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PRESS RELEASE

Association for Language Learning Publication of GCSE and A-level preliminary exam entries

The Association for Language Learning monitors the annual publication of preliminary exam entries for GCSE and A-level by Ofqual.

This year's report presents provisional figures, for the 2026 summer exam series, for the number of entries for GCSEs, AS and A levels submitted by schools and colleges in England to exam boards ahead of the summer exam series.

Key headlines by Ofqual

The key headlines in provisional entries for GCSEs, AS and A levels for the summer 2026 series are:

- GCSE entries have increased by 1.1% from 5,777,020 in summer 2025 to 5,840,185 in summer 2026.
- The proportion of entries by tier was broadly similar in summer 2026 compared with summer 2025 across majority of tiered GCSE subjects.
- A level entries have increased by 2.9% from 821,875 in summer 2025 to 845,485 in summer 2026.

Modern Languages

Professor René Koglbauer, Chair of the Association for Language Learning, said:

The Association for Language Learning has been closely monitoring trends in GCSE and A-level entries over a number of years, and this year's preliminary figures are broadly in line with what we expected.

At GCSE, overall entries in modern foreign languages are slightly down compared with 2025. This reflects a continuation of longer-term patterns rather than a sudden shift. One notable development this year is that Spanish appears to have overtaken French in GCSE entries. While significant, this will not come as a surprise to many in the sector: over the past two decades, increasing numbers of schools have introduced Spanish as their main language offer, often in place of – or ahead of – other languages.

However, the relative strength of Spanish does not offset the wider, sustained decline in language learning. Overall participation in modern foreign languages remains on a downward trajectory, and the system continues to face structural challenges in reversing this trend.

Looking ahead, the picture is concerning. Based on feedback and intelligence from our members, we anticipate a further decline in entries over the next two years. Recent changes following the Curriculum and Assessment Review are already having an impact on provision in some secondary schools. We are seeing a range of adjustments, for as early as September 2026, including reductions in curriculum time at key stage 3, the withdrawal of a second language from the curriculum, and, in some cases, the removal of expectations for higher-attaining students to study a language at GCSE.

Taken together, these decisions risk further narrowing access to language learning and may exacerbate existing inequalities in participation.

Source:

Ofqual (2026): Provisional entries for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2026 exam series


<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/provisional-entries-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2026-exam-series/provisional-entries-for-gcse-as-and-a-level-summer-2026-exam-series#gcse-entries>

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