

# Guide to 2021 Level 1 & 2 qualification results for VTQs in England

## **Summer 2021 arrangements**

This year, due to the ongoing impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic many assessments for vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) and other general qualifications had to be adapted or did not go ahead. COVID-19 caused different levels of disruption across the country, so many colleges, schools and training providers were not able to teach all the necessary qualification content.

Vocational qualifications are frequently modular and assessment typically happens throughout the course of study. They also tend to have a high proportion of teacher assessment. Some assessments are necessary to confer occupational competence or are 'Licences to Practice'. This diversity meant that it was not possible to prescribe a single approach to either adaptations or teacher-assessed grades (TAGs).

We asked awarding organisations (AOs) to balance carefully mitigating the effects of COVID-19 with the need to provide fair and reliable results that allowed learners to progress. In many cases, VTQ results have been determined using normal assessment methods. Some learners will have carried forward centre assessment grades (CAGs), from 2020, for some units or components. Some results have been determined through adapted assessments, including remote invigilation. Other results have been decided wholly, or in part, using TAGs like those used for A levels and GCSEs.

TAGs had to be based on evidence of a learner's achievement. Teachers drew on a range of different types of evidence to inform their professional judgement about a learner's result. AOs advised on the process teachers and tutors should follow when determining TAGs and how to check that decisions were evidence-based and consistent. Most learners had already completed assessments, many of which had been marked and, in some cases, moderated earlier in the course. Teacher judgements had to be reviewed by other subject teachers and assessors, as well as the relevant head of department or head of centre before TAGs could be submitted to AOs.

Many AOs reviewed centres' quality assurance procedures upfront, others adapted their normal verification or moderation processes to provide centres with additional support throughout. Some AOs required centres to confirm that they had complied with their internal quality assurance arrangements, while other AOs confirmed this through their monitoring and quality assurance processes.

After TAGs were submitted, AOs conducted their own quality assurance processes. AOs took different approaches to this, depending on their

qualifications and the part that TAGs had played in the final result. Some AOs did this through an extension of their normal centre monitoring, some asked centres to provide rationales for any results that looked unusual and also looked at work from centres selected at random, others looked at a sample of learner evidence, and many conducted a combination of these activities.

Results this year have only been possible due to the hard work of everyone involved, not least learners themselves. We have placed trust in the system, and especially in teachers and tutors. They have done everything possible to help learners achieve their qualifications and progress in their education or career.

Learners who think there has been a mistake with their grade can choose to appeal via their school or college; learners who are unhappy with their grade can talk to their centre about taking an assessment instead.

## 2021 results

This year we have carried out a range of [analyses to support our understanding of results](#).

### Outcomes

We primarily focus on the issuing of top grades, rather than the issuing of passing grades, as the percentage pass rate in our dataset is usually close to 100% in all years, as fail grades are often not reported. In every year the cohort of VTQ learners differs quite substantially with regard to their numbers, their ages, their prior attainment, and the centres and centre types they attend. The general ability of cohorts of learners might also have changed over time. The qualifications vary according to factors such as qualification size and types of assessment.

This year we saw an increase in volumes for all Performance Table qualification entries. This was particularly acute for Level 1/2 Performance Table qualifications (from 215,005 in 2019, to 354,855 in 2020, to 393,380 in 2021). Any changes in grade distributions could be explained partly due to the relatively large changes in entry size over time.

Overall, the proportion of Level 2 Passes in Level 1/2 qualifications, remained relatively stable. Those Level 1/2 qualifications with the highest entries showed a decrease in the proportion of top grades being issued (from 11.0% in 2020 to 8.9% in 2021). However, this followed a significant rise in top grades issued between 2019 (2.1%) and 2020 (11.0%).

For Level 2 qualifications the general shape of the grade distributions has not substantially changed. In the largest group of qualifications, the proportion of top grades slightly increased between 2020 and 2021 (from 25.7% to 30.1%).

## Equalities

AOs looked at student work from a sample of schools and colleges. They found no evidence that teachers' judgements were biased in favour of one group of students or another.

We conducted equalities analyses to check whether the gaps between the average results of different groups of students, which are observed in normal years, have changed this summer. We compare the extent to which the relationship between results and student background variables in 2019 and 2020 are similar in the 2021 outcomes. In doing so, we take account of the prior attainment of the students. This included a consideration of gender, ethnicity, free school meal eligibility (FSM), the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), and special educational needs (SEND).

There are [some small changes in the results of some groups of students, which are observed in normal years, which may reflect the impact of COVID-19](#). The only notable difference identified was that males were on average 2.2% less likely to achieve top grades than females in 2019, but this difference increased to 7.8% in 2020 and reduced slightly to 7.4% in 2021.

## Regional results

We conducted analysis to identify if any differences in the attainment of top grades appear to exist across different regions. We found that the degree of change for each region between 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 is relatively consistent, accounting for the fact that a degree of variation is always to be expected. The changes occurring in 2021 from previous years for any one region do not seem out of the ordinary, relative to other regions, suggesting a picture of stability across regions.

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# [Guide to GCSE results for England, 2021](#)

## Summer 2021 arrangements

This year GCSE exams did not take place because of the disruption to students' education caused by the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. It would not have been fair for exams to take place in the usual way. Instead, grades were determined by teachers based on a range of evidence. These were known as teacher assessed grades, or TAGs. Since, the pandemic caused different levels of disruption across the country, many schools and colleges had not been able to teach all the course content. In response, students were only assessed on the content they had been taught while ensuring sufficient coverage of the curriculum to enable progression. Centres were given flexibility to decide

how to assess their students' performance, for example, through mock exams, class tests, and non-exam assessment already completed. This flexibility was to accommodate on-going disruption to teaching including school closures and the need for students and teachers to self-isolate.

Schools and colleges put in place internal quality assurance processes. They were required to make sure at least 2 people were involved in each judgement and the head of each school or college had to sign off the grades. Teachers and senior leaders in schools and colleges have worked hard to make sure that judgements were made, quality assured and submitted on time. They also submitted examples of students' work to the exam boards.

Exam boards put in place external quality assurance arrangements, checking each centre's policy, reviewing the profile of grades submitted, and reviewing samples of student work. Where exam boards had concerns, these were followed up with the school or college and in some cases, teachers reconsidered their judgements and submitted revised grades.

These assessment arrangements are quite unlike those typically used. Normally students sit the same assessments, often exams, at the same time and under the same conditions, and they are marked and graded in the same way. Without the mechanisms usually used to secure standards over time and between students, outcomes this year look different from previous years – as we expected they would.

There has been an increase in outcomes at the top grades and the stability at lower grades. This may be because the most academically able students were even more able to study independently.

There are some small changes in the gaps between the average results of some groups of students, which are observed in normal years, which may reflect [the impact of the pandemic on learning](#). It's likely, however, that these changes would have been greater had we had not given teachers the flexibility to assess students only on the content they had taught.

## Key points

1. Overall GCSE results are higher at grade 7 and above compared to 2020 (28.5% in 2021 compared with 25.9% in 2020, and 20.7% in 2019) and relatively stable at grade 4 and above compared to 2020 (76.9% in 2021 compared with 75.9% in 2020, and 67.1% in 2019).
2. Broadly similar patterns in results are seen in Wales and Northern Ireland: in Wales at grade A or 7 and above (28.7% in 2021 compared with 25.5% in 2020, and 18.4% in 2019) and at grade C or 4 and above (73.6% in 2021 compared with 73.8% in 2020, and 62.8% in 2019); and in Northern Ireland at grade A or 7 and above (39.9% in 2021 compared with 36.3% in 2020, and 30.5% in 2019) and at grade C or 4 and above (89.6% in 2021 compared with 89.8% in 2020, and 82.2% in 2019).
3. The small overall increase in outcomes this year compared to previous years may partly reflect the change in assessment arrangements, for example, teachers may have given students some benefit of the doubt across the multiple opportunities many students had to show what they

had learned – quite different from end of course exams.

4. Analyses show general stability in the differences in outcomes for students with different protected characteristics compared to previous years and increases in outcomes for many groups, this suggests that the changes to the assessment arrangements have lessened the unevenness in outcomes we may otherwise have seen.
5. Students who think there has been a mistake with their grade can choose to appeal via their school or college. Students who are unhappy with their grade can choose to sit an exam in the autumn.

## **Summer 2021 results**

This summer we have carried out a range of analyses to support understanding of results.

### **Variability in centres' results**

We compared the level of variation in centres' outcomes in 2021 to that seen in 2020 and 2019. Higher variation means centres outcomes have fluctuated between years; lower variation means centres outcomes have been stable between years. Generally, at grade 7, variation in centre results was lower than it was in 2019 and only slightly greater than in 2020. Generally, at grade 4 variation in centre results is less in 2021 compared to 2020 and 2019. This suggests that the assessment arrangements lessened the impact of the pandemic on centres' results – otherwise we would expect to see much greater variability in centres' results this year compared to the past. For example, the variation (standard deviation) in centres' outcomes for GCSE English language at grade 4 was 7.4 in 2019, 8.2 in 2020 and 6.8 in 2021.

### **Equalities**

Exam boards looked at student work from a sample of schools and colleges. They found no evidence that teachers' judgements were systemically biased in favour of one group of students or another.

Nonetheless, we have conducted equalities analyses to consider whether the gaps between the average results of different groups of students, which are observed in normal years, have changed this summer. This has included a consideration of gender, ethnicity, free school meal eligibility (FSM), English as an additional language (EAL), socio-economic status (SES) and special educational needs and disability (SEND). We compare the extent to which the relationship between results and student background variables in 2019 and 2020 are similar in the 2021 outcomes. In doing so, we take account of the prior attainment of the students.

The analyses show increases in outcomes for many groups and general stability in the differences in outcomes for students with different protected characteristics compared to 2019 and 2020. There are, however, some, small, relative changes in overall outcomes.

Our model suggests that there is a slight widening of the longstanding results gap between those students in receipt of free school meals and those

who are not (this is seen at grades 7 and 4, and on average by 0.1 of a grade, compared to 2019).

Gypsy and Roma students' outcomes have declined on average, and at grades 7 and 4 compared to those of white students in both 2019 and 2020 (the average mean grade change from 2019 was 0.17 of a grade).

It seems likely that many of these changes reflect the uneven impact of the pandemic and that the changes to the assessment arrangements may have lessened the unevenness in outcomes we may otherwise have seen. The details of our analyses are included in our technical report.

## **Centre type results**

We have compared the results of different types of centre across 2021, 2020 and 2019. Outcomes for all types of centre have increased compared to 2020 at grade 7. The extent to which they have increased may partly reflect longstanding differences in the distribution of grades for different centre types. For example, in normal years, the distribution of grades for students attending independent centres is clustered around the top grades. A uniform increase in grading across all types of school and college is therefore most likely to benefit students attending independent schools at the top grades. For other centre types, the impact of increased grading may be lower down the grade distribution – wherever most of their candidates are normally clustered. This clustering of students at different points in the grade distribution means it is helpful to consider both the relative and absolute changes in outcomes across centre types. This is because relative changes on small numbers often look big but relative changes on big numbers often look small. On the other hand, absolute changes on small numbers often look small but absolute changes on big numbers often look big. Therefore, it is important to explore both types of change.

In relative terms, the largest increase compared to 2020 at grade 7 and above is for sixth form colleges (+50.8%) and further education establishments (+46.1%), and the smallest increase is for secondary selective (+4.2%) and independent schools (+7.1%). At grade 4 and above, the largest increase is for further education establishments (+16.2%), tertiary colleges (+12.1%), 'other' centres (+8.2%) and sixth form colleges (+5.6%). For all other centre types (including secondary comprehensives and academies) the relative change is very small at grade 4 and above (less than 1%).

In absolute terms, there are some small differences in the extent to which outcomes differ compared to 2020 by centre type and grade. At grade 7 and above, outcomes are higher than 2020 to a slightly greater extent for independent schools (+4.0 percentage points (pp)) and free schools (+3.6pp). When considering outcomes at grade 4 and above though, the differences compared to 2020 are greatest for further education establishments (+5.3pp) and tertiary colleges (+4.9pp).

Exam boards looked at student work from all types of school and college as part of the external quality assurance process. They did not find that any type of school or college was more likely than others to have provided grades

that did not reflect the standard of their students' work. Indeed, they found that, irrespective of the type of school or college, the grades were usually supported by the quality of students' work. The changes may therefore reflect the uneven impact of the pandemic which will have been lessened by the assessment arrangements. It is also worth noting that more able students are also more capable of independent study.

## **Regional results**

JCQ have published regional results compared to 2020. The rank order of regions according to their results is extremely similar to 2020 and the percentage of students achieving both grade 7 or above, and 4 or above, has increased in all regions. As is the case every year, there is some variation in the size of the increase across regions. At grade 7 and above the greatest increase was seen in London where the rate has increased by 3.1pp. At grade 4 and above the greatest increase was seen in the North East where the rate has increased by 1.7pp. As with the differences seen across centre types, these regional changes will partly reflect the well-established clustering of students around different parts of the grade distribution.

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## **[Guidance: COVID-19: wider impacts on people aged 65 and over](#)**

An estimation of the impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19) on physical activity and falls in older adults and recommendations to mitigate these effects.

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# Call for bids: UK-Australia maritime partnership in the Indo-Pacific

World news story

UK's mission in Australia is inviting bids for projects developing coordination between the UK and Australia on maritime issues in the Indo-Pacific region.



# UK Government

## Themes

We welcome bids on – but are not limited to – the following issues:

- directly delivering or developing options for maritime capacity-building in third countries
- building networks between experts on maritime issues in the UK, Australia and third countries
- using UK and Australian expertise to deliver impactful research on pressing maritime issues, particularly in the fields of maritime security and law, although projects in other areas such as maritime trade or ecology would also be considered

## Selection criteria

Bids will be assessed against the following criteria:

- project design: feasibility of activities and outputs including the capacity of implementing organisation to deliver outcomes
- impact: delivering high-impact outcomes that showcase UK expertise and build durable links with Australian institutions
- viability and risks: clear engagement/buy-in of key stakeholders. Robust analysis of key risks, and a plan of action to manage and mitigate those risks
- value for money: comparable and reasonable costs against the number of direct beneficiaries and the scale of achievable outcomes

Bids do not need to meet Official Development Assistance (ODA) criteria, but may also be assessed against ODA eligibility rules where appropriate.

We draw your attention to the below key points:

- proposals should be between £10,000 – £40,000 (approximately between A.\$19,000 to A.\$75,000)
- it may be possible to consider proposals above £40,000 that meet the eligibility rules for ODA – please contact [Australia.MaritimeProgramme@fcdo.gov.uk](mailto:Australia.MaritimeProgramme@fcdo.gov.uk) if you think your project may fit this category
- the entire project must be completed before 31 March 2022
- all funding must be activity-based (i.e. not for general staff costs, office rental etc.)

## Process

See also:

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