

Background Information for:
Perceptions of A levels, GCSEs, and
Applied General qualifications in England
– Wave 22

An Ofqual commissioned report

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Introduction

Background

This report accompanies the findings of wave 22 (2023 to 2024) of the General Qualifications Perceptions Survey and should be read alongside the [Perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and Applied General qualifications in England – wave 22](#) report. This project was commissioned by Ofqual and managed by YouGov.

Context

Ofqual regulates general and vocational and technical qualifications in England. Ofqual monitors perceptions of qualifications and the qualifications system from the range of stakeholders that work with and use the qualifications.

Ofqual has collected stakeholders’ perceptions of the AS and A level qualification system and, since wave 4 (2005), perceptions of the GCSE system.¹ This included surveying: head teachers², teachers, parents, young people, the general public, employers, and higher education institutions (HEIs). Starting in wave 16 (2017), the survey has also collected perceptions of Applied General qualifications. From wave 20 (2021), the reference to AS was removed due to small and declining entry numbers for AS qualifications. This large-scale survey is unique in providing a wide overview of perceptions of general and Applied General qualifications from the users of these qualifications.

The first part of the survey focussed on eight measures of confidence in GCSE and A level qualifications. Since wave 16, the survey was expanded to collect data on the same eight measures for Applied General qualifications. The data from these measures have been analysed collectively to form a composite measure of confidence in GCSE, A level, and Applied General qualifications that can be tracked in future waves. The questions related to these measures have all been asked in directly comparable ways since wave 13, allowing for trends over time to be monitored. The previous 5 years of data (waves 18 to 22) are reported in the wave 22 report.

The second part of the survey asked a series of questions on different topics covering: the review of marking, moderation and appeals against results³ for GCSEs and A levels

¹ The survey was originally commissioned by the QCA in 2003

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

³ Hereafter known as ‘the appeals process’

special consideration and reasonable adjustments for GCSEs and A levels

malpractice for GCSEs, A levels, and Applied General qualifications

appeals against results for Applied General qualifications

access to marked exam scripts (from 2023)

administering assessments onscreen

Geographical coverage

Ofqual regulates general and vocational and technical qualifications in England. The focus of this survey was to collect the perceptions of head teachers, teachers, parents, young people, the general public, employers and HEIs 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

[Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications in England](#)

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.

Survey objectives

The objectives of the survey were to investigate head teachers', teachers', young people's', parents', the general public's, employers', and HEIs' overall perceptions and confidence in GCSE, A level, and Applied General qualifications. Additionally, the survey investigated perceptions of a number of topical aspects of the qualifications system for GCSEs, A levels, and Applied General qualifications

Methods and data limitations

Overview of method

Wave 22 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).

The fieldwork was conducted between 8 November and 13 December 2023, which is a comparable fieldwork period to waves 16 to 21.

Sampling

The sampling of participants was designed with a view of achieving respondent samples that were representative of the wider population. Full 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:

278 head teachers (including deputy head teachers)

689 teachers of GCSE, A level and other and vocational and technical qualifications⁴ offered to people aged 14 to 19 years (referred to throughout this report as teachers)

267 young people, defined as those aged 14 to 19 years who are studying and/or have studied and/or will study A levels and/or GCSEs and/or a qualification such as functional skills, Level 1/2 certificates (for example, Pearson Level 1/2 BTECs and OCR Cambridge National Certificates), Level 3 tech levels or Applied General qualifications (for example, Pearson Level 3 BTECs and OCR L3 Cambridge Technical Certificates)

258 parents or carers of young people who are taking or who have just taken GCSEs, A levels and/or other qualifications described above

272 academic professionals⁵ who are involved in or have knowledge about the process of offering applicants a place on an undergraduate course at their institution (referred to throughout this report as HEIs)

254 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)

1,039 members of the public

The final achieved samples were structured to be representative of the relevant target populations (a full breakdown of the quotas and weighting can be found in Appendix A). We therefore conclude that, in meeting the sampling procedures, the samples delivered for head teachers, teachers, the general public, parents, young people, 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.

Survey design

The wave 22 survey was designed by Ofqual and YouGov. The survey covered themes explored in previous waves of the survey, namely, perceptions of qualifications and awareness of changes to the qualification system.

⁴ Ofqual defines vocational qualifications as qualifications that are taught in schools and colleges that prepare students for a particular type of job.

⁵ This sample consisted of academics and a small number of admissions staff. Please see Appendix A for a description of the sample profile.

The design of the wave 22 survey was very similar to wave 21. In wave 22 three new questions were added to the survey to investigate perceptions of the access to marked exam scripts provision. A copy of the questions included in wave 22 of the Perceptions Survey is available in Appendix B.

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, A level, and Applied General qualifications, and exploring any changes over time.

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, with responses that ranged from strong agreement to strong disagreement. These questions were asked separately for GCSE, 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, 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, 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 stakeholder groups. These data have been combined into one ‘All’ group referred to as ‘stakeholders’ or ‘respondents’ 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.

Responses to the questions in the survey are described throughout the report as a number out of ten (for example three in ten stakeholders), a more accurate description (for example one quarter of stakeholders), or a percentage figure (for example 25% or twenty five percent of stakeholders).

Reported differences are based on statistical significance testing as tested at the 95% confidence level. Throughout the report, all differences in findings between waves have been significance tested. Unless specified otherwise, all changes in this report are statistically significant. If a change is not statistically significant but may appear interesting or indicates a trend over time, it is also mentioned in the commentary but is noted as non-statistically significant. Any non-significant differences or other apparent differences in the data are within the margin of error, possibly due to smaller sample sizes, and so cannot be viewed as a change from the previous wave(s).

Margin of error for each figure has been included as error bars within the charts throughout the report. The margin of error is obtained from the product between the standard error of each variable and the critical score associated with them. A different procedure has been used for binary variables and those recorded on a five-point scale. For the critical scores we used a 5% two-tailed confidence level.

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: Composite confidence measure of qualifications

Measures of stakeholder confidence were calculated separately for GCSE, A level, and Applied General qualifications. All stakeholders were asked to report their levels of agreement with eight statements for GCSE, A level, and Applied General qualifications in general. The statements referred 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 2: 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 3: General perceptions of 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 A level qualifications in general.

Section 4: 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 5: Access to marked exam scripts in GCSEs and A levels

Teachers and head teachers can request access to marked exam scripts for GCSE and A level exams. This is a copy of the marked exam paper that can be used to decide whether to request a review of marking or a clerical re-check. Teachers and head teachers were asked whether they had used this service and, if so, their perceptions of it.

For the charts reporting proportions of ‘Helpful’ and ‘Not helpful’ responses, ‘Don’t know’ responses are not included in the figure. As such, proportions may not add up to 100%.

Section 6: Reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals against results for GCSEs and A levels

A range of [post-results services](#) are available to schools and colleges who have concerns about the results awarded to their students. These services include a clerical check, a review of marking and moderation. If a centre or private candidate is dissatisfied with the result of a review of marking or moderation, or if they wish to contest the outcome of a reasonable adjustment or special consideration request or a malpractice decision, they can submit an [appeal](#) for these results. Collectively, these services are called Reviews of Marking and Moderation and Appeals.

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

[Special consideration](#) is where additional marks are allocated to a student’s mark or grade to reflect temporary injury, illness, or other indisposition at the time of the exam or assessment. It can also be given when a student misses a timetabled assessment for acceptable reasons, when an adjustment may be made to the grade.

Awarding organisations have a duty to make [reasonable adjustments](#) for disabled⁶ students taking their qualifications and are made in cases where a student who is disabled would be at a substantial 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 A levels were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with statements about special consideration and reasonable adjustments for GCSEs and A levels.

⁶ 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.

Section 8: Malpractice for GCSE 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 A levels were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with statements about malpractice for GCSEs and A levels.

Section 9: Appeals against results for Applied General qualifications

Like for GCSE and A level qualifications, if a centre or private candidate has concerns about the result 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 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: Onscreen examinations

This section explores innovations in the role technology might have in assessments. In particular, stakeholders are asked about their views regarding assessments administered onscreen (for example, exams taken onscreen 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 National Extended Certificate qualifications and OCR Level 3 Cambridge Technical Extended Certificate.

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 qualifications:

There are a variety of general qualifications including the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A level).

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 22.

Weighting

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 shown in the tables details the number of completed surveys before any weighting took place. Comparatively, the weighted base shown in the tables details 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.

Weighting adjusts the contribution of individual respondents to aggregated figures and is used to make surveyed populations more representative of a project-relevant, and typically larger, population by forcing it to mimic the distribution of that larger population's significant characteristics, or its size. The weighting tasks happen at the end of the data processing phase on cleaned data.

When standard weighting variables such as gender are used to reweight the achieved sample back to target profiles, a simple weighting factor is created for each record. This weighting factor is a decimal number, such as 1.0 or 1.2 or 0.5. It is calculated by dividing the target proportion required by the actual proportion from the achieved sample data. The weight factor is used as a multiplier for each respondent during aggregation to determine their weighted contribution.

A weight of 1 occurs when the respondent (and respondents with the same profile) exactly reflect our target (we have exactly the number of such respondents in our study that we targeted); weights of <1 occur when the target has been exceeded, and weights of >1 occur when we have under-achieved the targets. This is calculated for each individual respondent, the largest and smallest weight factors for each sample have been detailed in the tables below.

YouGov uses RIM (Random Iterative Method) weighting as its standard approach. RIM is used when there are a number of different standard weights that all need to be applied together. This weighting method calculates weights for each individual respondent from the targets and achieved sample sizes for all of the quota variables. RIM weighting is an iterative process, whereby it recalculates the weights a number of times until the required degree of accuracy is reached. All weights are capped at six, and a weighting report is produced for each project. A summary of weights applied in wave 21 across all stakeholder groups can be seen in the tables below.

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 A levels, GCSEs, and other vocational and technical 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	108	96	0.67	1.2
Academy	356	331	0.76	1.37
Independent school	103	124	0.97	1.75
FE college/ sixth form	59	124	1.74	3.14
Other	63	14	0.18	0.33

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	65	47	0.45	0.85
Academy	163	167	0.69	1.32
Independent school	19	39	1.38	2.62
FE college/ sixth form	15	17	0.78	1.49
Other	16	8	0.33	0.62

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 A levels and/or GCSEs and/or a qualification such 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 or 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 3 to 11.

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	52	49	0.87	1.04
North West	139	136	0.88	1.06
Yorkshire and the Humber	106	101	0.86	1.04
East Midlands	95	90	0.87	1.04
West Midlands	103	108	0.96	1.15
East of England	114	116	0.93	1.11
London	156	160	0.94	1.14
South East	169	171	0.92	1.11
South West	105	107	0.93	1.11

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	74	68	0.86	0.96
Male 25-39	123	126	0.97	1.08
Male 40-54	126	123	0.92	1.03
Male 55+	189	186	0.93	1.04
Female 16-24	61	67	1.03	1.15
Female 25-39	133	133	0.94	1.05
Female 40-54	124	127	0.97	1.09
Female 55+	209	209	0.94	1.05

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	590	590	0.86	1.15
C2DE	449	449	0.87	1.15

Table 6: Summary of achieved parent sample and weighting scheme by region

Region	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
North East	10	13	1.15	1.58
North West	34	34	0.82	1.13
Yorkshire and the Humber	26	26	0.87	1.19
East Midlands	23	23	0.94	1.30
West Midlands	26	26	0.83	1.14
East of England	32	28	0.79	1.09
London	42	41	0.87	1.20
South East	41	41	0.86	1.18
South West	24	26	0.98	1.35

Table 7: Summary of achieved parent sample and weighting scheme by gender

Gender	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Male	122	126	0.81	1.58
Female	136	132	0.79	1.31

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

Social-economical classification	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
ABC1	159	142	0.79	1.18
C2DE	99	116	1.06	1.58

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	15	13	0.60	1.26
North West	35	35	0.66	1.38
Yorkshire and the Humber	24	27	0.73	1.54
East Midlands	24	24	0.65	1.37
West Midlands	30	27	0.58	1.22
East of England	29	29	0.66	1.38
London	41	43	0.69	1.46
South East	42	43	0.68	1.43
South West	27	27	0.64	1.34

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	134	0.58	1.54
Female	134	134	0.58	1.54

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	135	89	0.58	0.73
Aged 16 to 17 years	67	89	1.16	1.47
Aged 18 to 19 years	65	89	1.22	1.54

Social Grade within the General Public and Parents samples

Social grade is a classification system based on occupation. Developed by the National Readership Survey (NRS), it has been the research industry’s source of social-economic classification for over 50 years. The categories can be found in Table 12. For analysis purposes, the current report groups the categories together into ABC1 and C2DE, allowing key comparisons to be made. The brackets ‘ABC1’ and ‘C2DE’ are commonly used to describe those employed in broadly ‘white collar’ and broadly ‘manual’ occupations respectively.

Table 12: NRS Social Grade categories

Social-economical classification	Description	Percentage of population (NRS Jan- Dec 2016)
A	Higher managerial, administrative and professional	4
B	Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional	23
C1	Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional	28
C2	Skilled manual workers	20
D	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers	15
E	State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only	10

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 of 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 Tables 13 and 14.

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

Size	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
2-9 employees	66	74	1.09	1.20
50-249	45	36	0.76	0.83
250+ employees	143	145	0.98	1.07

Table 14: Summary of achieved employer sample and weighting scheme by sector

Sector	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Private sector	191	191	0.77	1.11
Public sector	45	46	0.83	1.20
Third/voluntary sector	18	18	0.76	1.09

HEI sample

Sample coverage

The HEI sample was designed to be representative of the university population in England 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 15.

Table 15: Summary of achieved HEI sample and weighting scheme by size

Size	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Russell group	79	52	0.65	0.65
Other old	46	49	1.06	1.06
Post 1992/New	103	135	1.31	1.31
Other HEI	44	37	0.83	0.83

Appendix B – Survey

Text

The following questions relate to your perceptions of GCSEs, A levels and Applied General qualifications in general, and not specific to any exam series.

Text

Perceptions of A level qualifications

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

Question

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

- A levels are well understood by people
- A levels are trusted qualifications
- A level standards are maintained year-on-year
- A levels are good preparation for further study
- A levels are good preparation for work
- A levels develop a broad range of skills for students
- The marking of A levels is accurate

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Grid (one answer required for each sub-question)
Base	All

Text

In 2023, the exam boards' published fee for an A level qualification was approximately £115 (Source: Ofqual 2023).

Question

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

- A levels offer “value for money”

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Grid (one answer required for each sub-question)
Base	All

Text

Perceptions of GCSE qualifications

This section asks about your perceptions of GCSE qualifications.

Question

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

- GCSEs are well understood by people
- GCSEs are a trusted qualification
- GCSE standards are maintained year-on-year
- GCSEs are good preparation for further study
- GCSEs are good preparation for work
- GCSEs develop a broad range of skills for students
- The marking of GCSEs is accurate

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Grid (one answer required for each sub-question)
Base	All

Text

In 2023, the exam boards' published fee for a GCSE qualification was approximately £48 (Source: Ofqual 2023).

Question

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

- GCSEs offer “value for money”

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Grid (one answer required for each sub-question)
Base	All

Text

The following questions are about access to marked exam scripts in GCSEs and A levels.

Question

Are you aware that, for GCSE and A level qualifications, schools and colleges can ask to see a student's marked exam script to help them decide whether to request a review of marking by the exam board?

Possible answers

1. Yes
2. No

Question design

Question type	Single (choose one of the possible answers)
Base	All

Question

Have you made use of exam boards' access to scripts provision?

Possible answers

1. Yes
2. No

Question design

Question type	Single (choose one of the possible answers)
Base	All Teachers and Head teachers who are aware of the access to scripts provision

Question

How helpful was being able to request a students' marked exam script when deciding whether to submit a review of marking?

Possible answers

1. Very helpful
2. Fairly helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful
5. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Single (choose one of the possible answers)
Base	All Teachers and Head teachers who have used the access to scripts provision

Question

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

Possible answers

1. Yes
2. No

Question design

Question type	Single (choose one of the possible answers)
Base	All

Text

The following questions are about the process of reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals for GCSEs and 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 for these qualifications. These services include a clerical check, a review of marking or moderation and access to marked scripts.

Question

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

- The process of reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals for GCSE results is fair
- The process of reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals for A level results is fair

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Grid (one answer required for each sub-question)
Base	All who are aware of the appeals system

Question

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

I have adequate information about the process of reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals for GCSE and A level results

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Single (choose one of the possible answers)
Base	All who are aware of the appeals system

Question

Are you aware that for any A level or GCSE subjects, a school or college can appeal to the exam board on the ground of a marking error if their concerns about marking have not been addressed during a review of marking as well as on the ground of a procedural failing by the exam board?

Possible answers

1. Yes
2. No

Question design

Question type	Single (choose one of the possible answers)
Base	All who are aware of the appeals system

Text

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

Question

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)

- I have adequate information about the arrangements that are available for a GCSE or A level student who is eligible for special consideration
- In the current special consideration system, the right arrangements are made for the right GCSE and A level students
- Special consideration makes the qualification system fairer for all GCSE and A level students
- I have adequate information about the adjustments that are available for a GCSE or A level disabled student who is eligible for reasonable adjustments
- Currently, the right reasonable adjustments are made for the right GCSE and A level disabled students
- Reasonable adjustments make the qualification system fairer for all GCSE and A level students

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Grid (one answer required for each sub-question)
Base	All teachers and head teachers who teach GCSEs or A levels

Text

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

Question

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

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

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Grid (one answer required for each sub-question)
Base	All teachers and head teachers who teach GCSEs or A levels

Text

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

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

- Applied General qualifications are well understood by people
- Applied General qualifications are trusted qualifications
- Applied General qualifications standards are maintained year-on-year
- Applied General qualifications are good preparation for further study
- Applied General qualifications are good preparation for work
- Applied General qualifications develop a broad range of skills for students
- The marking of Applied General qualifications is accurate

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Grid (one answer required for each sub-question)
Base	All

Text

In 2023, the exam boards’ published fee for an Applied General qualification was, on average, approximately £165 (Source: Ofqual 2023).

Question

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

- Applied General qualifications offer “value for money”

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Grid (one answer required for each sub-question)
Base	All

Question

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

Possible answers

1. Yes
2. No

Question design

Question type	Single (choose one of the possible answers)
Base	All

Text

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

Question

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

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

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Grid (one answer required for each sub-question)
Base	All who are aware of the appeals against results process

Text

The following questions are about malpractice in Applied General qualifications.

Question

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

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

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Grid (one answer required for each sub-question)
Base	Teachers and Head teachers who teach Applied General Qualifications in schools or colleges

Text

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

Question

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

- Onscreen examinations (e.g. exams taken on a computer) in GCSE and A level qualifications would be fairer for students than existing pen and paper examinations

- Onscreen examinations (e.g. exams taken on a computer) in GCSE and A level qualifications would be more manageable for schools and colleges than existing pen and paper examinations

Possible answers

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type	Grid (one answer required for each sub-question)
Base	All