

A and AS level trends in Modern Languages 2002-2018

Below are the results published by [JCO](#) on 16 August regarding AS and A-level examinations for 2018 for French, German, Spanish, Irish, Welsh and Other Modern Languages. A comparison of take-up of the subjects mentioned above is also offered alongside a more detailed look at data for Other Modern Languages. To access the complete results, please see [here](#).

1. Fluctuations in number of pupils studying a language at A Level 2018

A levels								
Year	French	German	Spanish	Irish	Welsh	other	total	Fr Ge & Sp only
2002	15614	7013	5572		914	5523	34636	28199
2003	15531	6950	5781	258	852	5660	35032	28262
2004	15149	6390	5966	286	919	6023	34733	27505
2005	14484	5901	6230	306	927	6412	34260	26615
2006	14650	6204	6520	329	953	7009	35665	27374
2007	14477	6303	6951	281	847	6752	35611	27731
2008	14885	6245	7055	248	934	7377	36744	28185
2009	14333	5765	7334	339	941	7932	36644	27432
2010	13850	5548	7629	352	861	7370	35610	27027
2011	13196	5166	7610	328	917	8953	36170	25972
2012	12511	4773	7351	304	859	9136	34934	24635
2013	11272	4242	7651	310	752	9087	33314	23165
2014	10433	4187	7601	313	692	9007	32233	22221
2015	10328	4009	8694	330	678	9375	33414	23031
2016	9672	3842	8460	331	610	9209	32124	21974
2017	9468	3663	8601	333	566	9386	32017	21732
2018	8713	3058	8255	332	536	9673	30567	20026
% change 02-18	-44.20%	-56.40%	48.15%	28.68%	-37.09%	75.14%	-11.75%	-28.98%
% change 17-18	-7.97%	-16.52%	-4.02%	-0.30%	-5.30%	3.06%	-4.53%	-7.85%

Results from this year show that pupils exiting Secondary education with an A-Level qualification in Modern Languages have done so with notable differences when comparing the ‘most commonly-taught’ languages with the ‘lesser spoken/heritage’ languages.

French, German, and, for the first time in three years, Spanish, have all had a decrease in number of pupils since 2017. The worst-hit language is German (-16.5% on last year’s figures) followed by French (-7.9%) and Spanish (-4.02%). The three languages combined are down by -7.85% overall in one year. Unfortunately, French has also been listed as the 7th most decreased subject at A-level (from 18th position in 2017): such figures are [published](#) for all those subjects with over 1,000 takers. However, this overall decrease does not come as a surprise especially when considering that the number of A-Level takers has also decreased nationally. It is worth noting that, with the reformed curriculum and decoupling of AS from A-Levels, fewer pupils now take [less than four](#) A-Levels, with a

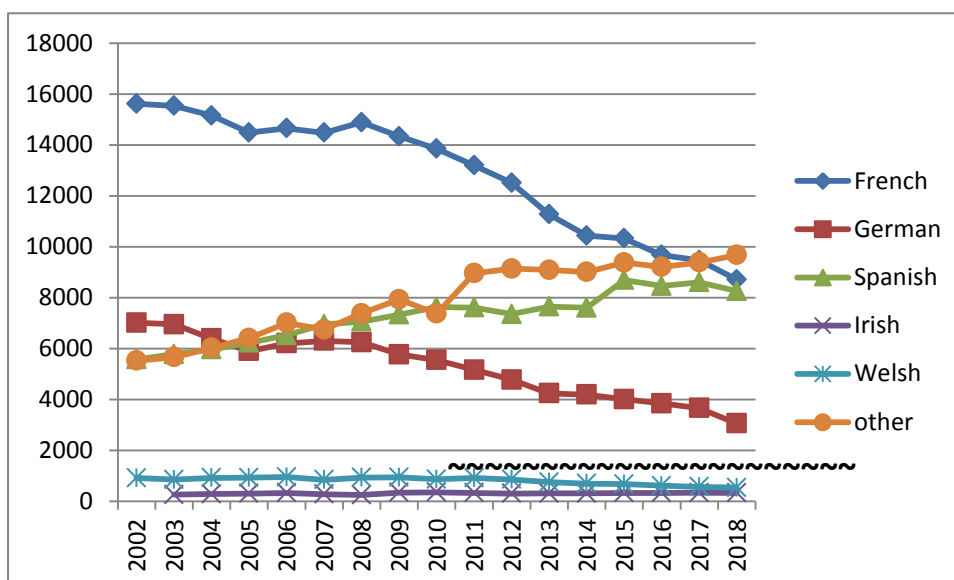
shift in subject popularity as [FFT Education Data Lab](#) claims: “although student numbers in most subjects have decreased, further maths, sociology, business studies, economics and government and politics have grown in popularity. Numbers in geography and mathematics were largely unchanged.”

However, when considering the lesser taught languages, which JCQ groups under Other Modern Languages, it can be seen that they continue to perform extremely well and with growing [figures](#) now for three years running (up by 3.06% on 2017). Although this figure is not sufficient to offset the Modern Languages deficit completely, it is important to notice that students continue to be interested in languages albeit with a marked shift in interest towards **Chinese** (an increase of 8.6% on last year’s figures), Dutch (55.92%) and other community languages, as the [Higher Education Policy Institute](#) also argues. It is also worth noting that, for the first time this year, Mandarin Chinese has overtaken German in the number of A-Level students taking the subject: this year Chinese counted 3334 pupils (3058 for German) and is expected to be on the rise. It will be most interesting to see if, in the coming years, a new ‘major’ language is making way and will be joining the ranks of the three most commonly taught ones at A-Level (Spanish, French, German) and whether this occurrence will bear any weight on UK undergraduate applications at tertiary level (see the [British Academy’s view](#) on how a decline in A-Level Humanities as affecting Higher Education).

The Other Modern Languages subject also features in the top A-Level subject increases for subject over 5,000 pupils: now they are firmly set in 6th position with a great improvement from last year’s 10th position.

Overall, All other modern foreign languages takers have grown from 9386 to 9673: a steady increase of nearly 3.06% in one year.

Fluctuations in A Level languages at a glance



Fluctuations in number of pupils studying a language at AS Level

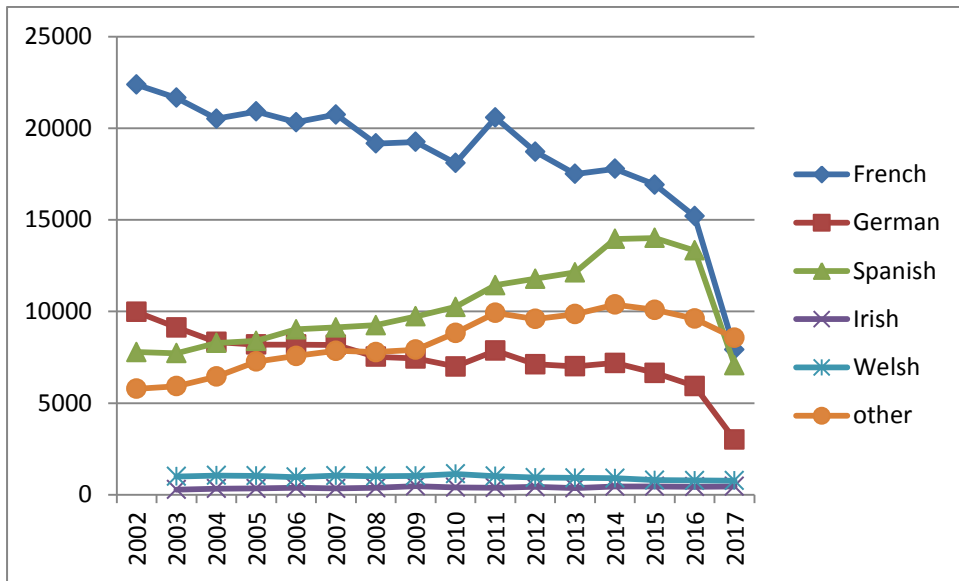
AS levels								
Year	French	German	Spanish	Irish	Welsh	other	total	Fr Ge & Sp
2002	22377	9973	7787			5785	45922	40137
2003	21663	9130	7727	284	998	5927	45729	38520
2004	20514	8333	8278	333	1049	6445	44952	37125
2005	20913	8195	8394	344	1037	7267	46150	37502
2006	20321	8192	9021	381	963	7577	46455	37534
2007	20747	8179	9131	341	1045	7858	47301	38057
2008	19167	7533	9247	378	1013	7782	45120	35947
2009	19247	7437	9730	479	1033	7919	45845	36414
2010	18096	7001	10250	406	1140	8836	45729	35347
2011	20579	7859	11433	385	1015	9923	51194	40256
2012	18721	7119	11781	430	936	9591	48578	38051
2013	17501	7006	12136	374	917	9857	47791	36643
2014	17781	7193	13958	461	901	10382	50676	38932
2015	16917	6645	14009	454	796	10086	48907	37571
2016	15200	5935	13331	437	778	9610	45291	34466
2017	7922	3005	7064	455	774	8562	27782	17991
2018	2759	907	2549	436	759	6085	13495	6215
% change 02-18	-87.67%	-90.91%	-67.27%	53.52%	-23.95%	5.19%	-70.61%	-84.52%
% change 17-18	-65.17%	-69.82%	-63.92%	-4.18%	-1.94%	-28.93%	-51.43%	-65.45%

AS level results must be considered with great caution. Although at first glance the picture does not look positive, it must not be forgotten that the results from this year are the direct consequence of the decoupling of the AS and A-Level. This means that AS results do not count towards A-level results anymore and a fall in the AS arena was to be expected.

It is indeed worth noting that nationally AS entries have suffered across all disciplines. For this reason, JCQ claims that **‘with the decoupling of the GCE AS from the GCE A level in England, some centres and candidates have stopped taking AS qualifications. Therefore, AS entries are not stable and any year-on-year comparisons should be made with caution’**.

Both Wales and Northern Ireland remain largely unaffected by such drastic drop in AS takers since their AS remain coupled with the A-Level qualification. However, in Ireland, there is an open market in qualifications which means that schools can offer both AS and A-Levels which have also been accredited Wales and the UK: in this respect, both de-coupled and coupled modular examinations may be available. In Wales, the small decrease in A-Levels (-5.3%) on last year’s figures has been offset by an increase in the grades awarded: the combination of A* and A*-A grades has raised from 33.3% in 2017 to 35% in 2018 (see [this infographic](#)).

Fluctuations in AS languages at a glance



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## 2. Conversion AS to A level

| % AS students who took A level in following year |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |            |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------------|
| Year                                             | French  | German  | Spanish | Irish   | Welsh   | other   | total   | Fr Ge & Sp |
| 2003                                             | 69.41%  | 69.69%  | 74.24%  |         |         | 97.84%  | 76.29%  | 70.41%     |
| 2004                                             | 69.93%  | 69.99%  | 77.21%  | 100.70% | 92.08%  | 101.62% | 75.95%  | 71.40%     |
| 2005                                             | 70.61%  | 70.81%  | 75.26%  | 91.89%  | 88.37%  | 99.49%  | 76.21%  | 71.69%     |
| 2006                                             | 70.05%  | 75.70%  | 77.67%  | 95.64%  | 91.90%  | 96.45%  | 77.28%  | 72.99%     |
| 2007                                             | 71.24%  | 76.94%  | 77.05%  | 73.75%  | 87.95%  | 89.11%  | 76.66%  | 73.88%     |
| 2008                                             | 71.75%  | 76.35%  | 77.26%  | 72.73%  | 89.38%  | 93.88%  | 77.68%  | 74.06%     |
| 2009                                             | 74.78%  | 76.53%  | 79.31%  | 89.68%  | 92.89%  | 101.93% | 81.21%  | 76.31%     |
| 2010                                             | 71.96%  | 74.60%  | 78.41%  | 73.49%  | 83.35%  | 93.07%  | 77.67%  | 74.22%     |
| 2011                                             | 72.92%  | 73.79%  | 74.24%  | 80.79%  | 80.44%  | 101.32% | 79.10%  | 73.48%     |
| 2012                                             | 60.79%  | 60.73%  | 64.30%  | 78.96%  | 84.63%  | 92.07%  | 68.24%  | 61.20%     |
| 2013                                             | 60.21%  | 59.59%  | 64.94%  | 72.09%  | 80.34%  | 94.75%  | 68.58%  | 60.88%     |
| 2014                                             | 59.61%  | 59.76%  | 62.63%  | 83.69%  | 75.46%  | 91.38%  | 67.45%  | 60.64%     |
| 2015                                             | 58.08%  | 55.73%  | 62.29%  | 71.58%  | 75.25%  | 90.30%  | 65.94%  | 59.16%     |
| 2016                                             | 57.17%  | 57.82%  | 60.39%  | 72.91%  | 76.63%  | 91.30%  | 65.68%  | 58.49%     |
| 2017                                             | 62.29%  | 61.72%  | 64.52%  | 76.20%  | 72.75%  | 97.67%  | 70.69%  | 63.05%     |
|                                                  |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |            |
| <b>% change 02-18</b>                            | -87.67% | -90.91% | -67.27% | 53.52%  | -23.95% | 5.19%   | -70.61% | -84.52%    |

Due to the decoupling of AS and A-Levels, Modern Languages are facing an unusual situation. Up until last year, more students taking an AS qualification could be counted for Modern Languages compared to those who would, the following year, continue to study the same language at A-Level. This year, however, the reverse is true. For the first time since records began in 2002, more students are registered for A-Levels than are for AS levels. This means that the crash in AS uptake for Modern Languages is offset by the number of students who decide to continue with Modern Languages at A-Levels since an AS qualification in a subject does no longer count towards the final A-Level result (now examinations are linear and taken all at the same period at the end of secondary school).