



GCE 2017: Notes for users of the JCQ results tables

These notes should be read before consulting the results tables as they put the results in a policy context and provide explanation for some year-on-year changes in reporting and outcomes. The notes do not, however, attempt to outline the detail of every policy that may influence results or entries. The relevant government and regulatory websites give a more extensive overview of system changes. **You should also refer to the JCQ press notice which has additional specific details with regard to key features of this year's outcomes.**

Regulator links:

England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual>

Northern Ireland

<http://cea.org.uk/regulation>

Wales

<http://qualificationswales.org>

Education Department links

England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>

Northern Ireland

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/>

Wales

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/?lang=en>

GCE A Level, AS, AEA and Extended Project Results

AS and A levels in England, Northern Ireland and Wales are changing, which means that in subjects where the qualification has been reformed there will be different qualifications in each jurisdiction.

For the reformed qualifications, the regulatory bodies in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will carry forward the standard of previous years. Grades awarded within a subject will no longer be

benchmarked across jurisdictions. Each regulator is committed to carrying forward the standards set in existing qualifications to the reformed ones, using well established principles and methods. Therefore, all other things being equal, a candidate taking a reformed qualification this year should get the same result as they would have received had they taken the legacy qualification. However, there are differences in content and assessment in the new qualifications and any comparisons should be made with caution.

JCQ tables include results for candidates of all ages from the summer examination series. They include results for candidates who are sitting their examinations for the first time as well as candidates who are resitting. The GCE Winter examination series is no longer available in any jurisdiction.

Interpreting the UK tables

Overall, GCE A level entries have not changed significantly, although some subjects are seeing differences in entry patterns. There is a variety of drivers for these differences, including GCSE subject choices. For example, particularly in England, GCE computing is growing in entry most likely as a consequence to the growth of entry at GCSE and the planned withdrawal of the legacy ICT A level. Changes to GCSE performance measures may affect GCSE subject choice, and in turn GCE subject choice.

With the decoupling of the AS from the GCE A level in England, some centres and candidates have stopped taking AS qualifications. Therefore, AS entries are not stable and any year-on-year comparisons should be made with caution. This has impacted both reformed and yet to be reformed AS subjects in England.

Further information on A and AS level reforms can be found on the relevant regulators' and governmental websites.

GCE in England

Reform in England is being introduced in four phases:

- Phase 1 AS subjects were first examined last year (2016).
- Phase 1 GCE A levels (in the same subjects as Phase 1 AS) were examined this summer (2017).
- Phase 2 AS subjects were first examined this year (2017) with A levels in the same subjects in 2018.
- Phase 3 AS examinations will be first examined next year (2018), with A levels in the same subjects in 2019.
- Phase 4 AS examinations (a number of small cohort languages) will be first examined in 2019, with A levels in the same subject in 2020.

The major differences between the legacy GCEs and the reformed GCEs in England are:

- The AS element has been decoupled from GCE A level.
- The AS forms a separately examined qualification.

- A levels are now linear and all papers in a subject must be sat in the same examination series.

The changes may result in some centres and candidates making different subject choices that will affect entries and results. It should be noted that where entries appear similar to previous years, it does not necessarily follow that candidates of similar abilities are entering a subject.

The main JCQ tables for both AS and A level contain both first sitting and resitting candidates and therefore both reformed and legacy GCE outcomes. These tables should be regarded as the primary source of information on candidate entries and outcomes.

This year, JCQ will also publish the outcomes of the reformed AS in separate tables. The outcomes of these tables are not directly comparable to last year's outcomes as there were no resit candidates last year. Changes in outcome may be a result of a change in the profile of this year's entry and the inclusion, for the first time, of the resit cohort (for phase 1). Given this, comparison of year-on-year outcomes in these tables is not as meaningful as in the main tables.

Northern Ireland

There is an open qualifications market in Northern Ireland, which means that schools can choose to offer AS / A levels from their preferred awarding organisation. Consequently de-coupled and coupled as well as linear / modular AS and A levels will be available to schools in Northern Ireland. This year all GCE AS subjects offered by CCEA in Northern Ireland will have a new specification apart from Maths.

- The GCE A level offered by CCEA in Northern Ireland remains modular with the AS coupled to the A2.
- There has been a minor adjustment in emphasis with the AS contributing 40% (previously 50%) of marks towards the A level.
- Candidates who sat the AS in 2016 will be able to resit the legacy qualification.

Regulators expect standards in Northern Ireland to be broadly similar to previous years.

Wales

In Wales, as in England, there is a phased timetable of reformed qualifications.

- Phase 1 AS subjects were first examined last year (2016).
- Phase 1 A levels (in the same subjects as Phase 1 AS) were examined this summer (2017).
- Phase 2 AS subjects were offered for the first time this year (2017), with A levels in the same subjects in 2018.
- Phase 3 AS examinations will be first examined next year (2018), with A levels in the same subjects in 2019.

The key features of the reformed GCEs in Wales are:

- New AS and A levels designed for Wales are only offered by WJEC.
- A levels remain modular with the AS coupled to the A2.
- There has been a minor adjustment in emphasis with the AS contributing 40% (previously 50%) of marks towards the A level.

As in England and Northern Ireland, the regulator expects standards to be broadly similar to previous years.

Limitations

Comparisons between year-on-year outcomes are made more difficult during times of reform. The precise reasons for changes in centre and candidate entry behaviour may not be immediately clear. Even in cases where entry numbers look similar it is not necessarily the case that a similar cohort is taking a subject.

JCQ carries out quality assurance checks to ensure that the data received is, to the best of our knowledge, accurate. Note that in previous years, provisional data for England included other jurisdictions (for example the Channel Islands), and this anomaly has been corrected this year.

The results tables are provisional. They are a snapshot of outcomes taken shortly before results are released. Results are updated constantly after this point, until results are released, to incorporate any late changes. Whilst provisional, we do not anticipate significant changes to outcomes or entries to occur once results are released.

The tables should be read in conjunction with the press notices in the media section of the JCQ website. The press notices outline the context of year-on-year changes in results.