

# Uptake of GCSE subjects 2013

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## Introduction

This report looks at the uptake of GCSE (and IGCSE) subjects in England in 2013. Reports on GCSE uptake have been produced by Cambridge Assessment every year since 2010. This is the first year that IGCSEs have been included in the data for the report. A decision was made to include IGCSEs due to the increasing numbers of candidates taking these qualifications as alternatives to GCSEs. For the remainder of the report 'GCSEs' will be used to refer to both GCSEs and IGCSEs.

The data for these analyses were taken from the National Pupil Database (NPD). This is a database held by the Department for Education, consisting of results for all students in all subjects in schools and colleges in England, as well as pupil and school background characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity and level of deprivation.

For the analysis of uptake at GCSE the Key Stage 4 (KS4) extract of the NPD was used, consisting of all students who were at the end of KS4 in 2013 (i.e. in year 11). Uptake in this report is defined as the percentage of these students taking a GCSE in the subject, and includes exams taken by these students in previous years. Only accredited IGCSEs were counted in this report as un-accredited ones will no longer be included in the NPD extract from 2014.

Table 1 presents a breakdown of the number of GCSEs taken by students.

**Table 1: Number of GCSEs taken (% of GCSE students)**

<b>Number of GCSEs</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	1.6
2	3.1
3	4.8
4	6.3
5	7.5
6	8.6
7	10.6
8	13.1
9	17.0
10	15.7
11	8.2
12+	3.4
No of candidates	611,685

Uptake of GCSEs in this report is presented by different student classifications: gender, school type, prior attainment, school gender and deprivation level. In the following tables the numbers of students in each of the classifications are presented.

### *School type*

There are several different types of school where students study for GCSEs. For this report these were classified into five groups. Table 2 presents the number and percentage of GCSE students attending each school type.

**Table 2: GCSE students by school type**

School type	Number of students	Percentage
Academy	237,228	39.0
Comprehensive	292,375	48.1
Grammar	10,378	1.7
Independent	50,854	8.4
Secondary Modern	14,862	2.4

*Pupil attainment*

Students were classified by their attainment at GCSE. GCSE grades were converted into scores (A\* = 8, A= 7, B= 6 etc) and a mean GCSE was calculated for each student, which was then used to divide students up into three approximately equally sized attainment groups: low, medium and high. Table 3 presents the number in each group as well as the mean, minimum and maximum value of mean GCSE for each group.

**Table 3: GCSE students by attainment**

Pupils' attainment group	Number of students	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Low	201,912	1.0	4.4	3.3
Medium	205,294	4.4	5.7	5.1
High	201,638	5.7	8.0	6.6

*Deprivation level*

The level of deprivation that a student experiences was measured by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). This is a measure of the proportion of children in a very small geographical area (Lower Layer Super Output Area or LSOA) who live in families that are income deprived. It varies between 0 and 1, with 0 representing minimum deprivation and 1 maximum deprivation.

It should be noted that there was some missing data for this measure (over 9% of students had no record). Students who did have a measure of deprivation were divided up into three equally sized groups. Table 4 presents the number of students and the mean, minimum and maximum IDACI values in each group.

**Table 4: GCSE students by deprivation level**

Pupils' deprivation group	Number of students	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Low	184,700	0.00	0.10	0.06
Medium	184,686	0.10	0.26	0.17
High	184,694	0.26	0.99	0.42

*School gender*

The school gender variable was determined by the female ratio (number of females over the total number of students) in the school. If this ratio was greater than 0.95, the school was considered to be a "Girls" school. If the female ratio was less than 0.05, then the school was designated a

“Boys” school. The rest of the schools were considered “Mixed” schools. Table 5 shows the numbers and percentages of students attending the different types of schools.

**Table 5: GCSE students by school gender**

<b>School gender</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Boys school	31,592	5.2
Girls school	47,152	7.7
Mixed school	532,941	87.1

### Number of GCSEs taken

The number of GCSEs taken by students in each of the classifications is presented in Tables 6-9. For example, Table 6 shows that 16.7% of students in Academies took 10 GCSEs, compared with 37.7% of students in grammar schools. Table 7 shows that 7.0% of students with low attainment took 9 GCSEs, compared with 20.3% of students with high attainment.

**Table 6: Number of GCSEs taken, by school type (% of students)**

<b>Number of GCSEs</b>	<b>Acad</b>	<b>Comp</b>	<b>Grammar</b>	<b>Ind</b>	<b>Sec Mod</b>
1	1.2	1.3	0.4	4.2	1.7
2	3.2	2.7	0.2	4.6	4.4
3	4.6	4.3	0.2	7.7	6.6
4	6.0	5.9	0.1	9.4	9.5
5	6.9	7.6	0.3	9.6	10.8
6	8.1	8.9	0.6	9.8	12.1
7	10.0	11.1	2.2	12.4	13.1
8	12.7	14.3	3.0	11.0	12.9
9	16.9	18.2	12.7	14.2	13.8
10	16.7	15.5	37.7	11.6	9.2
11	9.4	7.6	29.5	4.2	4.0
12+	4.2	2.8	13.0	1.3	1.9
Number of students	237,228	292,375	10,378	50,854	14,862

**Table 7: Number of GCSEs taken, by attainment (% of students)**

<b>Number of GCSEs</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>
1	2.4	0.5	1.0
2	7.0	1.2	1.0
3	11.1	1.7	1.6
4	13.6	3.4	2.0
5	15.6	4.9	2.2
6	14.9	8.5	2.5
7	13.1	13.8	5.1
8	11.0	18.8	9.4
9	7.0	23.8	20.3
10	3.3	15.4	28.8
11	0.8	5.9	18.0
12+	0.2	2.0	8.0
Number of students	201,912	205,294	201,638

**Table 8: Number of GCSEs taken, by deprivation level (%of students)**

Number of GCSEs	Low	Medium	High
1	0.3	0.6	1.1
2	1.1	2.3	4.7
3	2.0	4.0	7.2
4	3.2	5.9	9.0
5	4.6	7.4	10.1
6	6.2	8.9	10.6
7	8.9	11.2	11.7
8	13.4	14.1	12.9
9	20.9	17.7	13.9
10	22.0	15.9	11.1
11	12.4	8.3	5.4
12+	5.0	3.6	2.3
Number of students	184,700	184,686	184,694

**Table 9: Number of GCSEs taken, by school gender (%)**

Number of GCSEs	Boys school	Girls school	Mixed school
1	2.1	1.5	1.6
2	3.1	1.5	3.3
3	5.6	2.6	5.0
4	5.9	3.4	6.6
5	5.8	4.5	7.9
6	6.7	6.4	8.9
7	7.9	8.3	11.0
8	9.3	11.3	13.5
9	14.6	18.4	17.0
10	20.6	23.7	14.7
11	12.6	13.6	7.5
12+	5.7	4.7	3.1
Number of students	31,592	47,152	532,941

**Uptake of individual GCSE subjects**

In the following tables the uptake of individual subjects is presented, broken down into the classifications outlined above. Subjects with an overall uptake level of less than 1% are not included. In each table the subjects are ordered by overall uptake (highest first). Thus, mathematics had the highest level of uptake, being taken by 91.9% of all GCSE students, 91.5% of males and 92.3% of females.

It is worth noting that the expectation is that virtually all pupils take some core subjects, such as English, mathematics and science. However, there are alternatives to GCSEs in these subjects which are increasingly popular, such as (unaccredited) IGCSEs, BTECs and OCR Nationals (particularly in science). This means that the percentages for these subjects are reduced somewhat in these tables. For a detailed analysis of uptake of alternative qualifications in English schools see Gill (2013).

**Table 11: Uptake of individual subjects by gender (% of students)**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>All</b>
Mathematics	91.5	92.3	91.9
English Language	68.4	77.1	72.7
English Literature	67.3	76.7	72.0
Science (Core)	52.8	56.0	54.4
Additional Science	38.8	42.6	40.7
History	38.0	39.4	38.7
Religious Studies	34.1	41.1	37.6
Geography	35.0	30.8	32.9
Biology	26.9	26.1	26.5
French	22.4	30.7	26.5
Chemistry	26.4	25.4	25.9
Physics	26.3	25.1	25.7
English Language & Literature	29.0	20.9	25.0
Physical Education/Sports Studies	19.6	10.4	15.1
Spanish	11.4	15.7	13.5
Art & Design	8.2	18.1	13.1
Drama & Theatre Studies	8.7	14.0	11.3
German	9.4	10.4	9.9
Business Studies: Single	11.6	8.1	9.9
Information & Communications Technology	10.0	8.1	9.1
D&T Resistant Materials	14.3	2.5	8.5
Art & Design (Fine Art)	5.3	11.1	8.2
Media/Film/TV Studies	7.9	8.3	8.1
Statistics	7.4	6.9	7.1
D&T Food Technology	5.2	9.0	7.1
Music	6.7	6.8	6.8
D&T Graphic Products	7.2	4.6	5.9
D&T Product Design	7.4	3.4	5.4
D&T Textiles Technology	0.2	8.8	4.5
Sociology	1.7	4.5	3.1
Methods in Mathematics	2.9	2.8	2.8
Applications of Mathematics	2.7	2.6	2.6
Home Economics: Child Development	0.1	5.2	2.6
Art & Design (Photography)	1.6	3.0	2.3
Humanities: Single	2.0	2.0	2.0
Psychology	1.3	2.7	2.0
Office Technology	2.1	1.8	1.9
Dance	0.2	3.5	1.8
Social Science: Citizenship	1.7	1.9	1.8
Home Economics: Food	1.1	2.0	1.6
Latin	1.4	1.5	1.5
D&T Electronic Products	2.5	0.2	1.4
Art & Design (Textiles)	0.1	2.5	1.3
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.2	0.9	1.1

**Table 12: Uptake of individual subjects by school type (% of students)**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Academy</b>	<b>Comprehensive</b>	<b>Grammar</b>	<b>Independent</b>	<b>Secondary Modern</b>
Mathematics	95.4	95.4	92.6	54.7	96.6
English Language	75.4	74.7	96.9	51.9	65.4
English Literature	74.5	73.9	97.2	53.4	63.2
Science (Core)	56.0	58.9	33.4	28.6	57.8
Additional Science	41.8	44.0	27.5	22.3	42.3
History	38.8	37.6	53.7	47.2	32.4
Religious Studies	34.5	41.1	45.7	33.7	37.4
Geography	32.8	31.6	51.1	42.0	26.7
Biology	27.8	23.8	68.9	32.7	16.0
French	26.9	24.9	44.3	34.8	19.2
Chemistry	27.1	23.5	68.6	30.9	15.7
Physics	27.0	23.3	68.3	30.0	15.6
English Language & Literature	27.0	26.8	2.2	7.6	38.1
Physical Education/Sports Studies	15.6	15.2	17.9	13.6	11.8
Spanish	13.1	12.6	26.7	20.7	10.3
Art & Design	12.9	13.5	11.3	13.3	13.1
Drama & Theatre Studies	11.2	11.1	13.6	15.1	6.0
German	11.2	8.6	26.5	10.7	3.4
Business Studies: Single	10.9	9.5	18.1	7.3	5.7
Information & Communications Technology	9.0	8.6	23.5	10.4	5.9
D&T Resistant Materials	8.3	8.5	8.9	10.1	8.3
Art & Design (Fine Art)	7.8	7.8	13.7	12.4	5.5
Media/Film/TV Studies	8.4	9.2	5.3	1.5	8.8
Statistics	7.7	7.0	11.9	4.5	8.3
D&T Food Technology	7.6	7.7	7.4	1.7	5.6
Music	6.7	6.3	11.1	10.4	4.1
D&T Graphic Products	6.2	6.5	8.6	1.8	4.1
D&T Product Design	5.8	5.4	6.0	3.7	5.0
D&T Textiles Technology	4.6	5.0	5.4	1.7	3.5
Sociology	3.4	3.5	1.7	0.4	1.9
Methods in Mathematics	3.5	2.5	7.2	1.7	2.4
Applications of Mathematics	3.0	2.3	7.1	1.7	2.4
Home Economics: Child Development	2.7	3.0	0.3	0.5	2.7
Art & Design (Photography)	2.2	2.5	0.7	1.3	4.4
Humanities: Single	2.7	1.8	0.0	0.6	0.9
Psychology	2.1	2.0	2.8	0.6	2.3
Office Technology	2.1	1.8	1.1	1.9	3.1
Dance	2.1	1.8	1.4	0.8	1.7
Social Science: Citizenship	1.6	2.0	2.9	0.7	1.9
Home Economics: Food	1.4	1.5	1.6	2.6	1.4
Latin	0.6	0.3	4.4	12.0	0.3
D&T Electronic Products	1.6	1.3	3.3	0.8	1.0
Art & Design (Textiles)	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.2	0.7
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.3	1.0	0.0	0.6	0.9

**Table 13: Uptake of individual subjects by attainment (% of students)**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Low attainment</b>	<b>Medium attainment</b>	<b>High attainment</b>
Mathematics	95.2	94.9	86.1
English Language	52.4	79.6	86.8
English Literature	49.4	79.3	88.0
Science (Core)	55.6	69.2	38.6
Additional Science	29.9	57.7	34.6
History	21.7	40.0	55.0
Religious Studies	25.3	39.8	48.1
Geography	19.2	34.2	45.8
Biology	3.8	20.7	55.6
French	9.4	26.6	43.8
Chemistry	3.3	20.0	55.0
Physics	3.2	19.8	54.6
English Language & Literature	49.4	21.0	4.6
Physical Education/Sports Studies	11.0	18.4	15.9
Spanish	5.1	13.6	22.1
Art & Design	11.7	13.9	13.8
Drama & Theatre Studies	8.5	12.2	13.4
German	2.9	9.2	17.6
Business Studies: Single	6.3	11.8	11.6
Information & Communications Technology	5.7	9.7	11.9
D&T Resistant Materials	10.5	8.6	6.4
Art & Design (Fine Art)	6.2	8.4	10.1
Media/Film/TV Studies	8.4	10.0	6.2
Statistics	2.7	7.3	11.5
D&T Food Technology	8.3	7.6	5.4
Music	3.2	6.0	11.2
D&T Graphic Products	5.5	6.6	5.7
D&T Product Design	5.7	5.8	4.8
D&T Textiles Technology	3.7	4.9	5.0
Sociology	2.4	3.8	3.1
Methods in Mathematics	2.3	2.8	3.5
Applications of Mathematics	1.9	2.5	3.5
Home Economics: Child Development	3.8	2.9	1.1
Art & Design (Photography)	2.3	2.9	1.8
Humanities: Single	2.3	2.2	1.5
Psychology	1.2	2.3	2.5
Office Technology	1.8	2.2	1.8
Dance	1.4	2.2	2.0
Social Science: Citizenship	1.6	2.0	1.7
Home Economics: Food	1.6	1.7	1.4
Latin	0.0	0.2	4.2
D&T Electronic Products	1.2	1.5	1.6
Art & Design (Textiles)	1.1	1.5	1.2
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.1	1.3	0.9

**Table 14: Uptake of individual subjects by deprivation group (% of students)**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Low deprivation</b>	<b>Medium deprivation</b>	<b>High deprivation</b>
Mathematics	95.4	95.4	96.5
English Language	84.0	75.8	66.4
English Literature	83.8	75.0	65.2
Science (Core)	56.8	58.5	55.8
Additional Science	45.6	44.0	39.1
History	45.2	38.9	31.4
Religious Studies	39.9	37.2	38.2
Geography	39.6	32.3	25.8
Biology	35.7	26.0	17.3
French	32.2	25.7	20.4
Chemistry	35.2	25.5	16.8
Physics	35.1	25.3	16.6
English Language & Literature	16.8	26.1	37.0
Physical Education/Sports Studies	19.8	15.7	10.8
Spanish	15.3	12.6	11.3
Art & Design	13.4	13.7	12.6
Drama & Theatre Studies	12.6	11.3	9.3
German	14.7	9.6	5.6
Business Studies: Single	13.0	10.1	7.6
Information & Communications Technology	9.8	8.7	8.7
D&T Resistant Materials	9.0	8.9	7.4
Art & Design (Fine Art)	9.1	8.1	6.5
Media/Film/TV Studies	8.7	9.3	8.4
Statistics	8.5	7.5	6.6
D&T Food Technology	8.2	8.0	6.7
Music	8.6	6.5	4.5
D&T Graphic Products	7.1	6.5	5.4
D&T Product Design	5.8	5.7	5.5
D&T Textiles Technology	5.3	4.8	4.3
Sociology	2.9	3.2	4.0
Methods in Mathematics	3.4	3.2	2.3
Applications of Mathematics	3.3	3.0	1.9
Home Economics: Child Development	2.4	3.1	2.9
Art & Design (Photography)	2.3	2.7	2.2
Humanities: Single	1.8	2.1	2.5
Psychology	2.1	2.1	2.1
Office Technology	2.0	2.0	1.8
Dance	2.4	2.1	1.4
Social Science: Citizenship	1.2	1.7	2.7
Home Economics: Food	1.6	1.6	1.3
Latin	0.8	0.5	0.2
D&T Electronic Products	1.9	1.5	1.0
Art & Design (Textiles)	1.3	1.3	1.3
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.2	1.1	1.1

**Table 15: Uptake of individual subjects by school gender (% of students)**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Boys School</b>	<b>Girls School</b>	<b>Mixed School</b>
Mathematics	80.9	86.6	93.0
English Language	73.1	84.9	71.6
English Literature	72.6	84.9	70.8
Science (Core)	38.1	46.2	56.1
Additional Science	30.7	39.1	41.4
History	47.9	47.2	37.4
Religious Studies	45.8	51.9	35.8
Geography	43.2	39.1	31.7
Biology	40.4	37.9	24.7
French	33.6	36.9	25.1
Chemistry	39.5	37.2	24.1
Physics	39.2	37.1	23.9
English Language & Literature	15.2	8.4	27.1
Physical Education/Sports Studies	16.3	9.7	15.5
Spanish	16.3	22.8	12.5
Art & Design	7.8	14.7	13.3
Drama & Theatre Studies	9.2	16.9	10.9
German	14.1	13.7	9.3
Business Studies: Single	12.6	8.8	9.8
Information & Communications Technology	14.0	14.2	8.3
D&T Resistant Materials	13.9	2.6	8.6
Art & Design (Fine Art)	10.4	12.4	7.7
Media/Film/TV Studies	4.8	5.7	8.6
Statistics	7.9	6.9	7.1
D&T Food Technology	2.4	6.5	7.4
Music	8.7	9.3	6.4
D&T Graphic Products	6.0	3.8	6.1
D&T Product Design	6.4	3.7	5.5
D&T Textiles Technology	0.0	8.4	4.4
Sociology	0.4	4.9	3.1
Methods in Mathematics	3.6	2.5	2.8
Applications of Mathematics	3.3	2.3	2.6
Home Economics: Child Development	.	2.7	2.8
Art & Design (Photography)	1.6	1.5	2.4
Humanities: Single	0.8	0.4	2.2
Psychology	0.9	2.4	2.0
Office Technology	1.9	2.3	1.9
Dance	0.1	3.1	1.8
Social Science: Citizenship	2.8	2.3	1.6
Home Economics: Food	0.6	2.3	1.5
Latin	7.2	5.7	0.7
D&T Electronic Products	3.0	0.1	1.4
Art & Design (Textiles)	0.0	2.3	1.2
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.1	0.7	1.1

## **Reference**

Gill, T. (2013). *Uptake of level 2 qualifications in English schools 2008-2012. Statistics Report Series No.61*. Cambridge Assessment. Available at:  
<http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/our-research/all-published-resources/statistical-reports/>