

Overview of GCSE results in Wales – Summer 2019



This summer saw the first award of seven new GCSE qualifications and marks the end of a significant reform journey that means we now have a set of GCSEs made in Wales, for Wales.

A total of 28 new GCSE qualifications have been developed for, and taken by, learners in Wales. These are assessed and awarded separately to GCSEs taken elsewhere in the UK. They have updated content and are as equally demanding as other GCSEs. Unlike new GCSEs in England and Northern Ireland, we have kept the A* to G grades, which colleges, universities and employers know and understand.

We have closely monitored WJEC's delivery of these new qualifications and are confident that standards have been maintained.

Headlines

1. In Wales this summer, the proportion of grades awarded at A and above has decreased slightly. At C and above, the proportion has increased 1.2 percentage points and at G and above, the increase was 0.8 percentage points.
2. The results published by JCQ today are for exams that were sat this summer, in Wales and across the UK, by students of all ages. So, for 16-year-olds in Wales, these results do not give a full picture of all the GCSEs they have achieved, because they don't include any grades for GCSEs they may have achieved in previous exam series.
3. This summer there has been an increase in the number of entries, reflecting an increase in the population of 16-year-olds and changes to school performance measures.
4. The cohort of students sitting GCSE exams in some core subjects this summer is very different to previous years.
5. Results in English Language for 16-year-olds across the 2018/19 academic year show a drop of 4.1 percentage points at A*-C compared to 2017/18 – once students' best grades are taken into account. Having monitored the award closely, we are confident that grade boundaries have been established appropriately and that this summer's award is fair for students.
6. There is drop of 11.7 percentage points in outcomes at grade C for GCSE Welsh Second Language compared to 2018. The cohort of students sitting the new GCSE Welsh Second Language this summer is different to previous years. The new qualification is the only Welsh Second Language qualification available to schools this summer. In previous years, schools could enter students for the legacy full and short course GCSEs in Welsh Second Language or Applied Welsh Second Language.

GCSEs in Wales

The reformed GCSEs in Wales have several key features, they:

- contain updated content and strengthened assessment;
- are the same size as the legacy GCSEs;
- are either unitised or linear qualifications;
- are designed for the same range of students as in previous years; and
- continue to be graded A* to G.

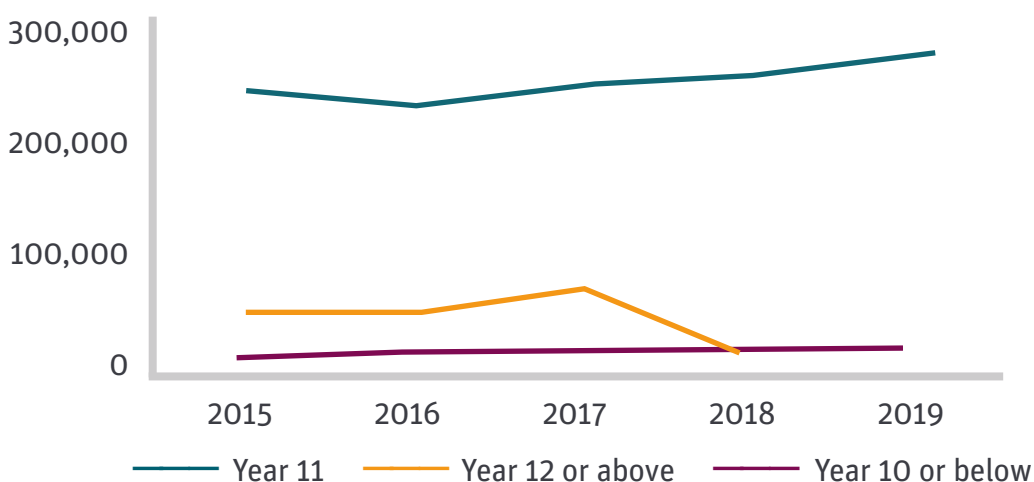
GCSEs sat in Wales

The overall number of GCSEs sat in Wales this summer has seen an increase of 8.8% (271,761 in 2018 to 295,690). This is mainly due to:

- an increase in Year 11 students linked to a sharp fall in the number of candidates entered early in Year 10 last year following the change in Welsh Government policy, which means that from this year only a student's first result in a subject can be used to measure a school's performance. Year 10 entries this year are similar to last year, which is encouraging and suggests that entry patterns might be getting more stable.
- an increase of around 0.7% in the 16-year-old population in Wales (Welsh Government, 2016-based national population projections).

These changes in the size and nature of the cohort are critical considerations when interpreting results.

GCSE Summer Entries by Year Group, 2015 to 2019



Sources: Qualifications Wales summer entries 2019; Ofqual summer entries 2015-2017

This overview contains year-on-year comparisons using the most relevant data and explains how this data has been compiled. All tables feature cumulative percentages and the total number of candidates.

Summer 2019 GCSE Results: Wales

In comparison with summer 2018 results:

- the proportion of results graded A* or A is down 0.1 percentage points to 18.4 %
- the proportion of results graded A* to C is up 1.2 percentage points to 62.8 %
- the proportion of results graded A* to G is up 0.8 percentage points to 97.2 %

Table 1: GCSE Results (all ages)

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
A*-A	19.2	19.4	17.9	18.5	18.4
A*-C	66.6	66.6	62.8	61.6	62.8
A*-G	98.7	98.7	96.9	96.4	97.2
Number sat	270,567	262,542	298,370	271,761	295,690

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications

The data includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales as well as GCSEs graded 9-1 designed for England.

In Wales, this summer the proportion of A* and A grades awarded has decreased slightly, the proportion of A* to C grades has risen and the overall pass rate (A*-G) is up.

It's important to remember that these results are only for exams sat in Wales this summer by students of all ages. They do not give a full picture of all GCSEs achieved by 16-year-olds in Wales, because they do not include grades for GCSEs achieved in previous exam series.

In some core subjects, the cohort of students sitting GCSE exams this summer is very different to previous years. In subjects like Maths, English and Welsh fewer of the current Year 11 learners have sat their exams before the end of Year 11, compared to the previous cohort.

The number of students taking GCSE English Literature, has risen sharply this year, with many students sitting in Year 10 and unlikely to re-enter next year, when they are in Year 11. This may be because in more schools, students are studying only English Literature in Year 10 then only English Language in Year 11.

All these changes mean that comparing the headline results for exams taken this summer (2019) with results from previous summers can't tell us very much.

To help make sense of this summer's results in individual subjects (English language, English literature, Welsh language, Welsh literature, Mathematics and Mathematics-Numeracy), this overview combines GCSE results from previous exam series with this summer's GCSE results to show the overall best grades achieved by all 16-year-olds in Wales at the end of Year 11.

GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy

The numbers of students sitting GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy have both increased this year. This is due to fewer students sitting exams early (most likely because the grade from either qualification now counts towards school performance measures).

Table 3: Summer A*-G GCSE Mathematics Results (all ages)

	2017	2018	2019
A*	4.7	5.1	5.9
A*-A	10.0	11.1	12.7
A*-C	45.7	43.7	49.4
A*-G	91.6	88.6	94.3
Number sat	40,829	28,701	33,368

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

Table 4: Summer A*-G GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy Results (all ages)

	2017	2018	2019
A*	5.2	3.9	4.7
A*-A	10.1	10.6	11.9
A*-C	46.2	46.5	50.5
A*-G	91.1	91.6	93.9
Number sat	32,260	22,448	24,105

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

Given the substantial shift in entry patterns for these qualifications, reliable conclusions cannot be drawn from the comparison between all student results in summer 2018 and summer 2019. To help make meaningful year-on-year comparisons, the data below shows the best grade for 16-year-old students achieved in any exam series up to and including summer 2019.

Table 5: A*-G GCSE Mathematics Results (16-year-olds' best grade)

	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
A*	9.4	9.3	9.1
A*-A	17.7	18.5	18.5
A*-C	60.0	60.4	58.8
A*-G	96.5	96.1	95.4
Number of students	30,812	29,926	30,345

Source: WJEC.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

JCQ published best grade data includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales as well as GCSEs graded 9-1 designed for England.

Table 6: A*-G GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy Results (16-year-olds' best grade)

	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
A*	7.8	7.6	6.8
A*-A	16.4	16.7	16.1
A*-C	58.5	59.6	58.1
A*-G	95.9	96.2	95.2
Number of students	30,683	29,655	30,073

Source: WJEC.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

JCQ published best grade data includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales as well as GCSEs graded 9-1 designed for England.

GCSE English Language

The number of students sitting GCSE English Language has substantially increased this year. This is due to the drop in students sitting exams early (most likely to have been caused by changes to school performance measures) leading to an increase in Year 11 students sitting exams for the first time this summer.

Table 7: Summer A*-G GCSE English Language Results (all ages)

	2017	2018	2019
A*	2.2	2.5	2.2
A*-A	10.4	9.3	10.5
A*-C	57.5	40.7	54.3
A*-G	98.3	98.1	98.4
Number sat	58,500	27,438	35,921

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

A substantially larger proportion of Year 11 students than last year sat the qualification for the first time this summer. Given this substantial shift in entry pattern for this qualification, reliable conclusions cannot be drawn from the comparison between all student results in summer 2018 and summer 2019. To help make more meaningful year-on-year comparisons, the data below shows the best grade for 16-year-old students achieved in any exam series up to and including summer 2019.

Table 8: A*-G GCSE English Language Results (16-year-olds' best grade)

	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
A*	3.2	3.2	2.9
A*-A	14.1	13.3	13.0
A*-C	64.4	63.3	59.2
A*-G	98.6	98.7	98.6
Number of students	30,792	30,013	30,478

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

JCQ published best grade data includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales as well as GCSEs graded 9-1 designed for England.

Table 8 shows a substantial drop in performance at A*-C of 4.1%, explained by a drop at grade C. Grade boundaries are lower than last year and, having monitored the subject closely, we are confident that they have been established appropriately and this summer's award is fair for students.

There are several potential explanations for this drop in results, including differences such as changing entry patterns over recent years and a change in students' performance.

We would like to understand this drop in more detail and plan to undertake work in the autumn to inform our work and that of others. In the meantime, WJEC will publish its Examiners' Report, which will provide some insight into this year's examinations.

GCSE Welsh Language

The number of students sitting GCSE Welsh Language this summer has increased; this follows on from a big decrease in entries in summer 2018, when Year 10 entries declined sharply.

Table 9: Summer A*-G GCSE Welsh Language Results (all ages)

	2017	2018	2019
A*	3.7	4.1	4.1
A*-A	14.6	14.5	15.8
A*-C	72.0	71.2	73.1
A*-G	99.7	99.4	99.3
Number sat	6,422	4,848	5,210

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

Given the substantial shift in the entry pattern over time for this qualification, reliable conclusions cannot be drawn from the comparison between all student results in summer 2018 and summer 2017. To help make meaningful year-on-year comparisons, the data below shows the best grade for 16-year-old students achieved in any exam series up to and including summer 2019.

Table 10: A*-G GCSE Welsh Language Results (16-year-olds' best grade)

	2017	2018	2019
A*	4.0	4.1	4.1
A*-A	15.6	14.8	15.7
A*-C	73.6	74.0	73.7
A*-G	99.6	99.5	99.4
Number sat	5,381	5,274	5,401

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

JCQ published best grade data includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales as well as GCSEs graded 9-1 designed for England.

GCSE English Literature

The number of students who sat GCSE English Literature has increased by 22.8 % to 28,931. This is largely explained by a substantial increase in Year 10 entries up 80.3 % from 5,190 to 9,355. This change is most likely due to changes that allow a student's best grade from their language or literature qualifications to count towards school performance measures. Overall, 99.1 % of the current Year 11 students have achieved a GCSE in English Literature (either sat in Year 10 or Year 11) compared to 99.2 in 2018.

Table 11: Summer A*-G GCSE English Literature Results (all ages)

	2017	2018	2019
A*	4.9	4.2	3.9
A*-A	22.4	20.8	19.1
A*-C	80.4	77.3	72.9
A*-G	99.5	99.0	99.2
Number sat	16,569	23,556	28,931

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

Given the substantial shift in entry pattern for this qualification and to help make meaningful year-on-year comparisons, the data below shows the best grade for 16-year-old students achieved in any exam series up to and including summer 2019.

Table 12: A*-G GCSE English Literature Results (16-year-olds' best grade)

	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
A*	4.1	4.5	4.2
A*-A	19.9	22.1	20.0
A*-C	77.1	79.4	74.6
A*-G	99.3	99.2	99.1
Number sat	21,925	20,317	24,599

Source: WJEC.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales. JCQ published best grade data includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales as well as GCSEs graded 9-1 designed for England.

GCSE Welsh Literature

The number of students sitting GCSE Welsh Literature has increased by 11.1%. This change may be a result of changes to school performance measures that allow a student's best grade from their language or literature qualifications to count.

Table 13: Summer A*-G GCSE Welsh Literature Results (all ages)

	2017	2018	2019
A*	9.0	8.9	7.7
A*-A	24.2	24.7	22.6
A*-C	75.1	76.0	76.3
A*-G	99.9	99.8	99.7
Number sat	3,320	3,304	3,671

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

Table 14: A*-G GCSE Welsh Literature Results (16-year-olds' best grade)

	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
A*	8.8	9.0	7.6
A*-A	23.8	24.8	22.6
A*-C	74.7	76.0	76.4
A*-G	99.9	99.8	99.7
Number of students	3,449	3,298	3,666

Source: WJEC.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales. JCQ published best grade data includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales as well as GCSEs graded 9-1 designed for England.

GCSE Welsh Second Language

A new GCSE Welsh Second Language has been awarded for the first-time this summer. In response to the recommendations made in the 2013 report *'One language for all: review of Welsh Second Language at Key Stages 3 and 4'*, the new qualification is only available as a full course GCSE, and replaces the legacy full and short course GCSEs in Welsh Second Language and Applied Welsh Second Language. Therefore, the cohort sitting this new qualification is different to the cohort that previously sat the legacy full course GCSE.

The new qualification has a different design and focus compared to the legacy qualifications. The new qualification has two oracy units worth 50%, compared to one unit worth 25% in the legacy qualification. These new oracy units have a greater focus on students' speaking and listening skills than in the old oracy unit, including their ability to respond spontaneously to conversation. Additionally, there is no controlled assessment (coursework) in the new qualification, whereas there was a controlled assessment unit worth 25% in the old qualification.

This year 19,509 students sat the approved GCSE Welsh Second Language, up from 14,632 last year. This reflects the fact that there is now only one qualification.

Table 15: Summer A*-G GCSE Welsh Second Language Results (all ages)

	2017	2018	2019
A*	12.5	9.3	6.8
A*-A	31.1	26.6	21.8
A*-C	79.8	74.8	63.1
A*-G	99.4	98.8	97.3
Number sat	12,296	14,632	19,509

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications.

N.B. Figures for 2017 and 2018 relate to legacy GCSE Welsh Second Language. Figures for 2019 relate to the approved GCSE Welsh Second Language.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

This year's drop in results reflect the change to this summer's cohort following the discontinuation of legacy qualifications and changes to the assessment structure, notably the increased focus on everyday speaking and listening skills.

GCSE Science Suite

The reformed GCSE Science suite has been awarded for the second time this summer: GCSE Biology, GCSE Physics, GCSE Chemistry, GCSE Science (Double Award), GCSE Applied Science (Double Award) and GCSE Applied Science (Single Award).

There have been some changes to the science entries compared to 2018:

- GCSE Biology, GCSE Physics and GCSE Chemistry entries have all increased
- GCSE Science (Double Award) entries have increased slightly
- GCSE Applied Science (Double Award) entries have fallen, whilst GCSE Applied Science (Single Award) entries have risen. We believe that there has been some movement of student entries between these qualifications, although entries for the GCSE Applied Science (Single Award) are still below 1000.

Table 16: Summer A*-G GCSE Biology Results (all ages)

	2017	2018	2019
A*	15.8	17.4	18.2
A*-A	41.1	41.1	42.3
A*-C	89.7	88.0	89.2
A*-G	99.5	98.8	98.9
Number sat	6,475	7,071	7,357

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

Table 17: Summer A*-G GCSE Chemistry Results (all ages)

	2017	2018	2019
A*	17.3	18.2	20.1
A*-A	42.1	42.5	44.0
A*-C	89.8	89.5	90.4
A*-G	99.7	99.1	99.5
Number sat	6,352	6,845	7,245

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

Table 18: Summer A*-G GCSE Physics Results (all ages)

	2017	2018	2019
A*	16.9	18.4	21.9
A*-A	40.5	42.1	43.5
A*-C	90.9	89.4	90.9
A*-G	99.5	99.2	99.6
Number sat	6,336	6,805	6,986

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

Table 19: Summer A*A*-GG GCSE Double Award Science and GCSE Applied Science (Double Award) Results (all ages)

	2018	2019
A*A*	1.5	1.6
A*A*-AA	6.1	6.6
A*A*-CC	50.9	52.2
A*A*-GG	94.6	95.4
Number sat	42,500	42,760

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications.

N. B. For these double award qualifications entries are counted twice as the qualifications count as two GCSEs.

The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A*-G designed for Wales.

Setting standards in GCSEs in 2019

GCSEs have been separately reformed in Wales, England and Northern Ireland. During these reforms, we have worked closely with the regulators in England and Northern Ireland to ensure the new GCSEs are equally demanding and have the same value. 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 content and outcomes in each subject area.

The approach to awarding GCSEs 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 past, present and future, which is particularly important when qualifications change. While variability at a national level is limited, when change happens, there is typically more variability in individual school and college results.

Exam boards have used data about how cohorts performed in previous years' exams to predict how the cohort is likely to perform this summer. If the cohort taking a subject this year is similar 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.

Awarding Process

When marking has finished, the awarding process begins, which is where grade boundaries are set. The aim of the awarding process is to ensure standards are maintained year-on-year. Exam boards use an awarding committee, made up of a group of senior examiners who are experts in that subject, to carry out the awarding process.

Exam boards always aim to develop question papers with the same level of difficulty year-on-year. Clearly it would be unfair for students to get a lower grade just because they sat a more difficult paper. However, it is very hard (almost impossible) to produce exam papers with exactly the same level of difficulty. For this reason, in each exam series, new grade boundaries are set for each exam.

As part of our regular approach to maintaining standards, we monitor the setting of grade boundaries. Before the award of a qualification is confirmed, the exam boards must report their outcomes to us. If the overall outcomes are significantly different to what we would expect them to be, we ask the exam board to explain why. If we are not satisfied, we can ask the exam board to look again at the award or to conduct additional analysis to confirm its proposed award.

GCSEs are assessed in different ways. In tiered GCSEs, students sit different exam papers depending on the grades they are aiming for. In untiered GCSEs, there is just one exam paper for all students, regardless of which grade they are aiming for. Because tiered exam papers only target a subset of the grades, it is important to take care when looking at grade boundaries. In higher, tier GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy for example, roughly a quarter of the questions will be targeted at each grade A*, A, B and C. This is why grade boundaries for grade C on higher, tier papers are lower than they are for intermediate or foundation, tier papers.

For more information, see our articles on the [Exams 360](#) section of our website.

GCSE qualification reforms in Wales

The seven GCSE subjects awarded for the first time in summer 2019 are:

Business
Computer Science
Design and Technology
History
Media Studies
Religious Studies
Welsh Second Language

These follow the 21 new GCSEs that were first awarded in 2017 and 2018:

Applied Science (Single Award)
Applied Science (Double Award)
Art and Design
Biology
Chemistry
Drama
English Language
English Literature
Food and Nutrition
French
Geography
German
Mathematics
Mathematics-Numeracy
Music
Physical Education
Physics
Spanish
Science (Double Award)
Welsh Language
Welsh Literature
Welsh Literature

Further information

Full GCSE results are published by [JCQ](#). We have published infographics about this year's GCSE [results](#). More information about exams is available on the [Exams 360](#) section of our website.