



GCSE 2021: Notes for users of the JCQ results tables

These notes put the results in context and provide an explanation for some year-on-year changes in reporting and outcomes. The notes should be read before consulting the results tables. However, the notes do not 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, consult relevant regulatory and governmental websites. **You should also refer to the JCQ press notices, which have additional details regarding 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://gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual>

Northern Ireland

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

Wales

<https://qualificationswales.org/english/>

<https://qualificationswales.org/cymraeg/>

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>

Interpreting the UK tables

The overall GCSE Entry remains stable (approximately 5.75 million entries), and the majority of entries, like in previous years, were from year 11 learners (year 12 in NI). There have been increases in entry numbers in many EBacc subjects, particularly Combined Science and Geography. Entries in Computing increased slightly this year (after a decrease, the first in several years, last year).

GCSE in England

In January 2021, the Secretary of State for Education in England confirmed that learners taking GCSEs in summer 2021 should be awarded grades based on an assessment by their teachers.

The grades awarded this year represent the holistic, objective judgement of learners' teachers. Teachers were asked to base their judgements on a range of evidence of each learner's performance in each subject, but only on content they had been taught.

When determining the grade, teachers were asked to reflect the standard at which the learner was performing. This is different from 2020 when centres were asked to determine a grade based on their judgement of what learners would likely have achieved if they had completed examinations. Further information about the awarding process in England can be accessed [here](#).

As part of the exceptional arrangements this year, exam boards were asked to put in place a quality assurance framework to check that centres have appropriately determined grades and were consistent with the approaches they said they would adopt in their Centre Policies. Centres also conducted internal quality assurance. Further information about the quality assurance process in England can be accessed [here](#).

System differences in England (from Wales and Northern Ireland)

- Learners who do not achieve a GCSE grade 4 in English and/or mathematics at age 16 must continue to study these subjects (this is called the condition of funding). Learners who just missed out on a grade 4 are given the opportunity to achieve a GCSE grade 4 or above during post-16. However, for students with prior attainment of a GCSE grade 2 or below, a Functional Skills Level 2 qualification may be more appropriate.
- All specifications are graded 9 to 1.
- GCSE Combined Science (Double Award) is graded 9-9, 9-8, 8-8.... 2-1, 1-1, U. 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.
- A November 2020 examination series was available for English and maths resit students as per usual years. However, there was an additional autumn series open for other GCSE subjects to all candidates who wanted an opportunity to improve their grades from summer 2020.

GCSE in Northern Ireland

In January 2021, the Minister for Education in Northern Ireland confirmed the approach to awarding grades in summer 2021. The grades would be based on teacher professional judgements with moderation.

The grades awarded this year represent the holistic, objective judgement of learners' teachers. Teachers were asked to base their judgements on a range of evidence of each learner's performance in each subject, but only on content they had been taught.

When determining the grade, teachers were asked to reflect the standard at which the learner was performing. This is different from 2020 when centres were asked to determine a grade based on their judgement of what learners would likely have achieved if they had completed examinations. Further information about the awarding process in Northern Ireland can be accessed [here](#).

As part of the exceptional arrangements this year, exam boards were asked to put in place a quality assurance framework to check that centres have appropriately determined grades and were consistent with the approaches they said they would adopt in their Centre Policies. Centres also conducted internal quality assurance. Further information about the quality assurance process in Northern Ireland can be accessed [here](#).

System differences in Northern Ireland (from England and Wales)

Please note that year 11 in NI equates to year 10 in England and Wales; and year 12 equates to year 11.

- Only GCSE learners in Year 12 or above and those in further education or training who are completing qualifications in 2021 have been issued with a grade this year. Learners in Year 11 or below may not be eligible to enter for or be awarded GCSE qualifications in 2021. They must continue to study their GCSE subjects into Year 12. There were two exceptions:
 - GCSE Irish learners who intend to progress to GCSE Gaeilge or require GCSE Irish for progression to other courses delivered in Irish; and/or
 - GCSE Mathematics learners who will be entering GCSE Further Mathematics in 2022. (GCSE Mathematics is required for progression to GCSE Further Mathematics.)
- GCSE Single Award and Double Award science unitised exams are usually available in November, March and summer. The November 2020 examinations went ahead, although delayed by a few weeks.

GCSE in Wales

In January 2021, The Minister for Education in Wales confirmed centres would determine the GCSE grades awarded to learners in summer 2021.

The centre determined grades awarded this year represent the holistic, objective judgement of learners' centres. Centres were asked to base their judgements on a range of evidence of each learner's demonstrated attainment in areas of the qualification content that a learner has covered.

When determining the grade, centres were asked to reflect the standard at which the learner was performing. This is different from 2020 when centres were asked to base centre assessment grades on their judgement of the grade each learner was likely to achieve had they sat exams at the end of their course. Further information about the awarding process in Wales can be accessed [here](#).

As part of the exceptional arrangements this year, exam boards were asked to put in place a quality assurance framework to check that centres have appropriately determined grades and were consistent with the approaches they said they would adopt in their Centre Policies. Centres also conducted internal quality assurance. Further information about the quality assurance process in Wales can be accessed [here](#).

Only WJEC offers the GCSEs designed for Wales. Where WJEC does not provide a subject, Qualifications Wales may allow students to take qualifications from another exam board. Centres in Wales that only entered general qualifications regulated by Ofqual were included in quality assurance procedures for those qualifications. All other centres went through the WJEC quality assurance procedures.

System differences in Wales (from England and Northern Ireland)

- GCSE mathematics-numeracy is available alongside GCSE mathematics. The majority of candidates take both.
- GCSE mathematics, mathematics – numeracy, English language and Welsh language can be sat in November or the summer. A November 2020 examination series was available.
- 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.
- Specifications in Wales are awarded on a grade scale of A*-G. 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.
- GCSE Combined Science (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.

Data Suppression

To protect candidate anonymity, data suppression (indicated by 0~) is applied to the results tables when the combined number of male and female candidates that entered a subject is fewer than 10. In this case, all rows for the subject would be suppressed. Suppression is also

applied to subjects when one of the gender breakdowns had fewer than ten candidates enter. In this case, the separate rows for male and female would be suppressed, but the combined 'male & female' row would not be suppressed.

Limitations

Given the approach to determining grades in 2021 has been different from any previous summer, it is difficult to draw comparisons with previous sets of results.

The JCQ tables include breakdowns by Male and Female gender types. Currently, JCQ and its member awarding organisations do not collect the data required to include the provision of non-binary candidates. However, after consultation with stakeholders and employee representation groups from awarding organisations, and one of our members consulting with Stonewall, we are pleased to share that we will be looking at this in the near future, and we commit to consulting with key stakeholders to demonstrate our continued support for the non-binary community.

JCQ carries out quality assurance checks to ensure that the data received is accurate to the best of our knowledge. The results tables are provisional. Results are updated after this point to include changes such as appeals. Whilst provisional, we do not anticipate significant changes to outcomes will occur.

The tables should be read in conjunction with the press notices in the [news releases](#) section of the JCQ website. The press notices outline the context of year-on-year changes in results.