



# **Review of the summer 2017 examination series**

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## Introduction

Qualifications Wales is the independent regulator of qualifications in Wales. One of our key activities is to oversee the award of GCSE, AS and A level qualifications and the Welsh Baccalaureate. While some exams are sat in November and January each year, the summer series is the main exam session. Its success is achieved through effective delivery by the awarding bodies overseen by the regulators: us in Wales, Ofqual in England and CCEA in Northern Ireland.

The 2017 summer series produced a total of 838,419 exam scripts (marked exam papers) in Wales. GCSE scripts comprised 80 per cent of this total (671,129), with the remaining 20 per cent split between AS (95,996) and A level (71,294). Sixty-two per cent of the scripts were marked electronically. Overall, more than 400,000 (418,125) certificates were awarded in Wales for the 2017 summer series<sup>1</sup>.

In summer 2017, new GCSE qualifications in English Language, Welsh Language, English Literature and Welsh Literature were awarded for the first time. This was the second time the new GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy qualifications were awarded (they were awarded for the first time in November 2016). Units for new science GCSEs were also awarded for the first time; these are modular GCSEs, so only unit level results were issued in 2017; the full qualifications will not be awarded until summer 2018.

New A level qualifications were awarded for the first time in the 14 subjects that had been taught from September 2015<sup>2</sup>. New AS qualifications were awarded in the nine subjects that had been taught from September 2016<sup>3</sup>. AS and A levels in subjects that have not been reformed will continue to be taken across Wales, England and Northern Ireland until they are replaced.

Summer 2017 was also the first time that the new Advanced and Key Stage 4 Welsh Baccalaureate programmes were awarded, and the second time for new post-16 Welsh Baccalaureate at National and Foundation levels.

In Wales, reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels are only offered by WJEC, which is also the awarding body providing the Welsh Baccalaureate. Qualifications in subjects that have not yet been reformed are provided by AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC. We

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/entries-and-late-entries-for-gcse-and-a-level-2016-to-2017-academic-year>

<sup>2</sup> Art and Design, Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry, Computing, Economics, English Language, English Language and Literature, English Literature, History, Physics, Psychology, Sociology and Welsh First Language.

<sup>3</sup> Drama, French, Geography, German, Music, Physical Education, Religious Studies, Spanish, Welsh Second Language.

regulate the non-reformed three-country qualifications alongside our fellow regulators, Ofqual and CCEA.

This report gives an overview of the summer 2017 examination series; our approach to overseeing the delivery, standard setting and awarding of assessments for general qualifications sat by learners in Wales.

### ***Our regulatory approach***

WJEC is the single supplier in Wales for most GCSE, AS and A level qualifications and the Welsh Baccalaureate, so that is where we focused our monitoring activities.

We worked closely with WJEC to prepare for, and oversee, the summer exams and awarding period. We reviewed its approach to the exam series and in particular the identification and management of risks to the secure delivery of the series.

Collectively with our fellow regulators, Ofqual and CCEA, we engaged with all exam boards that offer GCSEs and A levels, as well as the body that represents them, the Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ). Through this work we identified risks and issues, exchanged information and received regular updates.

As the independent regulator for qualifications in Wales, we answer directly to the Welsh National Assembly, but we recognise that exam results are of interest to Welsh Ministers. We therefore established clear working guidelines with Welsh Government and provided regular updates during the awarding and results period; this included early sight of our publications, typically a day or two before publishing.

## Preparing for the series

### *Joint working*

Until they are replaced, qualifications in subjects that have not yet been reformed continue to be taken across Wales, England and Northern Ireland. We regulate the non-reformed three-country qualifications alongside Ofqual and CCEA.

We sent a letter to the awarding bodies in June to set out our expectations for the summer. This referred to similar communications sent by Ofqual and CCEA. We produced a joint statement and infographic to explain the main similarities and differences between the qualifications offered in each country<sup>4</sup>.

The Qualifications Wales and Welsh Government Information Sharing Group (ISG) met several times in June, July and August to discuss our arrangements for overseeing the awarding process. This group provided a channel for alerting Welsh Government officials and Ministers of any risks arising that we felt they should be aware of, including significant issues or incidents.

### *Entries*

Each year in May, Ofqual publishes a statistical release detailing the provisional number of entries made for exams due to be sat later in the summer<sup>5</sup>. The release includes separate data tables for exam entries made in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The tables report the provisional number of entries for GCSEs, Level 1/2 certificates, AS and A levels submitted to exam boards for the exams being sat between May and June 2017. These figures are a useful indicator of potential issues that may develop due to entry fluctuations from year to year.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://qualificationswales.org/media/2436/3-countries-4pp-eng.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/summer-2017-exam-entries-gcses-level-1-2-certificates-as-and-a-levels-in-england>

### AS and A level entries

In Wales, A level entry figures decreased by 6 per cent to 35,530, whilst AS entry fell by 7 per cent to 48,970.

	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Total A Level Entries</b>	37,560	38,480	37,640	35,530

	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Total AS Entries</b>	54,690	57,030	52,620	48,970

Entry for the reformed A level<sup>6</sup> and AS subjects<sup>7</sup> decreased approximately in line with overall A level and AS entry.

### GCSE entries

Between 2014 and 2016, GCSE provisional summer entries in Wales steadily declined, but in 2017, we saw a 10 per cent increase up to 334,100.

	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Total GCSE Entries</b>	317,980	309,190	303,620	334,100

The 2017 increase was related to two factors:

- i) the replacement of the legacy GCSE Mathematics with two new reformed Mathematics and Mathematics-Numeracy qualifications; and
- ii) an increase in year 10 (or younger) entry.

The introduction of two Mathematics qualifications caused the overall number of GCSE Mathematics entries to increase by 136 per cent to 75,400 in 2017. Year 10 (or younger) entry increased by 41 per cent to 63,310 between 2016 and 2017. These

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<sup>6</sup> Art and Design, Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry, Computing Economics, English Language, English Language and Literature, English Literature, History, Physics, Psychology, Sociology and Welsh First Language.

<sup>7</sup> Drama, French, Geography, German, Music, Physical Education, Religious Studies, Spanish, Welsh Second Language.

factors contributed towards entry for reformed subjects in 2017 increasing by over 50 per cent.

We published infographics highlighting the key themes from the entries data; these are available on our website<sup>8</sup>.

### ***Stakeholder communications***

We produced a number of publications to support stakeholder understanding of the changes made to qualifications in the reform process and the potential impact on outcomes for learners.

Ahead of the summer exams series, we launched an information campaign<sup>9</sup> to raise awareness of the new GCSEs being awarded in Wales for the first time this year. With different changes being made to GCSEs in England (including a new grade scale), we wanted to make sure that students and parents in Wales understood the changes to GCSEs in Wales and how they compared to changes in England.

As soon as the exams were finished, we wrote to all schools and colleges in Wales setting out our approach to regulating the award of GCSEs and A levels this summer<sup>10</sup>. Our letter also confirmed the changes to the post-results services offered by exam boards.

Throughout July and August, we published nine 'spotlight' articles explaining the changes to the new GCSE qualifications in English, Mathematics and Welsh, and to the new Welsh Baccalaureate. They also explained how different aspects of the exam and awarding process work<sup>11</sup>. Our aim was to raise awareness of how we work with exam boards to secure fairness for students at a time when qualifications are changing.

We also published a number of blog articles and gave briefings to the press and media to aid public understanding of the results. In the run-up to GCSE and A level results days, we gave a series of briefings for stakeholders. These focused on the main things to bear in mind when interpreting this year's results, including how awarding works, changes to qualifications and changes to the number and type of students sitting their exams. On results day, we had a dedicated webpage giving guidance for parents and students once they received their results<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://qualificationswales.org/exams/summer-2017/entry-data-2017/?lang=en>

<sup>9</sup> <http://qualificationswales.org/qualifications/gcses/astar-g-resources/?lang=en>

<sup>10</sup> <http://qualificationswales.org/exams/summer-2017/letter-to-schools/?lang=en>

<sup>11</sup> <http://qualificationswales.org/exams/summer-2017/spotlight-articles/?lang=en>

<sup>12</sup> <http://qualificationswales.org/exams/summer-2017/you-ve-received-your-results-what-next/?lang=en>

## Series delivery

### **Access arrangements and special consideration requests**

Exam boards make reasonable adjustments for learners with disabilities<sup>13</sup> and learners who are disadvantaged at the time of the exam (for example, through injury or illness). These adjustments are known as 'access arrangements'. Access arrangements are agreed before the exam is sat, and include the provision of a modified paper (such as larger font sizes) and extra time for the exam.

If a learner has been absent from an exam due to illness, injury or bereavement, or if their performance in an exam has been impacted by illness, injury or bereavement, special consideration can be requested by the school or college for the learner. The exam board, where applicable, will estimate a mark for the learner, or adjust the mark given to the learner.

Ofqual publishes two statistical releases after the summer exam series. These report on access arrangements and special consideration requests for GCSEs and A levels during the 2016/17 academic year<sup>14</sup>. The releases include separate data tables for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

### **Access arrangements**

The number of access arrangements approved in Wales increased for the third consecutive year, up 9 per cent to 21,120.

The most common approved access arrangement remains an additional 25 per cent extra time, which accounts for 63 per cent of the Wales total. Approvals for this arrangement increased by 11 per cent to 13,265 in 2017.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
<b>Total number of approved arrangements</b>	17,450	18,005	19,370	21,120
<b>25% Extra Time approved arrangements</b>	10,280	10,700	11,945	13,265

### **Special consideration requests**

There were 41,110 special consideration requests for the 2017 summer series in Wales - an increase of 25 per cent compared to the previous summer series. This is in

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<sup>13</sup> The Equality Act 2010 defines disability.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/access-arrangements-for-gcse-and-a-level-2016-to-2017-academic-year> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-consideration-in-gcse-and-a-level-summer-2017-exam-series>



the context of a 4 per cent increase in the number of scripts and non-timetabled assessments.

The proportion of special consideration requests approved (95 per cent) and the proportion of total scripts and non-timetabled assessments receiving a special consideration request (3.4 per cent) remained comparable with corresponding figures for the 2014-2016 Summer series.

	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Number of requests for special consideration</b>	21,860	38,755	32,940	41,110
<b>Number of requests approved</b>	20,560	36,710	31,625	39,060
<b>Percentage of requests approved</b>	94.1%	94.7%	96.0%	95.0%
<b>Requests approved as a percentage of total scripts and non-timetabled assessments</b>	2.6%	4.6%	2.8%	3.4%

### ***Incident management***

Exam boards must notify us of any incident that is likely to lead to an adverse effect for students; for example, errors in assessment materials, or a breach in the security of an examination paper. When we receive a notification, we check that the exam board takes appropriate steps to reduce the impact on students and to prevent a recurrence. Incidents may originate outside Wales, but have the potential to impact upon Welsh students who are entered for the same qualification.

It is the responsibility of the exam board to manage the incident, but it must also notify all relevant regulators as soon as it becomes aware of the incident and report on the action it is taking to handle it. We closely monitored how exam boards managed each reported incident, and were satisfied that appropriate actions were taken.

Actions that an exam board may take to manage an incident include: investigating the extent and impact of the incident; monitoring social media ; and statistically analysing marking data to detect if an advantage has been gained. Where an incident has affected students, we ensure that the exam board has taken appropriate action to minimise the impact of the incident and to minimise the likelihood of future recurrences.

There was an increase in the number of incidents reported during the Summer 2017 examination series compared to Summer 2016. This was in part due to us asking exam boards to report all incidents – even minor incidents that may not have been reported in previous series. It also reflects the increased number of examinations

being taken this summer, with both reformed and legacy examinations available in many subjects.

### **Summer 2017 incidents**

Relating to the summer series, there were a total of 123 incidents reported to us in relation to GCSEs, AS and A levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate. The table below gives a breakdown of reported incidents by awarding body:

<b>Exam board</b>	<b>Incidents</b>
<b>AQA</b>	35
<b>OCR</b>	51
<b>Pearson</b>	11
<b>WJEC</b>	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>

We categorise the types of incidents as follows:

- Marking – issues concerning the process of marking scripts.
- Process and systems errors – issues involving processes or systems including electronic processes or systems employed by either the awarding body or an examination centre.
- Question paper errors – issues in any material used for assessment purposes, or the mark scheme.
- Security breach – any event whereby sensitive material is compromised.
- Other – incidents that do not fit into any of the above types.

The table below gives a breakdown, by category, of incidents reported by exam boards:

<b>Summer series incidents received by type</b>	
<b>Incident type</b>	<b>No of incidents received</b>
<b>Marking</b>	3
<b>Process and System Issues</b>	8
<b>Question Paper Errors</b>	37
<b>Security Breach</b>	73
<b>Other</b>	2

*We have set out below, in more detail, the incidents reported for the summer.*

### *Marking*

We are notified by exam boards if there are any issues in relation to the progress of marking during the summer series. Given the increase in examinations offered by WJEC this year, we required them to give us regular marking progress updates at agreed points throughout the summer series. These gave us assurance that marking was 'on track' and hence would be completed on time. They also gave us information at a subject level about any qualifications that were 'at risk' due to either an examiner recruitment issue or marking issue.

This summer we received three notifications from an exam board of delays in marking for five qualifications. In all of these cases the issues were resolved and did not affect learners.

### *Question paper errors*

The assessments that exam boards produce are subject to internal quality assurance processes during their production, which on average takes 18 months. However, errors in question papers, Welsh translation and the modification process<sup>15</sup> can occasionally occur.

Where such errors are detected before an assessment is sat, the exam board sends an erratum notice to schools and colleges and reports the incident to us. In cases where the error is discovered after the assessment has been sat, exam boards report the incident to us, explaining the actions they will take to mitigate for the error and ensure learners are not disadvantaged.

These actions may include:

- amending a mark scheme to compensate for the error in the question;
- crediting all candidates with the marks if a question is unanswerable.

There were 37 question paper errors reported to us during the year. To set this in context, there were 2,200 question papers developed for the Summer 2017 series alone. Most question paper errors reported to us were minor and did not impact on students being able to answer the questions. In a very few cases, there were some errors that resulted in students being unable to answer a question as anticipated. In such cases, we have monitored the action taken by the awarding body to ensure that

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<sup>15</sup> Assessments are modified in order that learners can access them. The modification process may include modified large print or braille.

students were not disadvantaged as a result.

The table below shows the breakdown, by awarding body, of question paper errors:

Awarding Body	Frequency
AQA	11
OCR	12
Pearson	3
WJEC	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>

This summer, a greater number of exam papers were produced than in previous years, because of the impact of qualification reform. We monitored the performance of awarding bodies carefully, and were satisfied that these incidents were handled appropriately. Moving forward, we will be working with WJEC to understand its processes and explore potential improvements to prevent these errors.

### *Security breach*

Exam papers are kept securely by exam boards and by schools and colleges until the day of the exam. Occasionally a security breach occurs and is reported to us, along with actions the exam board will undertake to mitigate the impact. These actions may include:

- monitoring social media to gauge the scale of the breach;
- conducting statistical analyses of the completed exam scripts from affected centres to detect any unfair advantage gained;
- recalling and replacing the examination paper to be sat.

The table below shows the breakdown, by awarding body, of security breaches:

Awarding Body	Frequency
AQA	22
OCR	34
Pearson	7
WJEC	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>

This year, the majority of security breaches (46 of 73 incidents reported) originated within a school or college; for example, centre staff opening the incorrect packet of exam papers, and in some instances, handing them out to students. Only two of these incidents originated in Wales, and neither of these resulted in an adverse effect for Welsh learners. Our Centre Support Team will continue to work with schools and colleges in preparation for the summer 2018 exam series.

The second most frequent type of security breach (19 of 73 incidents reported) was confidential examination material being leaked and shared via social media. The increase in use, and advancement of, social media and digital messaging increases the difficulty for schools, colleges and awarding bodies to contain breaches of confidential examination material. We will continue to monitor how exam boards deal with this type of incident.

### *Malpractice*

Exam boards are required to take all reasonable steps to prevent malpractice. Where there is an allegation of malpractice, exam boards are required to investigate. If cases of malpractice are found to have occurred, exam boards are required to take action. Where a malpractice case could affect standards or public confidence, an exam board must report this to us during the examination series. Otherwise, all such incidents are reported to us at the end of the series.

We monitored the actions taken by exam boards reporting alleged malpractice and were content that students in Wales were neither advantaged nor disadvantaged.

Ofqual published a statistical release after the exam series, detailing the number of malpractice investigations that are carried out by exam boards in relation to GCSEs, AS and A levels during the 2016/17 academic year<sup>16</sup>. The release contains details about the types of malpractice reported by exam boards and any penalties they have imposed. Separate data tables are published for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

There were 180 penalties issued for student malpractice in the summer 2017 exam series - up 9 per cent from the summer 2016 exam series. However, once the rise in entries is taken into account, the percentage of entries to which a penalty for student malpractice was applied remained unchanged from 2016 at 0.015 per cent.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/malpractice-for-gcse-and-a-level-summer-2017-exam-series>

The most common type of malpractice reported in 2017 was the introduction of unauthorised materials into the exam room, which, in most cases, was a mobile phone or other electronic communications device. Mobile phones accounted for 44 per cent of all student penalties in the summer 2017 exam series.

In the summer 2017 exam series, there were a total of 15 penalties for school or college staff, which represents 0.06 per cent of total full-time equivalent teachers in Wales<sup>17</sup>.

During the summer 2017 series, 17 malpractice cases were reported to us via the incident notification process; one of these cases originated in Wales. We monitored how the exam board dealt with these cases.

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<sup>17</sup> Stats Wales, Full-time equivalent teachers by local authority, region and category:  
<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/teachers-and-support-staff/School-Staff/fteteachers-by-localauthorityregion-category>

## Standard setting, awarding and results

### *GCSE, AS and A level standard setting*

Several new qualifications, designed specifically for learners in Wales, were awarded for the first time in summer 2017. Other new qualifications were awarded for only the second or third time. We scrutinised WJEC's process for setting appropriate grade boundaries for these qualifications closely throughout the awarding period.

Since this was the first year of awarding many of the new qualifications, and only the second year for others, we required WJEC to use the established comparable outcomes approach to ensure students were neither advantaged nor disadvantaged. This approach can compensate in situations where a small drop in performance may occur when new qualifications are introduced. It is the approach that was used successfully last summer when awarding the new AS level qualifications.

In addition to adopting the comparable outcomes approach, as part of the awarding process, we required WJEC to undertake additional statistical analysis of how each assessment performed and to conduct more extensive and intensive reviews of candidate work at key grade boundaries.

The comparable outcomes approach is undertaken at whole cohort level and ensures that variability in outcomes at the national level is limited. However, when a qualification changes, there can be more year-on-year variability than usual in the results for individual schools and colleges, as they may have taken different approaches to delivering the new qualification. This was seen to some extent this summer.

The standard-setting process for GCSEs and A levels takes place at the point at which a qualification is awarded, and is closely monitored by us. Each year, statistical analysis of the prior attainment of that year's cohort is compared with the performance of previous cohorts. This analysis is used to make predictions for this year's outcomes. Exam boards are expected to award in line with these predictions (within a reporting tolerance), or to give a rationale for why they have not done this. This process is outlined in our data exchange document<sup>18</sup>. As the regulator, we review the award outcomes and, where an award is 'out of tolerance', we review the evidence submitted by the exam board to decide whether the award is justified.

In reviewing the evidence, we are mindful of the following three principles:

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<sup>18</sup> <http://qualificationswales.org/media/2585/data-exchange-procedures-wales-summer-2017.pdf>

1. fairness for learners;
2. public confidence in the results being issued; and
3. maintenance of standards.

Qualifications that have not yet been reformed continue to be awarded across Wales, England and Northern Ireland. We worked closely with the qualifications regulators in those countries (Ofqual in England and CCEA in Northern Ireland) as part of an existing three-country regulatory approach. We worked with them to manage the risks to the three-country qualifications which are associated with:

- changes to entry patterns that tend to occur at the end of the lifetime of a specification;
- the challenges of qualifications co-regulated across three countries at a time of operational and policy divergence.

### **Monitoring**

We undertook a comprehensive programme of monitoring activity to oversee each stage of the assessment and awarding process. Our monitoring focused on WJEC's compliance with our regulations and requirements. We completed a detailed report and gave feedback to WJEC following each monitoring activity. We focused our attention on reformed GCSE, AS and A level qualifications, along with legacy GCSEs in the science suite and the Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications that contribute to the Welsh Bacc.

We observed meetings of Question Paper Evaluation Committees (QPECs), examiner standardisation meetings and awarding committees for a range of the new GCSE and A level subjects. Across the summer exam series, we attended 26 standardisation meetings and nine awarding meetings for GCSE subjects. For AS and A level, we attended 32 standardisation meetings and 20 awarding meetings. We also monitored the moderation of the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate, attending all six standardisation and three awarding meetings.

All of the meetings we observed complied with our requirements.

We have used the findings of our monitoring work to inform updates to the 2017-18 monitoring plan and to refine our regulatory processes for future exam series. Some overarching themes will be considered at appropriate meetings with WJEC.



## **Results**

### *AS and A levels*

The overall A levels results for Wales have improved; however, given the change in entries, it is important to look at absolute numbers of grades awarded as well as the percentages. In some subjects, performance has improved, whereas in others it has fallen. This is to be expected and can be considered normal variation.

### *GCSEs*

The overall results in Wales for exams sat in summer 2017 have fallen. A significant factor is the change in entry patterns, notably a significant increase in the number of year 10 entries and a significant number of year 11 students achieving their maths qualifications in November.

On both the GCSE and AS / A level results days we published an overview of results on our website<sup>19</sup> along with infographics highlighting the key themes from the entries data<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://qualificationswales.org/media/2694/2017-a-as-level-overview-eng.pdf>  
<http://qualificationswales.org/media/2710/overview-of-results-for-gcse-and-level-1-eng.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> i <http://qualificationswales.org/exams/summer-2017/entry-data-2017/?lang=en>

## Post Results

### *Incorrect results issued*

As part of the incident notification process, exam boards must notify us of cases where incorrect results have been issued. These errors may occur due to exam boards' IT system issues or administrative errors. There were three incidents reported to us relating to the summer series; all were rectified, with corrected results issued to affected candidates. Exam boards were also required to inform us of what steps they will be taking to prevent future recurrences, wherever possible.

### *Reviews of marking and moderation*

Ofqual publishes a statistical release after the exam series on reviews of marking and moderation for GCSE and AS and A level qualifications<sup>21</sup>. The release includes separate data tables for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In the summer 2017 exam series, 12,930 reviews of marking were requested for GCSE assessments in Wales, compared to 8,625 last year - an increase of 50 per cent. Although part of this increase in review requests was driven by the increase in GCSE entries this summer, other factors, such as the first award of a number of reformed qualifications, may also have influenced centre decisions about whether to request a review of marking.

There were 3,020 reviews requested for AS and A level assessments during the same period, compared to 3,605 in 2016, a decrease of 16 per cent. Although entries fell, other factors, such as requirements for entry to Higher Education, could be influencing decisions on review requests for AS and A level.

2.5 per cent of all GCSE and GCE grades certificated in the 2017 Summer exam series were challenged and 0.5 per cent were changed, up from 2.4 per cent and 0.4 per cent respectively in 2016.

The most commonly challenged grades for GCSE (A\*-G) were D and B (59 and 15 per cent respectively). For AS and A levels, the most commonly challenged grades were grade B (32 per cent of reviews) and grade C (27 per cent of reviews).

Overall, 53 per cent of GCSE and GCE reviews resulted in no mark change. It is important to note that a mark change does not necessarily result in a grade change.

- At GCSE, of the reviews requested, 78 per cent resulted in no grade change.
- At AS and A level, 80 per cent of the reviews resulted in no grade change.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reviews-of-marking-and-moderation-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2017-exam-series>

In August 2016, we introduced new conditions relating to reviews of marking and moderation and appeals, *Additional Standard Conditions of Recognition A – P - Reviews, Moderation and Appeals*<sup>22</sup>. As far as possible, we have aligned arrangements in Wales with the changes introduced in England, and wrote to all schools and colleges in 2016 to explain these changes<sup>23</sup>. We will continue to work with exam boards to ensure that schools and colleges understand these changes. Our centre support team will also continue to highlight the changes to centres. This includes the requirement to allow students the opportunity to appeal the mark they have received for components marked by the centre before it is moderated by the exam board.

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<sup>22</sup> [http://qualificationswales.org/media/1960/qwcc1-006\\_16e.pdf](http://qualificationswales.org/media/1960/qwcc1-006_16e.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <http://qualificationswales.org/media/2324/letter-to-schools-and-colleges-reviews-of-marking-and-appeals.pdf>

## **Qualifications Wales questionnaires**

Once again this year, we ran an online questionnaire ('Have Your Say') to gather views on the new GCSE, AS and A level qualifications from students and teachers. One of the aims of this questionnaire was to channel views to allow us to identify potential issues and react where necessary.

We received a positive response to the questionnaire, giving valuable feedback on how the new exams were received. The intelligence gathered helped to inform our oversight of the awards and to identify aspects of the new qualifications that we will look at in more detail as part of our ongoing monitoring of GCSEs and A levels.

The online questionnaire was open between May and July. It allowed respondents to comment on any exam, but the reformed GCSE, AS and A level exams were the particular focus. It was not anticipated that the results of the survey in isolation would be of enough significance to inform actions or decisions. However, the survey was carried out to promote engagement with stakeholders, and to gather feedback that may be useful when combined with other information.

More than 800 people completed the questionnaire; 51 per cent of the responses were from teachers and lecturers, and 45 per cent were from students. We asked about the difficulty of the exams, whether they assessed the specification fairly, whether students were given enough time, and for general comments on the qualifications.

Responses focused on a range of qualifications, with no one issue or subject dominating. There was general agreement that the content from the syllabus had been assessed appropriately. We saw a range of views about the difficulty of the assessments and whether enough time had been given, but nothing to indicate an overwhelming concern about a specific subject or exam.

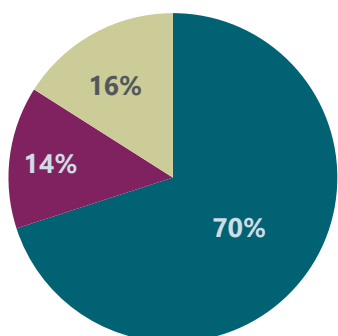
### *Findings of the questionnaire*

The questionnaire contained three key closed questions and an open comment box. The questions focused on: whether the exam covered the topics studied / specification, the difficulty of the exam and the amount of time allowed for the exam. The responses to the questions were analysed separately for learners and teachers (see figures 1 and 2 below).

**Figure 1 (Learner responses)**

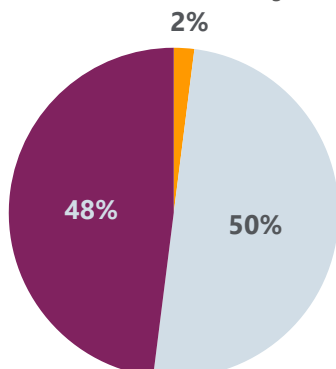
Did the exam paper(s) cover the topics studied in your course?

- Yes
- No
- Other



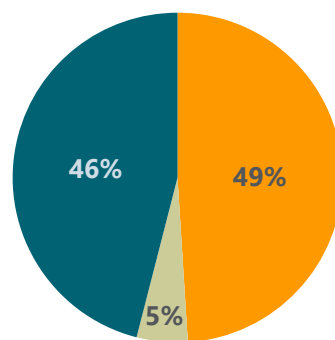
I felt that the exam(s)...

- Was (were) too easy
- Was (were) too difficult
- Was (were) about right



Did you have the right amount of time to complete the exam(s)?

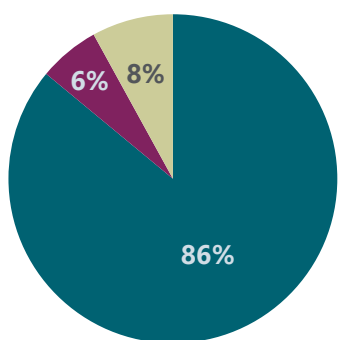
- Yes, I had the right amount of time
- No, I had too much time
- No, I did not have enough time



**Figure 2 (Teacher responses)**

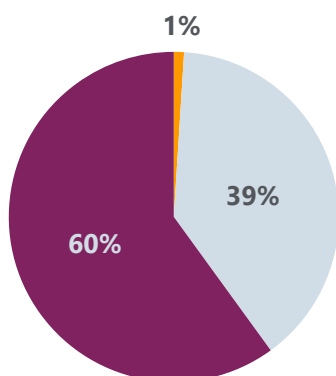
Did the exam paper(s) cover the topics in the specification?

- Yes
- No
- Other



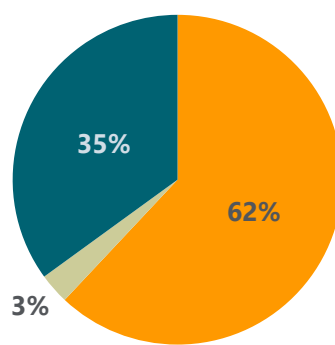
I felt that the exam(s)...

- Was (were) too easy
- Was (were) too difficult
- Was (were) about right



Was there sufficient time allocated for candidates to complete the exam(s)?

- Yes, there was the right amount of time
- No, there was too much time
- No, there was not enough time



The open-ended nature of the questionnaire, and the self-selecting nature of the responding sample, means that further statistical analysis would not be valid.

We shared the qualification-specific comments with WJEC to consider and we are using the information gathered to inform our monitoring work.

We have reviewed and evaluated the questionnaire and will repeat the questionnaire for the summer 2018 exam series, having further developed the questions and communication channels for promoting stakeholder engagement.

## **Conclusion**

This report gives an overview of the delivery of the summer 2017 series, including our monitoring of the awarding bodies that deliver the examination series. In the main, there were few issues that occurred which had the potential to lead to a significant adverse effect for learners in Wales. When issues did arise, we oversaw the awarding body's actions to ensure that they took appropriate action to protect learners, maintained standards and issued timely and accurate results. We closely monitored the standard setting in the reformed Wales-only GCSE, AS and A level qualifications, and we are content that standards have been appropriately carried forward.

Moving forward, we continue to work with WJEC to prepare for the final set of first awards of the new GCSEs and A levels. We will continue our programme of monitoring, with particular focus on the new reformed qualifications. We will run a questionnaire again in summer 2018 for students and teachers to feed back on the qualifications.

We are already discussing with WJEC, the other awarding bodies and fellow regulators the arrangements for the summer 2018 series. We will be using information gathered during summer 2017 to inform our discussions with awarding bodies; this includes exploring measures that can be taken to prevent issues arising which may impact on the safe delivery and award of the qualifications. As in 2017, we will be publishing our approach to the summer 2018 examination series.

Our principal aims are to ensure that qualifications, and the Welsh qualification system, are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales and to promote public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualification system. In order to meet these aims, it is important that we work together with all stakeholders, and that all play their role to ensure fairness for learners in Wales.