

Overview of results for GCSE and Level 1 / 2 Welsh Baccalaureate - Summer 2017



Qualifications Wales is the independent regulator of qualifications in Wales. We oversee how exam boards award GCSE, AS and A level qualifications and the Welsh Baccalaureate.

GCSE results summary: Wales¹

In comparison with summer 2016 results for all candidates:

- the proportion achieving A* is unchanged at 6.1%
- the proportion achieving A* and A is down by 1.5 percentage points to 17.9%
- the proportion achieving A* to C is down by 3.8 percentage points to 62.8%
- the proportion achieving A* to G is down by 1.8 percentage points to 96.9%

The overall GCSE results in Wales this summer for all students have fallen. A significant factor contributing to this fall is the considerable change in entry patterns, notably, a significant increase in the number of Year 10 entries and a significant number of Year 11 students achieving their maths qualifications in November. These factors contribute to a situation this summer where the nature of the cohort has changed considerably. The growing trend in early entry means more students have taken exams early, 'banked' a result and not returned to sit the exam again this summer; many will be students who have achieved a Grade C or above that would otherwise appear in this summer's results. **As a consequence, reliable conclusions cannot be drawn from direct comparisons between results in summer 2017 and summer 2016, or direct comparisons between summer results across the UK.**

This overview contains year-on-year comparisons using the most relevant data and explains how this data has been derived.

In general terms, performance has improved in some subjects and fallen in others; this is to be expected since cohorts vary from one year to the next, in both size and ability.

¹ The comparison at A* does not include any awards in the 9-1 grade scale, as there is no directly equivalent grade. Other points of comparison do include these awards as there are equivalent anchor points across both grade scales.



This year's GCSE results include subjects that have been specifically developed for, and taken by, learners in Wales:

- English Language;
- Welsh Language;
- English Literature;
- Welsh Literature;
- Mathematics-Numeracy; and
- Mathematics.

Except for Mathematics and Mathematics-Numeracy GCSEs, which were awarded for the first time in November 2016, this summer is the first time new GCSEs in these subjects have been awarded.

We have closely monitored WJEC's delivery of these new qualifications and are confident that standards have been maintained. GCSEs in other subjects that have not yet been reformed continue to be awarded across Wales, England and Northern Ireland. We have worked closely with the qualifications regulators in those countries (Ofqual and CCEA) to oversee these awards as part of an existing three-country regulatory approach.

GCSEs are being separately reformed in England and Northern Ireland, as well as here in Wales. During these reforms, we have worked closely with the regulators in those countries to ensure the new GCSEs are valued equally. A GCSE is still a GCSE, whether it's taken in Wales, England or Northern Ireland. While there are some differences in content, assessment structures and even grading scales, the underlying qualifications taken by students in each country are recognisably still GCSEs. They are the same size, they are taken by students of the same ability and assess the same or very similar outcomes in each subject area.

The approach taken to awarding has been consistent with well-established arrangements. Exam boards have used data about how cohorts performed in previous years' exams to predict how the cohort is likely to perform this summer; this is known as the 'comparable outcomes approach'.

If the cohort taking a subject this year is similar, in terms of its past performance, to the cohort that took it last year (and nothing else is seen to change), the expectation is that the overall grade outcomes for the two cohorts will be similar. This reflects the important fact that grade boundaries are set by an exam board for each exam series and apply to all students who sat their exams in that series.

The comparable outcomes approach ensures that variability in outcomes at the national level is limited; this protects standards and secures fairness for students, which is particularly important when qualifications change. However, when changes happen, there is typically more variability in individual school and college results.

GCSE entries: Wales

The overall entry² for GCSEs in Wales this summer has seen a 14% increase from 2016 (262,542 in 2016 to 298,370 in 2017). This increase is mainly due to:

- The significant increase in Year 10 entries (around 16% of all qualifications sat this summer were from Year 10 students);
- Most students taking both of the two new mathematics qualifications: GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy.

The overall number of 15-year-olds and under (mostly Year 10 students) entered this summer has increased by 57% to 47,821. The overall number of students taking GCSEs after leaving Year 11 (17-year-olds and over) has increased by 13% to 15,644.

Most of the entries this summer were by students in Year 11 (16-year-olds), who made up 79% of the overall entry. The number of Year 11 entries was 234,905, which is a rise of 8% compared to the number of Year 11 students who entered in summer 2016. This is mainly driven by the two new mathematics GCSEs replacing the old GCSE Mathematics.

² Where we refer to entries, these are the number of students who sat the examination and were awarded a result.

These changes in the size and nature of the cohort are critical considerations when interpreting results; in particular, the number of Year 10 students who will not yet have completed their programmes of study.

GCSE Mathematics

The entry figures for GCSE Mathematics have fluctuated over recent years as more students have been entered in the November examinations. Additionally, this year, there are two mathematics qualifications replacing the old qualification.

As a consequence, reliable conclusions cannot be drawn from the comparison between results in summer 2017 and summer 2016.

In November 2016, 22,688 students sat the new GCSE Mathematics qualification and 28,753 sat the new GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy qualification. This summer, 36,330 sat the new GCSE Mathematics qualification and 32,260 sat the new GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy qualification. In summer 2016, 30,570 sat the old GCSE Mathematics qualification.

As in previous years, data for the academic year is provided below. This data only includes the best grade a student achieved in either the November or summer series.

The outcomes for 16-year-old students this academic year for the new mathematics GCSE qualifications are:

	GCSE Mathematics Numeracy (cumulative %)	GCSE Mathematics (cumulative %)
A*	7.8	9.4
A*-A	16.4	17.7
A*-C	58.5	60.0
A*-G	95.9	96.5

Given the scale of change between the old mathematics GCSE and the two new mathematics GCSEs, along with the multiple entry attempts available to students, detailed comparisons between previous years' results and this year's results are not possible.

In the table below, the best outcomes for **16-year-old students this academic year compared to the 2015/2016 and 2014/2015 academic years** are shown, as they provide the most consistent comparator:

	2014/2015 cumulative %	2015/2016 cumulative %	2016/2017 cumulative %
A*	6.8	7.5	10.9
A*-A	16.0	17.4	19.9
A*-C	63.7	65.5	63.8
A*-G	97.9	98.7	97.9

GCSE English Language

Between 2016 and 2017, there has been a significant increase in the overall entries in GCSE English Language by 67% to 58,857. This significant increase is driven by the number of Year 10 students entered this summer. Year 10 entry has increased from 128 to 20,979 whilst the number of entries from learners over the age of 16 years has increased by 14% from 5,954 in 2016 to 6,814 in 2017.

Students were able to take the previous GCSE English Language qualification in either the January or summer exam series. This year, they could only sit the new qualification in the summer series, so care needs to be taken when comparing this summer's data to data from previous years. As in previous years, the historic data provided below is for the academic year. This data only includes the best grade a student achieved in either the November or summer series.

Given the significant shift in entry pattern for this qualification, reliable conclusions cannot be drawn from the comparison between all student results in summer 2017 and summer 2016. Therefore, we have used 16-year-old outcomes as the only consistent comparator.

Outcomes for **16-year-old students this year compared to the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 academic years** are shown in the table below:

	2014/2015 cumulative %	2015/2016 cumulative %	2016/2017 cumulative %
A*	3.1	2.8	3.2
A*-A	13.8	13.6	14.3
A*-C	64.5	64.2	64.8
A*-G	99.2	99.2	98.6

GCSE Welsh Language

As for GCSE Welsh Language, overall entries for GCSE Welsh Language have increased due to a significant increase in Year 10 entries which are up from 1 to 1,003.

Given the significant shift in entry pattern for this qualification, reliable conclusions cannot be drawn from the comparison between all student results in summer 2017 and summer 2016. Therefore, we have used 16-year-old outcomes as the only consistent comparator.

Outcomes for **16-year-old students this year compared to 2015/2016 academic years** are shown in the table below:

	2015/2016 cumulative %	2016/2017 cumulative %
A*	3.9	4.0
A*-A	15.4	15.6
A*-C	73.9	73.6
A*-G	99.8	99.6

GCSE English Literature

GCSE English Literature has seen a decrease in overall summer entries by 44% to 16,835. This is largely explained by last year's significant increase in Year 10 entries up 276% from 2,038 to 7,657. Overall, 21,925 of the current Year 11 students have achieved a GCSE in English Literature (either sat in Year 10 or Year 11) compared to 24,542 in 2016.

Outcomes for **16-year-old students who have achieved a GCSE in English Literature (either sat in Year 10 or Year 11)**, are shown in the table below:

	2015/2016 cumulative %	2016/2017 cumulative %
A*	4.3	4.1
A*-A	19.8	19.9
A*-C	77.5	77.1
A*-G	99.3	99.3

GCSE Welsh Literature

Overall entries and results for GCSE Welsh Literature have remained stable.

Outcomes for **16 year-old students this year compared to 2015/2016** are shown in the table below:

	2015/2016 cumulative %	2016/2017 cumulative %
A*	8.2	9.0
A*-A	23.4	24.2
A*-C	74.5	75.1
A*-G	99.9	99.9

GCSE Science Suite

The new science GCSEs will be awarded for the first time next year and are currently being studied by Year 10 students. This therefore means that the old GCSE Science which was historically taken by Year 10 students has seen a significant fall in overall entries this year of 78% from 23,941 to 5,157. Given that we are midway through the introduction of the new specification, this is to be expected. This significant change in entries means that comparisons cannot be made when interpreting results year on year.

Furthermore, the old GCSE Additional Science has seen an increase in overall entries of 26% to 16,315. This increase reflects students who moved from vocational science courses to the GCSE qualifications last year, as schools anticipate changes to school performance measures in 2018. Therefore, care needs to be taken when comparing summer 2017 with summer 2016.

Welsh Baccaulaureate

KS4 Welsh Baccaulaureate Skills Challenge Certificate

This summer sees the first award of the new Welsh Baccaulaureate KS4 Skills Challenge Certificate. The KS4 Skills Challenge Certificate is equivalent in size and demand to a GCSE. It is graded at A*-C for achievement at Level 2 and Pass* and Pass at Level 1.

	2017
Candidate entries	23,443
Candidates awarded the KS4 Skills Challenge Certificate	21,755
% achieving the KS4 Skills Challenge Certificate	92.7

KS4 Welsh Baccaulaureate Skills Challenge Certificate results 2017 (cumulative percentage)

	2017
A*	1.1
A*-A	7.0
A*-C	67.5

This table does not include historic data as the qualification has changed so significantly that year on year comparisons are not appropriate.

Post-16 Welsh Baccaulaureate Skills Challenge Certificate

This is the second year that the new Post-16 Welsh Baccaulaureate has been awarded with the following Skills Challenge Certificate outcomes:

National post-16 Welsh Baccaalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate

	2016	2017
Candidate entries	1,259	877
Candidates awarded the National post-16 Skills Challenge Certificate	1,015	691
% achieving the National post-16 Skills Challenge Certificate	80.6	78.8

Foundation post-16 Welsh Baccaalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate

	2016	2017
Candidate entries	908	728
Candidates awarded the Foundation post-16 Skills Challenge Certificate	859	620
% achieving the Foundation post-16 Skills Challenge Certificate	94.6	85.2

Further information

The data above is based on the JCQ results. Full GCSE results are published by [JCQ](#) and full Welsh Baccaalaureate results are published by [WJEC](#).