

# Overview of GCSE results in Wales – Summer 2018



This summer saw the first award of 15 new GCSE qualifications. There are now 21 new GCSE 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.** In Wales, this summer's overall GCSE performance is broadly stable. The proportion of A\* and A grades awarded has increased slightly, the proportion of A\* to C grades has fallen and the overall pass rate (A\*-G) is marginally down.
- 2.** 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 or accurate picture of the GCSEs achieved by 16-year-olds in Wales. The cohort of students sitting GCSE exams in some core subjects this summer is very different to previous years.
- 3.** This summer there has been a big fall in the number of entries from Year 10 students. This is likely to have been caused by a change to Welsh Government policy which means that, from summer 2019, only a student's first result will count towards school performance tables.
- 4.** Last year saw a record number of students in Year 10 sitting GCSEs early. This means that the number of Year 11 students who have sat their exams in some subjects this summer is lower than in previous years. A significant number of Year 11 students achieved their GCSEs in English Language, Welsh Language, Mathematics and Mathematics-Numeracy in an earlier exam series – summer or winter 2017 – so their results are not reported in this summer's data.
- 5.** The number of students taking the new science GCSEs has increased. This is because from this year, only results from the new reformed GCSEs can count towards school performance measures. GCSE results in Biology, Chemistry and Physics remain stable.

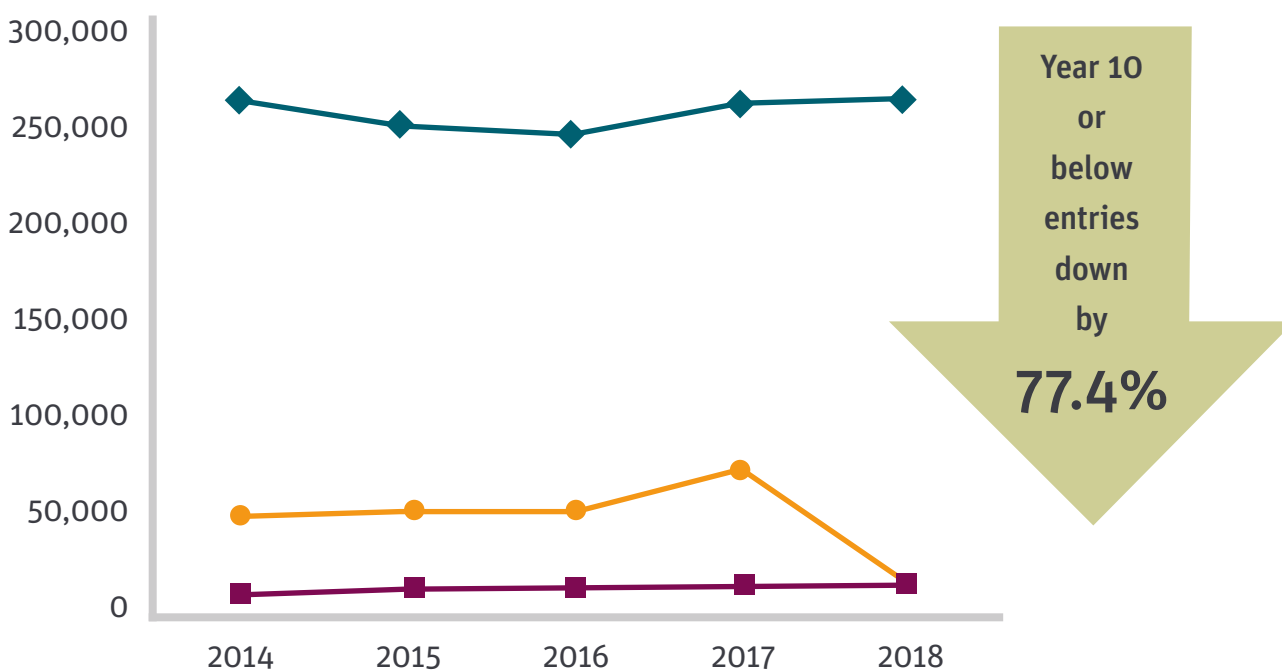
## GCSEs sat in Wales

The overall number of GCSEs sat in Wales this summer has seen a decrease of 8.9% (298,370 in 2017 to 271,761 in 2018). This is mainly due to:

- The significant decrease in students sitting exams in Year 10. Around 16.0% of all qualifications sat last summer were from Year 10 students whereas this summer only 4.3% of all qualifications are sat by Year 10 students. This is linked to a change in Welsh Government policy, which means that from next year only a student's first result can be used to measure a school's performance.
- Fewer Year 11 students sitting exams in some subjects this summer. This is because they have already sat them early (either in summer of Year 10 or November of Year 11), and not returned to sit the exam again this summer.

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

## Entries by year group 2015-2018



Sources: JCQ: GCSE and Entry Level Certificate Results Summer 2018; Qualifications Wales Summer Entries 2018; Ofqual Summer Entries 2014-2017

This overview contains year-on-year comparisons using the most relevant data and explains how this data has been compiled.

## Summer 2018 GCSE Results: Wales

In comparison with summer 2017 results:

- the proportion of results graded A\* or A is up 0.6 percentage points to 18.5%
- the proportion of results graded A\* to C is down 1.2 percentage points to 61.6%
- the proportion of results graded A\* to G is down 0.5 percentage points to 96.4%

**Table 1: GCSE Results (all ages)**

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

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications, table 4, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results – June 2018 (Wales Only), Joint Council for Qualifications, table 4, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results – June 2016 (Wales Only)

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/gcse/2016/gcse-and-entry-level-certificate-results-summer-2016>

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's overall GCSE performance is broadly stable. The proportion of A\* and A grades awarded has increased slightly, the proportion of A\* to C grades has fallen and the overall pass rate (A\*-G) is marginally down.

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 or accurate picture of the GCSEs achieved by 16-year-olds in Wales. The cohort of students sitting GCSE exams in some core subjects this summer is very different to previous years. In Maths, English and Welsh GCSEs many Year 11 students have already sat their GCSEs in earlier exams series and have not come back this summer to sit them again. Whereas the numbers of students taking GCSE English Literature and the new science GCSEs have risen sharply this year. The big fall in the number of Year 10 students taking GCSEs early this summer has also had an impact on this summer's overall results.

All these changes mean that comparing the headline results for exams taken this summer (2018) with results from previous summers can't tell us very much.

To help make sense of this summer's results in individual subjects, 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.

## GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy

The numbers of students sitting GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy have both fallen this year. This is due to the drop in Year 10 students sitting exams early (most likely to have been caused by school performance measures) and a drop in Year 11 students sitting exams this summer because they have sat the qualification in an earlier series and not returned to sit the exam again.

This decrease in the cohort size means that a higher proportion of the results in these subjects this summer are for year 12 and above, many of whom will be resitting to improve their grade.

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

	2017	2018
A*	4.7	5.1
A*-A	10.0	11.1
A*-C	45.7	43.7
A*-G	91.6	88.6
Number sat	40,829	28,701

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications, table 22, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A\*-G Only) – June 2018 (Wales Only). 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
A*	5.2	3.9
A*-A	10.1	10.6
A*-C	46.2	46.5
A*-G	91.1	91.6
Number sat	32,260	22,448

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications, table 22, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A\*-G Only) – June 2018 (Wales Only). The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.

Given the significant shift in entry patterns for these qualifications, 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 2018.

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

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

Source: WJEC.

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

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

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

Source: WJEC.

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

## GCSE English Language

The numbers of students sitting GCSE English Language has fallen this year. This is due to the drop in Year 10 students sitting exams early (most likely to have been caused by changes to school performance measures) and a drop in Year 11 students sitting exams this summer because they have sat the qualification in an earlier series and not returned to sit the exam again.

This decrease in the cohort size means that a higher proportion of the results in these subjects this summer are for year 12 and above, many of whom will be resitting to improve their grade.

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

	2017	2018
A*	2.2	2.5
A*-A	10.4	9.3
A*-C	57.5	40.7
A*-G	98.3	98.1
Number sat	58,500	27,438

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications, table 22, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A\*-G Only) – June 2018 (Wales Only). The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.

Given the significant shift in the entry pattern 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 2018.

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

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

Source: WJEC. The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.

## GCSE Welsh Language

As for GCSE English Language, the number of students sitting GCSE Welsh Language this summer has decreased. This is due to the fall in Year 10 students sitting exams early and a drop in Year 11 students sitting exams this summer because they have 'banked' an earlier result and not returned to sit the exam again this summer.

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

	2017	2018
A*	3.7	4.1
A*-A	14.6	14.5
A*-C	72.0	71.2
A*-G	99.7	99.4
Number sat	6,422	4,848

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications, table 22, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A\*-G Only) – June 2018 (Wales Only). The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.

Given the significant shift in the entry pattern 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 2018.

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

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

Source: WJEC. The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.

## GCSE English Literature

The number of students who sat GCSE English Literature has increased by 42.2 % to 23,556. This is largely explained by a significant increase in Year 10 entries up 146.1 % from 2,035 to 5,008. Overall, 23,320 of the current Year 11 students have achieved a GCSE in English Literature (either sat in Year 10 or Year 11) compared to 21,771 in 2017.

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

	2017	2018
A*	4.9	4.2
A*-A	22.4	20.8
A*-C	80.4	77.3
A*-G	99.5	99.0
Number sat	16,569	23,556

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications, table 22, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A\*-G Only) – June 2018 (Wales Only). The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.

Given the significant 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 2018.

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

	2016/2017	2017/2018
A*	4.1	4.5
A*-A	19.9	22.1
A*-C	77.1	79.4
A*-G	99.3	99.2
Number sat	21,925	20,317

Source: WJEC. The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.



## GCSE Welsh Literature

Overall results for GCSE Welsh Literature have remained stable. The number of students sitting this qualification has also remained stable.

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

	2017	2018
A*	9.0	8.9
A*-A	24.2	24.7
A*-C	75.1	76.0
A*-G	99.9	99.8
Number sat	3,320	3,304

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications, table 22, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A\*-G Only) – June 2018 (Wales Only). 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
A*	8.8	9.0
A*-A	23.8	24.8
A*-C	74.7	76.0
A*-G	99.9	99.8
Number of students	3,449	3,298

Source: WJEC.  
The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.

## GCSE Science Suite

Six new GCSE Science qualifications have been awarded for the first time this summer: GCSE Biology, GCSE Physics, GCSE Chemistry, GCSE Science (Double Award), GCSE Applied Science (Double Award) and GCSE Applied Science (Single Award).

Entries have increased for all the new science GCSEs. This is most likely to have been caused by changes to school performance measures where from this year, only results from the new reformed GCSEs can count towards school performance measures.

Historically, approximately two thirds of the cohort took GCSE Science qualifications, with the remainder generally taking a range of vocational alternatives. This year, nearly all Year 11 students sat at least one of the new GCSE science qualifications. Aside from the significant changes to the structure of the new qualifications compared to the legacy qualifications, the cohort of students taking science GCSEs has also changed significantly.

**Given the changes to the qualifications and the shift in entry patterns, care should be taken when drawing any conclusions from the comparison between results in summer 2018 and previous years.**

The new GCSEs in Biology, Chemistry and Physics replace the old separate science qualifications in these subjects.

**Table 15: Summer A\*-G GCSE Biology Results (all ages)**

	2017	2018
A*	15.8	17.4
A*-A	41.1	41.1
A*-C	89.7	88.0
A*-G	99.5	98.8
Number sat	6,475	7,071

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications, table 22, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A\*-G Only) – June 2018 (Wales Only). The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.

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

	2017	2018
A*	17.3	18.2
A*-A	42.1	42.5
A*-C	89.8	89.5
A*-G	99.7	99.1
Number sat	6,352	6,845

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications, table 22, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A\*-G Only) – June 2018 (Wales Only). The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.

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

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

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications, table 22, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A\*-G Only) – June 2018 (Wales Only). The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.

The new double award science qualification replaces the old GCSE Science and GCSE Additional Science qualifications. Two new applied science qualifications have also been introduced, one single award and one double award. The structure and grading of the new qualifications is so different to the old qualifications that it is not possible to make any meaningful comparisons with previous years.

**Table 18: Summer A\*A\*-GG GCSE Double Award Science and GCSE Applied Science (Double Award) Results (all ages)**

	2018
A*A*	1.5
A*A*-AA	6.1
A*A*-CC	50.9
A*A*-GG	94.6
Number sat	42,500

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications, table 22, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A\*-G Only) – June 2018 (Wales Only). The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.

## GCSE Welsh Second Language

A new GCSE Welsh Second Language will be awarded for the first-time next summer (2019). The new qualification is only available as a full course GCSE and replaces the current full and short course GCSEs in Welsh Second Language and Applied Welsh Second Language.

This year, the number of students who sat the full course legacy GCSE Welsh Second Language has increased by 19.0% to 14,632. This reflects an increase in both Year 10 (up 262.5 % from 347 to 1,258) and Year 11 entries (up 13.0 % from 11,906 to 13,333). This may be caused by schools increasing the number of students taking the full course GCSEs in anticipation of the short course being removed next year.

**Table 19: Summer A\*-G GCSE Welsh Second Language Results (all ages)**

	2017	2018
A*	12.5	9.3
A*-A	31.1	26.6
A*-C	79.8	74.8
A*-G	99.4	98.8
Number sat	12,296	14,632

Source: Joint Council for Qualifications, table 22, Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results (A\*-G Only) – June 2018 (Wales Only). The data only includes results for GCSEs graded A\*-G designed for Wales.

## Setting standards in GCSEs in 2018

GCSEs have been separately reformed in England and Northern Ireland as well as here in Wales. During these reforms, we have worked closely with the regulators in those countries to ensure the new GCSEs are valued equally. 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. 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 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. Where there are differences between cohorts, we expect those differences to be reflected in the outcomes. Exam boards must take these expectations into account when setting the grade boundaries for each subject, after the exams have been sat and marked. This is 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. However, when changes happen, there is typically more variability in individual school and college results.

## 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 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. This is why grade boundaries can be different each year and for each exam.

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 [Setting grade boundaries](#), [New Science GCSEs in Wales](#) and [Tiered assessment](#).

## GCSE qualification reforms in Wales

### Some key features of the reformed GCSEs in Wales:

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

### The 15 GCSE subjects awarded for the first time in summer 2018 are:

Applied Science (Single Award)

Applied Science (Double Award)

Art and Design

Biology

Chemistry

Drama

Food and Nutrition

French

Geography

German

Music

Physical Education

Physics

Spanish

Science (Double Award)

### These follow the six new GCSEs that were first awarded in 2017. They are:

English Language

English Literature

Mathematics

Mathematics-Numeracy

Welsh Language

Welsh Literature

## Further information

Full GCSE results are published by [JCQ](#). We have published infographics about this year's GCSE [results](#).