

Media Release

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Significant shift in entry patterns marginally affects overall outcomes in first year of GCSE reform

The Joint Council for Qualifications^{CIC} has today published the 2017 UK provisional GCSE results.

Key points

- New GCSEs in English Language, English Literature and Mathematics graded 9-1 in England¹
- New specifications in England “more challenging” to “better recognise the achievements of high-attaining pupils” - as required by the regulator and Government²
- Comparable outcomes used, protecting the first cohort taking reformed GCSEs
- Significant shift in entry patterns impact outcomes: IGCE students switch to GCSEs; more 17 yr old re-sitters; double weighting of best English grade for students taking both Language and Literature
- Grades A/7 down 0.5 percentage points to 20.0 percent; C/4 down 0.6 percentage points to 66.3 percent
- Two new Mathematics GCSEs in Wales: Mathematics and Mathematics Numeracy, taken in November and summer
- Different reforms across countries make comparisons difficult across years; across subjects; and across jurisdictions.

Reform

This year’s GCSE results are the first to include 9-1 grades, which are predominantly taken in England. The new scale applies to English Language, English Literature, and Mathematics with other subjects being reformed over the next two years.

The reformed GCSEs have been developed to meet the requirements of Government and the regulator, who wanted more challenging qualifications that enable the better differentiation of students at the top grades. The reformed subjects include an increase in content and external assessment.

The new grade scale cannot be directly compared with the old one, other than cumulatively at A/7; C/4; and G/1³. Therefore comparisons across years; across reformed and unreformed subjects and across jurisdictions, can only be made at these grades.

In Wales, there are two new Mathematics GCSEs: Mathematics and Mathematics Numeracy. These qualifications remain graded A*-G and have examinations available to all candidates in November and summer series. Therefore, when comparing year on year data, it is important to refer to the whole year. New GCSEs have also been introduced in Wales in English Language, Welsh Language, English Literature and Welsh Literature. These continue to be graded A* to G. The detailed results for these qualifications are available on the JCQ Website.

¹ Ofqual publication [New GCSE 9 to 1 grades coming soon](#)

² Department for Education publication [GCSE new grading scale](#)

³ Ofqual publication [Grading new GCSEs from 2017](#)

Entries

Entries across all subjects increased this year, rising 3.9 percent to just over 5.4 million. Much of this growth can be seen in English Language and English Literature specifications, and to a lesser extent Mathematics. English Language entries increased 48.1 percent to 760,277; English Literature 38.6 percent to 574,358; and Mathematics 1.7 percent to 770,034.

There are several factors influencing these changing entry patterns. There has been a significant shift, especially in both English GCSEs, from schools and colleges who previously entered their students for the IGCSE but have now switched to the GCSE following changes to performance measures in England.

English Literature has also been impacted by the switch from IGCSE and also from a different change in school performance measures which sees the best grade counted twice when candidates sit both English and English Literature.

Resit policies, which require students to continue taking, or working towards, their GCSE in English Language and Mathematics if they haven't achieved a grade C (and in future a grade 4 in England), has seen the number of 17 year olds and older continue to increase.

Entries in the Science GCSE dropped 27.6 percent (408,569 to 295,889). This is largely the consequence of 15 year olds, who make up the majority of the cohort, waiting to take the reformed Double Science GCSE in 2018.

Results

Overall outcomes for the UK show the number of grades at A/7 and above are marginally down this year by 0.5 percentage points to 20.0 percent. The number of grades at C/4 and above are also down, by 0.6 percentage points to 66.3 per cent. The number of grades at G/1 has remained unchanged at 98.4 percent.

New Specifications

The comparable outcomes approach has been used to ensure fairness to students in the first cohort taking reformed GCSEs. This ensures that the proportion of students receiving a 7, 4 or 1 and above this year is similar to the proportion who received an A, C or G and above in previous years. Any drop in results is therefore due to changes in the cohort and not more challenging qualifications or a change in grading standards.

English and English Language

Compared with summer 2016, outcomes for English and English Language taken together went down slightly at A/7 and above by 0.1 percentage points to 13.6 percent and up 1.9 percentage points at C/4 and above to 62.1 percent. However, when compared with all students taking GCSEs and alternative qualifications in 2016, the differences are marginal.

For the new England-only specification in English Language, graded 9-1, 64.9 percent of entries achieved a grade 4 or higher and 14.6 percent a grade 7 or higher; and 2.2 percent a grade 9.

English Literature

In English Literature, outcomes dropped 2.1 percentage points at A/7 cumulative and by 2.5 percentage points at C/4 cumulative to 72.6. This can be attributed to a significant increase in the number of students being entered for this qualification who previously would not have been, due to changes in school performance measures.

For the new England-only specification in English Literature, graded 9-1, 72.0 percent of entries achieved a grade 4 or higher and 18.8 percent a grade 7 or higher and 3.2 percent a grade 9.

Mathematics

Mathematics outcomes in the UK went down 0.4 percentage points at A/7 and above to 15.5 percent and down 1.6 percentage points at C/4 and above to 59.4 percent. This decline is driven by the growing cohort of 17 year olds (and over) re-sitting. When we look at 16 year olds, we see a more stable picture, especially at A/7 cumulative. But for 17 year olds and older, C/4 cumulative is down 3.0 percentage points to 26.5 percent and 0.6 percentage points at A/7 cumulative.

For the new England-only specification in Mathematics, graded 9-1, 3.5 percent of entries achieved a grade 9, 19.2 percent a grade 7 or higher, and 68.9 percent a grade 4 or higher.

Science (unreformed)

There is a drop in outcomes for Science, which are down 1.8 percentage points at A*-A and down 4.9 percentage points at A*-C. This is linked to the significant drop in 15 year old entries, with the higher performing students waiting for the reformed GCSE next year.

Director General of the JCQ, Michael Turner said:

“Whether they are receiving a 9-1 or an A*-G grade, students can be proud of their results and confident that they are a fair reflection of their achievements.

“Teachers, supported by exam boards, have worked hard to deliver these new GCSEs. Their content, assessments, and grades have been delivered fairly, consistently and to the requirements set out by the regulators.

“The substantial shifts in entry patterns, especially in the English subjects where there were a quarter of a million extra students, are mainly the result of those students who previously would have sat the IGCSE now taking the GCSE. And, as expected, these changes have had an effect on overall UK results.”

Notes to editors

1. The JCQ^{CIC} is a membership body and comprises AQA, CCEA, City & Guilds, OCR, Pearson, SQA and WJEC – the seven largest providers of qualifications in the UK.
2. Media contacts: The JCQ's press office can be contacted on: 020 7227 0671/020 7638 4132/07905 683 816.
3. Detailed tabulations of the GCSE Full Course, GCSE Short Course, GCSE Double Award, Entry Level Certification, Level 1 and Level 2 Project are published separately, with the STRICT EMBARGO OF 09.30 HOURS THURSDAY 24 AUGUST 2017 and will be available on the JCQ website from 0930 on 24 August.

4. These results are for qualifications taken by students across the UK but predominantly in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Press releases for Wales and Northern Ireland can be found on the JCQ Website.
5. Details on performance measures in England can be found on the DfE website.
6. Details on the policy in England regarding resitting English and Maths can be found on the DfE website.
7. In Wales and Northern Ireland there are winter series for some subjects. In England, the only winter series is in November and is restricted to English and Mathematics.
8. All awarding organisations are answerable to the regulatory authorities - Ofqual (England), Qualifications Wales (Wales) and CCEA (Northern Ireland). The regulatory authorities monitor the awarding bodies' standards. In addition, the awarding organisations themselves conduct a number of comparability studies to compare standards. Maintaining standards within and across all qualifications in order to ensure fairness to all candidates is the paramount concern of the awarding bodies.