

# Vocational and Other Qualifications Quarterly: Quarter 1 (January – March 2021) for Wales



10 June 2021

## About this release

This release presents data collected from awarding bodies on vocational and other qualification certificates issued in Wales during January to March (quarter 1) of 2021. Data prior to 2019 was collected by Ofqual. This release no longer includes Welsh Baccalaureate or Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications. More information on this change can be found in the background notes, as well as information on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected these statistics.

## Highlights

45.2%

**24,810** certificates were awarded in quarter 1 of 2021. This is a **45.2%** decrease compared to the same quarter in 2020.

30.6%

Between April 2020 and March 2021, **207,140** certificates were awarded, a decrease of **30.6%** compared to the previous year.



All sectors saw a decrease in certificates except Education and Training, with the largest percentage decrease in Retail and Commercial Enterprise.



The number of certificates awarded decreased for all levels except Level 1/2, Level 4 and Level 6 which saw small increases. Level 2 saw the largest decrease in terms of number of certificates.

## Quick links

### Statistics

[Total certificates](#)

[Certificates by level](#)

[Certificates by SSA](#)

[Top 10 awarding bodies](#)

[Top 10 qualifications](#)

[Essential Skills Wales](#)

[Approved vocational qualifications](#)

### Background notes

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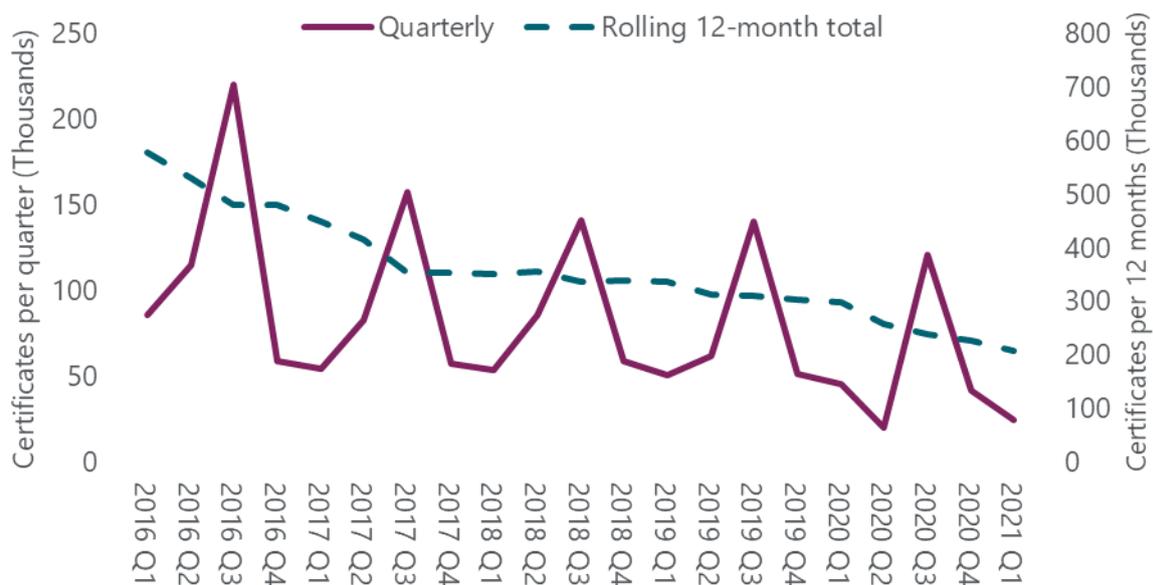
**Next update:** September 2021

# Statistics

## Total certificates and historical trends

**Figure 1: Quarterly and annual certificates have decreased compared to 2020**

Quarterly and annual certificates awarded for vocational and other qualifications



Source: Qualifications Wales VQ data collection from awarding bodies  
Full data can be found in table 1 of the data tables published alongside this release

### Quarterly Comparison

24,810 certificates were awarded in quarter 1 (Q1) of 2021. This is a 45.2% decrease compared to Q1 2020. This decrease is likely to be an impact of the continuing Covid-19 pandemic. Details of other external factors which have likely contributed to the overall downward trend seen over the last five years can be found in the [background notes](#) of this release.

### Annual Comparison

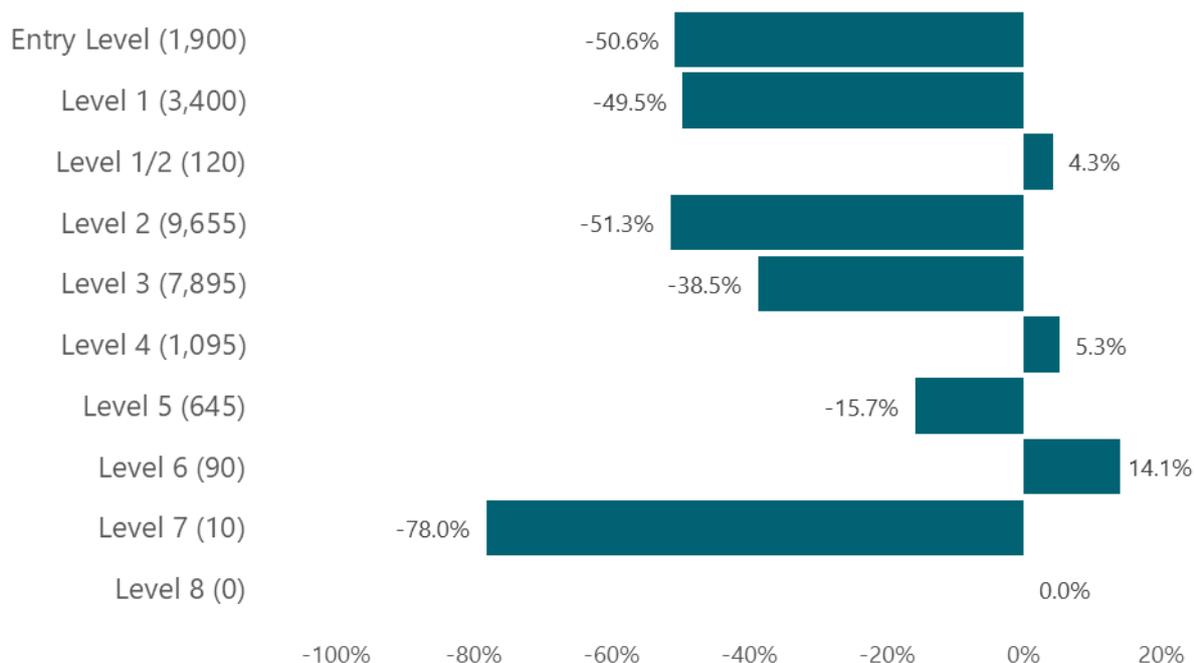
April 2020 and March 2021, 207,140 certificates were awarded, a decrease of 30.6% compared to the previous year. This decrease is consistent with the decreasing trend seen in the last five years and may also be as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These statistics no longer include Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc) or Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) qualifications (see [Changes to these statistics](#)). To help users with the transition to this new approach, the quarterly and annual totals calculated on the old basis (i.e including Welsh Bacc and SCC) can be found in table 1b of the data tables published alongside this release.

## Certificates by level

**Figure 3: Quarterly certificates decreased at all levels except Level 1/2, level 4 and level 6**

Percentage change in certificates awarded by level, Q1 2021 compared to Q1 2020  
Total certificates for 2021 Q1 shown in brackets



*Source: Qualifications Wales VQ data collection from awarding bodies  
Full data can be found in table 2 of the data tables published alongside this release*

Levels 3 and 2 were the most awarded levels in Q1 2021, jointly accounting for 70.7% of all certificates. Levels 4 and above made up less than 8% of all certificates awarded.

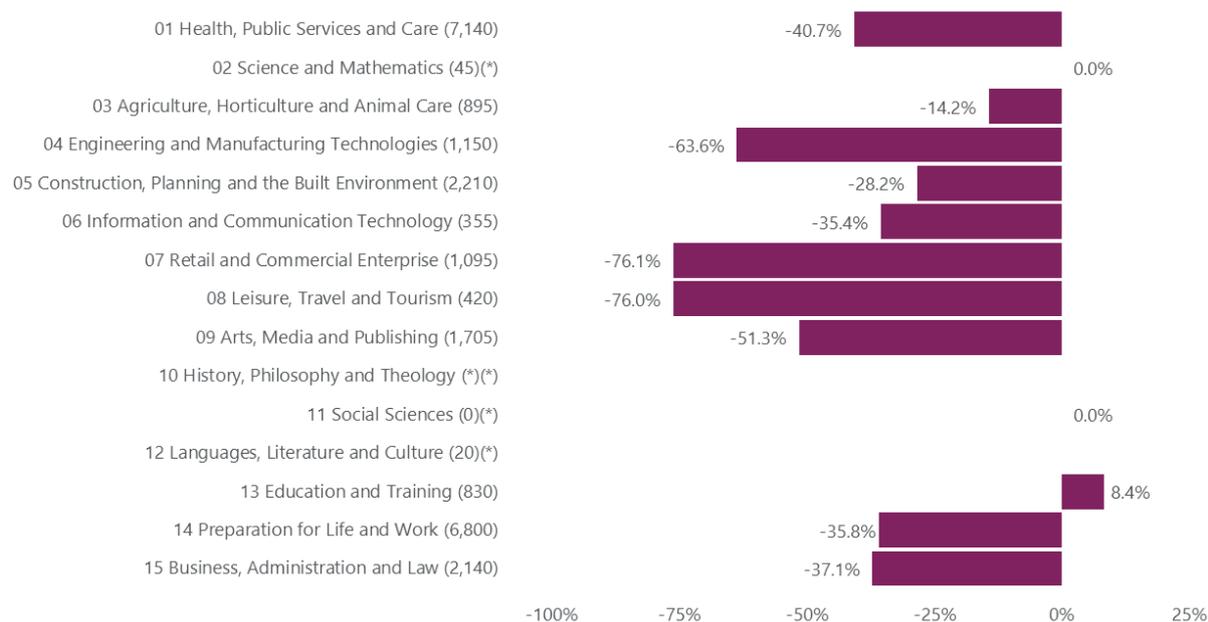
Most levels saw a quarterly decrease (compared to Q1 2020) and an annual decrease in the number of certificates awarded. Level 1/2 saw a quarterly increase of 4.3% and an annual increase of 47.1% compared to Q1 2020. Level 4 and level 6 also saw quarterly increases of 5.3% and 14.1% respectively.

Level 2 and Level 7 qualifications saw the largest proportional quarterly decreases of 51.3% and 78% respectively. The largest decrease in terms of certificates was at Level 2, which decreased by 10,175 certificates in Q1 2021 compared to Q1 2020.

## Certificates by sector subject area (SSA)

**Figure 2: All SSAs saw a decrease in certificates except Education and Training**

Percentage change in certificates awarded by SSA, Q1 2021 compared to Q1 2020



(\*) SSAs with fewer than 100 certificates in either quarter are suppressed.

Source: Qualifications Wales VQ data collection from awarding bodies

Full data can be found in table 4 of the data tables published alongside this release

The SSA with the most certificates awarded in Q1 2021 was 'Health, Public Services and Care' which, despite a 40.7% drop from the previous year, makes up 28.8% of all certificates. Despite a decrease in quarterly certificates of 35.8%, 'Preparation for Life and Work' was the second most awarded SSA.

The 'Languages, Literature and Culture' sector saw the largest quarterly proportional decrease in certificates, with a decrease of 97.4% in Q1 2021 compared with the Q1 2020. The sector with the second greatest decrease was 'Retail and Commercial Enterprise' which saw a quarterly decrease of 76.1%.

'Education and Training' was the only sector to increase, showing a 8.4% increase in the number of certificates, an increase of 65 certificates relative to 2020 Q1.

## Top 10 awarding bodies

As of 31 March 2021, there were 96 recognised awarding bodies in Wales.

**Table 1: Top 10 awarding bodies by number of certificates awarded between April 2020 and March 2021**

Awarding Body	Apr 2019 to March 2020	Apr 2020 to March 2021	Rank Apr 2019 to March 2020	Rank Apr 2020 to March 2021	Rank Change
City & Guilds - City and Guilds of London Institute	78,835	58,465	1	1	→ +0
Pearson - Pearson Education Ltd	37,120	41,815	2	2	→ +0
WJEC - WJEC-CBAC	15,195	17,910	5	3	↑ +2
Agored Cymru	18,545	15,610	4	4	→ +0
LIBF - The London Institute of Banking & Finance	5,760	11,645	11	5	↑ +6
Highfield - Highfield Qualifications	31,450	8,630	3	6	↓ -3
NCFE	6,390	6,250	10	7	↑ +3
VTCT	3,785	4,560	14	8	↑ +6
TCL - Trinity College London	8,860	4,145	8	9	↓ -1
ABRSM - Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music	10,575	3,695	7	10	↓ -3

Source: Qualifications Wales VQ data collection from awarding bodies

A full list of the top 50 awarding bodies can be found in table 7 of the data tables published alongside this release

Due to the variety of qualifications offered by different awarding bodies, it is likely that individual awarding bodies have been affected differently by COVID-19.

The top ten awarding bodies shown in table 1 accounted for over 80% of all certificates awarded between April 2020 and March 2021. City & Guilds continues to award the most certificates, despite an annual decrease of 25.8%. Highfield Qualifications moved down three ranks due to an 72.6% decrease in certificates and was overtaken by LIBF whose annual certificates increased by over 100% causing a 6-rank increase. This increase was driven by qualifications in the 'Preparation for Life and Work' and 'Business, Administration and Law' sectors.

VTCT also saw a large increase in rank moving from 14<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> despite only a small percentage increase of around 20.4%.

## Top 10 qualifications

**Table 2: Top 10 qualifications by certificates awarded in this quarter**

Qualification	2020 Q1	2021 Q1
Entry Level Certificate in ESOL International Speaking and Listening (Entry 3) (GESE Grade 5) (B1.1)	940	980
City & Guilds Level 2 Essential Digital Literacy Skills	900	810
Highfield Level 3 Award in Emergency First Aid at Work (RQF)	1,725	750
QA Level 3 Award in Emergency First Aid at Work (RQF)	1,470	615
City & Guilds Level 2 Health and Social Care: Core	0	570
City & Guilds Level 2 Introductory Award in Employability Skills	150	480
City & Guilds Level 2 Essential Application of Number Skills	710	465
City & Guilds Level 2 Essential Communication Skills	695	455
City & Guilds Level 1 Essential Communication Skills	265	450
City & Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Adult Care	280	430

*Source: Qualifications Wales VQ data collection from awarding bodies*

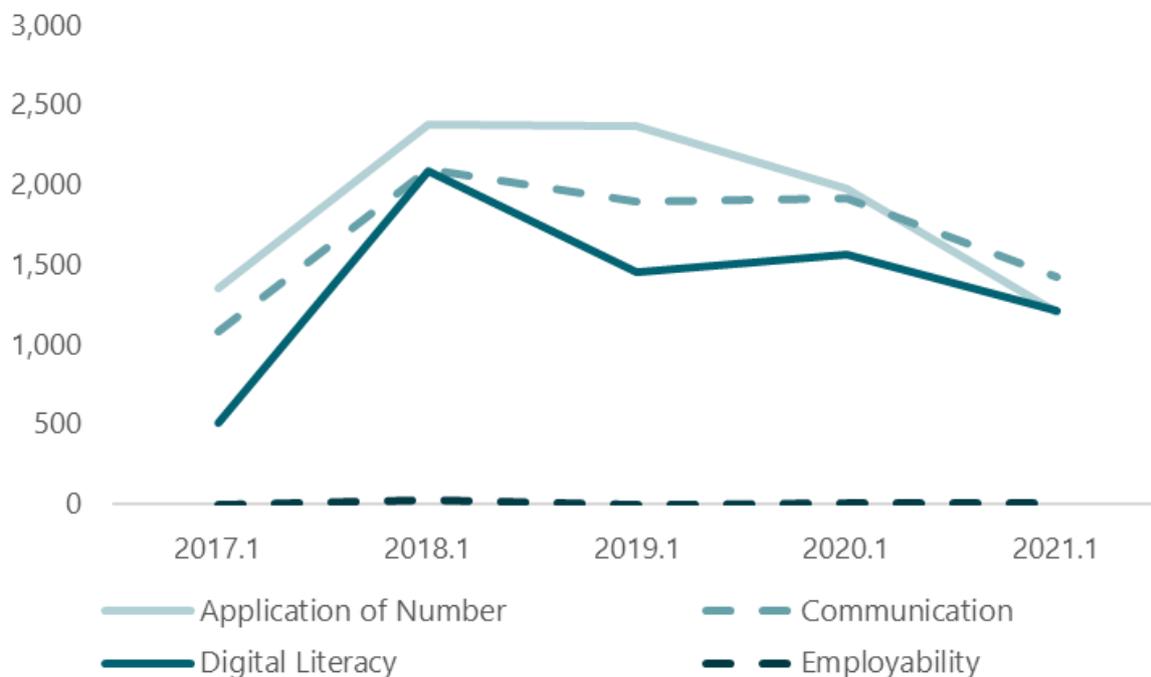
*A full list of the top 50 qualifications can be found in table X of the data tables published alongside this release*

The top ten qualifications accounted for 24.2% of all certificates awarded in Q1 2021. Of these top ten qualifications, compared to Q1 2020, City & Guilds Level 2 Introductory Award in Employability Skills saw the largest proportional increase (222%), followed by City & Guilds Level 1 Essential Communication Skills (71.2%). These proportional increases represent an increase in certificates of 330 and 190, respectively. Five qualifications in the top 10 saw a decrease in quarterly certificates with the largest proportional decreases in QA Level 3 Award in Emergency First Aid at Work (RQF) (58.3%) and Highfield Level 3 Award in Emergency First Aid at Work (RQF) (56.5%).

## Essential Skills Wales (ESW)

**Figure 4: Decrease in quarterly ESW certificates mostly due to Application of Number**

Q1 Essential Skills Wales certificates by subject, 2017 to 2021



*Source: Qualifications Wales VQ data collection from awarding bodies*

*A full list of the top 50 qualifications can be found in table 11 of the data tables published alongside this release*

Compared to Q1 2020, total certificates for Essential Skills Wales qualifications decreased by 29.7% in Q1 2021. This decrease was mostly associated with Application of Number qualifications at all levels except level 3, which overall decreased by 39.5%.

Certificates decreased at all levels. Entry level qualifications had the largest proportional decrease with a 68.6% drop compared to 2020 Q1, mostly driven by Application of Number Qualifications.

## Approved Vocational Qualifications

Approved vocational qualifications have been designed and made for Wales. There are currently approved vocational qualifications available in the Health and Social Care sector only.

### Figure 5: Certificates awarded in the one approved qualification

Number of certificates awarded for approved vocational qualifications that were awarded in Q1 2021



*Source: Qualifications Wales VQ data collection from awarding bodies*

*A full list of the top 50 qualifications can be found in table 13 of the data tables published alongside this release*

In Q1 2020, only one Health and Social Care qualification was awarded.

# Background Notes

## Purpose and coverage of this release

This release presents information on the number of certificates issued for regulated vocational and other qualifications in Wales. A full list of regulated qualifications can be found on the [Qualifications in Wales \(QiW\) database](#).

This data does not include GCSEs, AS level, A level, Advanced Extension Awards, Principal Learning, Project, Skills Challenge Certificates or Welsh Baccalaureate qualifications. The number of certificates awarded for some of these qualifications can be found on the [website of the Joint Council for Qualifications](#).

The data only includes certificates awarded to learners who were wholly or mainly assessed at centres located in Wales, regardless of the type of centre.

This release presents data by calendar quarter. Q1 represents 1 January to 31 March; Q2 represents 1 April to 30 June; Q3 represents 1 July to 30 September; and Q4 represents 1 October to 31 December.

This release shows the number of awards broken down by qualification level, sector subject area and awarding body.

Comparisons in this release are mainly made with data from the same quarter of the previous year. This is because there are seasonal changes in the number of certificates awarded over the year. For example, some qualifications are only awarded in the summer, at the same time as GCSEs and A levels.

These statistics do not represent individual learners, as a learner could have achieved multiple certificates during this period.

## Changes to these statistics

From quarter 1 2021, Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc) and Skills Challenge Certificate qualifications are no longer included in these statistics. Certificates for both the current and legacy Welsh Bacc qualifications have been removed from the data for all time periods. Qualifications that could contribute towards the legacy Welsh Bacc (e.g. Key Skills) have not been removed as we are unable to identify whether or not an individual certificate contributed to the Welsh Bacc.

We made this change following feedback from users of these statistics, both within Qualifications Wales and from other organisations. We found that because these qualifications are taken by a large number of school-age learners, these qualifications were dominating the statistics, and made it hard to understand what was happening

in the vocational sector as a whole. We also found that the regulation and monitoring of these qualifications is closer to GCSEs and A levels than to other vocational qualifications, so we have moved the reporting of statistics for these qualifications into our suite of general qualifications statistics.

To help users with the transition to this new approach, the quarterly and annual totals calculated on the old basis (i.e., including Welsh Bacc and SCC) can be found in table 1b of the data tables published alongside this release. All other tables and charts are calculated on the new basis only. If your use of these statistics is affected by these changes, or to give any other feedback on these changes, please contact us at [statistics@qualificationswales.org](mailto:statistics@qualificationswales.org).

## Data Source

Information on regulated qualifications and their characteristics (e.g., level, awarding body, SSA) are taken from the [QiW database](#). Where a historic qualification is not listed on QiW, characteristics are taken from the Ofqual register. A new extract of each database is taken at the time of production, and all data for each qualification is reported against the latest available characteristics data.

Data on the number of certificates awarded are sent to Qualifications Wales by awarding bodies. Data before quarter 1 2019 was collected from awarding bodies by Ofqual and provided to us to allow us to produce these statistics.

Prior to quarter 4 2017, statistics for Wales were reported by Ofqual. Ofqual [continues to collect certificates data for all UK regions](#) for internal purposes, but no longer publishes data for Wales.

When Qualifications Wales began collecting this data from awarding bodies, we ran two collections in parallel with Ofqual. We analysed any differences between the data we collected, and the data collected by Ofqual, and used this to engage with awarding bodies to assure and improve the quality of the data. As a result of this process, there may be some differences in the way awarding bodies report data to us, compared with how they previously reported data to Ofqual.

Until October 2020, the QiW register did not include regulated qualifications that were not eligible for public funding (known as "other regulated" qualifications). Therefore, a small number of Wales-only other regulated qualifications may be missing from pre-2019 data, as at they were not on Ofqual's register or QiW. The historical data may also include some qualifications that had been surrendered from the scope of our recognition but were still listed on the Ofqual register at the time of collection. Our data collection templates include both qualifications eligible for

public funding and other regulated qualifications, and therefore provide complete coverage of the regulated vocational and other qualifications landscape in Wales.

## **External influences**

### **COVID-19**

On 18 March 2020, the Minister for Education [announced that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all schools in Wales would be closed by 20 March 2020](#). On 23 March 2020, [First Minister announced further restrictions to slow the spread of coronavirus in Wales](#). These initial measures were eased prior to the start of quarter 3 2020, but a number of restrictions remained in place during some or all of the quarter. As a result of these restrictions, many colleges, assessment centres and training providers were unable to operate for several months. The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to cause disruption to learners and awarding bodies. This will likely have an impact on the number of certificates that were awarded for vocational and other qualifications from quarter 3 of 2020.

Due to the closure of schools and colleges and general disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the qualifications were assessed and awarded in a way that was different to the usual process. For some qualifications, this meant that overall results were notably different to result in previous years. The figures in this release represent the number of certificates awarded and do not include learners who do not pass the qualification. In some cases, changes in totals for individual qualifications may be due to changes in the pass rate, rather than changes in entry.

### **Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc)**

The Welsh Bacc is a qualification awarded to many learners in Wales. In previous years, Key Skills and Essential Skills qualifications could (alongside other qualifications) count towards the award. Current Key Skills and Essential Skills qualifications do not count towards the award of the current Welsh Bacc. This change may have affected the number of Key Skills and Essential Skills certificates that are reported in this data.

### **Performance Measures**

Changes to performance measures may also be affecting the number of certificates awarded for vocational and other qualifications over time, particularly at levels 1 to 3. For example, from 2017, vocational qualifications were capped to provide a maximum of 40% of the points for Welsh Government school (Key Stage 4) threshold measures. In 2018, a further change meant that only GCSE Science qualifications could count towards the science portion of the performance measure. Previously, vocational science qualifications had been allowed to count. Further information on

changes to performance measures in Wales can be found on the [Welsh Government website](#).

## **Qualification characteristics**

Each qualification is given a level, sector subject area (SSA) and type. Levels are described in the [Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales](#). The SSA is chosen by the awarding body to indicate which industry or academic subject the qualification is most relevant to. This release includes quarterly and annual totals for all qualifications by level and SSA. Due to issues with data quality and definitions, data by qualification type is not included in this release.

## **Limitations of data**

While Qualifications Wales expects awarding bodies to provide us with accurate data, we cannot guarantee that the information given to us is accurate. We compare the data over time to check for any systemic issues or anomalies and engage with awarding bodies to validate the data. We aim to collect data relating to learners who were assessed wholly or mainly at a centre based in Wales, but it is possible that non-Welsh learners may be included in the data, or that some Welsh learners may be excluded. For example, distance learners who study from home do not attend a centre at all. If this is the case, we expect awarding bodies to use the learner address, but this information is not always available.

When an awarding body stops being recognised by Qualifications Wales, they are no longer required to provide data to us. This means that if an awarding body stops being recognised by us during or immediately after a quarter, they will not provide data for that quarter. Any certificates awarded in Wales during that quarter while the awarding body was still recognised will be missing from the data in this release. The historical data provided by Ofqual contains data for some awarding bodies who, at the time of data collection, were recognised by Ofqual but not Qualifications Wales. Where an awarding body has never been recognised by Qualifications Wales, all data for that awarding body has been removed. Where an awarding body was recognised by us, but later surrendered recognition partway through a quarter, the data for that quarter is included, and the awarding body has been removed from the data from the following quarter onwards. In a small number of cases, an awarding body has surrendered recognition and then been recognised again later. In these cases, data has been excluded only when the awarding body was not recognised for the entire duration of the quarter. Therefore, historical totals may not match those published by Ofqual.

On 04 May 2018 Ofqual withdrew recognition from The Awarding Body for Vocational Achievement (AVA) Ltd (trading as BAA). Please see [this page](#) for more details. As part of the investigation which preceded the decision it was found that AVA had been providing incorrect certificates data to Ofqual. It is not practical to obtain corrected data from AVA, but the scale of corrections is known to be small.

## Who we are

Qualifications Wales regulates qualifications, other than degrees, in Wales. Under the [Qualifications Wales Act 2015](#), our principal aims are to ensure that qualifications, and the Welsh qualifications system, are effective for meeting the reasonable needs of learners in Wales and to promote public confidence in qualifications and in the Welsh qualifications system.

## Our statistics

The [Official Statistics \(Wales\) Order 2017](#) names Qualifications Wales as one of the bodies in scope of the [Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007](#). This release is published as official statistics, in compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

## Quality assurance

Details of how we quality assure this data are covered in our [Interim Statement on Statistical Quality and Quality Assurance of Administrative Data Sources](#). Historical data has been subject to [Ofqual's quality assurance procedures](#).

Publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

## Revisions

Once published, data on the number of vocational qualification certificates awarded is not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or correct an error. More information can be found in our [Revisions and Corrections Policy](#).

## Rounding and Confidentiality

To protect confidentiality, and in accordance with [Qualifications Wales's statistical outputs policy](#), figures fewer than 5 but greater than 0 are replaced with a \*. This is to ensure that data does not reveal an individual candidate. All figures for the number of certificates issued are rounded to the nearest 5. All percentages within the commentary are based on actual figures. Figures have been rounded independently and therefore may not sum to the total.

## Users of these statistics

These statistics are likely to be of interest to Qualifications Wales, Ofqual, awarding bodies, and the Welsh Government. Qualifications Wales uses these statistics to understand patterns in the awarding of these qualifications, and to help monitoring of vocational qualifications.

## Related statistics and publications

[Ofqual published statistics on vocational qualifications for England.](#)

[Research and Statistics published by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment \(CCEA\).](#)

[Statistics published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority \(SQA\).](#)

[Statistics published by Eurostat.](#)

## Useful information

A glossary of terms is available [on our website](#) to help you interpret this release. You can find information about future publications on the [Welsh Government website](#).

The [QiW database](#) gives information on approved and designated qualifications which are eligible for public funding in Wales.

## Next update

September 2021 (provisional).

## User feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to [statistics@qualificationswales.org](mailto:statistics@qualificationswales.org).

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