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Uptake of GCSE subjects 2025

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Introduction

This report is focused on the uptake of GCSE subjects in England in 2025. 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[1]. 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[2].

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.

[1] This can be accessed here: https://www.find-school-performance-data.service.gov.uk/

[2] 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)	33826	5.2	188	4.6
Academy (other non-selective)	438103	66.7	2379	58.3
Academy (selective)	23821	3.6	143	3.5
Independent	52666	8.0	801	19.6
Non-selective in HSA	4659	0.7	26	0.6
Other non-selective	100116	15.3	522	12.8
Selective	3221	0.5	20	0.5
Total	**656412**	**100.0**	**4079**	**100.0**

School attainment

Schools were ranked by their attainment at GCSE, based on the centre mean score per entry in the DfE[3] 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	1340	211705	0.9	4.4	3.9
Medium	1340	251495	4.4	5.2	4.8
High	1340	192415	5.2	8.8	6.2
Total	**4020**	**655615**	**-**	**-**	**-**

School deprivation level

Each school's deprivation level was derived based on the percentage of disadvantaged[4] students in the school at the end of KS4. This measure was used to categorise schools into three approximately 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.

[3] 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 99 – 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.

[4] 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	1101	219841	0.0	19.9	13.8
Medium	1084	200793	20.0	33.1	26.2
High	1092	183111	33.2	80.1	45.2
Total	**3277**	**603745**	**-**	**-**	**-**

School sex composition

School sex composition[5] 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 composition.

School sex	N schools	% schools	N students	% students
Boys' School	218	5.3	28409	4.3
Girls' School	358	8.8	45225	6.9
Mixed School	3501	85.8	582416	88.7
Total	**4079**	**100.0**	**656412**	**100.0**

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 4.4 GCSEs. This observation likely reflects that independent schools have a higher uptake of non-accredited qualifications (e.g., some IGCSEs/International GCSEs).[6]

Table 6 shows that students in the high attainment school group took on average 7.4 GCSEs, compared with those in the low attainment school group, in which students took on average 6.8 GCSEs. Table 7 shows that students in the low deprivation school group took on average 8.1 GCSEs, compared with students in the high deprivation school group, in which students took on average 6.9 GCSEs. Table 8 shows that at girls' schools, students took on average 7.8 GCSEs, compared with 7.8 GCSEs at boys' schools and 7.2 GCSEs at mixed schools.

[5] 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.

[6] 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.

School type	Total GCSE entries	Total no. of students	Mean GCSEs taken
Academy (non-selective in HSA)	243145	33826	7.2
Academy (other non-selective)	3217426	438103	7.3
Academy (selective)	232286	23821	9.8
Independent	232594	52666	4.4
Non-selective in HSA	33994	4659	7.3
Other non-selective	751425	100116	7.5
Selective	31584	3221	9.8

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

Attainment group	Total GCSE entries	Total no. of students	Mean GCSEs taken
Low	1445114	211705	6.8
Medium	1866518	251495	7.4
High	1430177	192415	7.4

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

Deprivation group	Total GCSE entries	Total no. of students	Mean GCSEs taken
Low	1772328	219841	8.1
Medium	1466396	200793	7.3
High	1271128	183111	6.9

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

School sex	Total GCSE entries	Total no. of students	Mean GCSEs taken
Boys' School	221922	28409	7.8
Girls' School	351982	45225	7.8
Mixed School	4166028	582416	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 94.6% of GCSE students in mixed schools, 88.8% of students in boys' schools, and 88% 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 35.9% of the GCSE students in independent schools took English Language, compared to 99% of students in non-selective academies in highly selective area.

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

Subject	Boys' School	Girls' School	Mixed School	Overall uptake
English Language	88.8	88.0	94.6	93.9
Mathematics	86.4	85.4	94.2	93.3
English Literature	86.7	87.0	92.5	91.8
Science: Double Award	44.3	50.3	71.8	69.1
History	39.5	41.1	44.4	43.9
Geography	48.0	43.0	43.6	43.7
Religious Studies	43.3	52.3	31.0	33.0
Biology	42.8	38.7	22.9	24.8
Chemistry	43.1	38.2	22.3	24.3
Physics	42.7	37.5	22.4	24.3
Spanish	21.0	27.6	19.2	19.8
Business Studies: Single	22.2	16.8	19.4	19.4
French	23.9	27.5	18.4	19.2
Computer Studies / Computing	25.9	13.6	12.8	13.4
Physical Education / Sports Studies	16.2	9.5	11.8	11.9
Design & Technology	20.9	9.5	11.4	11.7
Art & Design (Fine Art)	8.6	12.5	9.8	9.9
D&T Food Technology	3.6	10.1	8.3	8.2
Art & Design	4.0	7.6	7.6	7.5
Drama & Theatre Studies	6.0	13.2	7.0	7.3
Art & Design (Photography)	1.7	2.6	6.5	6.0
Music	6.8	7.5	4.9	5.2
German	10.5	8.2	4.4	4.9
Statistics	4.5	2.0	5.0	4.8
Sociology	0.9	5.6	4.3	4.3
Media / Film / TV Studies	2.6	3.3	4.1	4.0
Social Science: Citizenship	2.9	4.4	2.8	3.0
Psychology	1.0	4.0	2.8	2.8
Art & Design (Textiles)	0.0	4.5	1.9	2.0
Art & Design (3D Studies)	1.4	0.6	1.7	1.7
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.3
Latin	5.2	4.3	0.8	1.2
Polish	0.9	0.8	1.2	1.2
Chinese	2.7	2.2	0.9	1.1
Economics	5.4	1.2	0.9	1.1
Dance	0.1	2.4	1.0	1.1

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

Subject	Academy (non-sel in HSA)	Academy (other non-sel)	Academy (sel)	Independent	Non-sel in HSA	Other non-sel	Selective
English Language	99.0	99.0	99.9	35.9	98.7	98.8	99.7
Mathematics	99.0	99.0	99.9	27.8	98.8	98.8	99.7
English Literature	96.8	97.0	99.4	32.2	97.3	96.5	99.3
Science: Double Award	77.8	75.4	18.4	25.4	75.1	74.9	21.8
History	44.8	46.7	48.2	15.9	43.2	45.4	41.3
Geography	45.7	45.2	52.5	27.9	40.9	42.5	59.8
Religious Studies	27.3	30.5	45.8	24.5	48.7	45.5	54.1
Biology	19.5	22.2	81.2	26.4	22.5	22.4	77.8
Chemistry	19.0	21.8	81.0	24.3	21.7	22.1	77.7
Physics	19.0	21.9	81.1	23.3	22.0	22.1	77.7
Spanish	18.0	19.8	32.3	14.5	15.8	20.0	29.4
Business Studies: Single	20.8	19.7	25.0	13.2	26.0	19.0	22.4
French	16.7	19.3	35.0	14.5	14.0	18.4	32.2
Computer Studies / Computing	10.1	12.6	28.4	14.2	12.1	13.4	27.6
Physical Education / Sports Studies	8.4	11.2	18.9	17.2	8.1	11.4	20.6
Design & Technology	9.7	11.1	18.7	13.2	11.4	12.0	30.7
Art & Design (Fine Art)	8.6	10.1	11.4	11.9	6.9	8.3	10.2
D&T Food Technology	8.1	8.2	8.9	5.7	4.1	9.3	9.3
Art & Design	8.1	7.2	5.2	7.0	11.4	9.1	10.9
Drama & Theatre Studies	6.1	6.6	11.7	12.9	4.5	7.3	9.3
Art & Design (Photography)	6.9	6.6	1.0	2.5	5.0	6.3	0.0
Music	3.4	4.8	10.3	8.0	2.1	4.9	9.2
German	2.3	4.3	20.3	4.3	0.8	4.6	24.5
Statistics	9.6	5.2	2.6	1.0	6.6	4.1	3.3
Sociology	5.5	4.5	2.3	0.3	4.0	5.7	0.8
Media / Film / TV Studies	6.0	4.1	1.8	0.9	2.9	5.3	2.9
Social Science: Citizenship	5.1	3.0	0.6	2.2	5.7	3.2	0.1
Psychology	4.0	2.8	4.2	1.2	5.6	3.0	1.4
Art & Design (Textiles)	2.3	1.9	1.6	2.0	2.3	2.3	1.1
Art & Design (3D Studies)	2.3	1.7	0.3	1.9	0.6	1.8	0.0
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.5	1.5	1.1	0.5	0.4	1.3	0.0
Latin	0.1	0.4	6.0	8.1	0.0	0.4	9.7
Polish	1.3	1.3	0.6	0.1	1.5	1.6	1.0
Chinese	0.5	0.8	3.3	3.7	0.8	0.7	1.0
Economics	0.5	0.9	6.9	0.7	1.1	0.9	0.8
Dance	1.7	1.0	1.2	1.0	0.7	1.3	0.7

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

Subject	Low	Medium	High
English Language	98.4	98.7	83.2
Mathematics	98.4	98.7	80.9
English Literature	95.7	96.6	81.7
Science: Double Award	79.1	74.7	51.0
History	45.6	46.6	38.8
Geography	41.8	44.9	44.4
Religious Studies	26.5	31.8	41.8
Biology	17.2	22.8	36.0
Chemistry	16.6	22.4	35.4
Physics	16.7	22.5	35.1
Spanish	15.7	19.5	24.9
Business Studies: Single	15.8	21.2	20.9
French	13.3	19.9	25.0
Computer Studies / Computing	10.7	13.0	16.9
Physical Education / Sports Studies	6.6	12.8	16.5
Design & Technology	9.3	12.0	14.2
Art & Design (Fine Art)	9.9	9.4	10.7
D&T Food Technology	6.7	9.1	8.7
Art & Design	7.9	7.6	6.8
Drama & Theatre Studies	4.8	6.9	10.7
Art & Design (Photography)	7.6	6.5	3.7
Music	3.4	4.7	7.7
German	2.5	4.1	8.6
Statistics	7.3	4.7	2.2
Sociology	4.3	5.1	3.3
Media / Film / TV Studies	3.0	5.0	3.8
Social Science: Citizenship	2.7	3.5	2.5
Psychology	2.9	2.9	2.6
Art & Design (Textiles)	1.6	2.1	2.3
Art & Design (3D Studies)	2.2	1.6	1.2
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.2	1.5	1.2
Latin	0.1	0.3	3.7
Polish	1.2	1.3	1.1
Chinese	0.4	0.7	2.4
Economics	0.2	0.9	2.3
Dance	0.7	1.1	1.4

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

Subject	Low	Medium	High
English Language	99.1	99.0	98.9
Mathematics	99.2	99.0	98.9
English Literature	97.6	96.9	96.6
Science: Double Award	64.3	76.1	79.8
History	47.5	46.0	45.3
Geography	48.0	44.8	42.0
Religious Studies	35.5	32.0	33.4
Biology	33.8	21.4	17.4
Chemistry	33.5	21.1	16.8
Physics	33.6	21.2	16.9
Spanish	22.7	18.2	19.6
Business Studies: Single	25.0	19.1	14.6
French	22.9	19.1	16.4
Computer Studies / Computing	15.4	12.5	11.6
Physical Education / Sports Studies	17.6	10.3	5.2
Design & Technology	15.4	11.3	7.3
Art & Design (Fine Art)	10.3	10.0	8.9
D&T Food Technology	11.4	8.1	5.2
Art & Design	7.2	7.1	8.4
Drama & Theatre Studies	9.3	6.4	4.5
Art & Design (Photography)	5.1	7.2	6.7
Music	6.7	4.5	3.4
German	8.5	4.0	1.7
Statistics	3.7	5.4	6.6
Sociology	4.0	5.1	4.8
Media / Film / TV Studies	5.5	4.7	2.4
Social Science: Citizenship	2.3	3.5	3.4
Psychology	3.3	2.8	2.7
Art & Design (Textiles)	2.4	2.0	1.5
Art & Design (3D Studies)	1.3	1.7	2.0
Art & Design (Graphics)	1.6	1.3	1.3
Latin	1.2	0.3	0.3
Polish	1.1	1.4	1.3
Chinese	1.2	0.7	0.7
Economics	1.9	0.8	0.6
Dance	1.6	1.0	0.5