

# Uptake of GCSE subjects 2024

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## Introduction

This report is focused on the uptake of GCSE subjects in England in 2024. Uptake in a GCSE subject is defined as the number or percentage of students at the end of Key Stage 4 (KS4) taking the subject.

This report was produced using publicly available data from the Department for Education's (DfE) "Find and compare schools in England" service<sup>1</sup>. The dataset consisted of KS4 results in all subjects provided by each school in England. Other school information, such as schools' sex composition, admissions policy, and the number of disadvantaged pupils at the end of KS4 were also available. Only GCSEs (9-1) full course (both single and double award) were counted for this report.

In this report, GCSE uptake is presented by the following school classifications: school type, school attainment, school deprivation level, and school sex composition.

## Results

Tables 1 to 4 present the distribution of schools within each of the different school classifications. The total number of schools is not identical in each table, due to small amounts of missing or suppressed data within each classification. In certain circumstances, DfE suppressed some school data values to protect confidentiality and minimise identification risks. This usually happens when the measure covers only five or fewer students<sup>2</sup>.

### School type

GCSE qualifications are taught at several different types of school. Schools were assigned a school type based on their admissions policy and institution type as recorded in the dataset.

In this report, schools were classified into seven different school types: Academy (non-selective in highly selective area (HSA)), Academy (other non-selective), Academy (selective), Independent school, Non-selective in highly selective area, Other non-selective, and Selective. Other non-maintained schools, such as special schools, were excluded.

Table 1 presents the number and percentage of students and schools in each school type.

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<sup>1</sup> This can be accessed here: <https://www.find-school-performance-data.service.gov.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> The applied suppression rule was explained in the "abbreviations" file that accompanied the dataset. As stated in the file, different measures might have different rules applied.

Table 1. GCSE students and schools, by school type.

School type	N students	% students	N schools	% schools
Academy (non-selective in HSA)	33681	5.1	186	4.6
Academy (other non-selective)	435224	65.8	2333	57.2
Academy (selective)	23450	3.5	143	3.5
Independent	53175	8.0	811	19.9
Non-selective in HSA	4915	0.7	27	0.7
Other non-selective	107348	16.2	561	13.7
Selective	3250	0.5	20	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>661043</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4081</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## School attainment

Schools were ranked by their attainment at GCSE, based on the centre mean score per entry in the DfE<sup>3</sup> dataset. This score was used to divide schools into three equally sized groups, representing low, medium, and high attainment. Table 2 presents the number of schools and GCSE students in each group, and the minimum, maximum and mean points score for each group.

Given that this is a school-level average, there would be some students who obtained high grades in a low attainment school, and some who obtained low grades in a high attainment school. However, a high attainment school will have more high-attaining students than a low attainment school, which has implications for uptake and teaching.

Table 2. School attainment/ability group. Values for minimum, maximum and mean are calculated based on candidates' average points per entry.

Attainment group	Schools	Students	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Low	1341	214645	0.6	4.4	3.9
Medium	1341	251524	4.4	5.2	4.8
High	1341	194161	5.2	8.7	6.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>4023</b>	<b>660330</b>	-	-	-

## School deprivation level

Each school's deprivation level was derived based on the percentage of disadvantaged<sup>4</sup> students in the school at the end of KS4. This measure was used to categorise schools into three equally-sized groups, representing low, medium, and high deprivation. Table 3 presents the number of schools in each group and the minimum, maximum and mean percentage of disadvantaged candidates for each group.

<sup>3</sup> Average points per entry is derived by converting each qualification awarded at KS4 into points and dividing the total by the number of qualifications for which a school was entered. For single award GCSEs, points were equal to the grade (grade 9 = 9 points, etc.). For double award GCSEs graded 9 – 11, points were as follows: 99 = 18, 98 = 17, ..., 21 = 3, 11 = 2. Each double award GCSE was given a weight of two, representing two GCSE entries when calculating the average points per entry.

<sup>4</sup> Defined as those who attract pupil premium funding: that is, pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, and pupils in care, or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

Some schools had no recorded value for this measure (mostly independent schools) and quite a few schools had a suppressed value due to the rule applied by DfE. These schools were all excluded from this categorisation.

Table 3. School deprivation group. Values for minimum, maximum and mean are calculated based on the percentage of disadvantaged candidates within a school.

Deprivation group	Schools	Students	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Low	1091	220193	0.0	18.4	12.5
Medium	1093	202849	18.5	31.3	24.5
High	1086	184826	31.4	82.8	42.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>3270</b>	<b>607868</b>	-	-	-

## School sex composition

School sex composition<sup>5</sup> was recorded for each school in the DfE dataset. Table 4 shows the numbers and percentages of different types of schools.

Table 4. GCSE students and schools, by school sex.

School sex	N schools	% schools	N students	% students
Boys' School	221	5.4	28648	4.3
Girls' School	368	9.0	45489	6.9
Mixed School	3492	85.6	586906	88.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>4081</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>661043</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Mean number of GCSEs taken

Tables 5-8 show the mean number of GCSEs taken by students, according to the different school classifications described above. For example, Table 5 shows that students in selective academies took on average 9.8 GCSEs, compared with the students in independent schools, who took on average only 4.7 GCSEs. This observation likely reflects that independent schools have a higher uptake of non-accredited qualifications (e.g., some IGCSEs/International GCSEs).<sup>6</sup>

Table 6 shows that students in the high attainment school group took on average 7.5 GCSEs, compared with those in the low attainment school group, in which students took on average 6.9 GCSEs. Table 7 shows that students in the low deprivation school group took on average 8.2 GCSEs, compared with students in the high deprivation school group, in which students took on average 7 GCSEs. Table 8 shows that at girls' schools, students took on average 7.9 GCSEs, compared with 7.9 GCSEs at boys' schools and 7.2 GCSEs at mixed schools.

<sup>5</sup> The word 'sex' is used throughout the report to describe the different types of schools as it best reflects the admission policy at the time of data collection, and is consistent with terms used by DfE in their reports.

<sup>6</sup> However, we can't know this for certain, because these non-accredited qualifications are not included in the DfE data.

Table 5. Mean number of GCSEs taken by school type.

<b>School type</b>	<b>Total GCSE entries</b>	<b>Total no. of students</b>	<b>Mean GCSEs taken</b>
Academy (non-selective in HSA)	242820	33681	7.2
Academy (other non-selective)	3225151	435224	7.4
Academy (selective)	229510	23450	9.8
Independent	247570	53175	4.7
Non-selective in HSA	35498	4915	7.2
Other non-selective	810644	107348	7.6
Selective	31730	3250	9.8

Table 6. Mean number of GCSEs taken by attainment group.

<b>Attainment group</b>	<b>Total GCSE entries</b>	<b>Total no. of students</b>	<b>Mean GCSEs taken</b>
Low	1472055	214645	6.9
Medium	1887660	251524	7.5
High	1462674	194161	7.5

Table 7. Mean number of GCSEs taken by deprivation group.

<b>Deprivation group</b>	<b>Total GCSE entries</b>	<b>Total no. of students</b>	<b>Mean GCSEs taken</b>
Low	1797713	220193	8.2
Medium	1487040	202849	7.3
High	1290600	184826	7.0

Table 8. Mean number of GCSEs taken by school sex composition.

<b>School sex</b>	<b>Total GCSE entries</b>	<b>Total no. of students</b>	<b>Mean GCSEs taken</b>
Boys' School	226284	28648	7.9
Girls' School	357638	45489	7.9
Mixed School	4239001	586906	7.2

## **Uptake of individual GCSE subjects**

The uptake of individual GCSE subjects is presented in Tables 9 to 12, according to the school classifications described in Tables 1 to 4. Subjects with overall uptake of less than 1% are not included. In each table, subjects are ordered by overall uptake (highest first). Thus, English Language had the highest level of uptake, being taken by 95.1% of GCSE students in mixed schools, 90.2% of students in boys' schools, and 89.3% of students in girls' schools.

It is expected that most students take core subjects, such as English, Mathematics and science. However, there are alternatives to GCSEs in these subjects, such as (non-accredited) IGCSE/International GCSEs, BTECs and Cambridge Nationals, that are not included in these tables, so the percentages for these subjects are reduced. For example, as shown in

Table 10, only 41.3% of the GCSE students in independent schools took English Language, compared to 99.1% of students in non-selective academies in highly selective area. For a detailed analysis of uptake of alternative qualifications in English schools see Gill (2016).

Table 9. Uptake of individual subjects by school sex composition (percentage of students at the end of KS4).

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Boys' School</b>	<b>Girls' School</b>	<b>Mixed School</b>	<b>Overall uptake</b>
English Language	90.2	89.3	95.1	94.4
Mathematics	86.5	86.1	94.5	93.6
English Literature	88.5	89.0	93.2	92.7
Science: Double Award	43.4	50.2	70.5	68.0
History	42.9	43.7	46.7	46.3
Geography	47.6	41.0	42.6	42.7
Religious Studies	43.9	53.1	31.7	33.7
Biology	44.3	39.5	24.4	26.3
Physics	44.0	38.3	23.9	25.8
Chemistry	44.5	38.8	23.9	25.8
French	22.8	28.2	18.7	19.5
Spanish	21.5	26.9	18.6	19.3
Business Studies: Single	22.1	16.7	18.8	18.8
Computer Studies / Computing	25.9	13.7	13.4	14.0
Design & Technology	20.5	10.0	11.7	12.0
Physical Education / Sports Studies	15.1	9.7	11.5	11.6
Art & Design (Fine Art)	9.0	12.7	9.8	10.0
D&T Food Technology	3.5	9.2	8.5	8.3
Art & Design	3.7	8.0	7.9	7.7
Drama & Theatre Studies	6.0	13.4	7.0	7.4
Art & Design (Photography)	1.7	2.7	6.5	6.0
German	11.0	8.3	4.7	5.2
Music	6.4	7.4	4.6	4.9
Statistics	5.3	1.4	4.8	4.6
Sociology	1.1	5.9	4.5	4.4
Media / Film / TV Studies	2.8	3.7	4.2	4.1
Social Science: Citizenship	3.0	4.1	3.1	3.1
Psychology	1.4	4.3	2.9	3.0
Art & Design (Textiles)	0.0	4.6	1.9	2.0
Art & Design (3D Studies)	1.1	0.5	1.6	1.5
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.5	1.0	1.4	1.4
Latin	5.3	4.1	0.8	1.2
Polish	0.7	0.8	1.1	1.1
Economics	5.2	1.5	0.9	1.1
Chinese	2.6	2.1	0.9	1.0
Dance	0.1	2.1	0.9	1.0

Table 10. Uptake of individual subjects by school type (percentage of students at the end of KS4).

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Academy (non-sel in HSA)</b>	<b>Academy (other non-sel)</b>	<b>Academy (sel)</b>	<b>Independent</b>	<b>Non-sel in HSA</b>	<b>Other non-sel</b>	<b>Selective</b>
English Language	99.1	99.1	99.8	41.3	98.9	98.9	99.7
Mathematics	99.0	99.1	99.9	29.9	99.3	99.0	99.8
English Literature	97.4	97.5	99.6	37.8	97.6	97.1	99.2
Science: Double Award	77.5	73.9	16.5	25.1	75.1	74.2	23.4
History	47.7	49.0	50.5	18.5	45.3	47.9	47.4
Geography	43.8	43.9	51.0	28.9	42.1	41.8	57.5
Religious Studies	28.9	31.2	46.8	25.2	43.3	45.5	52.4
Biology	20.2	23.9	83.0	27.5	22.9	23.5	76.2
Physics	19.6	23.6	82.8	24.9	22.1	23.2	76.0
Chemistry	19.6	23.5	82.7	25.4	22.1	23.3	76.0
French	17.4	19.6	33.8	15.7	9.9	18.7	31.8
Spanish	15.6	19.5	33.3	15.2	16.4	18.4	23.9
Business Studies: Single	18.2	19.2	25.2	12.9	21.1	18.4	24.3
Computer Studies / Computing	10.9	13.2	28.0	14.8	14.6	13.9	30.6
Design & Technology	9.6	11.3	19.3	13.5	10.3	12.9	26.8
Physical Education / Sports Studies	8.7	10.8	18.2	16.2	7.0	11.8	19.9
Art & Design (Fine Art)	8.4	10.1	11.6	12.4	7.2	8.4	10.2
D&T Food Technology	8.1	8.3	8.5	5.5	5.5	9.7	9.3
Art & Design	8.9	7.4	5.1	7.3	9.7	9.3	9.0
Drama & Theatre Studies	6.1	6.6	11.9	13.1	4.6	7.3	7.1
Art & Design (Photography)	7.6	6.6	1.1	2.4	6.7	6.1	0.0
German	2.8	4.7	20.1	4.7	2.0	4.7	30.0
Music	3.2	4.4	10.4	7.9	3.0	4.7	8.1
Statistics	10.0	5.2	2.5	1.0	2.9	3.2	2.3
Sociology	5.3	4.7	2.2	0.3	2.9	5.8	1.1
Media / Film / TV Studies	5.8	4.2	1.7	1.1	4.3	5.3	4.5

Table 10. Uptake of individual subjects by school type (percentage of students at the end of KS4). *(continued)*

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Academy (non-sel in HSA)</b>	<b>Academy (other non-sel)</b>	<b>Academy (sel)</b>	<b>Independent</b>	<b>Non-sel in HSA</b>	<b>Other non-sel</b>	<b>Selective</b>
Social Science: Citizenship	4.9	3.2	0.5	2.2	5.2	3.2	0.1
Psychology	3.7	2.9	4.2	1.3	5.7	3.3	2.3
Art & Design (Textiles)	2.2	1.9	1.7	2.1	1.9	2.4	1.2
Art & Design (3D Studies)	1.5	1.5	0.3	1.7	2.6	1.5	0.0
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.9	1.5	1.4	0.6	1.1	1.3	0.0
Latin	0.1	0.4	5.1	8.4	0.0	0.4	9.0
Polish	1.2	1.1	0.5	0.1	1.0	1.4	0.7
Economics	0.6	1.0	6.8	0.6	1.1	1.0	2.6
Chinese	0.5	0.7	2.9	3.8	0.7	0.6	1.0
Dance	1.5	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.4	1.1	0.4

Table 11. Uptake of individual subjects by school attainment (percentage of students at the end of KS4).

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>
English Language	98.5	98.7	84.7
Mathematics	98.6	98.7	81.6
English Literature	96.4	97.2	83.3
Science: Double Award	78.1	73.4	49.9
History	48.1	48.7	41.5
Geography	40.7	44.2	43.0
Religious Studies	24.4	34.6	42.9
Biology	18.7	24.3	37.4
Physics	18.2	24.0	36.6
Chemistry	18.0	23.9	36.8
French	14.2	19.9	24.9
Spanish	14.8	19.3	24.2
Business Studies: Single	14.4	20.6	21.3
Computer Studies / Computing	10.9	13.7	17.7
Design & Technology	9.6	12.2	14.4
Physical Education / Sports Studies	6.5	12.5	15.9
Art & Design (Fine Art)	9.8	9.7	10.5
D&T Food Technology	7.1	9.0	8.7
Art & Design	8.1	7.7	7.3
Drama & Theatre Studies	4.6	7.2	10.8
Art & Design (Photography)	7.8	6.4	3.6
German	2.9	4.5	8.8
Music	2.9	4.6	7.4
Statistics	7.3	4.1	2.4
Sociology	4.1	5.4	3.6
Media / Film / TV Studies	3.3	4.9	4.0
Social Science: Citizenship	2.9	3.7	2.7
Psychology	2.9	3.2	2.6
Art & Design (Textiles)	1.6	2.0	2.3
Art & Design (3D Studies)	2.0	1.3	1.2
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.3	1.6	1.3
Latin	0.1	0.3	3.7
Polish	1.1	1.1	0.9
Economics	0.3	0.8	2.5
Chinese	0.4	0.6	2.3
Dance	0.7	1.1	1.1

Table 12. Uptake of individual subjects by school deprivation (percentage of students at the end of KS4).

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>
English Language	99.3	99.1	98.9
Mathematics	99.3	99.1	99.0
English Literature	98.0	97.5	97.1
Science: Double Award	62.3	75.4	78.9
History	49.7	48.8	47.6
Geography	46.3	44.1	40.7
Religious Studies	39.2	31.1	32.4
Biology	36.0	22.5	18.6
Physics	35.8	22.2	18.1
Chemistry	35.8	22.1	18.0
French	22.8	19.4	16.8
Spanish	21.7	17.8	19.2
Business Studies: Single	25.8	17.4	13.6
Computer Studies / Computing	16.4	13.4	11.4
Design & Technology	15.8	11.2	7.9
Physical Education / Sports Studies	17.2	10.0	5.2
Art & Design (Fine Art)	10.3	10.0	8.8
D&T Food Technology	11.5	8.5	5.1
Art & Design	7.5	7.3	8.4
Drama & Theatre Studies	9.4	6.3	4.7
Art & Design (Photography)	4.9	7.4	6.9
German	8.8	4.2	2.3
Music	6.3	4.3	2.8
Statistics	3.3	5.1	6.7
Sociology	4.3	5.1	5.1
Media / Film / TV Studies	5.7	4.3	2.7
Social Science: Citizenship	2.7	3.4	3.7
Psychology	3.3	3.1	2.8
Art & Design (Textiles)	2.2	1.9	1.7
Art & Design (3D Studies)	1.1	1.7	1.6
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.6	1.4	1.4
Latin	1.1	0.3	0.2
Polish	1.1	1.1	1.2
Economics	1.9	0.7	0.8
Chinese	1.1	0.5	0.6
Dance	1.5	0.9	0.5

## References

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