

Overview of AS and A level results in Wales – Summer 2019



This summer saw the final phase of new qualifications awarded. There are now 29 new AS and A level qualifications that have been developed for, and taken by, learners in Wales. We have closely monitored WJEC's delivery of these new qualifications and are confident that standards have been maintained.

Headlines

1. A level outcomes in Wales have risen.
2. AS qualification outcomes in Wales remain stable.
3. The overall number of AS and A level qualifications taken has fallen again this year. To take account of this, we have included in this overview the number of students achieving each grade, as well as the percentages.
4. Care should be taken when interpreting relatively small changes in year-on-year results due to the year-on-year changes in numbers taking the qualifications.

A level Results: Wales

In comparison with 2018 results:

- the proportion achieving A* is up 0.4 percentage points to 9.1%
- the proportion achieving A* or A is up 0.7 percentage points to 27.0%
- the proportion achieving A* to E is up 0.2 percentage points to 97.6%

A level Results 2015-2019 (cumulative percentage)

	A*	A*-A	A*-E
2019	9.1	27.0	97.6
2018	8.7	26.3	97.4
2017	8.3	25.0	97.7
2016	6.6	22.7	97.3
2015	7.3	23.1	97.3

Source: JCQ

A level Results 2015-2019 (number of grades awarded)

	A*	A*-A	A*-E	Number Sat
2019	2,876	8,512	30,716	31,483
2018	2,815	8,523	31,606	32,445
2017	2,749	8,321	32,523	33,294
2016	2,351	8,080	34,564	35,537
2015	2,360	8,324	35,061	36,034

Source: JCQ

The overall percentages of A level grades awarded in Wales have risen. Although the percentages achieving these grades have increased, it's important to consider the change in numbers sitting the qualifications this year. The actual number of grades awarded at A*, A* and A, and A* to E is broadly stable, with small shifts which we would expect and that can be considered normal variation.

AS level Results: Wales

In comparison with 2018 results:

- the proportion achieving A is down 0.1 percentage points to 20.3%
- the proportion achieving A to E has remained the same at 90.0 %

AS level Results 2015-2019 (cumulative percentage)

	A	A-E
2019	20.3	90.0
2018	20.4	90.0
2017	19.1	88.9
2016	18.0	88.3
2015	16.2	86.8

Source: JCQ

AS level Results 2015-2019 (number of grades awarded)

	A	A-E	Number Sat
2019	8,041	35,695	39,646
2018	8,737	38,635	42,915
2017	8,825	40,984	46,127
2016	8,831	43,384	49,144
2015	8,549	45,805	52,771

Source: JCQ

The overall percentage of AS level grades awarded at A in Wales has fallen slightly. However, as with A level results, these changes need to be considered within the context of a change in the numbers sitting these qualifications.

In some AS and A level subjects performance has improved, whereas in others it has fallen. This is to be expected because the number and mix of students taking each subject varies from one year to the next.

Setting standards in AS and A levels in 2019

The approach to awarding this summer has been consistent with well-established arrangements to ensure that standards have been set and maintained appropriately. It 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. When changes happen, there is typically more variability in individual school and college results

Exam boards have used data to produce predictions based on students' prior attainment at GCSE. If the cohort taking a subject this year is similar, in terms of its past performance at GCSE level, 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. However, these statistical predictions are not used in isolation. Senior examiners review student work at the key grade boundaries comparing them to the standard set in the previous series to ensure it is appropriate. If they judge that it is not, they will move the grade boundary to a mark that reflects a similar standard of work. This explains why grade boundaries can change from one exam series to the next.

Number of qualifications taken in Wales

At both AS and A level, the number of qualifications taken in Wales has decreased again this year. At AS level, the number of qualifications taken has fallen by 7.6 % to 39,646 compared to 2018. At A level, the number of qualifications taken in 2019 is 3.0 % lower at 31,483 compared to 2018.

AS and A level 2015-2019: Number of qualifications taken in Wales

	AS	A level
2019	39,646	31,483
2018	42,915	32,445
2017	46,127	33,294
2016	49,144	35,537
2015	52,771	36,034

Source: JCQ

This drop could be caused by a number of factors:

- a smaller population size in the relevant age groups, reducing the number of students that could choose to enter these qualifications;
- a fall in the average number of qualifications taken by students; and
- an increase in students choosing to study vocational qualifications, enter training or starting apprenticeships.

To understand this better, we have updated some work that we undertook last year looking at changes to the population in Wales. We wanted to see how the number of students that can choose to study AS and A levels in Wales might be changing. We have updated last year's blog on our [website](#).

Our updated analysis suggests that decreases in the population of 17 and 18-year-olds in Wales continues to be a major cause of the fall in entries for AS and A level qualifications. There may, however, still be other factors contributing to the decreases in entries, particularly in the case of 17-year-olds. The data showed us that among 17-year-olds, fewer of them are taking four or more AS levels, with more learners choosing to take three or less. Most 18-year-olds take three A levels along with the Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate and the proportion of 18-year-olds taking at least one AS level has also reduced, which helps to explain why AS entries have fallen more quickly than A level entries.

Note: the 2019 data is provisional and is subject to change following GCSE results day.

Further information

Full AS and A level results are published by [JCO](#). We have published infographics about this year's AS and A level [results](#).