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Official Statistics

Provisional Entries for GCSE, AS and A level: Summer 2020 exam series

Published 27 June 2019

Contents

Summer 2020 exam series
Main trends
GCSE entries
AS and A level entries
Entries for tiered GCSEs
Background information

Provisional Entries for GCSE, AS and A level

Summer 2020 exam series

This report presents **provisional** figures for the number of entries for GCSEs, AS and A levels submitted by schools and colleges in England to exam boards by 14 April 2020 for qualifications which were to be taken in summer 2020.

Entries reflect the information submitted to exam boards at that time but numbers for some subjects may change in later years as schools and colleges adjust their entry patterns for summer 2020 in light of the cancellation of exams and the operation of alternative arrangements, which are outlined here.

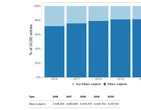
Main trends

The main trends in provisional entries for GCSE and GCE (AS and A level) for the summer 2020 exam series are:

- GCSE entries increased by 2.9% this year, mostly due to an increase in entry for Ebacc subjects. The increase in components with an increase of 3% is the size of the full year cohort this year.
- The largest increases in Ebacc entry numbers are in combined science, mathematics and English language.
- A small entry for the summer 2020 exam series decreased by 2% overall compared to last year, in line with a decrease in the size of the 16 year old cohort (which fell by 2% this year).
- The overall entry for AS is summer 2020 decreased by 20%.

GCSE entries

The overall entry for GCSEs in summer 2020 increased by 2% from 5,955,840 in 2019 to 5,281,790 in 2020.

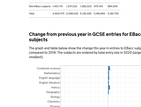


The majority of GCSE entries are from year 11 students, and it is the increase in year 11 entries that has driven the overall increase in GCSE entries this year. The increase in year 11 entries this increase is large uptake, since the size of the 16 year old cohort increased by 1% in 2020 compared to 2019 according to ONS population estimates (404,390).

Year 10 entries increased 17%, and Year 12 entries increased 3%.

Exam Series	Year 10 & below	Year 11	Year 12 and above	Total
2016	347,444	4,777,542	830,854	5,955,840
2017	334,243	4,973,175	390,050	5,698,518
2018	342,349	4,809,218	349,246	5,500,813
2019	322,041	4,607,015	441,883	5,368,940
2020	376,259	4,781,908	423,623	5,281,790

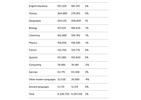
The increase in entries for GCSE was mostly due to a rise in entries for Ebacc subjects. Entries in Ebacc subjects increased by 90,405 (2%) and entries in non-Ebacc subjects increased by 9,555 (1%) compared to 2019.



Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Ebacc subjects	2,128,149	2,148,628	2,216,154	2,276,160	2,366,565
Non-Ebacc subjects	3,827,691	3,549,890	3,283,659	3092780	2815225
Total	5,955,840	5,698,518	5,499,813	5,368,940	5,281,790

Change from previous year in GCSE entries for EBacc subjects

The graph and table below show the change this year in entries to EBacc subjects compared to 2019. The subjects are ordered by total entry size in 2020 (largest to smallest).



Subject grouping	June 2019	June 2020	% change in entries
Combined science	546,540	603,275	10%
Mathematics	763,248	793,238	4%
English language	729,135	756,705	3%
English literature	691,435	708,145	2%
History	243,895	275,655	1%
Geography	229,215	239,905	1%
Biology	167,024	168,328	1%
Chemistry	163,488	163,763	0%
Physics	159,059	158,308	0%
French	145,166	145,376	0%
Spanish	141,085	139,245	-1%
Computing	76,980	75,790	-1%
German	25,280	25,135	-1%
Other modern languages	23,030	23,680	3%
Further mathematics	12,115	12,215	1%
Total	3,336,705	3,427,015	3%

There have been increases in entries numbers in many Ebacc subjects, particularly combined science, mathematics and English language. The largest proportional increases were in combined science, history and Spanish.

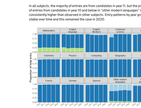
In combined science, the number of entries in 2020 increased by 33,440 compared to last year, a 10% increase. Entries in history increased by 31,760 compared to last year, also a 13%. There are likely to be a large variety of reasons why entries in combined science have increased, including the increase in the 16 year old cohort and a possible small shift from triple sciences, as well as other factors.

Entries in English language are now being increased by 27k (from 268,855 to 275,050) compared to last year, and English literature by 17k (from 245,915 to 263,055) and French entries increased under a similar 10% rate.

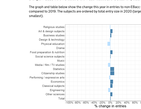
Entries in computing decreased slightly this year (from 76,980 in 2019 to 76,360 in 2020) after several years of increase.

Entries in Ebacc subjects over time and by year group

The total numbers of entries in English language, history, geography and Spanish have been increasing every year since 2016. Recent increases in mathematics and combined science are slightly more modest. Considering the temporal trend, entries in biology, chemistry and physics have been fairly stable over the last three years, while entries in other subjects have been largely stable over the last five years.



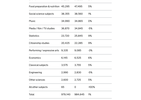
In all subjects, the majority of entries are from candidates in year 11, but the proportion of entries from candidates in year 10 and below in "other modern languages" is considerably higher than in other Ebacc subjects. Entries in computing in year group one dipped over time and first increased this year in 2020.



Changes in GCSE entries for non-EBacc subjects

Overall, entries in non-Ebacc subjects increased slightly in 2020. The largest relative changes in 2020 were increases of 9% in both statistics and citizenship studies.

The graph and table below show the change this year in entries to non-Ebacc subjects compared to 2019. The subjects are ordered by total entry size in 2020 (largest to smallest).

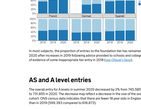


Note: "All other subjects" is shown in the table below but not in the graph above due to the very small number of entries in 2019/20 (entries).

Subject grouping	June 2019	June 2020	% change in entries
Religious studies	231,760	246,160	6%
Art & design subjects	94,360	100,035	6%
Business studies	89,890	95,855	7%
Design & technology	85,905	89,605	4%
Physical education	80,455	79,495	-1%
Drama	58,305	58,500	0%
Food preparation & nutrition	46,230	47,045	2%
Social science subjects	36,305	36,560	1%
Music	34,080	35,895	5%
Media / film / TV studies	26,470	26,945	2%
Statistics	20,395	20,895	2%
Citizenship studies	20,555	22,395	9%
Performing mysteries etc.	9,335	9,395	1%
Economics	6,345	6,535	3%
Physical education (short course)	2,275	2,765	22%
Engineering	2,895	2,830	-2%
Other subjects	2,605	2,725	5%
All other subjects	5	5	0%
Total	876,140	884,435	1%

Entries for tiered GCSEs

In some subjects, there are two tiers of entry: foundation and higher. The graph below shows the number of entries for tiered GCSEs in 2020 (including short course versions). Entries are tiered (except statistics which was awarded for the first time in 2019).



In most subjects, the proportion of entries to the foundation tier has remained stable in 2020 after increases in 2019 following advice provided to schools and colleges in light of prevalence of some inappropriate tier entry in 2018 (see Ofqual's blog).

AS and A level entries

The overall entry for A levels in summer 2020 decreased by 3% from 745,585 in 2019 to 723,180 in 2020. The number of AS entries decreased by more than 20 per cent. Ofqual's latest GCSE data indicates that there are fewer 16 year olds in England in 2020 than in 2019 (404,390 compared to 408,810).

The overall entry for AS is down 20% compared to 2019 (from 172,565 in 2019 to 137,615 in 2020). The decrease in AS entries has been a trend caused by the decoupling of AS from A levels as part of GCE reform.

Qualification	June 2016	June 2017	June 2018	June 2019	June 2020
A level	755,215	765,245	770,515	727,020	723,180
AS	1,135,625	928,865	829,300	172,565	137,615
Total	1,890,840	1,694,110	1,599,815	899,585	860,795

A level entries

Some A level subjects have increased in entry and other subjects showed a decrease (overall). Modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish) entries did not show a consistent pattern but entries in other subjects did. Entries in other modern foreign languages decreased by 27%. Entries are higher in mathematics and further mathematics than in 2019 but biology, chemistry and physics all showed slight decreases. Entries in English language and English literature increased by 2 per cent (2% and 1% respectively), as did political and religious studies (both by 4%). Entries in computing increased by 1%.

The graph and table below show the changes in entries this year compared to 2019. The subjects are ordered by total entry size in 2020 (largest to smallest).

Subject grouping	June 2019	June 2020	% change in entries
Mathematics	84,155	90,170	7%
Psychology	63,895	63,940	1%
Biology	60,395	61,135	1%
Chemistry	55,855	55,425	-1%
History	47,690	47,985	1%
Art & design subjects	39,175	39,630	1%
Business studies	35,305	36,305	3%
Economics	30,095	30,805	2%
Geography	32,095	31,675	-1%
Media / film / TV studies	18,485	18,520	0%
Politics studies	16,285	16,955	4%
English language	15,945	16,715	5%
Religious studies	14,985	15,630	4%
Mathematics (further)	13,930	14,575	5%
Computing	12,705	12,795	1%
Law	12,245	12,275	0%
Physical education	9,605	9,605	0%
Design & technology	9,375	9,165	-2%
Drama	9,025	9,085	1%
Spanish	7,955	8,325	5%
All other subjects	8,085	8,095	0%
French	7,885	7,885	0%
English language & literature	7,595	7,595	0%
Other modern languages	6,335	6,385	2%
Music	5,705	5,705	0%
Classical subjects	3,395	3,395	0%
Greek	3,395	3,395	0%
Total	747,580	723,180	-3%

Changes in A level entries for larger entry subjects

The graph below shows the changes in entries from 2016 to 2020 for a selection of 8 key subjects with large entries in 2020. Entries in other subjects are also increasing or flat after slowly increasing in previous years, whilst increases in social sciences also slowed in 2019. Entries in English language and English literature have been stable, and modern foreign language & literature specifications (released after decoupling in previous years)

Note: In this chart, 'English' includes English language, English literature and English language & literature specifications.

AS entries

Entries in an AS subjects saw a substantial decrease this year (percentage decrease ranging from 15% in Welsh to 29% in Mathematics). Entries in AS in 2020 (137,615) were less than 1,000 entries in 2019. The last year before reforms of the legacy (pre-reformed) AS and A levels began.

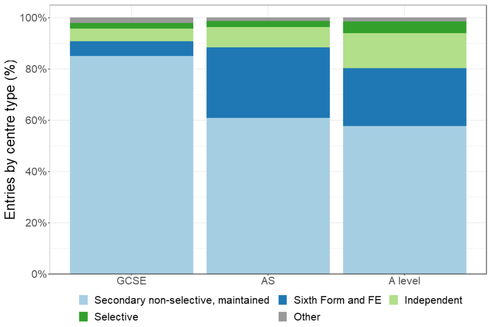
The graph and table below show the changes in entries this year (for large entry subjects) compared to 2019. The subjects are ordered by total entry size in 2020 (largest to smallest).

Subject grouping	June 2019	June 2020	% change in entries
All other subjects	26,255	17,675	-33%
Mathematics	17,035	12,085	-29%
Psychology	15,845	11,715	-26%
Biology	12,195	9,025	-26%

Chemistry	8,175	6,390	-22%
Sociology	7,415	5,960	-20%
Mathematics (further)	5,330	4,925	-8%
Physics	5,820	4,745	-18%
Business studies	5,315	4,140	-22%
Economics	4,300	3,620	-16%
History	4,995	3,585	-28%
Art & design subjects	5,160	3,230	-37%
English literature	4,580	3,160	-31%
Geography	3,030	2,110	-30%
Total	117,595	86,970	-26%

Entries by centre type

The graph below indicates the proportion of entries for each qualification by centre type. In all cases, the majority of entries are from secondary non-selective, maintained centres, followed by sixth form and further education (FE) establishments.



Centre type	A level	AS	GCSE
Secondary non-selective, maintained	423,560	53,065	4,498,255
Sixth Form and FE	165,210	24,015	303,420
Independent	100,640	6,905	266,905
Selective	32,735	2,050	111,590
Other	9,710	935	101,580

Centre type	A level	AS	GCSE
Secondary non-selective, maintained	58%	61%	85%
Sixth Form and FE	23%	28%	6%
Independent	14%	8%	5%
Selective	4%	2%	2%
Other	1%	1%	2%

Background information

In this report, Ofqual presents data on the number of provisional entries for GCSEs, AS and A levels in England received by exam boards for the summer 2020 exam series.

Schools and colleges enter students with exam boards to take qualifications in the summer. The figures for entries can normally change up to the day of the exams. We collect provisional data at the same time every year, at a point when it should be reasonably complete, although final entry numbers may be slightly different from these. The figures presented here are the provisional figures as received by exam boards by 14 April 2020.

On 18 March 2020, the Secretary of State announced that the summer 2020 exam series would be cancelled in order to help fight the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and that students due to sit the exams would be awarded a grade based on an assessment of the grade they would have been most likely to achieve had exams gone ahead. Alternative arrangements will therefore be in place this year. However, the numbers of provisional entries summarised here represent the provisional entries taken at the same point in time as previous years. Centres were asked to finalise entries by 21 February 2020.

In this report, all figures for the number of entries are rounded to the nearest 5.

Background information accompanying this report includes factors which may have an impact upon the entries in summer 2020 as well as information on data collected for this release and definitions of important terms used in the report.

Data tables published along with this report give provisional entry data (rounded to the nearest 5) for different subjects broken down by year group for GCSE, AS and A levels.

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