

Geography GCSE results and entries 2023

Context and summary

In 2023 GCSE examination results returned to pre-Pandemic grading patterns, following considerable disruption and changes in assessment arrangements in 2020-22. Overall outcomes in 2023 were slightly higher than 2019, the best year comparator year, and lower than in 2022. The achievement gap between boys and girls has reduced.

The design of GCSE qualifications varies between England, Wales and Northern Ireland: together these three home nations make up the data for 'the UK' below. Comparing GCSE entries for the UK with 2022:

- the UK population of 16-year-olds was lowest in 2018-19, then increased annually to 2023. The cohort increased by 2.1% in 2022-2023 and entries increased by 3.4% to 5.9 million students
- there was no change in the rank order of the top ten highest entry subjects (and no change since 2020). Geography again ranked sixth, with an entry of 293,319 (5.0%)
- 2023 saw a modest increase in geography entries (1.4% compared with 3.4% for all subjects). Business studies, although not a top ten subject, again grew most (+14.8%)¹ whilst art and design decreased by 3.6%.

Comparing GCSE outcomes, in 2023 the proportion of UK students achieving grade 7/A and above increased slightly from 2019. There were some differences between the three nations and, in England, a continuing gap between London and the South-east and some other regions^{2, 3}. In all subjects⁴:

Year	UK Entries	7/A	4/C	1/G
2023	5,905,000	22.0%	68.2%	98.0%
2022	5,708,871	26.3%	73.2%	98.4%
2021	5,745,945	28.9%	77.1%	99.0%
2019	5,547,447	20.8%	67.3%	98.3%
Change 2019-23	+357,553	+1.20%	+0.90%	-0.30%

In geography results were very similar to 2019 outcomes:

- 25% of students achieved grades 7/A and above in 2023, compared with 24.9% in 2019 (+0.1%)

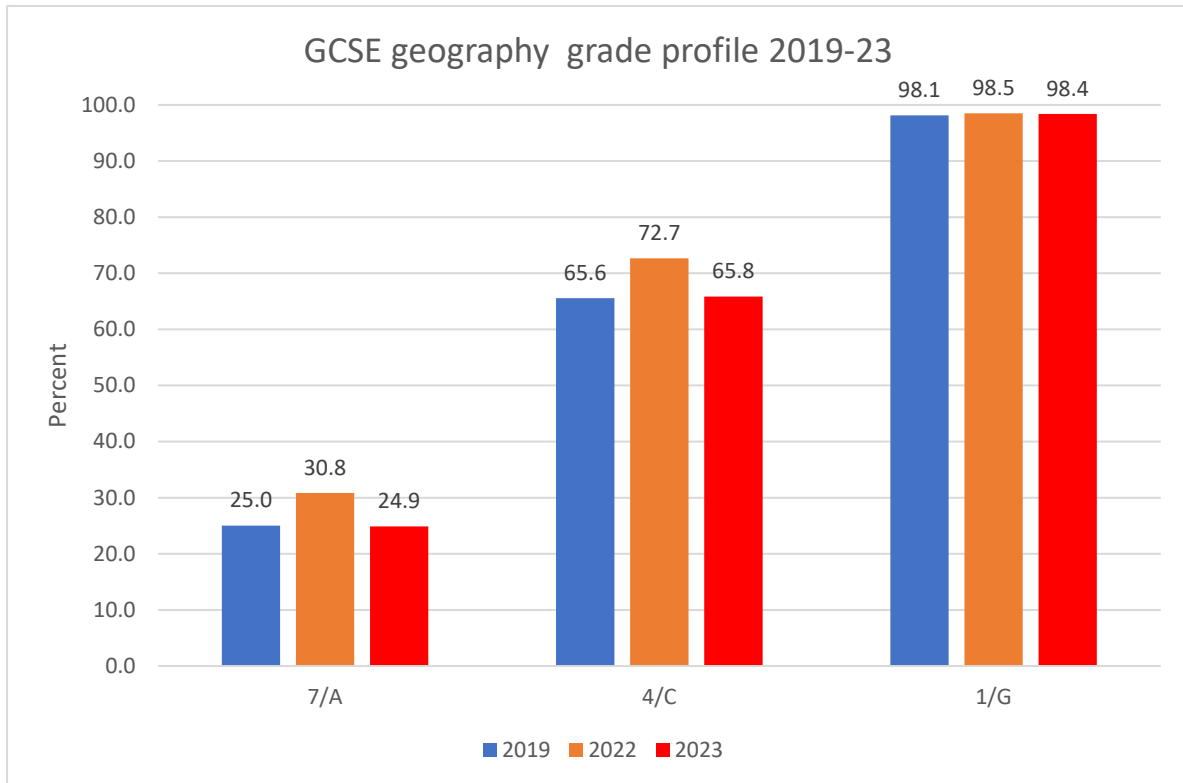
¹ GCSE, Project, and Entry Level Trends - UK, 2023 <https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/GCSE-Project-and-Entry-Level-Trends-2023.pdf>

² Infographics for GCSE results, 2023 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infographic-gcse-results-2023/infographics-for-gcse-results-2023>

³ JCQ GCSE Additional Charts, Summer 2023: Appendices

⁴ GCSE Full Course Results Summer 2023 v1.1 <https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/?post-year=2023&post-location=>

- 65.6% of students achieved grades 4/C and above in 2023, compared with 65.8% in 2019 (-0.2%)
- 98.1% of students achieved grades 1/G and above in 2023, compared with 98.4% in 2019 (-0.3%).



There are some differences in grading/standards between the three home nations, perhaps partly reflecting a harder landing post-Pandemic in England. This may make the home nations a more valid comparator for schools' own analyses than data for the UK as a whole.

	England	Wales	Northern Ireland	'The UK'
7/A	24.5%	32.6%	39.4%	25.0%

1. Entries for geography

- Geography remained the **sixth most popular** GCSE subject in 2023.
- **Geography entries** increased from 2022 to 2023 by 3,968 (+1.4%) to 293,319, compared with an increase in entries for all subjects of 3.4%. This follows an increase in geography entries of +2.7% in 2022 and +4.2% in 2021.
- History had the biggest increase (+6.5%) of the large entry (over 100,000) subjects; geography maintains its position in the top ten subjects, but entries are no longer growing strongly.
- The **gender imbalance** for geography entries is unchanged from recent years at 54:46 (M:F), compared with a near 50:50 balance for all subjects. Looking at it

another way, on a scale of 1 to 49, where 1 represents the most popular subject with males and 49 the most popular with females, geography ranked 13, compared with a mid-point of 24 for all subjects. History ranked 27, so was chosen proportionately by slightly more females⁵: it is one of the most gender-balanced subjects.

- The number of **entries from students aged 15** and under was 1,104 (<1% of the total entry for aged 15 and under). The entry decreased by 49% since 2019 (compared with 16% for all subjects).
- The number of **entries from students aged 17** and over was 3,355 (<1% of the total 17+ entry). The entry increased by 6% since 2019 (compared with -13% for all subjects).

Popularity of geography at GCSE compared with other subjects in 2023

The top 10 GCSE subjects and their ranking⁶ shows little change compared with 2022:

Ranking	Subject	% of total 2023 (2022)	Number of candidates
1 (1)	Science: Double Award	15.8 (15.8)	935,436
2 (2)	Mathematics	13.9 (13.7)	821,322
3 (3)	English	13.4 (13.3)	788,780
4 (4)	English literature	10.6 (10.8)	627,828
5 (5)	History	5.3 (5.1)	311,146
6 (6)	Geography	5.0 (5.1)	293,319
7 (7)	Religious studies	4.1 (4.3)	243,735
8 (8)	Art and design subjects	3.4 (3.6)	198,302
9 (9)	Biology	3.2 (3.3)	191,298
10 (10)	Chemistry	3.1 (3.1)	184,069

⁵ <https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/GCSE-Additional-Charts-Summer-2023.pdf>

⁶ GCSE, Project, and Entry Level Trends - UK, 2023 <https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/GCSE-Project-and-Entry-Level-Trends-2023.pdf>

2. Results for geography 2023

Entry and cumulative grade profiles for the UK (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) in 2023 (and 2019)

The results issued by JVC on 24 August 2023 for the UK (for all ages) were as follows⁷; 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 geography students: cumulative grades: geography outperforms 'all subjects' at 7/A in all three nations

Male and female

	Entry	7/A	4/C	1/G	U
All subjects 2023	5,905,000	22.0	68.2	98.0	100%
Geography 2023	293,318 (5.0%)	25.0	65.6	98.1	100%
(Geography 2019)	265,169 (4.8%)	(24.9)	(65.8)	(98.4)	(100%)

Male

All subjects 2023	2,969,162	19.1	64.9	97.5	100%
Geography 2023	159,397 (5.4%)	21.9	63.3	97.7	100%
(Geography 2019)	142,816 (5.2%)	(21.4%)	(62.5%)	(97.8%)	(100%)

Female

All subjects 2023	2,935,838	24.9	71.7	98.4	100%
Geography 2023	133,922 (4.6%)	28.8	68.2	98.7	100%
(Geography 2019)	122,353 (4.4%)	(28.9%)	(69.7%)	(99.0%)	(100%)

⁷ JVC: GCSE (Full Course) Results Summer 2023 <https://www.jvc.org.uk/examination-results/?post-year=2023&post-location=>

Cumulative percentages by grade for all students in each nation⁸

England	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	U	Entry
Geography 2023	4.9	12.9	24.5	38.0	51.9	64.8	80.5	91.4	98.1	100	279,082
Geography 2022	7.8	17.9	30.3	45.2	59.6	72.1	84.0	93.5	98.4	100	274,903
Geography 2021	9.7	21.0	34.3	48.9	63.2	76.8	88.3	95.4	99.1	100	266,903
Geography 2019	4.8	13.0	24.5	38.6	52.6	65.2	81.6	92.4	98.3	100	251,121
All Subjects 2023	4.9	12.0	21.6	35.6	52.2	67.8	83.8	93.1	98.0	100	5,422,613

Wales	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U	Entry
Geography 2023	13.6	32.6	55.2	75.9	87.7	94.6	97.9	99.4	100	7,109
Geography 2022	17.2	37.9	59.8	78.8	89.1	94.8	98.0	99.7	100	7,657
Geography 2021	22.8	44.4	67.5	84.4	92.9	97.2	98.6	99.6	100	7,584
Geography 2019	9.2	27.4	50.3	72.3	86.0	94.1	97.8	99.4	100	7,270
All Subjects 2023	8.7	21.3	40.9	64.5	78.5	87.5	92.0	96.8	100	293,368

Northern Ireland	A*	A	B	C*	C	D	E	F	G	U	Entry
Geography 2023	12.2	39.4	61.9	76.5	87.1	93.8	97.0	98.3	99.4	100	6,070
Geography 2022	15.2	43.9	69.0	83.6	91.6	95.9	98.0	99.1	99.6	100	5,830
Geography 2021	18.4	49.8	69.9	80.6	91.0	96.0	98.3	99.2	99.6	100	6,275
Geography 2019	8.5	34.7	54.4	69.5	81.6	90.9	95.5	97.7	99.0	100	5,766
All Subjects 2023	10.6	35.4	57.5	74.3	86.6	93.8	96.5	98.6	99.4	100	145,250

⁸ <https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/> Provisional GCSE (Full Course) Results - June 2023

Cumulative percentages by grade and gender 2023 and (2019) for each nation⁹

England	Entry¹⁰	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	U
Male	5.5%	3.8	10.6	21.4	34.9	49.0	62.5	78.6	90.1	97.6	100.0
(Male 2019)	(5.3%)	(3.7)	(10.7)	(21.3)	(34.9)	(49.0)	(61.9)	(79.2)	(90.8)	(97.7)	(100.0)
Female	4.8%	6.3	15.7	28.1	41.8	55.3	67.5	82.7	92.9	98.7	100.0
(Female 2019)	(4.6%)	(6.1)	(15.7)	(28.3)	(42.9)	(56.8)	(69.0)	(84.4)	(94.2)	(99.0)	(100.0)
Male and female	5.1%	4.9	12.9	24.5	38.0	51.9	64.8	80.5	91.4	98.1	100.0
(M & F 2019)	(5.0)	(4.8)	(13.0)	(24.5)	(38.6)	(52.6)	(65.2)	(81.6)	(92.4)	(98.3)	(100.0)

Wales	Entry	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
Male	2.8%	11.0	28.6	50.9	73.5	86.1	94.1	97.5	99.2	100.0
(Male 2019)	(2.8%)	(6.6)	(21.3)	(43.5)	(67.2)	(83.1)	(92.7)	(97.3)	(99.2)	(100.0)
Female	2.0%	17.1	38.1	61.0	79.3	89.9	95.3	98.3	99.7	100.0
(Female 2019)	(2.2%)	(12.4)	(35.0)	(58.9)	(78.7)	(89.6)	(95.9)	(98.4)	(99.5)	(100.0)
Male and female	2.4%	13.6	32.6	55.2	75.9	87.7	94.6	97.9	99.4	100.0
(M & F 2019)	(2.5%)	(9.2)	(27.4)	(50.3)	(72.3)	(86.0)	(94.1)	(97.8)	(99.4)	(100.0)

⁹ JCQ: GCSE (Full Course) Outcomes for main grade set for each jurisdiction, Results Summer 2023, <https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/GCSE-Full-Course-outcomes-for-main-gradeset-by-jurisdiction-Summer-2023.pdf>

¹⁰ % of total number sat.

Northern Ireland	Entry	A*	A	B	C*	C	D	E	F	G	U
Male	4.8%	8.5	32.6	57.2	73.7	85.8	93.6	96.9	98.2	99.3	100.0
(Male 2021)	(4.5%)	(4.7)	(26.3)	(46.0)	(63.0)	(76.9)	(88.1)	(93.9)	(97.0)	(99.0)	(100.0)
Female	3.6%	16.9	48.1	68.0	80.1	88.7	94.1	97.0	98.4	99.5	100.0
(Female 2021)	(3.7%)	(12.9)	(44.3)	(64.1)	(77.0)	(87.1)	(94.1)	(97.3)	(98.5)	(99.1)	(100.0)
Male and female	4.2%	12.2	39.4	61.9	76.5	87.1	93.8	97.0	98.3	99.4	100.0
(M/F 2021)	(4.1%)	(8.5)	(34.7)	(54.4)	(69.5)	(81.6)	(90.9)	(95.5)	(97.7)	(99.0)	(100.0)

- In all three nations more males than females took geography in 2023. The ratio was 54M/46F in England, 58/42 in Wales and 56/44 in Northern Ireland (compared with 54/46 overall).
- Conversely in all three nations females out-performed males at the highest grades; at 7/A the gap was 6.7% in England 9.5% in Wales and 15.5% in Northern Ireland.

3. Geography entries aged 15 and under and 17+

In common with 'all subjects', the geography cohort aged 15 and under is declining:

Year	UK Entries	7/A	4/C	1/G
2023	1104	31.8%	72.1	98.1
2022	1,396	34.2%	76.6	98.2
2019	2,145	28.0%	72.6	99.1
Change 2019-23	-1,041/48.5%	+3.8%	-0.5%	-1.0%

However, the geography cohort aged 17 and over has increased this year:

Year	UK Entries	7/A	4/C	1/G
2023	3,355	30.9%	72.0%	98.3%
2022	2,892	34.2%	77.3%	98.6%
2019	3,157	26.0%	68.5%	98.5%
Change 2019-23	+198/6.3%	+4.9%	+3.5%	-0.2%

For comparison, 25% of the main cohort (aged 16) achieved grade 7/C and above in 2023.

4. Links

JCQ [2023 results](#) (accessed 28th August 2023)

Ofqual: [Guide to GCSE results for England, Analytics visualisations](#)

Qualifications Wales: www.qualificationswales.org

CCEA: [Results statistics](#)

Appendix 1: The geography of GCSE in England

Ofqual publishes additional information about the distribution of entries and grades in England.

In England, **geography entries are distributed relatively evenly across the major regions¹¹**. Looking at differences in subject choices between students in the North, Midlands and South:

¹¹ JCQ GCSE Additional Charts, Summer 2023: Appendices

- in 2022 geography and art and design were the two subjects closest to 'all subjects' in their regional distribution
- in 2023 German and English literature were closest to 'all subjects'; geography was four subjects away in a slightly 'southerly direction'
- by comparison economics and classical subjects showed the strongest orientation towards the South.

You can find an Ofqual map showing entries and grades by **English county** here:

<https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/GCSE/County/>.

Achievement for Grades 7-9 in the English counties

Achievement below 24.5% (the England average)				Achievement 24.5% and above	
Isle of Wight	14.5	Durham	20.6	Cheshire	24.5
Cornwall	17.1	Greater Manchester	20.6	Kent	24.9
Staffordshire	17.6	Leicestershire	20.6	North Yorkshire	25.1
Northamptonshire	18.2	Tyne and Wear	20.9	East Sussex	27
East Riding of Yorkshire	18.3	Derbyshire	21	West Sussex	27.3
South Yorkshire	18.4	Shropshire	21	County of Bristol	29.6
Nottinghamshire	18.6	Worcestershire	21.4	Gloucestershire	30.1
West Midlands	18.7	Bedfordshire	21.6	Oxfordshire	30.2
Norfolk	18.9	Northumberland	21.6	Greater London	30.4
Rutland	19.2	West Yorkshire	21.6	Warwickshire	31
Lancashire	19.3	Somerset	23	Cambridgeshire	31.5
Cumbria	20	Dorset	23.2	Buckinghamshire	33
Lincolnshire	20	Devon	23.3	Berkshire	33.6
Merseyside	20.3	Essex	23.4	Hertfordshire	35.8
Suffolk	20.3	Hampshire	24	Surrey	37.4
Herefordshire	20.4	Wiltshire	24.3		

Written by John Hopkin, member of the GA's Assessment and Examination Special Interest Group (AESIG), August 2023