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Research and analysis

Equalities analysis: executive summary

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Applies to England

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Executive summary

Ofqual routinely analyses how attainment gaps for students with different characteristics (some of which are protected) and socio-economic status vary over time, for GCSEs and A levels (referred to here as general qualifications (GQ)) and a subset of vocational and technical qualifications (VTQ). Since 2023, results have been published in an interactive format on [Ofqual Analytics](#). This interactive tool allows users to explore how differences in results between groups of students with different characteristics and socioeconomic status have changed in relation to previous years.

The methodology used in this analysis allows us to identify and quantify any changes that have occurred. It is difficult, however, to identify the causes of any changes that are identified. There are likely to be many possible causal factors, including existing societal differences and the residual impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. Analysis from 2018 and 2019 shows that differences in results existed in pre-pandemic times and can vary from year to year. Many of the findings reported here are likely to reflect normal fluctuations in outcomes from one year to the next.

As in previous analyses, in addition to presenting the descriptive analysis of the raw differences in results between groups of students, Ofqual used a multivariate analytical approach. This allows us to explore the impact on overall results of each variable separately while controlling for other variables. This is important because we know that there are relationships between different features (for example, ethnicity and first language).

We used regression modelling to estimate differences in results for groups of students after controlling for other variables. The variables analysed were:

- ethnicity
- sex
- special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) status
- free school meal (FSM) eligibility (a measure of deprivation)
- Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) score
- prior attainment
- first language (GQ only)
- region (GQ only)
- centre type (GQ only) according to JCQ categories

For most of the above variables, the largest group is used as a comparator, and all other groups are compared with that. For example, for ethnicity, we use white British as the comparator as it is the largest group. We compare students in other ethnic groups with white British students of the same sex, SEND status, FSM eligibility, IDACI score, prior attainment, first language, region and centre type. We estimate the results of the 'average' student, that is, a student who falls into the comparator group for every variable, and can then examine the impacts of each of the other groups separately.

In this analysis, results for 2024 are presented alongside those for the period from 2018 to 2023. We compare results in 2024 with results in 2023. Grading continued as normal in summer 2024 following the return to pre-pandemic standards in summer 2023.

Analysis of results for 2018 to 2024 are shown in the interactive charts and accompanying data tables. Given the exceptional circumstances under which grades were awarded in 2020 and 2021, and adaptations for qualifications and the package of support in place for GCSE and A levels in 2022, any comparison with these years should be treated carefully.

General qualifications

For GCSEs and A levels we analysed 3 outcome measures:

- grade achieved
- the probability of attaining grade 7 and above for GCSE, or grade A and above for A level
- the probability of attaining grade 4 and above for GCSE, or grade C and above for A level

We used a set of criteria to identify changes we considered to be 'notable', those changes that we believe go beyond normal year-on-year fluctuations. These changes are drawn out in the interactive report. Of the many comparisons between groups of students presented in our modelling, the majority showed no notable change in 2024 with respect to 2023.

GCSE

For GCSE in 2024, the modelling showed that the grade for an "average" student was a high grade 4 (4.91 on a scale of 0 to 9, using the numeric grades). The probability of an "average" student attaining grade 7 and above was 16.5%, and the probability of them attaining grade 4 and above was 79.6%. The "average" student's grade and probabilities of attaining grade 4 or above and grade 7 or above were similar to 2023.

Only one group showed notable changes on all 3 outcome measures relative to demographics-matched students in the comparator groups:

Students in independent schools had higher outcomes than students in academies. For the numeric grade outcome, the difference of 1.7 grades was 0.1 grade wider than in 2023, but still narrower than the differences in 2018 to 2021.

A level

For A level in 2024, the modelling showed that the grade for an "average" student (a student who falls in the reference category for each variable)   was between a grade B and grade C (3.51 on a numeric scale of 0 to 6, where 0 was ungraded and 6 was A*). The probability of an "average" student attaining grade A and above was 17.7%, and the probability of them attaining grade C and above was 82.5%. The "average" student's grade and probabilities of attaining grade C or above and grade A or above in 2024 were broadly in line with 2023.

In this year's analysis, no groups showed notable changes on all 3 of the above outcome measures for A level when controlling for other variables.

Vocational and technical qualifications

For vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) analysis, we focused on national qualifications used alongside GCSEs and A levels in schools and colleges and included in the Department for Education's (DfE's) performance tables – specifically Level 1, 1/ 2 and 2 Technical Awards and Technical Certificates, and Level 3 Applied Generals and Tech Level qualifications. Unlike GCSEs and A levels, these

VTQs have different structures and grade scales. The analysis, therefore, looks at the probability of achieving the top grade, that is the highest grade that can be achieved in each qualification.

In most cases, we observed no notable changes over time in the relative average probabilities of achieving top grades between different groups of learners.

For level 1, 1/ 2 and 2 Technical Awards and Technical Certificates, the modelling showed that the probability of an "average" student attaining the top grade was 2.6% and 4.0% respectively in 2024. This is slightly lower than in 2023 for Technical Awards (3.6%) and slightly higher than in 2023 for Technical Certificates (2.1%).

For level 1 and 2 Technical Awards, students with very high prior attainment were more likely to achieve top grades than students with medium prior attainment in 2024. This gap has narrowed from a 13.4% likelihood in 2023 to a 7.5% likelihood in 2024.

For level 2 (and 1/2) Technical Certificates, there were notable changes relating to some groups with different ethnic backgrounds. However, the numbers of students in these groups were relatively small   and therefore are subject to greater uncertainty, so should be treated with caution.

For level 3 VTQs Applied Generals and Tech Level qualifications the modelling showed that the percentage probability of an "average" student attaining the top grade was 4.1% and 7.9% respectively in 2024. This is similar to 2023 (3.9% for Applied Generals and 7.3% for Tech Level qualifications).

For Applied Generals and Tech Level qualifications there were no notable changes identified between 2023 and 2024.

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