

Statistical Release

Entries and late entries for GCSE and A level: 2015 to 2016 academic year

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Key statistics.....	3
Glossary of terms	8
Background notes	10
Appendix.....	15

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Key points

This release provides information on the number of entries and late entries for GCSE and A level in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas, during the 2015/16 academic year.

Schools and colleges make entries to the exam boards for each unit or component that makes up a GCSE or A level qualification (for example, an exam paper or other form of assessment).

If a school or college registers an entry after the agreed deadline it is classed as late and may be subject to an additional charge.

The key findings for this release are as follows.

- There has been a 1% decrease in GCSE entries and a 17% decrease in A level (including AS) entries for the 2015/16 academic year relative to 2014/15, mainly due to changes to AS/A levels introduced in England for some subjects in 2015/16.
- The number of GCSE entries that were late dropped by 3% (from 547,200 to 532,400). Compared to 2014/15, late entries continue to represent 3% of all GCSE entries in 2015/16.
- There was a 28% decrease in the number of A level (including AS) entries that were late compared with last year (from 139,800 to 100,700), representing 2% of all A level (including AS) entries. The decrease was mainly due to a drop in number of entries caused by changes to AS/A levels introduced in 2015/16.

Introduction

This statistical release, published on behalf of the qualifications regulators for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, presents data on entries and late entries for GCSE and A level exams during the 2015/16 academic year.

Five exam boards offer GCSE and AS/A level qualifications in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas:

- AQA
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) (Northern Ireland)
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Pearson
- WJEC.

From 2011 to 2013, International Curriculum & Assessment Agency (Examinations) ICAA(E) also awarded GCSEs.

Schools and colleges are responsible for submitting entries to exam boards for GCSEs and A levels on behalf of their candidates. Candidates are entered separately for each unit or component that makes up a qualification.¹ An entry therefore is counted as a candidate being put forward for an individual assessment rather than for the overall qualification. A school or college submits entries to the relevant exam board on behalf of its candidates. We collect provisional data from exam boards at the point when it is reasonably complete, although final entry numbers may be slightly different from these.

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) is a membership organisation comprising seven providers of qualifications in the UK, including those awarding GCSEs and A levels. JCQ publishes deadlines by which entries should be made on behalf of the exam boards.² If an entry is made after the deadline it is classed as late and may be subject to an additional charge.

¹ For linear specifications, units are referred to as components.

² www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/key-dates-and-timetables

Data presentation

The new A level and AS qualifications in England are separate³, meaning that AS results will no longer count towards the A level grade, as in previous qualifications. In 2015/16, thirteen new AS qualifications were offered in England.⁴ In future years, more reformed qualifications will be awarded and reported in these statistics. Data was collected for AS and A level separately for the first time in 2016. However, as in previous years, it has been reported jointly as A levels in this publication to allow comparisons with previous years. Therefore, AS and A level combined are described as A level in this report. The 2016 data split by AS and A level will be reported from next year onwards for making historical comparisons.

Figures within the commentary and tables have been rounded to the nearest 100.

All tables referred to in the text are provided in the appendix.

³ AS and A level qualifications provided by WJEC and CCEA have not been separated.

⁴ Art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computing, economics, English language, English language and literature, English literature, history, physics, psychology, sociology. For more information on the reform timetable see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform/get-the-facts-as-and-a-level-reform>.

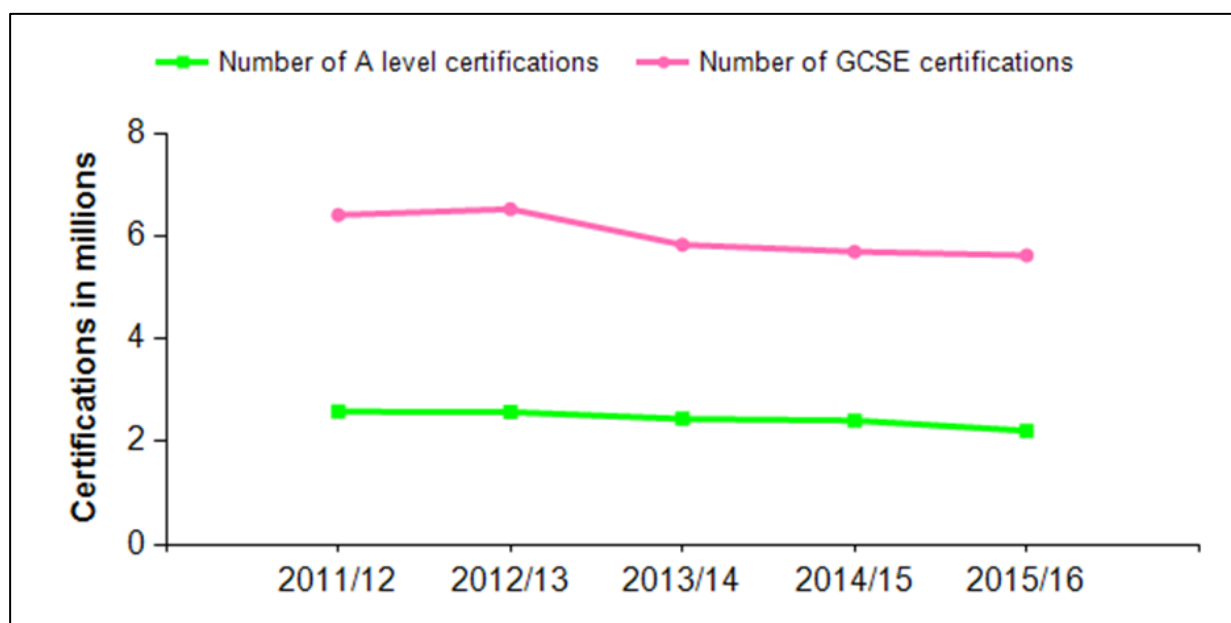
Key statistics

Certificates awarded

In the 2015/16 academic year, more than 2.2 million A level certificates and just over 5.6 million GCSE certificates were awarded in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas.

There was a 1% decrease in the number of GCSE certifications from 2014/15 to 2015/16. This decrease is smaller than the previous year's decrease of 2%.

Figure 1: Number of certifications for GCSE and A level, 2011/12 to 2015/16



The largest recent change in GCSE certifications was between 2012/13 and 2013/14, when there was an 11% decrease in the number of certificates awarded. This decrease was likely caused by changes made to the qualification system at that time. From 2013/14, GCSEs in England became linear and there were fewer exam series, so students had fewer opportunities to enter exams and therefore fewer opportunities to register for certification. In addition, a change in the way that schools' performance measures were calculated in England, so that only the first GCSE award in a subject counted, is likely to have discouraged GCSE entries from students aged 15 and under. The number of GCSE certificates decreased by 1% this year compared to the last year. This decrease is in line with the drop of 1% in the number of all GCSE entries this year, which is discussed in the following section.

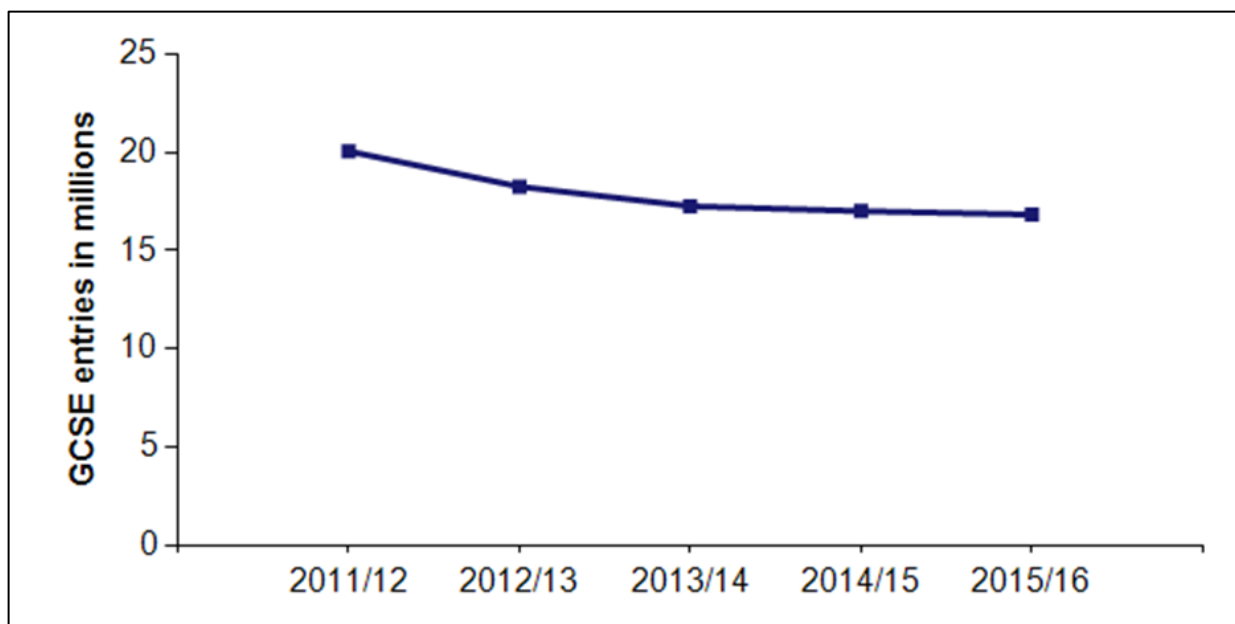
There was an 8% decrease in the number of A level certifications from 2014/15 to 2015/16, to the lowest figure in the last five years (see figure 1 and table 1). Most of this decrease will be due to a reduction in the number of entries for the new AS qualifications. Some year-on-year variation in the overall number of qualifications

awarded is inevitable as a result of fluctuations in the size of the cohort and changes in the timing of candidates being entered for some qualifications.

GCSE entries

Over the last 3 years the number of GCSE entries has stayed relatively stable, with small decreases year-on-year. Changes to school performance tables from autumn 2013, so that only the first award in a subject counted, will have discouraged some schools from entering younger students (Year 10 or below) and contributed to a reduction in entry numbers in subsequent years. The number of GCSE entries in 2015/16 was nearly 17 million (a 1% decrease compared with last year).

Figure 2: Total GCSE entries, 2011/12 to 2015/16



GCSE late entries

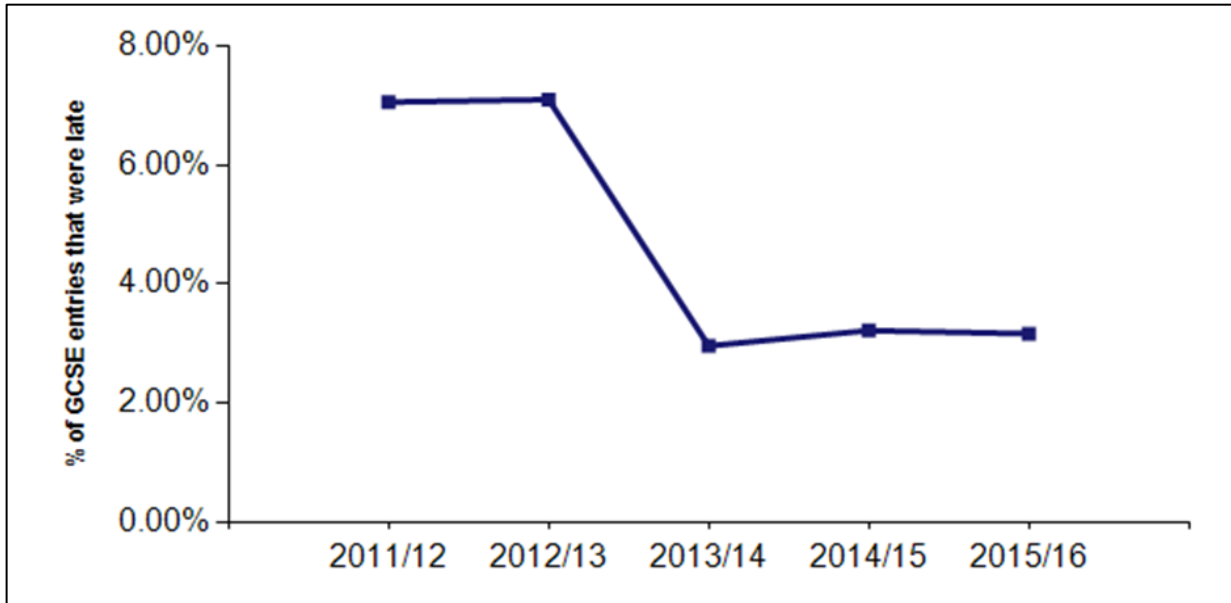
The proportion of GCSE entries that were late in 2015/16 was very similar to 2014/15 – around 3% (see figure 3 and table 2).

There were 532,400 GCSE late entries in 2015/16, compared with 547,200 last year – nearly a 3% decrease.

Between 2012/13 and 2013/14, the proportion of GCSE entries that were late dropped from 7% to close to 3%. The main contributing factor for this is likely to be the linearisation of GCSEs in England from 2013/14, so that candidates took all of their exams at the end of the programme of study. The reduction in the number of

exam series is likely to have enabled centres to better manage entries for their candidates.

Figure 3: Proportion of total GCSE entries that were late, 2011/12 to 2015/16



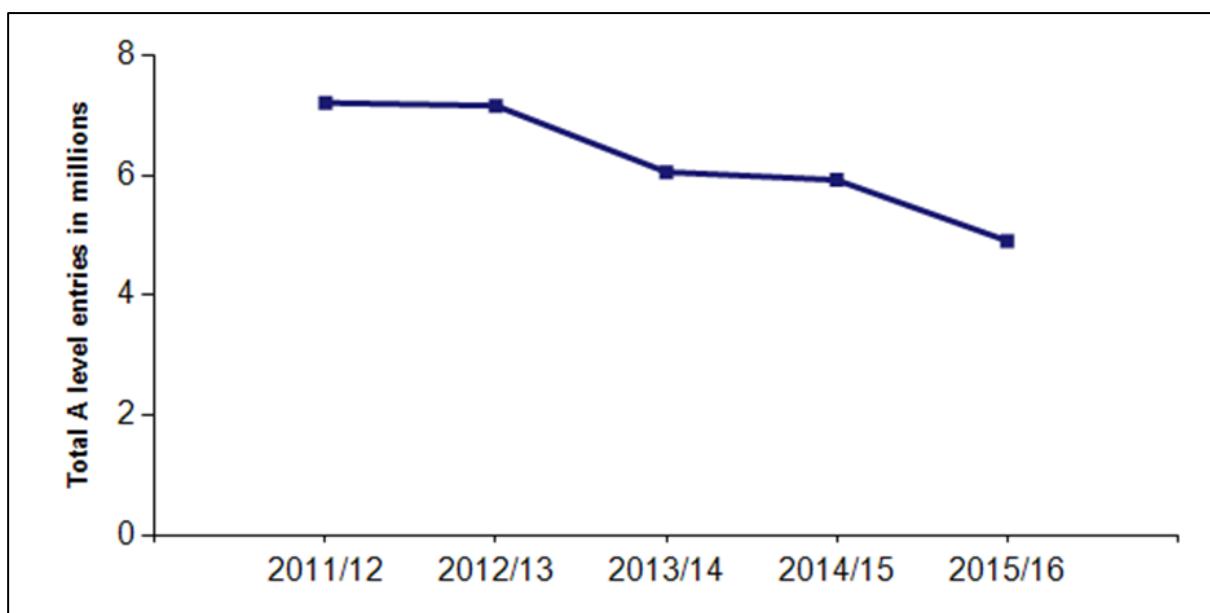
A level entries

From 2011/12 to 2012/13, the number of A level unit entries remained fairly constant, but there was a sharp decrease of 15% in 2013/14 (from 7 million to 6 million). This decrease was due to the removal of the January exam series in England, reducing the opportunities for candidates to enter a unit in January and then resit it in June.

The decrease continued in 2014/15 to nearly 6 million entries, and even more so for 2015/16 with 5 million entries (see figure 4 and table 3). This represents a 17% decrease on last year - the largest percentage decrease in the last 5 years. This decrease will be largely due to changes made to A level and AS qualifications which resulted in a decline in provisional entries for the reformed qualifications in 2016.

The new A level and AS qualifications in England are separate⁵, meaning that AS results will no longer count towards the A level grade, as in previous qualifications. In 2015/16, 13 new AS qualifications were offered in England.⁶ In future years, more reformed qualifications will be awarded and reported in these statistics.

Figure 4: Total A level unit entries, 2011/12 to 2015/16



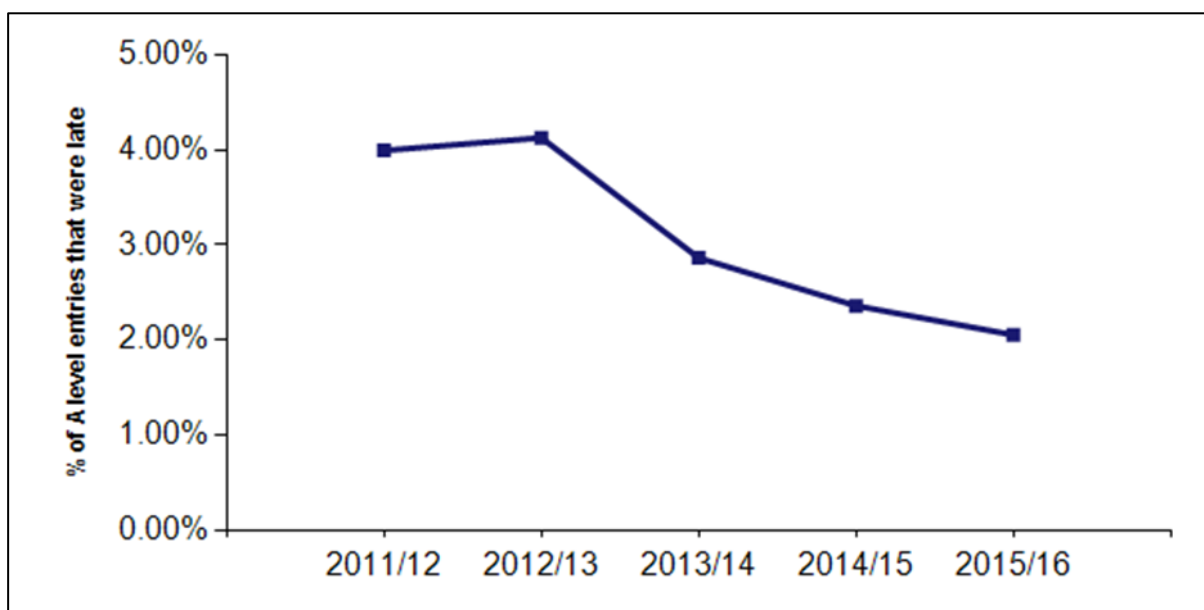
⁵ AS and A level qualification provided by WJEC and CCEA have not been separated.

⁶ Art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computing, economics, English language, English language and literature, English literature, history, physics, psychology, sociology. For more information on the reform timetable see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform/get-the-facts-as-and-a-level-reform>.

A level late entries

There were 100,700 late entries for A level in 2015/16, compared with 139,800 last year – a 28% decrease and the lowest figure in the last 5 years (see figure 5 and table 3). This sharp decrease in the number of late entries was most likely due to the changes in AS/A levels mentioned in the previous section. The proportion of A level unit entries that were late in 2016 was around 2%, very similar to last year.

Figure 5: Proportion of total A level unit entries that were late, 2011/12 to 2015/16



Glossary of terms

A levels

Also known as General Certificates of Education, the A level is an academic qualification offered by educational bodies in the UK to students completing secondary or pre-university education. At present, a combination of legacy and reformed A levels are available to students.

For legacy A levels, the qualification is generally studied for over two years and split into two parts, with one part studied in each year. The first part is known as the Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and was previously known as the Advanced Supplementary, with the same abbreviation. The second part is known as the A2 level. The AS is a qualification in its own right, and the AS combined with the 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. Reformed AS qualifications were available for the first time in thirteen subjects.⁷ Reformed AS qualifications in other subjects will be introduced for 2017 and 2018.

Awarding organisation

An organisation recognised by the qualifications regulators in England, Wales and/or Northern Ireland to develop, deliver and award qualifications. Also referred to as an exam board in the context of GCSEs and A levels.

Certificate/certification

A formal acknowledgement of a student's achievement.

⁷ Art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computing, economics, English language, English language and literature, English literature, history, physics, psychology, sociology. For more information on the reform timetable see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform/get-the-facts-as-and-a-level-reform>.

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.

Background notes

This document is prepared in line with Ofqual Statistics Policies⁸ and the Code of Practice for Official Statistics⁹.

Qualification reform

From 2010/11 to 2012/13, there were four exam series available in each academic year. GCSE and A level exams could be taken in the winter and summer exam series.¹⁰ Additionally, there were a further two exam series for a small range of GCSEs in November and March.

The government set out its intention to reform GCSEs and A levels in *The Importance of Teaching – The Schools White Paper 2010*.¹¹ The changes meant that, for schools and colleges in England, there was no longer an opportunity to take GCSE and A level exams in the winter series.

In addition to changes to the timing of assessments, from 2013/14 the structure of GCSEs has also changed in England. GCSEs are now linear, which means that exams must be taken at the end of the period of study. There is an opportunity to resit exams in the November series, but only for GCSEs in English, English language and mathematics.

GCSEs and A levels have been undergoing major reform in England. In September 2015, schools in England started teaching the first tranche of reformed subjects, including three GCSE (new 9 - 1 grades) subjects (English, English language and mathematics) and thirteen AS and A level subjects.¹² Ofqual announced in March 2016 that there would be two resit opportunities for legacy GCSEs in English, English language and mathematics, one in November 2016 and one in summer 2017.

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-statistics-policies-and-procedures>

⁹ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/monitoring-and-assessment/code-of-practice/>

¹⁰ The winter exam series typically runs from January to February. The summer exam series runs from May to June.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-importance-of-teaching-the-schools-white-paper-2010>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform>

The governments of Wales and Northern Ireland have retained the unitised structure of GCSEs, so schools and colleges in Wales and Northern Ireland will still be able to enter candidates for exams in the winter exam series in some subjects.

Data source

Exam boards submit data to Ofqual for GCSEs and A levels they have awarded as well as entries and late entries in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas.

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*¹³ to ensure the accuracy of the data and to challenge or question it where necessary. 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;
- 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 from the same provider over time;
- actively challenging any unexpected results with the data providers;
- having a proportionate data auditing framework in place which allows for the auditing of providers' information collection, collation, and delivery processes as necessary, using a wide range of tools from questionnaires to on-site process audits.

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

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-statistics-policies-and-procedures>

Geographical coverage

In this release, Ofqual presents data on entries, late entries and certifications for GCSEs, AS and A levels in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas.

Revisions

Once published, data are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or to correct an error.¹⁴

Completeness of the data

Exam boards send Ofqual data for each exam series. Any provider that does not return a complete set of data within the collection period is contacted to make sure the data are as complete as possible. For this release, Ofqual received data from all the exam boards.

Confidentiality

To ensure confidentiality of the published data accompanying this report, the figures have been rounded to the nearest 100. If the value is less than 50, it is represented as 0~ and 0 represents zero entries. The *Statement of Confidentiality* can be found on the Ofqual website.¹⁵

Rounding

Figures in the commentary and tables are rounded to the nearest 100. The Rounding Policy can be found on the Ofqual website.¹⁶

Related statistics and publications

A number of other statistical releases and publications relate to this one, including:

- *Statistical Release: Summer Exam Entries: GCSEs, Level 1 / 2 Certificates, AS and A Levels in England: Provisional Figures 2016.*¹⁷

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-statistics-policies-and-procedures>

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-statistics-policies-and-procedures>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-statistics-policies-and-procedures>

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/summer-2016-exam-entries-gcses-level-1-2-certificates-as-and-a-levels-in-england>

- *Statistical First Release: Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2016* (published by the Department for Education).¹⁸
- *Statistical First Release: A level and other level 3 results in England, 2014 to 2015 (revised)* (published by the Department for Education).¹⁹

Users of these statistics

These statistics are of particular interest to Ofqual, recognised exam boards and the Department for Education. Other users include government policy officials, academics, researchers, the public, government departments in Northern Ireland and Wales, and other interested parties. Ofqual uses these statistics to monitor for potential issues and to analyse trends over time. Central government officials use the statistics for policy implementation and ministerial briefings.

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2016>

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-level-3-results-2014-to-2015-revised>

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://surveys.ofqual.gov.uk/s3/entries-and-late-entries-in-gcse-and-a-level>

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.

Appendix

Table 1	Total number of certifications for GCSE and A level in each academic year, 2011/12 to 2015/16
Table 2	Total number of GCSE entries and late entries in each academic year, 2011/12 to 2015/16
Table 3	Total number of A level entries and late entries in each academic year, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Table 1: Total number of certifications for GCSE and A level in each academic year, 2011/12 to 2015/16

England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas								
	Year	AQA	Pearson	OCR	WJEC	CCEA	ICAA(E)	Total
GCSE (certifications)	2011/12	2,601,000	1,858,700	1,117,500	699,900	144,100	2,200	6,423,500
	2012/13	2,683,000	2,040,400	980,200	697,800	137,600	800	6,539,900
	2013/14	2,431,500	1,663,600	877,400	723,000	146,600		5,842,100
	2014/15	2,368,500	1,661,200	831,400	695,700	150,500		5,707,200
	2015/16	2,365,400	1,616,700	818,600	686,000	148,400		5,635,100
A level (certifications)	2011/12	1,069,500	629,000	621,500	203,300	66,700		2,589,900
	2012/13	1,069,900	634,100	603,800	204,200	68,100		2,580,200
	2013/14	1,028,000	592,400	548,400	209,600	69,900		2,448,300
	2014/15	1,033,400	571,800	532,500	209,200	69,100		2,416,000
	2015/16	930,400	537,600	480,000	197,800	70,400		2,216,200

1. Data are supplied by exam boards.

2. Data are rounded to the nearest 100. Figures have been rounded independently so may not sum to the total.

3. ICAA(E) awarded GCSEs for last time in 2013. ICAA(E) do not currently offer any GCSEs, so have a blank from 2014 onwards.

Table 2: Total number of GCSE entries and late entries in each academic year, 2011/12 to 2015/16

England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas								
	Year	AQA	Pearson	OCR	WJEC	CCEA	ICAA(E)	Total
Number of ontime entries for GCSE	2011/12	7,858,600	4,940,300	3,348,700	2,131,400	368,800	2,200	18,650,000
	2012/13	7,152,000	4,399,700	2,754,200	2,207,400	454,800	1,000	16,969,000
	2013/14	6,724,000	4,239,500	2,749,900	2,583,000	458,400		16,754,900
	2014/15	6,613,300	4,281,900	2,620,500	2,478,900	473,800		16,468,400
	2015/16	6,679,300	4,226,100	2,511,100	2,422,200	470,300		16,309,000
Number of late entries for GCSE	2011/12	737,100	288,300	339,500	36,600	15,100	0	1,416,600
	2012/13	717,300	274,200	245,700	40,800	19,400	0	1,297,500
	2013/14	289,800	76,300	93,200	32,400	18,700		510,400
	2014/15	285,900	136,600	75,700	32,100	16,800		547,200
	2015/16	268,700	146,900	69,200	29,200	18,400		532,400
Total GCSE entries	2011/12	8,595,800	5,228,500	3,688,200	2,168,000	383,900	2,200	20,066,600
	2012/13	7,869,300	4,673,900	2,999,900	2,248,300	474,200	1,000	18,266,500
	2013/14	7,013,800	4,315,800	2,843,100	2,615,400	477,100		17,265,300
	2014/15	6,899,100	4,418,500	2,696,200	2,511,000	490,700		17,015,600
	2015/16	6,948,000	4,373,000	2,580,300	2,451,400	488,800		16,841,400
Proportion of total GCSE entries that were late	2011/12	8.58%	5.51%	9.21%	1.69%	3.93%	0.00%	7.06%
	2012/13	9.12%	5.87%	8.19%	1.82%	4.10%	0.00%	7.10%
	2013/14	4.13%	1.77%	3.28%	1.24%	3.93%		2.96%
	2014/15	4.14%	3.09%	2.81%	1.28%	3.43%		3.22%
	2015/16	3.87%	3.36%	2.68%	1.19%	3.77%		3.16%

Notes:

1. Data are supplied by exam boards.
2. Data are rounded to the nearest 100. Figures have been rounded independently so may not sum to the total.
3. ICAA(E) awarded GCSEs for last time in 2013. ICAA(E) do not currently offer any GCSEs, so have a blank from 2014 onwards.

Table 3: Total number of A level entries and late entries in each academic year, 2011/12 to 2015/16

England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas							
	Year	AQA	Pearson	OCR	WJEC	CCEA	Total
Number of ontime entries for A level	2011/12	2,733,800	1,859,700	1,630,200	517,900	182,200	6,923,800
	2012/13	2,683,600	1,867,400	1,611,200	519,000	186,900	6,868,100
	2013/14	2,362,100	1,521,100	1,319,500	499,400	181,100	5,883,200
	2014/15	2,353,300	1,431,500	1,338,400	488,700	171,700	5,783,600
	2015/16	2,010,500	1,302,400	878,400	440,300	175,200	4,806,800
Number of late entries for A level	2011/12	64,000	60,300	155,800	4,500	3,700	288,200
	2012/13	100,000	58,300	127,000	6,900	3,600	295,900
	2013/14	27,900	21,600	116,800	3,500	3,500	173,400
	2014/15	50,000	38,500	46,300	3,100	1,900	139,800
	2015/16	35,400	31,200	27,700	4,800	1,700	100,700
Total A level entries	2011/12	2,797,800	1,920,000	1,786,000	522,400	185,800	7,212,000
	2012/13	2,783,700	1,925,700	1,738,200	525,900	190,500	7,163,900
	2013/14	2,390,000	1,542,700	1,436,400	502,900	184,600	6,056,600
	2014/15	2,403,300	1,470,000	1,384,700	491,800	173,500	5,923,300
	2015/16	2,045,900	1,333,600	906,200	445,000	176,900	4,907,600
Proportion of total A level entries that were late	2011/12	2.29%	3.14%	8.72%	0.86%	1.97%	4.00%
	2012/13	3.59%	3.03%	7.31%	1.30%	1.90%	4.13%
	2013/14	1.17%	1.40%	8.13%	0.70%	1.91%	2.86%
	2014/15	2.08%	2.62%	3.34%	0.62%	1.07%	2.36%
	2015/16	1.73%	2.34%	3.06%	1.07%	0.95%	2.05%

Notes:

1. Data are supplied by exam boards.
2. Data are rounded to the nearest 100. Figures have been rounded independently so may not sum to the total.

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