

Annual Qualifications Market Report: academic year 2016 to 2017

Background information accompanying statistical
release



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Information about the statistics

Purpose

This release provides information on the qualifications market in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for the academic year 2016 to 2017. For the purpose of this report the 2016/17 academic year is considered the start of October 2016 to the end of September 2017. It presents data on the number of qualifications available for award by recognised awarding organisations and certificates awarded for the qualifications.

Geographical coverage

This report presents data on the qualifications market in England. Reports published in previous years included data for learners in Wales and Northern Ireland as well. As such, historical figures in this year's report reflect England only data and may therefore differ from previously published figures.

For this, and all other releases for the academic year 2016/17, Ofqual will publish separate data tables for learners in Wales and Northern Ireland without commentary, in addition to data tables and report for England. This is following a [transition arrangement](#) with Qualifications Wales (the regulator in Wales) and CCEA (the regulator in Northern Ireland) whereby the responsibility for publishing data for learners in Wales and Northern Ireland for the academic year 2017/18 and beyond has been passed to Qualifications Wales and CCEA respectively.

External drivers

Interests of users of qualifications

The development and take-up of qualifications is influenced by a range of factors. There is a complex and dynamic relationship between those providing qualifications (awarding organisations), purchasers who teach or otherwise deliver the qualifications (schools, colleges and training providers), students, and 'end users' (employers and further and higher education providers). Government reforms of qualifications, performance measures, public funding policies and other requirements will all have a significant impact on many of these relationships.

Users of qualifications respond to incentives, many of which come into play as a result of government policy changes.

Awarding organisations respond to market demand for their qualifications and to incentives to develop and deliver new qualifications to meet government policy requirements and to meet changing skills requirements.

In deciding which qualifications to offer, in addition to student needs and institutional priorities, schools and colleges are influenced by accountability measures and funding considerations. Decisions are often balanced against practical delivery

considerations such as availability of teachers and student demand. Schools and colleges may be informed by networks that help them to navigate the system, which can lead to changes to which qualifications they offer.

Students may opt to study qualifications that will best help them progress in work or in higher or further education, according to their interests. Sometimes these relationships are very direct, such as many licence to practise schemes which depend on gaining a regulated qualification.

Awarding organisations may respond to feedback from employers and from schools, colleges and universities about whether their qualifications assess the knowledge, skills and understanding that they value, to the required standard.

Change impacting upon the market in England - GCSE, AS and A level qualifications

GCSE, AS and A level reform

GCSEs, AS and A levels have been undergoing major [reform](#) in England which is likely to have impacted upon the qualifications market. In September 2015, schools in England started teaching the first tranche of reformed subjects, the three GCSE 9-1 grade subjects (English language, English literature and mathematics) and thirteen AS/A level subjects (art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English literature, English language and literature, history, physics, psychology and sociology). GCSE and A level qualifications in these reformed subjects were first awarded in summer 2017. AS qualifications in these reformed subjects were first awarded in summer 2016, with AS qualifications in the second tranche of reformed AS/A level subjects (ancient languages, dance, drama and theatre, geography, French, German, Spanish, music, physical education and religious studies) being first awarded in summer 2017. The reformed GCSE, AS and A level qualifications included in this statistical release are those that were available to certificate in 2016/17 (November 2016 and summer 2017 exam series).

Resit opportunities

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. For legacy AS and A level qualifications there is one resit opportunity in the May or June of the year following the final award of the qualification.

AS decoupling

Changes to the structure of qualifications following the reform have impacted upon the number of qualifications available and certificates awarded. AS qualification grades no longer contribute to A level grades¹ and the decoupling of these qualifications has resulted in fewer candidates taking reformed AS qualifications. These structural changes have resulted in a reduction in the number of AS certificates awarded in England over the last two years.

Accountability reform

Changes to performance measures may have had an impact on the uptake of some qualifications.

From summer 2017, Level 1/Level 2 certificates (also known as international GCSEs) were not included in [performance tables](#). The removal of Level 1/2 certificates from performance tables has encouraged centres to move students back to GCSE qualifications in these subjects.

As part of changes to the [secondary accountability system announced in 2013](#), [Progress 8](#) and [Attainment 8](#) became the key measures of performance for all state-funded secondary schools and those colleges that offer KS4 education in England in [2016](#). They replaced the 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics headline measure, and expected progress measures. Progress 8 was introduced in 2016 and aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school. For English Language and English literature, providing both subjects are taken, the best score from these subjects is double weighted. The way that progress 8 is calculated, has encouraged uptake in the reformed English literature GCSE and explains the increase in certificates awarded in this subject in 2016/17. Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures may also further encourage centres to focus on the delivery of [EBacc](#) subjects. This most likely explains the decrease in certificates awarded in non-EBacc subjects, as the calculation includes only a maximum of three non-EBacc GCSEs.

Funding changes for 16- to 19-year-olds

From 2014/15, all students aged 16 to 18 starting, or who have already started, a new study programme of 150 hours or more, and who do not hold a GCSE grade C/4 or above, or an equivalent qualification, in maths and/or in English language, are required to study these subjects as part of their study programme in each academic

¹ In Wales and Northern Ireland, reformed AS qualifications contribute 40% of the total marks of the full A level. Non-reformed AS qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland continue to contribute 50% of the total marks of the full A level.

year. The Education and Skills Funding Agency² published additional funding regulations as a result of this new requirement. This policy change is likely to have contributed to increase in certifications in maths and English GCSE qualifications from 2014/15 onwards.

Change impacting upon the market in England - Vocational and other qualifications

Apprenticeships

It is likely that we will see a change in the vocational qualification market over the next few years as apprenticeship frameworks are phased out and are replaced with apprenticeship standards.

The majority of new apprenticeship standards do not contain separately awarded qualifications while apprenticeship frameworks contain qualifications, either separate qualifications attesting to competence and skills or a single hybrid covering both. Due to this change in structure we would expect the number of certificates issued by AOs to decline as the standards replace the frameworks.

Performance tables

It is possible that changes to performance tables may have had an impact on the uptake of some vocational and other qualifications. For instance, Applied General qualifications and Tech Level qualifications were first included in DfE performance tables in 2016. Technical Award and Technical Certificate qualifications were first included in performance tables in 2017.

Removal of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

On 1 October 2015, Ofqual withdrew the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) requirements and launched the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). From that date, the QCF type has ceased to exist. However, for administrative reasons, until our new system was introduced in summer 2016, awarding organisations could still use the QCF type on the system for new qualifications when no other type was appropriate. The QCF qualification type has therefore seen a reduction in certifications and qualifications available this year, whereas RQF qualifications have seen an increase.

Funding changes for post 19 year olds

Since the 2013/14 academic year, we have seen changes in the [funding rules](#) for vocational qualifications aimed at students who are over 19 years of age which may have had some effect on the number of certificates awarded since that date. This

² The Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency were replaced by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in April 2017. It funds education and training for children, young people and adults in England.

includes a reduction in the Adult Skills Budget and an increase in funding allocated for Adult Learner Loans.

Technical Awards and Technical Certificates

We would expect the introduction of T levels to have an impact on the number of certificates awarded to Tech Levels. They are being introduced in phases and are expected to replace most Tech Levels when fully implemented. The first T levels in Construction; Digital; and Education and Childcare are being introduced for first teaching from September 2020 (certificating in 2022) with T levels in Legal, Finance and Accounting; Health and Science; and Engineering and Manufacturing available from September 2021. The full suite of T levels is expected to be available from September 2022.

Changes to qualifications in Wales and Northern Ireland

The policy contexts in Wales and Northern Ireland are different from England in a number of ways. For example, the governments of Wales and Northern Ireland have retained the unitised structure in some GCSEs as well as grades A* to G, and schools and colleges in Wales and Northern Ireland are still able to enter students for exams in the winter exam series in some subjects. In Wales and Northern Ireland, reformed AS qualifications also contribute 40% of the total marks of the full A level.

Qualification Wales (QW), the qualifications regulator in Wales, have developed its own IT systems to support regulation and funding of qualifications in Wales. As a result, its qualification records are maintained separately and qualifications have a different method of identification (a QW Approval/Designation Number) to the approach used by Ofqual (a Qualification Number). This means the same qualification can have 2 different identifiers in the different jurisdictions. The vast majority of qualifications in Qualification Wales' system are the same as a qualification regulated by Ofqual. We are currently collecting data on behalf of Qualifications Wales and incorporate these records into our figures in the data tables for Wales.

A large proportion of certificates included in these statistics for Wales are reported against qualifications that are not eligible for public funding there. However, Qualifications Wales regulates these qualifications when they are offered by an awarding body that is recognised by them, and where the qualification has not been surrendered by the awarding body from the scope of their recognition with Qualifications Wales. Some certifications included in these statistics could be from awarding bodies that Qualifications Wales does not recognise, or qualifications that a recognised awarding body has surrendered from the scope of their recognition with Qualifications Wales. For certifications falling in the 2017/18 academic year and beyond, Qualifications Wales will be publishing these statistics for Wales, and will be developing them to more closely match qualifications that they regulate.

Data source

Information on qualifications (covering title, type, awarding organisation, sector subject area and level) is taken from [Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications](#) (the Register), which gives information on regulated qualifications and recognised awarding organisations in England and Northern Ireland. Data on qualifications offered in Wales is available at [Qualification in Wales](#) (QiW) database.

Qualification types used to describe the nature of qualifications are used in the registers of both Qualification Wales and Ofqual. However, there are some that are present only in the Qualification Wales register and therefore only contain qualifications offered in Wales. These qualification types were incorporated in to the Ofqual systems from July 2016 for the 2016 quarter 2 data collection.

The Register is used by awarding organisations to submit certain qualifications for accreditation and to maintain details of those qualifications. The data submitted by the awarding organisations includes information on qualifications, covering title, type, awarding organisation, sector subject area and level. Ofqual uses the Register for regulatory activity, and it is regarded as administrative data. Ofqual cannot amend this information; it is the responsibility of the awarding organisations. Where Ofqual sees anomalies in the data it requires awarding organisations to correct their information. Available qualifications are taken from the Register and awarding bodies are asked to send the associated data on certificates awarded.

Each quarter, all recognised awarding organisations submit data to Ofqual about the number of certificates they have awarded for qualifications other than GCSE, AS and A level in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, regardless of the age of the student and the type of school or college. Certificates are counted in the quarter when the qualification was awarded. This release shows the number of awards in these qualifications broken down by awarding organisation, sector subject area, type of qualification, level of qualification and country.

The number of qualifications and certificates awarded in all specifications for GCSEs, AS and A levels taken in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is sent to Ofqual annually by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), which includes the GCSE, AS and A level awarding organisations. GCSE certificates cover full course, short course, applied double and applied single awards. A level includes A level applied double award and A level applied single award. Similarly, AS includes AS applied double award and AS applied single award. The data reported here reflects those students who received certificates and therefore does not include those who received grade U or were absent.

Limitations

Certificate data for qualifications other than GCSE, AS and A level is collected at the earliest point available, which is the first day of the next reporting period. This reduces the time between the activity and reporting on the activity.

Ofqual cannot guarantee that the data received - the number of certificates – are correct, although it expects awarding organisations to send correct data. Summary data is sent to awarding organisations for checking and confirmation. The figures reported in this release reflect the certificates awarded by awarding organisations at the time of data collection.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance procedures are carried out as explained in the [Quality Assurance Framework for Statistical Publications](#) published by Ofqual 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 phase and for any subsequent change;
- 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; and
- 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.

Revisions

For vocational and other qualifications, once published, data are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or to correct an error. Qualifications may also be re-categorised to a different type, level, sector subject area or awarding organisation. In some cases, data may be amended to reflect the new categorisation.

For GCSE, AS and A level certificates we collect provisional data for the latest academic year from JCQ at the point when it is reasonably complete, although final certificate numbers may be slightly different and will be updated in the next release of this publication.

Confidentiality and rounding

To ensure confidentiality of the accompanying data, the number of certificates have been rounded to the nearest 5. If the value is less than 5 (1 to 4), it is represented as 0~ and 0 represents zero values.

Total values of rows or columns are calculated using unrounded figures; the sum of rounded figures may differ from the total reported.

All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, except where smaller magnitudes are needed for meaningful interpretation. As a result of rounded figures, the percentages (calculated on actual figures) shown in tables may not necessarily add up to 100.

The number of qualifications are not rounded.

Status

These statistics are classified as official statistics.

Related publications

This statistical release presents annual data. There will be some overlap between the figures in this release and those in Ofqual's Vocational and Other Qualifications Quarterly publication.

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

- [Statistics: GCSEs \(key stage 4\) collection](#)
- [Statistics: 16 to 19 attainment collection](#)
- [Statistics: further education and skills](#)

Statistical policies

The [policies and procedures](#) that Ofqual follow for production and release of its statistical releases are available online.

Glossary

Definitions of important terms used in this release are [available online](#).

Useful links

The [report and data tables](#) accompanying this release are available separately.

Feedback

We welcome your feedback on our publications. Should you have any comments on this statistical release and how to improve it to meet your needs please contact us at statistics@ofqual.gov.uk.

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us at publications@ofqual.gov.uk if you have any specific accessibility requirements.



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