2020_1] I had adequate information about what constituted malpractice for GCSEs and AS/A levels in 2020
- [GQ2_2020_3] I was confident that incidents of malpractice were fairly investigated for GCSEs and AS/A levels in 2020
- [GQ2_2020_4] I was confident malpractice was properly reported when it happened in GCSEs and AS/A levels in 2020

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know

The next few questions are about Applied General qualifications. Please think specifically about perceptions you have had between March 2020 and now.

Applied General qualifications include, but are not restricted to, Pearson BTEC Level 3 Applied qualifications and OCR Cambridge Level 3 Applied Certificates. They are taught in schools and colleges at level 3 (key stage 5) and are identified by the Department for Education as 'Applied Generals' for the purpose of performance table reporting.

Question type: *Grid*

[Q8_2020] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [Q8_2020_1] Applied General qualifications in 2020 were well understood by people
- [Q8_2020_2] Applied General qualifications in 2020 were trusted qualifications
- [Q8_2020_3] Applied General qualifications standards were maintained in 2020
- [Q8_2020_4] Applied General qualifications in 2020 were good preparation for further study
- [Q8_2020_5] Applied General qualifications in 2020 were good preparation for work

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree

- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know

Question type: *Single*

Base: *Teachers and head teachers who teach GCSEs or AS/A levels*

[Q9_2020] The appeals process for Applied General qualifications results was different than usual in 2020. There was no Reviews of Marking/Moderation stage this year. The appeals process was the only way for students or centres to get their results reconsidered if they were not satisfied with their grades. Were you aware that this was the appeals against results process in place for Applied General qualifications in 2020?

Answer options

- <1> Yes
- <2> No

The following questions are about appeals against results in Applied General qualifications in 2020. Please think specifically about perceptions you have had between March 2020 and now.

Question type: *Grid*

If [Q9_2020] - Yes is selected [if Q9_2020 == 1]

[Q10_2020] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [Q10_2020_1] I had adequate information about the appeals against results process for Applied General qualifications in 2020
- [Q10_2020_2] I was confident that appeals were dealt with fairly for Applied General qualifications in 2020

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know

The following questions are about malpractice in Applied General qualifications in 2020, as the types of malpractice in 2020 differed from usual. Please think specifically about perceptions you have had between March 2020 and now.

Question type: *Dyngrid*

Base: *Teachers and head teachers who teach Applied General qualifications in schools or colleges*

[Q11_2020] To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statements

- [Q11_2020_1] I had adequate information about what constituted malpractice for Applied General qualifications in 2020
- [Q11_2020_3] I was confident that incidents of malpractice for Applied General qualifications were fairly investigated in 2020
- [Q11_2020_4] I was confident malpractice was properly reported when it happened in Applied General qualifications in 2020

Answer options

- <1> Strongly agree
- <2> Agree
- <3> Neither agree nor disagree
- <4> Disagree
- <5> Strongly disagree
- <98> Don't know