

Who does better?

Task 1 Read and find out

Every year thousands of 15-16 year olds in the UK sit national examinations called GCSEs (General Certificate of secondary Education). GCSEs cover all school subjects. 25% of the marks come from coursework completed during the school year and 75% of the marks come from a formal written exam. The total mark is graded from A- G. The best marks or grades are from A to C. This year more than 600,000 students sat GCSEs. Who got the best grades? Read these statements and try to predict the results. Tick the sentences you agree with.

- Boys generally get the best grades for Science subjects.
- Girls are better at languages.
- Boys get better grades for technology.
- Girls perform better in English exams.
- Boys perform better at Economics or Business Studies.

Look at the results table for Wales and compare your predictions. Were you right?

	Boys	Girls
Overall passes grades A to C	55%	64.2%
English literature (A to C)	57.9%	72.5%
English language (A to C)	48.2%	61.1%
Welsh language (A to C)	67.1%	82.5%
Business Studies (A to C)	57.3%	61%
Design and technology (A to C)	52.1%	70.2%

Task 2 Nurture or Nature

A website asked users: Why do you think girls outperform boys at GCSE and at 'A' level (the national exam at 18)? Here are some of the many replies from website users in the UK and abroad.

- Divide the reasons into Nature (girls are born this way) and Nurture (girls are brought up/expected to be this way).
- What do you think? Are girls naturally more studious than boys? Are boys better at learning facts? Are girls better at language? Are boys and girls encouraged in the same way in your country's school system?
- "Equality is a fantasy as far as I'm concerned - males and females are fundamentally different and that means physically and mentally." John: UK
- "Because girls are all a bit swots." Peter: UK
- "Girls work harder than boys; they get a real buzz from succeeding in the exam system." Jane: UK
- "I didn't have a male teacher until I was 12. Perhaps without realising it at that age us boys thought school was a girls' thing". Simon: England
- "Boys don't like to learn or work hard at school - it's seen as uncool." Hazel: UK
- "I remember having to write about why animals should not be hurt for my GCSE English exam. Who's likely to perform better in such an exam – a caring sensitive female or a macho lad?" Anwar:UK
- "We all know that boys mature more slowly than girls. It does not mean they are less intelligent: they just catch up later." Geri: UK
- "It might be that there are loads more teachers who are female and who therefore communicate better with girls." Richard: UK
- "At GCSE age most girls can see forward to the next step in education and boys are too busy watching the girls...." Elizabeth: UK
- "From an early age girls are encouraged to take part in "quiet" activities which help equip them for studying later while boys are not." Mark: UK
- "It's easy - females have always been smarter than males." Sarah: USA
- "A number of changes to the way the exam system works have favoured this inequality. Boys are better at learning events and facts but GCSE questions ask more about feelings now. Boys are better in written exams but girls work hard at home to do the coursework. There should not be any coursework in my opinion!" Ceri: Wales

Glossary

- swot (someone who studies too much)
- gender (sex :male or female)
- outperform (do better than)
- marks (points given for each exam question)
- grades (letter, A-G, given for exam performance)
- coeducational (schools for boys and girls)
- reward (prize)

Task 3 Single sex schooling

Some educationalists think that the solution to the gender question in the UK is to separate boys and girls into single-sex schools. Divide these arguments into 'For' or 'Against' single sex schools.

- Girls are more likely to choose Science subjects if there are no boys in their class.
- Boys are distracted by girls during lessons and cannot concentrate Girls and boys learn to co-operate with each other if they study together.
- Girls feel worried that the boys will think they are swots so they do not answer questions.

- What do you think?
 - Is it the same for your country?
 - Are schools coeducational or single sex?
 - Which do you prefer?
 - Why?