

Another 50,000 Assessments:



a window onto the continuing effects
of the pandemic on language levels
in school



...part of the Speech and Language Link
whole school approach

Executive Summary

This report seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Do Infant Language Link assessment results (autumn 2021) reflect the opinion of education professionals that children started school with lower language levels?
2. How are the language levels progressing for children in Year 1, who were screened with Infant Language Link on school entry in autumn 2020?

(Note that the key points of the original 50,000 Assessments report, released spring 2021, are repeated within this report with the addition of autumn 2021 data)

To answer question 1, analysis of the Infant Language Link data shows:

- The percentage of children identified in 2021 with ‘red’ (approx. < 6th percentile) and ‘blue’ (< 16th percentile) language levels has fallen from a peak in autumn 2020 but is still higher than any previous year (page 4).
- In every year, the percentage of ‘red’ and ‘blue’ children in IMD quintile 1 (Index of Multiple Deprivation) is nearly twice that for IMD quintile 5.
An average class of 30 Reception pupils in IMD quintile 1 will have 7-9 pupils needing SLCN support, compared to just over 4 pupils in an IMD quintile 5 class (page 7).
- The level of SLCN has been rising since 2017 (the limit of these records). The considerable increase in September 2020 has not entirely fallen away in 2021 (page 7).

To answer question 2, the results for Year 1 children who require continuing support for SLCN show:

- Between autumn 2019 and autumn 2020, fewer ‘red’ pupils made progress and more ‘blue’ pupils dropped into the ‘red’ zone (page 10).
- In 2021, Year 1 children in lower IMD quintiles made less progress than children in less disadvantaged areas. (page 10).

What would “back to normal” mean?

- Approximately 1 in 4 pupils in least advantaged areas starting school with language levels below 16th percentile compared to approximately 1 in 7 in the most advantaged areas
- Approximately 1 in 9 pupils in least advantaged areas starting school with language levels below 6th percentile compared to approximately 1 in 20 in the most advantaged areas
- Ongoing concern about the continued progress of children identified with language needs in year R

We therefore feel it is essential to take a whole school approach to monitoring and supporting language needs beyond the Reception year, with particular emphasis on targeting help where it is most needed.

Background

Education professionals have reported lower levels of language in children starting school in September 2020 and in September 2021.

This document examines whether these reports are reflected in the language levels recorded by the Infant Language Link standardised assessment in the months of the autumn terms 2020 and 2021 and how these language levels compared to levels in pre-pandemic years. This is a follow-up to our original discussion document “50,000 Assessments” released in spring 2021

In addition, we have looked at the progress of Year 1 children previously identified with lower language levels on school entry in autumn 2020. Have they made the same level of progress as similar children identified in pre-pandemic years?

Infant Language Link Assessments

Infant Language Link contains two equated, standardised assessments of the understanding of language. The Reception Assessment is designed for use as its name suggests in Reception (in England ages 48 to 71 months) and the Infant Assessment is focused on years 1 and 2 (in England, ages 60 to 95 months).

Standardised in association with the University of Cambridge Psychometrics Centre, these assessments are based on Item Response Theory and are designed specifically to screen for problems understanding the language likely to be used in the classroom. The sensitivity of the assessments is therefore focused on the lower percentiles and peaks between the 6th and 16th. The standardisation is on a month by month basis, not the more usual six month age bands. Each year approximately 70,000 Reception Language Link Assessments are completed, with about 50,000 of these during the Autumn term.

Presentation of Language Link Results

A percentile rank and standard score are reported along with specific areas of weakness. The pupil’s result is placed in one of four bands which have recommendations associated with them. The bands are characterised as “Red” (approx. less than 6th percentile), “Blue” (less than 16th percentile), “Borderline” (approx. less than 22nd percentile) and “Clear”. Each criterion excludes those of the lower bands so to get all below the 16th for example, “Red” must be added to “Blue”.

Assessing in the Autumn Term

We recommend schools do not screen Reception pupils immediately on arrival at school, but that sufficient settling in time is allowed. However, many still do screen on arrival, possibly leading to some inflation of the numbers identified. As we have the data available, we have therefore looked at the levels recorded in the autumn term as a whole and in the individual months of the autumn term across the last five years.

Time away from school/nursery during first two years of pandemic

| | Jan | Feb | March | April | May | June | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 2020 | Green | Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green |
| 2021 | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green | Light Green |

Key

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Green | Children in school |
| Light Green | Children in school but levels of infection having an impact on teaching arrangements |
| Light Orange | Children in school but levels of infection or guidance having a significant impact on teaching arrangements |
| Orange | Many children not in school, ongoing restrictions and partial opening. ECEC settings “open” from 20-07-2020 |
| Dark Orange | Lockdown – only children of keyworkers in school ECEC settings closed in 2020 |

Sources: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

<https://post.parliament.uk/impact-of-covid-19-on-early-childhood-education-care/>

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9068/>

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), Deciles and Quintiles

Where appropriate we have broken down the data for England by Index of Multiple Deprivation. For a full explanation of the Index of Multiple Deprivation and associated terms please see this document:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835115/loD2019_Statistical_Release.pdf We have combined IMD deciles into quintiles to simplify data representation.

The Data

Criteria for Inclusion

Starting with approximately 50,000 assessments, in order to focus on SLCN prevalence, make sensible comparisons between years, months, expected levels and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), the following criteria were applied:

1. Pupils flagged as having English as an Additional Language were excluded from the sample.

(It is recognised that supporting pupils who have English as an Additional Language brings significant additional planning and work for the class teacher. However, as having English as an Additional Language is not a speech, language and communication need, it was felt inappropriate to include these children in the data, despite the Language Link programmes being beneficial for these pupils.)

2. Only schools with 15 or more initial Reception assessments completed within the autumn term are included. This is our gauge of whether schools are attempting universal screening.
3. Deprivation parameter weightings differ between the UK nations therefore, where IMD is considered, only schools in England have been included. Where all our UK schools' Reception data have been included, this is noted.

A First Look

UK wide percentages within the results zones. All pupils, excluding EAL, from all UK schools completing more than 15 assessments in the specified autumn term: (Note, it is not the same group of pupils being assessed in each month, nevertheless with 10,000 to 15,000 pupils per month comparisons with previous years are appropriate)

| Percentage in Red Zone all UK (pupils in sample, excluding EAL) | | | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
| Entire Autumn Term | 6.3 (44047) | 6.7 (41880) | 7.0 (42534) | 8.1 (40445) | 7.8 (41710) |
| September only | 6.8 (15,055) | 6.9 (16,672) | 7.7 (14,898) | 9.6 (11,814) | 7.9 (13644) |
| October only | 5.9 (17,990) | 6.4 (16,746) | 6.3 (15,342) | 7.5 (14,883) | 7.9 (14564) |
| Nov/Dec only | 6.4 (11,002) | 6.9 (8,462) | 6.9 (12,294) | 7.4 (13,748) | 7.7 (13502) |

Table 1

| Percentage in Red+Blue Zones all UK (pupils in sample are as above) | | | | | |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|
| | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
| Entire Autumn Term | 17.4 | 17.9 | 17.9 | 20.1 | 19.4 |
| September only | 18.4 | 18.6 | 19.0 | 23.2 | 19.7 |
| October only | 17.1 | 17.4 | 17.5 | 19.6 | 19.7 |
| Nov/Dec only | 16.5 | 17.4 | 17.1 | 18.0 | 18.7 |

Table 2

Year on Year changes in levels by autumn term and for each month

| Entire Autumn term | | |
|--------------------|--------|---|
| | Red | Red + Blue (<16 th percentile) |
| 2017 to 2018 | +6.3% | +2.9% |
| 2018 to 2019 | +4.5% | +0.0% |
| 2019 to 2020 | +15.7% | +12.3% |
| 2020 to 2021 | -3.7% | -3.5% |

Table 3

| September only | | |
|----------------|--------|------------|
| | Red | Red + Blue |
| 2017 to 2018 | +1.5% | +1.1% |
| 2018 to 2019 | +11.6% | +2.2% |
| 2019 to 2020 | +24.7% | +22.1% |
| 2020 to 2021 | -17.7% | -15% |

Table 4

| October only | | |
|--------------|--------|------------|
| | Red | Red + Blue |
| 2017 to 2018 | +8.5% | +1.8% |
| 2018 to 2019 | -1.6% | +0.6% |
| 2019 to 2020 | +19.0% | +10.0% |
| 2020 to 2021 | +5.3% | +0.5% |

Table 5

| Nov/Dec only | | |
|--------------|-------|------------|
| | Red | Red + Blue |
| 2017 to 2018 | +7.8% | +5.4% |
| 2018 to 2019 | +0.0% | -1.7% |
| 2019 to 2020 | +7.2% | +5.2% |
| 2020 to 2021 | +4.1% | +3.9% |

Table 6

The tables above show that for the two years prior to 2020 the percentage of scores falling into the red zone increased each year for the autumn term as a whole and for most individual months within the autumn term. The year on year change is noticeably larger between 2019 and 2020 both for the autumn term taken as a whole and for the months of September and October, by Nov/December the increase in red zone levels has fallen back to be commensurate with those increases seen in previous years, nevertheless the trend remains upwards.

In 2021 taking the term as a whole the levels have fallen from the spike seen in 2020. Looking at the individual months shows this fall is due to a large decrease in September, yet the following months continue to show an increase on 2020 levels.

Caveats:

Overall data are not equally weighted between numbers of schools in each IMD decile, there being fewer subscribers from the lower deciles, adjusting for this is likely to increase the levels of need shown above. We have examined the results for deciles combined into quintiles below.

These data are not derived from exactly the same set of schools each year and some of the schools may assess in different months each year. However, as we capture results from at least 10% of the UK Reception population, the trends shown are likely to reflect the true picture.

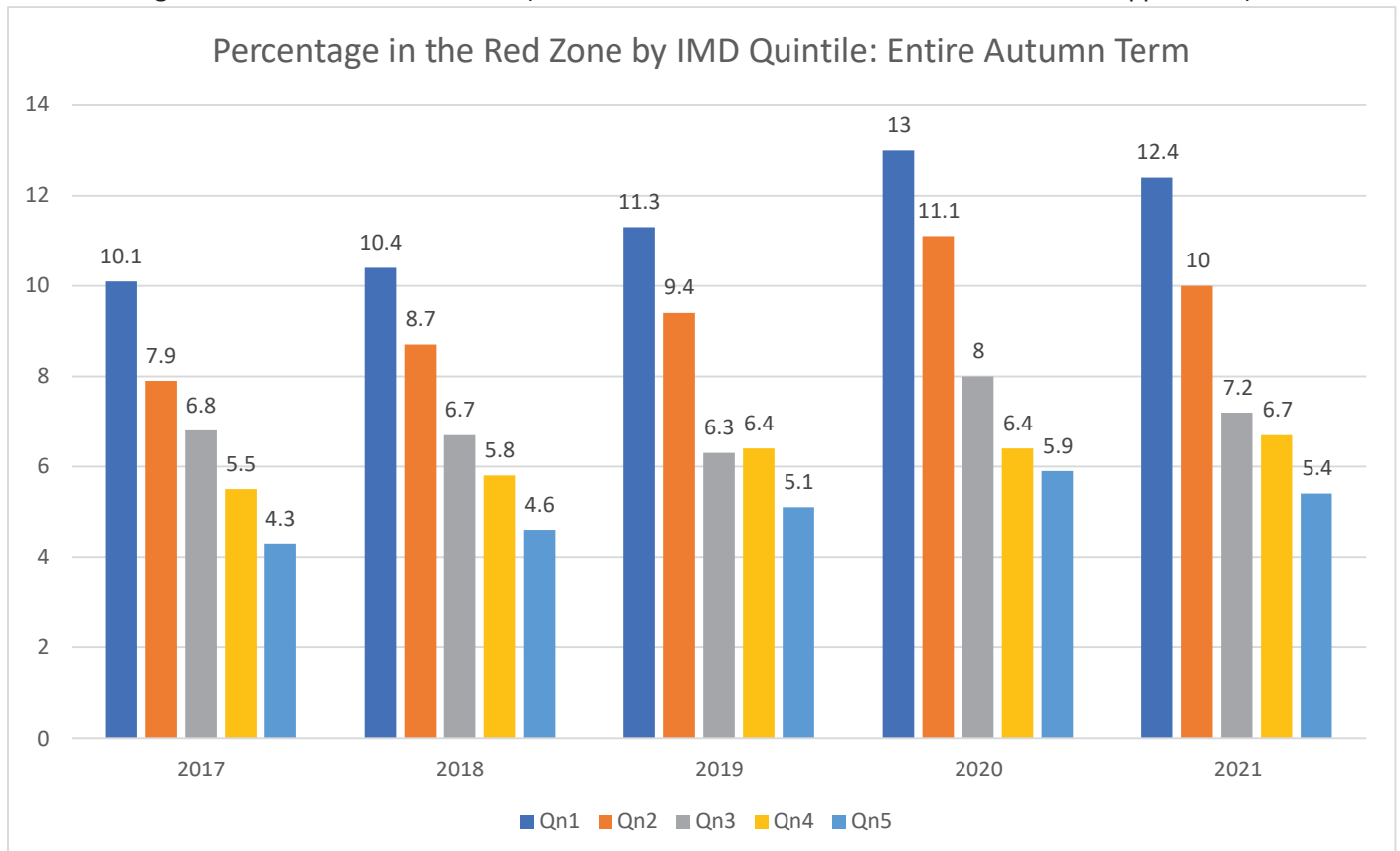
Note that, as the assessment is standardised by age in individual months, the overall pattern of change through the months of the autumn term is not due to the mean age of the children shifting relative to a 6 month standardisation band.

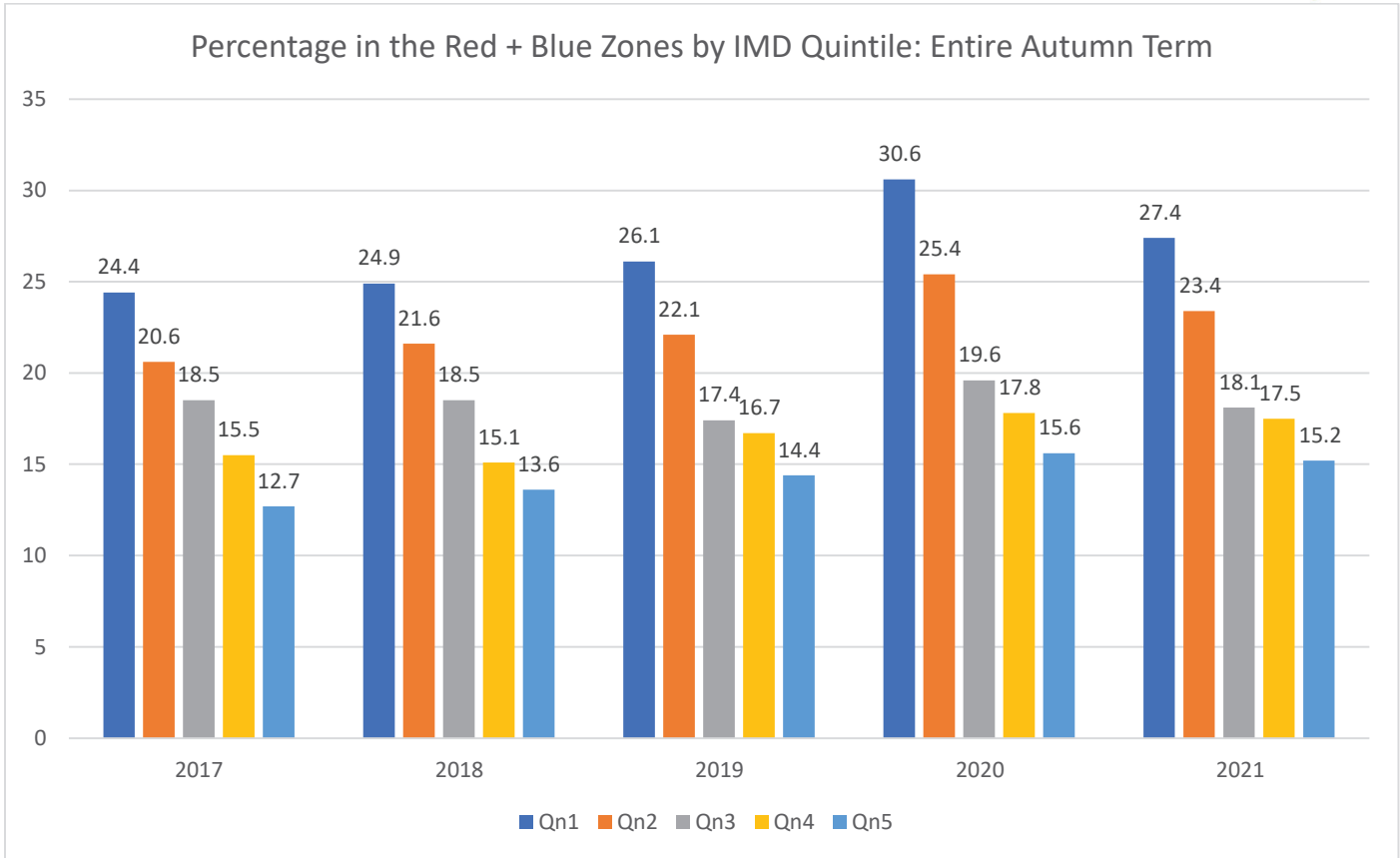
Comparisons between IMD Quintiles

We obtained a value for the IMD decile corresponding to the postcode of each school and combined the deciles into quintiles to ensure we had at least 1000 pupils from schools in each quintile for each month of interest.

See appendix 1 for tables which show the percentages of scores in the first two Infant Language Link bands for each year and month, for each quintile for the last 5 years.

The following charts derive from the tables (further charts for individual months are found in appendix 1):





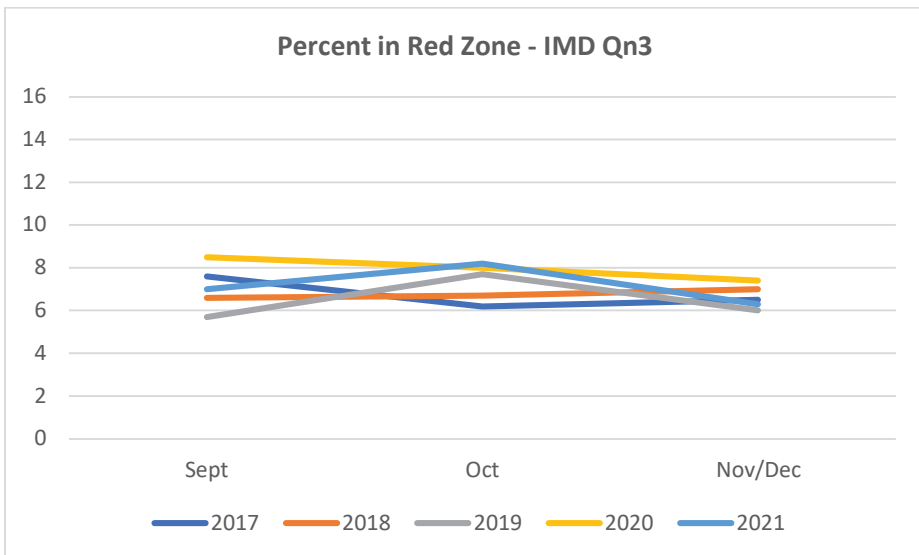
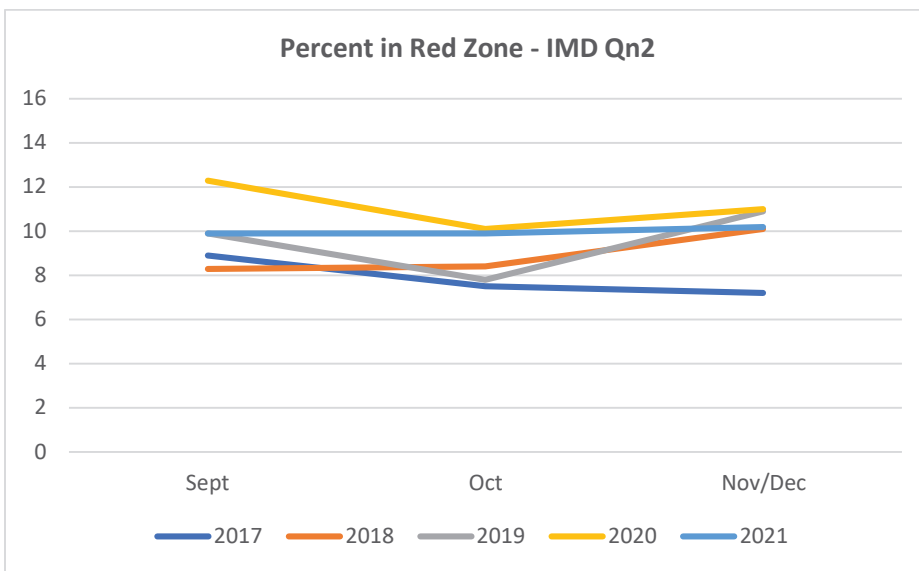
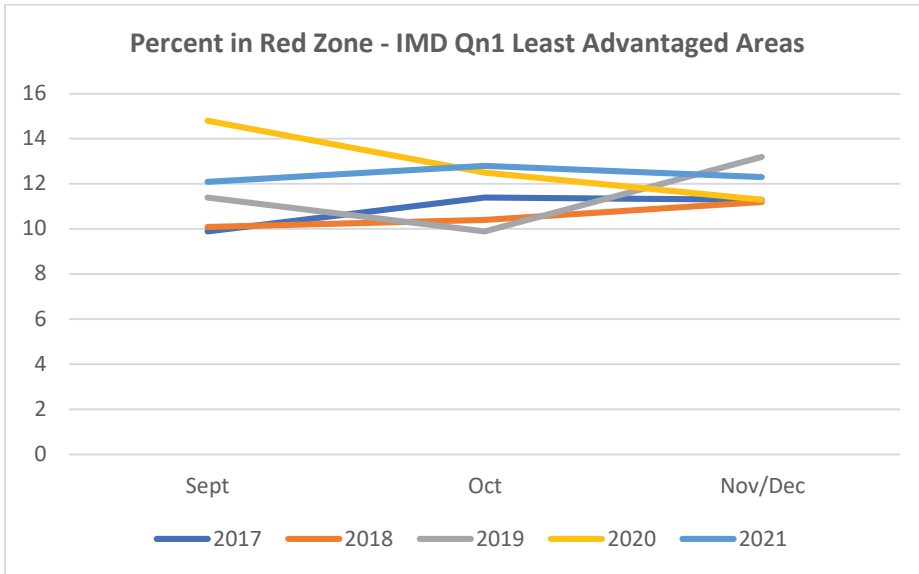
The chart for the red zone shows **in every year the percentage in quintile 1 is more than twice that in quintile 5**. The pattern holds for Red + Blue showing the percentage below 16th percentile in quintile 1 is nearly twice that for quintile 5 in each year. For an average class of 30 pupils in a quintile 1 school between 7 to 9 pupils will have a level of understanding below 16th percentile on school entry. This compares to just over 4 pupils in a quintile 5 class.

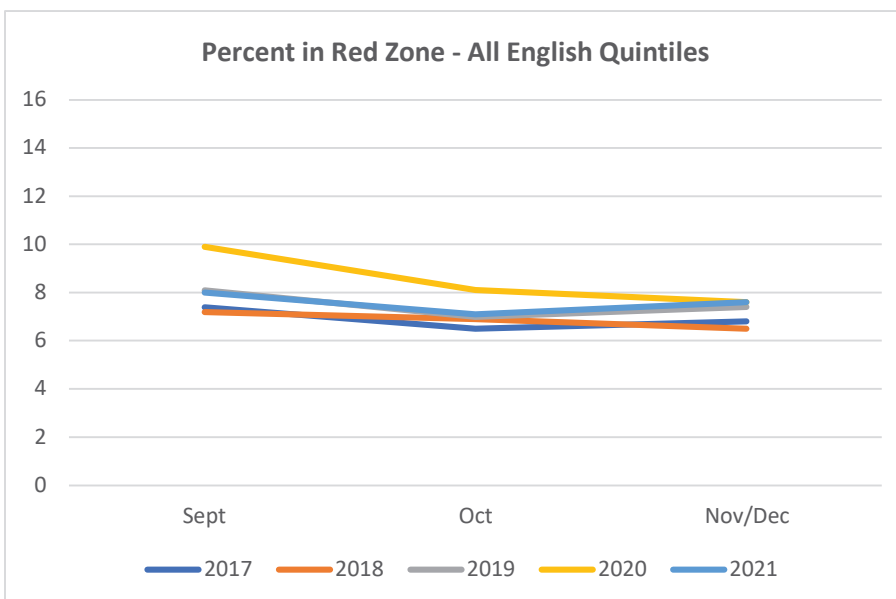
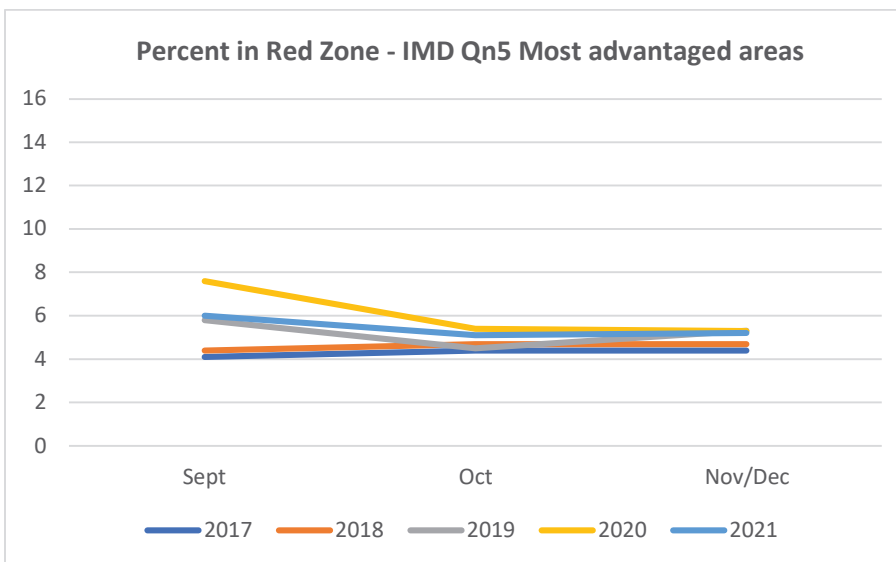
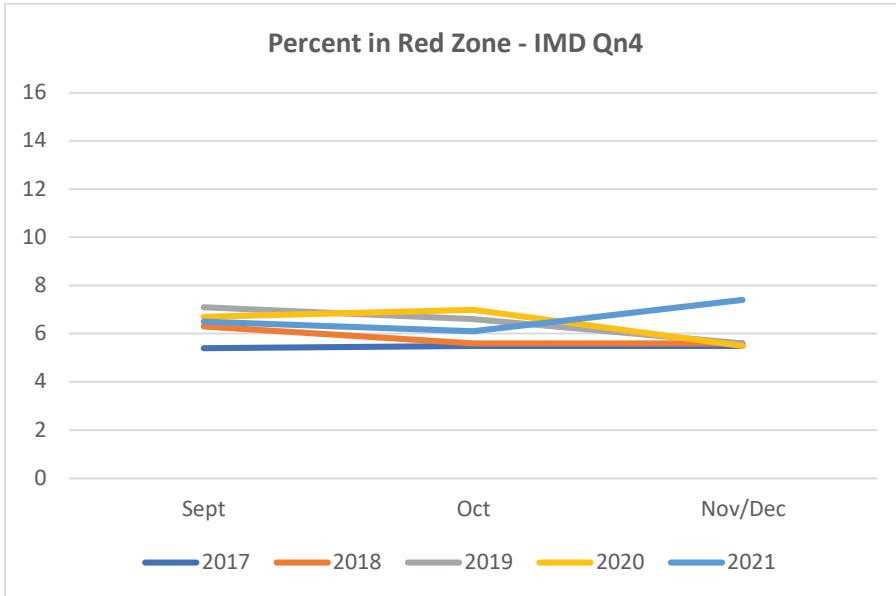
Examining further the fall in the numbers in Red and Blue zones between 2020 and 2021, if we look at the month by month charts in Appendix 1 we can see that nearly all of that fall is accounted for by lower recorded numbers in September with numbers in later months staying fairly steady between 2020 and 2021 for most quintiles.

If the considerable increase in September 2020 is postulated to be due to some combination of effects of lockdown and a particularly disrupted start to term, then the effects of lockdown or other Covid related reasons look to be still with us for 2021 as seen by the numbers in the later months of the term. However, an upward trend can be seen in each of the three years prior to 2020, particularly in the red zone for the lowest quintiles.

The month by month change for each quintile in each year can be seen in the following line graphs. These graphs all have the same vertical scale so the relative levels for each quintile and its month by month change can be seen by scanning through them down the page.

Month By Month Red Zone percentages





Progress into Year 1

Some pupils assessed in the autumn of year R are assessed again in the autumn of year 1 because a level of need has been identified by the year R assessment.

Of those pupils whose scores fall into the red zone in year R a percentage will remain in the red zone in the following year. This table shows the percentage of pupils with scores initially in the red zone who remained there on autumn term assessment in year 1. (All UK)

| YR 2017- Y1 2018 | YR 2018 - Y1 2019 | YR 2019 - Y1 2020 | YR 2020 - Y1 2021 |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 45% | 42% | 50% | 45% |

Table 7

Of those pupils with scores in the blue zone (approx. 7th to 16th percentile) a proportion will be in the red zone in the following year. (All UK)

| YR 2017- Y1 2018 | YR 2018 - Y1 2019 | YR 2019 - Y1 2020 | YR 2020 - Y1 2021 |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 13% | 13% | 18% | 13% |

Table 8

The above shows that between autumn 2019 and autumn 2020 fewer pupils with red zone scores made progress compared to previous years and in addition a greater percentage of pupils' scores dropped into the red zone during that time when compared to other years.

We can break this down further by IMD.

| Red results staying red | YR 2017- Y1 2018 | YR 2018- Y1 2019 | YR 2019- Y1 2020 | YR 2020- Y12021 |
|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| All (England) | 43% | 43% | 48% | 44% |
| Qn1 | 48% | 43% | 49% | 51% |
| Qn2 | 45% | 42% | 50% | 49% |
| Qn3 | 38% | 44% | 48% | 38% |
| Qn4 | 36% | 49% | 46% | 41% |
| Qn5 | 46% | 34% | 45% | 39% |

Table 9

| Blue results becoming red | YR 2017- Y1 2018 | YR 2018- Y1 2019 | YR 2019- Y1 2020 | YR 2020- Y12021 |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| All (England) | 12% | 12% | 17% | 13% |
| Qn1 | 14% | 18% | 17% | 18% |
| Qn2 | 14% | 10% | 18% | 14% |
| Qn3 | 11% | 12% | 19% | 10% |
| Qn4 | 13% | 10% | 16% | 11% |
| Qn5 | 7% | 14% | 17% | 11% |

Table 10

When we look at Reception 2020 to Year 1 2021 the tendency of lower quintile pupils to make less progress than higher quintile pupils, present but less obvious in R 2019 – Y1 2020, is considerable. These are the children whose 2020 Reception results were seen to be worse than previous years, not making the same amount of progress as previous years. The 2021 Reception results also show higher levels of need than pre-covid years, particularly in the lower quintiles, possibly predisposing these children to lower levels of progress. It is particularly important therefore to monitor the language and support needs of these children throughout their time in school.

The picture presented for every year is one of considerably lower language levels overall in the areas of least advantage. Regardless of whether the effect of the Covid years ultimately fades from the picture, it would be a mistake to think that “back to normal” is back to “everything is good”. The opportunity should not be missed to apply joined up thinking in speech and language support across the whole school journey.

For all questions and enquiries relating to the above please email therapists@speechlink.co.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1: Percentage of pupils scoring in the Red and Red+Blue zones, England only by Year, Month and IMD Quintile:

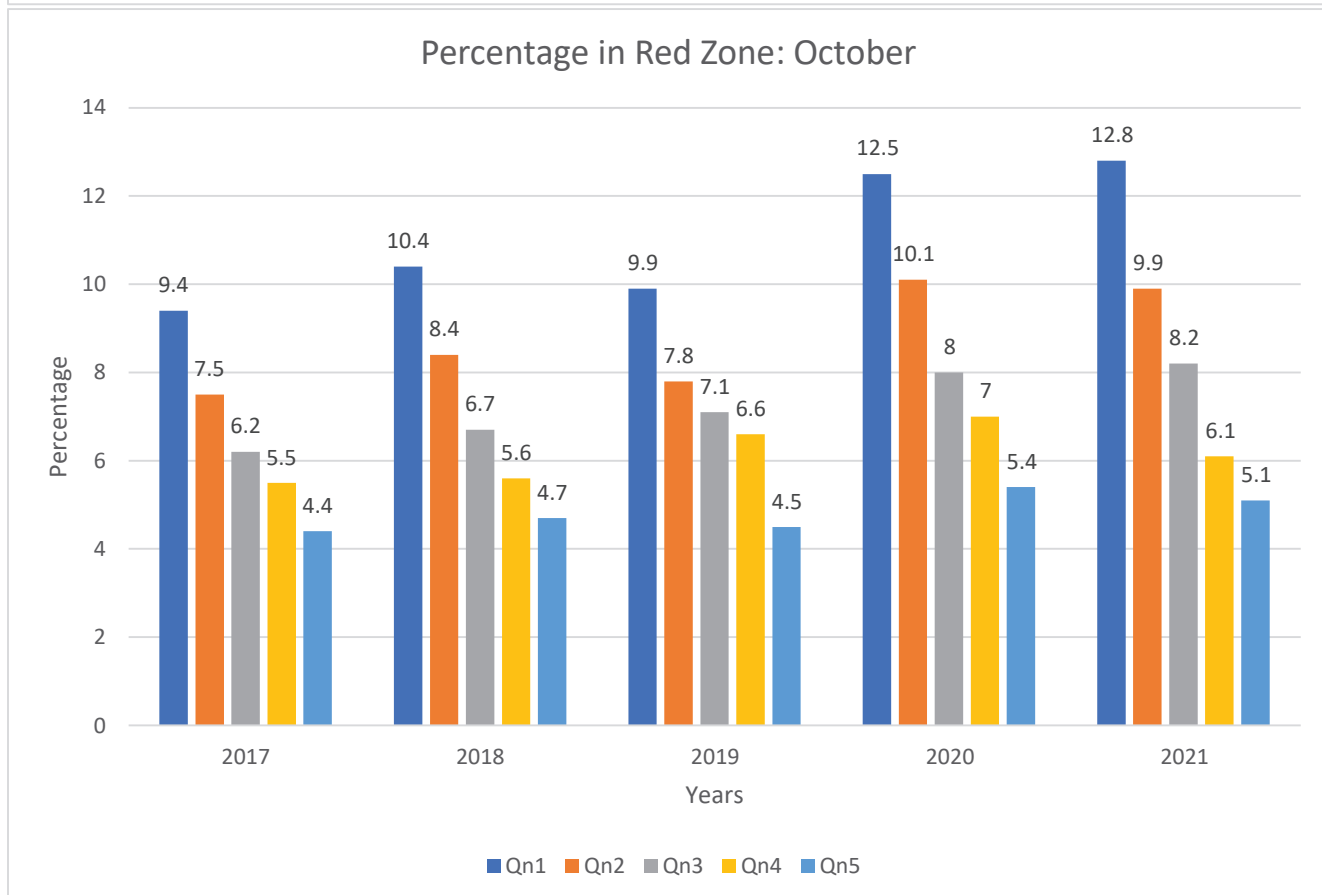
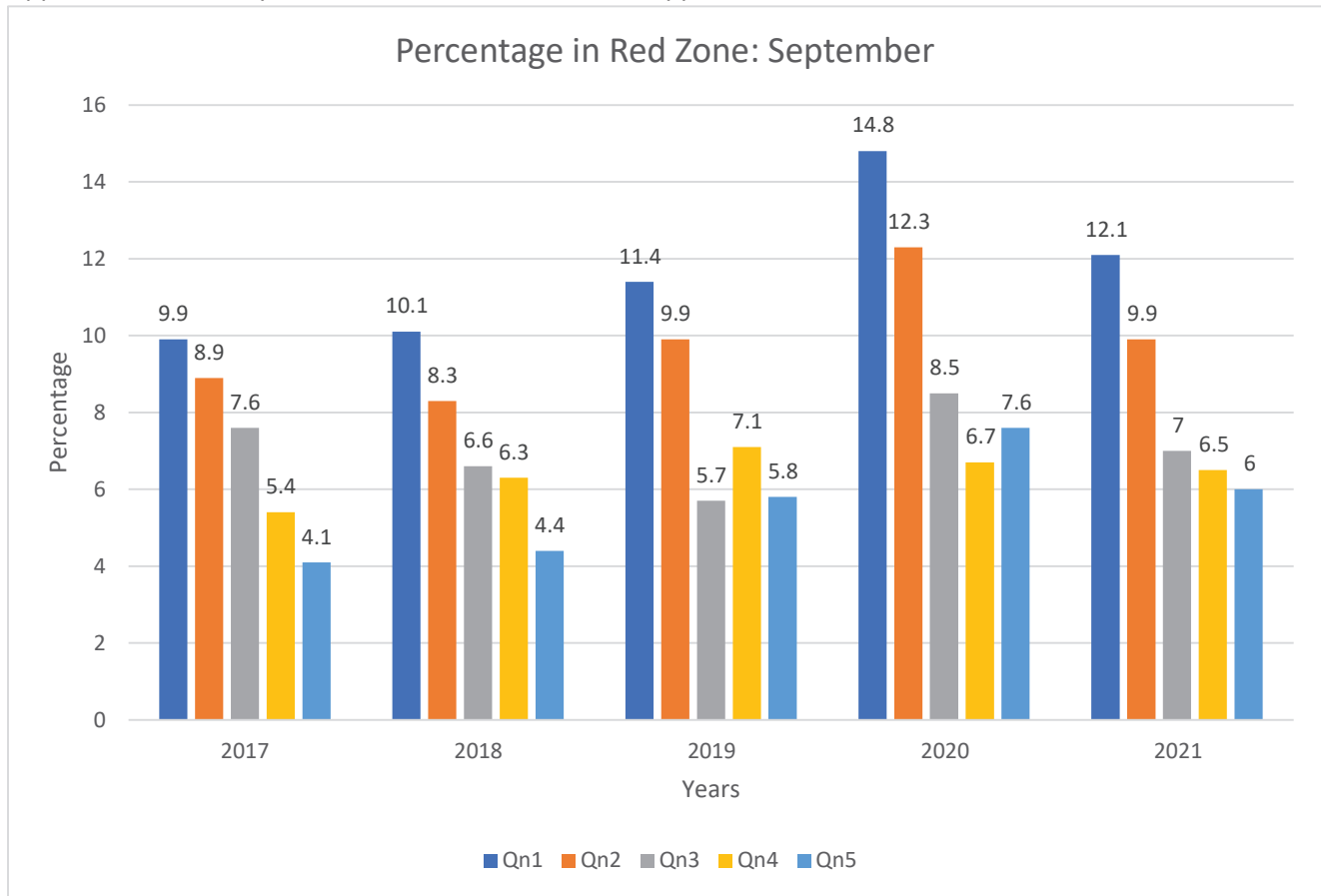
| Percentage in Red Zone England only, IMD quintiles (minimum of 1000 pupils in any given quintile and month) | | | | | |
|--|----------|-------------|-----------|---------|---------|
| | Quintile | Autumn Term | September | October | Nov/Dec |
| 2017 | 1 | 10.1 | 9.9 | 9.4 | 11.3 |
| | 2 | 7.9 | 8.9 | 7.5 | 7.2 |
| | 3 | 6.8 | 7.6 | 6.2 | 6.5 |
| | 4 | 5.5 | 5.4 | 5.5 | 5.5 |
| | 5 | 4.3 | 4.1 | 4.4 | 4.4 |
| 2018 | 1 | 10.4 | 10.1 | 10.4 | 11.2 |
| | 2 | 8.7 | 8.3 | 8.4 | 10.1 |
| | 3 | 6.7 | 6.6 | 6.7 | 7.0 |
| | 4 | 5.8 | 6.3 | 5.6 | 5.6 |
| | 5 | 4.6 | 4.4 | 4.7 | 4.7 |
| 2019 | 1 | 11.3 | 11.4 | 9.9 | 13.2 |
| | 2 | 9.4 | 9.9 | 7.8 | 10.9 |
| | 3 | 6.3 | 5.7 | 7.1 | 6.0 |
| | 4 | 6.4 | 7.1 | 6.6 | 5.6 |
| | 5 | 5.1 | 5.8 | 4.5 | 5.3 |
| 2020 | 1 | 13.0 | 14.8 | 12.5 | 11.3 |
| | 2 | 11.1 | 12.3 | 10.1 | 11.0 |
| | 3 | 8.0 | 8.5 | 8.0 | 7.4 |
| | 4 | 6.4 | 6.7 | 7.0 | 5.5 |
| | 5 | 5.6 | 7.6 | 5.4 | 5.3 |
| 2021 | 1 | 12.4 | 12.1 | 12.8 | 12.3 |
| | 2 | 10.0 | 9.9 | 9.9 | 10.2 |
| | 3 | 7.2 | 7.0 | 8.2 | 6.3 |
| | 4 | 6.8 | 6.5 | 6.1 | 7.4 |
| | 5 | 5.4 | 6.0 | 5.1 | 5.2 |

Table A1

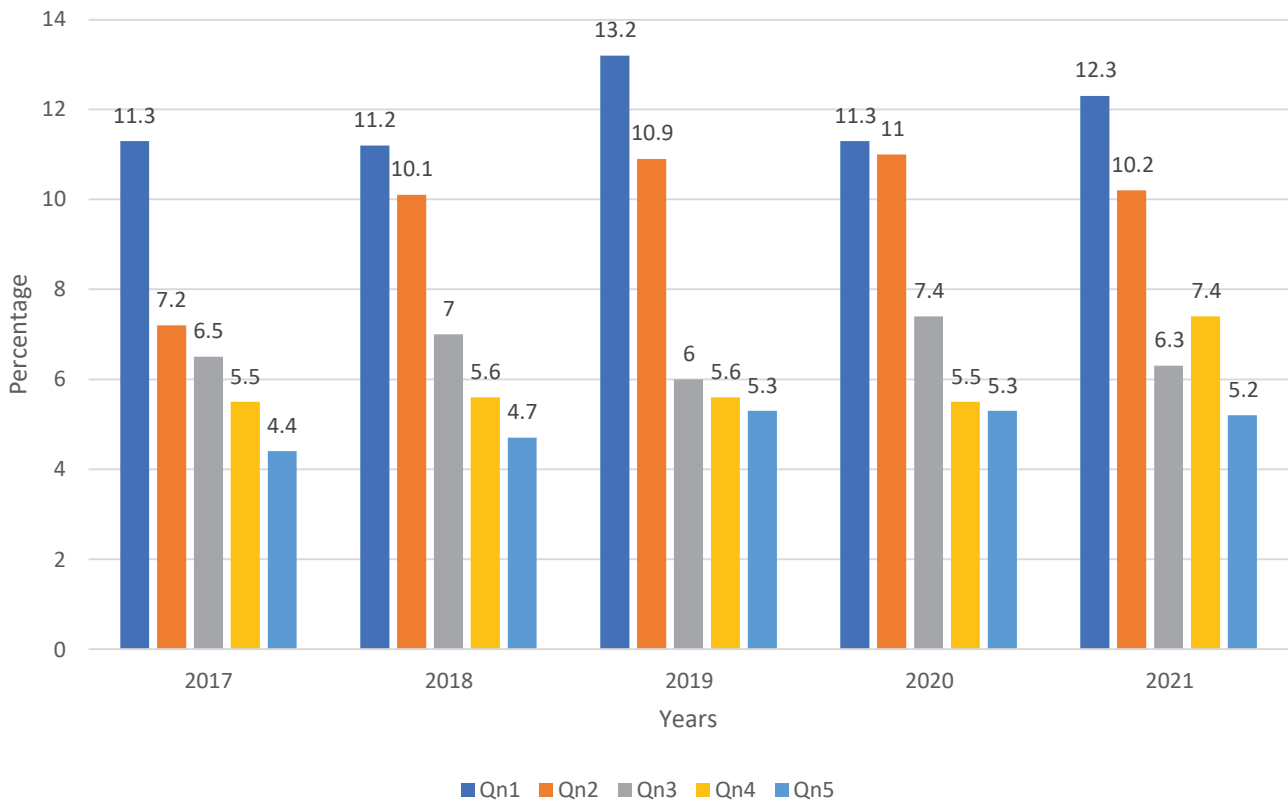
| Percentage in Red+Blue Zones England only, IMD quintiles (minimum of 1000 pupils in any given quintile and month) | | | | | |
|---|----------|-------------|-----------|---------|---------|
| | Quintile | Autumn Term | September | October | Nov/Dec |
| 2017 | 1 | 24.4 | 24.5 | 23.7 | 25.2 |
| | 2 | 20.6 | 22.7 | 20.1 | 18.1 |
| | 3 | 18.5 | 20.9 | 17.6 | 16.3 |
| | 4 | 15.5 | 15.0 | 16.0 | 15.5 |
| | 5 | 12.7 | 12.2 | 13.1 | 12.6 |
| 2018 | 1 | 24.9 | 25.5 | 24.4 | 24.6 |
| | 2 | 21.6 | 21.2 | 21.3 | 22.9 |
| | 3 | 18.5 | 18.4 | 18.9 | 17.9 |
| | 4 | 15.1 | 16.2 | 14.2 | 15.1 |
| | 5 | 13.6 | 13.7 | 14.1 | 12.5 |
| 2019 | 1 | 26.1 | 24.9 | 24.4 | 30.3 |
| | 2 | 22.1 | 23.8 | 19.7 | 22.3 |
| | 3 | 17.4 | 16.0 | 20.2 | 16.1 |
| | 4 | 16.7 | 17.5 | 17.9 | 14.6 |
| | 5 | 14.4 | 15.2 | 14.2 | 14.1 |
| 2020 | 1 | 30.6 | 34.6 | 29.4 | 27.0 |
| | 2 | 25.4 | 27.6 | 23.9 | 24.9 |
| | 3 | 19.6 | 21.4 | 19.9 | 16.9 |
| | 4 | 17.8 | 19.6 | 18.8 | 15.2 |
| | 5 | 15.6 | 17.6 | 15.7 | 14.4 |
| 2021 | 1 | 27.4 | 28.1 | 27.4 | 26.4 |
| | 2 | 23.4 | 23.6 | 23.4 | 23.2 |
| | 3 | 18.1 | 17.4 | 20.9 | 16.1 |
| | 4 | 17.5 | 17.6 | 16.1 | 18.5 |
| | 5 | 15.2 | 15.6 | 16.1 | 13.9 |

Table A2

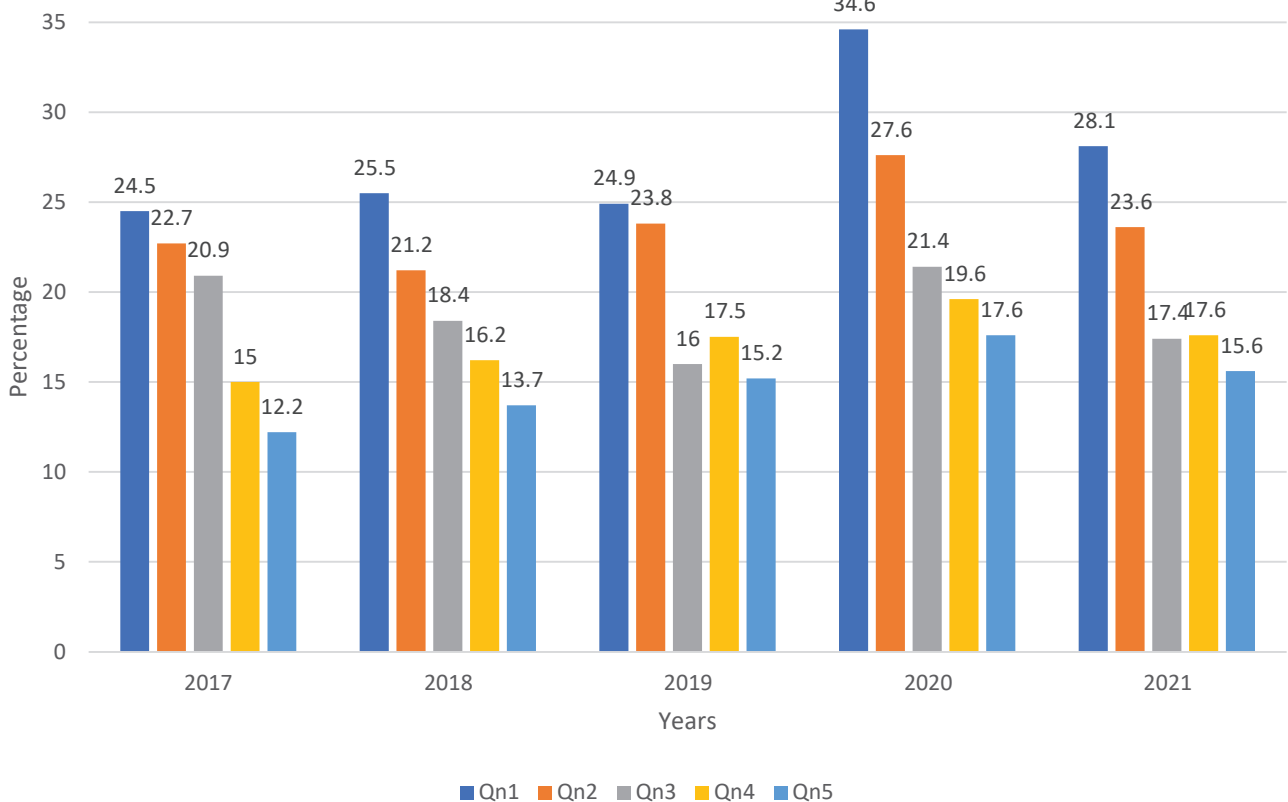
Appendix 2: month by month bar charts derived from appendix 1



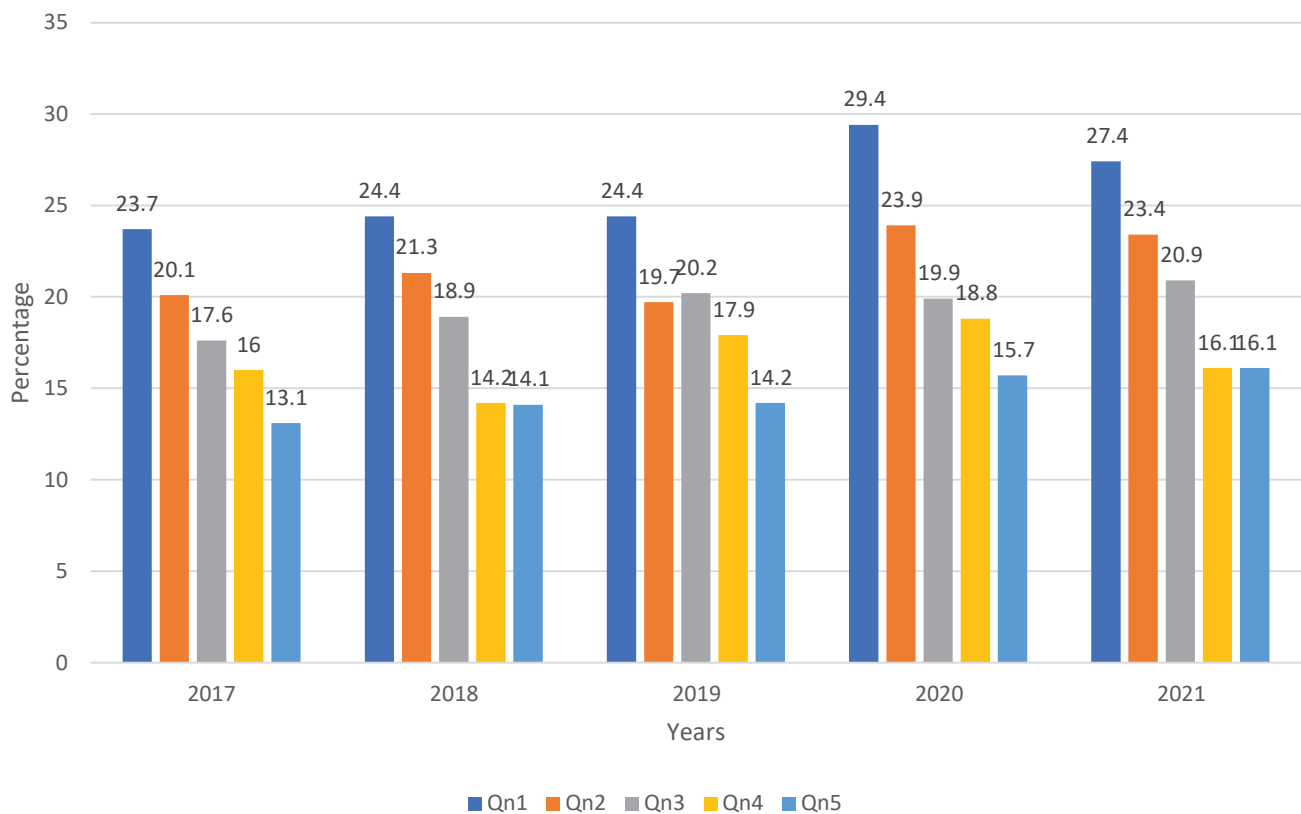
Percentage in Red Zone: Nov/Dec



Percentage in Red + Blue Zones: September



Percentage in Red + Blue Zones: October



Percentage in Red + Blue Zones: Nov/Dec

