

Media Release

Strictly Embargoed until 09.30 hours on Thursday 23 August 2018

2018 GCSE results - overall outcomes as expected and significant changes in entry patterns

The Joint Council for Qualifications has today published the 2018 GCSE results statistics for the UK.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Significant reform to the system continues in England and Wales, with results in 23 subjects in England using 9-1 grading scale.
- Content has been updated and refreshed and in some subjects is more challenging eg problem solving in Mathematics
- Standards continue to be maintained at key grades A/7, C/4, and G/1, the points at which comparisons across jurisdictions and between reformed and non-reformed qualifications in England can be made
- Outcomes are stable at A/7 up 0.5 percentage points to 20.5%; C/4 up 0.5% percentage points to 66.9%; G/1 down 0.1 percentage points to 98.3%
- Shifting entry patterns across the age range, especially in English Language, English Literature and Mathematics, affect outcomes
- Large increases of nearly 20% in entries for separate sciences and outcomes in the new Double Science award in line with expectations
- Entry increases: MFL entries 0.4%; Computing up 11.8%; Geography 4.3%; History 1.7%. The 16 year old population is down 2.7%

CONTEXT: GCSE Reforms continue with 20 reformed subjects in England and Wales having updated and more challenging content

This is the second year of reform for English Language, English Literature and Mathematics with the 9-1 grading scale in England. Another 20 reformed subjects (taking total to 23) have been assessed this year, including a new Double Award in Science.

GCSEs offered by WJEC in Wales have also been reformed but have maintained the A*-G grading scale. In Northern Ireland, GCSEs offered by CCEA also retain the A*-G grading and reformed GCSEs will be first awarded in 2019. Standards are maintained at grades A/7, C/4, and G/1 across jurisdictions and year on year within subjects becoming reformed.

The new 9-1 grading system and reformed qualifications were introduced to provide updated and more challenging content and better to differentiate at the top end of student performance.

The reforms, along with policy changes such as performance measures, resit policies and early entry rules, have impacted entry strategies adopted by schools and colleges for their students. This can be seen in entry patterns, especially in English Literature, English Language and the sciences.

OUTCOMES: Stable set of results overall, especially for 16 year olds

The overall statistics show stability. Small movements, due to several factors including shifting entry patterns, make outcomes the same as in 2016. The proportion of A/7s awarded increased 0.5

percentage points to 20.5%; C/4 increased 0.5% percentage points to 66.9%; and G/1 decreased 0.1 percentage points to 98.3%. There is greater stability for 16 year olds, the target age for GCSE, at A/7 and C/4, with outcomes up 0.4 percentage points each to 21.5% and 69.3% respectively.

	A/7			C/4			G/1		
	2018	2017	2016	2018	2017	2016	2018	2017	2016
All candidates	20.5	20.0	20.5	66.9	66.4	66.9	98.3	98.4	98.4

UK outcomes 2016 - 2018

ENTRIES: Small increase in overall entries despite 2.7% fall in 16 year old population; more significant shifts at subject level and age group

There was a 0.2% increase in the number of GCSE entries in 2018, to 5,470,076. Entries for 16 year olds was up 1.2% to 4,939,124 even though the 16 year old population dropped by 2.7%. Entries for 17 year olds remained static at 407, 349 and are down 26.7% for 15 year olds to 123,603. A new early entry policy in Wales is likely to be the main reason for this decrease in 15 year old entries.

At subject level we do see significant shifts underneath these headline figures, and these are detailed throughout this press release.

The table below shows the movement in entry patterns across the age ranges for English Language, English Literature and Mathematics – the first subjects to be reformed with results in 2017.

	All		16 yr olds		17 yr olds (and over)		15 yr olds (and under)	
	2018	% change	2018	% change	2018	% change	2018	% change
Eng Lang	733,085	- 3.6	561,923	- 2.7	160,672	+ 8.5	10,490	- 69.6
Eng Lit	565,791	- 1.5	527,226	- 3.2	6,360	+ 1.2	32,205	+ 39.1
Maths	747,169	- 3.0	567,295	- 1.1	172,291	-4.3	7,583	- 53.4

Entry changes (%) between 2017 and 2018 for English Language, English Literature and Mathematics by age

Declines in 16 year olds' entries in these subjects are more or less in line with the drop in the 16 year old population, which was 2.7%, although Mathematics is only down 1.1%.

Entries for 17 year olds are more stable compared to significant increases in recent years. In 2017, entries for 17 year olds in English Language rose 15.4%; English Literature up 18.7%; and Mathematics up 3.6%. The majority of these entries are resits and the smaller year on year change is due to the resit policy bedding down. It is worth noting that many mathematics resits will have been taken in the November series, explaining the 4.3% decline in entries.

Early entry policies in England and Wales have led to the decline in 15 year olds taking English Language and Mathematics. In England and Wales, we are seeing schools and colleges increasingly entering students for their English Literature a year early (up 39.1 %) possibly so they can concentrate on English Language the following year. In England, this may be the result of school performance measures in England double counting the best grade for school accountability tables if students sit both English Language and English Literature.

ENGLISH LITERATURE: Outcomes up due to smaller but higher performing 16 year old entry

Outcomes in English Literature for all candidates shows a 0.7 percentage point year on year rise at A/7 to 19.9%. At C/4 there is a 0.9 percentage point increase to 73.5% and at G/1 a rise of 0.1 percentage points to 98.3%. Outcomes for the reformed 9-1 English Literature follows the same pattern of increases.

Outcomes for 16 year olds are similar to all candidate statistics, but there are larger increases for 17 year olds and 15 year olds.

Entry patterns for 15 year olds in England are important when looking at English Literature outcomes. In 2016, only 700 students were entered at 15 years old. In 2017, the figure had increased to over 20,000; and in 2018 there were 27,000 entries from 15 year-olds. Results for 15 year olds are lower than for 16 year-olds, by about 10 percentage points at each of grades 7 and 4 in 2018.

There is some evidence relatively weaker performers are being entered for English Literature in year 10. There could be several reasons for this, for example spreading the exam load across two years. Or it may partly be driven by school performance measures, in which each student's best grade from English Language and English Literature is double-weighted, provided that students take both subjects. Schools might wish to focus just on English Language in year 11 for some students, and hence enter those students for English Literature in year 10.

This means that there is a decline in the number of 16 year-olds entered for English Literature (down 4.1% this year), with only the stronger students remaining, and hence an improvement in results.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE: Increase in 17 year olds re-sitters; 16 year old male students performing better and closing gap on female students

Outcomes in English Language for all candidates across the UK shows a 0.5 percentage point increase at A/7 to 14.1; a 0.3 percentage point decline at C/4 to 61.8%; and a 0.3 percentage point increase at G/1.

When comparing outcomes in the reformed 9-1 English Language, all candidate results are down 0.6 percentage points at grade 7 and 2.9 percentage points at grade 4. This decline is driven by the growing number of entries by 17 year olds not performing as well year on year. Looking at 16 year olds in isolation, male students are performing better and closing the gap on female students and this change is driving up overall outcomes for 16 year olds – up 0.7 percentage points at grade 7 to 17.6%, up 0.3 percentage points at grade 4 to 70.2 %, and up 0.1 percentage points at grade 1 to 99.1%.

MATHEMATICS: Outcomes stable year on year for 16 year olds; high performing 15 year olds being entered early and performing well

In Mathematics, outcomes rose 0.3 percentage points at A/7 to 15.8%, remained unchanged at C/4 at 59.4% and increased 0.4 percentage points to 97.4% at G/1.

16 years old outcomes were stable, up 0.1 percentage points and 0.2 percentage points at A/7 and C/4 respectively and unchanged at G/1. Outcomes for 15 year olds rose significantly while entries declined by 53.4%. This shows how schools and colleges are entering just their most high performing students for examinations early.

In the reformed 9-1 Mathematics, the movement for 16 year olds mirrors the national picture. However, 17 year olds see a 429.9% increase in entries as legacy Mathematics is no longer available, including for resits, resulting in a shift to the new specifications. Overall entries for 17 year olds in Mathematics are down 4.3% year on year.

SCIENCE: Outcomes for the new Double Award in England and Wales as expected; significant increase in entries for separate sciences

A new Science Double Award in England and Wales has replaced the Science and Additional Science GCSE. Entry patterns for Science GCSE have historically been complex and it was common for students to take Science at 15 years old and Additional Science a year later at 16 years old. Figures for 16 year olds Science also included re-sitters.

A few students only took one GCSE in Science. Most took Science and Additional Science. Some took Further Additional Science as well as Science and Additional Science. The latter three subjects covered the same content as the three separate Sciences and was awarded as three GCSEs.

The new Double Award in England counts for two GCSEs and its grading ranges from 9-9, 9-8, 8-8...all the way to 1-1. In Wales, the new double award has the grading scale A*-A*, A*-A...down to G-G.

As with all Science GCSEs, the Double Award is tiered with the higher tier grades awarded from 9-9 to 3-3 and the foundation tier ranging from 5-5 to 1-1.

The complexity of previous entry patterns and the change to what students are now studying makes year on year comparisons challenging. The table below provides the most accurate comparison and mirrors what was used to maintain standards. The 2017 comparative figures include 16 year olds entries in Science and Additional Science and 2016 15 year old entries in Science. The statistics show that outcomes are in line with expectations.

	A/7			C/4			G/1		
	2018	2017	Change (pp)	2018	2017	Change (pp)	2018	2017	Change (pp)
Double Award Science (16 year olds)	7.5	7.9	- 0.4	55.1	55.8	- 0.7	98.1	99.0	- 0.9

Outcomes for Double Award Science in 2018 compared to 2017 16 year old entries in Science and Additional Science and 15 year old entries in Science in 2016

All three separate Sciences had significant increases in entries: Biology up 23%, Chemistry up 18.6% and Physics up 17.2%. The total increase in entries was 83,876 and these are most likely to be the students who previously took the three sciences using the entry pattern of Science, Additional

Science and Further Additional Science. These new entrants into the separate sciences are performing very similar to the usual cohort with outcomes very stable year on year.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES: Entries up against drop in size of 16 year old population

Entries for Modern Foreign Languages were up 0.4%, which should be looked at in the context of the overall population declining 2.7%. In 2018, there were just under 300,000 entries for languages and these students performed to a very similar level to 2017.

Commenting on this year's GCSE results, JCQ's Director General, Michael Turner, said:

"The overall statistics released today show that outcomes and grade boundaries are in line with what exam boards and the regulators expected.

"They show considerable stability at a time of significant reform to the structure and content of GCSEs.

"When looking at the detail of this year's results and entry patterns, it is a complicated picture with some significant changes in the age profile of the cohort in some subjects which in part reflect education policies and how schools and colleges implement them.

"There will undoubtedly be a considerable amount of interest in these aggregated results, but that should not detract from congratulating the hundreds of thousands of students receiving their grades today and wishing them well on their educational journey."

Notes to editors

1. Details on the reforms in England, including content changes and timetable can be found here: [GCSE, AS and A level reforms](#)
2. Details on reforms in Wales and Northern Ireland can be found here: Qualifications Wales: [Process for reforming GCSEs and A levels](#) and CCEA: [Regulation GCE and GCSE](#)
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, also with the STRICT EMBARGO of 09.30 Thursday 23 August 2018 and will be available on the [JCQCIC website](#) from 09.30 on 23 August 2018.
4. These results are for qualifications taken by students across the UK but predominantly in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
5. Other modern languages are: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Dutch, Gujarati, Italian, Japanese, Modern Greek, Modern Hebrew, Panjabi, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Turkish, and Urdu.
6. 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.

7. The JCQCIC comprises AQA, CCEA, City & Guilds, NCFE, OCR, Pearson, SQA and WJEC – the eight largest providers of qualifications in the UK.
8. The JCQCIC is a membership organisation and enables member awarding bodies to act together in providing, where possible, common administrative arrangements for the schools and colleges and other providers which offer their qualifications; and responding to proposals and initiatives in assessment and the curriculum.
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