

GCSE Religious Studies 2026

WALES

Participation, attainment and the transition to the new GCSE



A briefing to accompany the NATRE GCSE RS 2026 infographic

August 2026

Cover image: NATRE secondary student image © NATRE 2026

What the 2026 GCSE RS results show in Wales

8,550

full-course entries

-6.1%

on 2025

31.8%

A or above

69.3%

C or above*

- **Participation is the warning light.** Full-course entries fell 6.1% in 2026 to 8,550 and are about 14% below 2019. The legacy short course has also contracted sharply as Wales transitions to its new GCSE.
- **2026 is a transition-year result.** The results relate to the legacy qualification, while schools have already begun teaching the new Curriculum for Wales GCSE Religious Studies introduced from September 2025. The first awards are due in 2027.
- **Attainment remains comparatively strong at the upper grades.** In JCQ Table 3, 31.8% of RS entries achieved A or above and 69.3% C or above. The headline key-grade table reports 69.8% at C or above; the small difference reflects different JCQ table populations.
- **Gender differences remain substantial.** The 2026 entry profile is 57.7% female and 42.3% male. The latest detailed gender-specific cumulative comparison available is the 2025 analysis, where girls led boys by 12.8 points at A or above and 13.5 points at C or above.

Scope and method

This briefing analyses full-course GCSE Religious Studies in Wales using JCQ results-day data. Wales is treated separately from England because the grading system and qualification context differ. The 2026 outcomes belong to the legacy GCSE and should be interpreted alongside the transition to the new made-for-Wales GCSE.

Important population note: JCQ Table 1 (common key grades across countries) and Table 3 (Wales-specific main grades) are not always identical populations. Where they produce slightly different Wales entry/pass totals, both are labelled rather than merged.

Source: JCQ GCSE results dashboard and 2026 Tables 1 and 3; JCQ historical results files; NATRE 2025 analysis for the latest detailed Wales gender comparison.

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Participation is the clearest warning signal

8,550

full-course entries

-6.1%

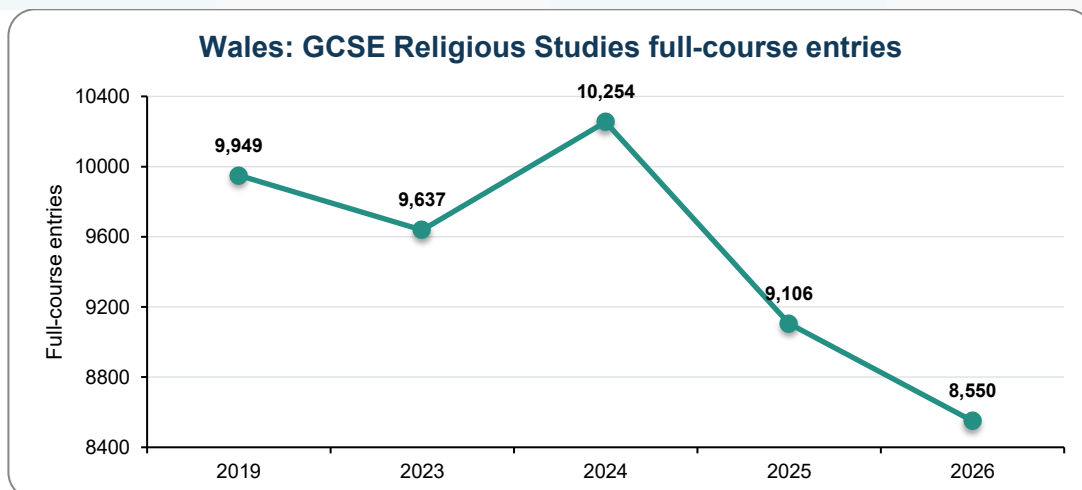
year on year

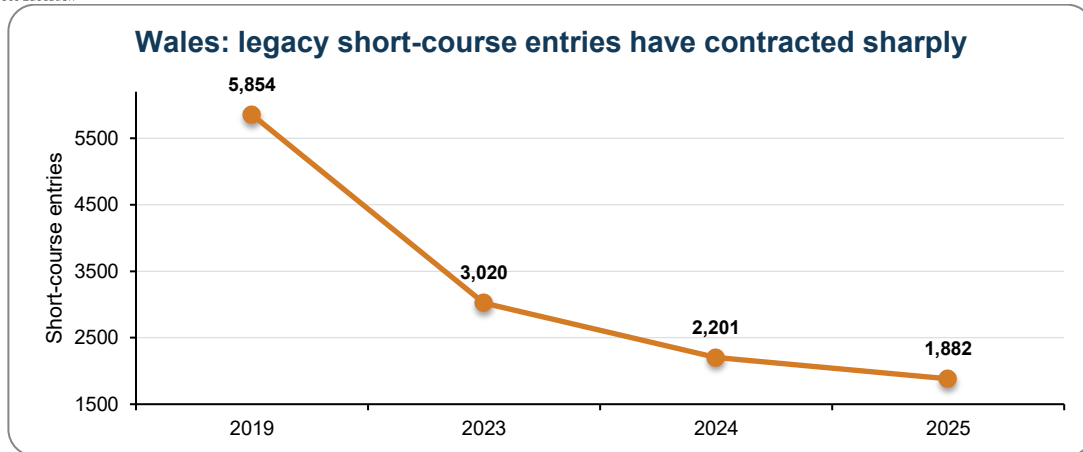
about -14%

since 2019

9th

most widely taken GCSE





Source: JCQ GCSE results files and NATRE 2025/2026 analyses of JCQ data. Full-course series: 2019 9,949; 2023 9,637; 2024 10,254; 2025 9,106; 2026 8,550. Legacy short-course series: 2019 5,854; 2023 3,020; 2024 2,201; 2025 1,882.

Unlike England, Wales shows a clear participation decline in 2026. The short-course contraction is also structurally important: the new made-for-Wales GCSE Religious Studies, first taught from September 2025, does not reproduce the legacy short-course route.

This means historical “total RS” figures can be misleading unless full and short courses are separated. Subject leaders should monitor the new qualification’s uptake as a new series rather than treating it as perfectly continuous with the old combined market.

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2026 is a transition-year result

The 2026 results relate to the legacy qualification, while schools have already begun teaching the new Curriculum for Wales GCSE Religious Studies introduced from September 2025. The first awards of that new GCSE are due in 2027.

For departments, this creates two simultaneous tasks: interpreting the final years of the legacy data accurately, and building a fresh baseline for the new qualification. Changes in assessment design, content and non-examination assessment mean that simple year-on-year outcome comparisons will become less secure as the new specification is awarded.

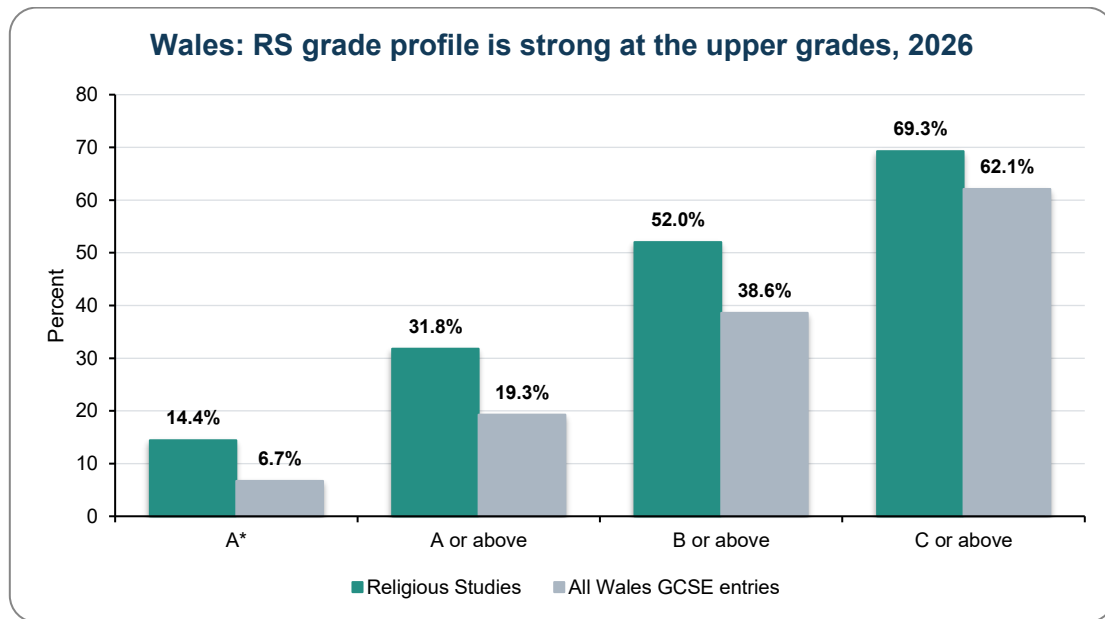
The decline in the legacy short course is therefore not simply a sudden loss of interest in RS; it also reflects qualification reform. The full-course decline, however, is still significant and should be tracked carefully by schools and system leaders.

Source: Qualifications Wales / WJEC information on the new made-for-Wales GCSE Religious Studies (first teaching September 2025; first award 2027), alongside JCQ legacy results data.

Practical recommendation: keep separate local series for legacy full course, legacy short course and the new GCSE. Do not merge them into one continuous headline.

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RS has a strong upper-grade profile



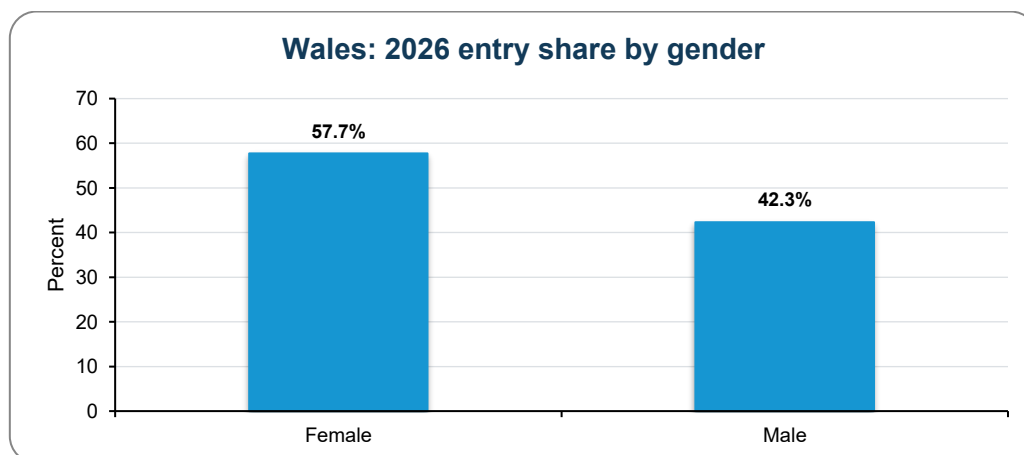
Source: JCQ, GCSE results by main grades, subjects, age and gender, Wales, 2026 (Table 3). Headline Table 1/key-grade data report 69.8% at C or above; Table 3's main-grade population reports 69.3%.

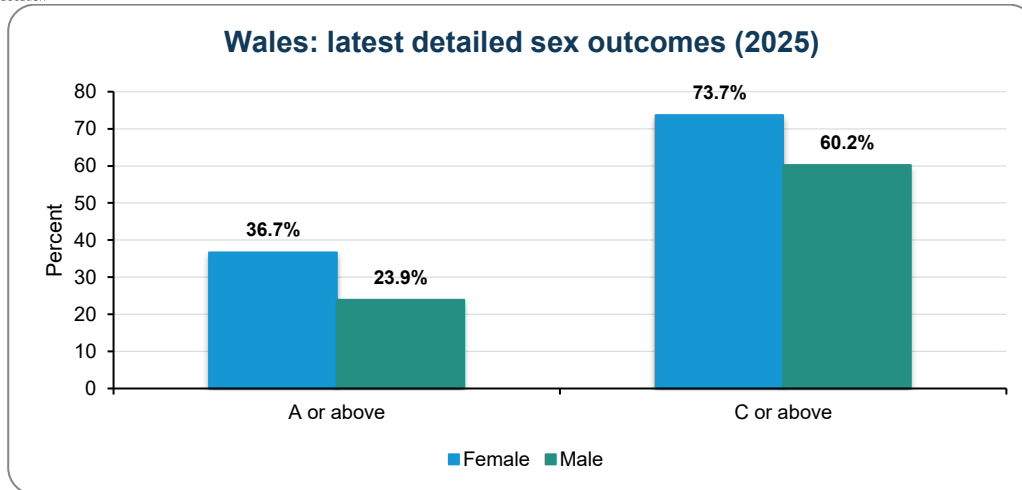
In Table 3, 14.4% of RS entries achieved A*, 31.8% A or above, 52.0% B or above and 69.3% C or above. In the same main-grade population, the all-subject cumulative figures are approximately 6.7%, 19.3%, 38.6% and 62.1%.

The key-grade table used for the public headline reports a slightly different RS population and a C+ rate of 69.8%, up about two percentage points from 2025. These values should not be averaged together; the difference reflects the way JCQ constructs the underlying tables.

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Gender differences remain substantial





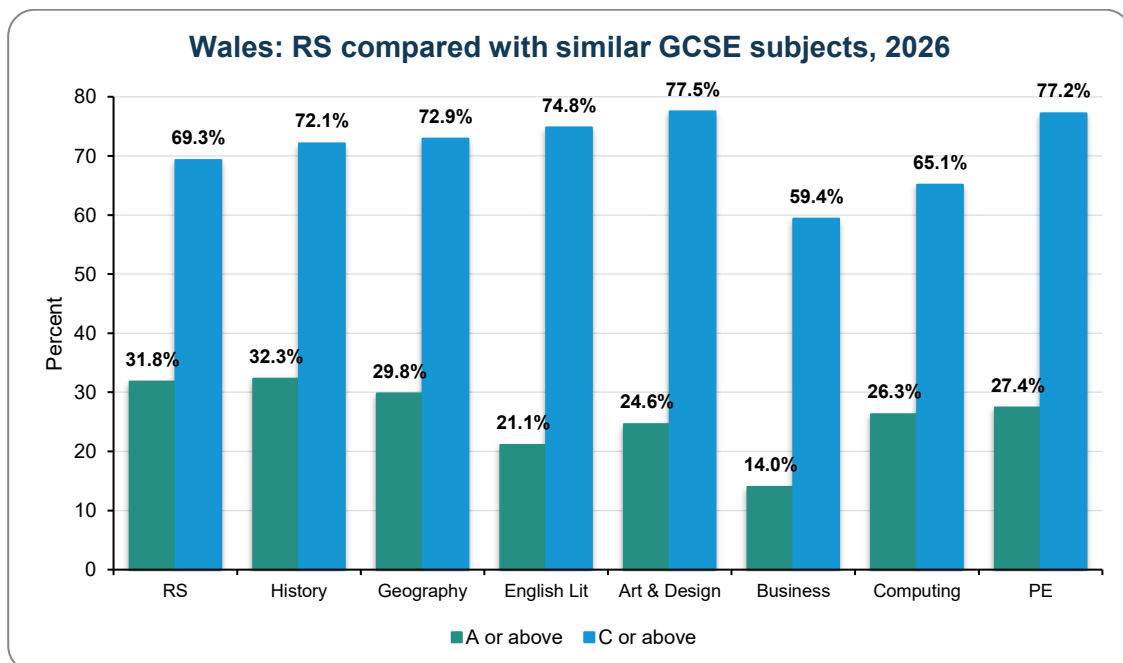
Source: JCQ Table 3, 2026, for entry share; JCQ/NATRE 2025 detailed gender analysis for the latest readily comparable cumulative attainment by gender.

The 2026 entry profile is more female-skewed than England: 57.7% female and 42.3% male in the Table 3 population (the key-grade headline rounds to 58:42).

The latest detailed gender-specific cumulative comparison available in the 2025 analysis shows 36.7% of girls versus 23.9% of boys at A or above, and 73.7% versus 60.2% at C or above. Those are gaps of 12.8 and 13.5 percentage points respectively. They should be treated as a 2025 attainment benchmark, not relabelled as 2026 outcomes.

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RS sits close to History and Geography at the top end



Source: JCQ, GCSE results by main grades, subjects, age and gender, Wales, 2026 (Table 3).

At A or above, RS (31.8%) is almost level with History (32.3%) and above Geography (29.8%). At C or above, RS (69.3%) is below History (72.1%) and Geography (72.9%), and further below English Literature, Art and Design and PE.

The resulting profile is worth discussing internally: Welsh RS is comparatively strong at the upper grades but has more entries below C than the two main humanities comparators. That pattern can guide curriculum review, intervention and question-level analysis.

A practical 2026 benchmarking framework for Wales

1. **Separate participation from attainment.** Track entries as a proportion of the eligible cohort as well as raw entry numbers.
2. **Use both high-grade and standard-pass thresholds.** Use A or above and C or above, and label whether the figure comes from Table 1 or Table 3.
3. **Analyse girls and boys separately.** Keep 2026 participation figures distinct from the latest detailed 2025 gender attainment benchmark.
4. **Benchmark against similar subjects.** History, Geography and English Literature are particularly useful comparators, while recognising different entry populations.
5. **Use a clean time series.** Keep 2019 as the pre-pandemic anchor, then compare 2023-2026; annotate 2020-22 rather than treating them as normal examination years.
6. **Maintain separate qualification series.** Keep legacy full course, legacy short course and the new made-for-Wales GCSE separate. Expect a baseline break when the new qualification is first awarded in 2027.
7. **Investigate access, not just results.** The participation decline should prompt local questions about option structures, curriculum time and who is being enabled to take full-course RS.

Central 2026 message: Wales faces a significant participation transition. Upper-grade outcomes remain strong, but full-course uptake and the gender profile both require close monitoring as the new GCSE is established.

SOURCES

Primary datasets and analytical references

Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), GCSE interactive results dashboard, published 20 August 2026.

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/gcse-interactive-results-dashboard/>

Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), Exam results data: historical and 2026 GCSE results tables.

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/exam-results-data/>

JCQ (2026), GCSE results by key grades, subjects, age, gender and country, 2026 (Table 1).

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2026/08/Table-1-GCSE-results-by-key-grades-subjects-age-sex-and-country-2026.xlsx>

JCQ (2026), GCSE results by main grades, subjects, age and gender, Wales, 2026 (Table 3).

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2026/08/Table-3-GCSE-results-by-main-grades-subjects-age-and-sex-Wales-2026.xlsx>

JCQ (2026), GCSE Short Course by subjects, country and gender, 2026 (Table 6).

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2026/08/Table-6-GCSE-Short-Course-by-subjects-country-and-sex-2026.xlsx>

Qualifications Wales / WJEC information on the new made-for-Wales GCSE Religious Studies (first teaching September 2025; first award 2027).

<https://www.qualifications.wales/>

NATRE (2025), GCSE Religious Studies 2025 - National Report for England and Wales, 17 September 2025.

<https://natre.org.uk/news/gcse-religious-studies-2025-national-report-for-england-and-wales/>

Interpretation note

Percentages are entry-level outcomes, not pupil-level pass rates. Subject comparisons describe the observed national entry populations and do not establish relative subject difficulty or grading severity. Values are rounded to one decimal place unless entry counts are shown. Where JCQ Table 1 and Table 3 use slightly different populations, the report identifies the source rather than forcing the values into one series.