



Department
for Education

Level 2 and 3 attainment in England: Attainment by age 19 in 2015

Technical document

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Introduction

This document provides background information on the 'Level 2 and 3 attainment in England: Attainment by age 19 in 2015' statistical first release (SFR). It explains the concepts and methods used to calculate the attainment figures and provides an overview of the data sources and other relevant information.

Coverage

The data in this publication covers young people who were age 19 between 2004 and 2015 in England. The publication contains data on Level 2, Level 2 English and maths and Level 3 attainment by age 19 for each cohort. The attainment figures are presented by gender, free school meal (FSM) eligibility, special education needs (SEN) status, Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) quartile and ethnicity for those in the state sector at academic age 15.

Tables 1 to 5 - the main national, institution type, and qualification type tables - include students in England of the relevant age who are recorded as achieving Level 2 or Level 3. Some Level 2s achieved through Level 3 qualifications are discounted to mitigate double counting caused by inward migration (for further information see section on numerator adjustments below). The denominators for these tables are the total school population (including independent schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)) for the cohort concerned in the year it turned 15 (academic age 14, i.e. generally year 10). These tables are not comparable with Table 6 onwards.

Tables 6 to 24 refer to young people in the state sector and are based on young people who were included in the spring pupil level census in the year in which they turned 16 (academic age 15). As well as pupils in maintained mainstream schools, academies and maintained special schools, this will also include the small number of pupils attending non-maintained special schools as these are covered by the School Census.

Tables 25 to 27 showing estimates for local authorities including all school types are not directly comparable with the national estimates (Tables 1 to 5) nor with the other LA level data (Tables 6 to 24). While the source for their denominators is the same (School Census in year turned 15) the numerators exclude anyone entering the data for the first time post-16.

For all local authority tables, assignment to local authority is based on the school attended in the academic year the young person turned 16. As with the school performance tables, the LA of the school is based on the administrative LA rather than its postcode (this only differs in a very small number of cases).

Qualification Levels

Achievements in the following qualifications are counted at Level 2+:

- 1 short GCSE at grade A* to C equals 10%
- 1 full GCSE at grade A* to C equals 20%
- 1 Double Award GCSE (including VGCSEs) at grade A* to C equals 40%
- 1 “part” intermediate GNVQ equals 40%
- 1 “full” intermediate GNVQ equals 80%
- 1 AS level (including VCE) at grade A to E equals 50%
- 1 A/A2 level (including VCE) at grade A to E equals 100%
- 1 NVQ pass at Level 2 or 3 equals 100% (this does not include qualifications accredited into the Qualifications and Curriculum Framework (QCF) using the term “NVQ” in the title)
- 1 pass with at least 325 guided learning hours (GLH) in a vocationally related qualification (VRQ) including QCF qualifications. A pass at Level 2 or Level 3 (with minimum 595 GLH) equals 100%
- 1 International Baccalaureate pass equals 100%
- 1 Apprenticeship pass equals 100%
- 1 Advanced Extension Award equals 5%
- 1 “Approved” IGCSE¹ from 2008/9 onwards counts 20%
- 1 Pre-U Principal Subject counts 80%
- 1 Pre-U Short Course Subject counts 40%

Achievements in the following qualifications are counted at Level 3:

- 1 AS level (including Applied and VCE equivalents) at grade A to E equals 25%
- 1 A/A2 level (including Applied and VCE equivalents) at grade A to E equals 50%
- 1 NVQ pass at Level 3 100% (this does not include for qualifications accredited into the Qualifications and Curriculum Framework (QCF) using the term “NVQ” in the title)
- 1 pass with at least 595 guided learning hours in a vocationally related qualification (VRQ) including QCF qualifications at Level 3 equals 100%
- 1 International Baccalaureate pass equals 100%
- 1 Advanced Apprenticeship pass equals 100%
- 1 Pre-U Principal Subject counts 50% (counted as A levels in L3 qualification type table)
- 1 Pre-U Short Course Subject counts 25% (counted as AS levels in L3 qualification type table)
- 1 Advanced Extension Award equals 5%

Achievements in the following qualifications are counted as Level 2 English up to 2012/13:

- For GCSE A*-C: Full GCSE or approved IGCSE¹ in English at grades A*-C or AS/A level passes
- For other Level 2: passes in Level 2 or 3 Key Skills in Communication; Level 2 Basic Skills in Adult Literacy; Level 2 Functional Skills in English.

Achievements in the following qualifications are counted as Level 2 maths up to 2012/13:

- For GCSE A*-C: Full GCSE or approved IGCSE¹ in Maths at grades A*-C or AS/A level and IB passes.
- For other Level 2: passes in Level 2 or 3 Key Skills in Application of number; Level 2 Basic Skills in Adult Numeracy; Level 2 Functional Skills in Maths; Free Standing Maths at level 2 or 3.

Achievements in the following qualifications are counted as Level 1 English up to 2012/13:

- GCSE D-G: Full GCSE or approved IGCSE¹ in English at grades D-G and passes in Level 1 Key Skills in Communication; Level 1 Basic Skills in Adult Literacy; Level 1 Functional Skills in English

Achievements in the following qualifications are counted as Level 1 maths up to 2012/13:

¹ See [IGCSEs section](#)

- GCSE D-G: Full GCSE approved IGCSE¹ in Maths at grades D-G and passes in Level 1 Key Skills in Application of number; Level 1 Basic Skills in Adult Numeracy; Level 1 Functional Skills in Maths; Free Standing Maths at level 1.

The qualifications counted for English and maths in 2013/14 and 2014/15 closely align with those highlighted in the [maths and English condition of funding](#) for 2014/15.

Combinations of academic qualifications at different levels are allowed where their parts add up to 100 per cent for that level. For example a candidate with 3 full GCSEs at grades A* to C (20% each) and 1 AS level (50%) would be deemed to have attained a Level 2 (60% + 50% = 110%).

GCSEs and GNVQs are subject to discounting, as are AS and A/A2 levels. For example, say a learner gains an AS level (25% L3) in 2009 and then an A level (50% L3) in the same subject in 2010. Discounting means the person has 25% of a full Level 3 in 2009 and then 50% in 2010 as the AS level is replaced by the full A level.

In Tables 3 and 4 people are assigned to qualification types in the following order:

Level 2: 5 GCSEs; Apprenticeships; NVQs and VRQs; GNVQs or a combination of GNVQs and GCSEs; Level 3 Qualifications; Combination of qualifications.

Level 3: A-Levels (including Applied A levels/AVCEs/Pre-U Principal Subject); International Baccalaureate; AS Levels; Advanced Apprenticeship; NVQs and VRQs; Other (including Level 3 Diploma)

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are counted as full Level 2 or 3 qualifications. However, any qualifications now coming under the Qualifications Curriculum Framework (QCF), including those with NVQ in the title, must meet the minimum GLH criteria set out above (325 for Level 2 and 595 for Level 3). This has led to a reduction in the number of vocational qualifications being counted as full. All QCF qualifications are categorised within the awarding body data as Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQs) and are not separately identified within the data as NVQs or otherwise. Since the 2012 SFR we have combined the previously published separate columns for NVQs and VRQs in the qualification type tables and the impact can be seen in the Technical Notes of the [Level 2 and 3 attainment by young people aged 19 in 2014 SFR](#).

IGCSEs

'Approved' IGCSEs are included in this SFR up until 2012/13. For 2013/14 onwards, IGCSEs that are no longer 'approved' in the performance tables have still been included in this SFR for two main reasons. Firstly, the aim of this SFR is to measure overall attainment at 19 and secondly, the previously approved IGCSEs count for the prior attainment criteria in the [maths and English condition of funding](#) for 2014/15 and 2015/16. Therefore, if they were removed from the maths and English qualifications it would give an inaccurate picture of how many pupils need to continue studying these subjects, and of the impact of the funding policy changes.

Tech levels

Tech levels are advanced (Level 3) qualifications for students wishing to specialise in a specific occupation or occupational group. All tech levels are backed by at least 5 employers or a relevant industry body. They will be reported separately in 16-19 performance tables from 2016, alongside technical certificates (vocational Level 2), applied general (vocational Level 3) and academic qualifications.

Even though the first tech level (and applied general) courses didn't start until September 2014, some of the qualifications that make up these courses started earlier than this, therefore we can report on tech level attainment by age that pre-dates this official starting point. This should be borne in mind when looking at the increase in tech level attainment in Figure 8 of the SFR.

The lists of qualifications approved under the tech level and applied general categories, for teaching from September 2014 and reporting in the 2016 performance tables, are available [here](#).

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Pupils with special educational needs have learning difficulties or disabilities that can make it harder for them to learn than most pupils of the same age.

Pupils with special educational needs comprise of those with SEN Support (previously School Action or School Action Plus) or with an Education, Health and Care Plan (previously a Statement of SEN). The relevant SFR tables still use the older terminology as this is how they were known when the SEN status of the learners was assigned (academic age 15 in 2011/12):

- School Action – where extra or different help is given, from that provided as part of the school's usual curriculum.
- School Action Plus – where the class teacher and the SENCO receive advice or support from outside specialists (the specialist teacher, an educational psychologist, a speech and language therapist or other health professionals).
- Statement – a pupil has a statement of SEN when a formal assessment has been made. A document setting out the child's needs and the extra help they should receive is in place.

Tables 7 to 11 also show the primary type of SEN at academic age 15 for those in the School Action Plus and Statement groups.

Free School Meals

Free school meal eligibility is used as a proxy for deprivation, and relates to those who meet the eligibility criteria and make a claim.

Prior to 2001, the numbers eligible for a free school meal were those pupils who had, or whose parents had, satisfied the relevant authority that they were receiving Income Support (IS) or income based Jobseekers Allowance (IBJSA) or support provided under Part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. From 2001 onwards this definition was modified to include only pupils where parents had indicated that they wished their child to have a free meal and had confirmed benefit receipt with the LA or school.

Under changes to the tax credit system introduced in April 2003, children in families receiving the Child Tax Credit (CTC) rather than IS or IBJSA would not have been entitled to receive a free school meal. As a result, for 2004 School Census, the entitlement for free school meals was extended to 'non-working' families who have an amount of income that extinguishes their IS or IBJSA benefit, who are receiving support via CTC, but are working fewer than 16 hours per week and thus not in receipt of Working Tax Credit (WTC). The majority of these families would have received IS or IBJSA prior to 6 April (and accordingly their children a free school meal). As a result of this change to entitlement, these children continue to be eligible for free school meals.

Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)

IDACI is provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). The index is based on Super Output Areas (SOAs) in England. Each SOA is given a rank between 1 and 32,482 where 1 is the most deprived SOA. IDACI is a subset of the Income Deprivation Domain of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Each SOA is given a score showing the percentage of pupils aged under 16 that live in families that are income deprived, i.e. they are in receipt of certain benefits and their equivalised income is below 60 per cent of median before housing costs. Further information about IDACI can be found on the [CLG website](#).

Relationship between academic year, academic age and year group, for the 19 in 2015 cohort

The 19 in 2015 cohort is the group of pupils aged 19 by the end of the 2014/15 academic year (ie aged 19 on 31/08/2015) as outlined in the table below.

Academic year	Academic age (years)	Year group	Age by end of academic year
2010/11	14	10	15
2011/12	15	11	16
2012/13	16	12	17
2013/14	17	13	18
2014/15	18	14	19

Data Sources

Estimates reported in this SFR are derived from matched administrative data. The first publication of figures from this methodology was in February 2005. The matched data methodology was introduced on the recommendation of a National Statistics Quality Review. This is a link to the report: [National Statistics Quality Review Series, Report No.38, Review of the Measurement of Attainment of Young People](#)

Several data sources are matched together at an individual level, using personal identifiers such as name, date of birth, gender and home postcode where available:

- Pupil level Schools Census database containing information on the participation and personal characteristics of pupils in state schools, collected by DfE.
- Awarding Organisation data including that collected as part of the School and Colleges Performance Tables exercise, and separately from awarding organisations as part of the Vocational Qualifications Database up until 2010/11.
- Individualised Learner Record (ILR) database covering participation and qualifications obtained in Further Education (FE) and Work-based Learning (WBL), collected by the FE Data Service from learning providers.

Further information on these datasets is available in DfE's Statement of Administrative Sources which can be reached via this link: [Standards for official statistics published by DfE](#).

The number of eligible qualifications not recorded in the datasets is considered to be minimal. The level of matching between data sources is very high.

Achievement records from Awarding Body data, the Vocational Qualifications Database and ILR are used to calculate the numerators. Results are only published at an aggregate level to protect the confidentiality of individuals.

Time series comparability

The data in this SFR is comparable for the whole time series.

Uses of data

The main use of these statistics is to provide Ministers, government departments and the wider public a comprehensive picture of trends in Level 2, Level 2 English and maths and Level 3 attainment by age 19.

Revisions to previously published figures

Each year the data is re-matched and this can alter the attainment figures slightly (either increasing or decreasing them). Previously there may have been cases where there was double-counting for the same

person (i.e. two records for the same person when there should have been one), or where one record should have been identified two people in the matched data.

The net impact of these revisions on the overall measures for the whole population reported in Table 1 is negligible (a maximum change of +/- 0.1ppts in estimates of attainment of Level 2 and Level 3 by age).

Numerator adjustments

The National Statistics Quality Review recommended that an adjustment is applied to the Level 2+ numerator to avoid double counting caused by migration (see section 3 of the Quality Review report for more information). Throughout the historical series people that have been recorded as having reached Level 3 but without having any Level 2 achievements were excluded from the Level 2+ numerator as they were assumed to be inward migrants i.e. people who were not in school at age 14. They are included in the Level 3 numerator. This methodology was refined slightly from the SFR published in March 2010, and the historical series updated as a result. The adjustment is now only applied to those who enter the data post-16 (ie after year 11), and it is now applied to those reaching Level 2 through any Level 3 qualifications (not just a full Level 3) in the first year that they enter the data. So for example someone appearing in the data for the first time after year 11 who reaches Level 2 through the achievement of two AS levels has their Level 2 discounted.

Comparison with measures published in the School and College Performance Tables

The definitions of Level 2 and Level 3 (and denominators) do not equate with those used in the School and College Performance Tables to measure attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 and 16-18 study.

For this SFR, vocational qualifications are not combined with each other or academic qualifications and are only counted as full if they have Guided Learning Hours (GLH) of at least 325 hours for Level 2 and 595 hours for Level 3.

However, up until 2012/13 the school performance tables included all accredited vocational qualifications and these could be combined with each other and academic qualifications in order to reach the Level 2 or 3 threshold (i.e. the measures of 5+ A*-C or equivalent, and of 2+ A-levels or equivalent).

In 2013/14 changes were made to the performance tables and more information can be found here: [Revised GCSE and equivalents results in England, 2013 to 2014](#). As well with the changes to the IGCSEs included the main changes were:

- Changes following Professor Alison Wolf's Review of Vocational Education which restricted the qualifications counted; prevented any qualification counting as larger than one GCSE; and capping the number of non-GCSEs included in performance measures at two per pupil
- An early entry policy to only count a pupil's first attempt at a qualification in the English Baccalaureate subjects. This brought the two attainment measures, closer together.

In July 2011, the Department for Education announced the 'Wolf' changes planned for the 2013/14 performance tables (highlighted above). Institutions were expected to teach the higher quality qualifications from September 2012, which significantly reduced the number of Level 2 qualifications being taught to 14-16 year olds that meet the minimum of 325 guided learning hours to be counted in this SFR. Furthermore, no qualification now count as equivalent to more than one GCSE in the performance tables, which may have affected take up of larger non-GCSE qualifications.

A comparison between the results for attainment at the end of Key Stage 4, and the measures of Level 2 at 16 used in this SFR, for young people in state schools, are shown in the table below (**Table 1**). The 2013/14 data onwards is not directly comparable with earlier Key Stage 4 attainment data, more information about the changes in methodology can be found within the details of [Revised GCSE and equivalents results in England, 2013 to 2014](#).

The 19 in 2016 cohort was the first cohort whose Level 2 at 16 results were affected by this change, leading to a fall in attainment of Level 2 at 16 from 69.2 per cent in 2012 to 67.1 per cent in 2013 and down to 64.1 per cent in 2014 and 62.6 per cent in 2015. When only academic qualifications are included in the matched administrative data, the change in 2015 is similar to the Key Stage 4 data.

Table 1: Percentage of young people qualified to Level 2 and Level 2 with English and maths, by data source

Coverage: England, young people in the state sector

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Key Stage 4, 5+ A*-C or equivalent (GCSE attainment SFR measure)	54.9	57.3	59.9	64.4	69.8	76.1	80.5	83.0	83.0	65.6	66.2
Level 2 at 16 (Attainment at 19 SFR measure)	54.4	56.6	58.0	60.5	63.7	67.0	69.0	69.2	67.1	64.1	62.6
Key Stage 4, 5+ A*-C with English and maths GCSE (GCSE attainment SFR measure)	42.5	44.0	45.8	48.2	50.7	55.1	58.2	58.8	60.6	56.6	57.1
Level 2 at 16 with English and maths (Attainment at 19 SFR measure)	42.2	44.2	46.2	48.9	51.2	54.7	56.5	56.3	56.3	56.4	55.7

Publication timetable

Published annually in March/April each year. The next publication will be March/April 2017

Feedback and user engagement

Feedback on methodology and presentation is welcomed and encouraged. If you have any comments on the information collected, the timing or format of our outputs or whether these statistics are meeting your requirements, please email: post16.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk



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