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Official Statistics

Background information for annual qualifications market report: academic year 2023 to 2024

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Applies to England

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Purpose

This release provides information on the qualifications market in England for the academic year 2023 to 2024. For this report, because certificates are collected quarterly, the 2023 to 2024 academic year is considered to be the start of October 2023 until the end of September 2024. Data is presented on the number of qualifications available by Ofqual regulated awarding organisations and certificates awarded for these qualifications. Data for previous years is also presented for comparison purposes.

Geographical coverage

This report presents data on the number of qualifications and certifications in England. This release also includes some statistics on certifications awarded outside of the UK for qualifications that are also awarded to students in England.

External influences

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The figures reported in this release cover the period from the 2019 to 2020 academic year through to the 2023 to 2024 academic year. These figures were,

therefore, likely affected by changes in public health restrictions and other interventions put in place in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic since 2020. Many exams and assessments across GCSE, AS and A level, and vocational and technical qualifications were cancelled or adapted for the [academic year 2019 to 2020](#) and the [academic year 2020 to 2021](#).

The academic year 2021 to 2022 saw the return of exams and other formal assessments with [some adaptations in place](#). Likewise, in the academic year 2022 to 2023, AS, A level, and most GCSE exams and formal assessments returned to pre-pandemic arrangements with some [some adaptations in place](#). For VTQs, adaptations to exams and other formal assessments that were put in place to help mitigate the impact of the pandemic, were no longer permitted.

Interests of users of qualifications

A range of factors influences the development and take-up of qualifications. There is a complex and dynamic relationship between those providing qualifications (awarding organisations), purchasers who teach or deliver the qualifications (schools, colleges and training providers), students, and other users such as employers and further and higher education providers. Government reforms of qualifications, performance measures, public funding policies and other requirements all significantly impact on many of these relationships.

Users of qualifications respond to incentives, many of which are driven by government policy changes. Awarding organisations respond to market demand for their qualifications, market opportunities, and 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. Decisions are often balanced against practical delivery considerations such as teacher availability and student demand. Schools and colleges may be informed, advised and influenced by organisations in their networks, which can influence their choice of which qualifications to offer.

Employers are users and purchasers of many vocational and other qualifications and, therefore, have influence over market demand for qualifications, including which qualifications lead to securing and sustaining employment in their sectors. Employer demand for certain types or specific qualifications can influence which qualifications

students choose to take. A range of factors influences employer demand, including policy changes, licence to practise requirements, sector development and other wider economic changes.

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.

Change influencing the market in England – GCSE, AS and A level qualifications

Accountability reform

Changes to performance measures may have influenced the uptake of some qualifications. 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 colleges offering key stage 4 education in England from 2016. They replaced the 5+ A* to 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 that 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.

Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures, as well as the government's separate measure of students entering [English Baccalaureate](#) (EBacc) subjects, may also further encourage providers 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 3 non-EBacc GCSEs.

Please note, [performance measures were suspended for the academic years 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021](#), as part of steps taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. [Performance measures for key stage 4 and post-16 qualifications returned for the academic year 2021 to 2022](#), with some adjustments.

Change influencing the market in England - vocational and other qualifications

Performance tables

The effect of changes to [performance tables](#), first introduced for reporting in the 2017 to 2018 academic year continue to be seen. Information on the changed requirements can be found in the [technical guidance for awarding organisations](#).

New Technical Awards were awarded for the first time in 2023 to 2024. From 2024, there were new rules about the design and structure of the qualifications. These changes were introduced so that students who take vocational and technical qualifications can be confident their results provide a reliable reflection of their abilities and are valuable in progressing their education and career. In many cases, the changes led to substantial differences in the design and delivery of the qualifications. For example:

- Students are now required take their external assessment at the end of their course. This enables awarding organisations to consider the performance of the whole cohort when setting grade boundaries for these assessments, improving their ability to set and maintain standards.
- The external assessments must be worth at least 40% of the marks available for the qualification.
- Changes to the design of some units. All units are marked and awarding organisations set grade boundaries after students have taken the assessment. Awarding organisations consider the performance of students on the assessment tasks when setting these grade boundaries. In the past, some assessments were not marked and were graded using pre-set criteria.

Many awarding organisations took the opportunity to update and refresh the content of these qualifications, and some choose to use a different grading scale for their new qualifications. Taken together, these changes represent a substantial change to the design and structure for many Technical Awards, with some qualifications changing more than others.

Funding changes for post 19-year-olds

The [funding rules](#) for an academic year for vocational qualifications aimed at students who are over 19 years of age may affect the number of certificates awarded in that academic year. For example, the [Adult Education Budget \(AEB\)](#)

[Devolution](#) and [National Skills Fund](#) are recent initiatives that both have the potential to influence the qualifications market, including the number type of certifications awarded in vocational, and technical qualifications.

Functional Skills Qualifications

From 1 September 2019, a [reformed suite of English and mathematics Functional Skills qualifications \(FSQs\)](#) have become available, which has likely affected the FSQs market and the number of certifications.

Whilst some Functional Skills qualifications in ICT were still certificating in 2023 to 2024, they are no longer available and have been replaced by Digital Functional Skills qualifications (DFSQs). DFSQs were first certificated against in 2023 to 2024 and are a separate qualification type only available at Entry Level and Level 1. DFSQs place greater emphasis on the use of digital devices and developing digital skills to use in daily life as well as in the workplace or education setting.

The number of certificates awarded in FSQs, particularly in the 2020 to 2021 academic year may have been impacted by temporary flexibilities introduced by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in February 2020. Additionally, the number of students achieving GCSEs in English and mathematics by the age of 16 during the COVID-19 pandemic may also have affected FSQ entries and certifications.

Introduction of T Levels

The introduction of T Levels is expected to affect the number of certificates awarded for Applied General and Technical qualifications. The first T Levels in construction, digital, and education and early years were available for teaching from September 2020 (certifying in 2022). Health and science T Levels were rolled-out in September 2021, followed by business and administration, engineering and manufacturing, and legal, finance, and accounting in September 2022. agriculture, environmental, and animal care T Levels were introduced in September 2023. For more details on T Levels roll-out, please see the Department for Education's [T Level action plan](#).

Change influencing international exports by awarding organisations in England

Many awarding organisations offering general, vocational and other qualifications that are regulated by Ofqual also operate internationally. The international appeal of

Ofqual-regulated qualifications is shaped by a combination of domestic policies, international agreements, and the evolving needs of global education and labour markets. Changes in any of these areas can influence the demand for, and recognition of, Ofqual-regulated qualifications outside the UK.

Qualification type

Regulated qualifications are classified into different qualification types to describe the nature of qualification. Qualification types provide information which complements that provided by the sector subject area classification and can give an indication of a number of features, such as the type of assessment, the qualification level and guided learning hours.

Qualification types are classified into 3 broad categories:

- 1) general
- 2) life and personal skills
- 3) vocational, technical and professional.

Some qualification types are 'regulatory types' which means they are subject to the General Conditions of Recognition as well as specific additional regulatory requirements or other restrictions (such as subject or qualification level conditions). Other qualification types are subject only to the General Conditions of Recognition.

Qualification type category is selected by the awarding organisation offering the qualification for the purposes of transparency on [Ofqual's Register](#).

As noted in Table 1, not all qualification types listed are reported in this release.

Table 1. Breakdown of the structure of qualification types

Broad qualification type	Specific qualification type	Status	Reported in this release
General	Advanced Extension Award	Regulatory type	Yes

General	GCE A level	Regulatory type	Yes
General	GCE AS level	Regulatory type	Yes
General	GCSE (9 to 1)	Regulatory type	Yes
General	GCSE (A* to G)	Regulatory type	Yes
General	Project	Regulatory type	Yes
General	Other General Qualification	Other qualification type	Yes
General	Free Standing Mathematics Qualification	Retired type	No
General	Principal learning	Retired type	No
Life and Personal Skills	English for Speakers of Other Languages	Regulatory type	Yes
Life and Personal Skills	Functional Skills	Regulatory type	Yes
Life and Personal Skills	Essential Skills (Northern Ireland)	Regulatory type	No
Life and Personal Skills	Other Life Skills	Other qualification type	Yes
Life and Personal Skills	Key Skills	Retired type	Yes
Life and Personal Skills	Basic Skills	Retired type	Yes

Vocational, Technical and Professional	Technical Qualification	Regulatory type	No
Vocational, Technical and Professional	End-Point Assessment	Regulatory type	No
Vocational, Technical and Professional	Occupational Qualification	Other qualification type	Yes
Vocational, Technical and Professional	Vocationally-Related Qualification	Other qualification type	Yes
Vocational, Technical and Professional	Performing Arts Graded Examinations	Other qualification type	Yes
Vocational, Technical and Professional	Other Vocational	Other qualification type	Yes
Vocational, Technical and Professional	General National Vocational Qualification	Retired type	No
Vocational, Technical and Professional	Vocational Certificate of Education	Retired type	No
Vocational, Technical and Professional	National Vocational Qualification	Retired type	No

Please note, Ofqual revised the list of qualification types in consultation with awarding organisations in 2018. Qualification types listed as retired type in Table 1 may still be reported on, where awarding organisations have not finished migrating their qualification types yet. Further detail on the changes to qualification types can be found in the [2020 to 2021 academic year annual qualifications market report background notes](#).

Please also note that new Digital Functional Skills Qualifications (DFSQs) were introduced for first teaching in August 2023 (certifying from October 2023). These replace Functional Skills Qualifications in Information and Communication

Technology. DFSQs are available at entry level and level 1.

Qualifications not covered in this release

T Level Technical Qualifications

Ofqual regulates the Technical Qualification that makes up part of an overall [T Level](#), which comprises the Occupational Specialism and core assessments. There is not a certificate for the Technical Qualification itself. The Department for Education (DfE) issues T Level certificates after collecting information from both awarding organisations and providers. Since there is no standalone certificate for the Technical Qualification, it is not included in this report. For overall T Level outcomes, please refer to the [T Level results](#) published by the DfE.

Apprenticeship end-point assessments

The number of qualifications and certifications for apprenticeship end-point assessments (EPAs) are not included in this release. For the annual qualifications market report, Ofqual receives data from awarding organisations. The awarding organisations that deliver EPAs do not issue certificates for the completion of EPAs. Instead, they request certificates on behalf of apprentices, which are issued by the DfE under Section A3 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. We report on volumes and outcomes of apprenticeship EPAs regulated by Ofqual [in a separate statistical publication](#). For information on the overall apprenticeships market, please see [DfE's report on apprenticeships and traineeships](#).

Data source

The data covers information on regulated qualifications and officially recognised awarding organisations in England from [Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications](#). Information on regulated qualifications (covering title, type, availability, awarding organisation, sector subject area and level) and recognised awarding organisations in England is taken from [Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications](#), referred to as the Register in this release. This information is correct at the point in time in which the Register was extracted (4 March 2025).

For the June 2024 exam series, certification data for GCSEs, AS and A levels was collected from awarding organisations in the summer and contains provisional

information on certificates awarded to students in England. For the June 2023 and November 2023 exam series, certification data was collected from awarding organisations after the provisional data and contains updated information on certificates awarded to students in England. Certification data for GCSEs, AS and A levels taken in England prior to June 2023 was provided by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), on behalf of the regulated awarding organisations offering GCSEs, AS and A levels.

GCSE certificates cover full course and short course. The data reported here is for students who were issued certificates and therefore does not include those who were unclassified or were absent.

For vocational and other qualifications, data on the number of certificates issued is sent quarterly by awarding organisations to Ofqual and is also reported in our [quarterly statistical releases](#).

Please note, in this release 'vocational and other' qualifications include all regulated qualifications other than GCSEs, AS and A levels, apprenticeship end-point assessments (EPAs) and T Level Technical Qualifications.

Limitations

Data is collected at the earliest point available, which is the first day after the end of the reporting period. This reduces the time between the activity and reporting on the activity.

The main source of potential error is in the information provided by awarding organisations. Ofqual cannot guarantee the number of certificates submitted is correct, although awarding organisations are expected to provide the correct data. Ofqual conducts a range of plausibility checks, which include comparing the data over time, searching for systematic issues. The figures reported in this release reflect the certificates issued 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. Publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

Revisions

Once published, data in the report is 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 in subsequent releases may be amended to reflect the new categorisation. In subsequent releases, the data on availability of qualifications may also be updated in line with the information available in [Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications](#) at the time of publication.

Confidentiality and rounding

In accordance with Ofqual's [rounding policy](#), figures shown in the report and accompanying data tables are rounded to the nearest 5. Values below 5 (1 to 4) are reported as 'fewer than 5' and '0' represents zero achievements.

We use unrounded values to work out percentages. Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers in the report and to one decimal place in the accompanying data tables. Because of rounded figures, the percentages shown in charts or tables may not add up to 100.

Status

These statistics are classified as official statistics.

Our statistical practice is regulated by the [Office for Statistics Regulation \(OSR\)](#). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

You are welcome to contact us directly at data.analytics@ofqual.gov.uk with any

comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the [OSR website](#).

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’ publications](#).

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](#)

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).

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

Head of profession: Ben Cuff

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