

## Geography GCSE entries and results 2021

### Press Release from JCQ about the 2021 Exam results

The GCE A Level, AS and GCSE examinations in England were cancelled in an announcement by the UK government in January 2021. Teachers instead determined grades this summer, using a range of evidence that reflected the content their students had been taught. Similar approaches were also applied ... in Northern Ireland and Wales. ... Exam boards supported schools and colleges through the provision of extensive assessment materials, guidance and training, and external quality assurance checks.

Given the approach to determining grades in 2021 has been different from any previous summer, the overall grade distribution in 2021 was always likely to look different from 2020 and years when exams took place. It is therefore difficult to draw comparisons with previous sets of results. In the UK overall:

- Entries have increased by 0.9% from 2020 to 5.75m
  - Spanish continues to be the GCSE subject with the largest percentage growth (+4.7% from 2020)
  - Geography is the GCSE subject with the second largest percentage growth (+4.2% from 2020); it has the largest percentage growth at A level
- Overall outcomes increased at 7/A and 4/C (7/A and above, and 4/C and above):
  - 7/A increased by 2.7 percentage points (pp) from 2020
  - 4/C slightly increased by 0.8pp in 2021 from 2020
  - Pass rates (1/G grade and above) declined slightly by 0.6pp from 2020
- Female students performed better than male students:
  - Female students' 7/A grades increased by 3.2pp and male students by 2.2pp
  - Female students only marginally increased at 4/C by 0.4pp compared to male students who increased by 1.3pp

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/JCQ-GCSE-Press-Release-UK-FINAL.pdf>

## National entries and outcomes<sup>1</sup>

Comparisons of outcomes over time cannot be reliably made again this year because no candidates sat exams and the methods used to award grades were unique. The commentary therefore focuses on entry trends, whilst the tables simply show the grades for this year alongside the grades for previous years.

- In 2021 geography remained the sixth most popular GCSE subject.
- The increase in geography entries was 11,430 (+4.2 %) to 281,741. This was the second highest percentage increase of the large entry (over 100,000) subjects; only Spanish had a larger increase. This follows an increase in geography entries of +1.7% in 2020. In 2021 the overall increase in entries was 53,000 (0.9%) to 5.75 million, the result of an increase in cohort size driven by a rise in the population of 16-year-olds (Charts 1 and 2).
- Geography entries rose in all three nations: England had 10,793 (+4.2%) additional geography entries; Northern Ireland had 427 (+7.3%) and Wales 146 (+2.0%).
- The gender imbalance for geography entries is largely unchanged 54:46 (M:F), compared with an almost equal number of entries from Males and Females for all subjects.
- 1440 (<1% of the total geography entry) were students aged 15 and under. This was a decrease of 250 (-15%), following a decrease of 21% in 2020. For all subjects, entries for 15 years and under fell by 2%.
- The number of older student entries (aged 17+) was 3052, a fall of 32 (<1% of the total geography entry). For all subjects entries for 17+ year olds fell by 51,543 (-12%).

To emphasise, comparison of changes in performance with previous years is of limited use as the method used to award the grades was changed in 2021 following the cancellation of exams because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: JVQ results for June 21: Provisional full course results accessed 12<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

## 1. Results for geography 2021

**Table 1 Entry and cumulative grade profile for England, Northern Ireland and Wales 2021 (and 2020)**

The results issued by JVQ on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2021 for the three nations were as follows; the numeric grading scale used in England compares with the alphabetical scales used in Wales and Northern Ireland at three anchor points, 7/A; 4/C and 1/G, where standards are the same.

### All students: cumulative grades<sup>2</sup>

	Entry	7/A	4/C	1/G	U
All subjects 2021	5,745,945	28.9%	77.1%	99.0%	100%
<b>Geography 2021</b>	<b>281,743</b> <b>(4.9%)</b>	<b>35.0%</b>	<b>77.4%</b>	<b>99.1%</b>	<b>100%</b>
(Geography 2020)	256110 (4.7%)	(30.7)	(76.2)	(99.5)	100%

### Male

	Entry	7/A	4/C	1/G	U
All subjects 2021	2,871,570	24.4%	73.6%	98.7%	100%
<b>Geography 2021</b>	<b>151,820</b> <b>(5.3%)</b>	<b>30.8%</b>	<b>75.4%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>100%</b>
(Geography 2020)	145,541 (5.1%)	(27.0%)	(73.4%)	(99.4%)	100%

### Female

	Entry	7/A	4/C	1/G	U
All subjects 2021	2,874,375	33.4%	80.6%	99.2%	100%
<b>Geography 2021</b>	129,921	39.8%	79.8%	99.2%	<b>100%</b>

<sup>2</sup> Source: JVQ results for June 21: Provisional full course results accessed 12<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

	(4.5%)				
(Geography 2020)	124,770 (4.4%)	(35.0%)	(79.4%)	(99.7%)	100%

**Table 2 Gender differences in the three nations**

Female vs male

	<b>Entry</b>	<b>7/A</b>	<b>4/C</b>	<b>1/G</b>	<b>U</b>
All subjects 2021	2,805	+9.0%	+7.0%	+0.5%	100%
Geography 2021	-21,899	+9.0%	+4.4%	+0.2%	100%
(Geography 2020)	(-20,771)	(+8.0%)	(+6.0%)	(+0.3%)	(100%)

Albeit allowing for the difficulties in making comparisons with previous years, females appear to have continued to outperform males in geography, especially at the highest grades.

**Table 3 Cumulative percentages by grade 2021/(2020) for each of the three nations.**

<b>England</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>U</b>
Male	7.6	17.5	30.3	45.1	60.2	74.8	87.3	95.0	99.0	100.0
(Male 2020)	(5.8)	(14.4)	(26.7)	(41.2)	(56.6)	(72.7)	(87.0)	(95.3)	(99.4)	(100.0)
Female	12.1	25.1	38.9	53.3	66.6	79.2	89.5	95.9	99.2	100.0
(Female 2020)	(9.2)	(20.7)	(34.2)	(49.6)	(64.2)	(78.8)	(90.4)	(96.9)	(99.7)	(100.0)
<b>Male and female</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>34.3</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>63.2</b>	<b>76.8</b>	<b>88.3</b>	<b>95.4</b>	<b>99.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(MF 2020)	(7.4)	(17.3)	(30.2)	(45.1)	(60.1)	(75.5)	(88.5)	(96.0)	(99.5)	(100.0)
-----------	-------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	---------

<b>Northern Ireland</b>	A*	A	B	C*	C	D	E	F	G	U
Male	12.1	40.7	62.3	75.7	88.6	95.3	98.2	99.2	99.6	100.0
(Male 2020)	(8.9)	(33.3)	(57.2)	(71.9)	(87.7)	(95.5)	(98.6)	(99.4)	(99.7)	(100.0)
Female	26.0	60.7	78.9	86.4	93.9	96.9	98.5	99.3	99.7	100.0
(Female 2020)	(20.5)	(53.1)	(73.9)	(83.9)	(93.6)	(97.9)	(99.4)	(99.6)	(99.9)	(100.0)
<b>Male and female</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>49.8</b>	<b>69.9</b>	<b>80.6</b>	<b>91.0</b>	<b>96.0</b>	<b>98.3</b>	<b>99.2</b>	<b>99.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>
(MF 2020)	(14.2)	(42.3)	(64.8)	(77.4)	(90.4)	(96.6)	(99.0)	(99.5)	(99.8)	(100.0)

<b>Wales</b>	A*	A	B	C*	C	D	E	F	G	U
Male	16.4	36.9	61.8	81.1	91.6	96.5	98.4	99.5	100.0	16.4
(Male 2020)	(11.9)	(29.8)	(55.4)	(80.7)	(93.9)	(98.7)	(99.6)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(11.9)
Female	31.2	54.3	74.9	88.8	94.6	98.0	98.9	99.8	100.0	31.2
(Female 2020)	(22.4)	(45.3)	(69.8)	(88.8)	(96.3)	(99.1)	(99.8)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(22.4)
<b>Male and female</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>44.4</b>	<b>67.5</b>	<b>84.4</b>	<b>92.9</b>	<b>97.2</b>	<b>98.6</b>	<b>99.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>22.8</b>
(MF 2020)	(16.5)	(36.6)	(61.8)	(84.3)	(94.9)	(98.9)	(99.7)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(16.5)

## 2. Popularity of geography at GCSE compared with other subjects

Table 4 Top 10 GCSE subjects in 2021

Ranking	Subject	% of total 2021 (2020)	Number of candidates
1 (1)	Science: Double Award	15.6 (15.4)	896,138
2 (2)	Mathematics	14.1 (14.2)	811,135
3 (3)	English	13.6 (14.0)	780,231
4 (4)	English Literature	10.7 (10.5)	615,669
5 (5)	History	5.1 (5.1)	294,807
<b>6 (6)</b>	<b>Geography</b>	<b>4.9 (4.7)</b>	<b>281,742</b>
7 (7)	Religious Studies	4.2 (4.4)	243,071
8 (8)	Art and Design subjects	3.7 (3.6)	210,091
9 (9)	Biology	3.2 (3.1)	184,008
10 (10)	Chemistry	3.1 (3.0)	176,950

**Table 5 Top GCSE full course subject increases (entry greater than 100,000), 2020 to 2021**

Ranking		Subject	% Change	2020 Number of entries	2021 Number of entries
1	(1)	Spanish	4.7	109,594	114,795
<b>2</b>	<b>(9)</b>	<b>Geography</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>270,311</b>	<b>281,741</b>
3	(12)	Physics	4.0	168,563	175,371
4	(13)	Chemistry	3.9	170,260	176,950
5		Business Studies	3.8	98,802	102,542
6	(11)	Biology	3.3	178,088	184,008
7	(8)	English Literature	2.6	599,975	615,669
8	(4)	Art and Design subjects	2.6	204,855	210,091
9	(3)	Science: Double Award	2.0	878,278	896,138
10	(2)	History	0.9	292,274	294,807

(2020 ranking in brackets. Subjects having a year-on-year decrease in 2020 are shown as blank.)

### 3. Historic results for Geography 2020 (England, Northern Ireland and Wales)

Table 6: Historic geography entries and results by grade and gender 2013-2020<sup>3</sup>

Gender	Year	Total Entry	A* -A / 9-7	B-C / 6-4	D-G / 3-1	U	A*-C / 9-4	Change	% Change
Male	2013	119887	22.4%	42.5%	34.1%	1.0%	64.9%	16106	15.5
Male	2014	121580	22.0	43.2	33.8	1.0	65.2	1693	1.4
Male	2015	122774	22.4	42.9	33.7	1.0	65.3	1194	1.0
Male	2016	129496	19.9	42.4	36.2	1.5	62.3	6722	5.5
Male	2017	130565	19.4	41.5	37.5	1.6	60.9	1069	0.8
Male	2018	137071	20.9	41.1	35.8	2.2	62.0	6506	5.0
Male	2019	142816	21.4	41.1	35.3	2.2	62.5	5745	4.2
<b>Male</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>145541</b>	<b>27.0</b>	<b>46.4</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>73.4</b>	<b>2725</b>	<b>1.9</b>
Female	2013	102965	32.4	41.5	25.5	0.6	73.9	19724	23.7
Female	2014	103569	31.8	41.7	25.9	0.6	73.5	604	0.6
Female	2015	105301	32.1	41.4	25.9	0.6	73.5	1732	1.7
Female	2016	114537	29.9	41.0	28.3	0.8	70.9	9236	8.8
Female	2017	115399	28.4	40.7	30.0	0.9	69.1	862	0.8
Female	2018	119349	28.0	40.9	30.2	0.9	68.9	3950	3.4
Female	2019	122353	28.9	40.8	29.3	1.0	69.7	3004	2.5
<b>Female</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>124770</b>	<b>35.0</b>	<b>44.4</b>	<b>20.3</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>79.4</b>	<b>2417</b>	<b>2.0</b>
All	2013	222852	27.0	42.0	30.2	0.8	69.0	35830	19.2
All	2014	225149	26.5	42.5	30.2	0.8	69.0	2297	1.0
All	2015	228075	26.9	42.2	30.1	0.8	69.1	2926	1.3
All	2016	244033	24.6	41.7	32.5	1.2	66.3	15958	7.0
All	2017	245964	23.6	41.2	33.9	1.3	64.8	1931	0.8
All	2018	256420	24.2	41.0	33.2	1.6	65.2	10456	4.3
All	2019	265169	24.9	40.9	32.6	1.6	65.8	8749	3.4

<sup>3</sup> Source: Paul Weeden for the GA, September 2020, based on JVQ



<b>All</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>270311</b>	<b>30.7</b>	<b>45.5</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>76.2</b>	<b>5142</b>	<b>1.9</b>
------------	-------------	---------------	-------------	-------------	-------------	------------	-------------	-------------	------------

## Charts<sup>4</sup>

Chart 1 Total entry for GCSE full course subjects, 2011-2021

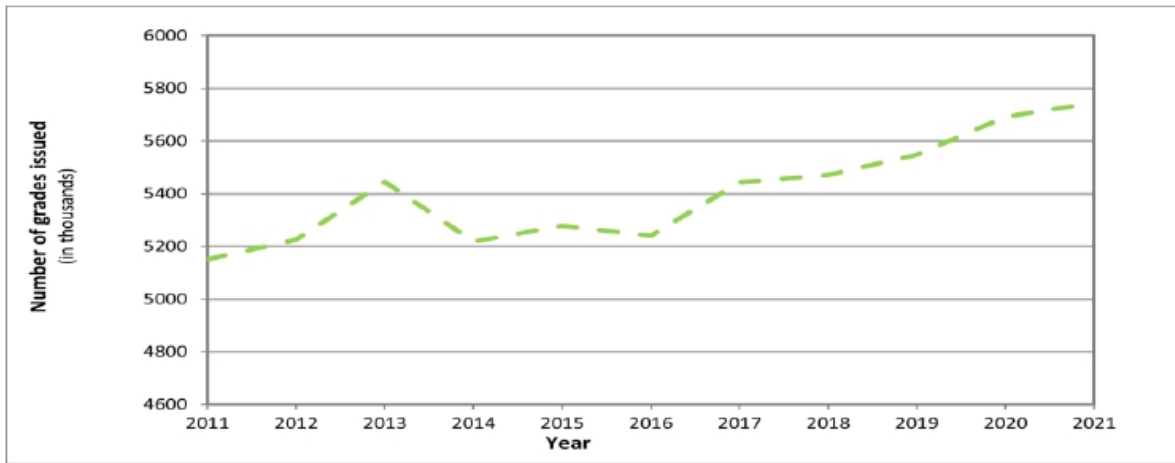
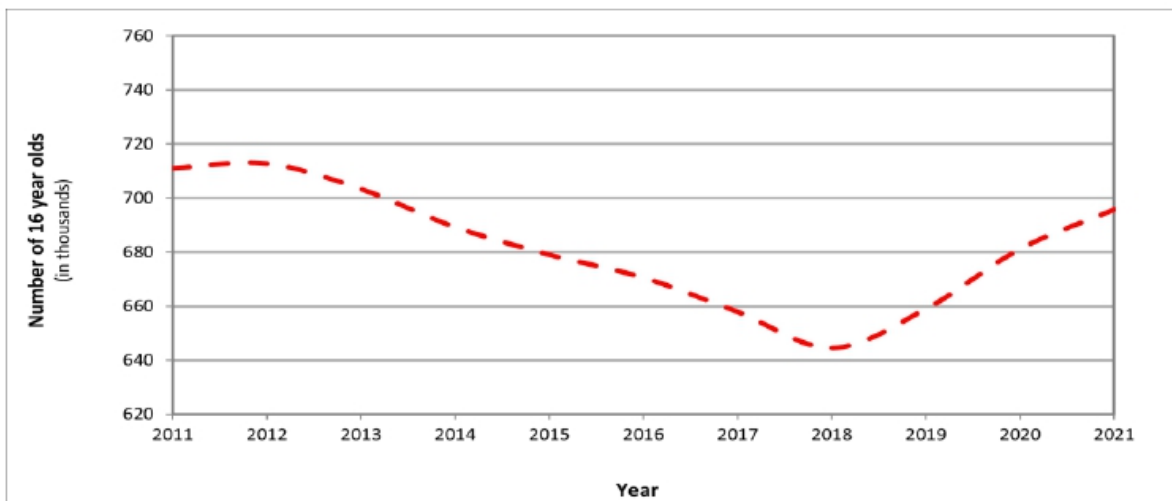
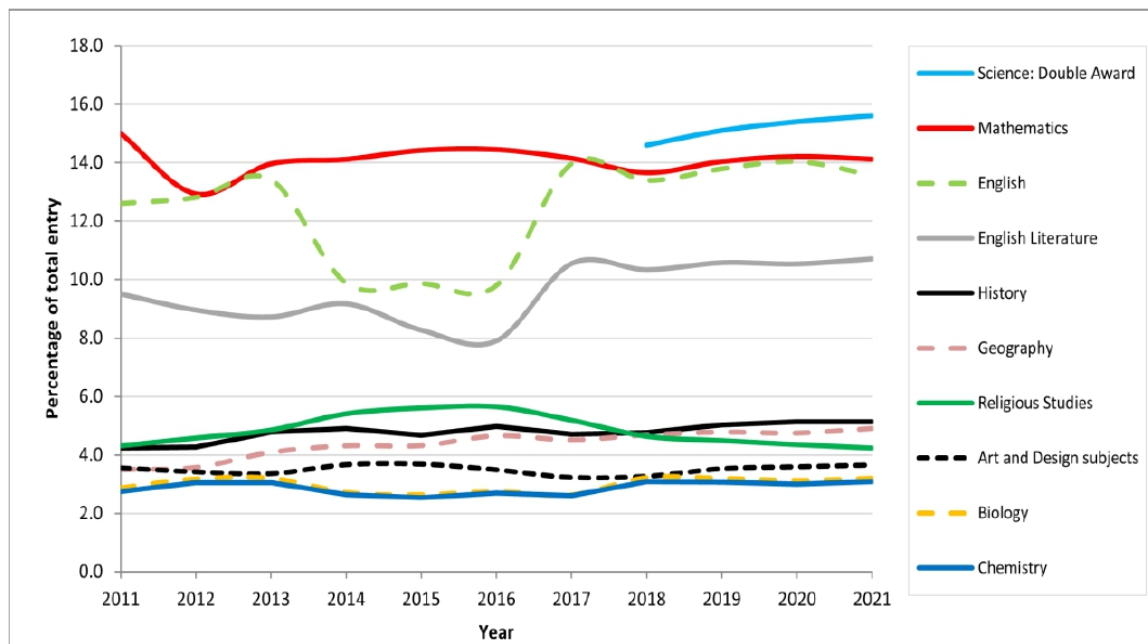


Chart 2 Cohort size 2011-2021

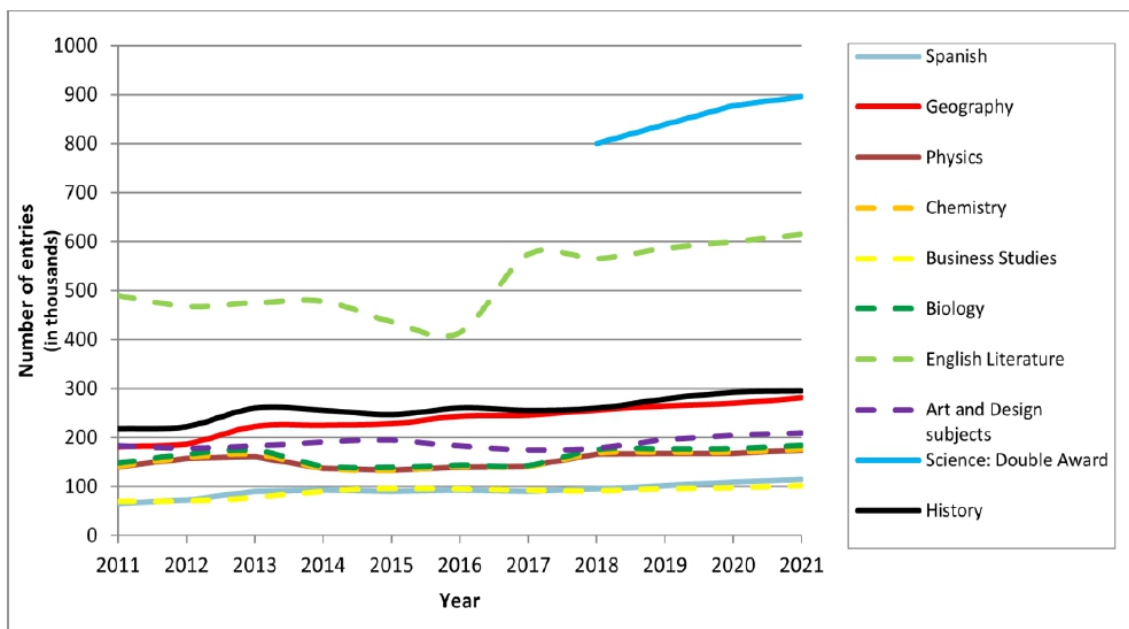


<sup>4</sup> All charts from [GCSE-Project-and-Entry-Level-Trends-Summer-2021.pdf \(jqc.org.uk\)](https://www.jcq.org.uk/publications/gcse-project-and-entry-level-trends-summer-2021.pdf)

**Chart 3 Top ten GCSE full course subjects as a percentage of the total entry over the period 2011 to 2021**



**Chart 4 Top GCSE full course subject increases, 2021 (entry greater than 100,000)**



### 3. Links

JCQ 2021 [Data tables](#) (accessed 12<sup>th</sup> August 2021)

JCQ 2021 Additional data and trends [GCSE-Project-and-Entry-Level-Trends-Summer-2021.pdf \(jcq.org.uk\)](#) (accessed 14<sup>th</sup> August 2021)

Ofqual: [Results infographic](#); [guide to GCSE results for England](#); [analysis](#)

Qualifications Wales: [Summer 2021 results](#)

CCEA: [Results statistics](#) and [overview](#)

John Hopkin August 2021