



Media release

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 09.30 HOURS
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Stability in A* results at GCSE, but changes in entry patterns and introduction of new mathematics qualifications impact on A*-A and A*-C outcomes

Changes in entry patterns, especially for 15 year olds, and the use of the November series for GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics Numeracy have had a substantial impact on this summer's GCSE results for Wales, especially for grades A*-C cumulatively.

Despite a 2.1% fall in size of the age 16 cohort, there is a 7.6% increase in entries from 16 year olds, caused mainly by the new GCSE Mathematics Numeracy qualification, available within the summer series for the first time this year.

The percentage of summer series outcomes for all candidates awarded an A* grade has remained at 6.1%. However, overall summer series outcomes at grades A*- A have fallen by 1.5 percentage points to 17.9%, whilst for grades A*-C there is a fall of 3.8 percentage points to 62.8%, relative to 66.6% for the previous two years¹.

Results for the age 16 cohort in Wales have also fallen, by 1.2 percentage points to 20.2% for grades A*-A and by 2.8 percentage points to 66.8% for grades A*-C¹. However, outcomes for 16 year olds in English Language show an improvement.

For GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy, overall outcomes are most appropriately reflected in the best outcome obtained by each 16 year olds across the November and summer series. On this basis, 60% of 16 year old candidates obtained grades A*-C in GCSE Mathematics, whilst 58.5% of 16 year old candidates obtained grades A*-C in GCSE Mathematics Numeracy.

¹ Outcomes graded 9-4 and graded 9-7 have been included in the cumulative percentages for grades A*-C and A*-A respectively, to allow inclusion of those candidates in independent schools in Wales who have chosen the qualifications that are graded using the 9-1 grade scale introduced this year for reformed GCSEs in English Language, English Literature and Mathematics that are regulated by Ofqual.

There are several factors which impact the results in different ways for individual subjects: for the first six qualifications referred to below, data has been combined for legacy and reformed qualifications.

English Language – slight improvement in outcomes for 16 year olds, but very large entry for 15 year olds

The very large increase in entry, from 35,000 to over 58,000 is explained by nearly 21,000 entries from candidates in the 15 year old age group. Overall results have remained stable at grades A*-C (57.7%) but have fallen by 1.1 percentage point to 10.6% at A*-A. Summer series results at grades A*-C for 16 year olds, at 64.8%, show a 0.6 percentage point improvement on the A*-C full academic year results for the 16 year old cohort (64.2% last year, which was the last time when this qualification could be “cashed in” at the earlier sitting in January). The lower overall results for the summer series relative to 2016 are explained by the relatively lower outcomes for the large cohort of 15 year olds, with 7.8% of results at grades A*-A and 54.0% at grades A*-C. Also, the number of candidates aged 17 years and older increased from 6,000 to nearly 7,000 with just 2.1% of results at grades A*-A and 36.6% at grades A*-C.

Welsh (1st) Language – stable outcomes for 16 year olds, increased entries from 15 year olds

An increase in entry of just over 20% is explained by approximately 1,000 candidates aged 15 being entered. This has caused a slight fall in overall outcomes, by 0.7 and 1.5 percentage points at grades A*-A and A*-C, respectively, but outcomes for 16 year old candidates have remained stable, with a 0.2 percentage point uplift to 15.6% at grades A*-A and a 0.3 percentage point fall to 73.6% at grades A*-C. The respective percentages for the 15 year old candidates are somewhat lower at 9.5% and 64.8%.

Welsh Literature – small improvement in outcomes but substantial fall in entry

The candidature is almost entirely in the 16 year old age group, but a fall in entries of over 10% leads to a situation in which fewer than 62% of Welsh 1st Language candidates in this age group are entered for the Literature qualification, compared with nearly 68% last year and over 70% in some previous years. Results have improved relative to 2016 by approximately 1 percentage point at each of A*, A*-A and A*-C grades.

English Literature – improvement in outcomes but very large fall in entry

A very large reduction in entry of 44% has taken the number of candidates down from 30,000 (22,300 aged 16 and 7,700 aged 15) to just under 17,000 (14,700 aged 16 and 2,000 aged 15). Results show improvements of 3.8 and 4.9 percentage points at grades A*-A and A*-C respectively, both age groups contributing to that improvement with the overall results for the much reduced number of age 15 candidates no longer being considerably lower than the results for 16 year olds.

Mathematics – results across academic year stable at A* and A*-A but fall at A*-C

The overall entry has increased from 30,600 to over 41,200 due largely to just over 10,000 entries from candidates aged 15 and the entries from 16 year old candidates increasing from 24,400 to 25,400 whilst the entry from candidates aged 17 and over fell by 200. Overall outcomes have fallen slightly by 0.7 and 1.6 percentage points at grades A*-A and A*-C, to

10.3% and 46.1% respectively. This is accounted for mainly by the lower outcomes for candidates aged 15, for whom 6.8% of results were graded A*-A and 39.8% were graded A*-C. Results for 16 year olds have remained relatively stable, with a 0.6 percentage point improvement to 13.6% at grades A*-A and a fall of 0.5 percentage points to 51.8% at grades A*-C. For the 5,600 candidates aged 17 and over, percentages were 1.6% at A*-A and 31.5% at A*-C.

Because a large proportion of the 16 year old cohort entered GCSE Mathematics in the November 2016 series, it is necessary to consider the full academic year outcomes for the 16 year old cohort, on which basis 9.4% obtained an A* grade, 17.7% A*-A grades and 60.0% A*-C grades. As this is the first year in which this specification is available, there is no comparator with a previous year. These outcomes are similar at A* and A*-A to full academic year results in previous years (e.g. 17.4% A*-A grades in 2015-16) but outcomes at grades A*-C have fallen (65.6% in 2015-16 and 63.7% in 2014-15). These results are based on taking the best outcome obtained within the year in the case of candidates who have entered in more than one series or with more than one awarding organisation.

Mathematics – Numeracy – nearly 60% of candidates achieved A*-C in the academic year for this new qualification

The overall entry comprises nearly 11,000 candidates from the 15 year old age group and nearly 20,000 candidates from the 16 year old age group. Results are somewhat better for the younger age group, by 5.4 and 3.0 percentage points at grades A*-A and A*-C respectively, this being explained by the fact that many of the stronger candidates in the 16 year old age group took the Mathematics-Numeracy qualification in November 2016 and did not participate in the summer series assessments.

For this reason, it is necessary to consider the full academic year outcomes for the 16 year old cohort, on which basis 7.8% obtained an A* grade, 16.4% A*-A grades and 58.5% A*-C grades. As this is the first year in which this specification is available, there is no comparator with a previous year.

Encouragingly, about 2,500 learners in Wales continue to take the WJEC Level 2 Additional Mathematics qualification, which includes an introduction to calculus, nearly half of whom obtained a Distinction award.

Welsh (2nd) Language – improved results at A* and A*-A for full course, with increase in entries

Results have remained stable for the full course at A*-C, but have improved by 1.7 and 1.8 percentage points at grades A* and A*-A respectively. The increase in full course entries of approximately 1,300 follows on from an increase of 1,000 candidates taking the short course at age 15 last year, where there was also an improvement in results. This year has seen a decrease of 2,000 in the overall entries for the short course (which are now 12,450), but an increase of 500 in the number of candidates aged 15. For these 5,100 younger candidates the outcomes are somewhat better (17.1% gaining grades A*-A and 61.9% gaining grades A*-C) than for the overall entry.

Sciences – increase in entries for separate sciences but fall in outcomes

A change in the structure of GCSE qualifications available in sciences has caused the entry for the single award Science to fall from nearly 24,000 (mainly 15 year old candidates who would have then taken Additional Science when aged 16) to just over 5,000 (mainly 16 year olds who are taking just the one Science qualification over two years). With such a major change, the results are also very different, with 34.8% of candidates gaining grades A*-C.

For Additional Science, there was a 26.2% increase in entries and a reduction in outcomes by 1.6 and 6.0 percentage points at A*-A and A*-C respectively (from 69.9% to 63.9% respectively for the latter).

For each of Biology, Chemistry and Physics there has been an increase in the number of candidates, by some 200 to 300 candidates (of the order of 4% to 5%), being the second year of increase following the reduced entries in 2015, which had been the first fall in many years. For Biology, results at A* and A*-A are similar to 2016, with a reduction of 2.3 percentage points at A*-C. For Chemistry and Physics there have been falls in outcomes at grades A*-C, by 1.3 and 0.8 percentage points respectively and also at grades A* and A*-A for Physics.

Modern Foreign Languages – slight increase in entries for Spanish but fall in French and German

As in all recent years, there was a fall in entries for French (10.9%), whilst for German a large fall of 30.8% has more than reversed the increase that was seen last year. For Spanish, a small increase of 4.2% has not reversed the substantial fall in the previous year. Results are substantially improved for German, by 5.1, 11.9 and 8.3 percentage points at A*, A*-A and A*-C respectively, reversing a weakening in results at upper grades last year. Results for Spanish are very similar to the previous year, with small improvements at A*, A*-B and A*-C, but for French results are considerably lower at the top grades (e.g. at A*-A and A*-B by 2.5 and 3.7 percentage points, respectively). However, in each of these subjects, well over 70% of candidates continue to achieve grades A*-C.

Entries in other subjects

The reduction in entries for a range of subjects that are typically offered as options at Key Stage 4 are considerably greater than can be explained by the 2.1% fall in the age 16 population: Music (down 4.9%), Art & Design (down 6.2%), Design & Technology (down 7.6%), History (down 12.1%), Geography (down 14.9%), Drama (down 16.8%), Social Science subjects (down 16.9%, reversing an increase in the previous year) and Media/Film Studies (down 20.8%). When considered alongside the overall reduced entries for foreign languages, the overall pattern may provide further indication of changes in the overall availability of opportunities for taking "option" subjects at Key Stage 4. The few exceptions to the overall downward trend in entries are Computing (a 24.7% increase, similar to that in the previous year), Religious Studies (up 8.5% following a 2.1% increase last year), Physical Education (up 6.5%, following a 4.3% increase last year) and Business Studies (up 1.5%, following a 5.8% increase last year). There is a decrease of 11.5% in the entries for the Religious Studies short course, approximately half the entry of 16,000 candidates being 15 year olds.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For information about the results in Wales, contact:

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For information about the UK results, contact JCQ^{CIC}'s press office on 020 7227 0671, or 07905 683816 or at pressoffice@jcq.org.uk

Further statistical details on the results for the UK, Wales, England and Northern Ireland may be found at www.jcq.org.uk

NOTES FOR EDITORS

General

1. The data provided in the main body of this media release represent the aggregate information for Wales across all awarding organisations, and are provisional, in the sense that they represent the position at the time that results are issued.
2. These results are provided by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ^{CIC}), representing awarding organisations in the UK, and presented in Wales on behalf of JCQ^{CIC} by WJEC.
3. The qualifications framework is common across Wales, England and Northern Ireland. Comprehensive data for entries and results on a country-by country basis (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) are provided by the Joint Council for Qualifications – www.jcq.org.uk - and may be accessed from 9.30 am on Thursday 24 August 2017.
4. All awarding organisations are answerable to the qualification regulators – Qualifications Wales, Ofqual (England) and CCEA (Northern Ireland) – for examinations standards. The qualification regulators monitor the awarding organisations' 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.
5. In comparing the results of individual schools and colleges with any aggregate totals, it should be borne in mind that substantial variations are to be expected. A number of social, economic and educational factors have a bearing on the performance of pupils in examinations, of which the effectiveness of the school or college is only one.

GCSEs

6. GCSE Short Course is equivalent to a half GCSE, with the same grading system as GCSE Full Course.
7. Applied GCSEs were first examined in 2004. These are 'Double Award' GCSEs counting as two subject entries and aiming to provide an introduction to a broad vocational area. They are graded on a 15 point scale (A*A*, A*A, AA, AB through to GG).