

## A Level Geography Results Analysis 2019

### Context

In recent years, there has been a trend towards a higher percentage of 18-year-old A level students taking 3 A levels and a lower percentage taking 4 and 5 or more A levels (Ofqual, 2019). The average number of A levels per pupil has remained fairly stable from the legacy specifications to the reformed A levels (Ofqual). The biggest change has been the decline in AS. Since this is now a stand-alone qualification in England and Northern Ireland the number tends to indicate those students taking a broader curriculum in sixth forms. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the norm now tends to be that students study three A level subjects.

Entries for the sciences continued to increase with female entries for the first time overtaking males. Entries for Biology, Chemistry and Physics represent 20.9% of all entries. Although the entries for Mathematics (11.5% of all entries 2019) were down by 5.9% it remains the most popular subject at A level.

### A Level key points

- 2019 the number of Geography A level entries **increased** from 2018 and now represent 4.4% of all A level entries. This is an increase of +4.2% from 2018
- Total A Level entries have increased as a proportion of 18-year-olds. However, there has been a decrease of 2.9% in the 18-year-old population in 2019, thus the total number of entries fell by 1.3%
- It is notable that the percentage achieving the highest grades in Geography (A-A\*) has decreased from 24.9% in 2018 to 23.8% in 2019. It is suggested that where there have been significant increases in entries, slight but not unexpected, decreases in the percentage achieving the higher grades have occurred. This is believed to be a consequence of the changing entry patterns
- Ofqual research indicates that there is generally a small dip in performance when new qualifications are available for the first time, following which performance gradually improves. The comparable outcomes approach to establish grade boundaries aims to ensure that students taking reformed A levels in the first years are not disadvantaged by the changes to the qualifications. With more students taking A levels this year, including Geography, this suggests changes in the cohort,

and may go some way to account for the changes in the grade distribution for the subject in 2019. There has been an increase in the percentage of boys taking the subject but, girls still outperform boys in the subject, with 7.3% of girls gaining an A\* compared with 3.5% of boys. This is an increase for girls from 2018 but a decrease for boys from 2018

- The male to female ratio in Geography in 2019 is 49%:51% compared with 45%:55% for all entries. This makes Geography the most gender balanced subject at A Level. However, girls continue to outperform boys
- In 2019 Geography was the 10<sup>th</sup> most popular subject (maintaining its position from 2018).

### **AS Level key points**

The number of entries for AS Geography continued to decline. AS Geography entries represent 3.4% of all AS entries in 2019. The total entry for AS across all subjects has declined, with total entries declining by 44.1%. in line with recent policy changes in England. In Geography this decline was 67% from 2018. If we compare the decline from 2016, the last year of the legacy specifications, the decline is 88%.

Since the Geography cohort is now so small it would be unwise to try to make a detailed comparison with previous years.

## A-level Geography Entries

### Top GCE A-level subjects in 2019 by entry (see Figure 1)

In 2019 Geography was the 10<sup>th</sup> most popular subject (maintaining its position from 2018).

**Figure 1: Top GCE A-level subjects in 2019 by entry**

Ranking		Subject	% of total	Number of candidates
<b>1</b>	<b>(1)</b>	Mathematics	11.5	91895
<b>2</b>	<b>(2)</b>	Biology	8.6	69196
<b>3</b>	<b>(3)</b>	Psychology	8.1	64598
<b>4</b>	<b>(4)</b>	Chemistry	7.4	59090
<b>5</b>	<b>(5)</b>	History	6.4	51438
<b>6</b>	<b>(7)</b>	Art and Design Subjects	5.3	42307
<b>7</b>	<b>(6)</b>	English Literature	5.1	40824
<b>8</b>	<b>(8)</b>	Physics	4.9	38958
<b>9</b>	<b>(9)</b>	Sociology	4.7	38015
<b>10</b>	<b>(10)</b>	Geography	4.4	34960

**(2018 ranking in brackets)**

### Geography A-level trends 2008-18 (Figure 2)

- In 2019 the number of Geography A level entries **increased** from 2018 and now represent 4.4% of all A level entries. This is an increase of +4.2% from 2018
- It is notable that the percentage achieving the **highest grades** in Geography (A-A\*) has **decreased** from 24.9% in 2018 to 23.8% in 2019
- There is an increase in the number of students gaining a grade D from 13.3% in 2018 to 14.4% in 2019.

**Figure 2: Trends in A-level geography entry between 2010 and 2019**

Year	Entries	% of total entry	A*	A	B	C	D	E	A*-E	A*/A	Change from previous year
2010	32063	3.8	6.8	23.4	27.6	23.1	13.4	4.5	98.8	30.2	-164
2011	31226	3.6	7.1	23.0	27.9	23.6	13.3	4.1	99.0	30.1	-837
2012	32005	3.7	6.3	22.8	29	24.6	12.6	3.9	99.2	29.1	779
2013	32872	3.9	5.6	22.9	29.4	24.5	12.7	4.1	99.2	28.5	867
2014	33007	4.0	6.3	21.2	29.3	24.9	13.1	4.4	99.2	27.5	135
2015	37195	4.4	7.1	20.4	29.5	24.6	13.6	4.0	99.2	27.5	4188
2016	36363	4.3	6.0	20.2	29.7	25.6	13.4	4.1	99.1	26.2	-832
2017	37814	4.6	5.9	20.8	29.7	25.3	13.0	4.1	98.9	26.7	1451
2018	33538	4.1	5.5	<b>19.4</b>	30.0	26.1	13.3	4.4	98.7	24.9	-4276
2019	34960		5.4	<b>18.4</b>	29.4	26.4	14.4	4.6	93.2	23.8	1422

**A-level entries by country (figures 3, 4 and 5)**

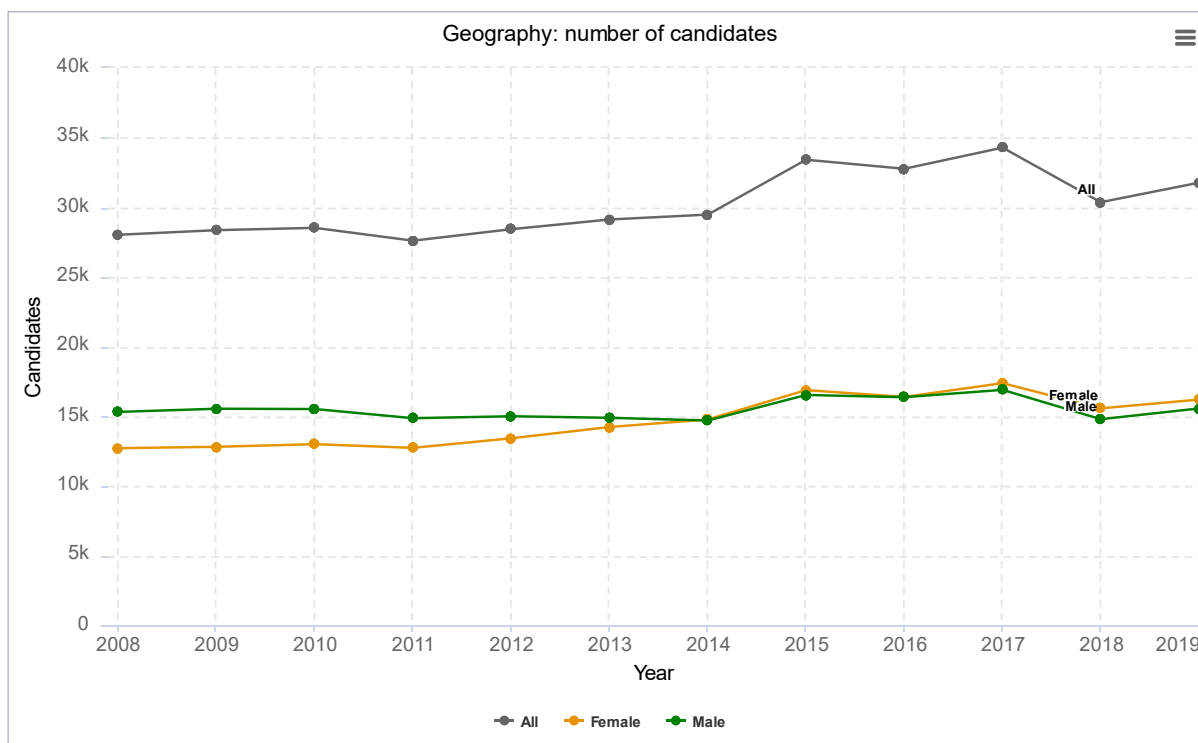
- Increase in entries in England 4.6%
- In England the number of entries is higher than the period 2008-2014, though still down on the high point of 2015-2017
- The grade distribution for England shows the decline in the number of students achieving a grade A and the increase in the number achieving a grade D
- Slight increase in entries in Northern Ireland of 0.6%
- Decrease in entries in Wales -1.5%.

**Figure 3: Geography A-level entries by country 2010-2019**

Year	England	Northern Ireland	Wales	UK (not Scotland)	Change England	Change NI	Change Wales	Change UK
2010	28525	1806	1732	32063	165 <i>0.5%</i>	-195 <i>-9.1%</i>	-134 <i>-7.0%</i>	-164 <i>-0.5%</i>
2011	27604	1878	1744	31226	-921 <i>-3.0%</i>	72 <i>3.3%</i>	12 <i>0.6%</i>	-837 <i>-2.4%</i>
2012	28430	1868	1707	32005	826 <i>2.7%</i>	-10 <i>-0.5%</i>	-37 <i>-1.9%</i>	779 <i>2.3%</i>
2013	29126	2001	1745	32872	696 <i>2.3%</i>	133 <i>6.2%</i>	38 <i>2.0%</i>	867 <i>2.5%</i>
2014	29476	1896	1635	33007	350 <i>1.2%</i>	-105 <i>-4.9%</i>	-110 <i>-5.7%</i>	135 <i>0.4%</i>
2015	33414 <i>4.3%</i>	1974 <i>6.1%</i>	1807 <i>5.0%</i>	37195 <i>4.4%</i>	3938 <i>13.0%</i>	78 <i>3.6%</i>	172 <i>9.0%</i>	4188 <i>12.2%</i>
2016	32765 <i>4.3%</i>	1864 <i>5.9%</i>	1734 <i>4.9%</i>	36363 <i>4.3%</i>	-649 <i>-2.1%</i>	-110 <i>-5.1%</i>	-73 <i>-3.8%</i>	-832 <i>-2.4%</i>
2017	34281 <i>4.5%</i>	1702 <i>5.6%</i>	1539 <i>4.6%</i>	37814 <i>4.6%</i>	1516 <i>5.0%</i>	-162 <i>-7.5%</i>	-195 <i>-10.2%</i>	1451 <i>3.8%</i>
2018	30366 <i>4.1</i>	1610 <i>5.6</i>	1342 <i>4.1</i>	33538 <i>4.1</i>	-3915 <i>-11.4</i>	-92 <i>-5.4</i>	-197 <i>-12.8</i>	-4276 <i>-11.3</i>
2019	31483 <i>4.3</i>	1619 <i>5.7</i>	1342 <i>4.2</i>	34960 <i>4.3</i>	1402 <i>4.6</i>	9 <i>0.6</i>	-20 <i>-1.5</i>	1422 <i>4.2</i>

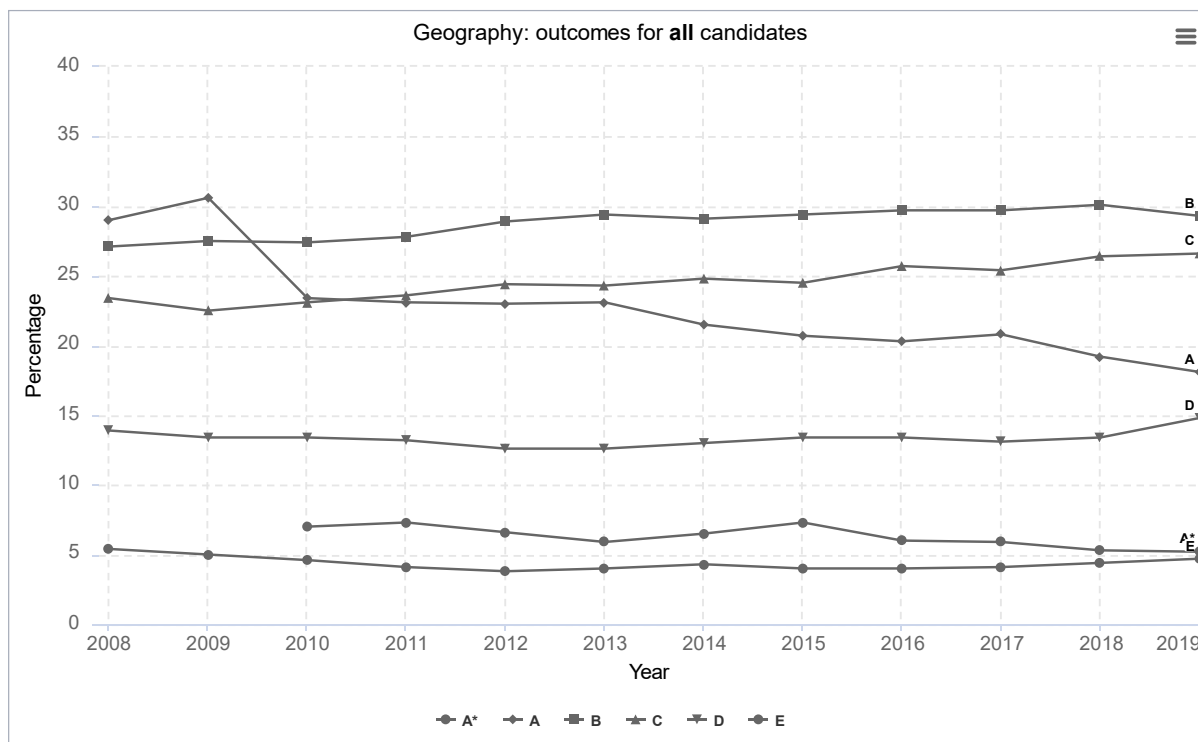
*% figures in italics for entries show the proportion of entries for geography out of the total number of entries for all A-level subjects.*

**Figure 4: Geography number of candidates in England**



Source: <https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/Alevel/Outcomes/>

**Figure 5: Geography outcomes for all candidates in England**



Source: <https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/Alevel/Outcomes/>

### Entries by Gender: A-level (Figures 6a, 6b, 7 and 8)

- There has been an increase in male entries now being 49% of all entries.
- Geography is now the most gender equal subject at A level in terms of entries.
- The grade distribution shows that girls outperform boys with 7.3% of girls gaining an A\* compared with 3.5% of boys. This is an increase for girls from 2018 but a decrease for boys from 2018.
- Boys show an increase in the % gaining a grade D from 15.8% 2018 to 17.1% in 2019 whereas for girls this was 10.8% in 2018 to 11.8 in 2019.

**Figure 6a: Male entries for A-level geography 2010-2019**

Year	Entries	% TOTAL ENTRY	A*	A	B	C	D	E	A-E	A*-A	% male
2010	17333	4.4	5.1	20.7	27.2	24.9	15.3	5.4	98.6	25.8	54.1
2011	16739	4.2	5.5	19.8	27.9	25.3	15.3	5	98.8	25.3	53.6
2012	16784	4.2	4.7	19.4	28.1	27.2	14.9	4.6	98.9	24.1	52.4
2013	16776	4.3	4.3	19.2	28.5	26.9	14.9	5.2	99	23.5	51.0
2014	16489	4.3	4.8	17.5	28.3	27.4	15.5	5.4	98.9	22.3	50.0
2015	18348	4.8	5	17.1	28.7	27.1	16	5	98.9	22.1	49.3
2016	18172	4.8	4.3	17.1	29.3	27.6	15.5	4.9	98.7	21.4	50.0
2017	18663	5.0	4.2	17.5	29.2	27.6	15.2	5.1	98.8	21.7	49.4
2018	16310	4.5	3.9	15.3	29.1	28.8	15.8	5.6	98.5	19.2	48.6
2019	17136	4.4	3.5	14.8	28.6	28.7	17.1	5.5	94.7	18.3	49

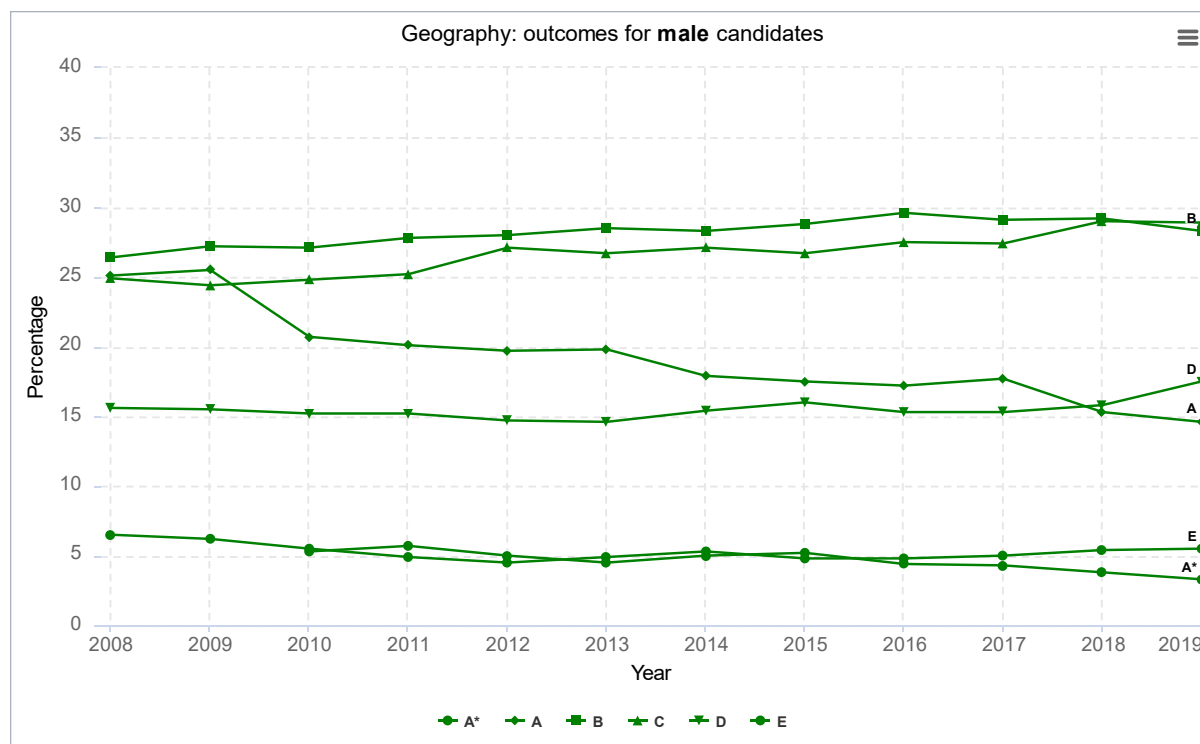
**Figure 6b: Female entries for A-level geography 2010-2018**

Year	Entries	% TOTAL ENTRY	A*	A	B	C	D	E	A-E	A*-A	% female
2010	14730	3.2	8.8	26.6	28.1	21	11.1	3.6	99.2	35.4	45.9
2011	14487	3.1	9	26.5	28.1	21.7	10.9	3.2	99.4	35.5	46.4
2012	15221	3.3	8.1	26.6	30	21.6	10.2	3	99.5	34.7	47.6
2013	16096	3.5	7.0	26.6	30.5	21.9	10.5	3.0	99.5	33.6	49.0

2014	16518	3.6	7.8	25.0	30.1	22.6	10.6	3.3	99.4	32.8	50.0
2015	18847	4.0	9.2	23.6	30.2	22.3	11.1	3.1	99.5	32.8	50.7
2016	18191	3.9	7.7	23.3	30.1	23.6	11.2	3.3	99.2	31.0	50.0
2017	19151	4.2	7.6	24.0	30.2	23.2	10.9	3.2	99.1	31.6	50.6
2018	17228	3.9	7.1	23.2	30.9	23.6	10.8	3.4	99.0	30.3	51.4
2019	17824	4	7.3	21.8	30.2	24.1	11.8	3.8	99	29.1	51

## England

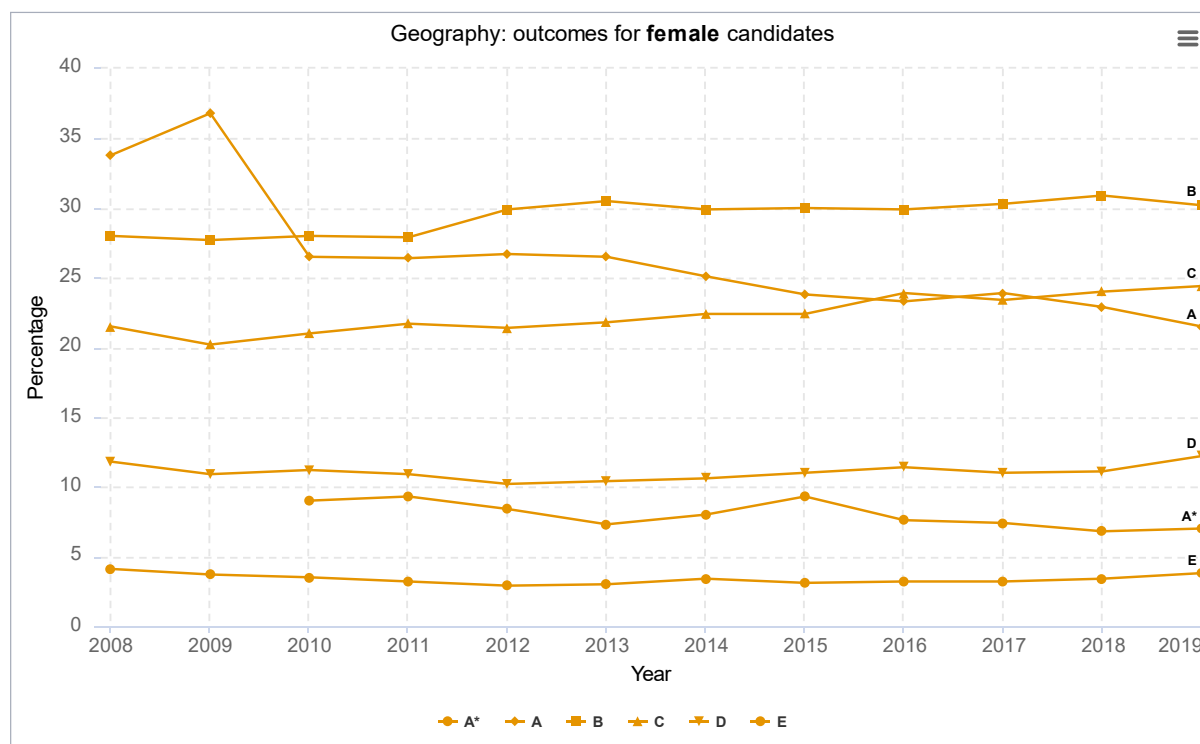
**Figure 7: Geography outcomes for male candidates in England**



Source: <https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/Alevel/Outcomes/>



**Figure 8: Geography outcomes for female candidates in England**



Source: <https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/Alevel/Outcomes/>

### AS Geography 2019: Key points

These are standalone qualifications in England and Northern Ireland that no longer count towards the A level qualification. Students therefore do not have to take the AS qualification if they are intending to certificate at A level. In Wales the WJEC A level course which can be taken in Wales is different, consisting of 2 AS units and 3 A level units.

The number of entries for AS Geography continued to decline (**Figure 9**). AS Geography entries represent 3.4% of all AS entries in 2019. The total entry for AS across all subjects has declined, with total entries declining by 44.1%. in line with recent policy changes in England. In Geography this decline was 67% from 2018. If we compare the decline from 2016, the last year of the legacy specifications, the decline is 88%.

Since the Geography cohort is now so small it would be unwise to try to make a detailed comparison with previous years.

**Figure 9: Trends in AS level geography entries between 2010 and 2019**

Year	Geography entries	Change	% of all entries	A	B	C	D	E	A-E
2010	36819	-1434	3.1	24.4	19.3	19.9	16.1	11.1	90.8
2011	45302	8483	3.7	23.7	19.5	20.0	16.1	10.6	89.4
2012	45923	621	3.8	23.9	19.7	20.1	15.6	10.6	89.4
2013	47586	1663	3.5	23.6	20.1	20.1	16.0	10.1	89.9
2014	55677	8091	3.9	23.3	20.1	20.6	16.0	10.5	90.5
2015	55801	124	4.0	21.7	20.1	21.5	16.9	10.5	90.7
2016	54866	-935	4.6	22.4	20.7	21.3	16.5	10.5	91.4
2017	27617	-27249	3.8	22.5	21.9	22.1	16.8	9.4	92.7
2018	9875	-17742	2.9	21.6	20.2	21.4	17.0	10.6	90.8
2019	6650	-3225	3.4	23	21.6	20.7	15.9	9.9	91.1

**Gender: AS-level 2019 (Figure 10)**

The pattern of decline in AS entries is seen for both male and female candidates.

**Figure 10: Geography AS entries by gender 2012-2019**

Geography entries	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	Change 2018-2019
AS Males	3285	4897	13689	27610	28111	28222	24467	24080	-1612
AS Females	3365	4978	13928	27256	27690	27455	23119	21843	-1613
AS Total	6650	9875	27617	54866	55801	55677	47586	45923	-3225

## Country entries for AS level 2019 (Figures 11 and 12)

### AS geography entries 2019

**Figure 11** shows that the decline in the number of 17-year-old students taking at least one AS qualification in England has declined from 2016 to 2019 by 85%.

### Figure 11: Number of students taking at least one AS qualification (17-year-olds in England)

	2016	2017	2018	2019
AS	270,500	209,540	64,810	40,880

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guide-to-as-and-a-level-results-for-england-2019>

In Wales the WJEC A level course consists of 2 AS units and 3 A level units. The AS and the A2 combined in a single subject constitute the A level. The standard set for the AS is that expected at the end of the first year of a two-year course. The AS covers the less demanding material in an A level course. The AS is not, therefore, of full Advanced level standard. In reformed qualifications approved by Qualifications Wales, the AS contributes 40% to the overall A level, whereas in the previous specifications the contribution was 50%. During the second year of the course, students develop greater understanding of the subjects they are studying, and the A2 covers the more demanding material in the specification. The Wales specific Geography course offered by WJEC is expected to be followed by state funded learners.

Students in England or Northern Ireland cannot follow the WJEC specification for Geography. In these jurisdictions the AS is now a stand-alone qualification. Thus, there is a much smaller decline in AS entries in Wales compared with England and Northern Ireland. **(Figure 12)**. This small reduction can be attributed to an extent by the reduction in the size of the 17-year-old age group in Wales.

**Figure 12: Entries for AS by country 2019 (All)**

Year	England	Northern Ireland	Wales	UK (not Scotland)	% Change England	% Change NI	% Change Wales	% Change UK
<b>2015</b>	50633	2749	2419	55801	0	3	3	0
<b>2016</b>	50106	2533	2227	54866	-1	-9	-9	-2
<b>2017</b>	23085	2280	1968	27333	-117	-11	-13	-100
<b>2018</b>	5742	2338	1762	9842	-302	2	-12	-180
<b>2019</b>	<b>2983</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>1434</b>	<b>6650</b>	<b>-92</b>	<b>-1501</b>	<b>-23</b>	<b>-48</b>

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