

Statistical Release

Summer Exam Entries: GCSEs, Level 1 / 2 Certificates, AS and A Levels in England: Provisional Figures April 2015

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Key points

This release presents figures on the number of entries for GCSEs, Level 1 / 2 Certificates (commonly known as IGCSEs), AS and A levels submitted to exam boards for the exams being sat between May and June 2015. These figures are provisional. They represent the number of entries submitted by schools and colleges to exam boards by 20th April 2015.

The key findings for this release are:

- The overall entry for GCSEs in England has decreased from 2014 to 2015 from 5,085,000 to 4,916,000.
- The overall entry for students in Year 10 and below for GCSE has decreased by 32 per cent from 504,000 to 344,000. One notable exception is computing where the entry increased by 83 per cent.
- The Year 11 entry in most GCSE subjects included in the EBacc has decreased. The decrease ranges from 3 to 14 per cent. There have been some significant increases seen in equivalent subjects for Level 1 / 2 Certificates. The increase ranges from 78 to 447 per cent. Overall, entries for EBacc subjects has increased.
- Overall entries for AS in England have decreased by 1 per cent, while overall A level entries have increased by 1 per cent.
- Computing and Spanish both saw large increases at AS and A level.
- Subjects with large decreases at both AS and A level are critical thinking, general studies and ICT.

Introduction

Ofqual regulates qualifications, exams and assessments in England, and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, one of Ofqual's objectives is to improve public confidence in regulated qualifications and assessments by raising awareness and understanding of the qualifications that Ofqual regulates.

In this release, Ofqual presents data on the number of entries for GCSEs, Level 1 / 2 Certificates (commonly known as IGCSEs), AS and A levels in England received by exam boards¹ for the May to June 2015 exam series. Schools and colleges enter students with exam boards to sit exams in the summer and 'cash in' or complete the qualifications. The figures for entries change daily up to the day of the exams. The figures presented here are the provisional figures as received by exam boards at 20th April 2015.

¹ The exam boards are AQA, CCEA, OCR, Pearson, WJEC and CIE.

Key statistics

GCSE and Level 1 / 2 Certificates

The overall entry for GCSEs in England in summer 2015 was down in comparison with summer 2014 from 5,085,000 to 4,916,000 – a decrease of 3 per cent. The published Department for Education (DfE) figures for January 2014 showed an expected 1 per cent drop in 2015 for Year 11.² Entry for Level 1 / 2 Certificates (commonly known as IGCSEs) was up by 55 per cent – from 294,000 in summer 2014 to 457,000.

Since summer 2014, students in England have had to take their GCSEs in a linear way – they take all units in the summer examination series. This was expected to increase entry numbers, as students have fewer opportunities to take exams early. There were changes to the entry rules for the November exam series in England from 2014 to make this a re-sit only series for GCSEs in English, English language and mathematics. This was also expected to increase entry numbers for the summer. Instead, the trend from summer 2014 for an overall decrease in entries has continued this summer. This is partly explained by fewer entries from students in Year 10 and below (students who are 15 or younger by the end of the 2014/15 academic year), down by 160,000, due to the changes in performance tables.³

The continued increase in entries for Level 1 / 2 Certificates, up by 163,000, may also explain the decrease at GCSE. Some of the increase in IGCSE entries is from students in Year 10 and below, up by 25 per cent to 18,000, but most of the increase has come from entries for students in Year 11 (students who are 16 at the end of the 2014/15 academic year), up by 100 per cent to 392,000.

The notable changes to GCSE and Level 1 / 2 Certificates entries are set out in the summary below. The subjects are grouped according to the categories that will be used in August 2015 by the Joint Council for Qualifications when they report results.

Early entry (Year 10 and below)

The overall number of GCSE entries from students in Year 10 and below in summer 2015 has decreased by 32 per cent from 504,000 in summer 2014 to 344,000.

²

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/406914/SFR15_2014_national_tables_v102.xlsx

³ www.gov.uk/government/news/changes-to-early-entry-at-gcse

In most subjects, early entry has continued to decrease from summer 2014. The notable exception this year is computing where the entry increased by 83 per cent to 1,000, although this is still a small entry. Computing is a relatively new subject at GCSE and is included in the EBacc performance measure.⁴

Year 11 entries for EBacc subjects

GCSE entries for Year 11 students decreased in English, English language, biology, chemistry, physics and German (a decrease of between 7 and 11 per cent), and increased in science, additional science and geography (an increase of between 1 and 31 per cent), continuing the trend of recent years. For GCSEs in English literature, maths, French, Spanish and history, there was an increase from summer 2013 to summer 2014, but this year entries have decreased (a decrease of between 3 and 14 per cent). Computing and further additional science are relatively new subjects and entries have increased for summer 2015.

English and English language

For GCSE English and English language, the Year 11 entry decreased in summer 2015 by 7 per cent to 365,000 and the Year 11 entry for Level 1 / 2 Certificate (commonly known as IGCSE) English language increased significantly, by 79 per cent from 105,000 in summer 2014 to 188,000 this summer. It is likely that the continued increase in Level 1 / 2 Certificate (commonly known as IGCSE) entries has meant fewer students being entered for GCSE.

English literature

Entries for GCSE English literature have decreased across all year groups and are down overall by 15 per cent to 403,000. This is a reversal of the trend seen between summer 2013 and summer 2014 when entries across all year groups increased. As for GCSE English and English language, it is likely that the continued increase in Level 1 / 2 Certificate (commonly known as IGCSE) entries has meant fewer students entering for GCSE. The Year 11 entry for Level 1 / 2 Certificate (commonly known as IGCSE) English literature increased significantly by 207 per cent from 29,000 in summer 2014 to 88,000 this summer.

Mathematics

Entries from Year 11 students for GCSE maths decreased by 4 per cent to 556,000. This slight decrease is a reverse of the trend seen between summer 2013 and summer 2014 when entries for Year 11 increased by 18 per cent. This year there is a

⁴ www.gov.uk/english-baccalaureate-information-for-schools

notable increase in Level 1 / 2 Certificate (commonly known as IGCSE) maths entries of 64 per cent, from 23,000 in summer 2014 to 37,000.

Sciences

Entries from Year 11 students for GCSEs in the separate sciences have all decreased by 8 per cent (biology down to 118,000, chemistry down to 119,000 and physics down to 121,000). In contrast, entries for science, additional science and further additional science have all increased, up 31 per cent to 200,000, 12 per cent to 309,000 and 9 per cent to 23,000 respectively. This may indicate that schools are increasingly choosing to enter students for the science, additional science and further additional science route through the science suite of subjects. There have been significant increases in Level 1 / 2 Certificate (commonly known as IGCSE) entries for separate sciences (biology up 83 per cent to 13,000, chemistry up 78 per cent to 12,000 and physics up 80 per cent to 12,000). This may also partly explain the decrease in entry for the separate sciences at GCSE.

Modern foreign languages – GCSE French, German and Spanish

Entries in GCSE modern foreign languages for Year 11 students all decreased (French down 6 per cent to 140,000, German down 11 per cent to 50,000 and Spanish down 3 per cent to 80,000). There have been some increases in Level 1 / 2 Certificates in modern foreign languages (French up 383 per cent to 7,000, German up 413 per cent to 3,000 and Spanish up 447 per cent to 5,000). This may partly explain the decrease in entry at GCSE.

Computing

As stated above, GCSE computing is a relatively new subject and is included in the EBacc performance measure. Entries for Year 11 students increased by 110 per cent to 33,000.

Other subjects

Other GCSE subjects that have seen relatively significant changes in entry from summer 2014 to summer 2015 are business and communications systems (down 14 per cent to 13,000), citizenship (down 18 per cent to 27,000), engineering (up 29 per cent to 7,000), health and social care (up 17 per cent to 19,000), hospitality (down 88 per cent to 3,000), humanities (down 15 per cent to 6,000), ICT (up 17 per cent to 96,000), leisure and tourism (down 12 per cent to 6,000), manufacturing (down 61 per cent to 130) and statistics (down 22 per cent 27,000).

AS and A level

The overall entry for England remained stable between summer 2014 and summer 2015. The total entry in England for all AS qualifications decreased by 1 per cent, while the total entry for all A levels increased by 1 per cent. The reverse of this trend

was seen between summer 2013 and summer 2014 when the total AS entry in England went up by 3 per cent and the total A level entry went down by 3 per cent.

Since 2014, students in England have been unable to take any AS or A2 units in the January exam series – they have to take all units in the summer exam series. This was expected to result in an increase of entry numbers for the summer for individual units, as students had fewer or no opportunities to take exams early. It was not expected to affect the total number of entries for AS and A level qualifications, since most students already enter for the qualifications in the summer.

The notable changes to AS and A level entry patterns in England are set out below. The subjects are grouped according to the categories that will be used in August 2015 by the Joint Council for Qualifications when they report results.

AS

The total entry for all AS qualifications in England decreased slightly by 1 per cent from summer 2014. There were a number of subjects where the decreases were much greater than this. These subjects were critical thinking (down 34 per cent to 4,000), general studies (down 31 per cent to 34,000), ICT (down 12 per cent to 20,000), performing/expressive arts (down 15 per cent to 5,000) and other sciences (down 13 per cent to 5,000). Critical thinking, general studies and ICT had also shown a relatively significant decrease in entry from summer 2013 to summer 2014.

There were a few subjects where there were significant increases in entry, including computing (up 17 per cent to 13,000), engineering (up 15 per cent to 500) and Spanish (up 26 per cent to 13,000). Computing and Spanish had also shown a significant increase in entry from summer 2013 to summer 2014. The continued decrease in ICT entries may be explained in part by the continued increase in computing entries.

A level

In contrast with AS, the total entry for all A levels in England increased slightly by 1 per cent from summer 2014. Computing and Spanish entries both increased at A level as they did for AS (up 30 per cent to 5,000 and up 13 per cent to 8,000, respectively). There was also a significant increase in geography entries for A level (up 14 per cent to 34,000), which was not matched at AS where entries were reasonably stable from summer 2014.

Subjects where there have been significant decreases at A level are critical thinking (down 61 per cent to 200), general studies (down 25 per cent to 18,000) and ICT (down 13 per cent to 11,000). All of these subjects also saw significant decreases in entry at AS. Performing/expressive arts and other sciences decreased at A level (down by 7 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively), although not by as much as for

AS. Engineering entries decreased at A level (down by 5 per cent to 200), whereas they had increased significantly at AS.

Glossary of terms

A level – a qualification mainly taken by 18-year-old students, which is made up of AS units and more demanding A2 units.

AS – a qualification mainly taken by 17-year-old students, which is the first half of an A level.

Cash in – schools and colleges enter students who are completing a qualification with exam boards.

GCSE – a qualification mainly taken by 16-year-old students. This is the main school-leaving qualification in England.

Level 1 / 2 Certificates – a number of these are commonly known as IGCSEs and are included as such in DfE school performance tables.

Year 10 – the cohort of students who will become 15 years old by the end of the academic year.

Year 11 – the cohort of students who will become 16 years old by the end of the academic year.

Background notes

This document is produced in line with Ofqual's statistics policies and the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.⁵⁶

Data source

The exam boards that provide GCSEs, Level 1 / 2 Certificates, AS and A levels have submitted information to Ofqual about the number of entries for each qualification available in May to June 2015. The entries are for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, regardless of the age of the student and the type of school or college. For GCSE and Level 1 / 2 Certificates, this release shows the number of entries broken down by subject, country and age of students based on school year groups. For AS and A level, the release shows the number of entries broken down by subject and country.

Limitations of data

There is potential for error in the information provided by exam boards, therefore Ofqual cannot guarantee that the information received is correct. Ofqual compares the data over time and checks for systematic issues. Summary data are sent back to exam boards for checking and confirmation.

Quality assurance procedures are carried out as explained in the Quality Assurance Framework for Statistical Publication and the Data Audit Framework to ensure the accuracy of the data and to challenge or question it, where necessary.⁷⁸ Ofqual continuously manages this process by:

- ensuring that data providers are clear about what is required of them – a process helped by ensuring that providers are fully consulted during the initial design and any subsequent change phases;

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-statistics-policies-and-procedures

⁶ www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk

⁷ www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/382776/2014-09-30-data-audit-framework-statistical-information.pdf

⁸ www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387637/2014-12-16-quality-assurance-framework-for-statistical_publications.pdf

- reminding all providers (if appropriate) that, as a condition of them being regulated, all data must be completely accurate;
- being alert to unexpected changes in the data submitted by comparing individual returns over time from the same provider;
- actively challenging any unexpected results with the data providers;
- having a proportionate data-auditing framework in place, allowing for auditing of providers' information collection, collation and delivery processes as necessary, using a wide range of tools from questionnaires to on-site process audits.

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

Data have been collected at an appropriate point when they are reasonably complete, in this case 20th April 2015. However, schools can continue to make late entries right up to the day of the exam, so the total entry numbers will change almost on a daily basis. Ofqual agreed these dates with the exam boards as the date when the majority of entries would have been submitted.

The tables of data for England, Wales and Northern Ireland differ in that Northern Ireland students sit GCSEs and Level 1 / 2 in Year 12 and A levels in Year 14. In England and Wales, these are Year 11 and 13 respectively. In addition, the point at which a student begins their education in Northern Ireland depends on their age as of 1st July, whereas in England and Wales, it is 1st September. Therefore entries were collected for each year group based on age as of 30th June 2014 for Northern Ireland and 31st August 2014 for England and Wales. Users of this release should be aware of this when interpreting the figures.

Geographical coverage

This release presents data on the number of entries for GCSEs, Level 1 / 2 Certificates, AS and A levels for the May to June 2015 exam series in England. Tables 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11 and 12, present entry figures for Northern Ireland and Wales for comparison. However, this release does **not** include GCSEs, Level 1 / 2 Certificates, AS and A levels taken everywhere, including outside the UK.

Revisions

Once published, data on the number of requests are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or to correct an error.

In some cases, data may be amended to reflect the new categorisation.⁹

Completeness of the data

Exam boards send Ofqual entry data for all regulated qualifications classified as GCSEs, Level 1 / 2 Certificates, AS and A levels. Ofqual contacts any exam board that does not return a complete set of data within the collection period, to make sure the data are as complete as possible. For this release, Ofqual received data from all the exam boards that were in a position to award qualifications.

Rounding

In accordance with Ofqual's Rounding Policy,¹⁰ all figures for the number of certificates issued are rounded. In the commentary, they are rounded to the nearest 1,000 to aid understanding. Where figures are less than 1,000, they have been rounded to the nearest 100. In the tables, the figures are rounded to the nearest 10. This is to ensure that the data does not reveal an individual candidate.

Users of these statistics

These statistics are of particular interest to Ofqual, recognised exam boards and the Department for Education. Ofqual uses these statistics to inform understanding of entry patterns on awarding outcomes. Exam boards use these statistics to help create predictions for exam outcomes.

Related statistics and publications

There are other statistical releases and publications that relate to this one:

- The statistical publication on Summer GCSE and IGCSE entries for England: April 2014.¹¹

⁹ www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/422198/2015-04-15-corrections-revisions-policy-for-official-statistics.pdf

¹⁰ www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/422200/2015-04-15-rounding-policy.pdf

¹¹ www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380115/2014-05-23-revised-summer-gcse-and-igcse-entries-for-england-provisional-figures-april.pdf

- The statistical publication on Summer AS and A level entries for England: April 2014.¹²

Useful information

A glossary of terms is available on page 7 to help you interpret this release.

You can find the publication schedule for the next releases on the Ofqual website.¹³

The Ofqual Register gives information on regulated qualifications and recognised awarding organisations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.¹⁴

¹²

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141031163546/http://ofqual.gov.uk/documents/summer-level-entries-england-provisional-figures-april-2014/>

¹³

www.gov.uk/government/statistics?keywords=&topics%5B%5D=all&departments%5B%5D=ofqual&from_date=&to_date=

¹⁴ <http://register.ofqual.gov.uk>

User feedback

Ofqual is running a rolling series of online surveys to make sure its statistical releases meet your needs.

Ofqual would like to invite you to take part in the online survey for this release.

<http://ofqual.Summer-GCSE-and-IGCSE-entries-for-England-v1.sgizmo.com/s3/>

It will take about 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will remain entirely confidential in any reports published about the survey.

If you would like to take part in the survey, have any questions, or would prefer a paper or large-type copy, please contact Ofqual at: statistics@ofqual.gov.uk.

List of tables

The following tables are available in Excel together with this publication on our website – www.gov.uk/government/statistics/summer-2015-exam-entries-gcse-level-1-2-certificates-as-and-a-levels-in-england

Table 1	Provisional summer series GCSE entries for England as at 20th April, 2014–15
Table 2	Provisional summer series GCSE entries for Northern Ireland as at 20th April, 2014–15
Table 3	Provisional summer series GCSE entries for Wales as at 20th April, 2014–15
Table 4	Provisional summer series Level 1 / 2 Certificate entries for England as at 20th April, 2014–15
Table 5	Provisional summer series Level 1 / 2 Certificate entries for Northern Ireland as at 20th April, 2014–15
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Table 7	Provisional summer series AS entries for England as at 20th April, 2014–15
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Table 10	Provisional summer series A level entries for England as at 20th April, 2014–15
Table 11	Provisional summer series A level entries for Northern Ireland as at 20th April, 2014–15
Table 12	Provisional summer series A level entries for Wales as at 20th April, 2014–15

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