

News release

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Improvements continue at GCSE as entries dip to 5 year low

The GCSE results for 2008 show continuing improvements despite the lowest number of entries being made since 2003.

Data published today (Thursday 21 August 2008) by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCO) show the overall results increasing by 1.2 percentage points at grades A*-A (from 19.5 per cent in 2007 to 20.7 per cent in 2008) and 2.4 percentage points at grades A*-C (from 63.3 per cent in 2007 to 65.7 per cent in 2008). Overall the cumulative percentage of candidates attaining GCSE grades A*-G increased by 0.4 percentage points (from 98.0 per cent in 2007 to 98.4 per cent in 2008).

The number of entries is down this year by 158,242 (from 5,827,319 in 2007 to 5,669,077). There has been a decrease in the number of 16-year-olds of about 6,000 and there is evidence of early entry being made for GCSE English and Mathematics in the winter examination in Year 11.

The number of entries for GCSE in the core subjects is largely governed by the statutory requirements of the National curricula in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. In the core subjects - English, mathematics and science (and Welsh in Wales), the great majority of students will take a GCSE examination. These core subjects still account for nearly half of all GCSE full course entries (47.4 per cent) despite the decrease in the number of 16-year-olds.

Performance in both English and mathematics in 2008 has improved at grades A*-C, with English up 0.7 per cent (62.2 per cent in 2007 to 62.9 per cent in 2008) and mathematics 1.1 per cent (55.2 per cent in 2007 to 56.3 per cent in 2008), evidence of improvement in literacy and numeracy skills in 16-year-olds.

Changes to the science curriculum have affected entry patterns. The old science Double Award has been replaced by two separate qualifications – Science and Additional Science. Fewer candidates are taking Additional Science than previously took Double Award (Science: Double Award in 2007, 478,028; Additional Science in 2008, 433,468). However, there is renewed interest and increased entries in separate sciences, with biology up 35.3 per cent (from 63,208 in 2007 to 85,521), chemistry up 29.4 per cent (from 59,219 in 2007 to 76,656) and physics up 29.1 per cent (from 58,391 in 2007 to 75,383).

Amongst the largest falls in entries in 2008 are French, down by 14,778 or 6.8 per cent (from 216,718 in 2007 to 201,940), and German, down by 4,366 or 5.4 per cent (from 81,061 in 2007 to 76,695) however, entries in Spanish continue to rise, by 3,114 or 4.9 per cent (from 63,978 in 2007 to 67,092). Other modern foreign languages are also up by 888 or 2.9 per cent (from 30,794 in 2007 to 31,682).

Information and communication technology has further declined by 14,057 or 14.1 per cent (from 99,656 in 2007 to 85,599). Design and Technology, with a fall of 22,172 or 6.2 per cent (from 354,959 in 2007 to 332,787) is the remaining large fall in a major entry subject.

Subjects which have seen an increase in entries are statistics, up by 3,542 or 4.3 per cent (from 82,682 in 2007 to 86,224), religious studies, up by 8,016 or 4.7 per cent (from 171,123 in 2007 to 179,139) and media/film/tv studies, up by 3,398 or 5.1 per cent (from 66,425 in 2007 to 69,823).

Commenting on the 2008 GCSE results, Dr Jim Sinclair, Director of the Joint Council for Qualifications, said:

“Once again, we have seen a welcome increase in results at GCSE despite the lowest entry for five years. This is evidence of the hard work of the students and the continued dedication of their teachers.

“The core subjects at GCSE continue to dominate and still account for almost half of the full course entry.”

GCSE Short Course

The Short Course entries increased by 3,898 or 0.7 per cent (524,427 in 2007 to 528,325). Four subjects – religious studies (55.6 per cent of total entries), citizenship studies (16.8 per cent), information and communication technology (15.3 per cent) and physical education (6.0 per cent) – together comprise 93.7 per cent of all entries.

The Short Course results show an improvement of 0.9 percentage points at grades A*-C (from 52.1 per cent in 2007 to 53.0 per cent in 2008).

Applied GCSE Double Award

Entries for the Applied GCSE Double Award continue to decrease, down 30,792 or 20.1 per cent (from 153,321 in 2007 to 122,529). The most significant drop in entry is for Applied ICT, down 11,594 or 41.9 per cent (from 27,656 in 2007 to 16,062).

Overall, the achievement in these double award qualifications shows an improvement of 1.9 per cent at grade A*A*-CC (from 44.3 per cent in 2007 to 46.2).

Applied GCSE Single Award

The number of entries rose by 1,753 or 12.4 per cent but remain very small in comparison to other qualifications (14,182 in 2007 to 15,935).

Entry Level Certificate

The number of entries fell again this year by 4,858 or 3.9 per cent (125,620 in 2007 to 120,762).

Notes to editors

1. 'Results 2008'- detailed tabulations of the GCSE Full Course, GCSE Short Course, Applied GCSE Double Award, Applied GCSE Single Award and Entry Level Certificate examinations are published separately, also with the STRICT EMBARGO: 09.30 hours Thursday 21 August 2008.
2. These are the results for the above qualifications taken by students across the UK but predominantly in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.
3. In the Home National Curricula for England, Northern Ireland and Wales at Key Stage 4 students must study six subjects and most will take examinations in at least five of these. In three of the Core subjects - English, mathematics and science (and Welsh in Wales), the great majority of students will take a GCSE examination. Outside the Core subjects, examinations may lead to GCSE Full Course, GCSE Short Course, GCSE Applied or a range of other qualifications. Details of the National Curriculum in England can be obtained from National Curriculum online www.nc.uk.net. Although not part of the National Curriculum, Religious Studies is a statutory requirement of the Education Act, 1996.
4. The JCQ consists of AQA, CCEA, City & Guilds, Edexcel, OCR, SQA and WJEC, the seven largest providers of qualifications in the UK, offering GCSE, GCE, AEA, Entry Level, Vocational and vocationally-related qualifications.
5. The JCQ was established in January 2004 and supersedes the Joint Council for General Qualifications (JCGQ, 1998-2003). The JCQ has been formed to enable member awarding bodies to act together in:
 - providing, wherever possible, common administrative arrangements for the schools and colleges and other providers which offer their qualifications;
 - dealing with the regulators; in responding to proposals and initiatives on assessment and the curriculum;
 - dealing with the media on issues affecting all member Bodies.

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