



Jonathan Lord MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

7 October 2019

Dear Mr Lord

PQ 290930: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of trends in the level of grade inflation in (a) GCSEs and (b) A Levels since 2010.

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP has asked Ofqual to respond to you directly regarding your recent parliamentary question. A copy of this response will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Ofqual was established in 2010 as the independent regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England. We have a statutory objective to secure qualification standards as part of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. This objective is to secure that:

- a) Regulated qualifications give a reliable indication of knowledge, skills and understanding, and
- b) Regulated qualifications indicate-
 - i. A consistent level of attainment (including over time) between comparable regulated qualifications, and
 - ii. A consistent level of attainment (but not over time) between regulated qualifications and comparable qualifications.

In terms of GCSE and A level qualifications, in line with this objective, we set regulations that require exam boards to take into account the appropriate evidence to ensure it is no easier or harder to get a given grade in one year than another, or with one exam board than another.

Standards in GCSEs, AS and A levels are maintained by the exam boards we regulate by setting appropriate grade boundaries so that grades in these qualifications are awarded to students whose performance is of the appropriate standard for the grade. In order to do so, exam boards use a process based on a combination of expert judgements and statistics based

on the cohort's prior attainment. If a cohort's prior attainment is similar to that of the cohorts in previous years, we would expect the proportion of students achieving each grade to be similar. We require exam boards to provide evidence to us in cases where they would propose outcomes should be greater or lower than the statistical evidence would indicate is appropriate. Any changes in outcomes are therefore underpinned by evidence.

If we assume grade inflation describes 'rises in student results that do not reflect increases in student performance', we do not believe that there has been grade inflation since 2010 and standards have been maintained. This is due to the effectiveness of the process we describe above. It can be seen, in the fact, that results at both GCSE¹ and A level² since 2010 have been stable. Whilst we would expect results to fluctuate slightly across individual years, the data show stability in outcomes over time, and our judgement is that this reflects the fact that there has not been any significant grade inflation in the period in either GCSE or A level.

I do hope this information is useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S Collier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath the name.

Sally Collier

Chief Regulator

¹ <https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/GCSE/Outcomes/>

² <https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/Alevel/Outcomes/>