

Background Information for:
Perceptions of A levels, GCSEs, and
Applied General qualifications in England
– Wave 23

An Ofqual commissioned report

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Contents

Introduction	4
Background.....	4
Context	4
Geographical coverage.....	5
Related statistics and publications.....	5
User feedback.....	6
Survey objectives.....	6
Methods and data limitations.....	6
Overview of method.....	6
Sampling	6
Survey design.....	7
Composite confidence measure.....	7
Guidance on analysis.....	8
Section-specific background information	9
Section 1: Composite confidence measure of qualifications	9
Section 2: Perceptions of GCSEs.....	9
Section 3: Perceptions of A levels	9
Section 4: Perceptions of Applied General qualifications	9
Section 5: Reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals against results for GCSEs and A levels.....	9
Section 6: Special consideration and reasonable adjustments for GCSE and A level qualifications.....	10
Section 7: Malpractice for GCSE and A level qualifications.....	10
Section 8: Appeals against results for Applied General qualifications.....	10
Section 9: Malpractice for Applied General qualifications.....	10
Section 10: On-screen examinations.....	10
Glossary.....	11
Applied General qualifications:	11
Base size:	11
Effective base:	11
General qualifications:	11
Marking:	11
Sample frame:	11
Statistically significant:.....	11
Vocational and technical qualifications:.....	11
Weighting:	12
Appendix A – Technical report.....	13

Weighting	13
Head teachers and teachers sample	13
Public, parents and young people’s samples	16
Employer sample	19
HEI sample	20
Appendix B – Survey	22
Parents: Profiling	22
Question Screener1	22
Question Screener2	22
Question Screener3	23
Question Screener4	23
Teachers and head teachers: Profiling	24
Question Screener1	24
Question Screener2	24
Question Screener3	24
Employers: Profiling	25
Question Screener1	25
Question Screener2	26
HEI: Profiling	26
Question Screener1	26
Young people: Profiling	26
Question Screener1	26
Question Screener2	27
Question Screener3	27
Text	28
Text	28
Question 1	28
Question 2	29
Text	29
Question 3	29
Text	29
Question 4	29
Question 5	30
Text	30
Question 6	30
Question 7	31

Text.....	31
Question 8	31
Question 9	32
Question 10	32
Text.....	32
Question 11	32
Question 12	33
Question 13	34
Text.....	34
Question 14	34
Text.....	34
Question 15	35
Question 16	35
Text.....	36
Question 17	36
Question 18	36
Text.....	36
Question 19	36
Text.....	37
Question 20	37
Text.....	37
Question 21	38

Introduction

Background

This report accompanies the findings of wave 23 (2025 to 2026) of the General Qualifications Perceptions Survey and should be read alongside the [Perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and Applied General qualifications in England: wave 23 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 these qualifications.

Ofqual has collected stakeholders' perceptions of the AS and A level qualification system and, since wave 4 (2005), perceptions of the GCSE system (The survey was originally commissioned by the QCA in 2003). This included surveying: head teachers (the sample consists of head teachers and deputy head teachers), 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 8 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. 5 years of data (waves 19 to 23) are reported in the wave 23 report.

The second part of the survey asked a series of questions on different topics covering:

- the review of marking, moderation and appeals against results (hereafter known as 'the appeals process') for GCSEs and A levels
- 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
- administering assessments on-screen

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
- [Statistics: perceptions of qualifications - GOV.UK](#)

User feedback

Ofqual welcomes your feedback on this publication. If you have any comments on this statistical release, or how to improve it to meet your needs, please [complete this short survey](#) or email Ofqual's statistics team at data.analytics@ofqual.gov.uk

Survey objectives

The objectives of the perceptions 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 aspects of the qualifications system for GCSEs, A levels, and Applied General qualifications.

Methods and data limitations

Overview of method

Wave 23 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 11 November and 12 December 2025, which is a comparable fieldwork period to waves 16 to 22.

Sampling

The sampling of participants was designed with the aim 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:

- 297 head teachers (including deputy head teachers)
- 660 teachers of GCSE, A level and other vocational and technical qualifications (Ofqual defines vocational qualifications as qualifications that are taught in schools and colleges that prepare students for a particular type of job) offered to people aged 14 to 19 years.
- 298 young people aged 14 to 19 years who are studying, have studied, or will study one or more of the following: A levels, GCSEs, 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)
- a total of 261 parents or carers of young people who are taking or who have recently taken GCSEs, A levels or other qualifications described above, either individually or in combination.

- in addition, 294 academic professionals (this sample consisted of academics and a small number of admissions staff; please see Appendix A for a description of the sample profile 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)
- 250 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)
- 1,036 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 were all of high quality. The sampling approach has aimed to identify groups of participants that are representative. However, surveys of this kind capture only the views of those involved. Therefore, throughout this report, perceptions attributed to stakeholder groups (for example, teachers, parents etc.) are inferred from the views of those who took part in the survey.

Survey design

The wave 23 survey was designed by Ofqual and YouGov. The survey covered themes explored in previous waves of the survey, namely, perceptions of qualifications.

The design of the wave 23 survey was very similar to wave 22. In wave 23, new questions were added to the survey to investigate respondents' perceptions of whether it is easier or more difficult to achieve a particular grade year-on-year, or whether there is no difference. Two additional questions were also included to measure teacher and headteacher perceptions of modified exam papers for learners. In wave 23, 3 questions relating to exam boards' access to scripts provision were removed from the teacher and headteacher survey.

A copy of the questions included in wave 23 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 8 criteria: understanding, trust, maintenance of standards, preparation for further study, preparation for work, skill development, accuracy in marking, and value for money. The first 7 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 8 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 8 criteria. 'Don't know' responses were excluded from the calculation. The scoring system is detailed as follows:

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

Next, an average of the individual scores across the 8 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 group, 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 5 most recent waves of the perceptions survey.

Guidance on analysis

The survey was undertaken with 7 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.

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 (i.e. the current wave is individually tested against each previous wave for statistically significant changes). Unless specified otherwise, all changes noted within the text of 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 not statistically significant. Any non-significant differences or other apparent differences in the data are within the margin of error. These are possibly due to smaller sample sizes, and so cannot be viewed as a change from the previous wave(s).

For the charts reporting proportions of 'Agree' and 'Disagree' responses, 'Don't know' responses are not included in the figure. Please note, 'Agree' is a combination of 'strongly agree' and 'slightly agree', and 'Disagree' is a combination of 'strongly disagree' and 'slightly disagree'. As such, proportions may not add up to 100%.

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 of the standard error of each variable and

the critical score associated with it. A different procedure has been used for binary variables and those recorded on a five-point scale, where those recorded on a five-point scale were first recoded into numeric variables. To calculate margin of error for 'Agree' responses, 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were first recoded to give a value of 1, while 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' were given a value of 0. The process was reversed for the margin of error for Disagree responses ('strongly disagree' and 'disagree' were given a value of 1, 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were given a value of 0). For the critical scores we used a 5% two-tailed confidence level.

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 8 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 8 statements.

Section 2: Perceptions of GCSEs

All stakeholders were asked to report their levels of agreement with the 8 statements used in the composite confidence measure with regards to GCSE qualifications in general. Wave 23 also included a new question to assess respondent perceptions of whether it is easier or more difficult to achieve a particular grade year-on-year, or whether there is no difference.

Section 3: Perceptions of A levels

All stakeholders were asked to report their levels of agreement with the 8 statements used in the composite confidence measure with regards to A level qualifications in general. Wave 23 also included a new question to assess respondent perceptions of whether it is easier or more difficult to achieve a particular grade year-on-year, or whether there is no difference.

Section 4: Perceptions of Applied General qualifications

All stakeholders were asked to report their levels of agreement with the 8 statements used in the composite confidence measure with regards to Applied General qualifications in general. Wave 23 also included a new question to assess respondent perceptions of whether it is easier or more difficult to achieve a particular grade year-on-year, or whether there is no difference.

Section 5: 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 a review of 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 6: Special consideration and reasonable adjustments for GCSE and A level qualifications

[Special consideration](#) is any adjustment given to a student who temporarily experiences an injury, illness, or other indisposition at the time of the exam or assessment, which significantly affects their ability to take an assessment or demonstrate what they can do in an 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 disabled students taking their qualifications.. 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.. Reasonable adjustments are made in cases where a student who is disabled would be at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with someone who is not disabled when taking an assessment. The exam or assessment must still test the same knowledge, skills and understanding for that qualification. 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.

Section 7: 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 8: 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 9: 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 10: On-screen examinations

This section explores innovations in the role technology might have in assessments. In particular, stakeholders are asked about their views regarding assessments administered on-screen (for example, 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 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 means we are 95% confident that, if they who population was surveyed, we would see the same change. 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 23.

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 base 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 less than 1 occur when the target has been exceeded, and weights of more than 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 several 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 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 6, and a weighting report is produced for each project. A summary of weights applied in wave 23 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 ensure that the survey represented establishments teaching qualifications for young people aged 14 to 19, only certain types of schools and colleges were eligible to take part. Eligible types of schools and colleges matched the definitions used in previous years of the survey. They included secondary schools and middle-deemed-secondary schools; academies that offer key stage 4, post-16 provision, or both; independent schools offering key stage 4, post-16 provision, or both; and dedicated post-16 institutions.

Sample frame

The samples of head teachers and teachers were drawn from 2 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, 2 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	129	83	0.55	0.96
Academy	349	397	1.01	1.77
Independent school	90	76	0.72	1.26
FE college/ sixth form	75	80	0.90	1.58
Other	17	24	1.23	2.16

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	47	37	0.73	1.31
Academy	172	178	0.91	1.63
Independent school	60	34	0.52	0.93
FE college/ sixth form	12	36	2.73	3.12
Other	6	11	1.69	1.93

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 respondents 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 past 19 years, YouGov has carefully recruited a panel of over 2 million UK adults to take part in their 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.

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 3. For analysis purposes, the current report groups the categories together into ABC1 and C2DE, allowing key comparisons to be made. The bracket ‘ABC1’ is commonly used to describe those employed in broadly ‘white collar’ occupations, while ‘C2DE’ is commonly used to describe those in broadly ‘manual’ occupations, or those who are not in work.

Table 3: NRS Social Grade categories

Social-economical classification	Description	Percentage of population (NRS January to December 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

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 are shown in Tables 4 to 12.

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

Region	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
North East	47	49	0.94	1.22
North West	136	136	0.87	1.12
Yorkshire and the Humber	101	100	0.88	1.14
East Midlands	89	90	0.90	1.16
West Midlands	110	108	0.87	1.13
East of England	118	116	0.88	1.14
London	154	160	0.91	1.19
South East	172	170	0.87	1.13
South West	109	107	0.86	1.12

Table 5: 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 to 24	68	68	0.97	1.07
Male 25 to 39	110	125	1.11	1.22
Male 40 to 54	113	123	1.06	1.17
Male 55+	205	185	0.88	0.97

Female 16 to 24	63	67	1.03	1.12
Female 25 to 39	138	133	0.93	1.03
Female 40 to 54	143	127	0.86	0.95
Female 55+	196	208	1.03	1.13

Table 6: 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	589	590	0.86	1.21
C2DE	447	446	0.87	1.22

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

Region	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
North East	10	11	0.99	1.33
North West	31	32	0.93	1.25
Yorkshire and the Humber	25	26	0.89	1.19
East Midlands	24	24	0.87	1.17
West Midlands	29	29	0.86	1.15
East of England	30	30	0.88	1.19
London	42	42	0.86	1.16
South East	43	43	0.90	1.21
South West	27	27	0.82	1.10

Table 8: Summary of achieved parent sample and weighting scheme by gender

Gender	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Male	123	128	0.87	1.33
Female	138	133	0.82	1.26

Table 9: 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	162	147	0.82	1.05
C2DE	99	114	1.04	1.33

Table 10: 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	15	0.78	1.32
North West	39	39	0.73	1.24
Yorkshire and the Humber	30	30	0.73	1.23
East Midlands	26	27	0.76	1.24
West Midlands	32	30	0.69	1.17
East of England	32	33	0.76	1.28
London	46	48	0.76	1.29
South East	48	48	0.73	1.24
South West	31	30	0.71	1.20

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

Gender	Unweighted base	Weighted base	Smallest weight factor	Largest weight factor
Male	144	149	0.74	1.32
Female	154	149	0.69	1.23

Table 12: 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	130	99	0.69	0.84
Aged 16 to 17 years	85	99	1.05	1.28
Aged 18 to 19 years	83	99	1.09	1.32

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 or 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 or more 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 or 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 to 9 employees	65	70	0.91	1.19
50 to 249	39	35	0.73	0.96
250 or more employees	146	145	0.80	1.04

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	186	187	0.90	1.12
Public sector	45	47	0.96	1.19
Third or voluntary sector	19	16	0.73	0.91

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 or 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 2 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	75	56	0.74	0.74
Other old	42	53	1.26	1.26
Post 1992 or new	114	146	1.28	1.28
Other HEI	63	40	0.63	0.63

Appendix B – Survey

Parents: Profiling

Question: Screener1

Do you have children in any the following age groups? (Please tick all that apply)

Possible answers

1. 0-4
2. 5-9
3. 10-13
4. 14-19
5. Children aged 20 or older
6. I don't have any children

Question design

Question type: Multiple (choose any of the possible answers)

Base: All

[end survey if not a parent of 14-19 year olds]

Question: Screener2

Do you have a child who is currently in years 10 or 11 at school (aged 14-16) and intends to take any of the following qualifications in the future? (Please tick all that apply)

Possible answers

1. Yes – AS levels
2. Yes – A levels
3. Yes – GCSEs
4. Yes – Functional Skills
5. Yes – Level 3 tech levels (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Technical Levels and City & Guilds Technical Qualifications)
6. Yes – Level 1/Level 2 vocational qualifications (e.g. Pearson Level 1/ Level 2 BTECs and OCR Cambridge National Certificates)
7. Yes – Applied General qualifications (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Applied qualifications and OCR Cambridge Level 3 Applied Certificates)
8. Yes – Other qualification(s) not classified above
9. No
10. Don't know

Question design

Question type: Multiple (choose any of the possible answers)

Base: All

Question: Screener3

Do you have a child who is currently studying any of the following qualifications? (Please tick all that apply)

Possible answers

1. Yes – AS levels
2. Yes – A levels
3. Yes – GCSEs
4. Yes – Functional Skills
5. Yes – Level 3 tech levels (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Technical Levels and City & Guilds Technical Qualifications)
6. Yes – Level 1/Level 2 vocational qualifications (e.g. Pearson Level 1/ Level 2 BTECs and OCR Cambridge National Certificates)
7. Yes – Applied General qualifications (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Applied qualifications and OCR Cambridge Level 3 Applied Certificates)
8. Yes – Other qualification(s) not classified above
9. No
10. Don't know

Question design

Question type: Multiple (choose any of the possible answers)

Base: All

Question: Screener4

Do you have a child who already has any of the following qualifications within the last 2 years? (Please tick all that apply)

Possible answers

1. Yes – AS levels
2. Yes – A levels
3. Yes – GCSEs
4. Yes – Functional Skills
5. Yes – Level 3 tech levels (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Technical Levels and City & Guilds Technical Qualifications)
6. Yes – Level 1/Level 2 vocational qualifications (e.g. Pearson Level 1/ Level 2 BTECs and OCR Cambridge National Certificates)
7. Yes – Applied General qualifications (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Applied qualifications and OCR Cambridge Level 3 Applied Certificates)
8. Yes – Other qualification(s) not classified above
9. No
10. Don't know

Question design

Question type: Multiple (choose any of the possible answers)

Base: All

[end survey if child is not intending to take relevant qualification, currently taking relevant qualification or has under taken relevant qualification]

Teachers and head teachers: Profiling

Question: Screener1

Which, if any, of the following best describes the phase or type of education you work in?

Possible answers

1. Early Years
2. Primary
3. Secondary
4. Post-16 sixth form college
5. Post-16 FE College
6. Higher education
7. I do not work in education

Question design

Question type: Single (choose one of the possible answers)

Base: All

[end survey if not working in relevant secondary or FE phase]

Question: Screener2

Which one of the following best describes your professional role?

Possible answers

1. Head teacher/Principal
2. Deputy Head teacher/Principal
3. Classroom or subject teacher/Lecturer
4. Head of Department/subject
5. Other teaching staff
6. Other non-teaching staff
7. Other, please specify
8. None of these
9. I do not work in education

Question design

Question type: Single (choose one of the possible answers)

Base: All

[end survey if not teaching staff or head teacher]

Question: Screener3

Which of the following qualifications do you currently teach? (Please choose all that apply)

Possible answers

1. GCSEs
2. AS levels
3. A levels
4. Functional Skills
5. Level 1/Level 2 vocational qualifications (e.g. Pearson Level 1/ Level 2 BTECs and OCR Cambridge National Certificates)
6. Level 3 tech levels (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Technical Levels and City & Guilds Technical Qualifications)
7. Applied General qualifications (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Applied qualifications and OCR Cambridge Level 3 Applied Certificates)
8. Other qualification(s) not classified above
9. None of these
10. Do not teach

Question design

Question type: Multiple (choose any of the possible answers)

Base: All

[end survey if teaching staff and not teaching relevant qualifications]

Employers: Profiling

Question: Screener1

What level of management responsibility do you hold in your current position?

Possible answers

1. Owner/ Proprietor
2. Partner
3. Chairperson
4. Chief Executive
5. Managing Director
6. Non Executive Director
7. Other board level manager/ director
8. Other senior manager or director below board level
9. Middle manager
10. Junior manager/ team leader/ supervisor
11. Other
12. Not applicable - I don't have any management responsibility

Question design

Question type: Single (choose one of the possible answers)

Base: All

[end survey if not senior manager or above]

Question: Screener2

Has your organisation recruited any young people (aged 16-25) in the past 12 months?

Possible answers

1. Yes
2. No
3. I don't know

Question design

Question type: Single (choose one of the possible answers)

Base: All

[end survey if not recruited young person in past 12 months]

HEI: Profiling

Question: Screener1

Do you make decisions and/or have knowledge about the process of offering applicants a place on an undergraduate course at your institution?

Possible answers

1. Yes
2. No

Question design

Question type: Single (choose one of the possible answers)

Base: All

[end survey if not decision maker/have knowledge about offering applicants a place on course]

Young people: Profiling

Question: Screener1

Are you currently in Years 10 or 11 at school and intending to take any of the following qualifications in the future? (Please tick all that apply)

Possible answers

1. Yes – AS levels
2. Yes – A levels
3. Yes – GCSEs
4. Yes – Functional Skills
5. Yes – Level 3 tech levels (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Technical Levels and City & Guilds Technical Qualifications)
6. Yes – Level 1/Level 2 vocational qualifications (e.g. Pearson Level 1/ Level 2 BTECs and OCR Cambridge National Certificates)

7. Yes – Applied General qualifications (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Applied qualifications and OCR Cambridge Level 3 Applied Certificates)
8. Yes – Other qualification(s) not classified above
9. No
10. Don't know

Question design

Question type: Multiple (choose any of the possible answers)

Base: All

Question: Screener2

Are you currently studying for one or more of the following qualifications? (Please tick all that apply)

Possible answers

1. Yes – AS levels
2. Yes – A levels
3. Yes – GCSEs
4. Yes – Functional Skills
5. Yes – Level 3 tech levels (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Technical Levels and City & Guilds Technical Qualifications)
6. Yes – Level 1/Level 2 vocational qualifications (e.g. Pearson Level 1/ Level 2 BTECs and OCR Cambridge National Certificates)
7. Yes – Applied General qualifications (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Applied qualifications and OCR Cambridge Level 3 Applied Certificates)
8. Yes – Other qualification(s) not classified above
9. No
10. Don't know

Question design

Question type: Multiple (choose any of the possible answers)

Base: All

Question: Screener3

Have you completed one or more of the following qualifications within the last two years? (Please tick all that apply)

Possible answers

1. Yes – AS levels
2. Yes – A levels
3. Yes – GCSEs
4. Yes – Functional Skills
5. Yes – Level 3 tech levels (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Technical Levels and City & Guilds Technical Qualifications)
6. Yes – Level 1/Level 2 vocational qualifications (e.g. Pearson Level 1/ Level 2 BTECs and OCR Cambridge National Certificates)

7. Yes – Applied General qualifications (e.g. Pearson BTEC Level 3 Applied qualifications and OCR Cambridge Level 3 Applied Certificates)
8. Yes – Other qualification(s) not classified above
9. No
10. Don't know

Question design

Question type: Multiple (choose any of the possible answers)

Base: All

[end survey if child is not intending to take relevant qualification, currently taking relevant qualification or has under taken relevant qualification]

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 1

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

Question 2

Thinking about A levels, on average, to what extent, if at all, do you think it is getting easier or harder to achieve the same grade each year?

Possible answers

1. A lot easier
2. Somewhat easier
3. No difference
4. Somewhat harder
5. A lot harder
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type: Single (choose one of the possible answers)

Base: All

Text

The average Standard Qualification Fee for an A level qualification in February 2025 was £128. (Source: Ofqual 2025).

Question 3

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 4

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

Question 5

Thinking about GCSEs, on average, to what extent, if at all, do you think it is getting easier or harder to achieve the same grade each year?

Possible answers

1. A lot easier
2. Somewhat easier
3. No difference
4. Somewhat harder
5. A lot harder
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type: Single (choose one of the possible answers)

Base: All

Text

The average Standard Qualification Fee for a GCSE qualification in February 2025 was £57 (Source: Ofqual 2025).

Question 6

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

Question 7

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 8

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 9

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 10

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

Text

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

Question 11

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

- 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

Question 12

Exam boards modify question papers on request for students with, for example, visual impairments or significant language comprehension disorders to allow them to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding. They can include, but are not limited to, enlarged font and braille papers.

To the best of your knowledge, have modified papers been requested for any of your students?

Possible answers

1. Yes
2. No

Question design

Question type: Single (choose one of the possible answers)

Base: All teachers and head teachers

Question 13

In your experience, how well, if at all, do you feel modified papers meet the needs of learners who use them?

Possible answers

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

Question design

Question type: Single (choose one of the possible answers)

Base: All teachers and headteachers who were aware of modified papers being requested for their learners

Text

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

Question 14

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 15

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

Question 16

Thinking about Applied General qualifications, on average, to what extent, if at all, do you think it is getting easier or harder to achieve the same grade each year?

Possible answers

1. A lot easier
2. Somewhat easier
3. No difference
4. Somewhat harder
5. A lot harder
6. Don't know

Question design

Question type: Single (choose one of the possible answers)

Base: All

Text

The average Standard Qualification Fee for an Applied general qualification in February 2025 was £176 (Source: Ofqual 2025).

Question 17

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 18

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 19

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 20

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 21

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