



Media release
EMBARGOED UNTIL 09.30 HOURS
TUESDAY, 10 AUGUST 2021

AS/A Level grades awarded in a year unlike any other

Today, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) publishes the 2021 Wales results for A and AS Levels.

School and college staff, exam boards, regulators and government officials have all worked collaboratively under challenging circumstances to ensure that students are awarded their qualifications today so they can progress to the next stage of their lives and careers

The GCE A Level, AS and GCSE examinations for summer 2021 were cancelled by the Welsh Government in November 2020. They established the Design and Delivery Advisory Group, with representative membership from school and college leaders, to develop alternative arrangements and make recommendations to the Minister, and were supported by Qualifications Wales and WJEC from a regulation and operational perspective.

Following discussions, it was decided that schools and colleges would use their professional judgement to determine learners' grades (Centre-Determined Grades) for Qualifications Wales' approved qualifications, using a range of evidence from the specification content their students had been taught. Similar approaches were applied to other regulated qualifications taken by learners in Wales.

Exam boards supported schools and colleges through the provision of extensive assessment materials, guidance and training, and external quality assurance, which ensured grades were determined appropriately.

Given that grades have been determined by an alternative approach this year, we anticipated the overall distribution of grades to differ from those in a standard year.

GCE A level Results

The A level results for Wales show that 99.1% of students achieved A* - E grades. There was an increase at A* with 21.3% of candidates achieving this grade, compared to 16.3% in 2020.

The total number of A level examination entries in Wales this year was 35,867, an increase of 14.5% relative to 2020, reversing the decreasing A level entries since the summer of 2015.

In Wales, the overall pass rate for males and females is broadly similar with 98.8% of subject entries by males achieving A* - E grades, compared to 99.3% of entries by females. However, females now outperform males at grades A by 6.2 percentage points and B by 7 percentage points. The difference at A* is 0.9 percentage points.

Advanced Subsidiary (AS) Results

There were 42,820 cash-in entries for AS in Wales this year, a reduction of 8.0% compared with 46,545 last year.

37.1% of all grades awarded were A in Wales this year, compared with 29.5% in 2020. The percentage of candidates achieving A - E grades show a decline, with 96.7% achieving these grades, compared with 98.5% in 2020.

Trends in subject entries

There has been an overall increase in entries for all subjects at A level. Biology (+855), Chemistry (+544), Design & Technology (+125), English Literature (+319), Geography (+205), Law (+132), Mathematics (+395), Physics (+362), Psychology (+598) and Sociology (+222) have seen significant increase in entries.

For AS, overall there has been a downward entry pattern in most subjects, with significant reduction in entries for the following: Biology (-448), Chemistry (-624), English Literature (-387), French (-111), Geography (-118), Mathematics (-848), Mathematics (Further) (-260) and Physics (-318).

Mathematics remains the most popular A level and AS subject with 4,106 and 4,298 entries respectively. Outcomes have remained relatively stable at both levels.

There has been a small decrease in entries for Welsh 1st Language at AS and A level. There has been a minor increase in entries for Welsh 2nd Language at A level, however these figures reflect the year on year fluctuations in entries.

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

Detailed tabulations of the GCE AS and A-level are published with the STRICT EMBARGO of 09.30 TUESDAY 10 August 2021 and will be available on WJEC's website from 09.30 on 10 August 2021 – www.wjec.co.uk

Results 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. Results for the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification are awarded by WJEC only.

The JCQ^{CIC} comprises AQA, CCEA, City & Guilds, OCR, Pearson, SQA and WJEC – the seven largest providers of qualifications in the UK

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.

The qualifications framework is common across Wales, England and Northern Ireland. Comprehensive data for entries and results on a country-by-country basis are provided by the Joint Council for Qualifications - www.jcq.org.uk - and may be accessed from 9:30 am on Tuesday 10 August 2021.

Awarding organisations are regulated by Ofqual (England), Qualifications Wales and CCEA (Northern Ireland). The regulatory authorities monitor the awarding bodies' standards. Maintaining standards within and across all qualifications in order to ensure fairness to all candidates is the paramount concern of the awarding bodies.

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.

GCE Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced Level

In Wales, the A level examination is made up of two parts, the Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and the A2. The AS and the A2 combined in a single subject constitute the A level.

For students receiving their A2 grades in Summer 2021, their previous AS grades will not contribute towards their final grades.

The standard set for the AS is that expected at the end of the first year of a two year course. The AS covers the less demanding material in an A level course. The AS is not, therefore, of full Advanced level standard. In reformed qualifications approved by Qualifications Wales, the AS contributes 40% to the overall A level, whereas in the previous specifications the contribution was 50%.

During the second year of the course, students develop greater understanding of the subjects they are studying, and the A2 covers the more demanding material in the specification.

Summer 2021: Alternative approach to assessment and grading

The information below relates to the following Qualifications Wales approved qualifications:

- *WJEC GCSE, AS and A level qualifications*
- *Skills Challenge Certificates*
- *Level 2 and Level 3 Health and Social Care: Principles and Contexts*
- *Level 2 Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Unit 216)*

Following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Welsh Government decided that Summer 2021 exams would not go ahead as planned.

They established the Design and Delivery Advisory Group which supported the work of Qualifications Wales in making changes to its regulations for qualifications, and WJEC to implement an alternative approach to grading this summer.

Following discussions, it was decided that schools/colleges would use their professional judgement to determine learners' grades (Centre-Determined Grades), based on a wide range of evidence, which could include:

- adapted past papers, non-examination assessment, centre- devised tasks, and coursework.

No single piece of evidence was necessarily more important than another, as grades were based on a holistic judgement.

The approach allowed for a high degree of flexibility, allowing schools/colleges to choose appropriate evidence which took account the variations in learning experiences of the learners.

Schools and colleges were required to submit a Centre Policy, outlining the evidence they would be using to determine grades and their quality assurance processes. These policies were reviewed by WJEC to ensure all areas of the guidance had been covered. In addition, WJEC led on external quality assurance to ensure that all processes were followed.

WJEC supported schools and colleges through the provision of adapted assessment materials, guidance and training, and external quality assurance, which ensured schools and colleges determined grades appropriately. Examples of this support is available from the [WJEC Summer 2021 website](#).

Please note schools and colleges delivering Ofqual regulated GCSE and AS/A levels followed arrangements as outlined by [JCQ guidance here](#).