



Department
for Education

A level Attainment: Characteristics

Ad-hoc notice

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Overview of attainment of A level students by characteristics

Historically, characteristics of A level students has not been published in the department's 16 to 19 attainment statistical first release. Following a review of user needs, this publication includes key stage 5 attainment data broken down by pupils' characteristics, such as ethnicity and Free School Meals eligibility, at key stage 4. The following text includes the headline performance measure; the proportion of pupils achieving three A grades or better by each characteristic. The data required to produce breakdowns of entry and achievement in specific subjects by characteristics is included in the underlying published tables. The underlying tables for this publication cover the academic years 2010/11 to 2015/16. For context, the 16 to 19 attainment statistical first release is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-attainment-at-19-years>

Definitions of the attainment measures used for this publication can be found in the quality and methodology document available [here](#).

Broadly patterns of attainment by characteristics at A level are similar to patterns seen in GCSE attainment data in that:

- Pupils eligible for free school meals have lower outcomes than their peers as do pupils with special educational needs.
- Pupils with Chinese ethnicity have the highest attainment of the major ethnic groups, whereas as pupils of Black ethnicity attain lower outcomes compared to others.
- The differences in attainment of pupils who have a first language other than English and their peers is smaller than for other characteristics and this is also reflected in GCSE results generally.

Although the patterns of attainment are similar to those seen at GCSE, the scale might be different because the A level cohort reflects those students that have gone on to enter at least one A level, which is more likely to be groups of pupils who attain better results at GCSE.

Key points

All pupils

The method used to match pupils to their characteristics for the purposes of this publication enabled 82.2% of pupils, who completed key stage 5 in 2015/16, to be matched to their census data. Pupils can be unmatched for a number of reasons of which the most likely is that they attended an independent school and therefore are not captured in the school census. Other reasons include, moving to England after the date of the census collection or taking longer than 3 years to complete A levels after finishing GCSEs. The distribution of characteristics of these pupils is likely to be different from those who have been matched, particularly because pupils from independent schools are more likely to be high attainers. The headline measures for unmatched pupils, compared to matched pupils and all pupils are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Achievement of all pupils in 2015/16¹ by whether a match was found in the 2012/13 spring census.

	Total number of pupils	Percentage of pupils achieving 3 A grades or better
Matched pupils	185,529	10.5
Unmatched pupils	40,203	25.6
All pupils	225,732	13.2

Free school meals

The proportion of pupils who finished 16 to 18 study in 2015/16, that could be matched to a census record for eligibility for free school meals (FSM) was 82.2%. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals 3 years prior to finishing key stage 5 was 5.9% and 76.2% of pupils were not eligible. The proportion of pupils with unclassified FSM status was 0.1%. Unclassified pupils were matched to a census record, but the information is unknown or was refused. The remaining 17.8% of pupils are those for whom a match was not found. Table 2 shows achievement of pupils by FSM eligibility for matched pupils.

¹ Pupils in the NPD do not exactly match pupils in the statistical first release every year as the NPD is based on final data, whereas the statistical first release is based on revised data. Where there are differences they are small.

Table 2: Achievement of pupils by FSM eligibility in 2015/16

FSM eligibility	Total number of pupils	Percentage of pupils achieving 3 A grades or better
Eligible for FSM	13,356	4.9
Not eligible for FSM	172,020	11.0
Unclassified	153	9.8

In 2015/16, pupils who were not eligible for free school meals achieved better outcomes than those who were.

This table shows FSM eligibility, the underlying data also includes Ever 6 FSM pupils. The Ever 6 FSM pupils are those who at the point of the census, had been eligible for free school meals at some point over the previous 6 years.

Special educational needs

The proportion of pupils who finished key stage 5 in 2015/16, that could be matched to a census record for special educational needs (SEN) was 82.2%. Pupils with SEN fall into two further major sub-categories, SEN with a statement and SEN without a statement. Of the pupils who finished key stage 5 in 2015/16, 77.4% of pupils had no identified SEN, 4.3% had SEN without a statement, 0.4% had SEN with a statement and 0.1% were unclassified. Unclassified pupils were matched to a census record, but the information is unknown or was refused. The remaining 17.8% of pupils are those for whom a match was not found. Table 3 shows the achievement of pupils by SEN status for matched pupils.

Table 3: Achievement of pupils by SEN status in 2015/16

SEN status	Total number of pupils	Percentage of pupils achieving 3 A grades or better
No identified SEN	174,647	10.8
SEN without statement	9,763	6.4
SEN with statement	966	8.2
Unclassified	153	9.8

In 2015/16, pupils with no identified SEN achieved better outcomes than those with SEN, and those who had a statement achieved better than those who did not.

English as an additional language

The proportion of pupils who finished key stage 5 in 2015/16, that could be matched to a census record for English as an additional language (EAL) was 82.2%. The proportion of pupils identified as having a first language other than English 3 years prior to finishing key stage 5 was 12.1% and 68.8% had English as a first language. The proportion of pupils with unclassified status was 1.3%, where unclassified includes those whose first language was 'believed to be English', 'believed to be other than English', 'information not obtained', 'refused' and 'pending'. The remaining 17.8% of pupils are those for whom a match was not found. Table 4 shows achievement by EAL status for matched pupils.

Table 4: Achievement of pupils by EAL status in 2015/16

First Language	Total number of pupils	Percentage of pupils achieving 3 A grades or better
Other than English	27,290	9.2
English	155,283	10.8
Unclassified	2,956	10.9

In 2015/16, pupils with English as a first language achieved better results than those pupils with English as an additional language, however the difference was small by comparison with other characteristics.

Ethnicity

The proportion of pupils who finished key stage 5 in 2015/16, that could be matched to a census record for ethnicity was 82.2%. The proportion of pupils identified as being of white ethnic background 3 years prior to finishing key stage 5 was 62.3%. The next largest group was pupils of Asian ethnicity at 9.3%, followed by pupils of black ethnicity at 4.2% and pupils with mixed ethnicity at 3.6%. Unclassified (0.8%) pupils were matched to a census record, but the information is unknown or was refused. There were 17.8% of pupils for whom a match was not found. Table 5 shows the achievements of pupils from each ethnic group for matched pupils.

Table 5: Achievement of pupils by ethnic group in 2015/16

Ethnic Group	Total number of pupils	Percentage of pupils achieving 3 A grades or better
White	140,651	10.8
White British	132,462	10.7
White Irish	901	15.1
White Irish Traveller	4	0.0
White Gypsy/Roma	17	0.0
White Other	7,267	10.9
Mixed	8,016	11.1
Mixed White/Black Caribbean	1,817	6.9
Mixed White/Black African	875	8.6
Mixed White/Asian	2,155	14.2
Mixed Other	3,169	12.1
Asian	21,097	10.1
Indian	7,702	13.7
Pakistani	6,210	6.7
Bangladeshi	3,396	6.2
Asian Other	3,789	11.8
Black	9,457	4.7
Black Caribbean	1,961	3.2
Black African	6,582	5.2
Black Other	914	4.6
Chinese	1,450	23.9
Any other ethnic group	2,975	11.1
Unclassified	1,883	13.4

In 2015/16, pupils with Chinese ethnicity had the best results in these two measures, followed by pupils with mixed ethnicity or any other ethnic background. Black pupils achieved the lowest results.

Methodology

The data used for this publication comes from the National Pupil Database.

Characteristics, such as ethnicity and free school meal eligibility are not routinely or consistently collected at key stage 5. In order to get characteristics data for these pupils, their key stage 5 exam records were matched to spring census records, for the academic year that fell three years before they reached the end of key stage 5, using a unique pupil matching reference. A three year time-lag was chosen as characteristics, such as ethnicity, are unlikely to change and this enables a match for pupils that have taken either two or three years to complete key stage 5. Characteristics such as free school meal eligibility are more likely to change over time than others, so the figures for these groups should be treated with more caution. This method enabled 82.2% of pupils to be matched to their census data. Pupils can be unmatched for a number of reasons of which the most likely is that they attended an independent school and therefore are not captured in the school census. Other reasons include, moving to England in the 3 year intervening period or taking longer than 3 years to complete A-levels after finishing GCSEs.

In some of the years published in the underlying tables, there were a very small number of duplicate pupil records (less than 0.5%). Some of these duplicates reflect dual registered pupils, but there was no obvious reasons for some of them and the numbers were small enough to have little impact, so these records were left in.

Future Publications

The coverage of the 2017 [16-18 performance tables](#) (due to be published in early 2018) will expand to include new disadvantage measures that show how students who were eligible for the pupil premium in year 11 compare to their peers in each of the headline measures. This plan was set out in more detail for schools and colleges in the [16-19 technical guide](#), published in January 2017. This document includes more information on the methodology that will be used to produce these new statistics.

Alongside this, the department will also review the coverage of the statistics included in future publications of the corresponding [A level and other 16-18 results Statistical First Release](#), taking into account user needs.



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