

ANALYSIS OF THE 2007 EXAMINATION RESULTS AND THE CURRENT STATUS OF GEOGRAPHY IN ENGLAND, WALES, NORTHERN IRELAND AND SCOTLAND

Introduction

The 2007 provisional summary statistics of the examination results are produced by the Joint Qualifications Council www.jqc.org.uk on behalf of the Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They do not include the results from Scotland which has a different regulating body for qualifications, the Scottish Qualification Authority, www.sqa.org.uk and a different examination system. Information about the education system in the UK can be found at <http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Schools/Teachers/Geography+in+the+UK+Curriculum/Geography+in+the+UK+curriculum.htm>. They include statistics on the number of students entered for each subject at a particular level regardless of the candidate's age. These statistics may be revised after re-marking or regrading of examinations following appeals by candidates or centers.

GCSE, AS and A level examination are part of the National Qualifications Framework which also includes vocational courses. More information about the Framework can be found at www.qca.org.uk/nq/framework/

A Level

This year again saw a slight drop in the number of candidates taking A Level Geography of -2.64% from 32,552 in 2006 to 31,653 this year. This is despite a 0.99% decrease in overall A level candidates. However it is a smaller decline than in 2006 which saw a fall of 4.0% in the subject.

Subjects losing a greater percentage of candidates than geography were:

- Computing down 10.0% to 5,610
- ICT down 5.97% to 13,360
- General Studies down 5.54% to 55,699
- Business Studies down 1.48% to 30,193
- Economics down 0.10% to 17,438
- Welsh down 11.12% to 847

Subjects gaining the highest percentage increase in candidates were:

- Law up 41.76% to 15,510
- PE Studies up 8.49% to 21,834
- Further Mathematics up 8.28% to 7,872
- Science subjects up 7.96% to 4,544
- Mathematics up 7.34% to 60093
- Religious Studies up 4.4% to 19,006
- Media Studies up 3.16% to 31,942

Once again females have tended to do better with 52.1% getting grade B or above, compared to males with 46.9% achieving these grades. The difference between the two genders, however, remains the same as last year.

Table 2; the % of students achieving various grades over a 3 year period in all subjects.

	2005	2006	2007
A to B	46.6%	48.1%	49.7%
A to C	69.9%	71.3%	72.8%
A to E	96.2%	96.6%	96.9%

Once again in 2007 an increasing number of geography candidates are achieving top grades in comparison with the past years, in the last four years the percentage of students getting A to B grades has risen by 3.6% as well as the number of students passing with at least a grade E has risen by 1.2%.

Table 3; the % of geography students achieving various grades over 3 years.

	2005	2006	2007
A to B	51.0%	52.8%	54.8%
A to C	75.6%	77.0%	78.5%
A to E	98.4%	98.7%	98.7%

Table 3 further shows us how the results in geography continue to improve. Furthermore, when compared to table 2, geography continues to do very well with a higher proportion of top grades than most other subjects.

Popularity of Geography A Level

Figure 1: A graph to show the 15 most popular subjects at A Level in 2007

Figure 1 shows that geography is the 10th having dropped below Media Studies for the first time.

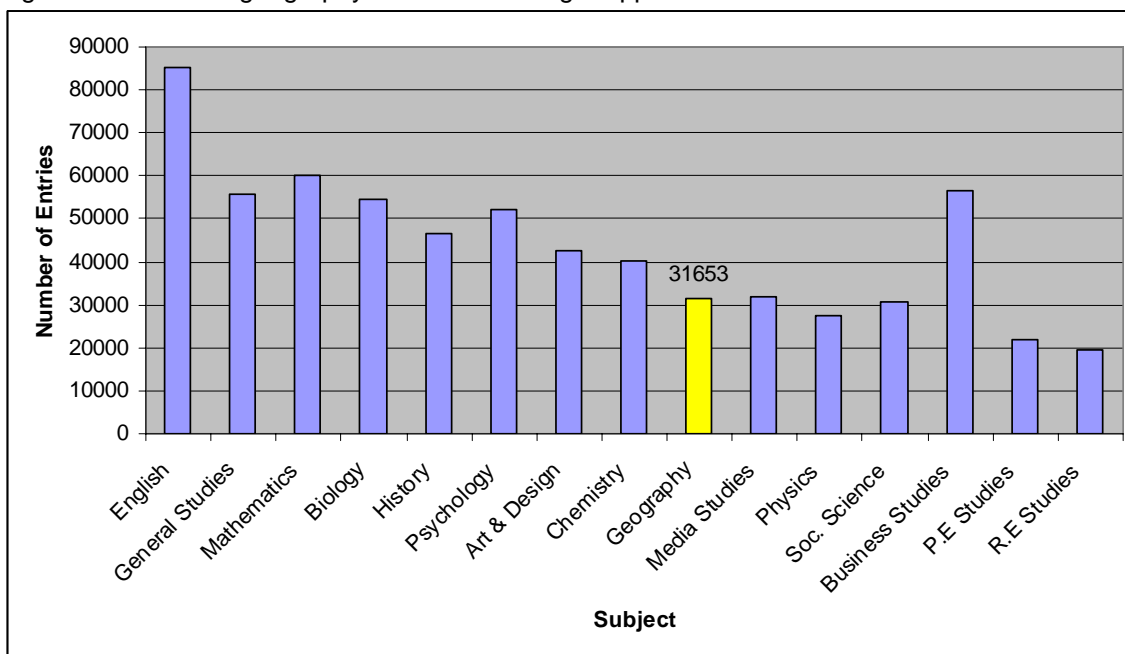


Table 4; A comparison of the most popular subjects at AS and A level. 2007

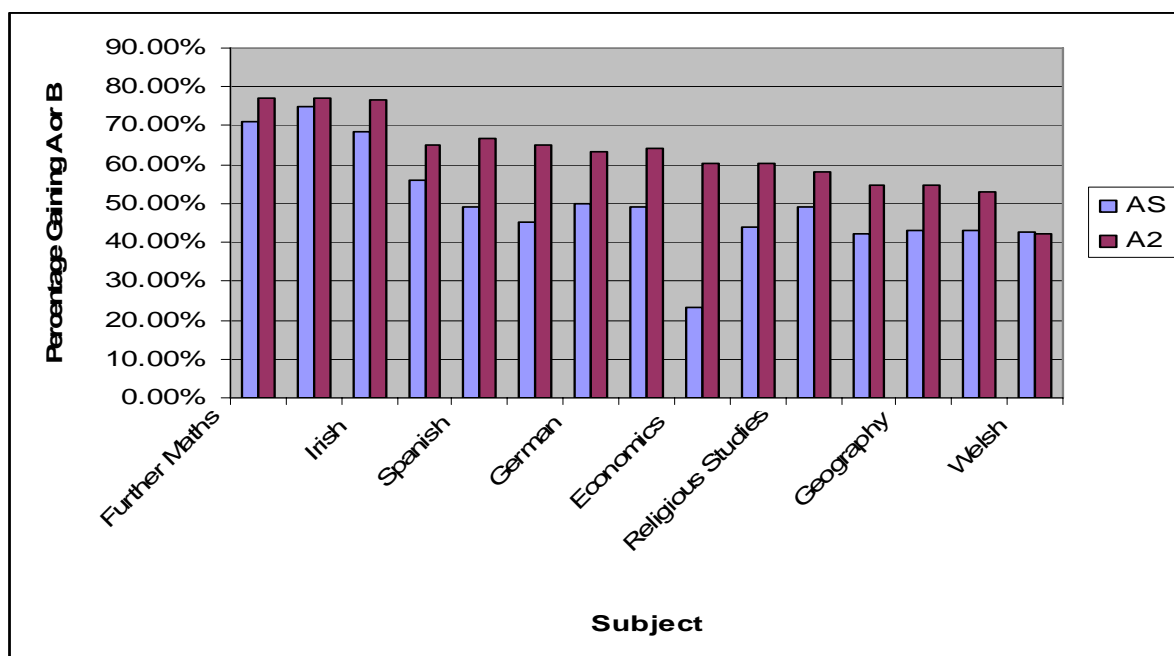
Subject:	Rank at AS Level	Rank at A level
English	1	1
General Studies	2	3
Mathematics	4	2
Biology	5	4
History	7	6
Psychology	3	5
Art & Design	6	7
Chemistry	8	8
Media Studies	9	9
Geography	13	10
Physics	11.5	12
Soc. Science	10	11
P.E. Studies	13	13
Technology Subjects	17	15.5
Religious Studies	15	14

Comparing the popularity of subjects at AS and A level by rank, it can be seen that there are a few changes in the ranking of subjects. Geography improves from rank 12 at AS to rank 9 at A level, which is the same as last year. This indicates that a high proportion of students taking geography at AS pursue their studies to A level. Maths, physics and history also follow this trend, although not to the same extent that geography does.

Table 5; the 15 best performing subjects, by A and B grade percentages, at AS and A level. 2006

Subject/Year	AS	A2
Further Mathematics	70.9%	77.1%
Other languages	74.9%	77.1%
Irish	68.6%	76.5%
Classical Subjects	55.8 %	65.1%
Spanish	49.3%	66.6%
Mathematics	45.4%	65.1%
German	49.9%	63.2%
French	49.1%	64.3%
Economics	23.1%	60.1%
Political Studies	43.8%	60.3%
Religious Studies	48.9%	58.0%
Art and design Subjects	42.1%	54.8%
Geography	43.2%	54.8%
History	43.2%	52.9%
Welsh	42.8%	42.3%

Figure 2; a graph showing the comparative performance of 15 subjects at AS and A level in 2007.



AS Level

There has been a slight increase in the total number of candidates who were entered for AS level in 2007, an increase of 2.5% to 1,114,424. Once again there were more female candidates, with 54.5%. Girls also achieved the higher results with 39.7% getting A or B compared to 34.1% with males.

The number of Geography entrants decreased by 1.67% to 36,777 despite an increase in overall candidates and an increase last year of 1.4%. In geography too, girls out-performed boys, with 9.0% more girls achieving A or B grades. 87% of AS students continued geography to A level, which is a decline from the 88% in 2005 but a small increase from last year.

Table 6; The distribution of grades in geography amongst boys and girls 2007.

Gender/ Grade	A	B	C	D
Male	19.6%	19.3%	20.8%	12.5%
Female	27.0%	20.9%	19.6%	9.6%
Male and Female	23.0%	20%	20.3%	11.2%

Table 6 shows the difference between the genders with the highest proportions of girls reaching an A grade compared to the boys averaging a C.

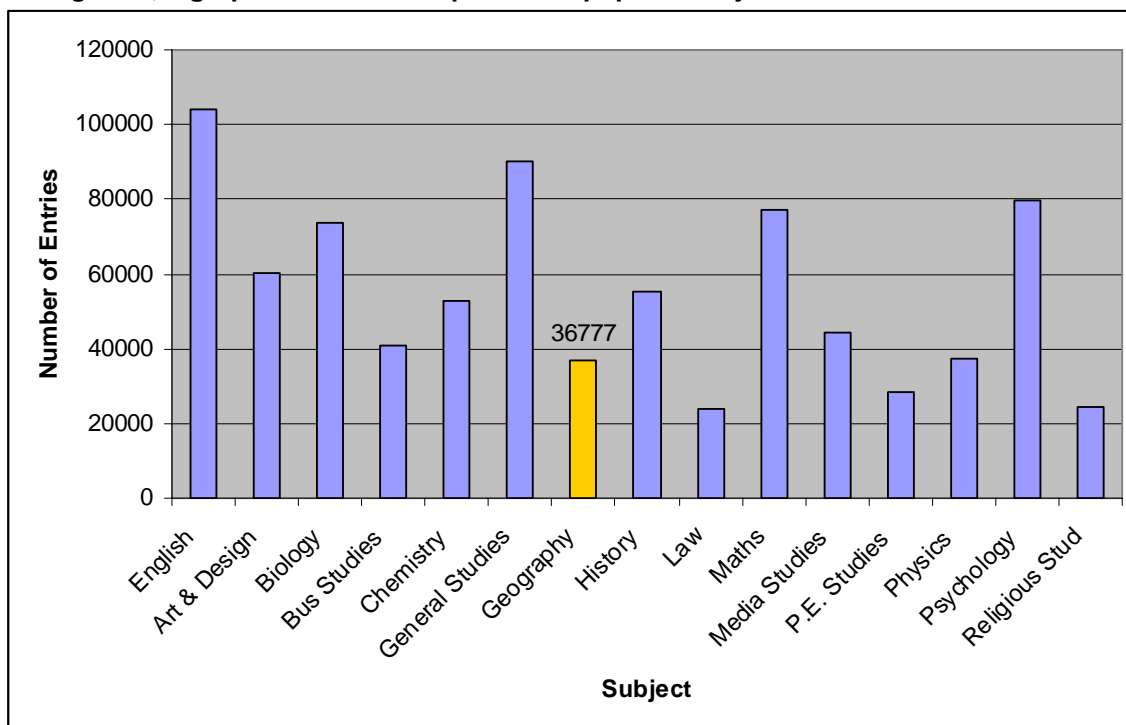
Performance has slightly improved across the board this year with 37.2% of candidates achieving a B or above compared to 36.9% last year. Geography also continues to get better with 43.0% getting B or above improving on 42.8% in 06. This shows that compared to the national average for all subjects, geographers performed very well with a higher proportion achieving top grades. It is interesting to note that more geography candidates achieved an A grade (23.0%) than a B (20.0%). The highest proportion of geography candidates achieved an A grade, whilst the highest proportion for all subjects is a C grade, this pattern has continued from last year.

Popularity Nationwide

Geography was ranked 13th most popular AS level which is the same as last year, however this is lower than its ranking in GCSE at (8th) and A level (10th). Some subjects have seen a marked increase in popularity this year, these include:

- Critical thinking up 18.36% to 23, 729
- Further mathematics up 18.02% to 7,426.
- Mathematics up 9.3% to 77,387
- Welsh up 8.52% to 1,045
- Religious studies 7.95% to 24,454
- Economics up 6.55% to 22,113
- English up 4.65% to 104,222
- Sociology 4.06% to 40,003

Figure 3; a graph to show the top 15 most popular subjects at AS level 2007.



General studies is compulsory in some schools, which accounts for its apparent popularity and rank of 2nd place in the graph. Science, mathematics and English, the three most commonly taken exams at GCSE, often because they are compulsory, still rank highly at AS with English being the most popular subject. Psychology, business studies and media are all non traditional academic subjects have seen a great increase in popularity since their introduction into the curriculum.

Performance of different subjects

Table 7; Top 15 subjects ranked by A or B grades at AS level. 2007

Subject/Year	2006	2007
Other languages	74.1%	73.8%
Further Maths	69.9%	70.9%
Irish	68.2%	68.6%
Classical Subjects	53.4 %	55.8%
German	49.2%	49.9%
Spanish	49.1%	49.3%
Religious Studies	48.8%	48.9%
French	48.3%	49.1%
Mathematics	46.1%	45.4%
Art and design Subjects	43.7%	42.1%
Political Studies	43.6%	46.4%
Welsh	43.0%	48.4%
Economics	42.6%	42.2%
Geography	42.2%	43.0%
History	42.2%	43.2%

Figure 4; a comparison of the 15 best performing subjects in 2007.

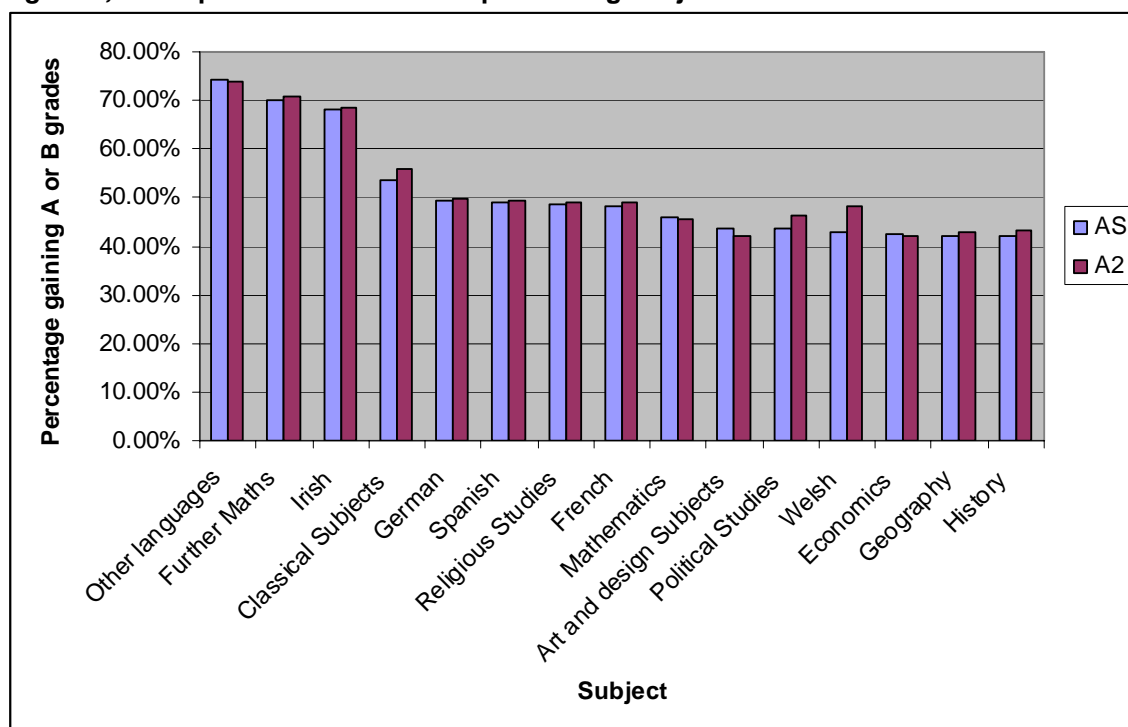


Table 7 and figure 4 shows that subjects like Further Math's and Irish have seen substantial improvement in performance from 2005 to 2006. Where as subjects like Welsh and classical studies have seen a slight drop in performance this year. We can also see that this year's top performing subjects were other modern languages, further mathematics and Irish. Geography's performance remains almost exactly the same as last year.

GCSE

There has been an increase of 5.13% of GCSE subject entries this year, from 5,752,152 in 2006 to 6,063,401 in 2007.

Across all subjects, 49% of entrants were male and 51% female. Overall girls performed better with 41.8% getting A*-B grades compared to boys achieving 34.4% A*-B. Once again a higher percentage of candidates got top grades, an increase of 0.9% on last year getting A*- C at 63.3%. This also meant there was also an increase in the pass rate.

Table 8; distribution of grades amongst students in 2006 and 2007

Grade/ Year	2006	2007
A*-A	19.1%	19.5%
A*-C	62.4%	63.3%
A*-G	98.1%	98.0%

The number of geography entrants fell slightly this year by 0.16%, from 213,469 to 213,124. There has also been an improvement in grades in 2007 with 8.2% of entrants getting A* compared to 7.6% last year.

Table 9; distribution of grades amongst Geographers in 2006 and 2007

Grade/ Year	2006	2007
A*-A	24.1%	25.2%

A*-C	65.9%	66.8%
A*-G	97.6%	97.8%

Once again there were more boys (55.3%) taking geography than girls, although there was an increase in the number of female candidates across the UK (excluding Scotland), however the girls generally performed better with 28.9% getting A*-A compared with 22.2% of boys. This is again an improved performance on 2006.

Geography therefore follows similar trends as other subjects. Compared to the national averages for all other subjects, geographers performed very well with a higher proportion achieving top grades, and a greater percentage in the A*- C boundary of 66.8%.

Popularity nationwide:

Once again geography remains the 8th most popular subject, which is the same position as it held for the last 4 years. History remains the most popular non-core curriculum subject this year. Art and design has risen above geography for the first time and information technology and drama which have swapped position at 13th and 14th place. Although geography remains one of the most popular non-core curriculum subjects, the gap between it and other subjects is decreasing. Subject choice is increasing at GCSE which may account for the relative and continued decline in traditional subjects such as geography.

Subjects with more than 100,000 entries which had the greatest rise in candidate numbers were:

- Religious studies up 7.2%
- Physical education up 1.8%

Subjects with less than 100,000 candidates which experienced the greatest rise in candidates were:

- Additional mathematics up 198%
- Statistics up 21%
- Media/film and TV studies up 15.5%
- Business communications systems up 5.7%
- Other modern foreign languages up 5.5%
- Spanish up 3.0%

The largest fall in entries were:

- German 10.2%
- ICT down 9.1%
- French down 8.2%
- Design and technology 4.5%
- History 1.6%

Popularity of subjects by Country

In **England** geography is only the 9th most popular subject as this year it was overtaken by Art which had 4314 more candidates for the first time. History rose to 6th place despite the drop in candidate numbers. French dropped to seventh place.

Figure 5: graph to show the ten most popular GCSE subjects in England

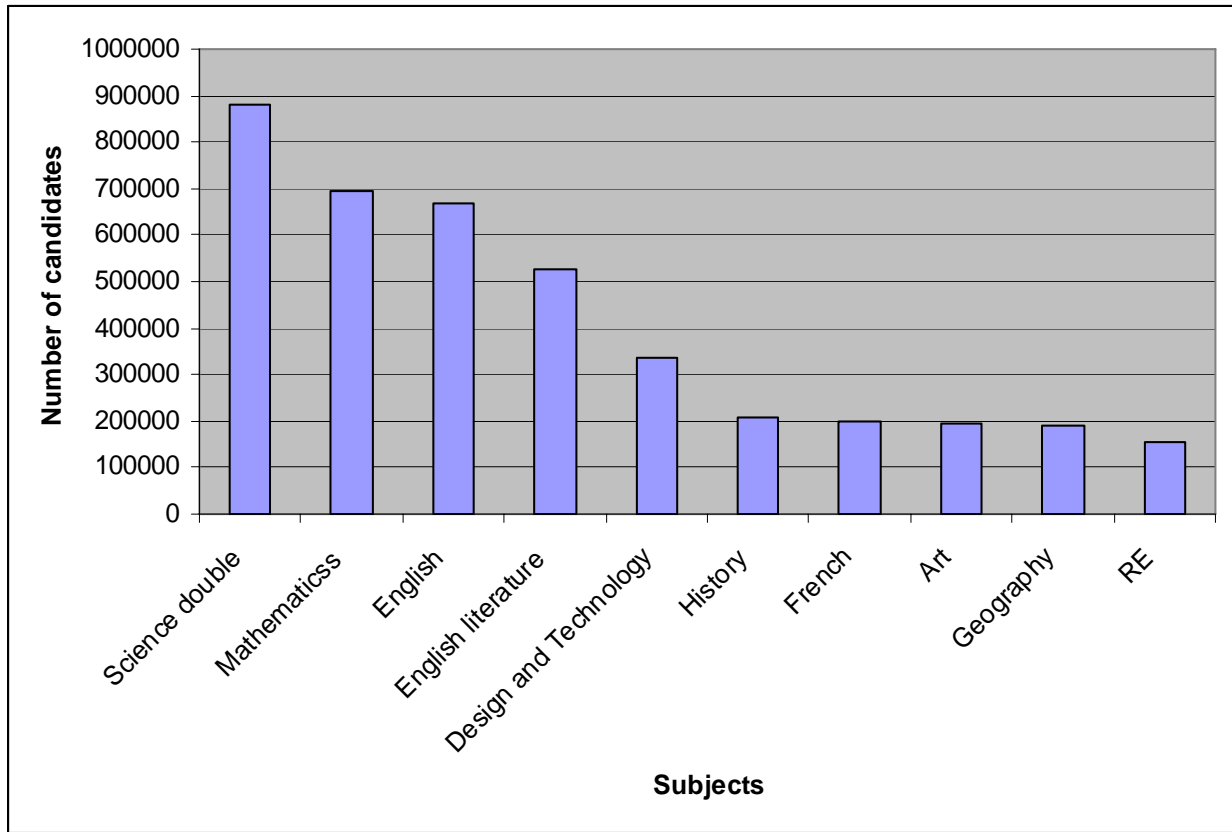
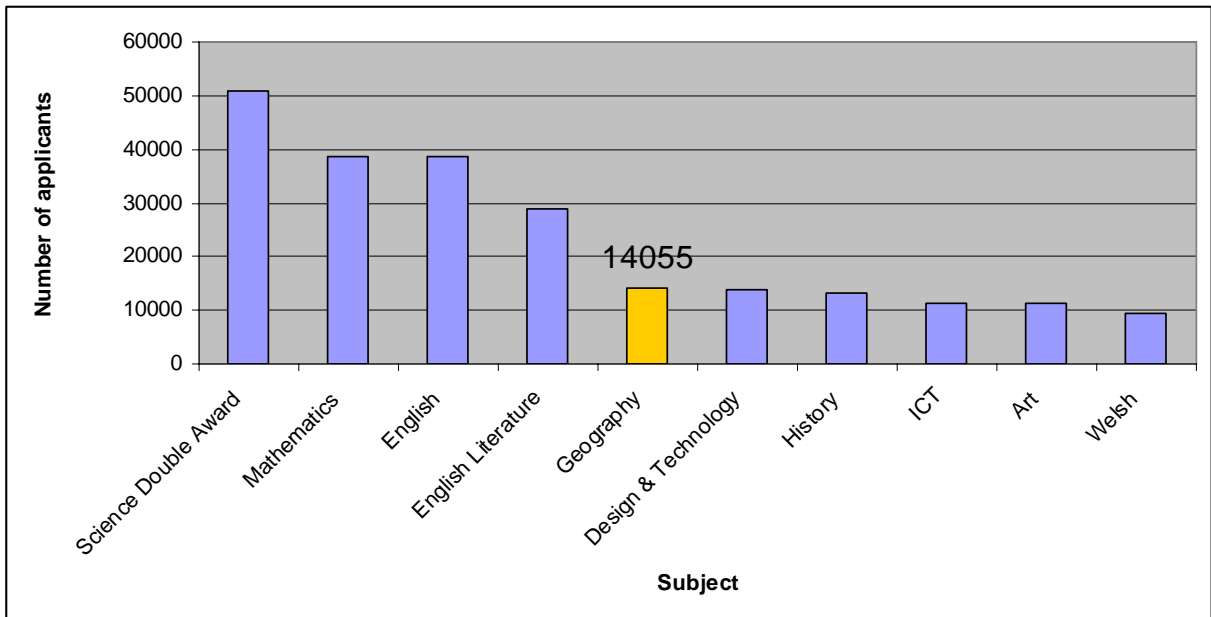
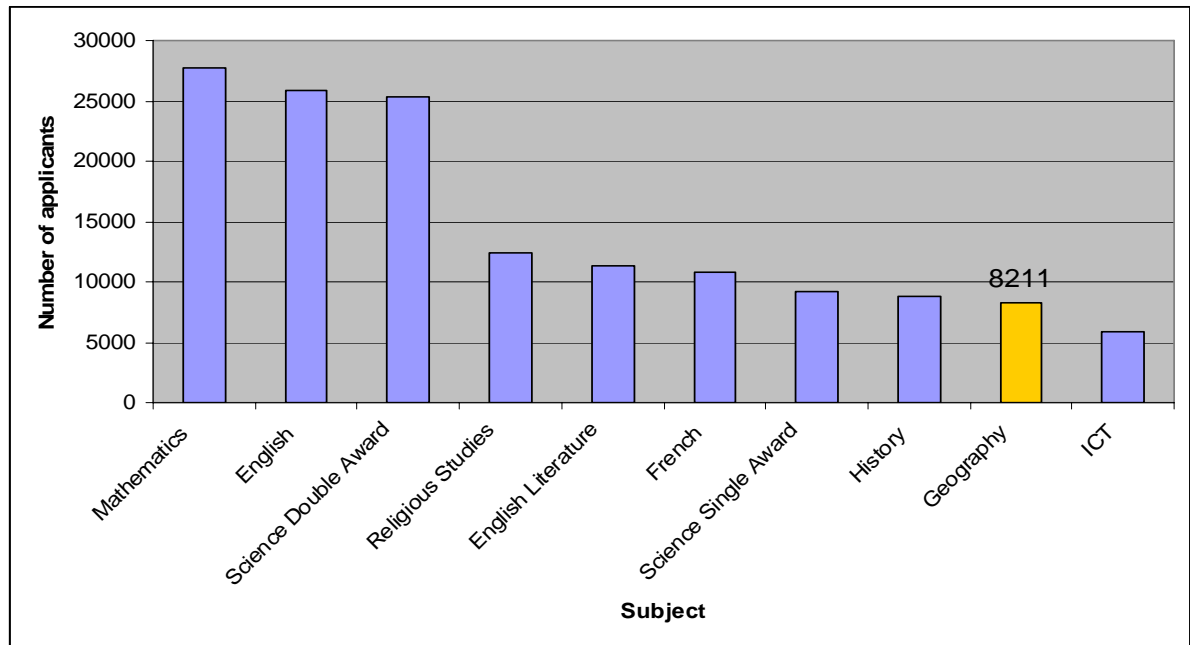


Figure 6; a graph to show the top ten most popular GCSE subjects in Wales 2007.



In **Wales**, geography is the 5th most popular subject again this year, well above history and art, which is better than the national trend. It is no surprise that Welsh appears in the top ten most popular subjects.

Figure 7; a graph to show the top ten most popular GCSE subjects in Northern Ireland 2007.



In **Northern Ireland** geography has fallen from 7th last year to 9th this year despite a rise in candidates numbers from 8211 to 8494, history overtook it by 588 candidates. Northern Ireland is the only British country where religious studies appears in the top ten and is even placed above English Literature. It is also interesting to note that the national language does not appear in the top ten as it does in Wales.

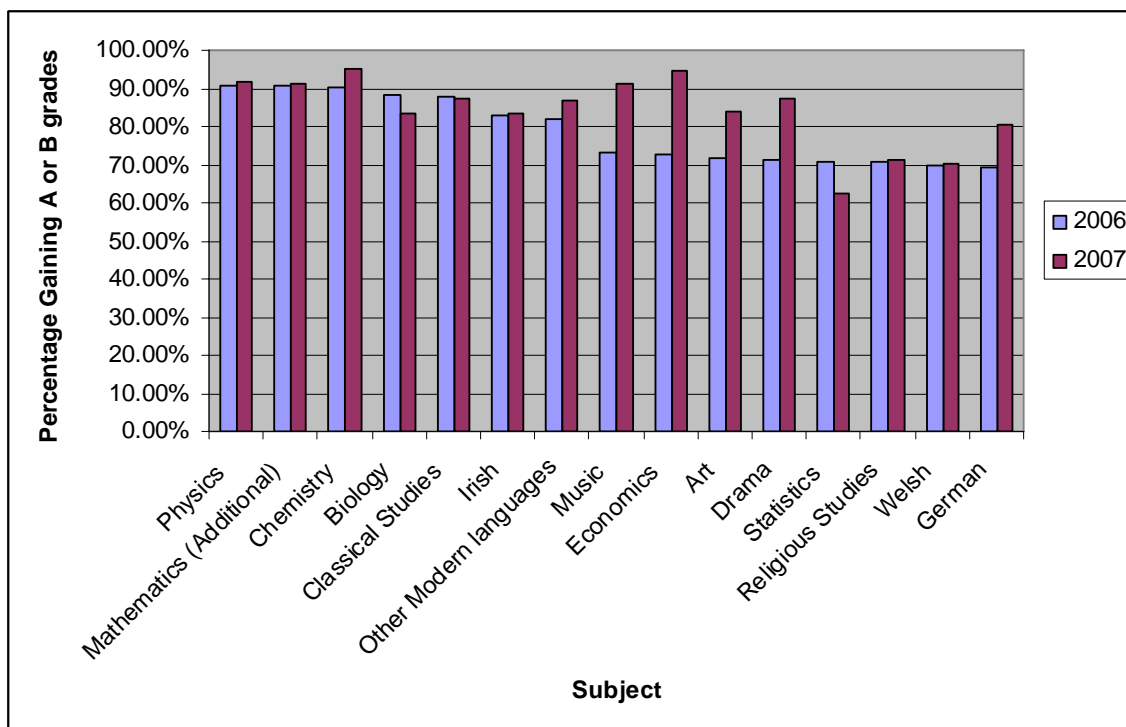
Performance in different subjects

Performance was determined by the percentage of people achieving A* to C grades.

Table 10; a comparison of the top 15 in terms of performance from A* to C grades from 2006 to 2007.

Subject	2006	2007
Physics	90.6%	91.9%
Mathematics (Additional)	90.5%	91.2%
Chemistry	90.2%	95.2%
Biology	88.4%	83.5%
Classical Studies	87.9%	87.1%
Irish	83.0%	83.3%
Other Modern languages	82.1%	86.6%
Music	73.4%	91.0%
Economics	72.8%	94.7%
Art	71.5%	83.9%
Drama	71.4%	87.2%
Statistics	70.7%	62.6%
Religious Studies	70.6%	71.3%
Welsh	69.9%	70.1%
German	69.3%	80.3%

Figure 8; a graph to show the comparative performance of the top 15 subjects across the UK from 2006 to 2007.

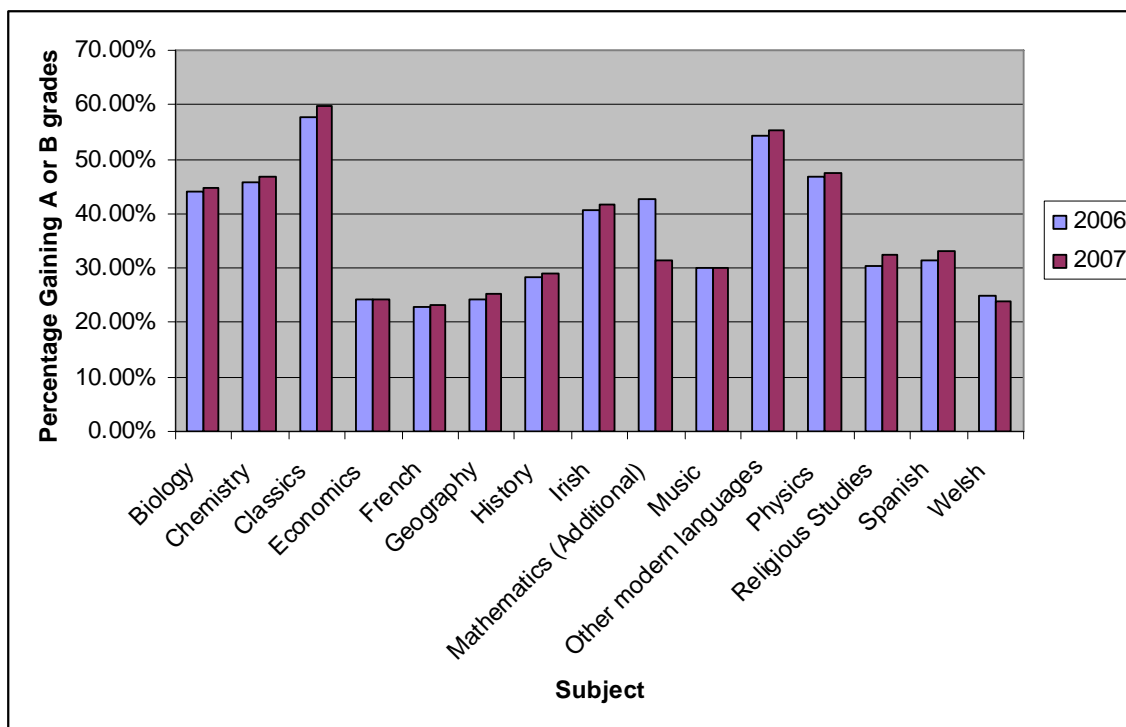


Subjects with the highest performing rating tend to be those where the number of candidates entered is lower. Biology performed better this year than in 2006, with larger improvements in subjects such as religious studies, economics, Irish and Welsh, which are interestingly at the lower half of this table.

Table 11; a comparison of the top 15 subjects by performance, according to A*- A grades, from 2006 to 2007.

Subject	2006	2007
Classics	57.6%	59.8%
Other modern languages	54.4%	55.2%
Physics	46.8%	47.4%
Chemistry	45.7%	46.9%
Biology	44.2%	44.7%
Mathematics (Additional)	42.6%	31.3%
Irish	40.6%	41.7%
Spanish	31.5%	33.1%
Religious Studies	30.5%	32.6%
Music	29.9%	30.1%
History	28.5%	29.1%
Welsh	24.9%	24.0%
Geography	24.1%	25.2%
Economics	24.1%	24.1%
French	22.8%	23.2%

Figure 9; Graph to show the comparative performance of the 15 top subjects by performance of A* to A grades from 2006 to 2007.



Most subjects seem to see a slight improvement from 2006, however subjects like economics, the sciences and music seem to have remained virtually the same. Subjects such as classics are more likely to be offered by selective schools than comprehensives, which may account for its high performance, as only 16,305 students sat the exam, yet 59.8% achieved an A grade or higher. 'Other Languages' do not include French, German or Spanish, most commonly taken by GCSE students. It does include Japanese, Urdu, Chinese, Greek and Arabic and are likely to be taken by students already fluent in the language, accounting for the very high success rate with 55.2% gaining A* or A grades. This is also true for Irish and Welsh; the highest proportion of exams sat in these two subjects was taken by candidates in Ireland and Wales respectively and thus the candidate is likely to have already been fluent. Mathematics (additional) is an extension of the core Mathematics paper and so is likely to only be taken by very able candidates.

Scottish Exams

Scottish Standard Grade

Standard Grades are generally taken over two years of study in the third and fourth year at secondary school. Students often take seven or eight subjects including Maths and English. Although they are not directly comparable to GCSEs as they are taken by students at a different age, they are of a similar level and provide important information about the position of geography in the Scottish system.

The total number of entries this year was 416,023, an increase of 4,701 candidates from last year's figure of 411,144 (1.19%). This is a marked improvement on the fall in candidates last year of -5.2%. The percentage of entries leading to an award of grades 1-6 has risen from 97.3% in 2006 to 97.7% in 2007.

Table 12; a comparison of the top 15 most popular subjects in 2006 and 2007.

Subject	No. of entrants 05	Rank	No. of entrants 06	Rank
English	57,308	1	58,832	1
Mathematics	53,835	2	53,776	2
French	34,270	3	33,838	3
Biology	22,213	4	23,201	4
History	21,085	5	21,129	5
Chemistry	20,875	6	20,688	6
Geography	18,931	8	19,641	7
Art and Design	19,512	7	18,562	8
Physical Education	17,564	9	18,359	9
Physics	16,917	11	17,064	10
Computing Studies	17,237	10	16,507	11
Modern Studies	13,420	13	14,191	12
Craft & Design	14,055	12	13,899	13
Administration	13,113	14	13,321	14
German	11,276	15	11,066	15

The number of geographers has increased this year from 18,931 in 2006 candidates to 19,641 in 2007, a rise of 3.75%. Geography has now overtaken art and risen to 7th place. However it remains behind history which is still the highest non-core curriculum subject. There have been some changes this year with decreasing popularity and a resulted change in rank for art, computer studies, and craft & design.

The percentage of Standard Grade entries resulting in a grade 1-6 in Geography has remained virtually static falling by only 0.1% from 98.3% to 98.2% this year, placing it at 9th place in the top 15. This small decrease may reflect the larger number of applicants who took the subject this year.

Table 13; the top 15 subjects at Standard Level ranked in terms of performance

Subject	% grade 1-6	Rank	No. of Candidates
Classical Greek	100.0%	1	7
English - Alternative Communication	100.0%	1	2
Russian	100.0%	1	4
Chemistry	98.9%	4	20,688
Physics	98.6%	5	17,064
English	98.6%	5	58,832
Modern Studies	98.4%	7	14,191
Biology	98.4%	7	23,201
Mathematics	98.3%	9	53,776
Technological Studies	98.2%	10	1,902
Geography	98.2%	10	19,641
Latin	98.2%	12	548
Business Management	98.1%	13	6,618
Physical Education	98.0%	14	18,359
Computing Studies	97.8%	15	16,507

Scottish Higher Grade

Higher is aimed at students who have passed subjects at Standard Grade Credit level, or who have successfully completed a subject at Intermediate 2. They are comparable with AS levels

though not identical. The number of entries this year was 158,053, a 3.66% decrease from last year when 164,053 students were entered; this number has continued to fall over the last three years. The decrease is largely accounted for by the fall in S5 students. The pass rate this year was 70.8%, a decrease of 1.0% on last year's 71.2%. The number of entries for geography decreased from 7,417 to 7,019, a large fall of 5.37%.

Geography this year drops back to 8th place after briefly over taking modern studies last year, This year modern studies has only 61 more candidates then geography. Computing has seen a large revival, having not made the top 15 last year; the numbers taking it nearly doubled placing it at 12th place.

Scottish Advanced Highers

Advanced Highers are aimed particularly at students who have passed Highers and are usually taken in sixth year at school, or at college. They extend the skills and knowledge gained at Higher and are additional qualifications that are useful for entry into higher education or the workplace. The number of entries this year was 18,253, an increase of 6.52% from 17,141 last year. Geography entries have also increased by 5.09% from 845 in 2006 to 888 in 2007.

Geography remains in 8th place after last year despite many subjects seeing a large increase in entries and having fallen from 6th place in 2004. However this is still quite high as with A level it is still at 9th place.

At Advanced Higher Level, entries were made into 43 subjects. This performance graph does not show the extent of the top 15 subjects, as it is based on popularity. As with Highers, subjects such as Classical Greek, Gaidhlig and Gaelic all feature as top performers, but with very few candidates. Although geography ranks 4th in the top performers according to popularity, it ranks 17th overall, a drop from 12th last year.

CONCLUSIONS

The graph below shows the rise and decline in the number of geography entrants since the year 2000. This shows that although there was a slight rise in popularity in 2001, at a time when geography was at its most popular in the last 6 years, geography's popularity has in general been declining.

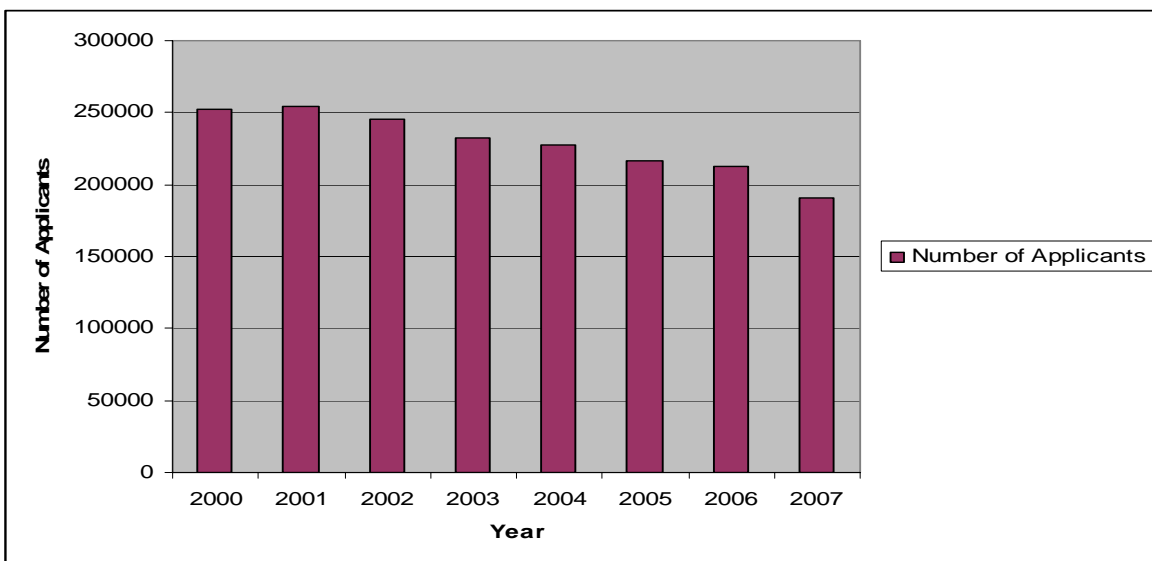
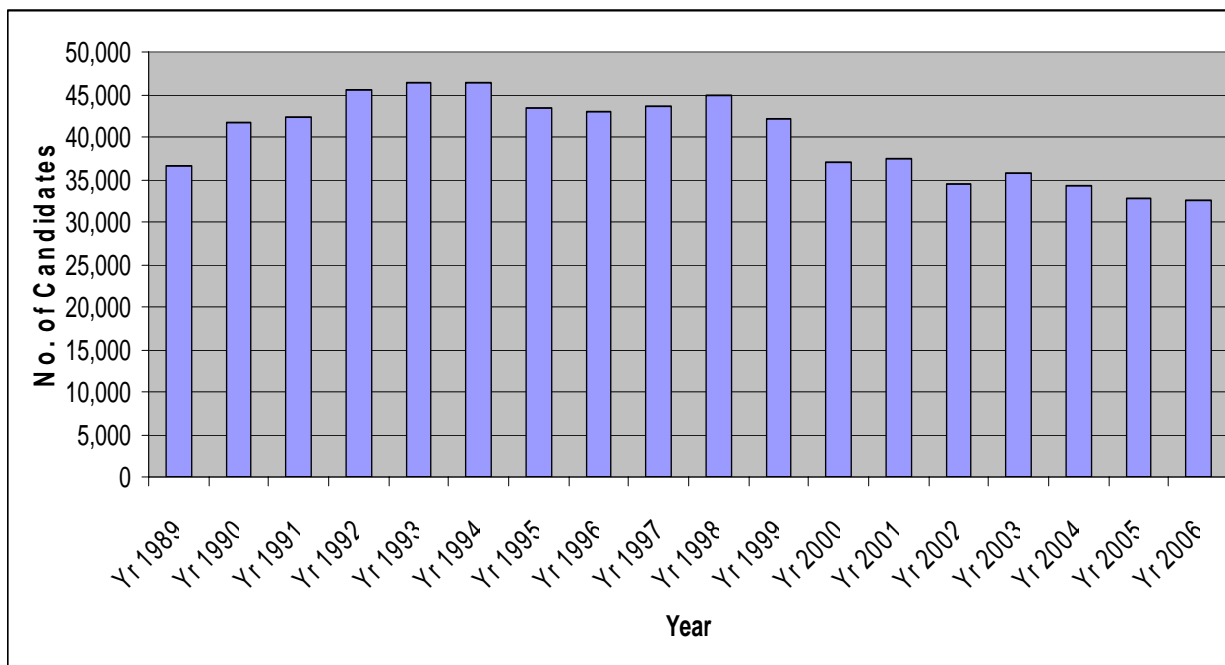


Figure 14; the changing popularity of Geography at GCSE since 2000.

Figure 15; the changing popularity of Geography at A level since 1989.

The popularity of geography A level has been very erratic. Despite a period of steady increase in



number of entrants from 1989 to 1994, entry numbers have fluctuated since then and there has been a general decline in the popularity of geography. This erratic trend has coincided with a similarly erratic trend in the total number of entrants. However, as with geography, total entry numbers have begun to decline in this century. The decline of popularity at both GCSE and A level can probably be related to increasing subject choice. As the number of subjects has increased and new non-traditional subjects have been introduced into the syllabus, fewer students have taken geography as their non-core curriculum subject.

On a brighter note, despite decreased popularity, geographers have performed well continuing to exceed the national average for all subjects. This year 54.8% of A level geographers achieved an A or B at A level compared to a national average of 52.8%.

Not all schools and departments experience the same decline in numbers and there is evidence that suggests that the most successful are those who 'market' the subject effectively and cater for their pupil's needs by interviewing them either formally or informally to assess their needs and an understanding of appropriate teaching and learning styles. Ideas on 'marketing geography' can be found on the Society's website. (www.rgs.org/OurWork/Schools)

The Action Plan for Geography funded by the DCSF for England is addressing the problems of poor uptake of geography. Specific projects developed through the Action Plan such as the ambassadors Programme and resources posted on the Geography Teaching Today website www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk

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