

A level Religious Studies 2026

WALES

Participation, attainment, gender and the subject pipeline



A briefing to accompany the NATRE A level RS 2026 infographic

August 2026

Cover image: © NATRE 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What the 2026 A level RS results show in Wales

762 entries	+3.4% on 2025	26.9% A*-A	77.8% A*-C
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- The long-term participation problem is much deeper than the recent increase suggests. RS entries are 40.3% below 2019 and its share of Welsh A level entries has fallen from 3.95% to 2.34%.
- The short-term direction is more encouraging. Entries rose from 702 in 2024 to 737 in 2025 and 762 in 2026 - a second consecutive annual increase.
- Attainment remains solid. RS is below the all-subject rate at A* and A*-A, but virtually level at A*-C. The 2026 A*-A rate rose 2.5 percentage points to 26.9%.
- The entry profile is very female-skewed: women are 78.0% of entries. Workforce evidence also warrants attention: 61.2% of middle and secondary teachers recorded as teaching RE were trained in RE, while 35.6% were trained in another subject.

Scope and method

This briefing analyses A level Religious Studies in Wales using JCQ results-day data, FFT Education Datalab and Education Workforce Council statistics. Wales is treated separately from England because Ofqual regulates England and its subject analytics should not be treated as Welsh data.

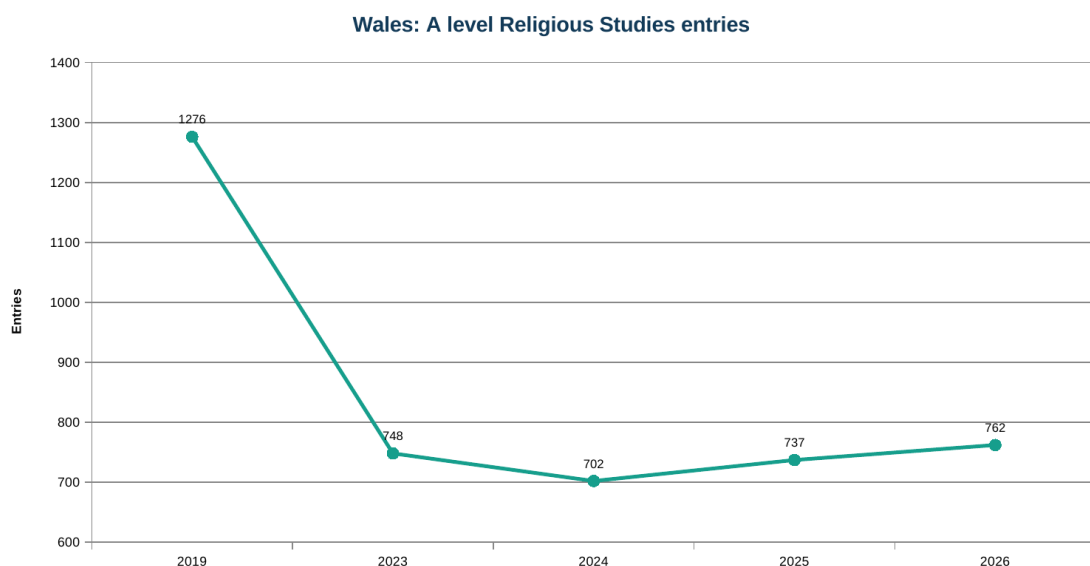
The infographic provides the headline summary; this longer briefing sets out the underlying patterns, caveats and questions for subject leaders and policy audiences. Small Welsh cohorts mean that multi-year interpretation is especially important.

Source: JCQ A level Table 1, 2026; JCQ historical results; FFT Education Datalab; Education Workforce Council Annual Education Workforce Statistics 2025.

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Long-term contraction, but two years of small recovery

762 entries in 2026	+3.4% year on year	-40.3% since 2019	2.34% share of A level entries
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Source: JCQ (2026), A level by subject, age, sex and country, Table 1, for 2025-2026; JCQ (2024), AS and A level results summer 2024, for 2019, 2023 and 2024 comparators.

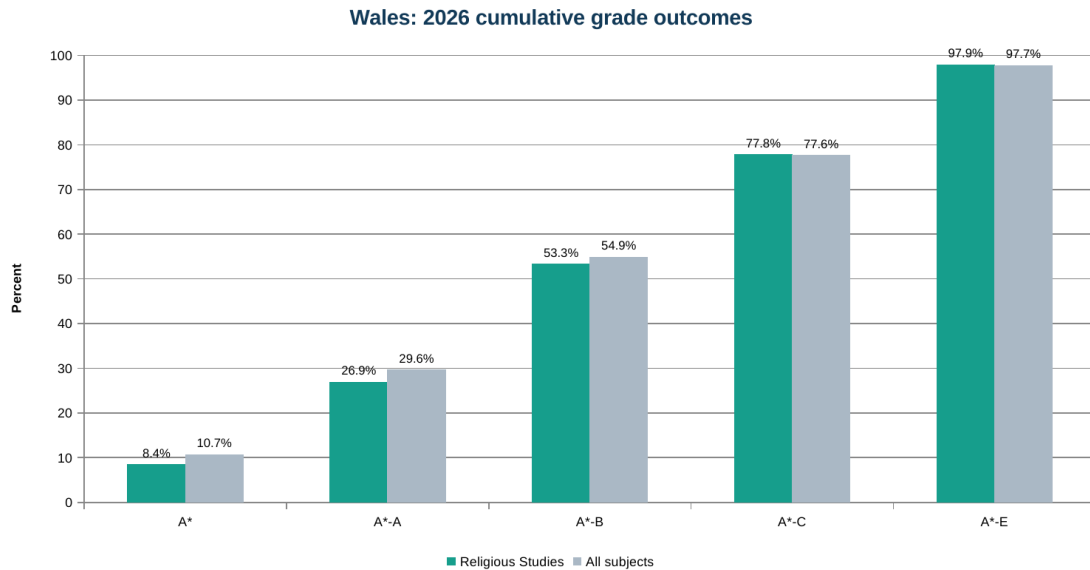
Entries fell from 1,276 in 2019 to 762 in 2026 - down 40.3% - while total Welsh A level entries were broadly similar across the two endpoints. RS's share of Welsh A level entries therefore fell from 3.95% to 2.34%.

The short-term direction is more encouraging. Entries rose from 702 in 2024 to 737 in 2025 and 762 in 2026. The 2026 increase of 3.4% was slightly faster than growth in all Welsh A level entries (2.6%). The fairest headline is long-term contraction, but two consecutive years of small recovery.

Measure	2019	2026
RS entries	1,276	762
RS share of Welsh A level entries	3.95%	2.34%

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RS now sits very close to the national distribution by C+



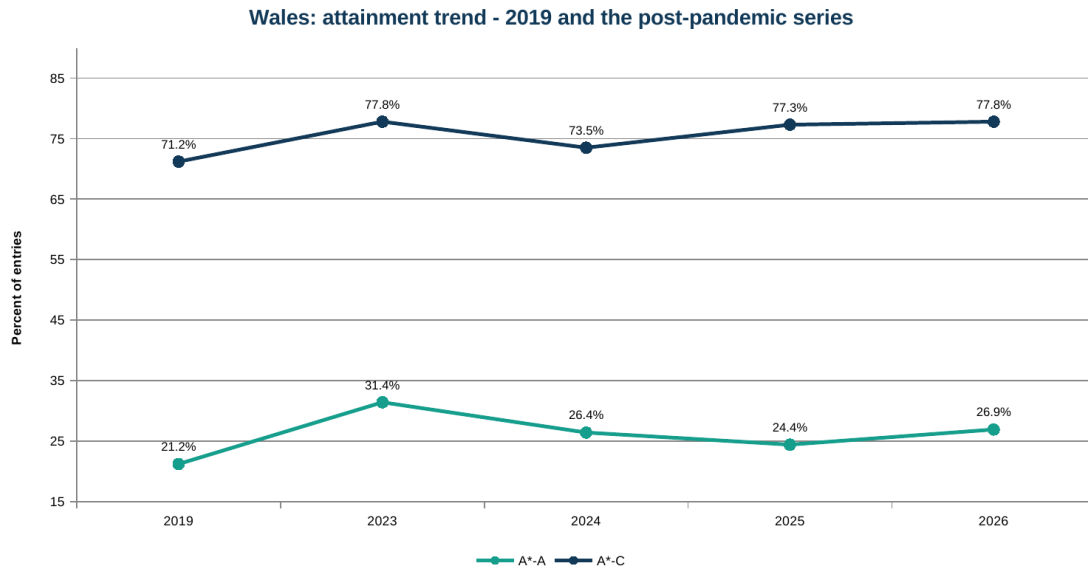
Source: JCQ (2026), A level by subject, age, sex and country, Table 1, Wales, all ages, male and female combined.

RS is below the all-subject rate at the very top but much closer to the national distribution by C+. RS records 8.4% versus 10.7% at A*, and 26.9% versus 29.6% at A*-A; the gap narrows to 1.6 points at A*-B and disappears at A*-C, where RS is fractionally higher (77.8% versus 77.6%).

Among Welsh subject categories with publishable outcomes, RS ranks 16th for A*, 15th for A*-A, 17th for A*-B and 18th for A*-C. The 2026 A*-A increase - from 24.4% to 26.9% - was much larger than the broadly flat movement in Welsh A level top grades overall.

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The attainment series is more volatile



Source: JCQ (2024), AS and A level results summer 2024, for 2019, 2023 and 2024; JCQ (2026), Table 1, for 2025 and 2026.

Welsh A*-A is 5.7 percentage points above 2019 (21.2% to 26.9%) and A*-C is 6.6 points higher (71.2% to 77.8%). Since 2023, however, A*-A has moved from 31.4% to 26.4%, 24.4% and then 26.9%.

Some volatility is unsurprising in a subject with fewer than 800 entries nationally. A movement of a few dozen candidates has much more impact on a percentage than it does in a large national cohort. Policy and media interpretation should therefore use multi-year patterns rather than a single annual movement.

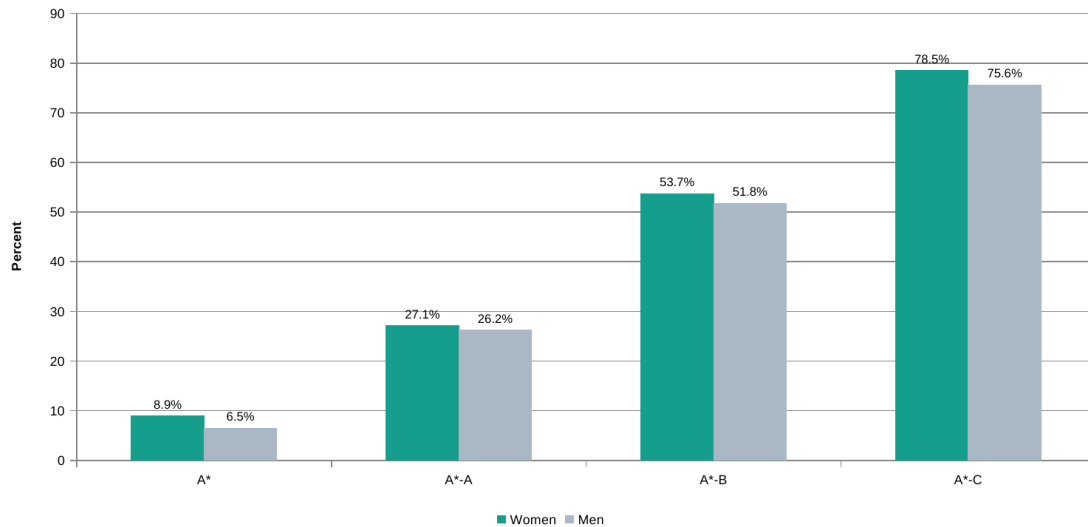
Use 2019 as the clean pre-pandemic benchmark, then 2023 onwards. Do not treat 2020-2022 as ordinary points in the time series.

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An even stronger female skew

Entry share	Women	Men
2026 entries	594 (78.0%)	168 (22.0%)

Wales: 2026 grade outcomes by sex



Source: JCQ (2026), A level by subject, age, sex and country, Table 1, Wales, all ages. Gender ranking calculated across subjects with at least 100 combined entries.

Women account for 78.0% of Welsh RS entries and men 22.0%. Among Welsh subjects with at least 100 entries, RS is the 8th most female-dominated A level.

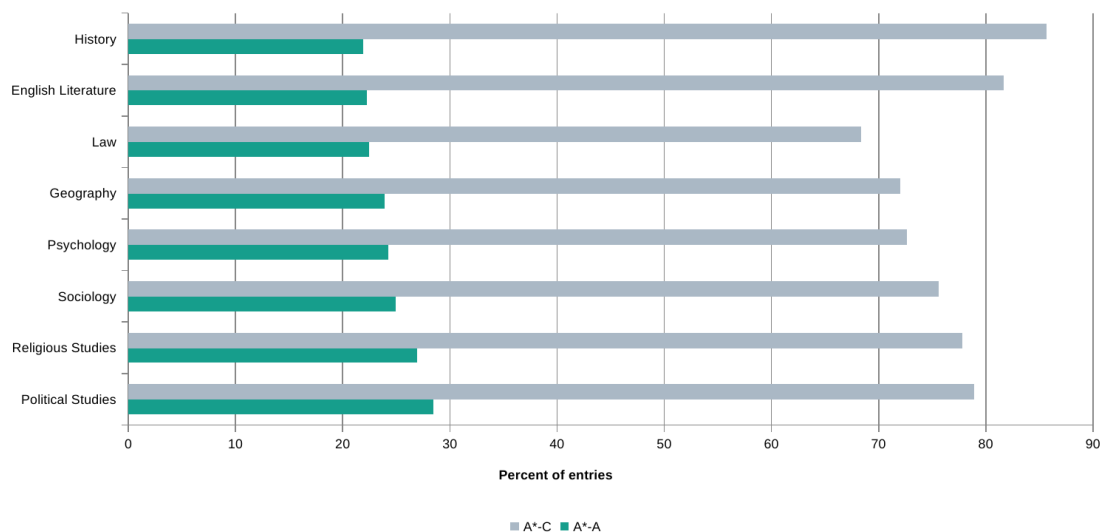
In the all-age cohort women lead at A* (8.9% versus 6.5%), A*-A (27.1% versus 26.2%), A*-B (53.7% versus 51.8%) and A*-C (78.5% versus 75.6%). But the A*-A gap disappears among 18-year-olds: women 27.4%, men 27.6%.

The male cohort is small: only 152 18-year-old male RS entries in Wales in 2026. Year-to-year male percentages are therefore especially unstable and should not be over-interpreted.

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RS compares strongly at A*-A within its peer group

Wales: RS compared with similar A level subjects, 2026



Source: JCQ (2026), A level by subject, age, sex and country, Table 1, Wales, all ages, male and female combined. Subjects selected as common humanities and social-science comparators.

Within this peer group, Welsh RS has the second-highest A*-A rate at 26.9%, behind Political Studies (28.4%). It is ahead of Sociology, Psychology, Geography, Law, English Literature and History.

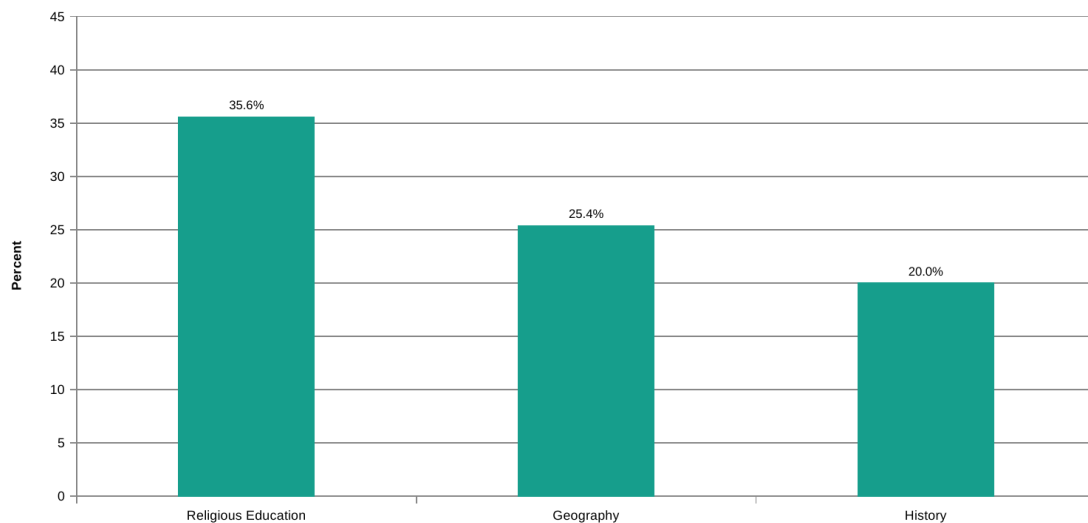
The order changes at A*-C. History and English Literature are stronger, Political Studies is 78.9%, and RS is 77.8%. RS remains above Sociology, Psychology, Geography and Law. The comparison does not support a simple claim that falling participation is caused by weak outcomes.

WORKFORCE + ACCESS

Specialist capacity also warrants attention

61.2% of teachers recorded as teaching RE were trained in RE	35.6% were trained in another subject	3.2% training subject unknown
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Wales: teachers trained in another subject, 2025



Source: Education Workforce Council (2025), Annual Education Workforce Statistics 2025, maintained school sector, Table 1.16.

In middle and secondary phases, 35.6% of teachers recorded as teaching RE were trained in another subject. The comparable figures were 25.4% for Geography and 20.0% for History. These figures measure subject of teacher training, not the same concept as England's relevant post-A-level qualification measure, so the national percentages should not be compared directly.

The Welsh evidence nevertheless points to the same policy issue: the sustainability of specialist provision. A level access depends on a pipeline that begins much earlier, including sufficient specialist subject knowledge and viable GCSE provision.

POLICY AND CAMPAIGN USE

Protect and build on the recent recovery

Wales faces a distinctive position: participation is 40.3% below 2019, but entries have risen for two consecutive years. Attainment does not explain the long-run contraction. Policy should therefore focus on where A level RS is still available, where provision has disappeared, what makes small cohorts viable and how specialist capacity can be sustained.

Implications for policy in Wales

Priority	Action
Treat the 40.3% fall since 2019 as a distinct national issue	Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales and post-16 providers should examine where A level RS has ceased to be offered and what has enabled the recovery since 2024.
Monitor access as well as entries	Publish and analyse subject availability and uptake by provider type and geography so falling participation can be separated from the disappearance of provision.
Review workforce and teacher-training policy	Consider recruitment incentives, funded subject-knowledge support and deliberate specialist workforce planning, adapted to Welsh ITE and curriculum arrangements.

Protect the GCSE-to-A-level pipeline

Treat workforce planning, GCSE access and post-16 subject viability as connected rather than separate issues.

Central 2026 message: Wales shows a much deeper long-term contraction than England, but the recent direction is more encouraging. The policy challenge is to understand and build on that recovery while strengthening specialist capacity.

FOR SUBJECT LEADS

A practical 2026 benchmarking framework for Wales

- Separate participation from attainment. Track entries as a proportion of the eligible post-16 cohort as well as raw entry numbers.
- Use the full grade profile. Compare A*-A, A*-B and A*-C rather than relying on one top-grade measure.
- Analyse women and men separately but interpret male trends cautiously because the Welsh male cohort is small.
- Benchmark against similar subjects. History, English Literature, Political Studies, Geography, Sociology and Psychology are useful comparators.
- Use a clean time series. Keep 2019 as the pre-pandemic anchor, then compare 2023-2026; do not treat 2020-22 as ordinary examination years.
- Investigate access, not just results. Ask where RS is still offered, whether cohorts are viable and whether option structures or staffing limit progression.
- Keep Ofqual out of Welsh benchmarking. Use JCQ and Welsh sources for Wales; Ofqual's subject analytics relate to England.

Central 2026 message: Welsh A level RS has strong outcomes and two years of modest entry recovery, but participation remains far below 2019 and specialist capacity requires sustained attention.

SOURCES

Primary datasets and analytical references

Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) (2026). A level interactive results dashboard, published 13 August 2026. <https://www.jcq.org.uk/a-level-interactive-results-dashboard/>

JCQ (2026). A level by subject, age, sex and country, 2026 (Table 1). https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2026/08/Table-1-A-level-by-subject_age_sex_country-2026.xlsx

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FFT Education Datalab (2026). A-Level, T-Level and other Level 3 results 2026: The main trends in grades and entries, 13 August 2026.

Education Workforce Council (2025). Annual Education Workforce Statistics 2025, Section 2: Maintained School Sector, Table 1.16.