



Examination results in schools in Wales, 2020/21

2 December 2021
SFR 375/2021

Changes to the production of these statistics

Suspension of performance measures

Due to the cancellation of the normal examination period in 2020/21 and ongoing disruption to schools as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, then [Minister for Education confirmed](#) that the Welsh Government will not to calculate or publish performance measures for 2019/20 or 2020/21, for both Year 11 and sixth form cohorts.

The analysis presented in this release is based on grade distributions that are consistent with other information released by Qualifications Wales and the Joint Centre for Qualifications (JCQ) (see definitions). These grade distributions allow the results to be interrogated at a finer level and show results at both the upper and lower ability ranges.

Centre determined grades

Following the cancellation of public examinations, all qualifications that would have been sat as examinations in the 2020/21 summer term have been awarded through a [centre determined grade model](#). Grades were determined by schools and colleges, based on their assessment of learners' work, using a range of evidence (including non-examination assessments, mock exams and classwork).

Pupils that were awarded a qualification before the summer 2020 examination series will not have a centre determined grade, but the grades they were awarded in a written examination.

Grade distributions

The values in the graphs and figures in this release show the percentage of entries awarded at each individual grade, broken down by selected pupil characteristics. For example, in Chart 2, the first light blue bar on the left (value 6.9 per cent) represents the number of A* grades awarded in 2017/18 as a percentage of all entries in 2017/18.

These results represent the data that was available to awarding bodies as at 17th September 2021. They may differ from results published earlier by either Qualifications Wales or JCQ. This statistical release focuses on pupils in year 11 in maintained schools in Wales and includes the results of successful appeals up to 17th September 2021. Data published by other organisations

About this release

This statistical release provides an analysis of external qualifications awarded to pupils in Year 11 (KS4; aged 15) or pupils in sixth form (KS5; aged 17 at the start of the academic year) in schools in Wales in 2020/21 and previous years. For more data and detailed analysis, see the [supplementary tables](#).

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may include grades awarded at other centres and to students of other ages. Data published earlier than the date of this release will include fewer successful appeals.

1. Key results for 2020/21

Year 11 (Key Stage 4)

- In 2020/21 the percentage of entries awarded A*-A and A*-C was the highest since 2008/09 (data between 2008/09 and 2014/15 is available on StatsWales).
- The percentage of entries awarded at each individual grade at A*, A and G was higher in 2020/21 than the previous year. The percentage of entries awarded at each individual grade between B and F was lower or the same as the previous year (chart 2).
- The results by selected pupil characteristics show that:
 - The gap between boys and girls increased over the last year at grades A*-A and A*-G but decreased at grades A*-C, with girls outperforming boys in all three grade ranges (chart 6b).
 - The gap increased at A*-A, A*-C and A*-G grades between pupils eligible for free school meals and those not eligible, with pupils not eligible for free school meals outperforming pupils eligible for free school meals at all three grade ranges (chart 7b)
 - The gap between White British pupils and Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils increased at A*-A and A*-C grade ranges, with Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils outperforming White British pupils. The gap at A*-G was negligible (chart 8b).

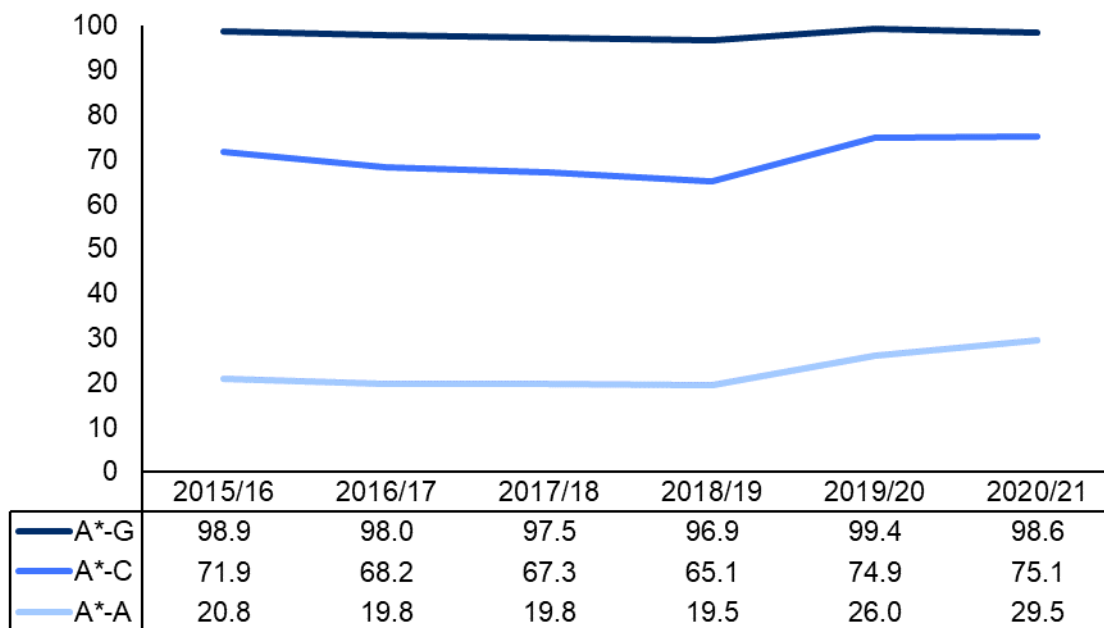
Aged 17 (Sixth Form)

- A similar pattern is seen in A level results.
- The percentage of entries awarded A*-A grades was the highest since 2008/09 (data between 2008/09 and 2014/15 is available on StatsWales).
- The gap between boys and girls increased at A*-A and A*-C grades, with girls outperforming boys. The gap at A*-E was negligible (chart 11B).

2. Year 11 pupils (Key Stage 4)

Overall GCSE grade distribution

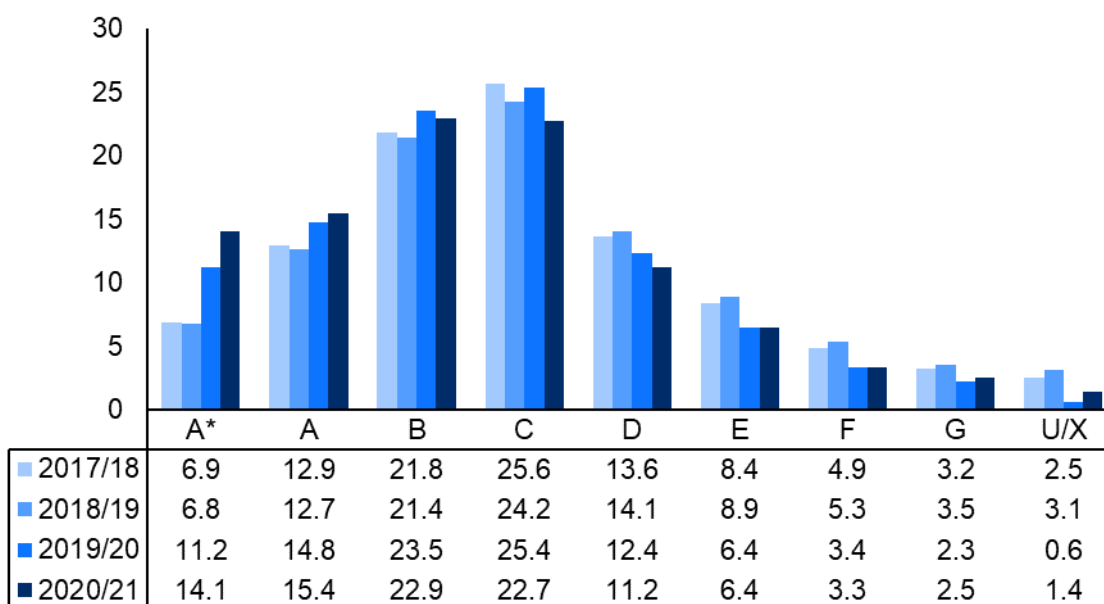
Chart 1: Percentage of GCSE entries by grade range in all subjects



Between 2015/16 and 2018/19 the percentage of GCSE entries awarded in each grade range (A*-A, A*-C and A*-G) declined. The largest decrease in that period was a 6.8 percentage point decrease in the A*-C range.

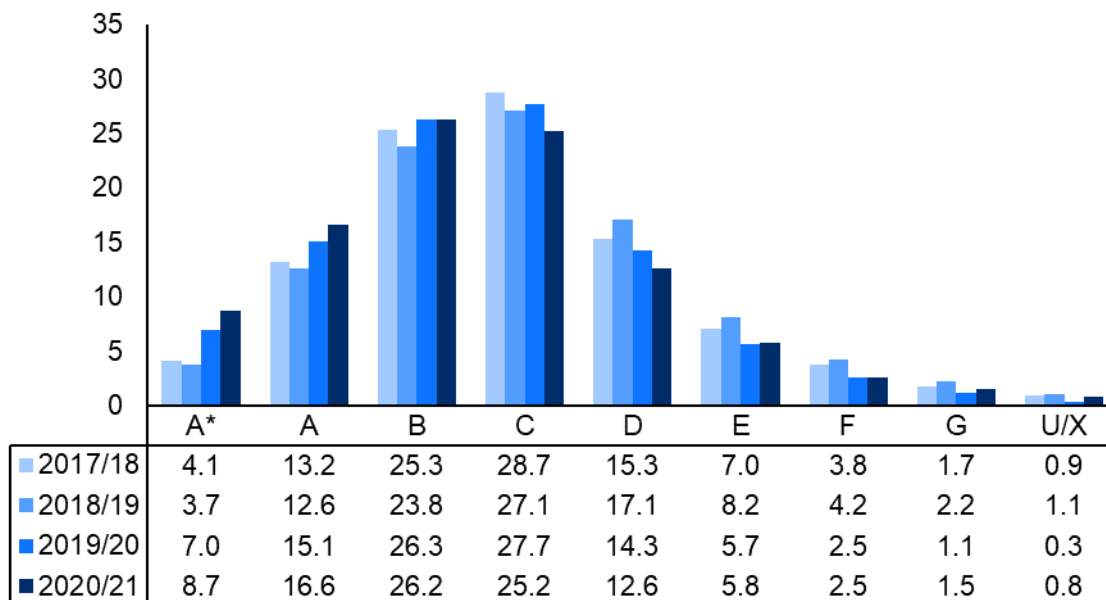
In 2020/21 the percentage of GCSE entries awarded in the A*-A and A*-C range has increased from 2019/20. The largest increase was in the A*-A range with an increase of 3.5 percentage points. The percentage of GCSE entries awarded in the A*-G range has decreased in 2020/21 to 98.6 percentage points.

Chart 2: Percentage of GCSE entries by individual grade over all subjects



The largest change in the distribution occurred in 2019/20 and 2020/21. In 2020/21 the percent of GCSE entries awarded grades A* and A increased compared to previous years, the largest increase is at A* at 14.1 percentage points. This corresponds to a decrease of GCSE entries awarded grades C, D, E and F in 2020/21.

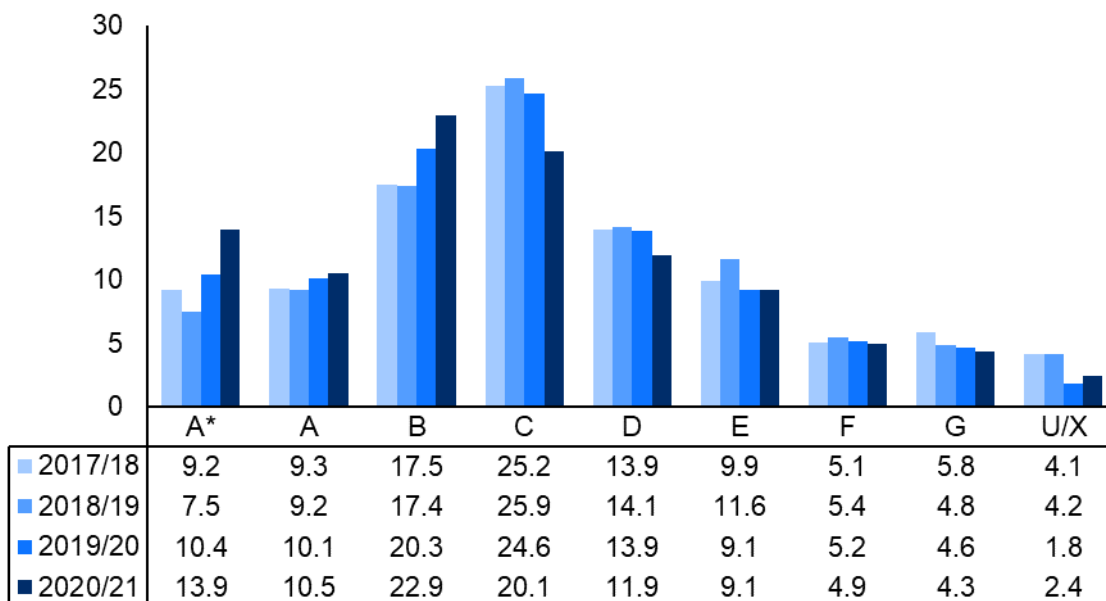
Chart 3: Percentage of GCSE entries by individual grade in Literacy qualifications



Literacy qualifications include English/Welsh (first language) Language and Literature GCSEs.

From 2018/19 to 2019/20 there was an increase in the percent of GCSE entries awarded A*, A, B and C grades. In 2020/21 the percent of GCSE entries awarded A* and A have further increased. The largest increase was at the A* grade with a 1.7 percentage point increase. This corresponds to a decrease of GCSE entries awarded grades C and D in 2020/21.

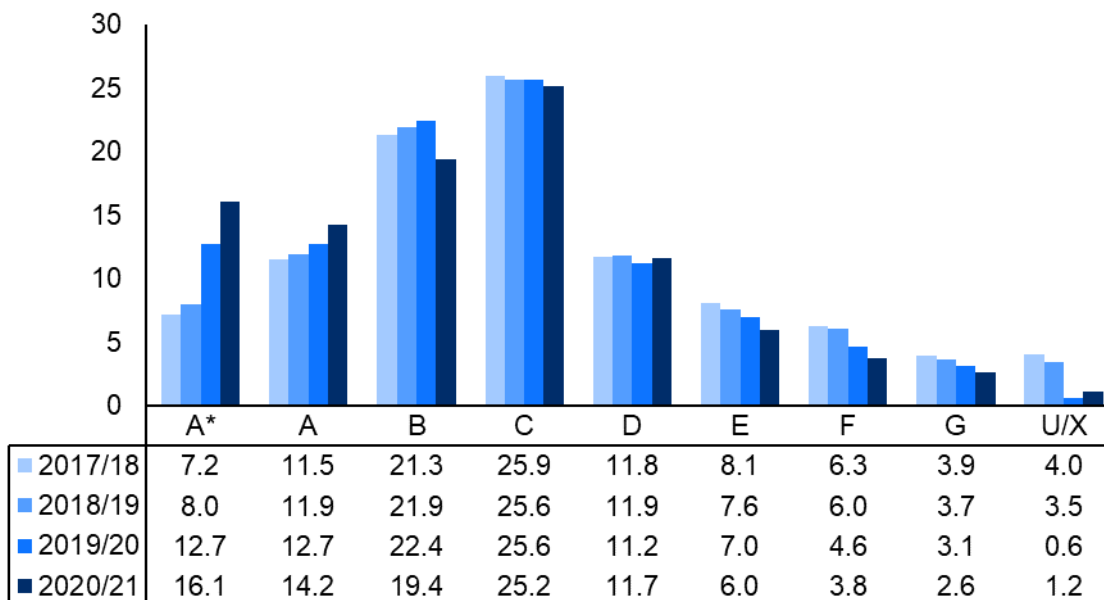
Chart 4: Percentage of GCSE entries by individual grade in Numeracy qualifications



Numeracy qualifications include GCSE Mathematics and GCSE Mathematics Numeracy.

From 2018/19 to 2019/20 there was an increase in the percent of GCSE entries awarded A*, A and B grades. In 2020/21 the percent of GCSE entries awarded A*, A and B has further increased. The largest increase was at the A* grade with a 3.5 percentage point increase. This corresponds to a decrease of GCSE entries awarded grades C, D, E, F and G in 2020/21. The largest decrease was at the C grade with a 4.5 percentage point decrease.

Chart 5: Percentage of GCSE entries by individual grade in Science qualifications



Science qualifications include GCSEs in the following subjects: Physics, Biology, Chemistry, Science (Double Award), Applied Science (Double Award) and Applied Science (Single Award).

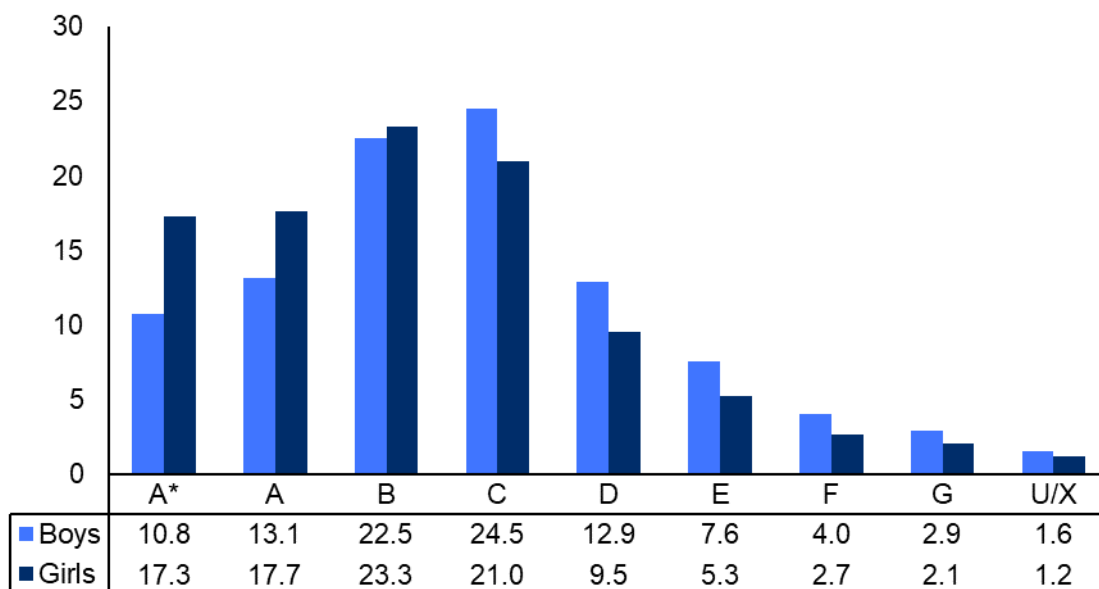
From 2018/19 to 2019/20 there was an increase in the percent of GCSE entries awarded A*, A and B grades. In 2020/21 the percentage of GCSE entries awarded A* and A grades has had a further increase. The largest increase was at the A* grade with a 3.4 percentage point increase. This corresponds to a decrease of GCSE entries awarded grades B, C, E and F in 2020/21.

Results by pupil characteristics

The following charts show how the grade distribution in 2020/21 by selected pupil characteristics. Comparisons by pupils' ethnicity and SEN status can be found in the provided supplementary tables.

Gender

Chart 6a: Percentage of GCSE entries by Year 11 pupils awarded in grades in all subjects by gender, 2020/21



In 2020/21 there were 150,748 GCSE entries by girls and 147,097 by boys. Girls were awarded more grades at A*, A and B than boys. The largest grade disparity was at the A* and A grade: girls were awarded 6.5 and 4.5 percentage points, respectively, more than boys. The smallest grade disparity was at the U/X grades with boys awarded 0.4 percentage points more U/X grades than girls.

Table 1: Percentage of GCSE entries awarded in grade range in all subjects by gender

	Year	Number of entries	Percentage of entries achieved at grade:			
			A*-A	A*-C	A*-G	No graded result
Boys	2015/16	118,970	16.9	67.3	98.6	1.4
	2016/17	134,660	16.0	64.2	97.7	2.3
	2017/18	134,763	16.3	62.5	97.0	3.0
	2018/19	139,754	15.7	59.9	96.4	3.6
	2019/20	141,082	21.3	70.4	99.3	0.7
	2020/21	147,097	23.9	71.0	98.4	1.6
Girls	2015/16	125,722	24.6	76.2	99.1	0.9
	2016/17	139,145	23.5	72.1	98.3	1.7
	2017/18	137,773	23.2	71.9	97.9	2.1
	2018/19	142,816	23.1	70.1	97.5	2.5
	2019/20	143,944	30.7	79.3	99.4	0.6
	2020/21	150,748	35.0	79.2	98.8	1.2

Chart 6b: Percentage point difference of GCSE entries awarded in grade range by gender (girls – boys)

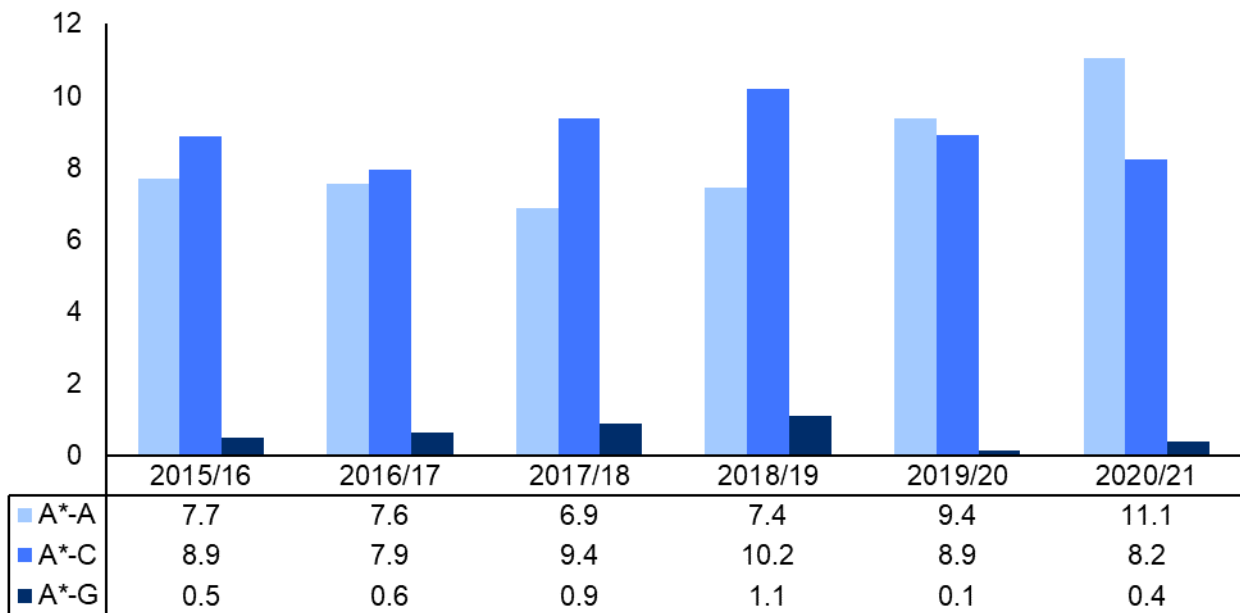


Chart 6b shows the difference between the percentage of girls who were awarded the grade range and the percentage of boys who were awarded the grade range (e.g. in Table 1 in 2015/16 24.6% of girls and 16.9% of boys were awarded A*-A grades. Therefore the difference is 7.7 percentage points as shown above)

The gap between girls and boys being awarded grades A*-A between 2015/16 and 2020/21 widened, from 7.7 percentage points in 2015/16 to 11.1 percentage points in 2020/21.

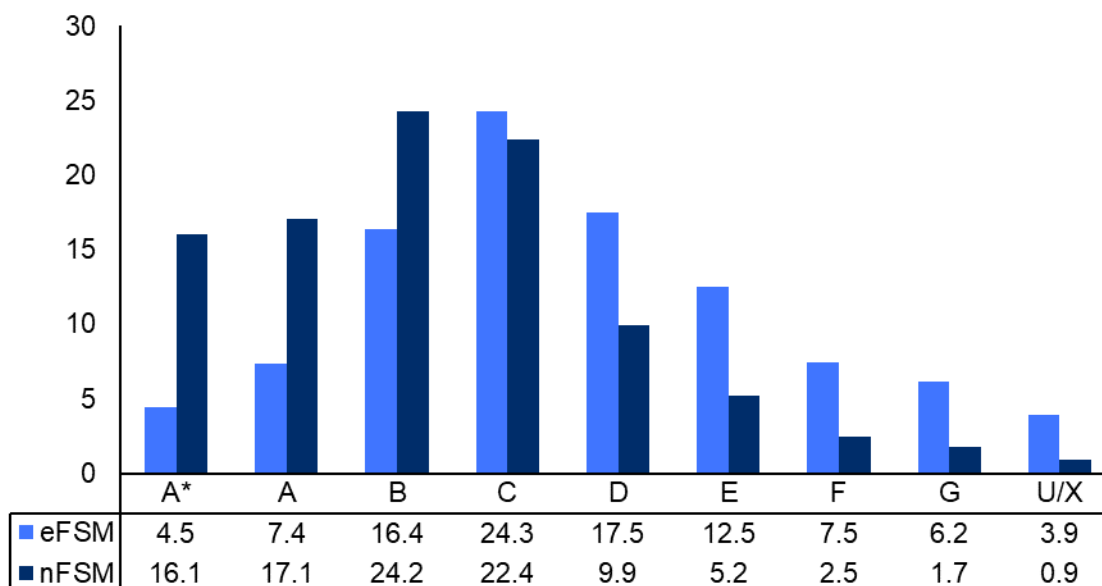
The gap between the percentage of girls and boys being awarded grades A*-C between 2015/16 and 2020/21 narrowed, from 8.9 percentage points in 2015/16 to 8.2 percentage points in 2020/21.

The gap between the percentage of girls and boys awarded grades A*-G is negligible, fluctuating between 2015/16 and 2020/21 from 0.5 percentage in 2015/16 points to 0.4 percentage points in 2020/21.

Free School Meals (FSM)

Pupils are [eligible for free school meals](#) if their families are in receipt of certain benefits/support payments or are on universal credit. Charts 7a and 7b illustrate the size of the attainment gap between those eligible for FSM (eFSM) and those who are not (nFSM).

Chart 7a: Percentage of GCSE entries by Year 11 pupils awarded grade in all subjects by FSM status, 2020/21



In 2020/21 there were 50,883 GCSE entries by pupils eligible for FSM and 246,962 by pupils not eligible for FSM. A greater percentage of all entries by pupils not eligible for FSM were awarded at A*, A and B grades than pupils who were eligible for FSM. The largest grade disparity was at the A* grade with pupils not eligible for FSM awarded 11.6 percentage points more A* grades than pupils eligible for FSM. The smallest grade disparity was at the C grade with pupils not eligible for FSM awarded 1.9 percentage points fewer C grades than pupils eligible for FSM.

Table 2: Percentage of GCSE entries awarded by grade range in all subjects by FSM status

	Year	Number of entries	Percentage of entries achieved at grade:			
			A*-A	A*-C	A*-G	No graded result
eFSM	2015/16	29,844	8.0	50.0	96.6	3.4
	2016/17	35,624	6.9	44.5	94.2	5.8
	2017/18	35,548	7.1	43.1	92.9	7.1
	2018/19	37,443	6.6	40.7	92.0	8.0
	2019/20	39,244	10.7	53.6	98.1	1.9
	2020/21	50,883	11.8	52.5	96.1	3.9
nFSM	2015/16	214,819	22.6	74.9	99.2	0.8
	2016/17	238,180	21.7	71.7	98.6	1.4
	2017/18	236,988	21.7	70.9	98.2	1.8
	2018/19	245,130	21.4	68.8	97.7	2.3
	2019/20	245,782	28.5	78.3	99.6	0.4
	2020/21	246,962	33.2	79.8	99.1	0.9

Chart 7b: Percentage point difference of GCSE entries awarded by grade range by FSM status (not eligible FSM – eligible FSM)

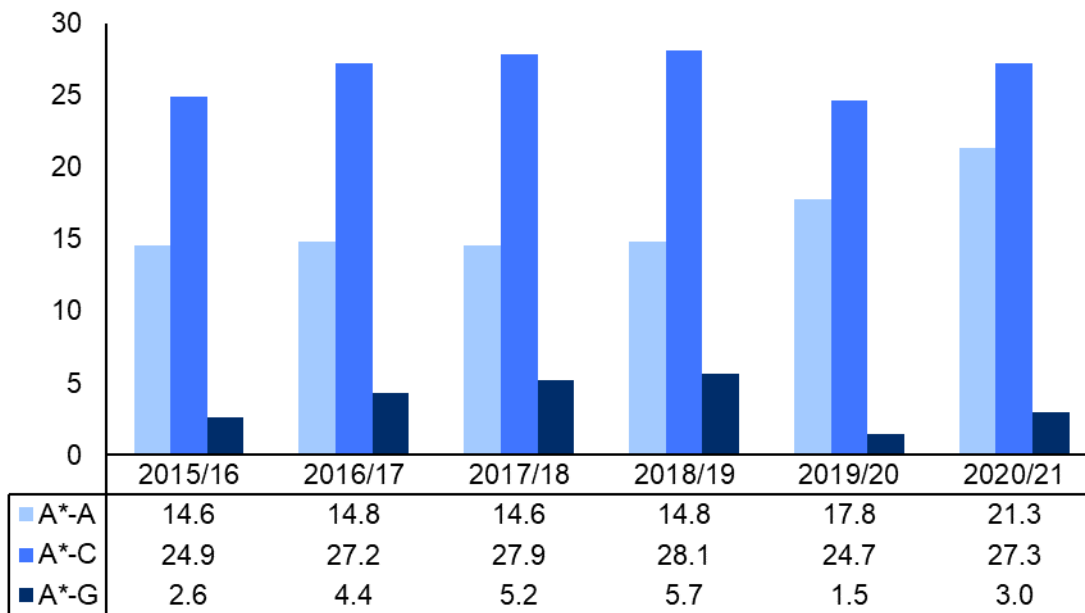


Chart 7b shows the difference between the percentage of pupils not eligible for FSM who were awarded the grade range and the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM who were awarded the grade range (e.g. in Table 2 in 2015/16 22.6% of pupils not eligible for FSM and 8.0% of pupils eligible for FSM were awarded A*-A grades. Therefore the difference is 14.6 percentage points as shown above)

The gap at grades A*-A between pupils not eligible for FSM and pupils eligible for FSM widened between 2015/16 and 2020/21, from 14.6 percentage points in 2015/16 to 21.3 percentage points in 2020/21.

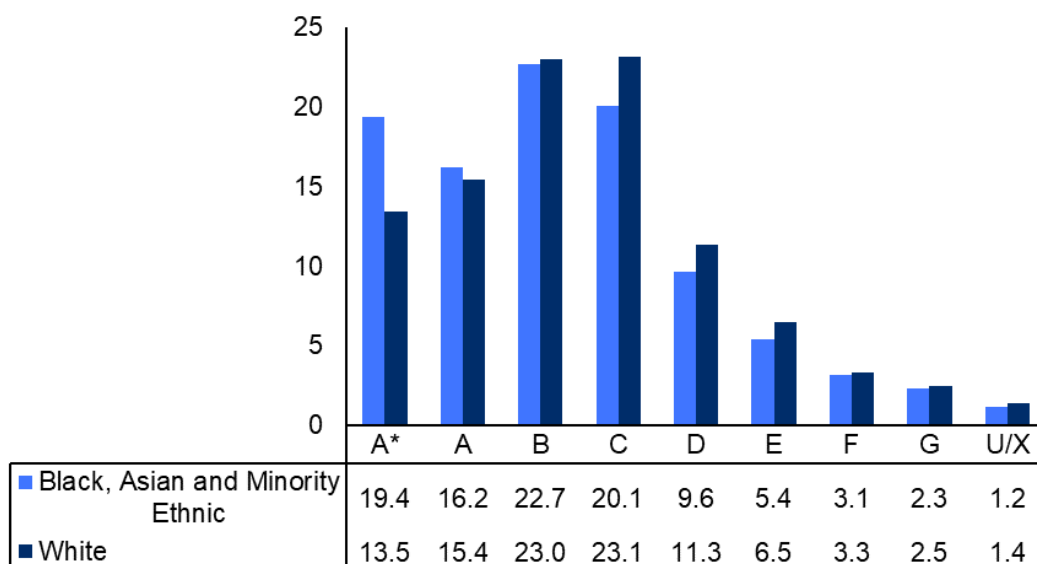
The gap at grades A*-C between pupils not eligible for FSM and pupils eligible for FSM widened between 2015/16 and 2020/21, from 24.9 percentage points in 2015/16 to 27.3 percentage points in 2020/21.

The gap at grades A*-G between pupils not eligible for FSM and pupils eligible for FSM widened between 2015/16 and 2020/21, from 2.6 percentage points in 2015/16 to 3.0 percentage points in 2020/21.

Ethnicity

In the context of this publication the category "White" used below, refers to White British pupils only. All other pupils which have a recorded ethnicity are included under the Black, Asian and minority ethnic group category. This category therefore also includes non-British White pupils. Pupils that have not indicated their ethnicity have not been included. There will likely be differences in achievement between groups within the Black, Asian and minority ethnic group category. Further analysis is available for more detailed ethnic groups in the supplementary tables.

Chart 8a: Percentage of GCSE entries by Year 11 pupils awarded by grade in all subjects by ethnicity, 2020/21



In 2020/21 there were 32,403 GCSEs entries by Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils and 262,034 by White pupils. A greater percentage of all entries by Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils were awarded A* and A grades than White pupils. The largest grade disparity was at the A* grade with Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils awarded 5.9 percentage points more A* grades than White pupils. The smallest grade disparity was at the F and G grades with White pupils awarded 0.2 percentage points more F and G grades than Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils.

Table 3: Percentage of GCSE entries awarded grade range in all subjects by Ethnicity

	Year	Number of entries	Percentage of entries achieved at grade:			
			A*-A	A*-C	A*-G	No graded result
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic	2015/16	20,851	25.1	73.0	98.5	1.5
	2016/17	23,053	25.5	71.1	97.7	2.3
	2017/18	24,740	25.6	71.4	97.7	2.3
	2018/19	28,124	23.8	68.4	96.8	3.2
	2019/20	29,379	31.5	77.1	99.3	0.7
	2020/21	32,403	35.6	78.3	98.8	1.2
White	2015/16	221,045	20.5	72.1	99.0	1.0
	2016/17	247,352	19.4	68.3	98.2	1.8
	2017/18	244,848	19.4	67.3	97.6	2.4
	2018/19	250,970	19.1	65.1	97.1	2.9
	2019/20	254,206	25.3	74.6	99.4	0.6
	2020/21	262,034	28.9	75.0	98.6	1.4

Chart 8b: Percentage point difference of GCSE entries awarded by grade range by ethnicity (Black, Asian and minority ethnic – White)

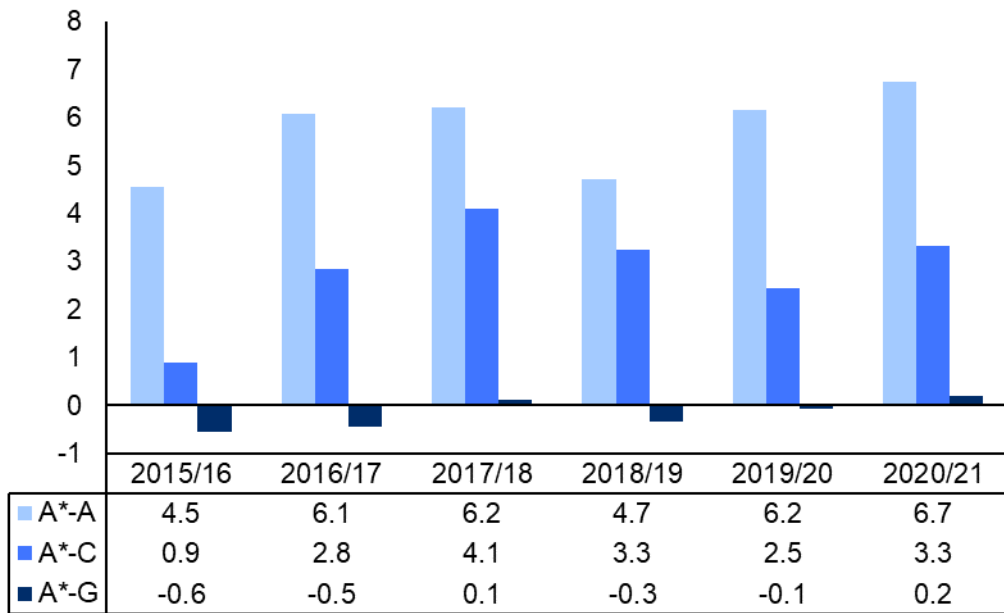


Chart 8b shows the difference between the percentage of the Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils who were awarded the grade range and the percentage of White pupils who were awarded the grade range (e.g. in Table 3 in 2015/16 25.1% of Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils and 20.5% of White pupils were awarded A*-A grades. Therefore the difference is 4.5 percentage points as shown above)

The gap between Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils and White pupils awarded grades A*-A between 2015/16 and 2020/21 widened, from 4.5 percentage points in 2015/16 to 6.7 percentage points in 2020/21.

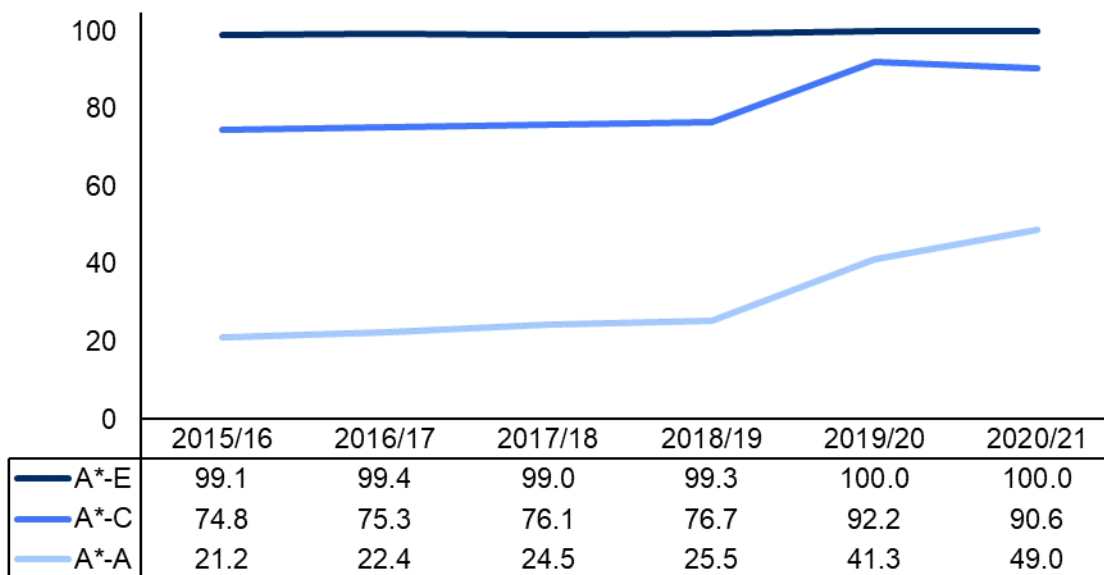
The gap between Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils and White pupils awarded grades A*-C between 2015/16 and 2020/21 fluctuates, from 0.9 percentage points in 2015/16 to 3.3 percentage points in 2020/21. The widest gap was in 2017/18 at 4.1 percentage points.

The gap between Black, Asian and minority ethnic pupils and White pupils awarded grades A*-G is negligible, fluctuating between 2015/16 and 2020/21 from -0.6 percentage points in 2015/16 to 0.2 percentage points in 2020/21.

3. Pupils aged 17 at the start of the school year in schools (Key Stage 5)

Overall A level grade distribution

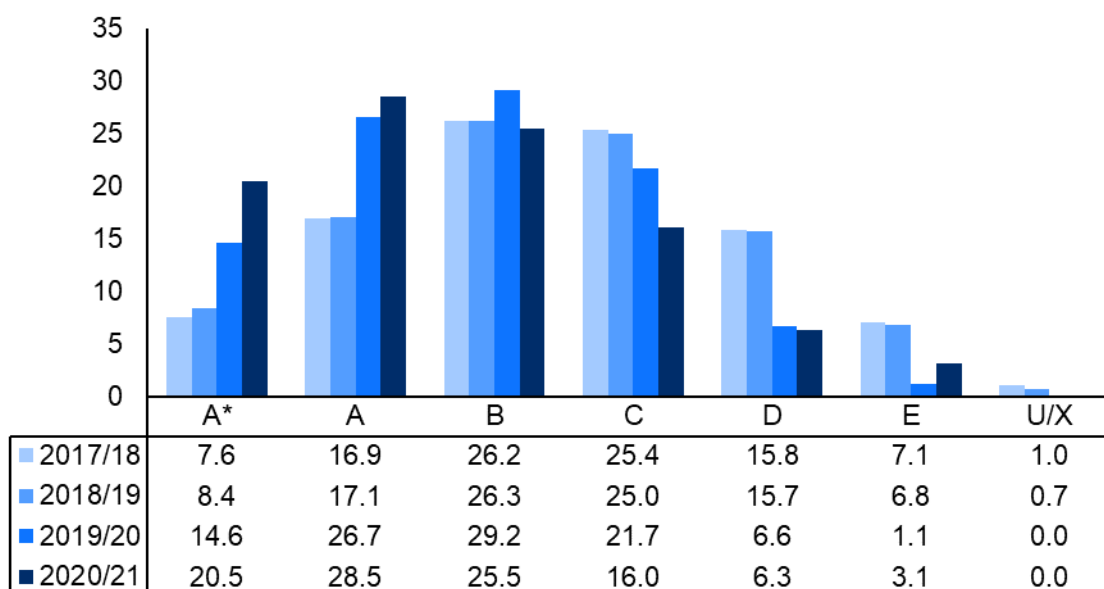
Chart 9: Percent of A level entries by pupils aged 17 awarded different grade range



Between 2015/16 and 2019/20 the percentage of A level entries awarded to all three grade ranges (A*-A, A*-C and A*-E) increased. The largest increase was a 20.0 percentage point increase in the A*-A grade range.

In 2020/21 the percentage of A level entries that were awarded to grade ranges A*-A and A*-E have increased. The largest increase was in the A*-A grade range with an increase of 7.7 percentage points. There was a decrease in pupils awarded in the A*-C grade range of 1.7 percentage points.

Chart 10: Percent of A level entries by pupils aged 17 awarded grade in all subjects



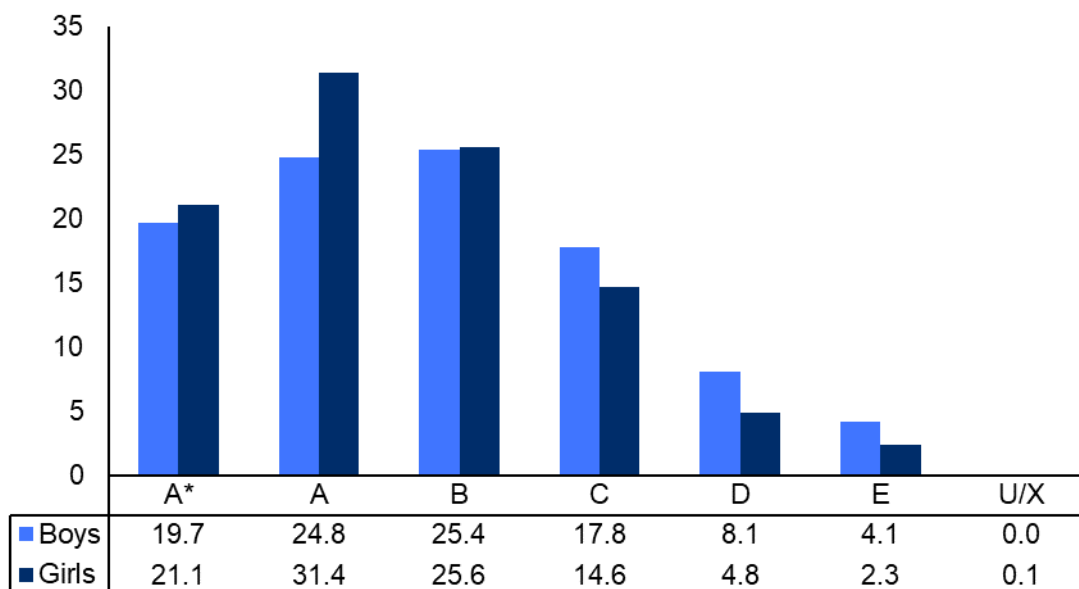
From 2017/18 to 2019/20 there was an increase in the percent of A level entries awarded A*, A and B grades. In 2020/21 the percent of A level entries awarded A* and A have further increased. This corresponds to a decrease in A level entries awarded grades B, C and D in 2020/21.

Results by pupil characteristics

The following charts show how the grade distribution in 2020/21 by selected pupil characteristics. There is no chart for free school meal entitlement because the number of such pupils in year 13 in maintained schools is too low to allow any meaningful comparisons. Comparisons by pupils' ethnicity and SEN status can be found in the provided supplementary tables.

Gender

Chart 11a: Percentage of A level entries by pupils aged 17 awarded grade in all subjects by gender, 2020/21



In 2020/21 there were 12,368 A levels entries by girls and 9,739 by boys. A greater percentage of all entries by girls were awarded A*, A and B grades than boys. The largest grade disparity was at the A grade with girls awarded 6.6 percentage points more A grades than boys. The smallest grade disparity was at the B grade with girls awarded 0.2 percentage points more B grades than boys.

Table 4: Percentage of GCSE entries awarded by grade range in all subjects by gender

	Year	Number of entries	Percentage of entries achieved at grade:			
			A*-A	A*-C	A*-E	No graded result
Boys	2015/16	10,024	20.1	70.6	98.9	1.1
	2016/17	9,586	22.6	72.2	99.1	0.9
	2017/18	8,748	24.9	72.6	98.5	1.5
	2018/19	8,278	24.6	73.1	99.0	1.0
	2019/20	8,137	38.8	90.2	99.9	0.1
	2020/21	9,739	44.5	87.8	100.0	0.0
Girls	2015/16	13,849	22.1	77.7	99.2	0.8
	2016/17	12,744	22.2	77.6	99.6	0.4
	2017/18	11,787	24.2	78.7	99.4	0.6
	2018/19	11,309	26.2	79.4	99.5	0.5
	2019/20	10,834	43.2	93.8	100.0	0.0
	2020/21	12,368	52.6	92.8	99.9	0.1

Chart 11b: Percentage point difference of A level entries awarded by grade range by gender (girls – boys)

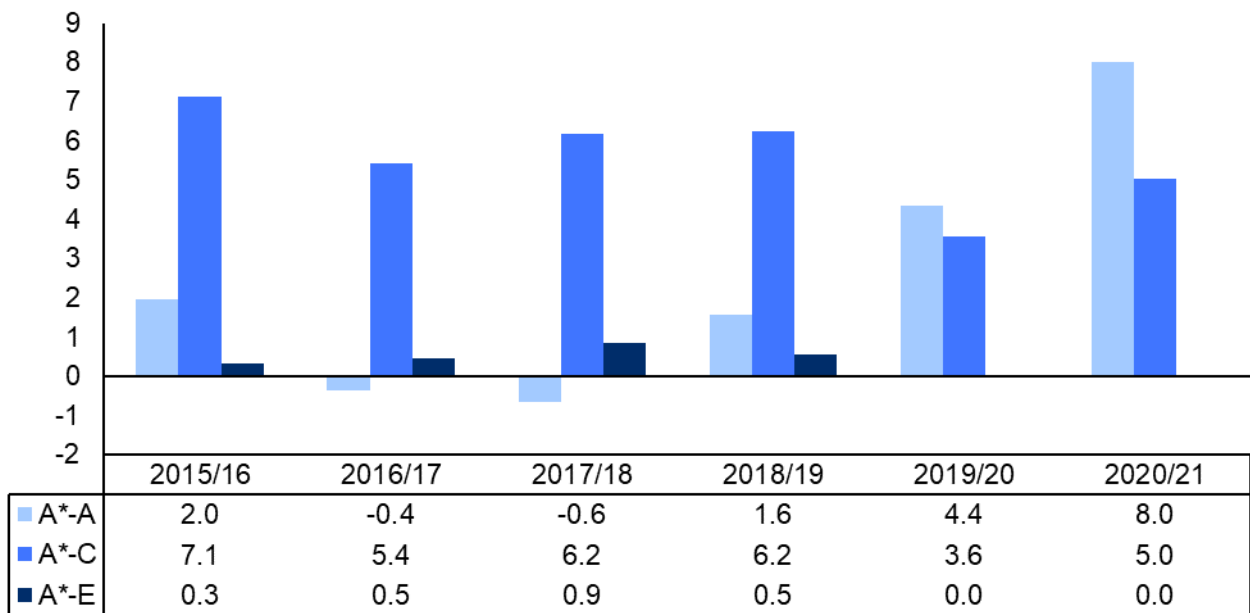


Chart 11b shows the difference between the percentage of girls who were awarded the grade range and the percentage of boys who were awarded the grade range (e.g. in Table 4 2015/16 22.1% of girls and 20.1% of boys were awarded A*-A grades. Therefore the difference is 2.0 percentage points as shown above)

The gap between girls and boys awarded grades A*-A between 2015/16 and 2020/21 widened, from 2.0 percentage points in 2015/16 to 8.0 percentage points in 2020/21.

The gap between girls and boys awarded grades A*-C between 2015/16 and 2020/21 narrowed, from 7.1 percentage points in 2015/16 to 5.0 percentage points in 2020/21.

The gap between girls and boys awarded grades A*-E is negligible, fluctuating from 0.3 percentage in 2015/16 points to almost zero in 2020/21.

4. Definitions

Changes and comparisons

On 20 January 2021 the then [Minister for Education confirmed](#) that learners entered for GCSE, AS and A Levels qualifications in summer 2021 would have their qualifications awarded through a centre determined grade model.

The closure of schools during the March to August 2020 period prevented the Welsh Government from completing a census of Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) schools or Educated Other Than at School (EOTAS) pupils. For this reason PRU and EOTAS pupils have not been included in the results for the 2019/20 academic year.

The data in this release starts at 2015/16 due to a definition change of the GCSE cohort between 2014/15 and 2015/16 where the cohort was changed from pupils aged 15 to pupils in Year 11. Data for earlier years can be found on [StatsWales](#).

Similar information has also been published by both [Qualifications Wales](#) and [JCQ](#). The information published by those organisations will include students of all ages and at all examination centres and will reflect the grades available on results day (JCQ) or in early September (Qualifications Wales). The results in this release are only for students in year 11 or aged 17 in maintained schools in Wales and reflect the grades available as at 17th September 2021.

5. Notes

Accuracy

Schools and local authorities have now had an opportunity to assess the provisional results for accuracy, and have supplied amended information where applicable. In keeping with previous years, the change between provisional and final data in this release is less than 1 percentage point.

National Statistics

The [United Kingdom Statistics Authority](#) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is Welsh Government's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

The continued designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed in 2019 following a [compliance check by the Office for Statistics Regulation](#). These statistics last underwent a [full assessment against the Code of Practice in 2019](#).

Since the latest review by the Office for Statistics Regulation, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- Introduced a summary of the key measures to the start of the publication, including a detailed explanation of the new key measures and placed them into context in terms of grade equivalents.
- A breakdown of the new measures by gender and Free School Meal eligibility has been included in the release and accompanying tables.

Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators (“national indicators”) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the Well-being goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before Senedd Cymru.

The 46 national indicators were laid in March 2016 and this release includes 1 of the national indicators namely the average capped points score per pupil, including the gap between those who are eligible or are not eligible for free school meals.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the well-being goals and associated technical information is available in the [Wellbeing of Wales report](#).

As a national indicator under the Act they must be referred to in the analyses of local wellbeing produced by public services boards when they are analysing the state of economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing in their areas.

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local well-being assessments and local wellbeing plans.

Further details

The document and supplementary tables are available at:

<https://gov.wales/examination-results-september-2020-august-2021>

Further technical information can be found in the notes document also on the examination results webpage.

Next update

October 2022

We want your feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to school.stats@gov.wales.

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