



Media release

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 09.30 HOURS
THURSDAY, 12 AUGUST 2021**

GCSE grades awarded in a year unlike any other

Today, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) publishes the 2021 Wales results for GCSEs.

School and college staff, exam boards, regulators and government officials have all worked collaboratively under challenging circumstances to ensure that students are awarded their qualifications today so they can progress to the next stage of their lives and careers.

The GCE A Level, AS and GCSE examinations for summer 2021 were cancelled by the Welsh Government in November 2020. They established the Design and Delivery Advisory Group, with representative membership from school and college leaders, to develop alternative arrangements and make recommendations to the Minister, and were supported by Qualifications Wales and WJEC from a regulation and operational perspective.

Following discussions, it was decided that schools and colleges would use their professional judgement to determine learners' grades (Centre-Determined Grades) for Qualifications Wales' approved qualifications, using a range of evidence from the specification content their students had been taught. Similar approaches were applied to other regulated qualifications taken by learners in Wales.

Exam boards supported schools and colleges through the provision of extensive assessment materials, guidance and training, and external quality assurance, which ensured grades were determined appropriately.

Given that grades have been determined by an alternative approach this year, we anticipated the overall distribution of grades to differ from those in a standard year.

GCSE overall performance

Overall GCSE performance in Wales remains stable with 73.6% of candidates achieving a C grade or above, compared to 73.8% in 2020.

However, the proportion of students in Wales being awarded the top grades A* - A has increased; from 25.5% to 28.7% this year.

Mathematics

In Wales, students have the opportunity to take either GCSE Mathematics or GCSE Mathematics - Numeracy, with the majority taking the opportunity to study both subjects.

There has been an increase of 3.1 percentage points to 64.6%, in the number of students being awarded grades A*-C for GCSE Mathematics. Outcomes at A*-A have also increased by 4.8 percentage points to 21.6%.

Meanwhile, 65.3% of students achieved grade A*-C in GCSE Mathematics - Numeracy; an increase of 3.4 percentage points on 2020. Outcomes at A*-A have increased by 4.7 percentage points to 22.6%.

English Language

GCSE English Language outcomes have increased by 2.4 percentage points at grade C and above to 71.3%. Outcomes have also increased at grade A*-A by 5.0 percentage points.

Welsh First Language

Entries for GCSE Welsh (1st) Language have increased by 9.0 percentage points and outcomes at A*- C are stable, with a slight increase of 0.2 percentage points. Outcomes have increased by 3.4 percentage points at grade A*-A.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For information about the results in Wales, contact:

Jonathan Thomas, PR Manager, WJEC on 029 2026 5102 or jonathan.thomas@wjec.co.uk.

For information about the UK results, contact JCQ^{CIC}'s press office on 020 7227 0671, or 07905 683816 or at pressoffice@jcq.org.uk

Further statistical details on the results for the UK, Wales, England and Northern Ireland may be found at www.jcq.org.uk

NOTES FOR EDITORS

General

1. The data provided in the main body of this media release represent the aggregate information for Wales across all awarding organisations, and are provisional, in the sense that they represent the position at the time that results are issued.
2. These results are provided by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ^{CIC}), representing awarding organisations in the UK, and presented in Wales on behalf of JCQ^{CIC} by WJEC.
3. The qualifications framework is common across Wales, England and Northern Ireland. Comprehensive data for entries and results on a country-by country basis (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) are provided by the Joint Council for Qualifications – www.jcq.org.uk - and may be accessed from 9.30 am on Thursday 12 August 2021.
4. All awarding organisations are answerable to the qualification regulators – Qualifications Wales, Ofqual (England) and CCEA (Northern Ireland) – for examinations standards. The qualification regulators monitor the awarding organisations' standards. In addition, the awarding organisations themselves conduct a number of comparability studies to compare standards. Maintaining standards within and across all qualifications in order to ensure fairness to all candidates is the paramount concern of the awarding bodies.
5. In comparing the results of individual schools and colleges with any aggregate totals, it should be borne in mind that substantial variations are to be expected. A number of social, economic and educational factors have a bearing on the performance of pupils in examinations, of which the effectiveness of the school or college is only one.

Data Analysis

- There is a small number of candidates, mainly from the independent sector, who sit the reformed GCSE 9-1 examinations. Their overall outcomes are included in the headline figures, however, their outcomes are not included in the subject analysis which is A* - G only. Their data is available from the JCQ website www.jcq.org.uk.

Summer 2021: Alternative approach to assessment and grading

The information below relates to the following Qualifications Wales approved qualifications:

- *WJEC GCSE, AS and A level qualifications*
- *Skills Challenge Certificates*
- *Level 2 and Level 3 Health and Social Care: Principles and Contexts*
- *Level 2 Children's Care, Play, Learning and Development (Unit 216)*

Following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Welsh Government decided that Summer 2021 exams would not go ahead as planned.

They established the Design and Delivery Advisory Group which supported the work of Qualifications Wales in making changes to its regulations for qualifications, and WJEC to implement a balanced and fair approach to grading this summer.

Following discussions, it was decided that schools/colleges would use their professional judgement to determine learners' grades (Centre-Determined Grades), based on a wide range of evidence, which could include:

- adapted past papers, non-examination assessment, centre- devised tasks, and coursework.

No single piece of evidence was necessarily more important than another, as grades were based on a holistic judgement.

The approach allowed for a high degree of flexibility, allowing schools/colleges to choose appropriate evidence which took account the variations in learning experiences of the learners.

Schools and colleges were required to submit a Centre Policy, outlining the evidence they would be using to determine grades and their quality assurance processes. These policies were reviewed by WJEC to ensure all areas of the guidance had been covered. In addition, WJEC led on external quality assurance to ensure that all processes were followed.

WJEC supported schools and colleges through the provision of adapted assessment materials, guidance and training, and external quality assurance, which ensured schools and colleges determined grades appropriately. Examples of this support is available from the [WJEC Summer 2021 website](#).

Please note schools and colleges delivering Ofqual regulated GCSE and AS/A levels followed arrangements as outlined by [JCQ guidance here](#).