

# 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.

**Today we are publishing:**

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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.



## 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 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:

Published 12 August 2021

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## [UK signs partnership in Central America to boost trade](#)

- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will enable closer economic collaboration between the UK and Central America.
- Countries that can benefit from the joint financing agreement include the Dominican Republic, Panama, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica.
- The partnership will predominantly focus on supporting major infrastructure, clean energy and construction projects.

UK Export Finance (UKEF) has today (12 August) signed a historic partnership with the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), Central America's leading development bank and the highest rated borrower in Latin America. The agreement will encourage joint financing of major clean energy, infrastructure and construction projects in the region that need expertise from the UK.

This cooperation agreement guarantees a closer relationship between both institutions and will help finance major projects in Central America that involve UK exports, supporting businesses and jobs in the UK: a condition of

UKEF's involvement overseas.

Governments and businesses in Central America looking to raise funds to develop larger projects can benefit from working with CABI while also accessing UKEF's support, aimed at reducing and spreading the cost of financing for buyers of UK exports.

Last year, a number of countries in Central America benefitted from significant increases to UKEF's country limits as the department has established a greater presence in the region. This means that at least £2.5 billion is available for new business in each of Guatemala, Honduras and Panama and £1.5 billion for Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Central America is home to some of the fastest growing economies in the world and trade between the UK and Central America was worth over £1.7 billion in 2020. This MoU will boost those trade links and builds on the [UK-Central America trade association agreement signed in August 2019](#).

**Louis Taylor, Chief Executive of UKEF said:**

I am delighted today to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with CABI. In doing so we have agreed a robust channel of cooperation between our two organisations in order to find and finance projects in Central America involving UK exports.

Elsewhere in the world, we have transformed lives, supporting healthcare projects in Ghana, clean energy in Taiwan and transportation projects in Egypt. Working with CABI we can bring this expertise to Central America.

**Dante Mossi, Executive President of CABI said:**

Working together we can bring more UK expertise to Central America. CABI is committed to supporting the UK's ambition for a Global Britain and this MoU is a demonstration of our desire to strengthen social and economic ties between both markets.

## **About UKEF**

[UK Export Finance](#) is the UK's export credit agency. It exists to ensure that no viable UK export lacks for finance or insurance from the private market, providing finance and insurance to help exporters win, fulfil and get paid for export contracts.

UKEF has a global network of 15 "International Export Finance Executives" (IEFEs) based in strategic trading markets across Latin America, South Asia, the Middle East, Asia Pacific and Africa.

The IEFE network is a key driver of business development activity and local

UKEF representatives in the region are [Diego Folino based in Mexico City](#) and [Camilo Neira in Bogota](#).

## **About CABEI**

CABEI was created in 1960 as the region's financial arm for integration and development. Its resources are continuously invested in projects with an impact on development to reduce poverty and inequalities, strengthen regional integration and the competitive insertion of its partners in world economy, paying special attention to environmental sustainability. CABEI is based in Tegucigalpa with offices throughout Central America.

CABEI's financial strength as the best credit in Latin America is supported by its high credit rating granted by the different international agencies: Standard & Poor's with a rating of AA, Moody's with a rating of Aa3, and Japan Credit Rating with AA.

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## **[Government announces £4 million boost towards opportunities for young people](#)**

Minister for Civil Society and Youth Baroness Barran has today announced that the Government will invest an additional £2 million into the #iwill Fund, which will be matched by The National Lottery Community Fund to create thousands of new volunteering, social action and community activities for young people.

Since its launch in 2016, the #iwill Fund has used a £54 million joint investment between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and The National Lottery Community Fund, in collaboration with over thirty funders, to create more than 650,000 engaging opportunities for young people led by hundreds of programmes across the country, with a particular focus on benefiting those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

For example, thanks to the #iwill Fund:

- UK Youth, British Red Cross and Young Women's Trust are delivering a programme called EmpowHER, which is enabling girls and young women to change their communities, increase their self-esteem and supporting their wellbeing by providing inclusive and meaningful social action opportunities. For example, students from a small rural primary school near Stroud sold cards and cakes to support the British Red Cross' Independent Living 'First Call' service.
- Young Minds in Haringey, London are delivering a new and contemporary



approach to increasing social action amongst boys aged 10-14 from black and minority ethnic communities, with 'Action to Achieve'. Year 7 pupils across five school 'hubs' are being trained and supported by teachers to deliver after-school and lunchtime social action projects within the local community.

- Leonard Cheshire Disability is empowering young disabled people with their 'Can Do Sport' project, enabling them to be a catalyst for change in their local community by harnessing the potential sport has to make positive changes through physical activity, upskilling, and social action. The project specifically targets a younger age group, under-represented in social action, where they've identified a need for earlier intervention.

The announcement was made by Baroness Barran during a series of visits to mark International Youth Day, underlining the Government's continued support for young people.

The Minister visited Urban Foxes, a project by Leicester City's charitable arm Leicester City in the Community, which engages young people through a range of urban sports such as skateboarding, parkour and BMX, and has seen strong interest so far, with the prospect to grow following the successful Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. The project is offered by Premier League, who have match-funded £1.5 million into the #iwill Fund.

Minister for Civil Society and Youth Baroness Barran said:

I'm acutely aware of how the pandemic has impacted the lives of young people, and I can reassure them that it's a Government priority to ensure they are supported and given access to opportunities that can help them develop and grow.

I'm delighted that an additional £4 million will now be added to the £50 million we have provided to this important fund, which means even more young people can make a positive difference in their communities whilst developing their own unique skills and knowledge.

It was also fantastic to see the work the Premier League and Leicester City in the Community are carrying out with the Urban Foxes programme to help young people get into sport this summer. I encourage everyone to explore the opportunities on offer to rediscover summer safely with their families.

This additional funding forms part of the Government's dedicated support for

young people. Over £100 million from an unprecedented Covid-19 support package for the charity sector has been provided to organisations supporting children and young people during the pandemic, including the £16.5 million Youth Covid Support Fund which provided emergency funding specifically for youth services. In addition, the National Citizen Service is providing thousands of young people opportunities to develop skills for life and work outside of school across the summer.

The Youth Investment Fund also remains a manifesto commitment for this Parliament, of which £30 million has already been committed to provide capital investment in safe spaces for young people this year, so that they can access support from youth workers, and enjoy beneficial activities including sports and culture.

The Minister's visit to Urban Foxes highlighted the Government's Rediscover Summer campaign to help inspire families to get out and about safely and make the most out of the school holidays.

The Minister also spent the week visiting The Skill Mill in Birmingham Targeted Young Women's Programme in Sandwell, Leicester New Parks and Sands United Football Club in Northampton.

David Knott, Interim Chief Executive at The National Lottery Community Fund, said:

The work of the #iwill Fund has had an incredible impact on young people, empowering them to design and deliver projects that will benefit their peers, their communities and young people of the future. Thanks to National Lottery players and Government funding, this additional £4 million investment will provide even more opportunities and enable young people to help their communities build back from COVID, prosper and thrive.

Allison Tripney, Head of Community at Leicester City in the Community, said:

It is very encouraging to see more funding allocated to creating opportunities for young people after what has been a very challenging time.

We're proud to host the launch of this fund with our PL Kicks funded 'Urban Foxes' programme as a fitting backdrop; aiming to provide further positive opportunities for young people too.

James Hope-Gill, CEO at Skateboard GB, said:

It is great to see the activation of the Urban Foxes project which allows youngsters to try other sports such as skateboarding.

Leicester City in the Community do a great job of promoting alternative sports and this will play a part in strong growth of the skateboarding community in Leicester, which recently got a boost with the opening of Skate Parlour Skatepark in the city.

ENDS

Notes to editors

The #iwill Fund

- The #iwill Fund is made possible thanks to £54 million joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities.
- The #iwill Fund brings together a group of organisations who all contribute funding to embed meaningful social action into the lives of young people.
- The #iwill Fund supports the aims of the #iwill campaign – to make involvement in social action a part of life for young people, by recognising the benefit for both young people and their communities.
- By bringing together funders from across different sectors and by making sure that young people have a say in where the funding goes – the #iwill Fund is taking a collaborative approach.

The #iwill movement

- The #iwill movement is a collaboration of over 1000 organisations and 300 young #iwill Ambassadors from across the UK. They are united by a shared belief that all children and young people should be supported and empowered to make a positive difference on the issues that affect their lives, their communities, and broader society.
- The #iwill movement is supported by an independent coordination hub, hosted by Volunteering Matters & UK Youth.
- Take the lead by signing up to the Power of Youth Charter at [www.iwill.org.uk](http://www.iwill.org.uk) or follow us @iwill\_campaign on twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

The National Lottery Community Fund

- The National Lottery Community Fund is the largest funder of community activity in the UK – they are proud to award money raised by National Lottery players to communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. National Lottery players raise £36 million each week for good causes throughout the UK. Since June 2004, they have made over 200,000 grants and awarded over £9 billion to projects that have benefited millions of people. They are passionate about funding great ideas that matter to communities and make a difference to people's lives. At the heart of everything they do is the belief that when people are in the lead, communities thrive. Thanks to the support of National Lottery players, their funding is open to everyone. They are privileged

to be able to work with the smallest of local groups right up to UK-wide charities, enabling people and communities to bring their ambitions to life.

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## Education Secretary congratulates GCSE students on results day

The Education Secretary has praised GCSE students receiving their results tomorrow (Thursday 12 August) and championed the range of high-quality post-16 choices available to young people.

While exams remain the fairest and best form of assessment, recognising the unprecedented disruption the pandemic has caused to education, the Government and Ofqual decided it would not be fair for exams to go ahead this year.

Grades instead have been determined by those who know students best – their teachers.

Students were assessed only on what they had been taught and were assessed on multiple pieces of work, giving them their best possible chance to show what they can do.

Students receiving results will have the opportunity to move on to a range of high-quality options. This is the second year that young people can move on to study T Levels, with seven new subject choices available from September, including Healthcare, Science and Onsite Construction.

Today's GCSE results follow results for AS, A level and vocational technical qualifications on Tuesday, which enabled more than 190,000 18-year-olds in England to take up their first choice university place. The results showed an increase in grades for students from all backgrounds, and Ofqual report that the assessment approach this year is likely to have helped prevent previous gaps from widening as much as they would have done without this year's grading process.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Students should feel proud of their achievements and will now be looking forward to taking their next steps.

I am also hugely grateful to teachers and school leaders for their hard work to ensure students get the grades they deserve and need to progress to the next stage of their lives.

There have never been so many great options available for young people, whether that's going on to study A levels, our pioneering T

Levels, starting an apprenticeship or a traineeship. Whatever option young people choose, they can do so with the confidence it will give them the skills and knowledge to get on in life.

Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills Gillian Keegan said:

If you want to get really valuable experience in the workplace while continuing your studies, we have seven new pioneering T Level qualifications, including science, health, and more digital routes, launching from September.

There are also a huge number of fantastic apprenticeship opportunities on offer right up to master's degree level, from engineering and software development to dental nursing and electric vehicle technician, to help you reach your goals.

Teachers received guidance and support on grading and making objective decisions, and grades were subject to checks by schools with further checks of samples by exam boards – helping to give students, parents, colleges, universities and employers confidence in grades.

There was also a quality assurance process in place, with all grades being checked by exam centres – and one in five having a sample of their grades checked by exam boards – helping to give students, parents, colleges, universities and employers confidence in grades.

The National Careers Service's Exam Results Helpline is available to help young people and their parents think about their next steps and explore the best pathway for them.

The website provides free and impartial information and advice, with professional career advisers also available to speak to via the webchat. And from 9 August, ahead of Results Days, advice will also be available over the phone on the Exam Results Helpline on 0800 100 900, open weekdays 8am-8pm Sat 10am-5pm.

There are also record numbers of vacancies being advertised on the Find An Apprenticeship service including exciting opportunities in sectors such as construction, social care, digital, health and many more.