

Overview of AS and A level results in Wales – Summer 2018



This summer saw the first award of 6 new AS and 10 new A level qualifications. There are now 29 new AS qualifications and 24 new A level qualifications that have been developed for, and taken by, learners in Wales. Next year will see the final phase of new qualifications awarded. We have closely monitored WJEC's delivery of these new qualifications and are confident that standards have been maintained.

Headlines

1. The overall percentages of A level grades awarded at both A* and A in Wales have risen, while the overall pass rate remains stable.
2. The overall number of AS and A level qualifications that have been awarded 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.
3. Care should be taken when interpreting relatively small changes in year-on-year results due to the change in numbers taking the qualifications.

A level Results: Wales

In comparison with 2017 results:

- the proportion achieving A* is up 0.4 percentage points to 8.7 %
- the proportion achieving A* or A is up 1.3 percentage points to 26.3 %
- the proportion achieving A* to E is down 0.3 percentage points to 97.4%

A level Results 2015-2018 (cumulative percentage)

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

A level Results 2015-2018 (number of grades awarded)

	2015	2016	2017	2018
A*	2,630	2,351	2,749	2,815
A*-A	8,324	8,080	8,321	8,523
A*-E	35,061	34,564	32,523	31,606

The overall percentages of A level grades awarded at both A* and A 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 2017 results:

- the proportion achieving A is up 1.3 percentage points to 20.4 %
- the proportion achieving A to E is up 1.1 percentage point to 90.0 %

AS level Results 2015-2017 (cumulative percentage)

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

A level Results 2015-2018 (number of grades awarded)

	2015	2016	2017	2018
A	8,549	8,831	8,825	8,737
A-E	45,805	43,384	40,984	38,635

The overall percentages of AS level grades awarded at both A to E in Wales have risen. However, as with A level results, these changes need to be considered within the context of a change in the numbers sitting these qualifications. The actual number of grades awarded at A and A to E is broadly stable, with small shifts which we would expect and that can be considered normal variation.

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 2018

The approach to awarding this summer 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 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. Awarding bodies must take this expectation into account when setting the grade boundaries for each subject, after the exams have been sat and marked. This explains why grade boundaries can change from one exam series to the next.

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. When changes happen, there is typically more variability in individual school and college results.

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 7.0 % to 42, 915 compared to 2017. At A level, the number of qualifications taken in 2018 is 2.6 % lower at 32,445 compared to 2017.

AS and A level 2015-2018: Number of qualifications taken in Wales

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

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 done some work 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 also gathered additional data from exam boards on the number of unique students achieving at least one result for AS level or A Level and compared these to population statistics. We have recently published our initial findings in a [blog](#).

Our analysis suggests that decreases in the population of 17 and 18-year-olds in Wales has been 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.

So overall, it seems that population size is driving the change in entries although not the sole factor, particularly at AS level. We'll be looking at these changes more closely over the coming months, including further exploration of what has happened in the current school year.

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](#).