



GCE 2021: Notes for users of the JCQ results tables

These notes should be read before consulting the results tables as they put the results in context and provide explanations for some year-on-year changes in reporting and outcomes. However, the notes do not attempt to outline the detail of every change that may influence results or entries. The relevant government and regulatory websites give a more extensive overview of system changes. **It would help if you also referred to the JCQ press notices with additional details regarding key features of this year's outcomes.**

Regulator links:

England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual>

Northern Ireland

<https://ccea.org.uk/regulation>

Wales

<https://qualificationswales.org/english/>

<https://qualificationswales.org/cymraeg/>

Education Department links

England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>

Northern Ireland

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/>

Wales

<https://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/?lang=en>

Interpreting the UK tables

There has been a rise in the overall A level entry for the summer 2021 series compared to last year, increasing by 5.1%. An increase in population (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) only partly explains this. Some A level subjects have increased in entry, and other subjects showed a decrease. Geography, Law, Computing and Psychology have seen sizable increases.

The overall AS entry has decreased year on year, following reforms in England, where the GCE AS level was decoupled from the GCE A level. Therefore, AS entries are not stable.

GCE in England

In January 2021, the Secretary of State for Education in England confirmed that learners taking AS and A levels in summer 2021 should be awarded grades based on an assessment by their teachers.

The grades awarded this year represent the holistic, objective judgement of learners' teachers. Teachers were asked to base their judgements on a range of evidence of each learner's performance in each subject, but only on content they had been taught.

When determining the grade, teachers were asked to reflect the standard at which the learner was performing. This is different from 2020 when centres were asked to determine a grade based on their judgement of what learners would likely have achieved if they had completed examinations. Further information about the awarding process in England can be accessed [here](#).

As part of the exceptional arrangements this year, exam boards were asked to put in place a quality assurance framework to check that centres have appropriately determined grades and were consistent with the approaches they said they would adopt in their Centre Policies. Centres also conducted internal quality assurance. Further information about the quality assurance process in England can be accessed [here](#).

Northern Ireland

In January 2021, the Minister for Education in Northern Ireland confirmed the approach to awarding grades in summer 2021. The grades would be based on teacher professional judgements with moderation.

The grades awarded this year represent the holistic, objective judgement of learners' teachers. Teachers were asked to base their judgements on a range of evidence of each learner's performance in each subject, but only on content they had been taught.

When determining the grade, teachers were asked to reflect the standard at which the learner was performing. This is different from 2020 when centres were asked to determine a centre assessed grade based on their judgement of the grade learners would likely have achieved if they had completed examinations. Further information about the awarding process in Northern Ireland can be accessed [here](#).

As part of the exceptional arrangements this year, exam boards were asked to put in place a quality assurance framework to check that centres have appropriately determined grades and were consistent with the approaches they said they would adopt in their Centre Policies. Centres also conducted internal quality assurance. Further information about the quality assurance and moderation process in Northern Ireland can be accessed [here](#).

Wales

In January 2021, the Minister for Education in Wales confirmed centres would determine the AS or A level grades awarded to learners in summer 2021.

The centre determined grades awarded this year represent the holistic, objective judgement of learners' centres. Centres were asked to base their judgements on a range of evidence of each learner's demonstrated attainment in areas of the qualification content that a learner has covered.

When determining the grade, centres were asked to reflect the standard at which the learner was performing. This is different from 2020 when centres were asked to base centre assessment grades on their judgement of the grade each learner was likely to achieve had they sat exams at the end of their course. Further information about the awarding process in Wales can be accessed [here](#).

As part of the exceptional arrangements this year, exam boards were asked to put in place a quality assurance framework to check that centres have appropriately determined grades and were consistent with the approaches they said they would adopt in their Centre Policies. Centres also conducted internal quality assurance. Further information about the quality assurance process in Wales can be accessed [here](#).

Only WJEC offers the AS and A levels designed for Wales. Where WJEC does not provide a subject, Qualifications Wales may allow students to take qualifications from other exam boards. Centres in Wales that only entered general qualifications regulated by Ofqual were included in quality assurance procedures for those qualifications. All other centres went through the WJEC quality assurance procedures.

Changes to the results tables (Applied A/AS Levels)

From summer 2021, Applied A/AS levels have been merged with A/AS levels for classification purposes in the JCQ results tables. Two subjects are remaining in the Applied Category: Health & Social Care and Applied ICT. These subjects are incorporated in the main A/AS results tables, and separate tables for Applied subjects will no longer be published. The 2020 reference data included in the 2021 tables was changed to reflect this new classification.

Data Suppression

To protect candidate anonymity, data suppression (indicated by 0~) is applied to the results tables when the combined number of male and female candidates that entered a subject is fewer than 10. In this case, all rows for the subject would be suppressed. Suppression is also applied to subjects when one of the gender breakdowns had fewer than ten candidates enter. In this case, the separate rows for male and female would be suppressed, but the combined 'male & female' row would not be suppressed.

Limitations

Given the approach to determining grades in 2021 has been different from any previous summer, it is difficult to draw comparisons with previous sets of results.

The JCQ tables include breakdowns by Male and Female gender types. Currently, JCQ and its member awarding organisations do not collect the data required to include the provision of non-binary candidates. However, after consultation with stakeholders and employee representation groups from awarding organisations, and one of our members consulting with Stonewall, we are pleased to share that we will be looking at this in the near future, and we commit to consulting with key stakeholders to demonstrate our continued support for the non-binary community.

JCQ carries out quality assurance checks to ensure that the data received is accurate to the best of our knowledge. The results tables are provisional. Results are updated after this point to include changes such as appeals. Whilst provisional, we do not anticipate significant changes to outcomes will occur.

The tables should be read in conjunction with the press notices in the [news releases](#) section of the JCQ website. The press notices outline the context of year-on-year changes in results.