

Annual Qualifications Market Report: academic year 2017 to 2018

Background information accompanying statistical
release

14 February 2019

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Information about the statistics

Purpose

This release provides information on the qualifications market in England for the academic year 2017 to 2018. For the purpose of this report the 2017/18 academic year is considered the start of October 2017 to the end of September 2018. It presents data on the number of qualifications available for award by recognised awarding organisations and certificates awarded for the qualifications.

Geographical coverage

This report presents data on the qualifications market in England.

External drivers

Interests of users of qualifications

The development and take-up of qualifications is influenced by a range of factors. There is a complex and dynamic relationship between those providing qualifications (awarding organisations), purchasers who teach or otherwise deliver the qualifications (schools, colleges and training providers), students, and 'end users' (employers and further and higher education providers). Government reforms of qualifications, performance measures, public funding policies and other requirements will all have a significant impact on many of these relationships.

Users of qualifications respond to incentives, many of which come into play as a result of government policy changes.

Awarding organisations respond to market demand for their qualifications and to incentives to develop and deliver new qualifications to meet government policy requirements and to meet changing skills requirements.

In deciding which qualifications to offer, in addition to student needs and institutional priorities, schools and colleges are influenced by accountability measures and funding considerations. Decisions are often balanced against practical delivery considerations such as availability of teachers and student demand. Schools and colleges may be informed by networks that help them to navigate the system, which can lead to changes to which qualifications they offer.

Students may opt to study qualifications that will best help them progress in work or in higher or further education, according to their interests. Sometimes these relationships are very direct, such as many licence to practise schemes which depend on gaining a regulated qualification.

Awarding organisations may respond to feedback from employers and from schools, colleges and universities about whether their qualifications assess the knowledge, skills and understanding that they value, to the required standard.

Change impacting upon the market in England - GCSE, AS and A level qualifications

GCSE, AS and A level reform

GCSEs, AS and A levels have been undergoing major [reform](#) in England which is likely to have impacted upon the qualifications market. Reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels started to be phased in from 2015. The first results for the reformed AS levels were issued in 2016 and the first results for the reformed GCSEs and A levels were issued in 2017. The reformed GCSE, AS and A level qualifications included in this statistical release are those that were available to certificate in 2017/18 (November 2017 and summer 2018 exam series).

Resit opportunities

Ofqual announced in March 2016 that there would be a resit opportunity in all legacy GCSE science and additional science qualifications to be taken no later than summer 2018. For other legacy GCSE qualifications awarding organisations are permitted to offer one resit opportunity in the year following the last scheduled sitting, although in practice most organisations have chosen not to offer such resits.

For legacy AS and A level qualifications there is one resit opportunity that awarding organisations are required to offer in the May or June of the year following the final award of the qualification. Certificates for resits are included in the number of certificates reported in this release.

AS decoupling

Changes to the structure of qualifications following the reforms have impacted upon the number of qualifications available and certificates awarded. AS qualification grades no longer contribute to A level grades and the decoupling of these qualifications has resulted in fewer candidates taking reformed AS qualifications. These structural changes have resulted in a reduction in the number of AS certificates awarded in England over the last three years.

Accountability reform

Changes to performance measures may have had an impact on the uptake of some qualifications.

From summer 2017, Level 1/Level 2 certificates (also known as international GCSEs) were not included in [performance tables](#). The removal of Level 1/ Level 2 certificates from performance tables has encouraged centres to move students back to GCSE qualifications in these subjects.

As part of changes to the [secondary accountability system announced in 2013](#), [Progress 8](#) and [Attainment 8](#) became the key measures of performance for all state-funded secondary schools and those colleges that offer KS4 education in England in [2016](#). They replaced the 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics headline measure and expected progress measures. Progress 8 was introduced in 2016 and aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school. For English language and English literature, providing both subjects are taken, the best score from these subjects is double weighted. The way that progress 8 is calculated has encouraged uptake in the reformed English literature GCSE. Progress 8 and Attainment 8 measures, as well as the government's separate measure of students entering EBacc, may also further encourage centres to focus on the delivery of [EBacc](#) subjects. This most likely explains the decrease in certificates awarded in non-EBacc subjects, as the calculation includes only a maximum of three non-EBacc GCSEs.

The government also decided that, only reformed GCSEs will be included in the secondary performance tables as they are introduced for each subject.

Funding changes for 16- to 19-year-olds

From 2014/15, all students aged 16 to 18 starting, or who have already started, a new study programme of 150 hours or more, and who do not hold a GCSE grade C/4 or above, or an equivalent qualification, in maths and/or in English language, are required to study these subjects as part of their study programme in each academic year. The Education and Skills Funding Agency¹ published additional funding regulations as a result of this new requirement. This policy is likely to have contributed to increases in certifications in maths and English GCSE qualifications from 2014/15 onwards.

¹ The Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency were replaced by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in April 2017. It funds education and training for children, young people and adults in England.

Change impacting upon the market in England - Vocational and other qualifications

Apprenticeships

It is likely that we will see a change in the vocational qualification market over the next few years as apprenticeship frameworks are phased out and are replaced with apprenticeship standards.

The majority of new apprenticeship standards do not contain separately awarded qualifications while apprenticeship frameworks contain qualifications, either separate qualifications attesting to competence and skills, or a single hybrid covering both. Due to this change in structure we would expect the number of certificates issued by awarding organisations to decline as the standards replace the frameworks.

Performance tables

It is possible that changes to performance tables may have had an impact on the uptake of some vocational and other qualifications. For instance, Applied General qualifications and Tech Level qualifications were first included in Department for Education performance tables in 2016. Technical Award and Technical Certificate qualifications were first included in performance tables in 2017.

There have been substantial changes to the list of Tech level and Applied General qualifications that are eligible for reporting in performance tables in 2017/18. Before 2017/18 qualifications could count in performance tables if they met interim requirements. Characteristics for interim requirements include declared purpose, size and recognition. From 2017/18 qualifications must also meet additional requirements to be eligible for performance tables. The additional requirements include that at least 40% of the qualification is external assessment set and marked by the awarding organisation. Information on the requirements can be found in the [technical guidance for awarding organisations](#). As a result of these additional requirements, the list of eligible Tech level and Applied General qualifications changed significantly from 2016/17 to 2017/18; [over 90% of Tech level and Applied General qualifications eligible in 2016/17 were no longer eligible in 2017/18](#) (260 out of 284 for Tech level and 97 out of 107 for Applied General). These additional requirements most likely explain the decrease in certificates of Applied Generals in 2017/18.

From 2017/18 an additional measure will be published to show the number of students entering Level 3 vocational qualifications which count in the 16 to 18 performance tables as a proportion of the total number of students entering any Level 3 vocational qualification.

Qualification type

Regulated qualifications are classified into different qualification types. The qualification type classification is completed by the awarding organisations offering

the qualifications. Qualification types provide information which compliments that provided by the sector subject area characterisation. Qualification type categorisation can give an indication of a number of features, such as the nature of the qualification, the type of assessment, the qualification level and guided learning hours. In order to improve consistency in the way qualifications are classified, we have recently revised qualification types as outlined in our [letter to awarding organisations](#) alongside [guidance](#) on how to classify qualifications.

Ofqual revised the list of qualification types in consultation with awarding organisations and the new structure of qualification types is given in Figure 1. In the new structure, we have removed qualification types that did not identify a coherent group of qualifications and also cut across other types or described a qualification using other information in the regulatory framework. We have added types where necessary to cover the broadest range of qualifications that we regulate. No changes were made for those qualifications where there are qualification specific regulatory requirements. This includes, but is not limited to, GCSEs, GCEs, Functional Skills, and End-Point Assessments.

Awarding organisations were requested to review, and where appropriate amend, the qualification types of their qualifications to fit with our revised list of qualification types. These revised qualification types have been available since 1 October 2018 and awarding organisations were given until the 31 October 2018 to amend their qualification types. Not all awarding organisations have migrated their qualifications over to the new categories and so we may still report on old qualification types until this migration is complete.

As part of the removal of the regulatory arrangements for the QCF, the term 'QCF' is being removed from qualification titles where it is still being used. The only exception where 'QCF' may still be used in a qualification title is for Applied General and Technical Qualifications, where appropriate.

With revisions to qualification types, some qualifications under a particular qualification type category are having the qualification type changed. The expected mapping of old to new qualification types is shown in Figure 2. As such, we are likely to see higher numbers of qualifications, and related statistics, in qualification type categories into which qualification types are being moved. Similarly, we are likely to see a decrease in numbers of qualifications, and related statistics, in qualification type categories out of which qualification types are being moved. However, because in some instances the revised qualification types will be a result of some qualifications moving in as well as out of the category, it may be difficult to disentangle the particular source of changes pre and post the revised qualification type categories.

Key:

- Current categories
(remains unchanged)
- Retired categories
- New categories
- To be retired:
- Entry Level
- Higher Level
- QCF

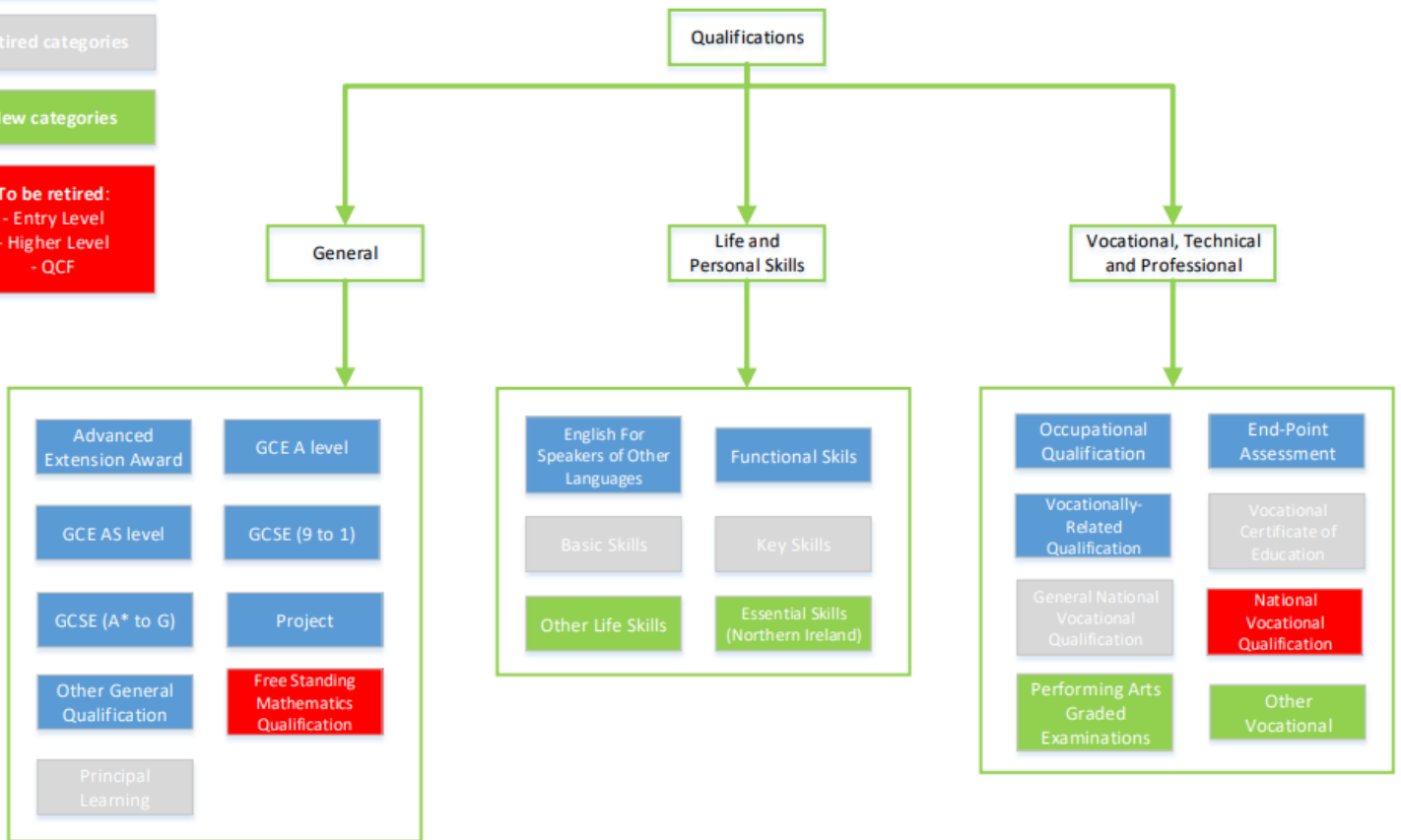


Figure 1. The new structure of qualification types in place from 1 October 2018

| Current category | New category |
|---|---|
| Advanced Extension Award | No change |
| End-Point Assessment | No change |
| English For Speakers of Other Languages | No change |
| Entry Level | English For Speakers of Other Languages |
| | Essential Skills (Northern Ireland) |
| | Other General |
| | Other Life Skills |
| Free Standing Mathematics Qualification | Other General |
| Functional Skills | No change |
| GCE A level | No change |
| GCE AS level | No change |
| GCSE (9 to 1) | No change |
| GCSE (A* to G) | No change |
| Higher Level | Occupational Qualification |
| | Vocationally-Related Qualification |
| Key Skills | No change |
| National Vocational Qualification | Occupational Qualification |
| Occupational Qualification | No change |
| Other General Qualification | English For Speakers of Other Languages |
| | Essential Skills (Northern Ireland) |
| | Occupational Qualification |
| | Other General Qualification |
| | Other Life Skills |
| | Other Vocational |
| | Performing Arts Graded Examination |
| Vocationally-Related Qualification | |
| Principal Learning | No change |
| Project | No change |
| QCF | English For Speakers of Other Languages |
| | Essential Skills (Northern Ireland) |
| | Occupational Qualification |
| | Performing Arts Graded Examination |
| | Other Life Skills |
| | Other Vocational |
| Vocationally-Related Qualification | Vocationally-Related Qualification |
| | English For Speakers of Other Languages |
| | Occupational Qualification |
| | Other Vocational |
| | Other Life Skills |

Figure 2. Expected changes to qualification type

The left-hand column of Figure 2 gives the old qualification types; the right-hand column gives the expected new categories for each of the old qualification types.

Funding changes for post 19-year-olds

The [funding rules](#) for an academic year for vocational qualifications aimed at students who are over 19 years of age may have had some effect on the number of certificates awarded in that academic year.

Technical Awards and Technical Certificates

We would expect the introduction of T levels to have an impact on the number of certificates awarded to Tech Levels. They are being introduced in phases and are expected to replace most Tech Levels when fully implemented. The first T levels in Construction; Digital; and Education and Childcare are being introduced for first teaching from September 2020 (certificating in 2022) with T levels in Legal, Finance and Accounting; Health and Science; and Engineering and Manufacturing available from September 2021. The full suite of T levels is expected to be available from September 2022.

Data source

Information on qualifications (covering title, type, awarding organisation, sector subject area and level) is taken from [Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications](#), which gives information on regulated qualifications and recognised awarding organisations in England. Data on the number of certificates awarded are sent by awarding organisations to Ofqual.

The number of qualifications and certificates awarded in all specifications for GCSEs, AS and A levels taken in England is sent to Ofqual annually by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) on behalf of the regulated awarding organisations, which includes the GCSE, AS and A level awarding organisations. GCSE certificates cover full course, short course, applied double and applied single awards. A level includes A level applied double award and A level applied single award. Similarly, AS includes AS applied double award and AS applied single award. The data reported here reflects those students who received certificates and therefore does not include those who received grade U or were absent.

Limitations

Data are collected at the earliest point available, which is the first day of the next reporting period. This reduces the time between the activity and reporting on the activity.

The main source of potential error is in the information provided by awarding organisations. Ofqual cannot guarantee the number of certificates submitted is correct, although awarding organisations are expected to provide the correct data. Ofqual compares the data over time and checks for systematic issues. The figures

reported in this release reflect the certificates issued by awarding organisations at the time of data collection.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance procedures are carried out as explained in the [Quality Assurance Framework for Statistical Publications](#) published by Ofqual to ensure the accuracy of the data and to challenge or question it, where necessary. Publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

Revisions

For vocational and other qualifications, once published, data are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or to correct an error. Qualifications may also be re-categorised to a different type, level, sector subject area or awarding organisation. In some cases, data may be amended to reflect the new categorisation.

For GCSE, AS and A level certificates we collect provisional data for the latest academic year from JCQ at the point when it is reasonably complete, although final certificate numbers may be slightly different and will be updated in the next release of this publication.

Confidentiality and rounding

In accordance with Ofqual's [rounding policy](#), figures in the statistics and commentary for the number of certificates issued are rounded to the nearest 5 for ease of understanding. If the value is between 1 and 4, it is represented as 0~. A 0 represents zero achievements. We use unrounded values to derive percentages. As a result of rounded figures, the percentages shown in charts/tables may not necessarily add up to 100.

In the datasets published alongside this publication, the figures are rounded to the nearest 5 (values between 1 and 4 are represented as 0~). A 0 represents zero achievements. This is to ensure the data does not reveal an individual student.

Status

These statistics are classified as official statistics.

Related publications

This statistical release presents annual data. There will be some overlap between the figures in this release and those in Ofqual's [Vocational and Other Qualifications Quarterly publications](#).

A number of other statistical releases and publications relate to this one, including:

- [Statistics: GCSEs \(key stage 4\) collection](#)
- [Statistics: 16 to 19 attainment collection](#)
- [Statistics: further education and skills](#)

For any related publications for qualifications offered in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland please contact the respective regulators – [Qualifications Wales](#), [CCEA](#) and [the Scottish Qualifications Authority \(SQA\)](#).

Useful Links

- [Report and data tables](#) accompanying this release
- [Definitions](#) of important terms used in this release
- [Policies and procedures](#) that Ofqual follows for production of statistical releases

Feedback

We welcome your feedback on our publications. Should you have any comments on this statistical release and how to improve it to meet your needs please contact us at statistics@ofqual.gov.uk.



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