

Statistical Release

Entries and Late Entries for GCSE and A Level: 2014/15 Academic Year

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Key points

This release provides information on the number of entries and late entries for GCSE and A level in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas, during the 2014/15 academic year.

Schools and colleges make entries, to the exam boards, for each unit or component that makes up a GCSE and A level qualification (for example, an exam paper or other form of assessment).

If a school or college registers an entry after the agreed deadline it is classed as late and may be subject to an additional charge.

The key findings for this release are as follows.

- There has been a 1.4 per cent decrease in GCSE entries and a 2.2 per cent decrease in A level entries for the 2014/15 academic year relative to 2013/14.
- There was a 7.2 per cent increase in the number of GCSE entries that were late compared with last year (from 510,400 to 547,200), representing 3.2 per cent of all GCSE entries.
- There was a 19 per cent decrease in the number of A level entries that were late compared with last year (from 173,400 to 139,800), representing 2.4 per cent of all A level entries.

Introduction

This statistical release, published on behalf of the qualifications regulators for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, presents data on entries and late entries for GCSE and A level exams during the 2014/15 academic year.

Five exam boards offer GCSE and A level qualifications in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas:

- AQA
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) (Northern Ireland)
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
- Pearson
- WJEC.

From 2011 to 2013, International Curriculum & Assessment Agency (Examinations) ICAA(E) also awarded GCSEs.

Schools and colleges are responsible for submitting entries to exam boards for GCSEs and A levels on behalf of their candidates. Candidates are entered separately for each unit or component that makes up a qualification.¹ An entry therefore is counted as a candidate being put forward for an individual assessment rather than for the overall qualification. A school or college submits entries to the relevant exam board on behalf of its candidates.

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) is a membership organisation comprising seven providers of qualifications in the UK, including those awarding GCSEs and A levels. JCQ publishes deadlines by which entries should be made on behalf of the exam boards.² If an entry is made after the deadline it is classed as late and may be subject to an additional charge.

Data presentation

In this release, AS figures are included in the figures reported for A level, since AS units are a subset of the A level qualification.

¹ For linear specifications, units are referred to as components.

² www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/key-dates-and-timetables

Figures within the commentary and tables have been rounded to the nearest 100.

All tables referred to in the text are provided in the appendix.

Key statistics

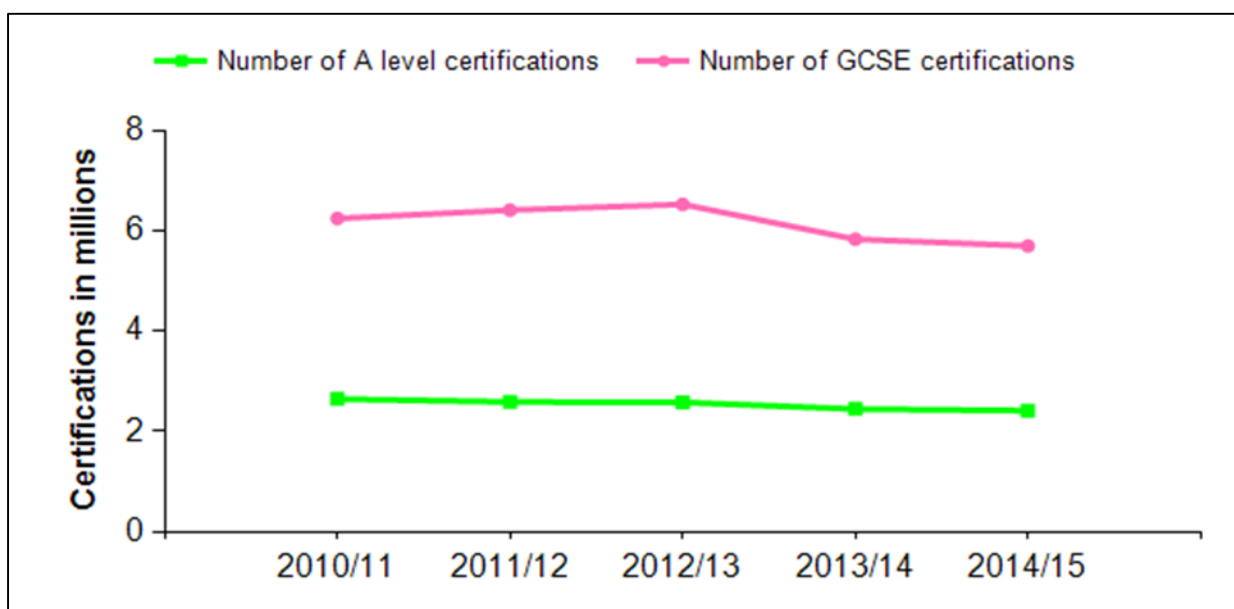
Certificates awarded

In the 2014/15 academic year, more than 2.4 million A level certificates and just over 5.7 million GCSE certificates were awarded in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas.

There was a 2.3 per cent decrease in the number of GCSE certifications from 2013/14 to 2014/15.

There was a 1.3 per cent decrease in the number of A level certifications (including AS) from 2013/14 to 2014/15, to the lowest figure in the last five years (see figure 1 and table 1).

Figure 1: Number of certifications for GCSE and A level, 2010/11 to 2014/15



The largest recent change in GCSE certifications was between 2012/13 and 2013/14, when there was a 10.7 per cent decrease in the number of certificates awarded. This decrease was likely caused by changes made to the qualification system that took effect from last year. From 2013/14, GCSEs in England became linear and there were fewer exam series, so students had fewer opportunities to enter exams and therefore fewer opportunities to register for certification. In addition, a change in the way that schools' performance measures are calculated in England, so that only the first GCSE award in a subject counts, is likely to have discouraged GCSE entries from students aged 15 and under.

Some year-on-year variation in the overall number of qualifications awarded is inevitable as a result of fluctuations in the size of the cohort and changes in the timing of candidates being entered for some qualifications.

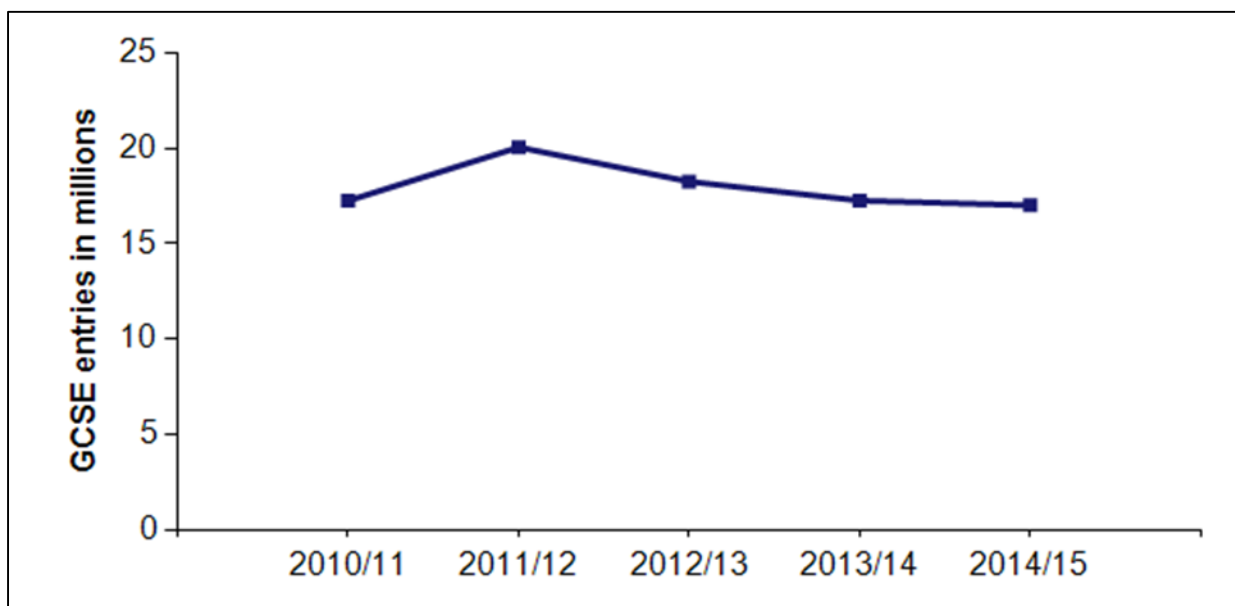
GCSE entries

Over the last five years there have been some significant changes to the structure of GCSE qualifications which will have impacted on the number of entries for the individual assessments. In 2009, the majority of GCSEs changed from a linear structure recorded as one entry, to a unitised structure made up of a number of units with entries reported at the unit level. As more GCSEs became unitised, the number of reported entries increased. This is shown, in part, by the increase in entries between 2010/11 and 2011/12 (see figure 2 and table 2). However, the actual number of certifications remained fairly stable because certifications are reported at the qualification level (see figure 1).

We know that there was a significant increase in the number of candidates entered for units aged 15 and under from 2010/11 to 2011/12. This accounts for some of the increase in entries during this period. Changes to school performance tables from autumn 2013, so that only the first award in a subject counted, will have discouraged some schools from entering younger students (Year 10 or below) and contributed to a reduction in entry numbers in subsequent years.

There was a 1.4 per cent decrease in entries in 2014/15 compared with last year (from 17.3 million to just over 17 million).

Figure 2: Total GCSE entries, 2010/11 to 2014/15



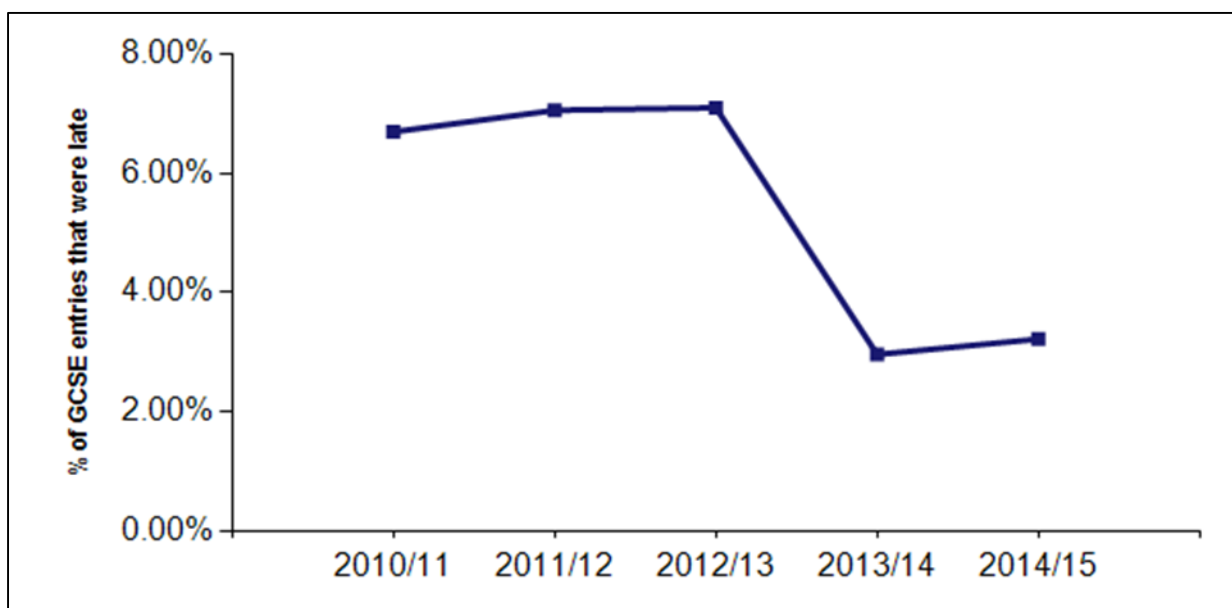
GCSE late entries

Exam boards make available the deadlines by which entries should be made. This information is also collated and published by the JCQ. If a school or college registers an entry after the agreed deadline, it is classed as late and may be subject to an additional charge.

There were 547,200 GCSE late entries in 2014/15, compared with 510,400 last year – a 7.2 per cent increase. The proportion of GCSE entries that were late was 3.2 per cent of all entries, which is a slight increase on last year (see figure 3).

Between 2012/13 and 2013/14, the proportion of GCSE entries that were late dropped from 7.1 per cent to close to 3 per cent. The main contributing factor for this is likely to be the linearisation of GCSEs in England from 2013/14, so that candidates took all of their exams at the end of the programme of study. The reduction in the number of exam series is likely to have enabled centres to better manage entries for their candidates.

Figure 3: Proportion of total GCSE entries that were late, 2010/11 to 2014/15

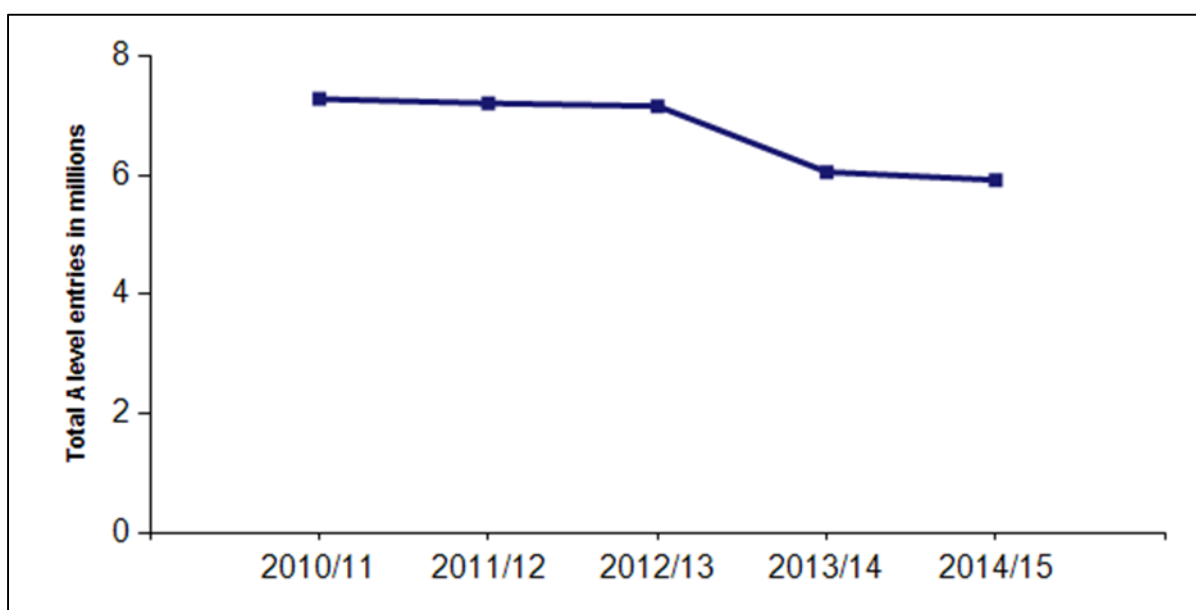


A level entries

From 2010/11 to 2012/13, the number of A level unit entries remained fairly constant, but there was a sharp decrease of 15 per cent in 2013/14 (from 7.2 million to 6.1 million). This decrease was due to the removal of the January exam series in England, reducing the opportunities for candidates to enter a unit in January and then resit it in June.

The decrease continued in 2014/15 with 5.9 million entries – the lowest figure in the last five years (see figure 4 and table 3). This represents a 2.2 per cent decrease on last year.

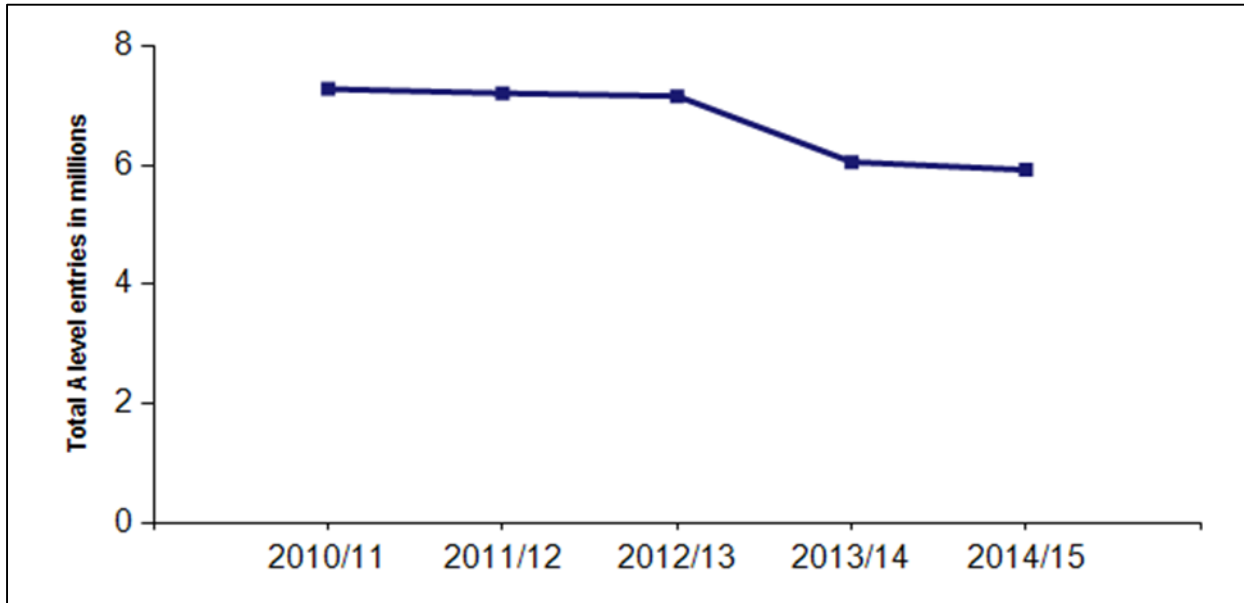
Figure 4: Total A level unit entries, 2010/11 to 2014/15



A level late entries

There were 139,800 late entries for A level in 2014/15, compared with 173,400 last year – a 19 per cent decrease and the lowest figure in the last five years. The proportion of A level unit entries that were late was 2.4 per cent, compared with 2.9 per cent last year (see figure 5 and table 3).

Figure 5: Proportion of total A level unit entries that were late, 2010/11 to 2014/15



Glossary of terms

A levels

Also known as General Certificates of Education – currently available as advanced level qualifications (A levels) and advanced subsidiary (AS) qualifications. They are the qualifications that the majority of students use to gain entry to university. They are generally sat by 17 to 18 year olds in schools and colleges but are open to anyone who wants to gain a qualification.

Awarding organisation

An organisation recognised by the qualifications regulators in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to develop, deliver and award qualifications. Also referred to as an exam board in the context of GCSEs and A levels.

Certificate/certification

A formal acknowledgement of a student's achievement.

GCSEs

General Certificates of Secondary Education are the main school-leaving qualification in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are available in a range of subjects and can be studied alongside other qualifications. They are generally sat by 15 to 18 year olds in schools and colleges but are open to anyone who wants to gain a qualification.

Background notes

This document is prepared in line with Ofqual Statistics Policies³ and the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.⁴

Qualification reform

From 2010/11 to 2012/13, there were four exam series available in each academic year. GCSE and A level exams could be taken in the winter and summer exam series.⁵ Additionally, there were a further two exam series for a small range of GCSEs in November and March.

The government set out its intention to reform GCSEs and A levels in *The Importance of Teaching – The Schools White Paper 2010*.⁶ The changes meant that, for schools and colleges in England, there was no longer an opportunity to take GCSE and A level exams in the winter series.

In addition to changes to the timing of assessments, the structure of GCSEs has also changed in England. GCSEs are now linear, which means that exams must be taken at the end of the period of study. There is an opportunity to resit exams in the November series, but only for GCSEs in English, English language and mathematics.

The governments of Wales and Northern Ireland have retained the unitised structure of GCSEs, so schools and colleges in Wales and Northern Ireland will still be able to enter candidates for exams in the winter exam series in some subjects.

Data source

Exam boards submit data to Ofqual for GCSEs and A levels they have awarded as well as entries and late entries in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas.

Limitations of data

There is potential for error in the information provided by exam boards, therefore Ofqual cannot guarantee that the information received is correct. Ofqual compares

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-statistics-policies-and-procedures

⁴ www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html

⁵ The winter exam series typically runs from January to February. The summer exam series runs from May to June.

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf

the data over time and checks for systematic issues. Summary data are sent back to exam boards for checking and confirmation.

Quality assurance procedures are carried out as explained in the *Quality Assurance Framework for Statistical Publication* and the *Data Audit Framework*⁷ to ensure the accuracy of the data and to challenge or question it where necessary. Ofqual continuously manages this process by:

- ensuring that data providers are clear about what is required of them – a process helped by ensuring that providers are fully consulted during the initial design and any subsequent change phases;
- reminding all providers (if appropriate) that, as a condition of them being regulated, all data must be completely accurate;
- being alert to unexpected changes in the data submitted, by comparing individual returns from the same provider over time;
- actively challenging any unexpected results with the data providers;
- having a proportionate data auditing framework in place, which allows for the auditing of providers' information collection, collation and delivery processes, as necessary, using a wide range of tools from questionnaires to on-site process audits.

The publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

Geographical coverage

In this release, Ofqual presents data on entries, late entries and certifications for GCSEs, AS and A levels in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas.

Revisions

Once published, data are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or to correct an error.⁸

Revisions have been made to the numbers of GCSE entries and late entries in 2012/13 and 2013/14 (see table 2).

⁷ www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-statistics-policies-and-procedures

⁸ www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-statistics-policies-and-procedures

Completeness of the data

Exam boards send Ofqual data for each exam series. Any provider that does not return a complete set of data within the collection period is contacted to make sure the data are as complete as possible. For this release, Ofqual received data from all the exam boards.

Confidentiality

To ensure confidentiality of the published accompanying data, the figures have been rounded to the nearest 100. If the value is less than 50, it is represented as 0~ and 0 represents zero entries. The *Statement of Confidentiality* can be found on the Ofqual website.⁹

Rounding

Figures in the commentary and tables are rounded to the nearest 100. The Rounding Policy can be found on the Ofqual website.

Related statistics and publications

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

- *Statistical Release: Summer Exam Entries: GCSEs, Level 1 / 2 Certificates, AS and A Levels in England: Provisional Figures 2015.*¹⁰
- *Statistical First Release: Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2015* (published by the Department for Education).¹¹
- *Statistical First Release: A level and other level 3 results in England, 2014/2015 (provisional)* (published by the Department for Education).¹²

Users of these statistics

These statistics are of particular interest to Ofqual, recognised exam boards and the Department for Education. Other users include government policy officials, academics, researchers, the public, government departments in Northern Ireland and Wales, and other interested parties. Ofqual uses these statistics to monitor for

⁹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-statistics-policies-and-procedures

¹⁰ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/summer-2015-exam-entries-gcses-level-1-2-certificates-as-and-a-levels-in-england

¹¹ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2015

¹² www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-level-3-results-2014-to-2015-provisional

potential issues and to analyse trends over time. Central government officials use the statistics for policy implementation and ministerial briefings.

User feedback

Ofqual is running a rolling series of online surveys to make sure its statistical releases meet your needs.

Ofqual would like to invite you to take part in the online survey for this release.

<http://surveys.ofqual.gov.uk/s3/entries-and-late-entries-in-gcse-and-a-level>

It will take about 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will remain entirely confidential in any reports published about the survey.

If you would like to take part in the survey, have any questions or would prefer a paper or large-type copy, please contact Ofqual at: statistics@ofqual.gov.uk.

Appendix

Table 1	Total number of certifications for GCSE and A level in each academic year, 2010/11 to 2014/15
Table 2	Total number of GCSE entries and late entries in each academic year, 2010/11 to 2014/15
Table 3	Total number of A level entries and late entries in each academic year, 2010/11 to 2014/15

Table 1: Total number of certifications for GCSE and A level in each academic year, 2010/11 to 2014/15

England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas

	Year	AQA	Pearson	OCR	WJEC	CCEA	ICAAE	Total
GCSE (certifications)	2010/11	2,778,000	1,524,600	1,113,500	675,000	151,100	16,200	6,258,400
	2011/12	2,601,000	1,858,700	1,117,500	699,900	144,100	2,200	6,423,500
	2012/13	2,683,000	2,040,400	980,200	697,800	137,600	800	6,539,900
	2013/14	2,431,500	1,663,600	877,400	723,000	146,600		5,842,100
	2014/15	2,368,500	1,661,200	831,400	695,700	150,500		5,707,200
A level (certifications)	2010/11	1,101,800	619,300	663,700	205,200	57,800		2,647,800
	2011/12	1,069,500	629,000	621,500	203,300	66,700		2,589,900
	2012/13	1,069,900	634,100	603,800	204,200	68,100		2,580,200
	2013/14	1,028,000	592,400	548,400	209,600	69,900		2,448,300
	2014/15	1,033,400	571,800	532,500	209,200	69,100		2,416,000

Source: exams monitoring data

1. Data are supplied by exam boards.
2. Data are rounded to the nearest 100. Figures have been rounded independently so may not sum to the total.
3. ICAA(E) awarded GCSEs for last time in 2013. ICAA(E) do not currently offer any GCSEs, so have a blank from 2014 onwards.

Table 2: Total number of GCSE entries and late entries in each academic year, 2010/11 to 2014/15

England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas								
	Year	AQA	Pearson	OCR	WJEC	CCEA	ICAAE	Total
Number of ontime entries for GCSE	2010/11	6,532,000	4,673,300	3,675,100	936,200	270,500	16,400	16,103,500
	2011/12	7,858,600	4,940,300	3,348,700	2,131,400	368,800	2,200	18,650,000
	2012/13	7,152,000	4,399,700	2,754,200	2,207,400	454,800	1,000	16,969,000
	2013/14	6,724,000	4,239,500	2,749,900	2,583,000	458,400		16,754,900
	2014/15	6,613,300	4,281,900	2,620,500	2,478,900	473,800		16,468,400
Number of late entries for GCSE	2010/11	443,800	386,800	300,000	14,700	10,600	200	1,156,000
	2011/12	737,100	288,300	339,500	36,600	15,100	0	1,416,600
	2012/13	717,300	274,200	245,700	40,800	19,400	0	1,297,500
	2013/14	289,800	76,300	93,200	32,400	18,700		510,400
	2014/15	285,900	136,600	75,700	32,100	16,800		547,200
Total GCSE entries	2010/11	6,975,800	5,060,100	3,975,100	950,800	281,100	16,600	17,259,500
	2011/12	8,595,800	5,228,500	3,688,200	2,168,000	383,900	2,200	20,066,600
	2012/13	7,869,300	4,673,900	2,999,900	2,248,300	474,200	1,000	18,266,500
	2013/14	7,013,800	4,315,800	2,843,100	2,615,400	477,100		17,265,300
	2014/15	6,899,100	4,418,500	2,696,200	2,511,000	490,700		17,015,600
Proportion of total GCSE entries that were late	2010/11	6.36%	7.64%	7.55%	1.54%	3.77%	1.48%	6.70%
	2011/12	8.58%	5.51%	9.21%	1.69%	3.93%	0.00%	7.06%
	2012/13	9.12%	5.87%	8.19%	1.82%	4.10%	0.00%	7.10%
	2013/14	4.13%	1.77%	3.28%	1.24%	3.93%		2.96%
	2014/15	4.14%	3.09%	2.81%	1.28%	3.43%		3.22%

Source: exams monitoring data

Notes:

1. Data are supplied by exam boards.
2. Data are rounded to the nearest 100. Figures have been rounded independently so may not sum to the total.
3. ICAA(E) awarded GCSEs for last time in 2013. ICAA(E) do not currently offer any GCSEs, so have a blank from 2014 onwards.

Table 3: Total number of A level entries and late entries in each academic year, 2010/11 to 2014/15

England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas							
	Year	AQA	Pearson	OCR	WJEC	CCEA	Total
Number of ontime entries for A level	2010/11	2,763,500	1,796,900	1,790,300	516,700	175,200	7,042,600
	2011/12	2,733,800	1,859,700	1,630,200	517,900	182,200	6,923,800
	2012/13	2,683,600	1,867,400	1,611,200	519,000	186,900	6,868,100
	2013/14	2,362,100	1,521,100	1,319,500	499,400	181,100	5,883,200
	2014/15	2,353,300	1,431,500	1,338,400	488,700	171,700	5,783,600
Number of late entries for A level	2010/11	80,800	66,700	87,300	3,100	2,600	240,400
	2011/12	64,000	60,300	155,800	4,500	3,700	288,200
	2012/13	100,000	58,300	127,000	6,900	3,600	295,900
	2013/14	27,900	21,600	116,800	3,500	3,500	173,400
	2014/15	50,000	38,500	46,300	3,100	1,900	139,800
Total A level entries	2010/11	2,844,300	1,863,500	1,877,600	519,800	177,900	7,283,000
	2011/12	2,797,800	1,920,000	1,786,000	522,400	185,800	7,212,000
	2012/13	2,783,700	1,925,700	1,738,200	525,900	190,500	7,163,900
	2013/14	2,390,000	1,542,700	1,436,400	502,900	184,600	6,056,600
	2014/15	2,403,300	1,470,000	1,384,700	491,800	173,500	5,923,300
Proportion of total A level entries that were late	2010/11	2.84%	3.58%	4.65%	0.59%	1.47%	3.30%
	2011/12	2.29%	3.14%	8.72%	0.86%	1.97%	4.00%
	2012/13	3.59%	3.03%	7.31%	1.30%	1.90%	4.13%
	2013/14	1.17%	1.40%	8.13%	0.70%	1.91%	2.86%
	2014/15	2.08%	2.62%	3.34%	0.62%	1.07%	2.36%

Source: exams monitoring data

Notes:

1. Data are supplied by exam boards.
2. Data are rounded to the nearest 100. Figures have been rounded independently so may not sum to the total.
3. ICAA(E) awarded GCSEs for last time in 2013. ICAA(E) do not currently offer any GCSEs, so have a blank from 2014 onwards.

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