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Official Statistics

Provisional entries for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2021 exam series

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Contents

1. Summer 2021 series
2. Main trends
3. GCSE entries
4. AS and A level entries
5. Entries by centre type
6. Background information
7. User feedback

Print this page

1. Summer 2021 series

This report presents provisional figures for the number of entries for GCSEs, AS and A levels submitted by schools and colleges in England to exam boards by 28 April 2021 for qualifications which are to be awarded in summer 2021.

Entries reflect the information submitted to exam boards at that time but numbers for final entries are always expected to vary to some degree.

2. Main trends

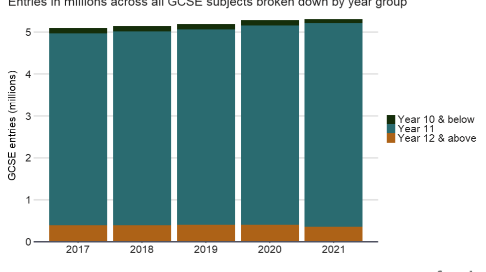
The main trends in provisional entries for GCSE and GCE (AS and A level) for the summer 2021 series are:

- Overall, GCSE entries remain stable (approximately 5.3m) this year (increasing by 0.4%), though an increase in entries from year 11 students masks decreases in entries from candidates in other year groups.
- There are small increases in the proportion of entries for the higher tier in most tiered GCSEs.
- A level entries for the summer 2021 increased by 3% (756,230 in 2021 compared to 731,855 in 2020) overall.
- The overall entry for AS in summer 2021 decreased by 33% (58,300 in 2021 compared to 86,970 in 2020).

3. GCSE entries

The overall entries for GCSEs in summer 2021 remain stable: 5,301,075 entries in 2021 compared to 5,281,745 in 2020 (a difference of 0.4%).

GCSE entries remain stable overall in 2021
Entries in millions across all GCSE subjects broken down by year group

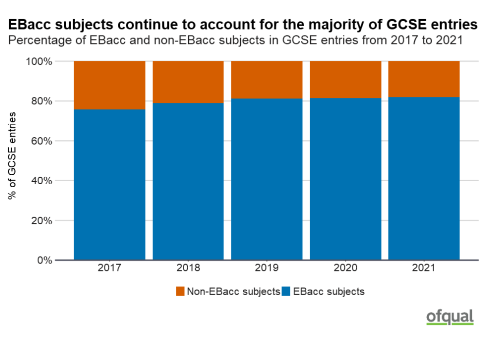


Year	Year 10 & below	Year 11	Year 12 & above	Total
2017	134,300	4,573,175	390,550	5,098,020
2018	123,350	4,619,275	393,870	5,136,495
2019	127,240	4,657,115	401,480	5,185,840
2020	124,310	4,756,135	401,300	5,281,745
2021	95,580	4,847,140	358,350	5,301,075

The majority of GCSE entries are from year 11 students as in other years. Entries from year 11 students are higher than at any time in the past five years. This is likely to be partly explained by a small increase in the size of the 16 year old cohort, which increased by 2% in 2021 compared to 2020 according to ONS population estimates (634,043 compared to 624,590). The increased number of entries from year 11 is offset by decreases in the number of entries from younger and older candidates resulting in a very similar overall entry to 2020.

The small change in entries for GCSE (an increase of 0.4% overall) was mostly due to a rise in entries for EBacc subjects. Entries for EBacc subjects increased by 40,580 (1%) and entries for non-EBacc subjects decreased by 21,255 (-2%) compared to 2020, continuing a trend seen in previous years.

EBacc subjects continue to account for the majority of GCSE entries
Percentage of EBacc and non-EBacc subjects in GCSE entries from 2017 to 2021

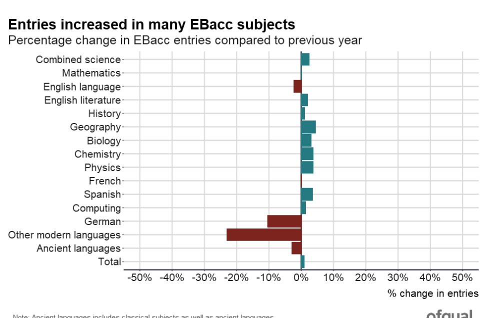


Year	Number non-EBacc entries	Number EBacc entries	Percent non-EBacc entries	Percent EBacc entries
2017	1,247,220	3,850,805	24%	76%
2018	1,082,020	4,054,475	21%	79%
2019	979,140	4,206,700	19%	81%
2020	984,645	4,297,100	19%	81%
2021	963,390	4,337,685	18%	82%

3.1 Change from previous year in GCSE entries for EBacc subjects

Entries for many EBacc subjects show small increases compared to 2020. Subjects are ordered by total entry size in 2021 (largest to smallest) in the graph below, which shows the change in entry compared to last year.

Entries increased in many EBacc subjects
Percentage change in EBacc entries compared to previous year



Note: Ancient languages includes classical subjects as well as ancient languages.

Note: In the table below, ancient languages includes classical subjects as well as ancient languages.

Subject grouping	June 2020	June 2021	% change in entries
Combined science	820,270	840,955	3%
Mathematics	757,235	758,755	0%
English language	746,705	729,605	-2%
English literature	561,315	572,765	2%
History	275,910	278,880	1%
Geography	256,805	268,180	4%
Biology	166,635	171,835	3%
Chemistry	159,760	165,710	4%
Physics	158,395	164,330	4%
French	125,770	125,655	0%
Spanish	105,840	109,655	4%
Computing	76,180	77,245	1%
German	41,320	37,035	-10%
Other modern languages	32,755	25,225	-23%
Ancient languages	12,215	11,860	-3%
Total	4,297,100	4,337,685	1%

There have been increases in entries for many EBacc subjects, particularly combined science, English literature and geography. The largest proportional increases were in geography, physics and chemistry.

Overall, modern foreign language entries remain stable (272,930 in 2020 to 272,345 in 2021) but the entries for the individual languages have been subject to different changes. German entry decreased in contrast to the increase in Spanish (by around -10% and 4% respectively) whilst French entries remain stable compared to 2020.

Entries in computing increased slightly this year (from 76,180 in 2020 to 77,245 in 2021) after a fall last year.

3.2 GCSE entries in EBacc subjects over time and by year group

Entries for combined science, geography, history and Spanish have increased each year for the last five years. Please note that combined science entry is double counted because 2 GCSEs are awarded.

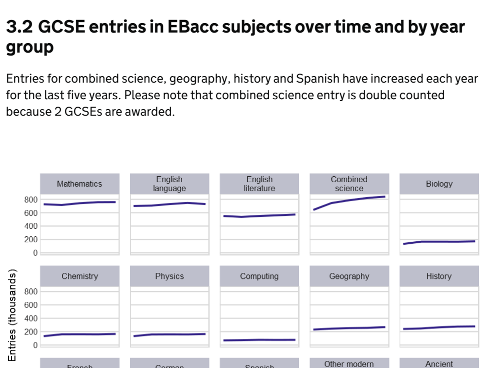


Table: Trends in GCSE EBacc subject entry size over time

Subject	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ancient languages	10,265	11,770	12,170	12,215	11,860
Biology	133,030	167,075	167,525	166,635	171,835
Chemistry	132,520	160,110	160,980	159,760	165,710
Combined science	641,725	744,185	786,830	820,270	840,955
Computing	69,350	72,360	78,080	76,180	77,245
English language	701,020	706,255	729,315	746,705	729,605
English literature	551,030	537,990	551,205	561,315	572,765
French	121,485	120,605	125,700	125,770	125,655
Geography	231,350	244,925	253,125	256,805	268,180
German	41,990	43,260	42,175	41,320	37,035
History	240,170	248,040	264,680	275,910	278,880
Mathematics	726,595	715,775	742,245	757,235	758,755
Other modern languages	32,295	31,850	32,035	32,755	25,225
Physics	132,595	158,295	159,555	158,395	164,330
Spanish	85,380	91,980	101,080	105,840	109,655

There are some small changes to entry by year group in 2021 compared to previous years. In all subjects, the majority of entries are from candidates in year 11, but the proportion of entries from candidates in year 10 and below ("early entries") in other modern languages is consistently higher than observed in other subjects. This remains the case in 2021 but the proportion of early entries has fallen. In English language, the proportion of candidates in year 12 and above is also lower than seen in other recent years.

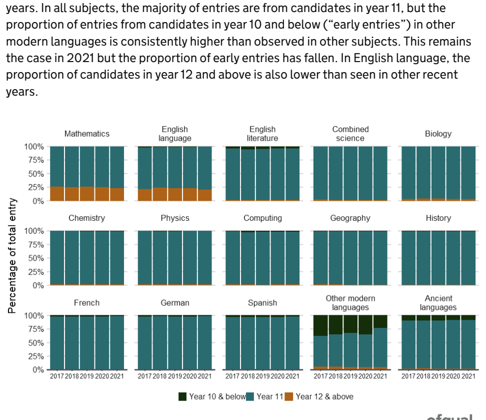


Table: Percentage of candidates by year group in EBacc subjects

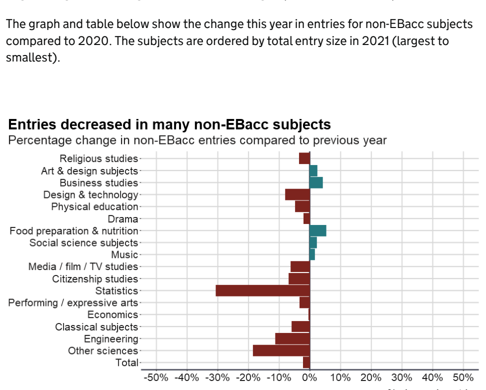
Subject	Year group	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ancient languages	Year 10 & below	10%	9%	10%	9%	9%
Ancient languages	Year 11	88%	88%	88%	89%	89%
Ancient languages	Year 12 & above	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Biology	Year 10 & below	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Biology	Year 11	97%	96%	96%	96%	97%
Biology	Year 12 & above	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Chemistry	Year 10 & below	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Chemistry	Year 11	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%
Chemistry	Year 12 & above	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Combined science	Year 10 & below	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Combined science	Year 11	97%	99%	99%	99%	99%
Combined science	Year 12 & above	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Computing	Year 10 & below	1%	3%	2%	2%	2%
Computing	Year 11	98%	97%	97%	97%	98%
Computing	Year 12 & above	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
English language	Year 10 & below	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%
English language	Year 11	76%	75%	76%	76%	80%
English language	Year 12 & above	21%	24%	23%	23%	20%
English literature	Year 10 & below	4%	6%	5%	4%	4%
English literature	Year 11	95%	94%	94%	95%	96%
English literature	Year 12 & above	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
French	Year 10 & below	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
French	Year 11	97%	97%	97%	97%	98%
French	Year 12 & above	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Geography	Year 10 & below	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Geography	Year 11	98%	98%	98%	99%	99%
Geography	Year 12 & above	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
German	Year 10 & below	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%
German	Year 11	97%	98%	97%	97%	98%
German	Year 12 & above	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
History	Year 10 & below	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
History	Year 11	98%	98%	98%	99%	99%
History	Year 12 & above	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Mathematics	Year 10 & below	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Mathematics	Year 11	74%	75%	74%	75%	77%
Mathematics	Year 12 & above	25%	25%	25%	24%	23%
Other modern languages	Year 10 & below	38%	35%	33%	35%	24%
Other modern languages	Year 11	56%	59%	63%	60%	72%
Other modern languages	Year 12 & above	6%	6%	5%	5%	5%
Physics	Year 10 & below	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%
Physics	Year 11	99%	98%	98%	98%	98%
Physics	Year 12 & above	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Spanish	Year 10 & below	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%
Spanish	Year 11	96%	96%	96%	96%	97%
Spanish	Year 12 & above	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

3.3 Changes in GCSE entries for non-EBacc subjects

Overall, entries in non-EBacc subjects decreased slightly in 2021 with more subjects experiencing decreases in entry than increases. Statistics, other sciences and engineering have the largest proportional changes (-31%, -19% and -11%).

The graph and table below show the change this year in entries for non-EBacc subjects compared to 2020. The subjects are ordered by total entry size in 2021 (largest to smallest).

Entries decreased in many non-EBacc subjects
Percentage change in non-EBacc entries compared to previous year



Subject grouping	June 2020	June 2021	% change in entries
Religious studies	248,340	239,680	-3%
Art & design subjects	193,035	197,595	2%
Business studies	91,800	95,610	4%
Design & technology	89,665	82,505	-8%
Physical education	74,995	71,425	-5%
Drama	58,000	56,860	-2%
Food preparation & nutrition	47,495	49,965	5%
Social science subjects	38,560	39,395	2%
Music	34,865	35,400	2%
Media / film / TV studies	34,845	32,705	-6%
Citizenship studies	22,285	20,750	-7%
Statistics	25,845	17,950	-31%
Performing / expressive arts	9,085	8,780	-3%
Economics	6,525	6,500	0%
Classical subjects	3,755	3,540	-6%
Engineering	2,830	2,515	-11%
Other sciences	2,725	2,220	-19%
Total	984,645	963,390	-2%

3.4 Entries for tiered GCSEs

In some subjects, there are two tiers of entry: foundation and higher. The graph below shows the entry by tier for the last 3 years for those reformed specifications which are tiered. Entry to higher tier has increased slightly in most tiered subjects in 2021.

Entries to higher tier increased slightly in 2021 in many subjects
Percentage of entries to higher and foundation tiers between 2019 & 2021

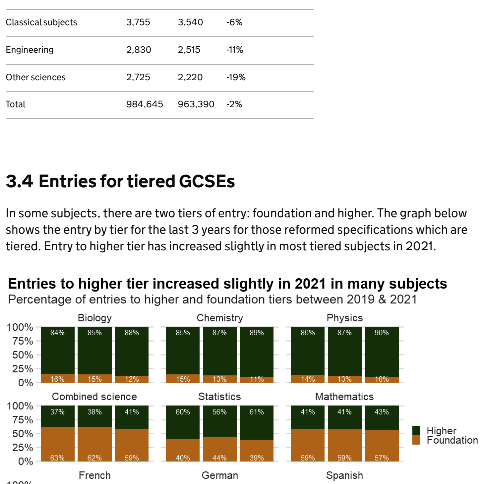


Table: Percentage of entries for higher tier between 2019 and 2021

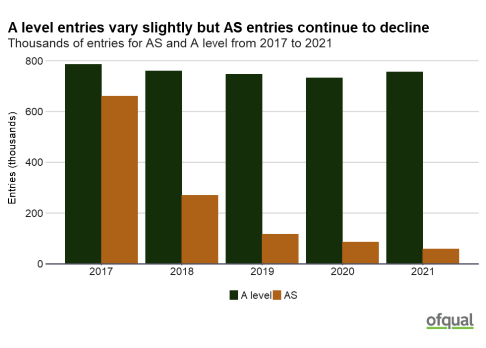
Subject	2019	2020	2021
Biology	84%	85%	88%
Chemistry	85%	87%	89%
Physics	86%	87%	90%
Combined science	37%	38%	41%
Statistics	60%	56%	61%
Mathematics	41%	41%	43%
French	52%	52%	56%
German	62%	60%	64%
Spanish	55%	53%	57%

4. AS and A level entries

The overall entry for A levels in summer 2021 increased by 3% (756,230 in 2021 compared to 731,855 in 2020). The change is likely to partly reflect a change in the size of the overall cohort: ONS census data indicates that there are more 18 year olds in England in 2021 than in 2020 (607,496 compared to 599,393).

The overall entry for AS in summer 2021 decreased by 33% (58,300 in 2021 compared to 86,970 in 2020). This drop in AS entries continues a trend caused by the decoupling of AS from A levels as part of AS and A level reforms.

A level entries vary slightly but AS entries continue to decline
Thousands of entries for AS and A level from 2017 to 2021



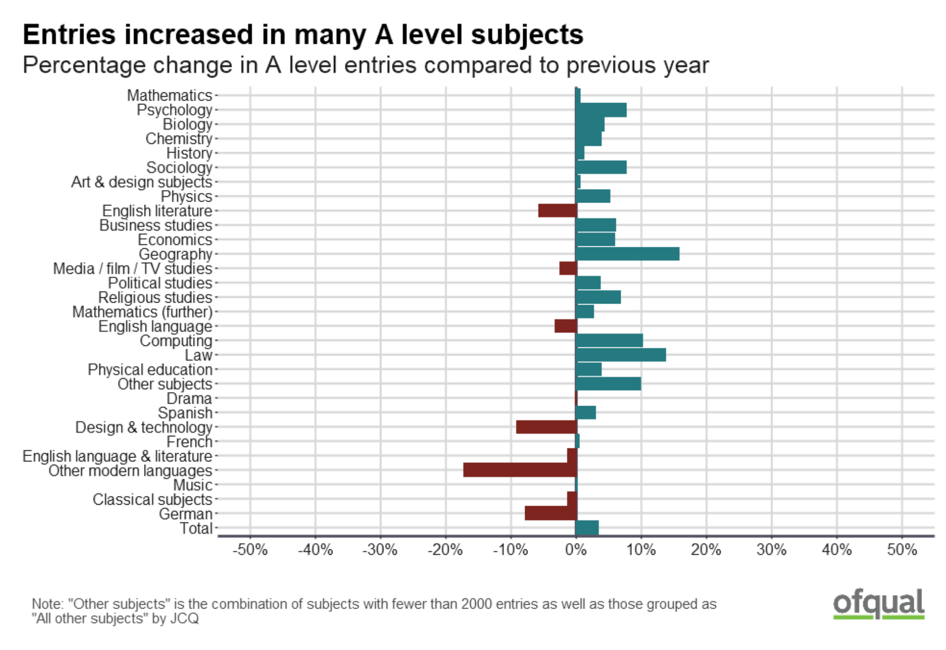
Qualification	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
A level	785,450	759,670	745,585	731,855	756,230
AS	659,880	269,090	117,595	86,970	58,300
Total	1,445,330	1,028,765	863,180	818,825	814,525

4.1 A level entries

Some A level subjects have increased in entry size and other subjects show a decrease. Geography, law and computing show the biggest percentage increases. Overall, modern foreign language (French, German, Spanish) entries varied a little compared to last year (increased entry in Spanish but a decrease in German, similar to GCSE), but

entries in other modern languages decreased by 17%. Entries in biology, chemistry and physics all show a slight increase this year. Entries in computing also show another sizeable increase (10%), following a similar change in 2020.

The graph and table below show the change in entries this year compared to 2020. The subjects are ordered by total entry size in 2021 (largest to smallest).



Note: In this table, “Other subjects” is the combination of subjects with fewer than 2,000 entries as well as those grouped as “All other subjects” by JCQ.

Subject grouping	June 2020	June 2021	% change in entries
Mathematics	89,730	90,290	1%
Psychology	63,490	68,315	8%
Biology	61,130	63,765	4%
Chemistry	53,435	55,485	4%
History	41,120	41,585	1%
Sociology	36,965	39,825	8%
Art & design subjects	39,145	39,370	1%
Physics	35,740	37,560	5%
English literature	38,310	36,135	-6%
Business studies	33,260	35,285	6%
Economics	30,865	32,700	6%
Geography	27,470	31,810	16%
Media / film / TV studies	19,525	19,025	-3%
Political studies	16,455	17,065	4%
Religious studies	14,680	15,685	7%
Mathematics (further)	14,475	14,850	3%
English language	14,715	14,230	-3%
Computing	11,730	12,930	10%
Law	11,275	12,825	14%
Physical education	10,355	10,755	4%
Other subjects	8,095	8,890	10%
Drama	8,685	8,670	0%
Spanish	8,225	8,465	3%
Design & technology	9,185	8,340	-9%
French	7,685	7,725	1%
English language & literature	7,250	7,155	-1%
Other modern languages	6,420	5,315	-17%
Music	5,035	5,045	0%
Classical subjects	4,665	4,600	-1%
German	2,735	2,525	-8%
Total	731,855	756,230	3%

4.2 Change in A level entries over time

The graphs below show the change in entries from 2017 to 2021 for a selection of A level subjects in 2021. Entries for social science subjects continue to increase.

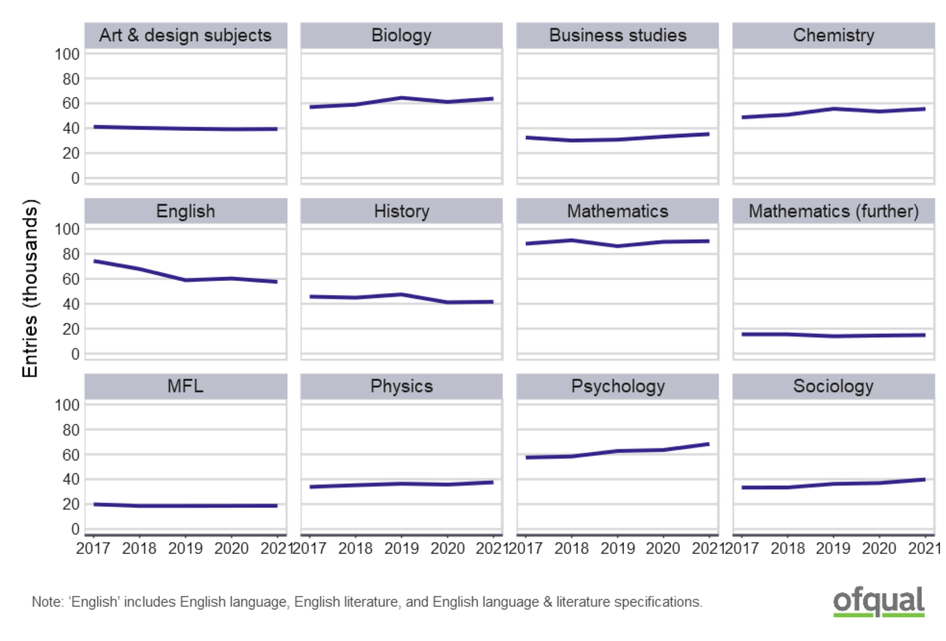


Table: Selected A level subject entry size over time. Note: In this table, ‘English’ includes English language, English literature and English language & literature specifications.

Subject	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Art & design subjects	41,150	40,300	39,635	39,145	39,370
Biology	56,945	58,925	64,460	61,130	63,765
Business studies	32,540	30,155	30,820	33,260	35,285
Chemistry	48,765	50,830	55,615	53,435	55,485
English	74,355	67,865	58,870	60,275	57,515
History	45,725	44,900	47,455	41,120	41,585
Mathematics	88,205	90,955	86,185	89,730	90,290
Mathematics (further)	15,450	15,450	13,920	14,475	14,850
Physics	33,840	35,255	36,420	35,740	37,560
Psychology	57,460	58,300	62,685	63,490	68,315
Sociology	33,330	33,420	36,295	36,965	39,825
Modern foreign languages	19,885	18,540	18,585	18,645	18,715

4.3 AS entries

Entries in all AS subjects experience another substantial decrease this year (percentage decreases range from 15% to 45%) although the decrease is less pronounced in Mathematics (further) and Art & design subjects. Overall, there has been a decline of 96% to 58,300 in 2021 from 1,331,955 entries in 2015, the last year that AS formed part of the A level qualification prior to reform.

The graph and table below show the change in entries this year (for subjects with entries of 2,000 or more) compared to 2020. The subjects are ordered by total entry size in 2021 (largest to smallest).

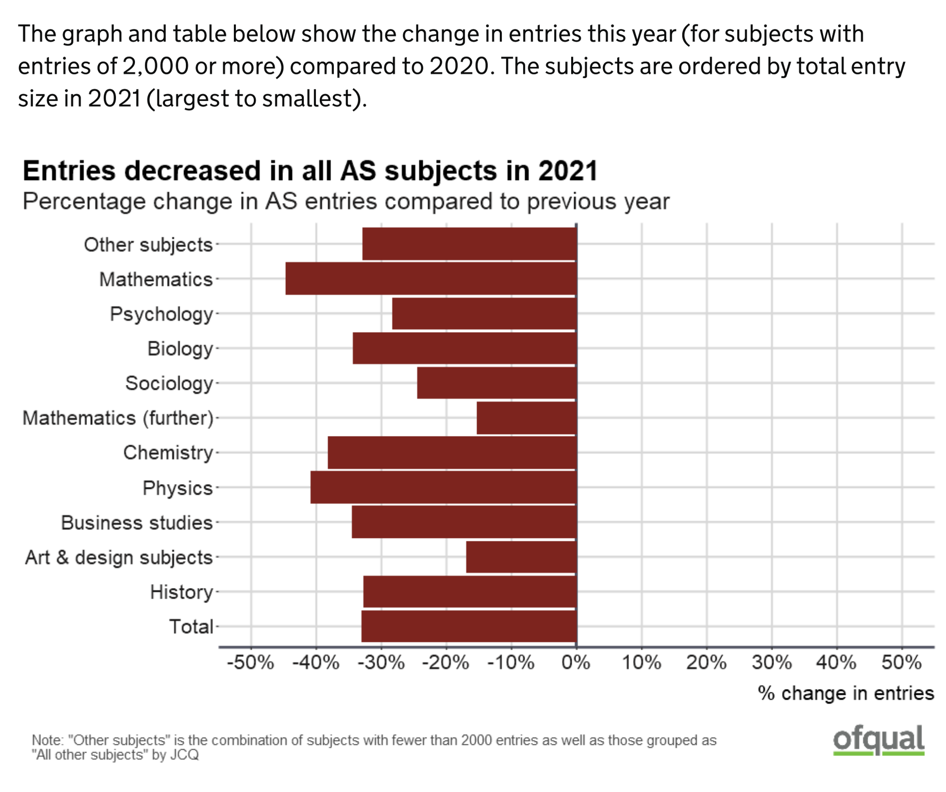


Table: Percentage change in AS entries compared to previous year. Note: “Other subjects” is the combination of subjects with fewer than 2,000 entries as well as those grouped as “All other subjects” by JCQ

Subject grouping	June 2020	June 2021	% change in entries
Other subjects	26,105	17,530	-33%
Mathematics	12,550	6,955	-45%
Psychology	8,110	5,820	-28%
Biology	7,230	4,745	-34%
Sociology	5,960	4,510	-24%
Mathematics (further)	4,925	4,175	-15%
Chemistry	6,390	3,950	-38%
Physics	4,745	2,810	-41%
Business studies	4,140	2,710	-35%
Art & design subjects	3,230	2,685	-17%
History	3,585	2,410	-33%
Total	86,970	58,300	-33%

5. Entries by centre type

The graph below indicates the percentage of entries for each qualification by centre type. In all cases, the majority of entries are from secondary non-selective, maintained centres, followed by sixth form and further education (FE) establishments.

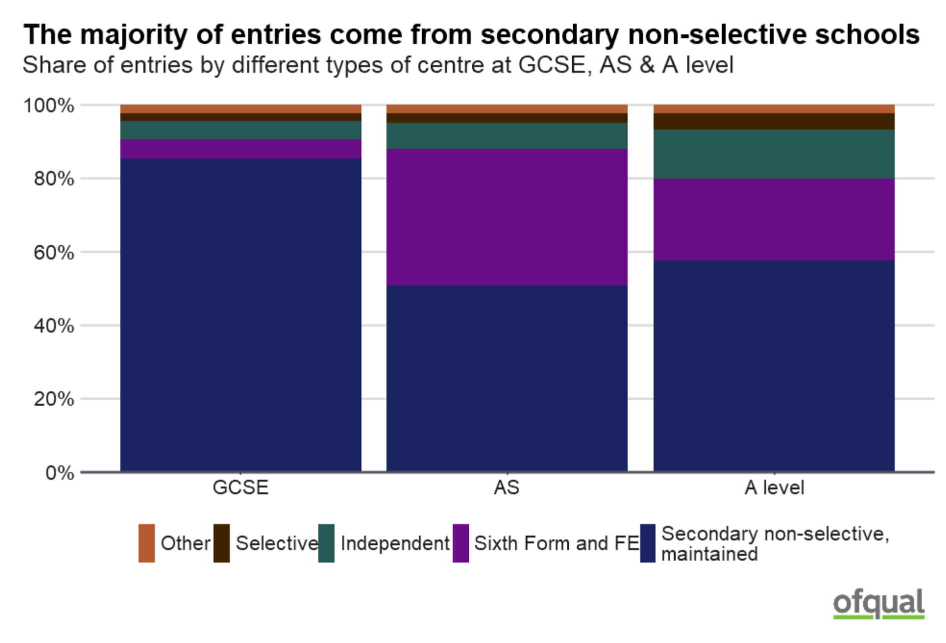


Table: Number of entries by qualification and centre type

Centre type	GCSE	AS	A level
Secondary non-selective, maintained	4,535,745	29,720	437,010
Sixth Form and FE	274,090	21,745	168,750
Independent	267,030	4,105	101,155
Selective	114,285	1,475	32,390
Other	109,920	1,250	16,925

Table: Percentage of total entries by centre type for each qualification

Centre type	GCSE	AS	A level
Secondary non-selective, maintained	86%	51%	58%
Sixth Form and FE	5%	37%	22%
Independent	5%	7%	13%
Selective	2%	3%	4%
Other	2%	2%	2%

6. Background information

In this report, Ofqual presents data on the number of provisional entries for GCSEs, AS and A levels in England received by exam boards for the summer 2021 series.

Schools and colleges enter students with exam boards to take qualifications in the summer. The figures for entries can normally change up to the day of the exams. On 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister announced that schools and colleges would again be closed to most students to help fight the spread of coronavirus and that exams would not take place as normal. On 25 February 2021, following consultation and a letter of direction from the Secretary of State, Ofqual published information setting out how grades would be determined for students entering for qualifications in summer 2021. We collect provisional data at the same time every year, at a point when it should be reasonably complete, although in 2021 centres were given an extension to the deadline for private candidates. The figures presented here are the provisional figures as received by exam boards by 28 April 2021 and final entry numbers may be slightly different from these.

In this report, all figures for the number of entries are rounded to the nearest 5.

Background information accompanying this report includes factors which may have an impact upon the entries in summer 2021 as well as information on data collected for this release and definitions of important terms used in the report.

Data tables published along with this report give provisional entry data (rounded to the nearest 5) for different subjects broken down by year group for GCSE, AS and A levels.

7. User 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 data.analytics@ofqual.gov.uk.

Head of profession: Vikas Dhawan

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