

UCAS

# UCAS qualification provision survey 2017





# Executive summary

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UCAS has broadened the scope of its previous AS and A level survey to encapsulate a wider range of provision, such as GCSEs and vocational qualifications. The purpose of this is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how schools and colleges in England are responding to the wide ranging reforms.

UCAS issued a survey of all schools and colleges in England registered to use its services between November 2016 and January 2017. The key findings of this survey are below:

## **AS and A level provision**

- 56% of respondents have changed their AS and A level provision since the 2015/16 academic year.
- 29% of respondents are offering the AS in all reformed subjects for the 2016/17 academic year, and 30% are offering the reformed AS in some subjects. Our previous survey indicated 59% would offer in all subjects, and 15% in some subjects.
- 36% of respondents will not offer the AS for the 2016/17 academic year.
- 43% of respondents intend to revisit their decision regarding AS provision for the 2017/18 academic year, at which point all A level subjects will be reformed. Our previous survey indicated that 64% of respondents would revisit their decision at this point. This may be due to some centres already revisiting decisions about their provision.

# Executive summary

## Vocational qualification provision

- 23% of respondents are offering an unreformed vocational specification in the 2016/17 academic year, despite the availability of the fully reformed version.
- 22% of respondents do not feel universities and colleges have a good understanding of vocational qualifications.
- The majority of respondents to this section offer vocational qualifications awarded by Pearson. However, schools and colleges also offer a range of vocational qualifications awarded by other bodies such as OCR, City and Guilds, and AQA. Universities and colleges need to ensure they reflect this diversity in their entry requirements.

## GCSE provision

- 40% of respondents do not feel confident in identifying the level a learner is performing at under the new numerical grading scale.
- Respondents to our survey commonly ask for a grade 4 or grade 5 in English and Maths to access their post-16 provision.
- The majority of universities and colleges which previously required a C, now ask for a 4. Those that asked for a B are split across the 5 or 6 grade.

## Next steps

- UCAS will continue to work with schools, colleges and universities to support them with the changing landscape.

# Full report



# UCAS qualification provision survey

UCAS has taken a central role in communicating intelligence regarding qualification reform. To date, UCAS has published the results of two A levels survey – Unpacking Qualification Reform (2015), and an update in 2016. In addition to this, we have produced a range of resources to support all audiences with the changing landscape, including a survey of universities and colleges to provide more information about how they are responding to GCSE reform.

The HE and secondary sectors have both found the intelligence gathered through these surveys valuable in understanding the national response to qualification reform. With this in mind, we have now repositioned our Unpacking Qualification Reform survey as a broader, annual qualification provision survey encapsulating a wider range of qualifications, such as GCSEs, and vocational qualifications.

# Overview of previous surveys

## January 2015

- 66% said they would offer the reformed AS qualifications in some or all subjects.
- A diverse range of influencing factors – funding, timetabling, performance measures, and university entry requirements, in addition to the belief that there is intrinsic value in a midpoint assessment.
- Many were taking ‘a wait and see’ approach until the full suite of revised A levels is available.

## January 2016

- The AS was more prevalent in the 2015/16 academic year than previously thought, with 74% of respondents indicating they would offer the AS in all or some subjects.
- As with the previous survey, independent schools were less likely to offer the AS.
- The survey also indicated that 49% of respondents did not feel they had sufficient information when making decisions.

# Methodology

UCAS emailed all registered Apply centres between November and January, with information regarding the new qualification provision survey.

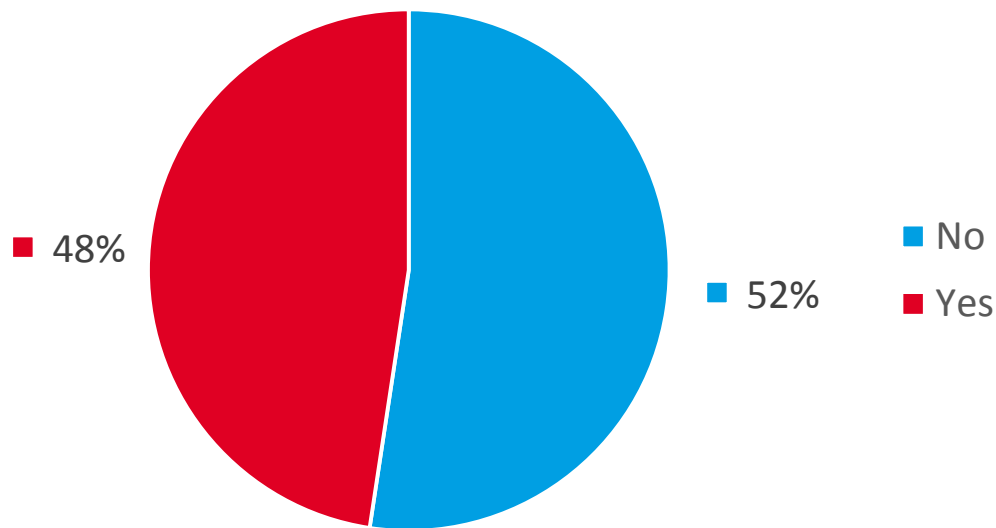
Overall, the survey received 286 individual, analysable responses. Due to the logic of survey questions and user engagement, different questions will have differing levels of participation. The findings presented are not weighted by respondent type.

## Respondents to UCAS qualification provision survey (broken down by school type)

Academy	90
Further education college	21
Grammar school	9
Independent school	99
Other (please specify)	12
Sixth form college	20
Other State	35
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>286</b>



# In general, has the range of qualifications or subjects you offer changed as a result of qualification reform?



n = 271

*"We are offering more BTEC Subsidiary Diplomas alongside A levels."*

**Sixth form college**

*"For 2017/18, we will only offer three options instead of four and students will no longer sit AS level exams."*

**Academy**

*"We will be introducing a Pre-U qualification in art history and a Level 3 diploma qualification in food science and nutrition to replace A levels that have been withdrawn."*

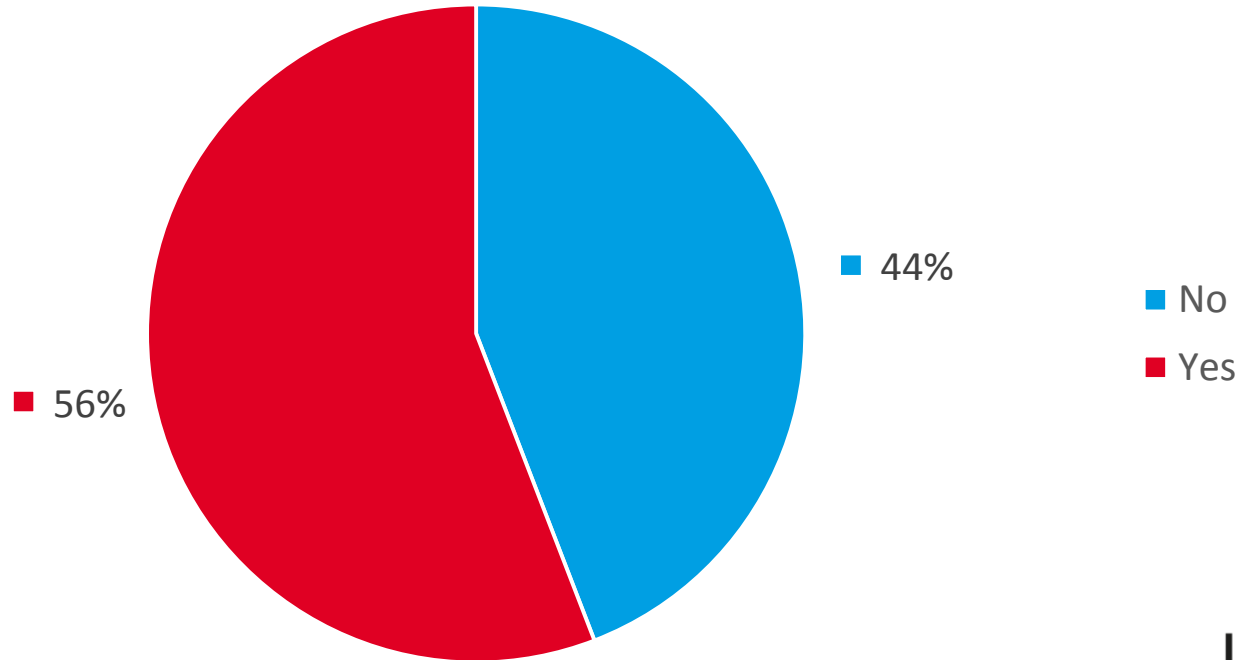
**Independent school**

# A level provision

The following section provides an overview of the responses received in relation to the impact of qualification reform and AS and A level provision.

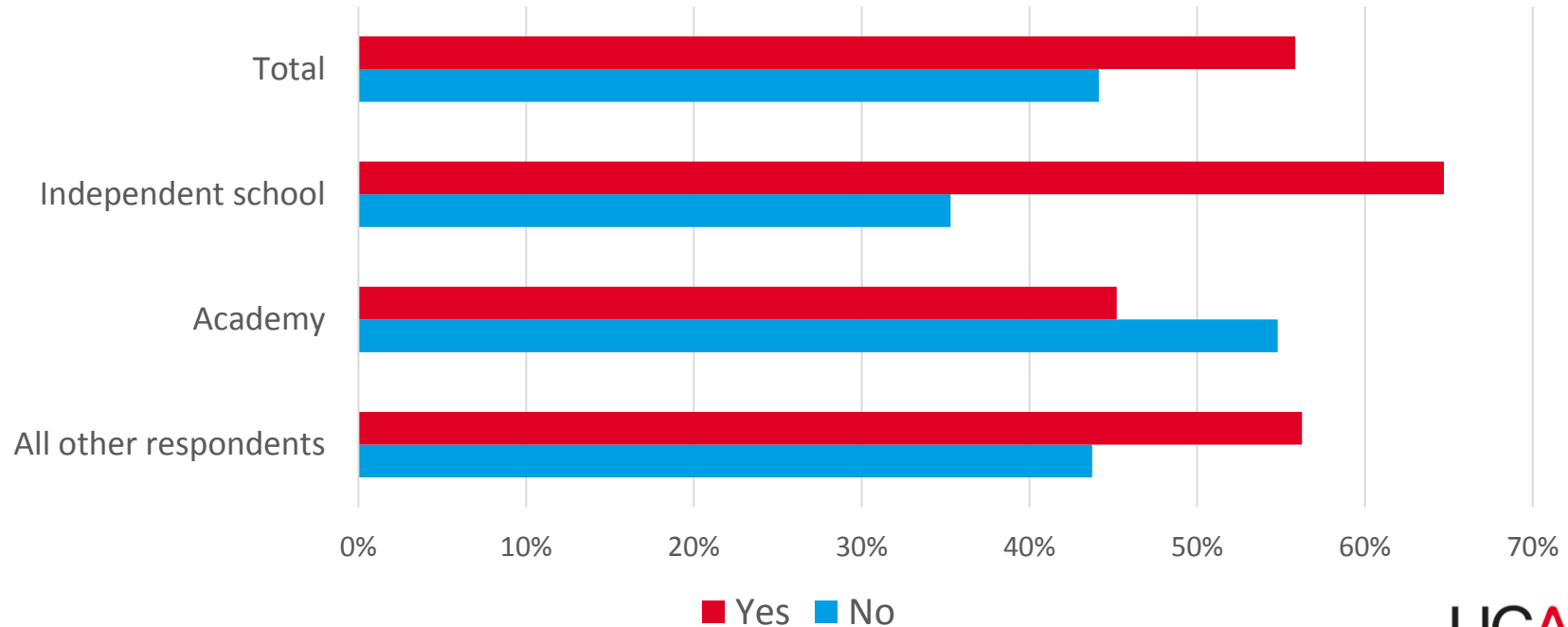


# Have you changed your AS provision since the 2015/16 academic year?



n = 222

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n = 222

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*“AS exams taken in all subjects, then reviewed. Subject leaders were all keen to make the transition to linear A levels.”*

**Academy**

*“Difficulty of co-teaching some of the new AS and A level specs. Universities no longer needing fourth AS. More teaching time with no AS exams.”*

**Independent school**

*“Decided on educational grounds not to continue with AS. Currently Y12s do a fourth subject which they drop, but we are moving to 3+ EPQ or similar as a norm.”*

**Independent school**

*“We are phasing out the AS as subjects become reformed, moving to internal end of year exams, to gain more teaching time. Also we don't think the reformed AS is fit for purpose.”*

**Independent school**

*“AS qualifications were not required for university offers, and were costly. Removing them allowed us more flexibility to deliver the curriculum and allowed us to take pressure off students in the midst of growing stress and anxiety levels.”*

**Other state school**

# Have you changed your AS provision since the 2015/16 academic year?

*"We offered AS qualifications for most linear subjects for 2016 exams, but decided against doing so for 2017 due to a variety of factors and an overview of what other colleges were doing locally."*

**Sixth form college**

*"Content of AS, skills required and time taken divert from A level, particularly outside the sciences. Great difficulty in co-teaching A level and AS satisfactorily. Many universities not offering on AS test – value questionable for our school."*

**Independent school**

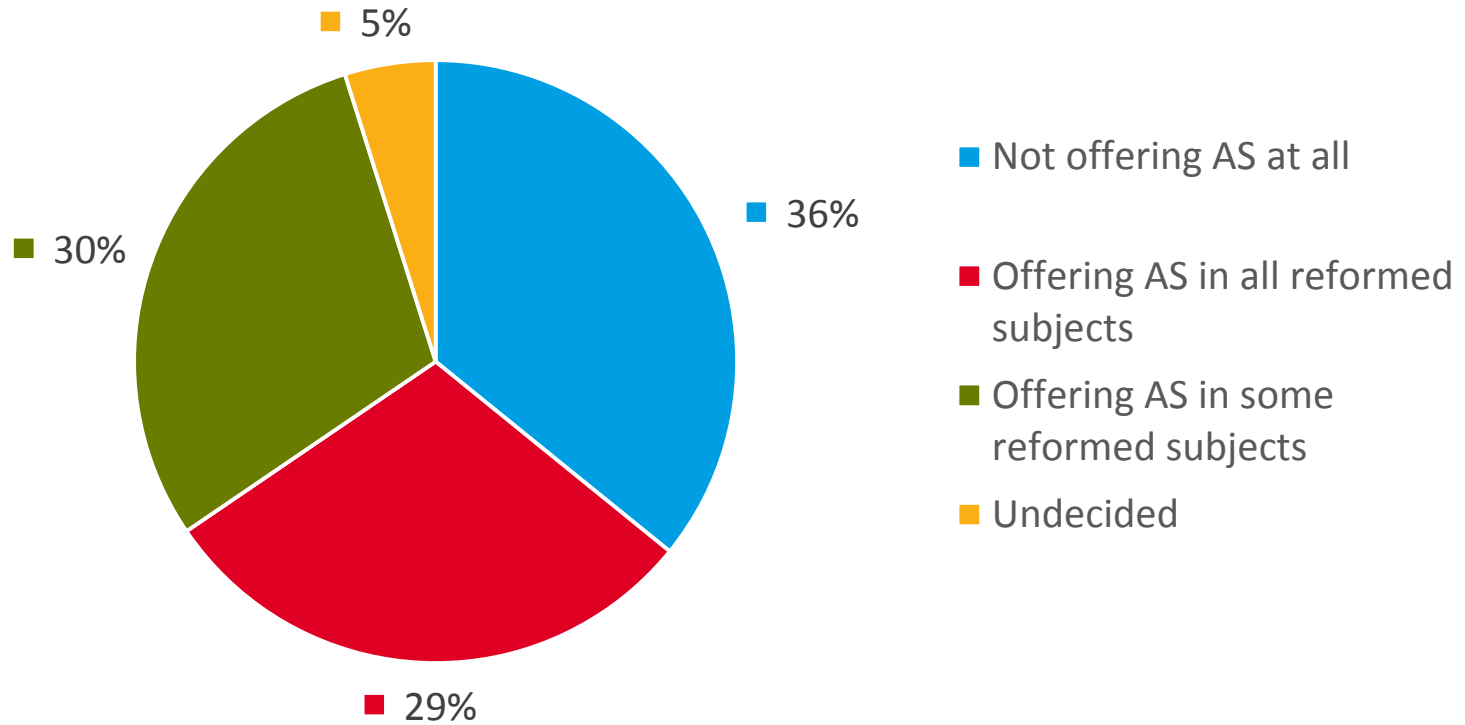
*"To ease transition, all students undertook AS qualifications for that academic year. We have now moved to a model where three full A levels is standard, and additional AS qualifications supplement study for high achieving students (who may also study four full A levels). AS qualifications are also used for students who are in danger of not progressing to Year 13, to secure some qualifications before they potentially leave."*

**Academy**

*"Becoming more logistically difficult to co-teach AS and A level together in the same class, which is what we have to do due to low funding levels."*

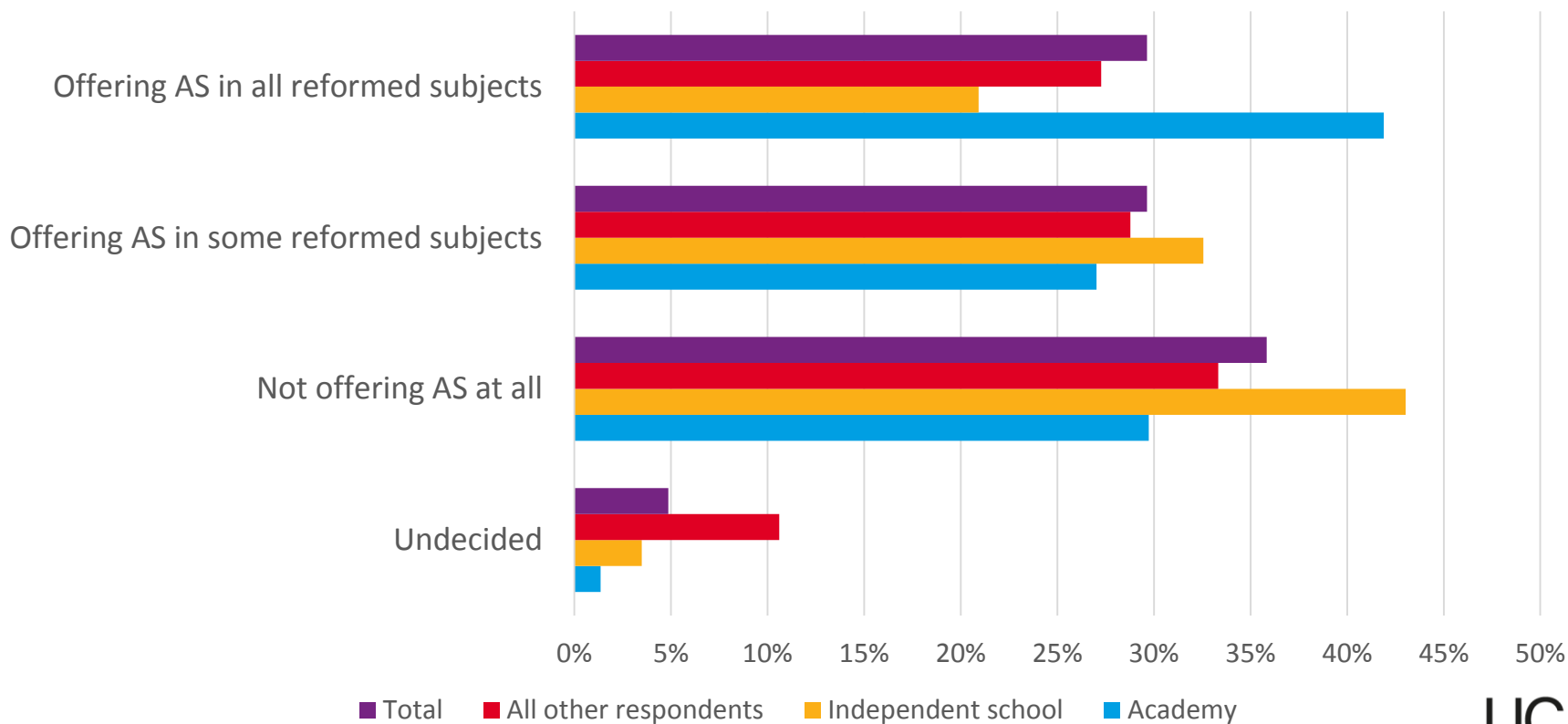
**Grammar schools**

# From the 2016/17 academic year, we are:



n = 226

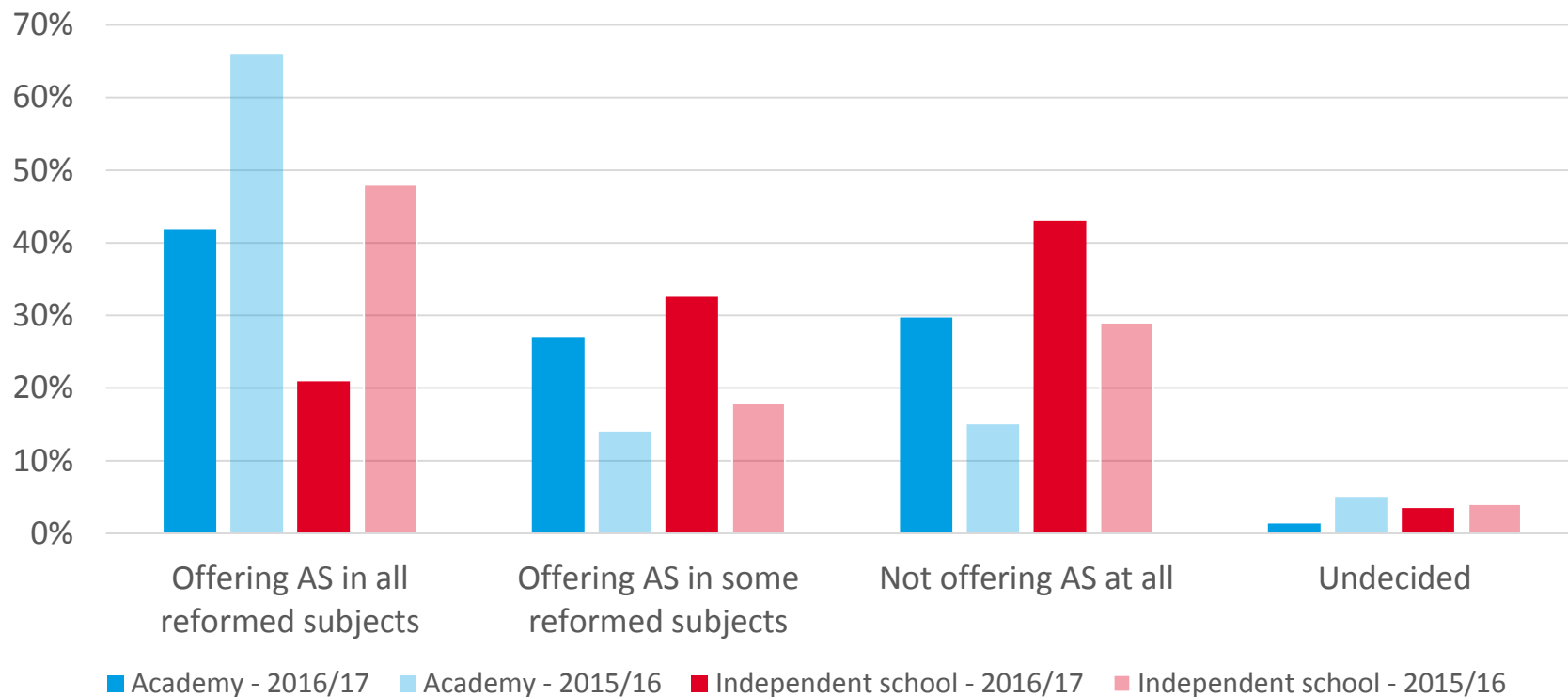
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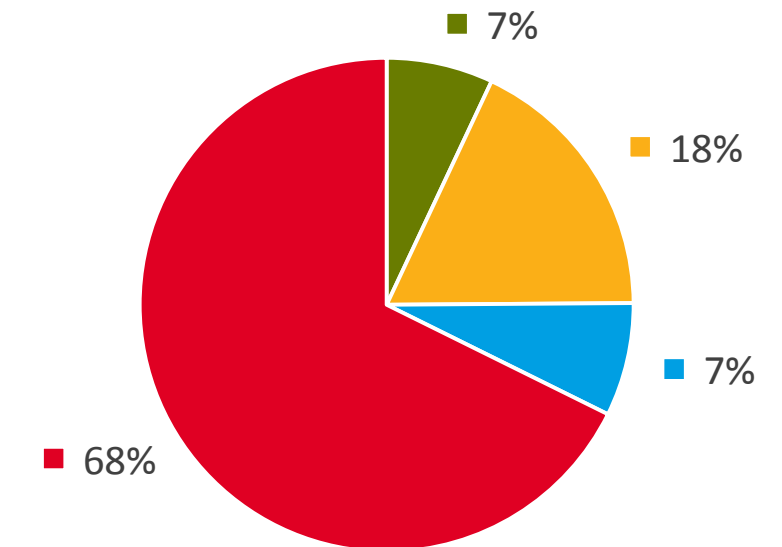
n = 226



# AS provision – 2015/16 vs 2016/17



# As a result of A level reform, has the amount of teaching time available in your centre changed?



■ Decreased

■ Increased

■ Not yet clear

■ Remained the same

n = 229

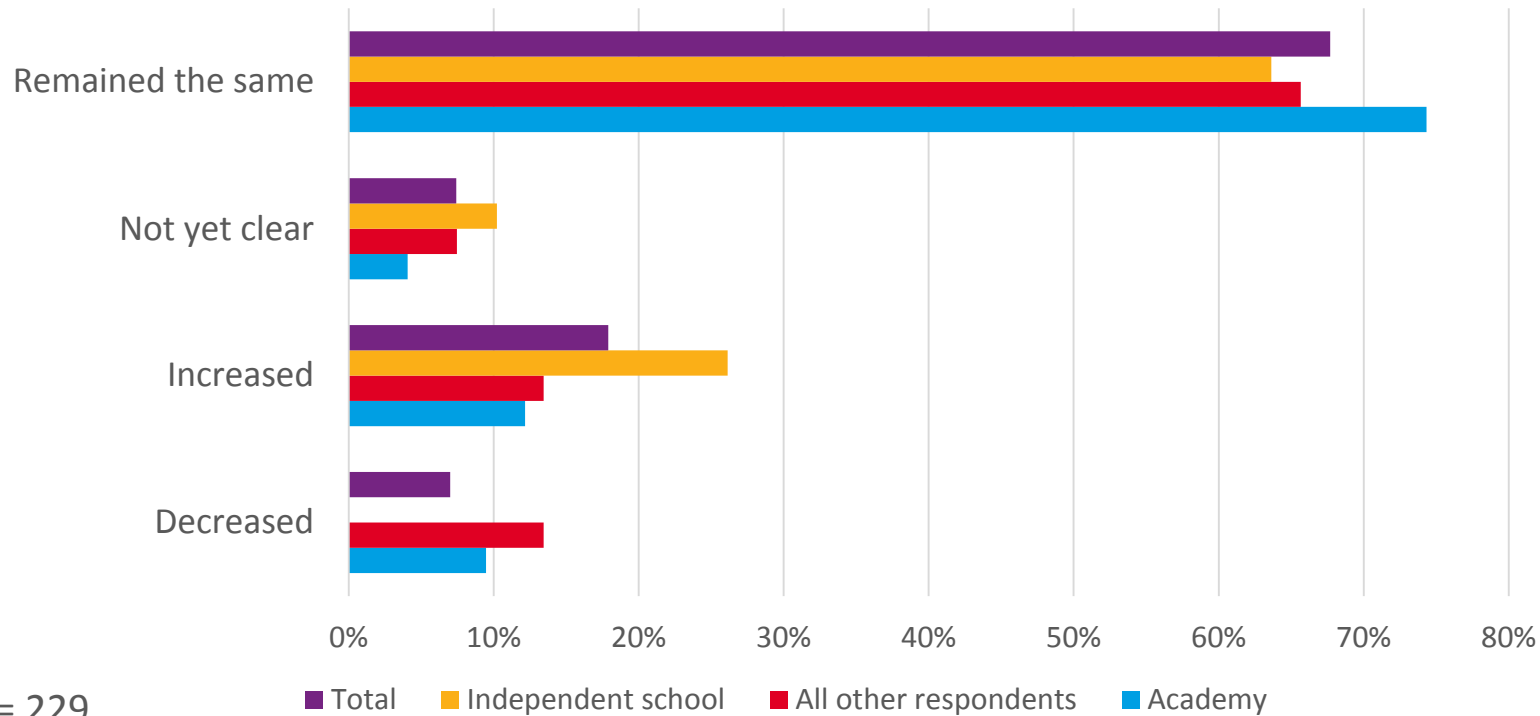
*"Linear AS qualifications no longer offered. Therefore, more teaching time in Year 12."*

**Independent school**

*"The amount of weekly teaching time per A level subject has increased slightly. A pupil's timetable has reduced as we have moved from four subjects in the Lower Sixth to three+ EPQ."*

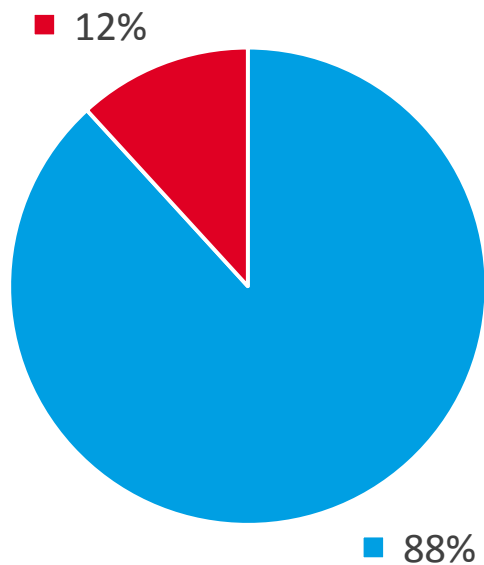
**Independent school**

# As a result of A level reform, has the amount of teaching time available in your centre changed?



n = 229

# As a result of A level reform, has your centre sought more collaborative arrangements with other centres in the provision of certain subjects?



n = 229

■ No ■ Yes

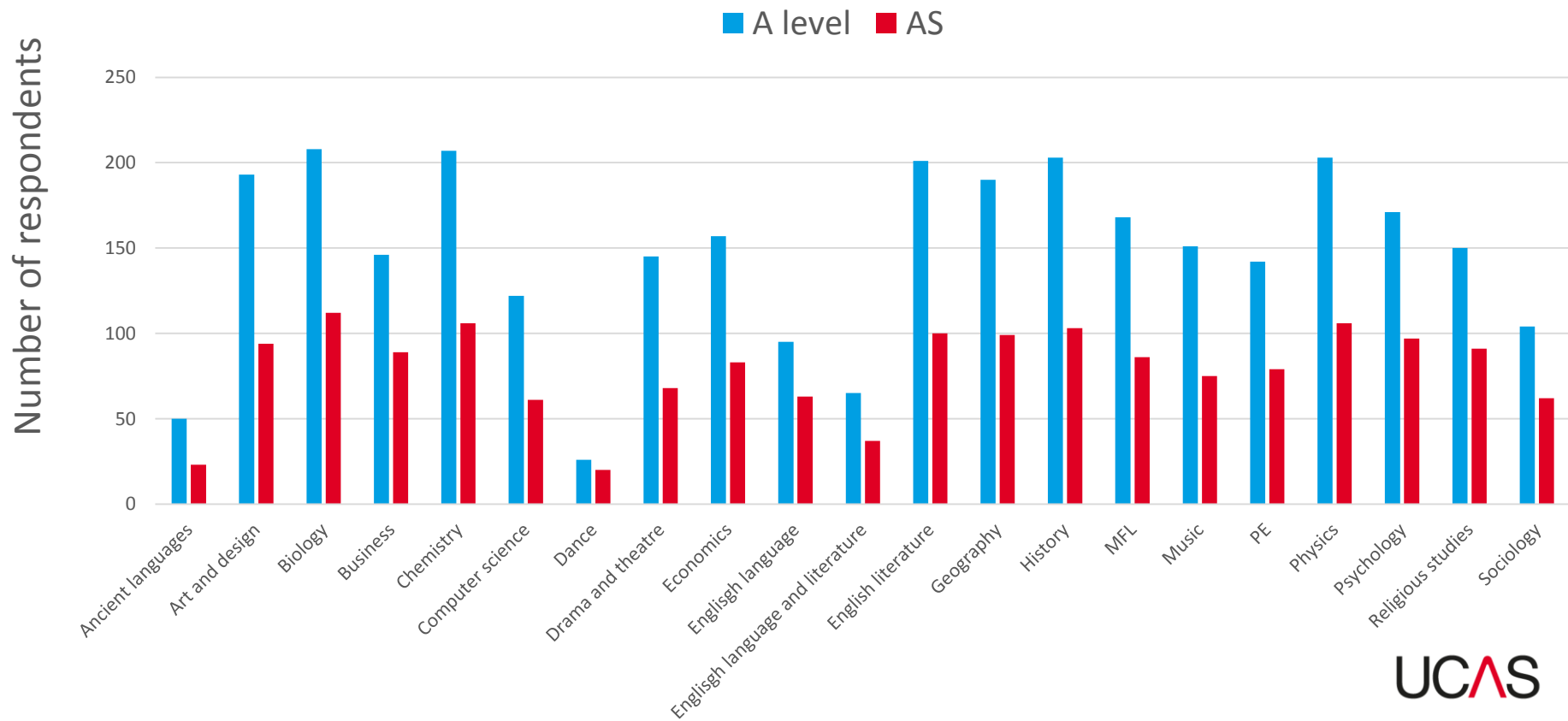
*“Specifically in the sciences, collaboration has been sought to help with the new practical endorsement requirements and how to implement them. Also, collaboration about how to teach and assess linear courses.”*

**Academy**

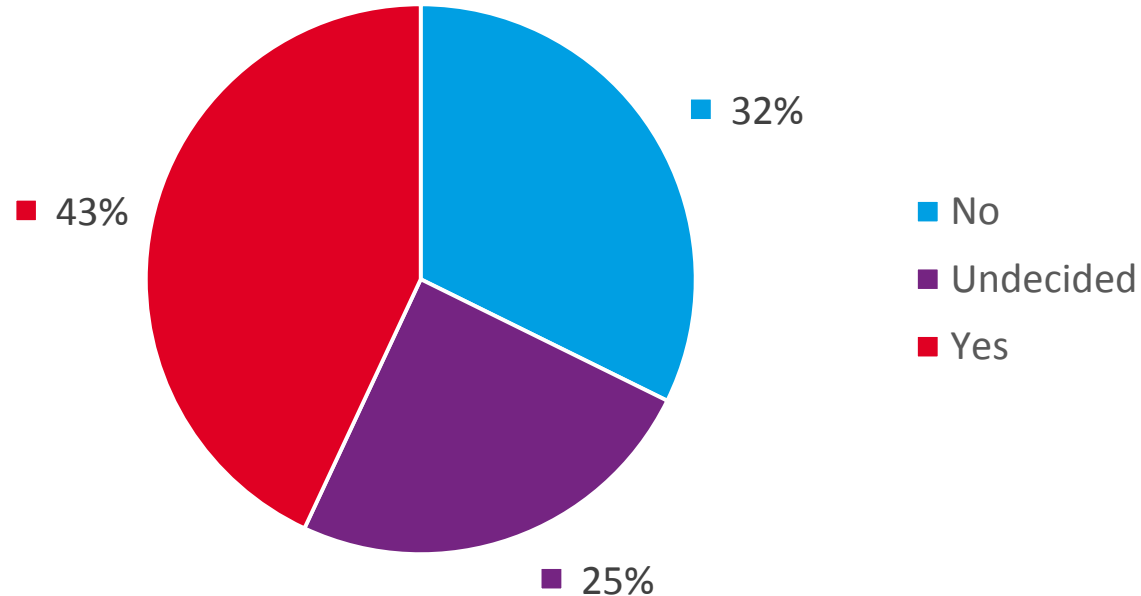
*“Consortium arrangements to extend subject offer.”*

**Academy**

# Subject provision from 2016/17

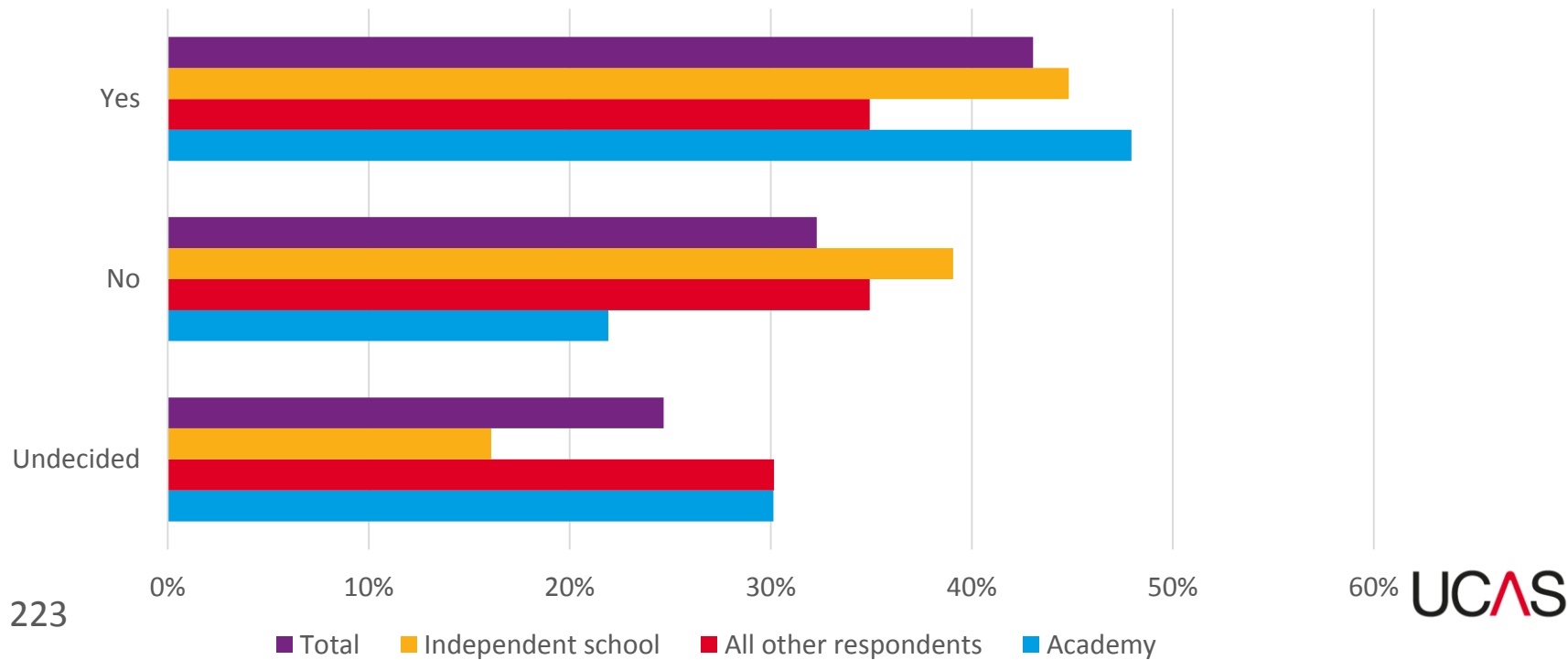


# Do you intend to revisit your decision about AS provision once all A levels are reformed (2017 first teaching)?



n = 223

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n = 223

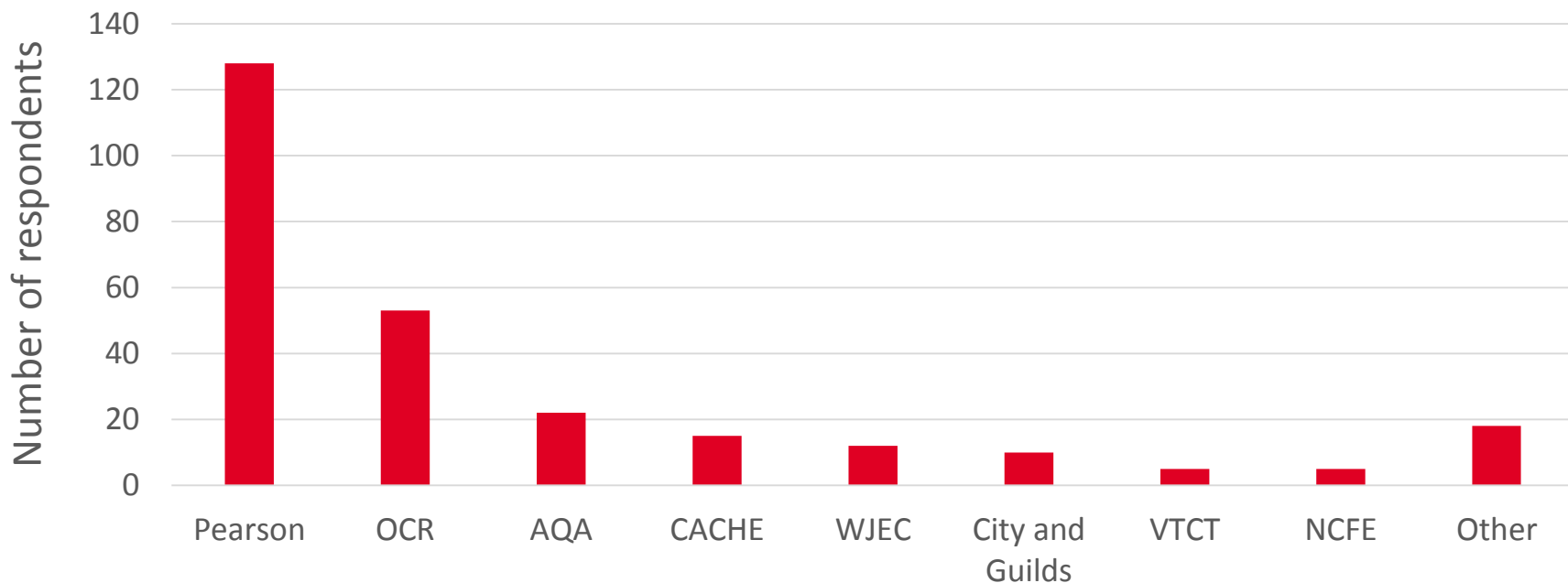
# Vocational qualification (VQ) provision

This section explores how schools and colleges are responding to Applied General and Tech level reform.



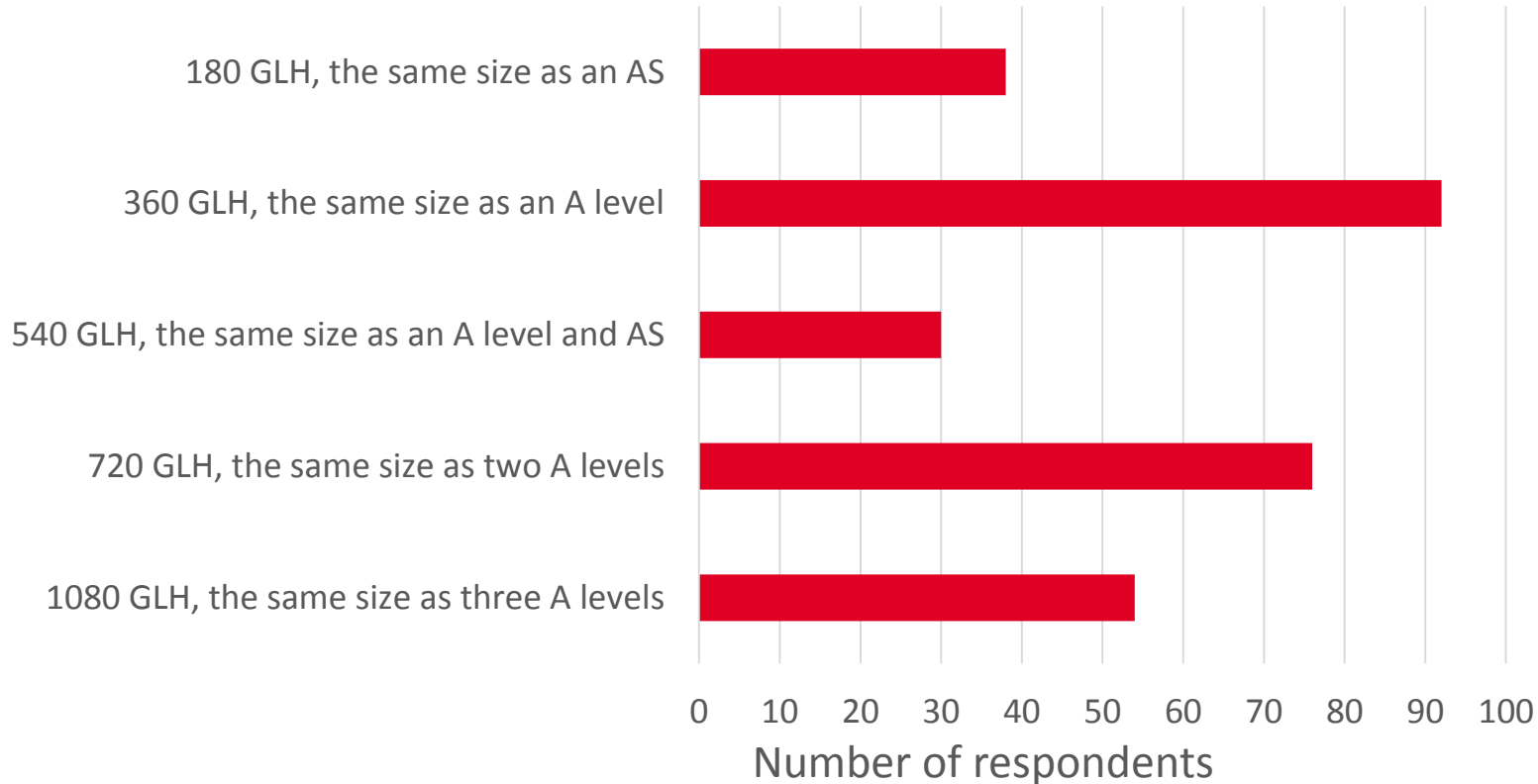


# Which organisation awards the vocational qualifications you deliver?



n = Independent Schools: 13, Academies: 65, All other respondents: 66

# What size VQ do you offer?



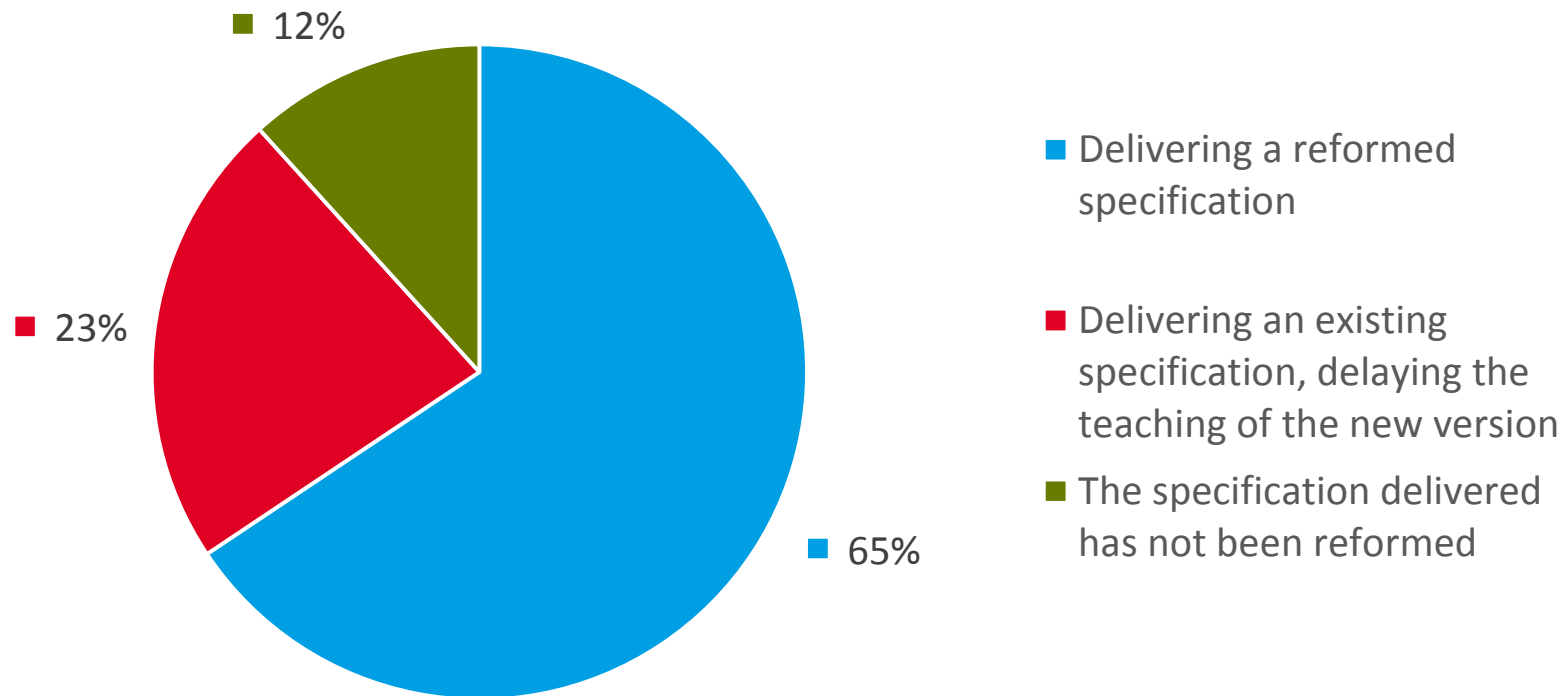
# Are you delivering a reformed specification?

For the 2016/17 academic year, schools and colleges offering vocational qualifications such as BTEC Nationals, OCR Cambridge Technicals, and AQA Technicals, are able to decide whether they wish to offer a reformed or unreformed specification. This has led to differing approaches taken by schools.

Whilst both options are entirely legitimate, it is important that learners select the correct title of the qualification they have undertaken when completing UCAS Apply. Equally, schools and colleges should detail in the reference, or qualification provision web page, their rationale for offering the specific specification they are delivering. This will allow universities and colleges to make fully informed decisions regarding an applicant.

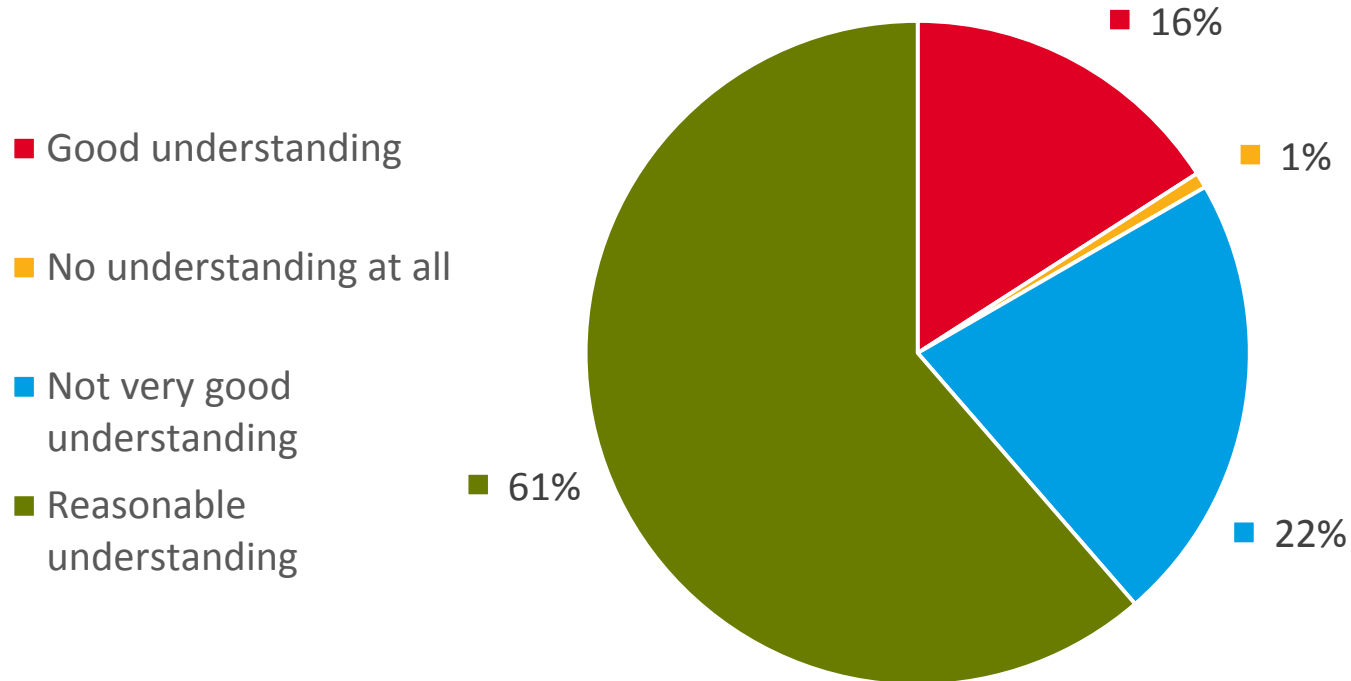
Our survey shows a diversity of approaches.

# For the 2016/17 academic year, are you:



n = 128

# To what extent do you believe universities and colleges understand VQs?



n = 132

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*"I feel it is important that students on the new Cambridge Technicals don't feel like these qualifications are unwanted by universities. They should be specifically mentioned in entry requirements so students are fully aware of what they need to achieve."*

**Academy**

*"Depends on the university – I perceive that the more traditional seem to understand them less well than the younger universities."*

**Academy**

*"We often have to contact universities to explain what equivalent they are compared to A levels."*

**Academy**

# Information regarding VQs

UCAS works extensively with universities and colleges to assist them in remaining up to date with reformed qualifications.

UCAS has recently published the outcomes of its Progression pathways project. The purpose of this project was to explore the vocational qualification progression route in detail, and illustrate the opportunities and challenges faced by learners, schools and HEPs and highlight the support available. The outputs of this project can be found at: [www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-and-resources/qualification-reform/progression-pathways](http://www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-and-resources/qualification-reform/progression-pathways).

UCAS also provides information about vocational qualifications in a standardised manner via our Qualification Information Profiles. These can be found at: [gips.ucas.com/](http://gips.ucas.com/).

# GCSE provision

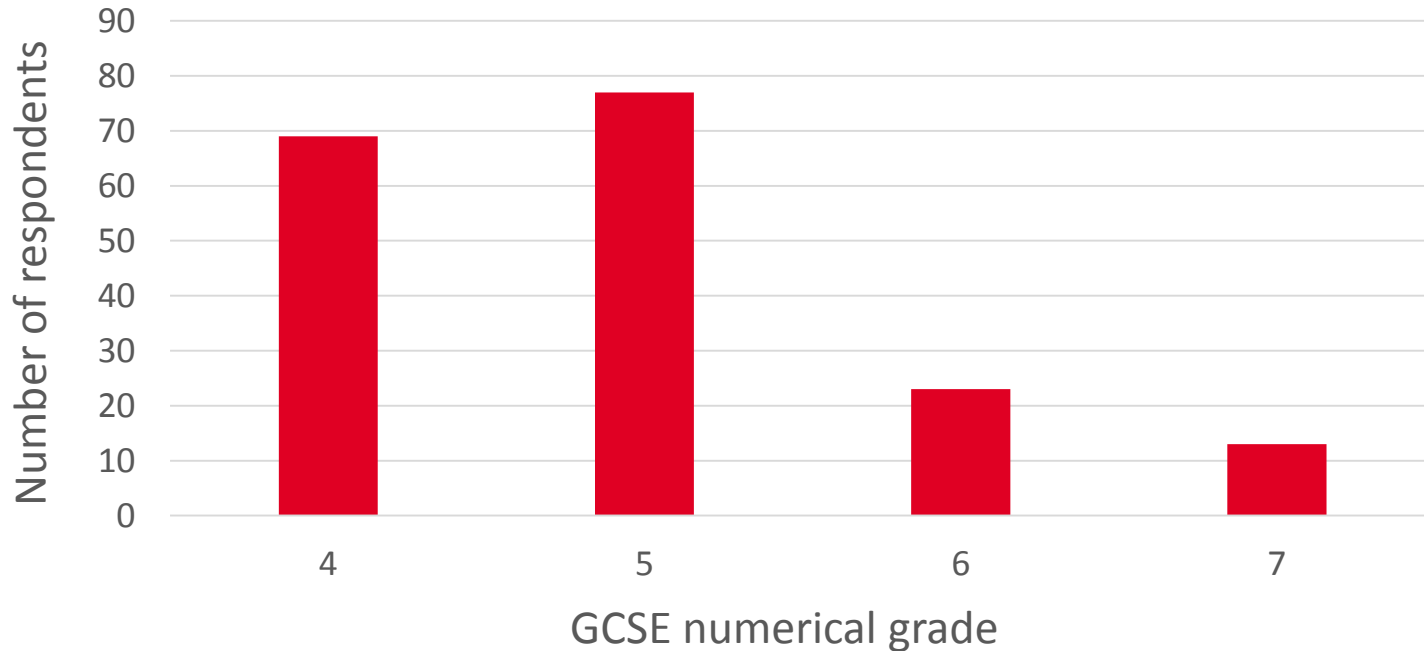
This section explores how schools and colleges are responding to the introduction of reformed GCSEs, with a numerical grading scale.





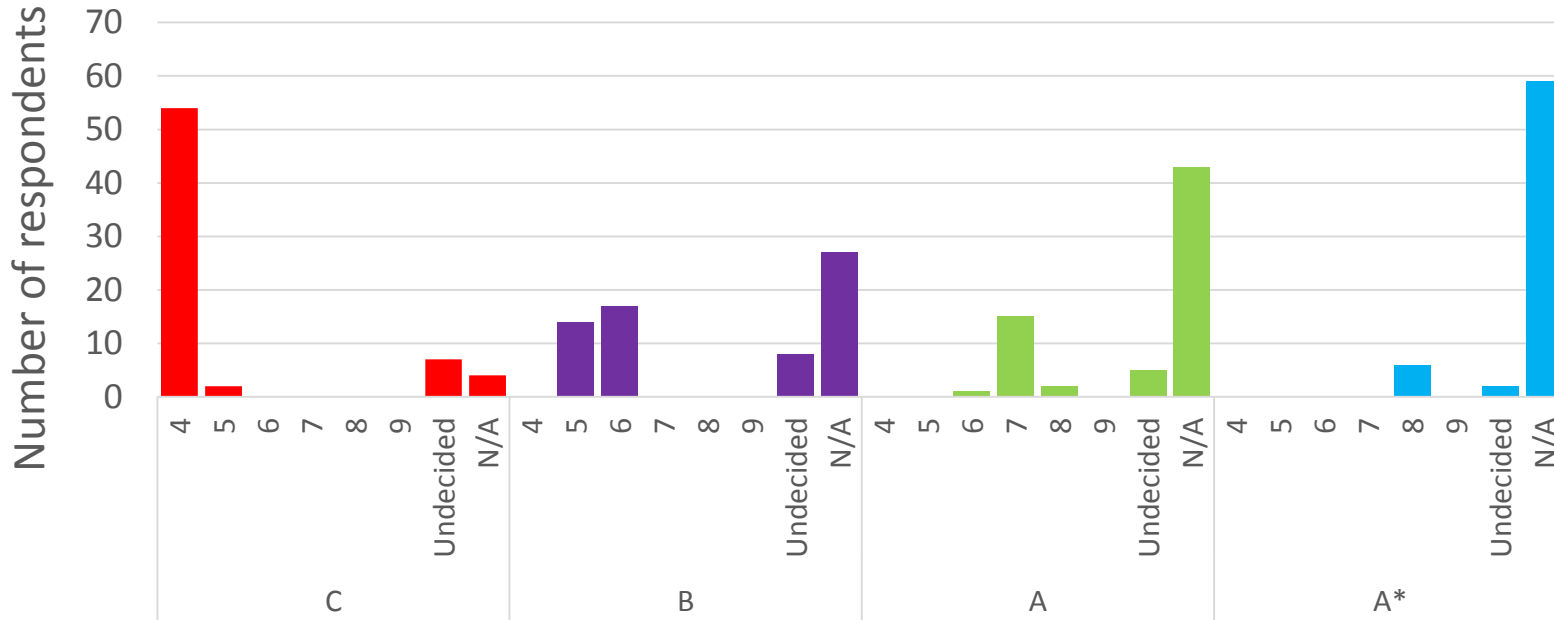
# GCSE requirement for schools and colleges

In our survey, 185 schools and colleges indicated they have a GCSE entry requirement in English and Maths for access to post-16 provision. These requirements were generally as follows:



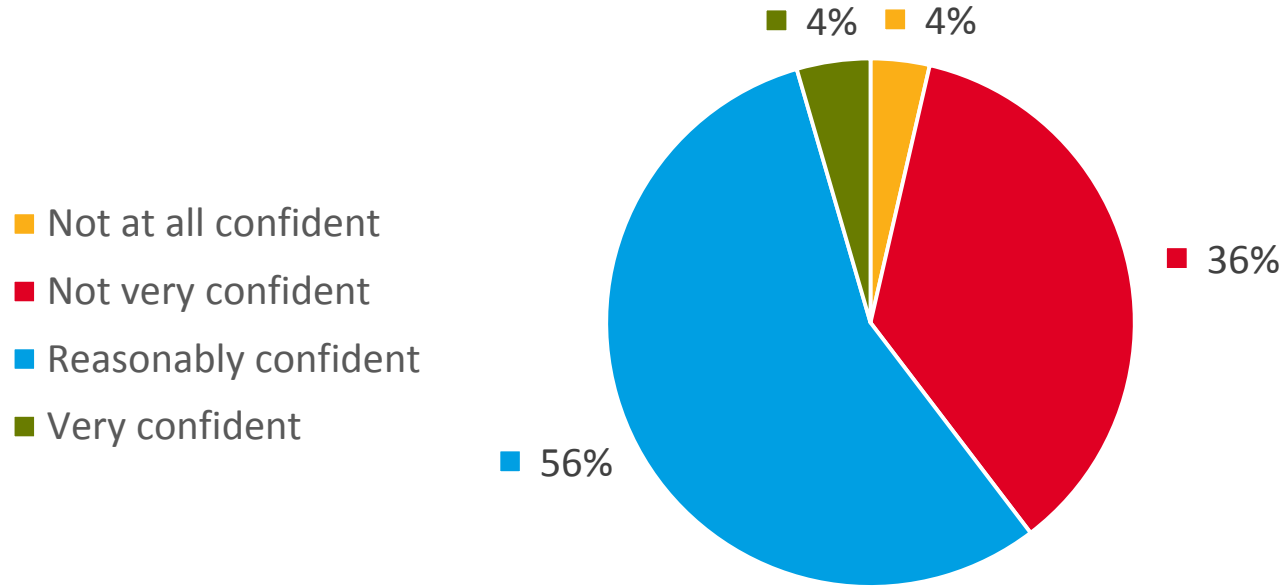
# GCSE requirement for higher education

In 2016, UCAS ran a survey of universities and colleges to understand how they were positioning future GCSE entry requirements. Their general approach can be seen below:



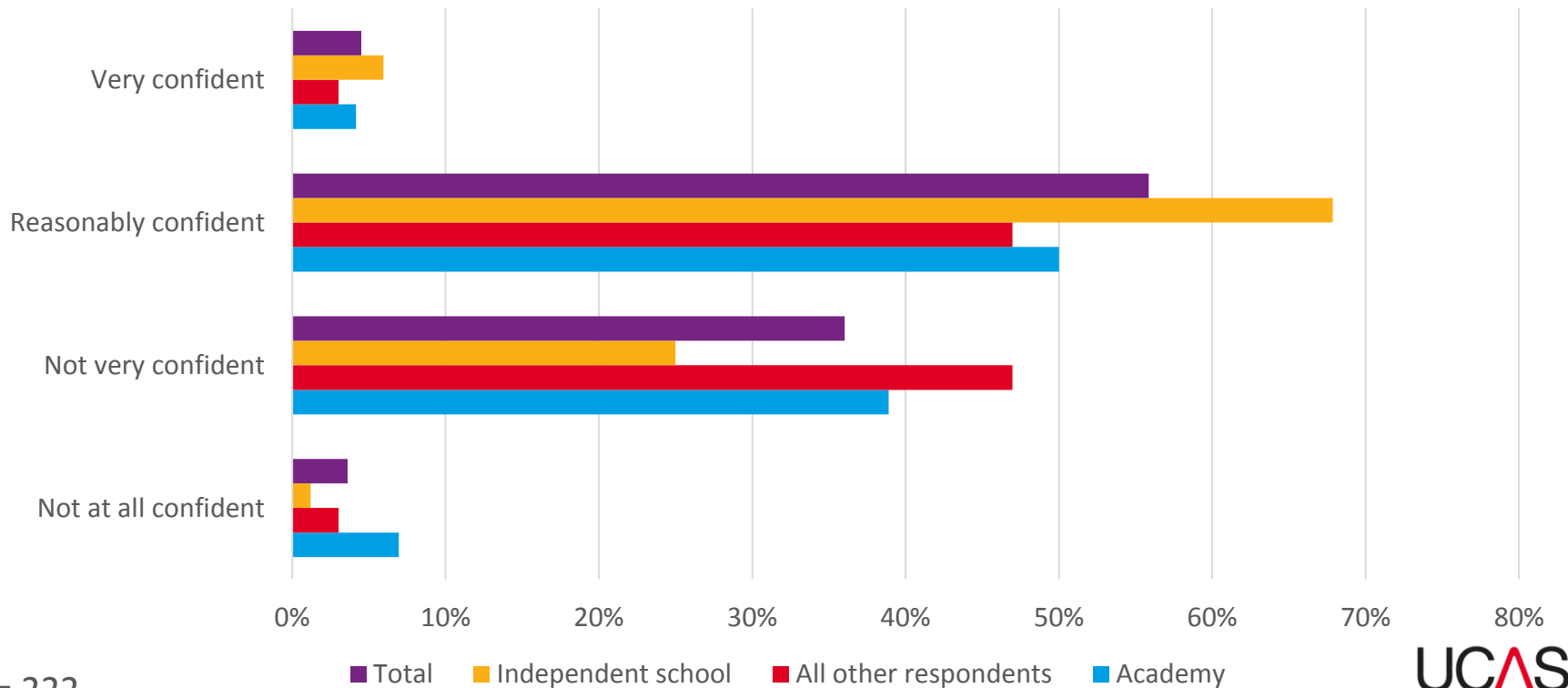
# Numerical grading scale

We asked schools and colleges how confident they felt in identifying the standard a student is performing at under the numerical GCSE grading scale.



n = 222

# Numerical grading scale



n = 222

# Information regarding GCSEs

Ofqual has produced a range of resources to provide clarity regarding the new numerical grading structure being introduced for reformed GCSEs in England. These resources include videos, newsletters, blogs on specialist issues, and a postcard outlining the new grading scale. These resources, along with details about how schools and colleges can remain up-to-date with developments, can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-gcse-9-to-1-grades-coming-soon>

UCAS has also produced an [annotated version of the Ofqual GCSE grading postcard](#) that places the new grading scale in the context of higher education admissions.

# Conclusions and next steps



# Conclusions

The findings of this survey indicate that qualification reform is continuing to drive changing provision across the education sector. It is important that the HE and education sector continue their dialogue to ensure one another understands the impact of these reforms. UCAS will continue to act as an intermediary for this.

ucas.com provides a range of resources to support both audiences with the changing qualification landscape. These resources can be found at [www.ucas.com/qualsreform](http://www.ucas.com/qualsreform).

# Next steps for schools and colleges

With changing provision, the UCAS reference becomes increasingly more important, therefore we recommend:

- schools create a web page detailing their qualification provision and rationale behind this. The URL for this can be placed in the reference. [The SPA NETT guidance in this area](#) will provide insight into the sort of information HE would like to know
- in the reference, schools should detail how they are making grade predictions
- schools should review our [Applying to higher education with reformed qualifications web page](#), which provides an overview of how the higher education sector is responding to the reforms, as well as listing a range of FAQs
- schools should continue to engage with universities and colleges to ensure they are aware of your centre's particular circumstance



# Next steps for universities and colleges

Universities and colleges should:

- continue to engage with schools and colleges to understand how they are responding to qualification reform
- aim to be clear and transparent in entry requirements, referencing legacy, current, and future qualifications where relevant, and stating any requirements for the AS, science practical grade and GCSEs. In particular, universities and colleges should seek to clarify the range of vocational qualifications they deem suitable for entry (either in isolation or in combination with other qualifications)
- continue to produce and review qualification reform statements based on the latest developments

# Next steps for UCAS

UCAS will:

- continue to act as an intermediary between schools and colleges to ensure both parties remain up-to-date with developments
- continue to provide a range of information regarding a broad range of qualifications, including vocational qualifications. This information is intended to raise the level of understanding regarding specific qualifications to support informed decision-making
- continue to produce resources to support schools, colleges and universities
- continue to issue a qualification provision survey on an annual basis and seek to expand coverage to include all UK nations
- ensure the range of qualifications and qualification provision is reflected in current and new UCAS services



**Ben Jordan**

**Senior Policy Executive**

[b.jordan@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:b.jordan@ucas.ac.uk)

**UCAS**