

A brief explanation of summer 2014 GCSE results



This briefing is based on data published by JCQ on Thursday 21 August 2014 and available at www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/gcses/gcse-and-entry-level-certificate-results-summer-2014

Key points

- Fewer entries from 15-year-olds in 2014 – schools appear to have been more selective, entering only their most able 15-year-olds.
- Results for 16-year-olds are generally more stable than the results for all candidates, because of changing entry patterns.
- There is more variation at centre level in English/English language. This appears to be more pronounced in schools that have previously used a modular approach with re-sits.

Summary

This summer the number of entries for all subjects is down 4 per cent from 5.4 million in 2013 to 5.2 million in 2014. The number of entries from 15-year-olds is down by 39 per cent, and is much more in line with the 15-year-old entry in 2012.

Entries from 16-year-olds are again very stable – up 1 per cent to nearly 4.5 million. Entries from post-16 students are up 15 per cent to just over 260,000. We also reported in May¹ that entries for IGCSE in English language in 2014 were up 96 per cent to 139,000.

For all students across the UK, the proportions getting the grades are as follows:

- The proportion getting A* is down 0.1 percentage points to 6.7 per cent.
- The proportion getting A* and A remains the same, at 21.3 per cent.
- The proportion getting A*-C is up 0.7 percentage points to 68.8 per cent.

¹ See www.ofqual.gov.uk/standards/statistics/provisional-summer-gcse-igcse-entries/

- The proportion passing (A*-G) is down 0.3 percentage points to 98.5 per cent.

These changes reflect changes in the make-up of the overall cohort – in terms of the number of entries and overall ability.

In summer 2013 we reported that shifts in entry patterns made it difficult to compare the overall results in 2013 with results in 2012. The same is true for 2014 – we are not comparing like with like. This is likely to be due to schools changing their approaches to teaching and exam entry in response to policy changes.

Performance by year group

The table below compares the cumulative percentages of students at A*, A and C for all students, 15-year-olds, 16-year-olds and post-16 students, for all subjects combined.

	Cumulative percentage at grade (summer 2013 figures in brackets)			
Grade	All students	15-year-olds	16-year-olds	Post-16
A*	6.7 (6.8)	6.2 (4.3)	7.0 (7.4)	3.2 (3.7)
A	21.3 (21.3)	19.2 (14.2)	22.2 (23.1)	9.5 (10.9)
C	68.8 (68.1)	68.2 (58.1)	70.1 (70.9)	47.2 (50.4)

In general, 15-year-olds perform less well than 16-year-olds. In 2013 we reported that the gap between the cumulative percentage of students at A*, A and C for 15-year-olds and 16-year-olds had widened since 2012 to 3.1 percentage points at A*, 8.9 percentage points at A and 12.8 percentage points at C. This year the gap has closed considerably, particularly at grade C. This appears to be due to schools being more selective and entering only their most able 15-year-olds.

The following table shows the proportion of students achieving A*/A and A*-C in English, mathematics and the science subjects, by age group.

	Grades A*/A			Grades A*-C		
	Age 15	Age 16	Post-16	Age 15	Age 16	Post-16
English	16.5 (8.9)	16.3 (16.1)	3.5 (3.7)	65.3 (52.3)	66.0 (67.6)	37.9 (41.4)
English literature	13.0 (15.2)	22.9 (23.1)	23.1 (24.0)	65.7 (66.9)	77.5 (77.3)	74.4 (75.0)
Mathematics	29.7 (10.6)	16.1 (17.0)	3.8 (4.5)	68.3 (51.7)	66.0 (62.1)	38.9 (41.1)
Biology	32.0 (25.5)	42.9 (42.7)	17.3 (17.8)	87.1 (80.0)	91.7 (91.7)	60.8 (62.5)
Chemistry	34.3 (29.8)	43.2 (43.2)	33.0 (32.9)	88.0 (81.2)	91.2 (90.8)	76.2 (74.5)
Physics	33.7 (31.8)	42.4 (42.0)	30.7 (31.3)	85.8 (83.7)	91.7 (91.4)	76.1 (75.3)
Science	11.8 (9.4)	4.6 (4.9)	6.1 (6.0)	66.2 (55.1)	49.8 (47.9)	55.7 (52.8)
Additional science	24.4 (20.7)	12.1 (11.3)	11.3 (13.2)	80.4 (72.1)	65.1 (63.8)	58.4 (59.4)
All subjects	19.2 (14.2)	22.2 (23.1)	9.5 (10.9)	68.2 (58.1)	70.1 (70.9)	47.2 (50.4)

English/English language

(combined under the heading 'English' in the JCQ data)

The overall entry is down from 731,000 in 2013 to 516,000 in 2014. This drop is due to fewer 15- and 16-year-olds than in 2013. This is likely to be due to students

entering in November 2013 and not re-entering in June 2014, as well as the continued shift towards IGCSEs in English language.

The biggest change in outcomes at grades A and C is for 15-year-olds. The 15-year-old entry has dropped from 70,000 in 2013 to 14,000 in 2014. Schools appear to be being more selective in their entries and entering only their most able 15-year-olds.

Outcomes for 16-year-olds are more stable than outcomes for all candidates. But there are some changes – outcomes at C are down 1.6 percentage points. This change is likely to reflect changes in the ability level of the cohort, as a result of changing entry policies in schools. It is not a result of the separate reporting of speaking and listening, although that could well be a reason for variation in a school's results. Our approach to awarding this summer was to make sure that, overall, students were not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged because of this change to the qualification.

In English and English language, we said in August 2013² that when speaking and listening was not contributing to the overall grade, grade boundaries might have to be set a mark or two lower than in previous years, in order that this year's cohort was not disadvantaged. Details of the grade boundaries are available to download through our website³.

Initial analysis of the year-on-year variation at school level suggests there is more variation at grade C in English/English language than in other subjects. This variation appears to be less in schools that used a linear approach in 2013, and more pronounced in schools that have previously used a modular approach and those that used re-sitting. The analysis is available to download through our website⁴.

Speaking and listening results will be reported to candidates separately on a 5-point scale, with 5 being the highest. Overall outcomes are as follows.

Grade	Cum. %
5	32.4
4	65.9

² www.ofqual.gov.uk/news/changes-to-gcse-english-and-english-language/

³ www.ofqual.gov.uk/documents/grade-boundaries-english-language-mathematics-june-2013-november-2013-june-2014/

⁴ www.ofqual.gov.uk/documents/variability-gcse-english-language-summer-2014/

3	87.7
2	96.7
1	98.9

English literature

English literature is one of the few subjects where entries from 15-year-olds have increased, from nearly 22,000 in 2013 to nearly 45,000 in 2014. At the same time entries from 16-year-olds have decreased by 19,000. Overall outcomes at A and C are down slightly, reflecting the increased proportion of 15-year-olds who in general are less able than the 16-year-old students.

Mathematics

While the number of entries overall is similar to 2013, there were far fewer 15-year-olds entered this summer, and many more post-16 students. The biggest change in outcomes at grades A and C is for 15-year-olds – up 19.1 percentage points at A and 16.6 percentage points at C. Entries from 15-year-olds have dropped from 170,000 in 2013 to nearly 40,000 in 2014. It is therefore not surprising that the outcomes for 15-year-olds are very different, reflecting a more able 15-year-old entry.

Outcomes for 16-year-olds are down 0.9 percentage points at A and up 3.9 percentage points at C. As in English, it is likely that these changes reflect differences in the ability of the students entered in June as a result of the removal of the January and March exam series.

We have published details of the grade boundaries in mathematics this summer, compared to previous exam series. Again, this is available to download through our website⁵.

The science subjects

Entries in the science subjects are very different from those in 2013 and in 2012. The GCSE sciences suite has been modular for much longer than many other subjects and as a result the move to linear may have had a more significant impact on schools' entry policies in the science subjects.

⁵ www.ofqual.gov.uk/documents/grade-boundaries-english-language-mathematics-june-2013-november-2013-june-2014/

For example, entries for GCSE science were 553,000 in 2012, 451,000 in 2013 and 375,000 in 2014 – a drop of 178,000 in two years. Much of the drop this year has been in the 15-year-old entry, so schools may be delaying entry for some students until they are in Year 11. All of this suggests that the cohort of students is very different in 2014 compared to 2012 or 2013, as the pattern of results shows.

Entries for the separate sciences have dropped this year. Some of this drop may be accounted for by entries for a new title – further additional science – which can be taken as a third science GCSE (alongside science and additional science). Results for further additional science are reported within the ‘Additional Science’ heading in the JCQ results tables, and hence may be one of the reasons for the increase of 40,000 for additional science.

Note

In this document we have referred to the age of students entered for GCSEs. These are defined as follows.

- 15-year-olds – students in school year 10 (or earlier) in the academic year 2013/2014.
- 16-year-olds – students in school year 11 in the academic year 2013/2014.
- Post-16 – students who are beyond Key Stage 4. This will include students in school years 12 and 13 as well as adult students of all ages.