News story: Guide to GCSE results for England, 2017

Key points

1. Overall GCSE outcomes are stable.
2. Overall results for 16-year-olds in English language, English literature and mathematics are stable at grade C/4 when comparing combined GCSE and international GCSE outcomes last summer, with GCSE outcomes this summer.
3. For the reformed GCSE qualifications in English language and mathematics, outcomes for 16-year-olds in England are broadly similar to the modelling that we published in our blog.

Today (24 August 2017) we are publishing:

Background to GCSE reforms

The first of the reformed GCSEs in English language, English literature and mathematics, are being issued today. The qualifications were designed in line with the Government's policy for the qualifications and therefore:

- have more demanding subject content than the qualifications they replace
- are accessible, with good teaching, to the same proportion of students that currently sit GCSE examinations at the end of key stage 4
- all the assessments are taken at the end of the course and, for these 3 subjects, all assessment is by examination
- use tiered examination papers only where it is necessary: so English language and English literature GCSEs are not tiered and GCSE mathematics is tiered

The government also asked us to consider the case for a new grading scale. Students' performance is being recognised using the new grades of 9 to 1.

These changes reflect the government's intention that the qualifications better prepare students for further study and work, are more stretching for the most able students and remain accessible to the range of students who have traditionally taken GCSEs.

The new GCSEs are being phased in. By 2020 all GCSEs taken in England will be in line with this policy and be graded 9 to 1. (The policy steer was set out in a letter from the Secretary of State to Ofqual in February 2013).

Setting standards in GCSEs in 2017

We have set out our approach to setting standards in GCSEs this summer in our monitoring report. In the 2017 awards, exam boards used predictions based on students' prior attainment at key stage 2 to inform the setting of grade boundaries.

And, as in previous years, senior examiners have been involved in all awards. In the reformed GCSEs they were asked to check whether the student work at the grade boundaries suggested by the statistics was at an acceptable standard for the grade (either 7, 4 or 1). We have not intervened to ask any boards to change their grade boundaries this summer.

For the reformed GCSEs we published a blog that estimated the likely proportions of 16-year-old students that would achieve each grade in GCSE English language and mathematics, including grade 9, in England (a technical explanation of the modelling is also available). As with any modelling, our figures were based on a number of assumptions, so these were only estimates. However, our modelling is broadly similar to the proportion of 16-year-old students in England achieving each grade this summer. We said in our blog that we could be more confident in the estimates at grades 7, 4 and 1, since the bottom of these grades were set to align with the bottom of grades A, C and G in the previous A* to G grade structure. The modelling shows that the estimates are very close to the actual outcomes at these grades.

Grade 9 in reformed GCSE subjects

This summer is the first award of the new grade 9 in the reformed GCSE English language, English literature and mathematics specifications. Grade 9 is not the same as A*: it is a new grade, designed to recognise the very highest performing students, so there are fewer grade 9s than there were A*s.

Last year we announced the detail of how grade 9 will work, known as the 'tailored approach'. This approach will mean that across all subjects (when all GCSEs are graded 9 to 1) about 20% of those students achieving grade 7 or above will achieve a grade 9. We adopted this approach in order to be fair across all subjects, including those where there are relatively high proportions of students currently achieving A* and A. We have provided more details of the approach to setting grade 9 on our blog.

In the first year each specification is awarded, grade 9 is calculated arithmetically, using the formula shown below for 16 year old students that are matched to their prior attainment at key stage 2. These are the students that are included in the statistical predictions that are used to guide awarding. This means that the percentage of all students achieving a grade 9, relative to the percentage achieving a grade 7, will not necessarily correspond to the formula.

Percentage of those achieving at least a grade 7 who will be awarded a grade 9 = 7% + 0.5 × (percentage of students awarded grade 7 and above)

Grade boundaries

It is always difficult to compare in a meaningful way grade boundaries between old and new qualifications. Maximum marks for the papers, the number

of papers in a subject and the type of assessment can all be different. Where some of the old qualifications had coursework, grade boundaries on written papers may have been higher to compensate for high marks on the coursework.

Comparing the previous GCSE qualifications with the reformed qualifications is particularly challenging for a number of reasons.

The reformed GCSE English language and English literature qualifications are no longer tiered. The new papers are very different from the legacy papers since they are targeted at the full range of ability.

In mathematics, the mark allocations and the grades covered by the tiered papers have changed. When producing their question papers, exam boards are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the targeting of marks to grades complies with our subject level conditions. However, it is not possible to accurately predict the difficulty of a question before it has been sat by students. This means that a question targeted at a particular grade might perform at a lower or higher grade than intended, which will influence the position of the grade boundaries. Our sawtooth research also suggests that, on average, grade boundaries will increase over the first few years of a specification.

The targeting of marks to grades for the foundation and higher tier in reformed GCSE mathematics are shown in the figure below (the numbers on the bars refer to the targeting of marks to grades, not to the grade that a student might achieve). The figure also shows the average grade boundary at each grade for the reformed GCSE mathematics qualifications. The average grade boundaries are weighted by the number of entries to each qualification.

GCSE English language

More 16-year-olds took GCSEs in English language this summer following changes to school performance tables. To provide a meaningful comparison of results for 16-year-olds, we have therefore combined GCSE and international GCSE data from summer 2016 to compare with GCSE data this year.

The following table shows the cumulative percentage outcomes for 16-year-olds in England in summer 2016 and summer 2017, comparing grades C/4, and grades A/7 (all of the GCSE and international GCSE combined figures in this guide are based on data provided to Ofqual by exam boards a week before results day. While the data is not complete, any missing data is likely to be missing at random). This shows that overall results for 16-year-old students in English language have remained stable in summer 2017 when compared to summer 2016, particularly at grade C/4.

Cumulative percentage at grade	2016	2017
A or 7	16.2	16.8
C or 4	69.7	69.9

GCSE English language spoken language endorsement

Performance in spoken language is reported separately and in the reformed GCSE qualifications is graded as pass, merit, or distinction. Students not achieving a grade are not classified. For the spoken language endorsement students do a prepared spoken presentation on a specific topic.

The table below shows the percentage of students achieving each endorsement grade, broken down by the grade for their performance in their examinations (these figures are based on data provided to Ofqual by exam boards a week before results day. While the data is not complete, any missing data is likely to be missing at random). It is not surprising that students achieving higher grades for their examination performance tend to perform better in the spoken language assessment too.

Grade	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Not classified	Total
9	76.2	20.8	2.5	0.4	13,988
8	63	31.5	5.1	0.4	28,083
7	49.6	40.5	9.4	0.6	49,267
6	34.6	47.4	17.2	0.8	92,418
5	20.9	48.1	29.4	1.6	116,375
4	11.5	42.2	43.2	3.1	106,417
3	5.6	29.9	58.5	6.1	136,224
2	2.4	16.8	69.3	11.6	55,943
1	1.4	10.6	67.2	20.8	21,010
U	1.2	7.6	58.1	33.1	6,623
Total	20.9	36.6	38.1	4.4	626,348

GCSE English literature

The 16-year-old cohort has increased this summer compared to last summer. More students are taking GCSE qualifications in English literature instead of international GCSEs, following changes to school performance tables. The reformed English literature GCSE is also now the main route to gain a qualification containing literature (previously students could take GCSE English which incorporated both language and literature). This, coupled with the way in which Progress 8 performance measures are now calculated, has contributed to the increased uptake of English literature. These changes to the cohort will have had an impact on the overall outcomes.

To provide a comparison of results for 16-year-olds we have combined GCSE and international GCSE data from summer 2016 to compare with GCSE data this year. The following table shows the cumulative percentage outcomes for 16-year-olds in England in summer 2016 and summer 2017, comparing grades C/4, and grades A/7. This shows that overall results for 16-year-old students in English literature have remained stable at grade C/4. The lower outcomes at grade A/7 this year are likely to be as a result of the cohort changes this summer.

Cumulative percentage at grade	2016	2017
A or 7	21.7	19.1
C or 4	72.5	72.5

The increased uptake in English literature is as a result of new schools and colleges entering students to GCSE English literature, and existing schools and colleges, on average, entering more students this summer compared to last summer. This is shown in the table below.

Year	Mean number of entries per centre	Number of centres
2016	120.0	3065
2017	131.2	3965

GCSE mathematics

Like the legacy qualifications, the reformed GCSE mathematics qualifications use a two-tier assessment model. However, there are differences in the content and demand of both the higher and foundation tiers. The balance of entries between tiers has therefore changed. This is shown in the table below, that shows the percentage of 16-year-old students in England sitting the foundation and higher of the reformed qualifications this summer, compared to the linear qualifications in summer 2016.

Tier	2016	2017
Foundation	24%	47%
Higher	76%	53%

Following changes to performance tables there has also been a small increase in the number of 16-year-olds taking GCSEs in mathematics rather than international GCSEs. To provide a comparison of results for 16-year-olds we have combined GCSE and international GCSE data from summer 2016 to compare with GCSE data this year. The following table shows the cumulative percentage outcomes for 16-year-olds in England in summer 2016 and summer 2017, comparing grades C/4, and grades A/7. This shows that overall results for 16-year-old students in mathematics have remained stable at grades A/7 and C/4.

Cumulative percentage at grade	2016	2017
A or 7	19.7	19.9
C or 4	69.9	70.7

Post-16 outcomes in English language and mathematics

There has been an increase in post-16 entries for GCSE English language and mathematics qualifications this summer (from 116,821 to 135,881 in English language, and from 160,783 to 167,541 in mathematics). The table below shows the cumulative percentage outcomes for 17-year-olds, 18-year-olds, and students aged 19+ for English language and mathematics. These figures combine the outcomes for post-16 students taking the legacy and reformed

qualifications this year, and compare these to outcomes for post-16 students taking the legacy qualifications in summer 2016.

Subject	Age	A/7 2016	A/7 2017	C/4 2016	C/4 2017
English	17-year-olds	0.8	1.1	21.9	29.1
English	18-year-olds	0.2	0.3	16.9	24.6
English	19+	1.9	2.7	33.1	39.4
Maths	17-year-olds	1.9	1.5	26.4	24.6
Maths	18-year-olds	0.6	0.4	18.0	16.5
Maths	19+	3.2	2.4	39.3	33.9

GCSE (combined) science

Overall entries for GCSE (combined) science have decreased this summer when compared to summer 2016 (from 375,654 to 283,390). In general, students take GCSE science in year 10 and GCSE additional science in year 11. This year the entry from year 10 students is lower, because these students are waiting to take the reformed GCSE science qualifications that are available in summer 2018.

The change in entry has an impact on the overall results. In the past, year 10 students generally out-performed the year 11 students at grades A* to C. This year, although the results for 16-year-olds have remained stable, the overall outcomes are lower because the year 10 cohort has changed. This is shown in the table below for England.

Cumulative percentage at A* to C	2016	2017
Year 10 and under	63.6	35.8
Year 11	47.6	48.0
Overall	52.7	47.9

News story: ‘Momentum must be maintained’ as pound coin changeover enters final weeks

On a visit today (24 August) to one of the UK’s largest coin storage facilities, Vaultex UK Ltd, in Dagenham, the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, Andrew Jones MP, thanked businesses for their efforts so far in the transition, but urged them to maintain momentum.

Citing findings from the cash centres, the minister warned that businesses must be vigilant when returning coins to centres such as the Dagenham storage facility for sorting. Currently half of the £1 coins being returned are the

new 12-sided £1 coin – not the soon-to-be discontinued old one. This confusion slows the process down by removing new pound coins from entering circulation and keeping the old round pounds in our tills and purses.

Speaking at the coin centre, Mr Jones said:

> There has been a fantastic effort from both the public and businesses in returning more than 1 billion old round pounds, and I thank everybody involved in this process so far. But there is still more to do before the October 15 deadline.
>
> Businesses must remain vigilant when returning coins and ensure old and new coins are organised in separate packaging to make the sorting process quicker and easier.
>
> We also want cashiers and shopkeepers working at till points, who are truly on the front line of the changeover, to play their part to ensure only new pound coins are given to shoppers in their change.

The government has been working hard with businesses over the last three years to help make the changeover as smooth as possible. Key to this has been reminding business to check all types of equipment that may still be holding old coins alongside regular tills and cash drawers.

News story: Government to commission assessment of international students

The government will today commission its independent advisers on migration to complete a detailed assessment of the social and economic impact of international students in the UK.

The commission is part of a series of publications coming out today which will feed into a robust and comprehensive evidence base on the impact of international students.

Alongside the commission, the UK’s first publication of exit checks data will provide a comprehensive account of the compliance of international students. In addition, the Office of National Statistics is releasing a report as part of its ongoing programme of work looking at the impact of students on net migration.

Taking action

The government has been clear that it is committed to keeping the doors open to genuine students, while at the same time taking action to crack down on immigration abuse from poor quality institutions that were damaging the UK's reputation as a provider of world-leading education. Since 2010, this has included taking away the ability of more than 900 – often bogus or low quality – colleges to bring in international students.

The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) will be asked to examine the impact both EU and non-EU students have on the labour market and economy whilst in the UK.

Issues the MAC will be asked to consider will include:

- the impact of tuition fees and other spending by international students on the national, regional, and local economy and on the education sector
- the role students play in contributing to local economic growth
- the impact their recruitment has on the provision and quality of education provided to domestic students

Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

> There is no limit to the number of genuine international students who can come to the UK to study and the fact that we remain the second most popular global destination for those seeking higher education is something to be proud of.
>
> We understand how important students from around the world are to our higher education sector, which is a key export for our country, and that's why we want to have a robust and independent evidence base of their value and the impact they have.

Popular destination

The UK is the second most popular destination for international students, with 4 UK universities in the world's top 10, 16 in the top 100 and international student satisfaction in the UK at 91 per cent for undergraduates.

Last year the UK saw an increase of 6 per cent in visa applications for Russell Group universities while visa applications sponsored by universities are 17 per cent higher than they were in 2010.

This has driven in part by an effective and user-friendly visa system which sees 99 per cent of entry clearance applications decided within the target of 15 days and the grant rate for Tier 4 (General) visa entry clearance applications having increased every year since 2010, with 96 per cent of applications granted in 2016.

Immigration Minister Brandon Lewis said:

> We have always been clear that our commitment to reducing net migration to sustainable levels does not detract from our determination to attract international students from around the world.
>
> Since 2010 we have clamped down on abuse, while increasing the number of genuine students that come to the UK from around the world.

The MAC, which comprises of a group of internationally recognised experts in their field, is responsible for providing transparent, independent and evidence-based advice to the government on migration issues. They have been asked to report back by September 2018.

Press release: HMRC reminds parents to update their children's educational details

As exams results are revealed across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, HMRC are urging parents to inform them if any of their children are aged 16+ and continuing in full-time education or are undertaking an apprenticeship otherwise their payments will stop. Alternatively, if a young person leaves education or training – for example to start full-time work or because their course has ended – claimants must report this change straight away to prevent the build-up of overpayments which they will have to pay back.

Parents can use their Personal Tax Account (PTA) to update both their Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit information online in a matter of minutes; it's quick and easy, and more than 12 million customers have registered for the PTA so far.

Angela MacDonald, Director General of Customer Services, said:

> Congratulations to all students getting their results today. Once parents or guardians know what their child has decided to do it's really important they let us know as soon as possible, so they continue to get the right benefits and credits.
>
> This can be done quickly and simply using the Personal Tax Account, which is available 24 hours-a-day, seven days-a-week. That means that parents can let us know their child's education status, at a

time that suits them ahead of the 31 August deadline.

1. Customers can access their Personal Tax Account on any device – PC, tablet or smartphone. It is secure and takes just a few minutes to get started. Those doing it for the first time will need:
    - their National Insurance number
    - either a recent payslip or P60 (a passport can be used if you don't have these)
    - a phone to receive a security access code.
2. There are three simple steps for customers to get started:
    - Go to gov.uk/personal-tax-account and click 'start now'.
    - Set up a Government Gateway account (if not already held) by answering a few simple questions – this is where a payslip or P60 is needed. A security access code will then be sent to the customer's phone.
    - Enter the access code on their phone when prompted, which will take them straight to their account.
3. People can continue to claim for teenagers aged between the ages of 16 and 19 years old if they are in qualifying full-time education or training. Online information about what counts as education and training can be found on GOV.UK.
4. Young people must be accepted onto qualifying education or training before their 19th birthday to be eligible. Child Tax Credit claimants need to confirm their continued eligibility annually for 16, 18 and 19 year olds.
5. Those unable to access the internet can also inform HMRC of changes on the phone by calling 0300 200 3100 or sending a letter to: Child Tax Credits: Tax Credits Office, Preston, PR1 4AT and/or Child Benefit: Child Benefit Office, PO Box 1, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE88 1AA.
6. Claimants could be given a penalty for failing to report a change, or even prosecuted for benefit fraud if they are found to have deliberately claimed money they were not entitled to.
7. If customers need help defining what counts as education, the government's website contains information to help them. Some of the educational options available to 16 year olds include GCSEs, A/AS levels, national diplomas and NVQs up to level 3, as well as apprenticeships or traineeships. The qualifying education level is non-advanced, so studying for a degree at university or a BTEC Higher National Certificate does not count.

8. HMRC's Flickr channel can be found here

9. Follow HMRC's press office on Twitter @HMRCpressoffice

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Press release: Metropolitan Police's use of Facial Recognition Technology at the Notting Hill Carnival, 2017

Paul Wiles, Biometrics Commissioner writes about the use of Facial Recognition Technology at the Notting Hill Carnival.

This kind of biometric technology (Facial Recognition Technology) has the potential to be a really useful crime fighting tool but we are not there yet. It needs to be properly tested and evaluated if it is going to be effective and it will need to be handled carefully by the police and the government if it is going to be trusted by the public.

Key messages

1. There is a public benefit in the use of such technology if it can be shown to help prevent the problems that there have been at previous carnivals by assisting the police to catch offenders or prevent crime.

2. Tests of facial matching for spotting individuals in large crowds have so far had very poor success – hence the Metropolitan Police's trial. It is good that they have made their trial public but they must carry out a proper evaluation and publish the results.

3. The police already hold over 20 million facial images but there is as yet no single, shared policing system for storing and searching police held images nor an evaluation of its accuracy and usefulness.

4. Police forces need to work together to agree on a single facial recognition system that has been proved to work in the field and government needs to create a legislative framework for its use, with independent oversight to provide public assurance, as it has done for DNA and fingerprints.

5. The previous Biometrics Commissioner made similar points as have others, such as the Science and Technology Select Committee, and we have yet to see what the government proposes as their Biometrics Strategy has been delayed for some time.

Broader explanation

1. Police already hold over 20 million facial images on both the Police National Database and in separate force systems. Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (Scotland) recently commented unfavourably on this situation since it means that different standards are being applied across the UK. Most of these facial images are custody images. The courts held in 2012 that these holdings were unlawful and the Home Office responded to that judgment in 2017. I have commented on this response elsewhere.

2. Current police interest in facial matching has moved on from custody images to whether it can be used to identify individual offenders in public places. The capability to do this is still unproven since tests in such situations have shown very poor match rates unlike match rates in controlled environments.[1]

3. The police are conducting a number of trials to see if facial searching and matching technology can be employed effectively in crowded public places. Such experiments should be properly designed and evaluated, preferably involving external experts, and the results published. The police should also evaluate their use of facial images generally in order to demonstrate that they have a useful and cost-effective purpose, based on adequate matching quality. They also need to explain how they will deal with potential false matches.

4. There is limited research on this area and most of it has been conducted in the USA. Evaluations should include not just the behaviour of the matching algorithms but how they work in the total criminal justice system and how human decision making in such systems affects the accuracy of match rates.[2]

5. Facial matching systems have improved significantly recently and the use being explored by the Metropolitan Police may, at some point, reach acceptable quality for operational use but presently that remains to be

demonstrated.

6. The use of facial images, especially in public places, is very intrusive of individual freedom, especially because images can be captured without the subject being aware. The public benefit of the use of such an intrusive technology must outweigh the interference in individual privacy. Such a difficult balance between public benefit and individual privacy should not be decided by the police but is best decided by Parliament through informed debate and legislation. As is currently the case for DNA and fingerprints the legislation should include independent oversight to reassure the public that their privacy is being properly protected.

Paul Wiles, Biometrics Commissioner

[1] The most extensive evaluations of the facial matching capabilities of different systems have been carried out by the US National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

[2] See e.g. D. White et al: Error Rates in Users of Automatic Facial Recognition Software, Plos One, 2015, 10 (10): eo 139827, showing how human error can reduce further the effectiveness of facial recognition systems.