GCSE 2019:
Notes for users of the JCQ results tables

These notes put the results in context and provide explanation for some year-on-year changes in reporting and outcomes. The notes should be read before consulting the results tables. The notes do not, however, attempt to outline the detail of every change that may influence results or entries in some way. For a more extensive overview of system changes, please consult relevant regulatory and governmental websites.

You should also refer to the JCQ press notices, which have additional specific details with regards to key features of this year's outcomes. Note that the provisional results are only for the summer series and do not include results for qualifications awarded earlier in the academic year.

Regulator links:

- England:
  https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual

- Northern Ireland:
  http://ccea.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

GCSE, Entry level and Project Level 1 and 2 Results

In Wales, this is the final phase of reform. In England it is the final phase with the exception of a few lesser taught languages. In NI, new GCSEs designed for NI are being awarded for the first time, alongside other reformed GCSEs.

The adoption of a 9 to 1 grade scale for reformed GCSEs in England, with 9 being the highest grade, is almost complete. CCEA's reformed GCSEs are available for the first time this summer. Whilst CCEA's GCSEs retain a letter based grade scale, one grade is being recalibrated and another new grade is being introduced. (See the Northern Ireland section for more details.)

The grade scale for GCSEs reformed for Wales remains unchanged (A*-G).

Regulators remain committed to anchoring grade standards of reformed and legacy qualifications at key grades (A/7, C/4, G/1) within their respective jurisdictions. This means that all things being equal (i.e. no other changes and a similar cohort profile), outcomes are broadly similar to legacy outcomes.

It should be noted that although anchoring is taking place, the reformed qualifications are different from legacy qualifications. There are now differences in content and grading arrangements in all three jurisdictions. This is one reason why any comparisons with previous years should be made with caution, particularly at centre level where there could be more year-on-year variability in results.

In reporting UK wide results we have considered how best to do that in a meaningful way. As the divergence in grading systems extends to more subjects, the main results tables report outcomes only at the anchored grades. This change was introduced in 2017.

These anchored outcomes are easier to compare to prior years than disaggregated outcomes from different grading systems.

An overview of the differences in the grading systems in the three jurisdictions

The diagram over the page, gives an approximation of the relationship between the grades in the three jurisdictions' grade scales. As in previous years, at A/7, C/4, G/1 we expect that grading standards are broadly comparable to legacy specifications at this level of achievement. Intermediate grades cannot be precisely compared to one another across the jurisdictions.

The 9-1 grade scale in England, which was first introduced in 2017 to the phase 1 subjects, is now used by nearly all subjects in England.

Reformed specifications in Wales continue to use an A* to G grade scale, which was also the scale for legacy GCSEs in England and Northern Ireland.

This year A* in Northern Ireland has been recalibrated to align with the grade 9 standard in England. C* has also been introduced this year, to broadly align with the grade 5.

England 9 to 1	Northern Ireland A* to G(NI)	Wales A* to G
9	A*	A*
8	A	
7		A
6	B	B
5	C*	
4	C	C
3	D	D
2	E	E
	F	F
1	G	G
U	U	U

(Adapted from Ofqual and CCEA)

System differences in England

- Progress 8, introduced in 2016, is a school performance measure which is expected to continue to influence centre subject choice.

- EBacc achievement and entry continue to be measured in performance tables in England and will also influence subject choice.

- Full time post-16 students in England must study English and/or mathematics if they have not already achieved at least a grade C/4 in either subject (those achieving 3/D must be enrolled on a GCSE course).

- This year all specifications will be graded 9 to 1 with the exception of Biblical Hebrew, Gujarati, Persian, Portuguese and Turkish, which will be awarded on the 9 to 1 grade scale for the first time in summer 2020.

- Last year a new combined science double award GCSE was examined for the first time. This replaced the single GCSE awards in science and additional science. The double award is graded 9-9, 9-8, 8-8…. 2-1, 1-1, U. In order to retain these outcomes in the main GCSE full course tables, we report outcomes at key grades 7-7, 4-4 and 1-1 as 7, 4, and 1. Each entry is doubled to reflect the achievement of *two* grades in the subject.

- Evidence from the National Reference Tests has been fed into the awarding of GCSE English language and GCSE mathematics for the first time this year.

Reform in Northern Ireland

Grades for CCEA's reformed GCSEs will be issued for the first time this summer. Many of the specifications remain modular and therefore candidates can take examinations that contribute to their overall grade in earlier series.

In the new grade scale, standards for grades D-G will broadly replicate the standards set at these legacy grades. At grade C and above the new grade scale will largely replicate with the standards of the new 9-1 specifications in England.

There are other differences in Northern Ireland between the other jurisdictions and these are set out below.

Key system differences In Northern Ireland:

- In Northern Ireland, there is an open qualifications market, which means that schools can choose to offer GCSEs graded A*-G(NI), or 9 to 1 or a combination of both.

- English Language GCSE must contain a speaking and listening component that contributes to the overall grade outcome.

Reform in Wales

GCSE reform in Wales is following a similar schedule to that in England, with third phase subjects being awarded for the first time this summer. The reformed specifications in Wales are awarded on a grade scale of A*-G, which is the same grade as the legacy qualifications in England and Northern Ireland.

There are however differences in Wales between the other jurisdictions and these are set out below.

Key system differences in Wales are noted below:

- GCSE mathematics numeracy is available alongside GCSE mathematics. Candidates may take this or GCSE mathematics, and most take both.

- GCSE mathematics, mathematics – numeracy, English language and Welsh language can be sat in November or in the summer.

- Changes to school performance measures have continued to impact on entries this summer.

- Only the first grades achieved by learners in qualifications can be used for school performance measures.

- Last summer this led to a decline in early entrants to GCSE mathematics, mathematics numeracy, English language and Welsh.

- This is one of the factors leading to a higher GCSE entry from year 11s this summer.

- It should be noted that the November series in Wales is open to all candidates, and is not just a resit series.

- Overall year-on-year results comparisons based just on the summer series therefore need careful interpretation, both within Wales and across jurisdictions.

- Best grade data is provided in the data set for subjects substantially effected by changes in early entry across the previous and current year 11 cohorts.

- Note that a few centres may choose to offer 9 to 1 specifications. In Wales this will be confined to subjects in which no Wales-approved GCSE exists, or to non-maintained centres.

- Last year a GCSE science double award was awarded for the first time. This replaced the single GCSE awards in science and additional science in Wales. The double award is graded A*A*, A*A, AA…. FG, GG, U. In order to retain these outcomes in the main GCSE full course tables, we will report outcomes at key grades AA, CC, and GG as A, C, and G. Each entry will be doubled to reflect the achievement of two grades in the subject.

Population Statistics

The Office for National Statistics population estimates are published by actual age – not academic age – which is different. There are many ways that the number of people in an academic year group can be estimated, which will give slightly different results and are not directly comparable, but broadly these estimates show that there are around 2.9% fewer 18 year olds in the England population in 2019 than in 2018.

The UCAS definition for the UK includes Scotland, given its relevance for University entrants, however the JCQ definition includes England, Wales and NI only. Scotland is not included in the JCQ population estimates.

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, and therefore outcomes may differ from previous years.

JCQ carries out quality assurance checks to ensure that the data received is, to the best of our knowledge, accurate.

The results tables are provisional. Results are updated constantly after this point, until results are released. For example, if late marks were received, results would be updated. 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.