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▼ Menu

[Home](#) > [Education, training and skills](#) > [School curriculum](#) > [Secondary curriculum, key stage 3 and key stage 4 \(GCSEs\)](#)
> [Key stage 3 and 4 exam marking, qualifications and results](#)
> [Entries and late entries for GCSE, AS and A level: 2021 to 2022 academic year](#)



Official Statistics

Background information for entries and late entries for GCSE, AS and A level: 2021 to

2022 academic year

Published 17 November 2022

Applies to England

Contents

1. [Purpose](#)
2. [Geographical coverage](#)
3. [Description](#)
4. [External influences](#)
5. [Data source](#)
6. [Limitations](#)
7. [Quality assurance](#)
8. [Revisions](#)
9. [Confidentiality and rounding](#)
10. [Status](#)
11. [Related publications](#)
12. [Useful links](#)
13. [Feedback](#)

 [Print this page](#)

1. Purpose

This statistical release presents data on entries, late entries and certifications for GCSE, AS and A level for the autumn 2021 series, November 2021 series and June 2022 series, and historical data going back to 2018.

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

2. Geographical coverage

This report presents data on entries, late entries and certifications for GCSE, AS and A level in England.

3. Description

Four exam boards offered GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in England during the time period covered in this release:

AQA Education (AQA)

- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Pearson Education Ltd. (Pearson)
- WJEC-CBAC Ltd. (WJEC/Eduqas)

Schools and colleges are responsible for submitting entries to exam boards for GCSE, AS and A level on behalf of their students. In this statistical release, entries are counted separately for each component that makes up a qualification. An entry, therefore, is counted as a student being entered for an individual assessment, whereas certifications refer to the overall qualification. In summer 2020 and summer 2021, although entries continued to be made at the component level, students received teacher assessed grades at qualification level.

Exams were cancelled in summer 2020 and in summer 2021 following the closure of schools and colleges to most students, as part of the response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In summer 2020, as part of the exceptional arrangements for exam grading and assessment in 2020, students ultimately received the higher of a centre assessment grade or calculated grade for GCSE, AS and A level. In summer 2021, students were awarded grades based on an assessment by their teachers based upon what they had been taught and supported by a range of evidence. In 2022, exams and other formal assessments went ahead with some planned adaptations intended to recognise the disruption to education caused by the pandemic.

In this report, figures for the November 2022 series relate only to GCSE English language and maths, as only GCSEs in those subjects could be taken in that series. The November exam series usually occurs every year for post-16 GCSE English language and Maths. Students took exams in both the autumn and November series in 2020 and 2021. The autumn 2020 and 2021 series cover other GCSE subjects as well as AS and A level. In both 2020 and 2021, the exceptional autumn series were put in place to give students who had been unable to receive a grade in the summer the opportunity to do so, and to allow students who were disappointed with their grade in the summer the opportunity to improve their grade.

4. External influences

There are various factors which might have influenced the entries for GCSE, AS and A level in recent years:

4.1 Coronavirus (Covid-19)

In 2020 and 2021 exams did not take place because of the extraordinary circumstances of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and alternative arrangements to determine and award grades to students were put in place. This may have affected patterns of entry.

4.2 AS and A level

Reformed A levels in England are linear qualifications and therefore entries are counted at component level. Modular qualifications, such as many of the legacy qualifications, are counted at unit level. These differences may affect patterns of entry due to potentially differing numbers of units and components for each qualification across legacy and reformed A levels. From 2020 reformed A levels were available in all subjects.

In addition to this, reformed A levels in England differ from legacy qualifications in that the results of the AS qualification do not count towards a student's A level grade. As such, there is no requirement for students to enter the AS components or certificate at AS in a given subject, as they do not count towards the A level. These structural changes are likely to have been the key factor in a substantial decline in AS entries (and therefore total AS and A level entries) since the introduction of reformed AS and A levels from 2016 onwards.

4.3 GCSE

Reformed GCSEs started to be phased in for first teaching from 2015 with the first results issued for English language, English literature and mathematics in 2017. From 2020 all 53 reformed GCSEs were available. Reformed GCSEs are linear qualifications, therefore entries to reformed GCSEs are counted at component level. Legacy GCSEs differ in that they tended to be modular and therefore entries were counted at unit level. This may have had an impact on patterns of entry due to differing numbers of units and components across legacy and reformed GCSE qualifications.

As GCSEs have been reformed, Level 1 and Level 2 certificates (also known as international GCSEs) in equivalent subjects no longer count in school performance tables. The biggest impact of this is in English language, English literature and mathematics where, in 2017, there was a fall in the entries to Level 1 and Level 2 certificates and a shift in the cohort back to GCSEs.

Since August 2015, full time students who have not achieved a grade 4 (prior to 2017 a grade C) or above in mathematics and English language or English literature GCSEs have to continue studying mathematics and/or English language in order to be funded post-16.

5. Data source

Exam boards send data on entries and late entries as well as on the certificates they award in GCSEs, AS and A levels to Ofqual for each exam series.

6. Limitations

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.

7. 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. Publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

8. 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.

9. Confidentiality and rounding

To ensure confidentiality of the published accompanying data, figures have been rounded to the nearest 5. If the value is less than 5, it is represented as 0~ and 0 represents zero entries. As a result of rounded figures, the percentages (calculated on actual figures) shown in any tables may not necessarily add up to 100.

10. Status

These statistics are classified as Official Statistics.

11. Related publications

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

- Provisional entries for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2022 exam series (published by Ofqual)
- GCSEs (key stage 4) collection (published by the Department for Education)
- 16 to 19 attainment collection (published by the Department for Education)

For any related publications for qualifications offered in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland please contact the respective regulators – Qualifications Wales, CCEA and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

12. Useful links

- Report and data tables accompanying this release
- Definitions of important terms used in this release
- Policies and procedures that Ofqual follows for production of statistical releases

13. Feedback

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[Back to top](#)

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[Money and tax](#)

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