

## Background Notes – Variation in GCSE, AS and A level qualification results

### **Purpose and coverage of this release**

This release presents statistics on changes in GCSE, AS and A level outcomes seen by maintained schools. The data consists of summer series results for the main age group entering the qualification: 16-year olds for GCSE, 17-year-olds for AS, and 18-year-olds for A level. Due to the different assessment and awarding arrangements that took place, results in 2020, 2021 and 2022 are not directly comparable to each other or to results in previous years.

Despite the data not resulting from directly comparable assessment systems, comparisons are being made to help users understand how the changes in national results have played out at a school level compared to previous years. Limitations on comparability should be kept in mind when interpreting changes in results. Additional statistics are available in the tables published alongside this release.

### **Data Source**

Data for historic years is sourced from the Welsh Examinations Database/Pupil Level Annual School Census (WEDPLASC) provided by the Welsh Government. Data for the most recent year is collected by Qualifications Wales from the awarding bodies directly. The data is restricted to maintained schools only. To avoid unrepresentative extreme values due to small entry sizes, the data is restricted to centres with at least 30 entries in consecutive years for AS and A level, and at least 100 entries for GCSE. This threshold is applied within each year of analysis, so an individual centre may be included in one year but not another.

### **External influences**

Alternative arrangements were used to award grades in summer 2020 and summer 2021 because exams were cancelled due to the pandemic. The restrictions imposed at the time and the disruption to learners, awarding bodies and centres will likely have an impact on 2020 and 2021 grades.

### **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.

## **Statistical methods**

The statistics on changes in schools results are presented as boxplots. Boxplots summarise features of the distribution of changes and allow users to understand better the changes seen by centres, and to put the change seen by their centre in the context of this distribution. The line in the middle of the box shows the average (median) change and the box shows the change experienced by half of all centres. The whiskers extending from the box show the most extreme change that is still within 1.5 times the width of the box (interquartile range) from the end of the box. Changes more extreme than this are shown as dots.

To help users understand the relationship between changes in different years, correlations have been commented on. The correlations tell you whether schools with increases in one year tended to see bigger increases in the next year (a positive correlation), or whether they tended to see decreases or smaller increases (a negative correlation). It is possible for the correlation to be negative even if there were increases in both years. This will occur if the increase in the second year tended to be smaller than the increase in the first year.

## **About us and our statistics**

[Qualifications Wales](#) is the independent organisation responsible for regulating general and vocational qualifications in Wales

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](#).

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

## **Revisions**

Once published, data on the general qualification grades 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**

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 centres are rounded to the nearest 5. All percentages are based on unrounded figures. Figures have been rounded independently and therefore may not sum to the total.

### **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.

### **Related statistics and publications**

Ofqual published statistics on Variability in GCSE results for schools and colleges 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.

### **Users of these statistics and feedback**

Qualifications Wales uses these statistics to monitor the qualification system. These statistics are also likely to be of interest to Ofqual and other qualifications regulators, awarding bodies, centres (schools and colleges) and the Welsh Government. We welcome any feedback on these statistics which can be provided by email to [statistics@qualificationswales.org](mailto:statistics@qualificationswales.org).

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