ofqual

Research and analysis

Equalities analysis: executive summary

Published 3 December 2025

Applies to England

Contents

Print this page

Ofqual routinely carries out equalities analysis for qualification results. This report presents an analysis of how attainment gaps for students with different characteristics (some of which are protected) and socio-economic status have changed in 2025 compared to previous years. A difference between this year's report compared to those published previously is that the analysis pertains only to A levels (referred to here as general qualifications [GQ]) and Applied Generals and Tech Level qualifications (referred to collectively here as vocational and technical qualifications [VTQ]).

Analysis of level 1, level 1/2, and level 2 qualifications (including GCSEs) is not included this year because, for students taking these qualifications, crucial information on their prior attainment at Key Stage 2 is not available following the cancellation of Key Stage 2 assessments in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A key feature of Ofqual's equalities analysis is the use of a multivariate analytical approach. This allows us to explore the impact on overall results of each student characteristic (for example, gender, or ethnicity) separately while controlling for other characteristics, that is, holding other characteristics constant. Prior attainment is key to this analysis as it is the strongest predictor of qualification results, and its inclusion allows for more accurate modelling of the impact of other student characteristics. Without

prior attainment data in our analysis, differences would likely be wrongly attributed to other characteristics leading to a misleading picture. We therefore decided to carry out this year's equalities analysis only for level 3 qualifications for which prior attainment data remains available.

As in previous analyses, in addition to presenting the descriptive analysis of the raw differences in results between groups of students, 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 according to JCQ categories (GQ only)

For most of the above variables, the largest group is used as a comparator, against which all other groups are compared. 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 results of each of the other groups separately.

Since 2023, we have published our equalities analysis 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 over time.

In this report, results for 2025 are presented alongside those for the period from 2018 to 2024 in the interactive charts and accompanying data tables. We compare results in 2025 with results in 2024. Grading continued as normal in summer 2025 and summer 2024 following the return to pre-pandemic standards in summer 2023.

General qualifications

For A levels, we analysed 3 outcome measures:

- grade achieved
- the probability of attaining grade A or above
- the probability of attaining grade C or above

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.

A level

For A level in 2025, 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 (3.53 on a numeric scale of 0 to 6, where 0 is ungraded and 6 is A*). The probability of an “average” student attaining grade A or above was 18.2%, and the probability of them attaining grade C or above was 83.4%. The “average” student’s grade and probabilities of attaining grade C or above and grade A or above in 2025 were broadly in line with 2024.

Of the many comparisons between groups of students presented in our modelling, the majority showed no notable change in 2025 with respect to 2024. No group showed notable changes on all 3 of the above outcome measures.

Vocational and technical qualifications

The analysis focused on national qualifications taken alongside general qualifications in schools and colleges and included in the Department for Education’s (DfE’s) performance tables – specifically Level 3 Applied Generals and Tech Level qualifications. Unlike GQs, 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, and a set of criteria are used to identify “notable” changes, that is, changes that we believe exceed usual year-to-year fluctuations.

For Applied Generals and Tech Level qualifications, the modelling showed that the probability of an “average” student attaining the top grade was 5.2% and 10.6% respectively in 2025, which was broadly in line with 2024.

For Applied Generals, there was no notable change identified between 2024 and 2025 for any group.

For Tech Level qualifications, all but one of the many comparisons between groups of students presented in our modelling showed no notable change in 2025 with respect to 2024.

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 multiple causal factors, including existing societal differences. Results for 2018 and 2019 show that differences in qualification results have existed across this period of time and can vary from year to year. Many of the between-year differences on individual variables reported here are likely to reflect normal fluctuations in outcomes from one year to the next. Also, given the exceptional circumstances under which grades were awarded in 2020 and 2021, and adaptations for qualifications and the package of support in place in 2022, any comparison with these years should be treated carefully.

↑ Back to top

Services and information

Benefits

Births, death, marriages and care

Business and self-employed

Childcare and parenting

Citizenship and living in the UK

Crime, justice and the law

Disabled people

Driving and transport

Government activity

Departments

News

Guidance and regulation

Research and statistics

Policy papers and consultations

Transparency

How government works

Get involved