

# **Uptake of GCSE subjects 2017**

Statistics Report Series No. 120

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#### Introduction

This report looks at the uptake of GCSE (and IGCSE/International GCSE) subjects in England in 2017. The data for these analyses was 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 student characteristics such as age and gender. School census data, which is primarily available for students from state-maintained schools, provides information on student characteristics such as ethnicity and level of deprivation.

For analyses here, the Key Stage 4 (KS4) extract of the NPD was used, consisting of all students who were at the end of KS4 in 2017 (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/International GCSEs were counted in this report, as non-accredited qualifications are not included in the NPD extract.

#### Results

Table 1 presents a breakdown of the number of GCSEs taken. The most common number of GCSEs taken was 9 (28.3% of students). The mean number taken was 8.6.

Number of GCSEs	Percent
1	0.6
2	0.8
3	1.4
4	1.9
5	2.3
6	4.4
7	9.7
8	18.5
9	28.3
10	22.5
11	7.9
12+	1.7
Mean no. taken	8.6
No. of students	558,700

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

#### School type

Students study for GCSEs at several different types of school. As with the previous GCSE uptake report in this series (Carroll & Gill, 2017), seven school categories were used<sup>1</sup>: Academy (Comprehensive); Academy (Modern); Academy (Selective); Comprehensive; Grammar; Independent; and Secondary Modern. Students were associated with the school

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> These categories combine school type and selection policy, and are derived from the Get Information About Schools service (formerly known as Edubase), the Department for Education's register of educational establishments in England and Wales, available at <a href="https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/">https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/</a>. For further information on derivation of categories, see Statistics Report No. 113 (Gill, 2017).

at which they were registered in the NPD, indicated by the school's Unique Reference Number (URN). 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	Percent
Academy (comprehensive)	311,512	55.8
Academy (modern)	12,168	2.2
Academy (selective)	19,510	3.5
Comprehensive	162,656	29.1
Grammar	3,212	0.6
Independent	43,914	7.9
Secondary Modern	5,728	1.0

#### **Pupil attainment**

Students were classified by their attainment at GCSE, based on their 'average points per entry' score in the NPD<sup>2</sup>. This score was used to divide students into three approximately equally sized groups, reflecting low, medium and high attainment. Table 3 presents the number in each group, and the mean, minimum and maximum points scores for each group. Note that 244 students (0.04%) had no 'average points per entry' score recorded in the NPD, so were excluded from this analysis.

Table 3: GCSE students by attainment

Attainment group	Number of students	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Low	186,266	0.0	3.8	2.7
Medium	185,536	3.8	5.4	4.6
High	186,654	5.4	10.8	6.6

#### Income related deprivation level

The level of deprivation that a student experiences was inferred using a Government index, based on home postcode. The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) measures the proportion of children in a very small geographical area (Lower Layer Super Output Area or LSOA) living in low income families<sup>3</sup>. It varies between 0 and 1 and indicates how income deprived the area is that they live in (although it cannot tell us how income deprived the student actually is).

Around 8.3% of students had no record for this measure in the NPD, so were excluded from this analysis. The remaining students were divided into three equally sized groups. Table 4 presents the number of students and the mean, minimum and maximum IDACI values in each group.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</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 student was entered. In 2017, to account for the introduction of GCSEs graded from 9–1 in Maths and English, point scores were assigned differently from previous years. For 9–1 GCSEs, points were equal to the grade (grade 9 = 9 points, etc.). For subjects graded with letters, points were as follows: A\* = 8.5, A = 7, B = 5.5, C = 4, D = 3, E = 2, F = 1.5, G = 1. Note that the maximum points score available was 10.75, which corresponded to Grade A at AS level.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> For further information on IDACI calculation, including definitions of children, families, and income deprivation, see <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015-technical-report">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015-technical-report</a>

Table 4: GCSE students by deprivation group

<b>Deprivation Group</b>	Number of students	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Low	170,930	0.00	0.10	0.06
Medium	170,345	0.10	0.24	0.16
High	171,091	0.24	0.92	0.36

### School gender

School gender was determined by the school's female ratio (the number of females divided by the total number of students). If this was greater than 0.95, the school was designated a "Girls" school. If it was less than 0.05, the school was designated a "Boys" school. Remaining schools were considered to be "Mixed". Table 5 shows the numbers and percentages of students attending each type of school.

Table 5: GCSE students by school gender

School gender	Number of students	Percent
Boys' School	29,269	5.2
Girls' School	42,881	7.7
Mixed School	486,550	87.1

#### **Number of GCSEs taken**

The number of GCSEs taken by students in each of the different classifications described above is presented in Tables 6-9. For example, Table 6 shows that 22.8% of students in comprehensive academies took 10 GCSEs, compared with 51.1% of students in grammar schools. Table 6 also indicates that in independent schools, 5.3% of students took 10 GCSEs, with 2-9 GCSEs more common: this reflects higher uptake of non-accredited qualifications (e.g., some IGCSEs/International GCSEs) in these schools. Table 7 shows that 10.5% of students in the low attainment group took 10 GCSEs, compared with 33.3% of students in the high attainment group. Table 8 shows that 30.9% of students in the low deprivation group took 10 GCSEs, compared with 17.5% of students in the high deprivation group. Table 9 shows that at girls' schools, 27.0% of students took 10 GCSEs, compared with 24.4% at boys' schools and 22.0% at mixed schools.

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

Number of GCSEs	Academy (comp)	Academy (mod)	Academy (sel)	Comp.	Grammar	Ind.	Sec. Mod.
1	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.1	3.0	0.4
2	0.3	0.5	0.0	0.4	0.2	6.0	0.4
3	0.5	0.6	0.0	0.5	0.0	12.6	0.6
4	0.7	0.9	0.1	0.8	0.1	15.5	0.9
5	1.6	1.5	0.1	1.5	0.2	12.4	1.8
6	4.2	4.4	0.2	3.3	0.4	11.6	5.8
7	10.2	12.1	1.2	9.1	3.1	11.9	11.9
8	19.9	22.7	3.2	19.8	4.2	10.5	23.2
9	30.3	30.0	13.1	31.7	14.8	9.1	29.9
10	22.8	19.2	42.1	24.1	51.1	5.3	19.1
11	7.5	6.5	32.0	7.2	21.2	1.8	5.6
12+	1.6	1.3	7.9	1.4	4.8	0.3	0.5
Mean no. taken	8.7	8.6	10.2	8.8	9.9	5.7	8.5
No. of students	311,512	12,168	19,510	162,656	3,212	43,914	5,728

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

Number of GCSEs	Low	Medium	High
1	0.8	0.2	0.6
2	1.0	0.3	1.1
3	1.4	0.6	2.3
4	2.1	0.7	2.8
5	3.9	0.9	2.2
6	8.6	2.4	2.1
7	17.6	8.2	3.3
8	26.5	20.7	8.5
9	25.8	35.0	24.2
10	10.5	23.7	33.3
11	1.6	6.2	15.8
12+	0.2	1.1	3.7
Mean no. taken	7.8	8.8	9.1
No. of students	186,266	185,536	186,654

Table 8: Number of GCSEs taken, by deprivation group (% of GCSE students)

Number of GCSEs	Low	Medium	High
1	0.1	0.2	0.3
2	0.2	0.3	0.5
3	0.2	0.4	0.7
4	0.4	0.7	1.0
5	0.8	1.4	2.2
6	2.0	3.6	5.6
7	6.0	9.4	13.3
8	15.0	19.8	23.0
9	31.1	30.4	28.6
10	30.9	23.8	17.5
11	11.2	8.2	5.8
12+	2.2	1.9	1.4
Mean no. taken	9.2	8.8	8.4
No. of students	170,930	170,345	171,091

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

Number of GCSEs	Boys' school	Girls' school	Mixed school
1	0.9	0.7	0.5
2	1.9	1.1	0.7
3	3.8	2.5	1.2
4	4.6	3.7	1.5
5	4.8	3.3	2.1
6	3.8	4.3	4.4
7	6.5	7.0	10.2
8	11.0	11.5	19.6
9	20.4	22.8	29.3
10	24.4	27.0	22.0
11	14.1	13.3	7.0
12+	3.7	2.7	1.5
Mean no. taken	8.4	8.6	8.6
No. of students	29,269	42,881	486,550

#### **Uptake of individual GCSE subjects**

In the following tables, uptake of individual subjects is presented, broken down into the classifications described above. 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 94.6% of all GCSE students, 94.1% of males and 95.1% of females.

It is expected that nearly all pupils take some core subjects, such as English, Mathematics and science. However, there are alternatives to GCSEs in these subjects, such as (non-accredited) IGCSEs/International GCSEs, BTECs and Cambridge Nationals, that are not included in these tables, so the percentages for these subjects are reduced somewhat. For a detailed analysis of uptake of alternative qualifications in English schools see Gill (2016).

Note that uptake patterns have changed somewhat this year, due to changes to both GCSEs themselves (i.e., the introduction of 9-1 GCSEs in English and Mathematics) and the accreditation of qualifications. Compared to 2016 (Carroll & Gill, 2017), uptake has increased for all of Mathematics, English Language and English Literature, but English Language has overtaken Mathematics as the subject with highest uptake. Table 11 indicates that this is primarily driven by Independent schools, for which uptake of English Language is substantially higher than that for Mathematics; at most other school types, uptake for Mathematics is similar to, or slightly higher than, that for English Language. These patterns reflect the fact that many candidates at Independent schools take non-accredited qualifications, which do not appear in these tables. The changes compared to previous years therefore presumably reflect a combination of genuine changes in uptake (i.e., Independent schools taking 9-1 GCSEs) and some qualifications becoming non-accredited (thus no longer appearing in these tables). Hence, any comparisons to previous years' results should take into account the various changes in the system, and the differing uptake patterns between different school types.

Table 10: Uptake of individual subjects, by gender (% of GCSE students)

Subject	Boys	Girls	All
English Language	94.1	95.1	94.6
Mathematics	94.2	94.5	94.3
English Literature	92.7	94.2	93.4
Science (Core)	67.8	68.6	68.2
Additional Science	62.9	64.5	63.7
Religious Studies	43.1	51.1	47.0
History	42.9	47.2	45.1
Geography	45.5	40.5	43.0
Biology	26.2	26.2	26.2
Chemistry	26.0	25.9	26.0
Physics	26.0	25.7	25.9
French	19.8	27.8	23.8
Physical Education/Sports Studies	25.7	14.0	19.9
Spanish	14.2	18.8	16.5
Business Studies: Single	15.6	11.0	13.3
Art & Design	7.9	18.0	12.9
Computer Studies/Computing	19.7	5.1	12.5
Information & Communications Technology	13.5	8.8	11.1
Drama & Theatre Studies	8.4	13.9	11.1
Art & Design (Fine Art)	5.5	12.1	8.7
German	8.0	8.5	8.3
D&T Resistant Materials	12.8	2.5	7.7
Media/Film/TV Studies	7.4	7.2	7.3
Music	6.3	7.8	7.0
D&T Product Design	9.2	3.5	6.4
D&T Food Technology	3.8	6.9	5.3
Statistics	5.5	4.7	5.1
Art & Design (Photography)	3.2	5.5	4.3
D&T Graphic Products	4.9	3.0	4.0
Sociology	2.0	5.2	3.6
D&T Textiles Technology	0.2	6.3	3.2
Social Science: Citizenship	2.5	3.0	2.7
Further additional science	2.5	2.6	2.5
Psychology	1.5	3.4	2.5
Home Economics: Child Development	0.1	4.7	2.4
Dance	0.2	3.1	1.7
Economics	2.1	1.0	1.5
Office Technology	1.5	1.3	1.4
Latin	1.3	1.4	1.3
Health & Social Care	0.2	2.5	1.3
Home Economics: Food	0.8	1.6	1.2
Applied Engineering	2.1	0.2	1.2
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.3	1.0	1.1
Art & Design (Textiles)	0.1	2.2	1.1

Table 11: Uptake of individual subjects, by school type (% of GCSE students)

Subject	Acad. (comp)	Acad. (mod)	Acad. (sel)	Comp.	Gram.	Ind.	Sec. Mod.
English Language	99.0	98.7	99.9	98.9	99.8	43.0	98.9
Mathematics	99.4	99.2	99.3	99.3	99.9	35.2	99.4
English Literature	98.4	98.1	99.7	98.2	99.5	35.8	98.3
Science (Core)	73.9	80.0	16.1	75.4	23.6	23.0	78.0
Additional Science	69.4	74.3	16.0	70.4	23.3	19.2	71.9
Religious Studies	44.3	45.1	56.4	54.3	51.8	35.6	47.2
History	45.4	43.6	54.3	45.0	55.6	39.1	38.9
Geography	42.8	43.4	53.9	41.7	55.8	44.3	40.1
Biology	24.3	17.8	81.7	22.6	71.4	28.1	20.5
Chemistry	24.3	17.6	81.6	22.6	71.4	25.5	20.4
Physics	24.2	17.5	81.6	22.5	71.4	25.5	20.5
French	22.6	20.1	40.2	22.7	43.0	29.3	16.4
Physical Education/Sports Studies	20.5	19.9	19.4	20.6	15.7	13.4	18.6
Spanish	15.6	16.2	31.4	14.9	26.4	22.2	10.4
Business Studies: Single	14.2	11.6	18.1	12.7	14.5	8.3	6.8
Art & Design	13.3	12.3	8.8	13.3	9.0	10.3	15.3
Computer Studies/Computing	12.9	11.4	17.3	12.5	13.9	7.0	16.0
Information & Communications Technology	11.6	10.2	10.8	11.5	12.7	6.1	13.4
Drama & Theatre Studies	10.8	11.5	12.7	10.7	10.5	14.4	9.4
Art & Design (Fine Art)	8.3	8.7	11.1	8.4	14.3	12.3	5.6
German	7.8	2.1	26.4	7.1	25.4	9.5	1.3
D&T Resistant Materials	7.3	6.3	6.3	8.0	5.8	10.1	7.9
Media/Film/TV Studies	8.2	7.9	1.5	7.9	5.2	1.2	7.6
Music	6.6	5.7	11.2	6.6	9.8	10.5	4.0
D&T Product Design	6.7	4.9	8.7	6.0	10.1	4.2	5.6
D&T Food Technology	5.4	6.3	5.9	5.9	4.0	1.8	6.4
Statistics	5.3	11.2	4.2	4.8	3.1	1.8	21.5
Art & Design (Photography)	4.5	7.9	1.3	4.8	0.2	1.7	6.0
D&T Graphic Products	4.0	4.1	4.0	4.5	5.0	1.3	4.1
Sociology	3.8	4.1	1.1	4.3	1.3	0.3	4.5
D&T Textiles Technology	3.3	2.7	3.6	3.6	4.5	1.6	2.8
Social Science: Citizenship	2.7	5.1	0.2	3.4	0.0	1.1	1.2
Further additional science	2.6	3.1	0.3	3.0	1.5	1.2	2.4
Psychology	2.6	2.9	2.5	2.6	1.4	0.9	5.2
Home Economics: Child Development	2.7	3.2	0.0	2.6	0.0	0.2	2.5
Dance	1.8	2.8	1.3	1.7	0.6	0.9	2.1
Economics	1.5	0.9	7.0	1.0	2.2	1.8	0.0
Office Technology	1.4	1.6	0.9	1.5	2.0	1.3	1.6
Latin	0.2	0.0	5.9	0.1	6.7	11.9	0.0
Health & Social Care	1.4	1.0	0.2	1.7	0.7	0.1	2.7
Home Economics: Food	1.1	1.3	0.9	1.1	2.1	2.3	0.8
Applied Engineering	1.3	0.3	0.8	1.4	1.7	0.1	0.0
Art & Design (Graphics) Art & Design (Textiles)	1.3 1.1	1.4 2.5	0.8	1.1 1.1	0.3 0.7	0.7 1.3	0.3 1.0

Table 12: Uptake of individual subjects, by attainment (% of GCSE students)

Subject	Low	Medium	High
English Language	97.1	97.4	89.5
Mathematics	98.0	97.4	87.7
English Literature	95.1	96.8	88.6
Science (Core)	90.7	76.2	37.9
Additional Science	79.7	74.1	37.5
Religious Studies	38.8	48.6	53.7
History	36.2	46.4	52.7
Geography	37.0	44.2	48.0
Biology	5.1	21.1	52.4
Chemistry	4.9	21.0	51.9
Physics	4.8	20.9	51.9
French	10.6	23.8	36.9
Physical Education/Sports Studies	19.6	22.8	17.3
Spanish	7.8	16.9	24.8
Business Studies: Single	11.5	15.7	12.8
Art & Design	13.4	13.2	12.1
Computer Studies/Computing	9.1	13.3	15.0
Information & Communications Technology	11.8	12.5	9.2
Drama & Theatre Studies	9.4	11.8	12.2
Art & Design (Fine Art)	8.0	8.5	9.7
German	2.8	7.7	14.3
D&T Resistant Materials	10.4	7.3	5.4
Media/Film/TV Studies	8.5	8.4	5.0
Music	4.2	6.4	10.4
D&T Product Design	7.5	6.6	5.0
D&T Food Technology	7.1	5.2	3.5
Statistics	4.1	5.4	6.0
Art & Design (Photography)	5.5	4.9	2.7
D&T Graphic Products	4.0	4.3	3.7
Sociology	3.1	4.2	3.5
D&T Textiles Technology	2.9	3.4	3.4
Social Science: Citizenship	3.1	3.0	2.1
Further additional science	0.4	2.2	5.0
Psychology	1.6	2.9	2.9
Home Economics: Child Development	3.7	2.5	0.9
Dance	1.4	2.0	1.6
Economics	0.5	1.3	2.7
Office Technology	1.4	1.7	1.2
Latin	0.0	0.2	3.8
Health & Social Care	1.9	1.5	0.6
Home Economics: Food	1.4	1.2	1.0
Applied Engineering	1.5	1.3	0.8
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.2	1.3	1.0
Art & Design (Textiles)	1.2	1.2	1.0

Table 13: Uptake of individual subjects, by deprivation group (% of GCSE students)

Subject	Low	Medium	High
English Language	99.6	99.2	98.8
Mathematics	99.7	99.6	99.3
English Literature	99.1	98.5	98.1
Science (Core)	63.9	72.6	79.8
Additional Science	61.4	68.6	73.0
Religious Studies	49.2	48.2	46.9
History	48.0	45.6	43.5
Geography	47.5	43.1	38.5
Biology	35.0	25.6	17.8
Chemistry	34.9	25.6	17.8
Physics	34.8	25.5	17.7
French	27.3	23.2	19.6
Physical Education/Sports Studies	24.7	20.3	16.5
Spanish	17.8	15.4	14.9
Business Studies: Single	16.4	13.8	11.2
Art & Design	12.2	13.2	14.1
Computer Studies/Computing	13.7	13.2	12.1
Information & Communications Technology	10.7	11.8	12.3
Drama & Theatre Studies	12.3	11.0	9.4
Art & Design (Fine Art)	8.9	8.6	7.8
German	12.0	7.9	4.6
D&T Resistant Materials	8.0	7.8	6.8
Media/Film/TV Studies	7.5	8.3	7.5
Music	8.3	6.6	5.4
D&T Product Design	6.4	6.7	6.6
D&T Food Technology	5.9	5.7	5.2
Statistics	5.2	5.5	5.5
Art & Design (Photography)	4.3	4.8	4.7
D&T Graphic Products	4.8	4.5	3.3
Sociology	3.2	3.8	4.7
D&T Textiles Technology	3.7	3.5	2.9
Social Science: Citizenship	2.0	3.0	3.7
Further additional science	2.8	2.6	2.5
Psychology	2.6	2.6	2.6
Home Economics: Child Development	2.1	2.7	2.8
Dance	2.1	1.8	1.4
Economics	1.9	1.4	1.3
Office Technology	1.5	1.4	1.4
Latin	0.7	0.4	0.2
Health & Social Care	1.0	1.3	2.0
Home Economics: Food	1.0	1.3 1.1	0.9
Applied Engineering	1.3		1.1
		1.3	
Art & Design (Graphics) Art & Design (Textiles)	1.2 1.1	1.2 1.1	1.2 1.2

 $\textit{Table 14: Uptake of individual subjects, by school gender (\% of GCSE \textit{students})}$ 

Subject	Boys' School	Girls' School	Mixed School
English Language	84.2	88.1	95.8
Mathematics	82.7	83.7	96.0
English Literature	81.6	86.5	94.8
Science (Core)	41.6	50.5	71.4
Additional Science	38.7	46.6	66.8
Religious Studies	51.4	63.5	45.3
History	47.7	47.2	44.7
Geography	49.9	42.5	42.7
Biology	41.7	37.0	24.3
Chemistry	40.9	36.2	24.2
Physics	41.1	36.1	24.1
French	30.9	33.3	22.5
Physical Education/Sports Studies	18.4	11.7	20.7
Spanish	21.3	25.8	15.4
Business Studies: Single	15.6	10.1	13.5
Art & Design	6.6	11.9	13.4
Computer Studies/Computing	15.8	7.8	12.7
Information & Communications Technology	10.3	10.5	11.2
Drama & Theatre Studies	7.6	15.9	10.9
Art & Design (Fine Art)	9.5	11.9	8.4
German	14.2	11.5	7.6
D&T Resistant Materials	11.2	2.0	8.0
Media/Film/TV Studies	4.4	4.1	7.7
Music	8.4	9.6	6.7
D&T Product Design	8.3	4.3	6.4
D&T Food Technology	1.6	5.3	5.5
Statistics	6.2	3.2	5.2
Art & Design (Photography)	2.4	2.4	4.6
D&T Graphic Products	3.6	2.7	4.1
Sociology	0.5	5.4	3.6
D&T Textiles Technology	0.0	6.6	3.1
Social Science: Citizenship	2.2	4.2	2.6
Further additional science	1.8	2.5	2.6
Psychology	1.0	2.3	2.6
Home Economics: Child Development	0.0	2.1	2.5
Dance	0.2	2.5	1.7
Economics	5.4	1.4	1.3
Office Technology	1.1	2.4	1.3
Latin	7.3	5.4	0.6
Health & Social Care	0.0	2.1	1.4
Home Economics: Food	0.4	1.7	1.2
Applied Engineering	0.9	0.2	1.3
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.2	0.5	1.2
Art & Design (Textiles)	0.0	2.1	1.1

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