

[Home](#) > [Glossary for Ofqual's statistics](#)



Contents

[A levels](#)

[AS levels](#)

[Available qualification](#)

[Awarding organisation](#)

[Certificate](#)

[Certification](#)

[Certification end date](#)

[Cohort](#)

[Component](#)

[Exam board](#)

[GCEs](#)

[GCSEs](#)

[General qualifications](#)

[Grading](#)

[Level](#)

[Linear qualification](#)

[Marking](#)

[Mark scheme](#)

[Modified question papers](#)

[Modular qualification](#)

[Operational start date](#)

[Operational end date](#)

[Qualifications and credit framework \(QCF\)](#)

[Qualification level](#)

[Qualification number](#)

[Qualification title](#)

[Qualification type](#)

[Quarter](#)

[Recognition](#)

[Recognition number](#)

[Reformed qualification](#)

[Register](#)

[Regulated qualification](#)

[Regulated qualifications framework \(RQF\)](#)

[Scripts](#)

[Sector subject area \(SSA\)](#)

[Title](#)

[Type](#)

[Unit](#)

[Vocational and technical qualifications](#)

[Year 10](#)

[Year 11](#)

[Year 12](#)

[Year 13](#)

A levels

Also known as General Certificates of Education, the A level (Advanced level) is a qualification offered by exam boards in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and is the main pre-university qualification. At present, a combination of legacy and reformed A levels are available to students. The qualification is mainly taken by 18-year-old students but is open to anyone who wants to gain a qualification.

For legacy A levels, the qualification is generally studied over 2 years and split into two parts, with one part studied in each year. The first part is known as the Advanced Subsidiary (AS). The second part is known as A2. The AS level is a qualification in its own right, and the AS combined with A2 forms the complete A

level qualification.

Reformed A levels in England are different in that the results of the AS qualification do not count towards a student's final A level grade. As such, there is no requirement for students to enter the AS qualification in a given subject, even if they intend to study the full A level. The introduction of reformed AS and A level qualifications [started in 2016 and will be completed in 2020](#).

AS levels

See '[A levels](#)'.

Available qualification

An available (or active) qualification is only available for new learners to begin studying between its [operational start date](#) and [operational end date](#). It can be awarded up until the certification end date, but will not be available to new learners after the operational end date.

Awarding organisation

An organisation recognised by the qualifications regulators in England, Wales or Northern Ireland to develop, deliver and award qualifications. See also '[exam board](#)'.

Certificate

Formal confirmation of a completed qualification and a student's achievement in that qualification. Certificates are provided by the exam board.

Certification

A result issued by an awarding organisation following the completion of a given qualification.

Certification end date

The last date on which an awarding organisation has indicated that certification is available.

Cohort

The population of students in each academic year. The term may also be used to refer to a specific group of students – for example, a specific age group (the 16 to 18-year-old cohort) or to a group of students sitting a specific qualification (the GCSE maths cohort).

Component

A discrete part of a qualification.

Exam board

The term used for an [awarding organisation](#) which awards GCSEs, AS levels, A levels or some similar qualifications.

GCEs

See '[A levels](#)'.

GCSEs

General Certificates of Secondary Education are the main school-leaving qualification in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are available in a range of subjects and can be studied alongside other qualifications. They are generally sat by 16-year-olds in schools and colleges but are open to anyone who wants to gain a qualification.

General qualifications

There are a variety of general qualifications including the General Certificate of Secondary Education ([GCSE](#)), the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level ([AS and A level](#)) and international GCSEs. The most popular general qualifications are GCSEs, AS and A levels.

Grading

The process of grouping students into overall performance categories, usually on the basis of the marks received.

Grading: A level

A levels award a grade, from highest to lowest, of A*, A, B, C, D and E, with a grade of U for unclassified.

Grading: AS level

AS levels award a grade, from highest to lowest, of A, B, C, D and E, with a grade of U for unclassified.

Grading: legacy GCSE

The legacy GCSEs award, from highest to lowest, A*, A, B, C, D, E, F and G, with a grade of U for unclassified..

Grading: reformed GCSE

Reformed GCSEs award, from highest to lowest, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1, with a grade of U for unclassified.

Grading: double-award

Some qualifications are 'double award' which means that a student will receive 2 qualification grades from a single qualification. Combined science is one example of a 'double award' qualification.

The available grades, in reformed GCSEs, are 9-9, 9-8, 8-8, 8-7, 7-7, 7-6, 6-6, 6-5, 5-5, 5-4, 4-4, 4-3, 3-3, 3-2, 2-2, 2-1, 1-1 and U (unclassified).

Grading: vocational and technical qualifications

Vocational qualifications have a variety of different grading scales (for example, pass, merit and distinction).

Level

See '[qualification level](#)'.

Linear qualification

In linear qualifications students must sit all of the assessment in the same exam series that they complete the qualification. To re-sit a qualification students must generally re-sit all of the assessment (the exception to this is non-exam assessment where the marks can generally be carried forward). See also '[modular qualification](#)'.

Marking

The process of giving a student credit for their answers according to the requirements set out in a mark scheme. The process of marking is distinct from [grading](#), which usually happens after marking.

Mark scheme

The mark scheme sets out the requirements for how students' responses to an assessment should be rewarded. There are different types of mark scheme depending upon the type of question or task that students are required to respond to.

Modified question papers

Modified papers are individually prepared for candidates with a range of visual impairments and significant language comprehension disorders to enable them to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding. A request for a modified paper is made for each individual exam paper, rather than one request for each candidate across all exams. Requests for modified question papers are made by schools and colleges in advance of a specific exam series.

Modular qualification

In modular qualifications the overall assessment is broken down into smaller discrete examined and non-examined assessments. Students are able to take the assessments at different points throughout the course of study and can generally re-sit individual assessments without having to re-sit the whole qualification. See also '[linear qualification](#)'.

Operational start date

The date on which the qualification becomes available for teaching.

Operational end date

The date on which the qualification is no longer available to new learners as there is insufficient time for new candidates to complete all the learning required before the certification end date. Existing candidates may still work towards the qualification.

Qualifications and credit framework (QCF)

This was the national framework for vocational qualifications in England, Northern Ireland and Wales until October 2015. It provided a system for indicating level and size of qualifications and for credit transfer of qualification units, so that qualifications could be 'built' through accumulation of credit. [It was withdrawn in 2015](#) by Ofqual and replaced by the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF).

Qualification level

Regulated qualifications are assigned a level from [entry level through to level 8](#) broadly indicating the relative level of demand of the qualification. Regulated qualifications will be assigned a level by an awarding organisation with reference to Ofqual's published [level descriptors](#). Qualifications at the same level can cover different amounts of the same subject and take different lengths of time to study. For example, a GCSE sits across levels 1 and 2, A level is level 3 and degrees are level 6.

Qualification number

The unique reference number assigned to a qualification when it is regulated by Ofqual. It was previously known as a qualification accreditation number (QAN).

Qualification title

The title of the qualification, as it appears on the '[Register of Regulated Qualifications](#)', which must be used on qualification certificates. It must include the awarding organisation name, qualification level, qualification type where relevant, an indication of the content and any endorsement available.

Qualification type

[Regulated qualifications](#) in England are classified into different qualification types given below:

advanced extension award (AEA)

- basic skills
- end point assessment
- English for speakers of other languages
- entry level
- free standing mathematics qualification
- functional skills
- functional skills (QCF)
- GCE A level
- GCE AS level
- GCSE (9 to 1)
- GCSE (A* to G)
- general national vocational qualification (GNVQ)
- higher level
- key skills
- national vocational qualification (NVQ)
- occupational qualification
- other general qualification
- principal learning
- project
- QCF
- VCE advanced subsidiary level
- vocational certificate of education
- vocationally-related qualification

Quarter

Refers to calendar quarters:

- quarter 1 (Q1): January to March
- quarter 2 (Q2): April to June
- quarter 3 (Q3): July to September
- quarter 4 (Q4): October to December

Recognition

The process that Ofqual operates to evaluate applicant awarding organisations who wish to offer regulated qualifications. Awarding organisations are required to demonstrate that they meet the '[Criteria for Recognition](#)'.

Recognition number

The unique number assigned to a recognised awarding organisation by Ofqual.

Reformed qualification

A qualification that has been redeveloped during a period of reform. The reform may mean that the content of the qualification or the nature and structure of the assessment has changed. For example, the number of assessments in a qualification may change, or the proportion of non-examined assessment may change.

Register

Ofqual's '[Register of Regulated Qualifications](#)' that contains details of recognised awarding organisations and the regulated qualifications they offer.

Regulated qualification

A qualification that is offered by a recognised awarding organisation within the scope of its recognition.

Regulated qualifications framework (RQF)

A framework for understanding the level and size of all regulated qualifications. It was introduced by Ofqual in October 2015.

Scripts

The documents containing students' responses to assessment questions or tasks.

Sector subject area (SSA)

SSA is a [classification of qualifications](#) into business sectors or subject areas maintained by Ofqual. There are 15 broad 'tier 1' subject areas and 50 more detailed 'tier 2' sub-sector subject areas.

Title

See '[qualification title](#)'.

Type

See '[qualification type](#)'.

Unit

See '[component](#)'.

Vocational and technical qualifications

Term encompassing qualifications that are not 'general'. These normally have a more vocational focus, and can include qualifications designed to support the development of practical skills in English, maths and ICT (functional skills qualifications) as well as technical, professional or occupational qualifications.

Year 10

The cohort of students who are usually 15 years old by the end of the academic year.

Year 11

The cohort of students who are usually 16 years old by the end of the academic year.

Year 12

The cohort of students who are usually 17 years old by the end of the academic year.

Year 13

The cohort of students who are usually 18 years old by the end of the academic year.

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