



GCE 2020: Notes for users of the JCQ results tables

These notes put the results in context and provide explanations for the extraordinary circumstances in which GCE grades were awarded in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. An outline of this year's awarding process is provided below the regulator links. In light of these changes, this year's results are not directly comparable to previous years, but JCQ is publishing them for continuity and information purposes.

The notes do not, however, attempt to outline the detail of every change that may influence results or entries. The relevant government and regulatory websites give a more extensive overview of system changes.

Regulator links:

England

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

Northern Ireland

<https://ceea.org.uk/regulation>

Wales

<https://qualificationswales.org>

Education Department links

England

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

Northern Ireland

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

Wales

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

In response to the Global COVID-19 pandemic, the Summer 2020 exam series was cancelled to help fight the spread of the virus. An initial process was put in place to award candidates with a calculated grade aiming to reflect the grade they would have been likely to achieve, in their overall qualification, had an exam gone ahead.

GCE grades were to be awarded by exam boards this summer through a methodology set or agreed by the regulators. In England, Ofqual set the methodology for GCE exam boards in consultation with them. In Wales and Northern Ireland, exam boards developed the methodologies used, which were agreed with the regulators in those jurisdictions

However, following the earlier publication of A level results, English, Northern Ireland and Welsh Education Ministers opted to accept Centre Assessment Grades or the calculated grades, whichever was the higher. In Wales, candidates could receive their AS grade from the previous year, if this was higher than either the CAG or calculated grade.

GCE A Level, AS, AEA and Extended Project Results

GCE results were originally released on 13 August 2020. Following ministerial decisions, mentioned above, GCE results were revised and JCQ republished results tables on 10 September 2020.

The reform of AS and A levels in England, Northern Ireland and Wales is almost complete. Further information on A and AS level reforms in each devolved jurisdiction can be found on the relevant regulators' and governmental websites.

Interpreting the UK tables

There has been a slight decrease in the overall A level entry for the summer 2020 exam series, compared to last year, in line with a decrease in the size of the 18-year-old cohort (which fell by 3%).

The overall AS entry has decreased year on year, following reforms in England, where the GCE AS level was decoupled from the GCE A level. Therefore, AS entries are not stable, and any year-on-year 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 were intending to sit examinations for the first time as well as candidates who would have been resitting.

GCE in England

Reform in England is in its final phase, with grades for A levels in a number of lesser taught languages available for the first time in 2020 (Biblical Hebrew, Gujarati, Persian, Portuguese and Turkish).

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, provided these comply with Department of Education requirements.

Wales

The AS and A levels designed for Wales are only offered by WJEC. Where WJEC does not offer a subject, Qualifications Wales may designate a qualification designed for another jurisdiction.

Limitations

Comparisons between year-on-year outcomes are made more difficult during times of reform and major impacts such as the global pandemic of COVID-19. Whilst reform is complete, some changes may still be working through. 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.

The results tables are provisional. Results are updated after this point to include changes such as reviews of marking (or in 2020, where reviews of marking are not possible, appeals). Whilst provisional, we do not anticipate significant changes to outcomes to occur.

The tables should be read in conjunction with the press notices in the media section of the JCQ website.