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OVERVIEW

1. A detailed summary of attainment data for schools, provided in Appendix A, reiterates the issue that academic achievement across the County Borough has, for too long, been variable with too many young people not achieving their academic potential.
2. Whilst young people who are eligible for free school meals do as well as other children eligible for free school meals across Wales, the same cannot be said for those young people who do not receive free school meals. The gap between other similar areas in Wales has widened over recent years. There continues to be a marked lack of challenge, development and aspiration for the majority of learners who are non-FSM. This means over 75% of the school population have been let down by the system.
3. The emphasis on care and engagement in schools – which is a significant strength – should not eclipse or limit the challenge and stretch in learning that young people need. There must be a focus on improving the attainment levels for all pupils.
4. There has not been the acceptance, or the drive from key partners and stakeholders, that fundamental change is required to achieve the highest possible outcomes for each young person and to ensure that this change is sustainable. This fundamental change must be underpinned by the recognition that the success of our young people is everyone's responsibility and that by working in partnership we can achieve far more for our future generations.
5. The pandemic has, and will, further hit economy hard but ensuring that each young person leaves statutory education with the best possible academic profile is a pre-requisite for sustainable future growth and security.
6. Over the last ten years education performance across the County Borough has been a cause for concern.
7. In 2012 the authority was placed in Special Measures following an inspection by Estyn. It was removed from this position in 2016 having been judged to have improved sufficiently during the intervening period. However, since then, standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have declined.
8. Of the four secondary schools, only one now performs consistently above the expected outcomes for schools within similar contexts. Challenging questions must be asked about the sustainable impact of the changes made during that time.
9. By 2016, three out of the four secondary schools had received Schools Challenge Cymru money. This, together with significant investment from the local authority, in terms of staff support and time-limited, targeted, basic skills financial support, did impact positively on standards at the time. However, as that support was withdrawn it has become evident that more fundamental changes were needed to make sustainable improvement.
10. Inspection outcomes since 2017 have been in the main positive with no school placed in a reported category and aspects of wellbeing and care, support and guidance being judged highly. However, in the primary schools inspected, teaching and learning was judged to be the weakest area across the board. This is an area that needs to be addressed if the ambition of this plan is to be realised.

11. There have been improvements in attendance over the past three years but compared to other local authorities, attendance for both primary and secondary schools is the lowest, or close to the lowest, with persistent absenteeism a significant area of challenge.
12. Whilst figures for permanent exclusions are the lowest in the region, the number of fixed-term short exclusions is the highest and the percentage of pupils moved in Year 10 to Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) is the highest in Wales.
13. Since the pandemic started, the number of pupils eligible for free school meals has risen by 18.5% (from 2026 pupils to 2401). As of the end of October 2020 the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals within the total school population now stands at 27% – the long-term impact of this is yet unknown and it may not be known for some years.
14. The Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) figures for Merthyr Tydfil remain relatively positive. Figures as at 31st October show that 14 young people on the mainstream PLASC were not engaged in EET. This equates to 2.75% and is higher than the 2019 figure of 2.05% (11 young people). However, 8 young people on the EOTAS PLASC were not engaged in EET which gives a total NEET figure of 3.9% (22 young people) and is lower than the 2019 figure of 4.3% (25 young people). A concern that must be addressed is, that of the 22 young people currently presenting as NEET, 9 were not known to the NEET team and have been classed as GREEN on the vulnerability profile. This figure is significantly higher than in previous years.
15. Within schools across the County Borough there has been and still is, rightly, a strong focus on nurturing and supporting pupils. The emphasis on care and engagement in schools – which is a significant strength – should not eclipse or limit the challenge and stretch in learning that young people need. There must be a focus on improving the attainment levels for all pupils.
16. Within KS4 there is too high a prevalence of learners being placed on special tuition due to behavioural issues and whilst the outcomes for these pupils have improved, challenge must be made over the numbers of pupils being placed on this path.
17. There is no clear transition pathway from primary to secondary and there is still an element of mistrust between standards identified at the end of KS2 as learners move into KS3.
18. Schools have not been working well enough together in **partnership**. This is changing but needs to be further developed. The schools' collective response during the pandemic has demonstrated a much stronger cohesion and common enterprise. This however must also be replicated by local authority staff and other partners. Actions cannot be 'done to' schools, there needs to be a collaborative approach to both identifying the problems and securing solutions. The work on the recent staff Wellbeing Charter and the working party securing the ambitions of the Raising Aspirations, Raising Standards (RARS) strategy demonstrate how much more can be achieved when engaging with a range of partners – the 'buy-in' to the solution is far greater.
19. The focus within the support plan from the Central South Consortium over the next three years is on working collaboratively as clusters from primary through to secondary. There is a need for not only schools to work together but also the Improvement Partners and Strategic Partners from the primary and secondary sectors so that the expectations for attainment are clear to all. The work of these must dovetail in the work of local authority service areas so that there is a common purpose to improvement.

20. The role of school Governors in the standards agenda needs to be further developed. There must be an acceptance from all Governors of the need to raise standards for all learners and Governors must be supported in their understanding of how they can challenge school leaders to demonstrate progress.
21. There has been too much reliance on actions and process in relation to support from partners including the Central South Consortium and from service areas within the local authority and not enough focus on impact on impact. Support has tended to be generic and not focussed on specific areas for development.
22. There is much to be done on challenging the 'so what' – action without impact will not achieve the ambitious outcomes of the RARS strategy and will continue the cycle of underachievement for the young people of the County Borough.
23. It must be recognised however that the challenges of the pandemic have required a strongly collaborative and more collective approach. There is renewed awareness, in MTCBC and more widely, of the key importance of education and schooling in all young people's lives. The resilience, dedication and professionalism of all staff in schools signals strong potential to move forward as we eventually emerge from the pandemic in the new year.

IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

The Coronavirus pandemic has had a number of implications for the information presented below:

- Cancellation of the normal examination period has resulted in:
 - Welsh Government deciding not to calculate or publish performance measures for 2019/20 or 2020/21, for the Year 11 cohort.
 - Results are based on the best of either the centre assessed grade, or the standardised grade calculated by the WJEC.
- Cancellation of teacher assessment collections at Foundation Phase, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, means that we have no information to report.
- Cancellation of Welsh national tests data collection means that we have no information to report.
- Cancellation of attendance data collections means that information reported below is based on attendance from September 2019 to February 2020 and is compared with the LA information for the same period in the previous academic year. No national comparative information is available.
- Exclusions information is reported for the period September 2019 to February 2020 and is compared with the local authority information for the same period in the previous academic year.

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Key Stage 4 2019/20

(definitions and changes to performance measures are detailed in annex A)

- The average Literacy point score increased and is closer to the national average from 2018/19. The average is now towards the higher end of a D range rather than at the lower end.
- The average Numeracy point score increased and is above the national average from 2018/19. The average is now in the D range rather than in the E range.
- The average Science point score increased and is above the national average from 2018/19. The average is now in the D range rather than in the E range.
- The average Skills Challenge Certificate point score increased and is now in the D range rather than in the E range.
- The average Capped 9 points score (interim measure version) increased and is above the national average from 2018/19.
- Girls outperformed boys in each of these five indicators, and pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals had a lower average score than those who were not eligible.
- ALPS information shows there has been an improvement in value added outcomes since last year in the majority of subjects. However, in English Language and Mathematics pupils are making less than expected progress in three out of four schools.

KEY STAGE 4 2018/19

- The average Literacy point score is 34.7 whilst the national score is 39.0.
- The average Numeracy point score is 32.4 with the national numeracy score being 37.1.
- The average Science point score is 32.7 with the national science score being 36.8.
- The average Skills Challenge Certificate point score is 30.8 with the national score being 36.4.
- The average Capped 9 points score (interim measure version) in the local authority is 313.4 with the national score being 353.8.
- Girls outperformed boys in each of these five indicators, and pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals had a lower average score than those who were not eligible, which is the same pattern as seen nationally.

- Performance of boys in the local authority is lower than the national average for boys, with a similar pattern evident for girls. However, the gap in performance between girls in the local authority and Wales is smaller than that seen for boys.
- The performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals in the local authority is higher than the national performance in both average Literacy points and average Science points. However, the local authority performance is below the national averages for all other measures for pupils who are eligible for free school meals pupils and for all measures for pupils not eligible for free school meals.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION INFORMATION (PROVISIONAL DATA) 2019-20

Welsh Government have published grade distribution information instead of performance measures. These grade distributions allow the results to be interrogated at a finer level and show results at both upper and lower ability ranges. Comparing this information with the grade distribution for Merthyr Tydfil CBC shows:

- The percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-A and A*-C across all subjects is lower than the national average
- The percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-A and A*-C in Literacy qualifications is lower than the national average
- The percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-A in Numeracy qualifications is lower than the national average, however the percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-C is at the national average.
- The percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-A and A*-C in Science qualifications is lower than the national average.
- The gender difference across all subjects is lower than the national average for the higher A*-A grades and in line with the national average for grades A*-C.
- The difference between pupils entitled for free school meals and those not entitled across all subjects is lower than the national average for the higher A*-A grades and in line with the national average for grades A*-C.
- The difference between pupils with SEN provision and without SEN provision achieving grades A*-A and A*-C across all subjects is lower than the national average.

Further information can be found in Annex B.

ATTENDANCE

2019/2020

Attendance information is reported for the period from September 2019 to February 2020.

- Attendance across primary schools is 0.17% lower than in the equivalent period in the previous academic year.
- Attendance at secondary schools is 0.78% higher than the equivalent period in the previous academic year.

2020/2021

Attendance information for this academic year has been significantly impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic. However, due to COVID 19 codes not being implemented until October half term, it is difficult to distinguish between COVID 19 related absence and general absence.

- Attendance across primary schools until the end of October is 87.9% which is 6.8 percentage points lower than the equivalent period in the 2019/20 academic year.
- Attendance across secondary schools until the end of October is 85.6% which is 8.2 percentage points lower than the equivalent period in the 2019/20 academic year.

EXCLUSIONS

2019/2020

Exclusion information is reported for the period from September 2019 to March 2020.

- There is a reduction in both the number of exclusions and the days lost due to exclusion from primary schools when compared to the equivalent period in the previous academic year.
- There is an increase in both the number of exclusions and the days lost to exclusion from secondary schools when compared to the equivalent period in the previous academic year.

2020/2021

- There has been a reduction in both the number of exclusions and the days lost due to exclusion from primary schools when compared to the equivalent period in the previous academic year.
- There has been an increase in both the number of exclusions and the days lost to exclusion from secondary schools when compared to the equivalent period in the previous academic year.

Annex A – KS4 performance measures definitions and changes from 2018/19

Performance measures for Year 11

New performance measures were introduced in 2018/19. The measures are now based on point scores and converts each grade achieved into a point score (see Definitions). The measures are:

- Capped 9 points score (interim measure version, see below)
- Literacy measure: the best qualification a pupil has achieved in (first Language Welsh or English) Language or Literature GCSE.
- Numeracy measure: the best qualification from Mathematics or Mathematics - Numeracy GCSEs.
- Science measure: takes the best single qualification in a Science GCSE (where a double GCSE is taken the higher grade will be counted).
- Skills Challenge Certificate: part of the Welsh Baccalaureate that can be taken at Foundation or National Level.

For further information regarding the introduction of these new measures please see the [Interim Key Stage 4 School Performance Arrangements: Measures and Analyses Guidance](#)

Multiple entry changes for Year 11

Prior to 2018/19, the best result for each Year 11 pupil in each subject was used for performance measures. From 2018/19, the first entry in each subject is used instead, regardless of whether any resits have resulted in a higher grade. This will affect comparability of the data with previous years. Please see page 8 which gives an indication of the impact of this change.

Capped 9 points score (interim measure version)

The Capped 9 measure has been changed since last year by reducing the number of subject specific requirements. The measure still includes the best nine GCSEs or equivalent volume of qualifications, but now only three of the nine slots cover specific GCSE subjects, down from five in previous years. These specific subjects are English or Welsh First Language or Literature, Mathematics or Numeracy and a Science.

The Capped 9 points score is one of the Well-being of Future Generations (WFG) Headline Indicators. Due to these changes to the Capped 9 points score (interim measure version) comparisons to previous Capped 9 scores should be avoided. A breakdown of this Capped 9 score (interim measure version) and an explanation of the method used to calculate this measure is available in this [guidance document](#). As a guide, an A* grade at GCSE is worth 58 points, an A grade is worth 52 points, a C grade is worth 40 points and so on. See Definitions for a full breakdown of points by grade.

Skills challenge certificate measure

The Skills Challenge Certificate (SCC) is a key part of Welsh Baccalaureate, available to learners at Foundation Level 1 or National Level 2. National Level 2 is graded A-C and is converted into the same point scores as the subject measures, with an A as 52 and C as 40. The Foundation Level 1 is graded as Pass* and Pass, converted into a point score of 31 and 22. This means caution should be taken when comparing this measure to the three subject performance measures.

Key Stage 4 Key Indicator Changes



Summer 2017

- Level 1 Threshold
- Level 2 Threshold
- Level 2 Threshold inc EWM
- New Capped 9 Points Score (5 + 4 others)
- Level 2 English/Cymraeg (Best) (Lang only)
- Level 2 English (Lang only)
- Level 2 Cymraeg (Lang only)
- Level 2 Mathematics (Best of Maths or Maths-Num)
- Level 2 Science (Best)



Summer 2018

- Level 1 Threshold
- Level 2 Threshold
- Level 2 Threshold inc EWM
- New Capped 9 Points Score (5 + 4 others) (*)
- Level 2 English/Cymraeg (Best) (Lang only)
- Level 2 English (Lang only)
- Level 2 Cymraeg (Lang only)
- Level 2 Mathematics (Best of Maths or Maths-Num)
- Level 2 Science (Best) (*)
- Skills Challenge Certificate (Foundation and National)
- Welsh Baccalaureate Measures (Foundation and National)



Summer 2019 onwards

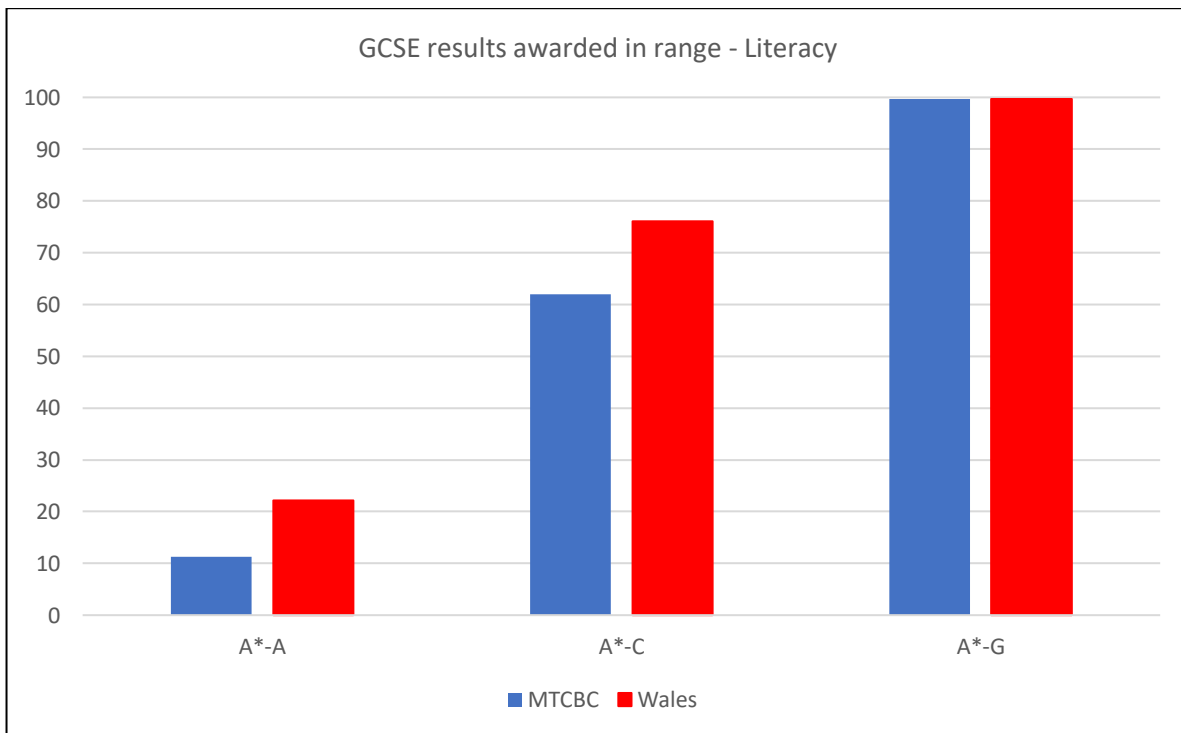
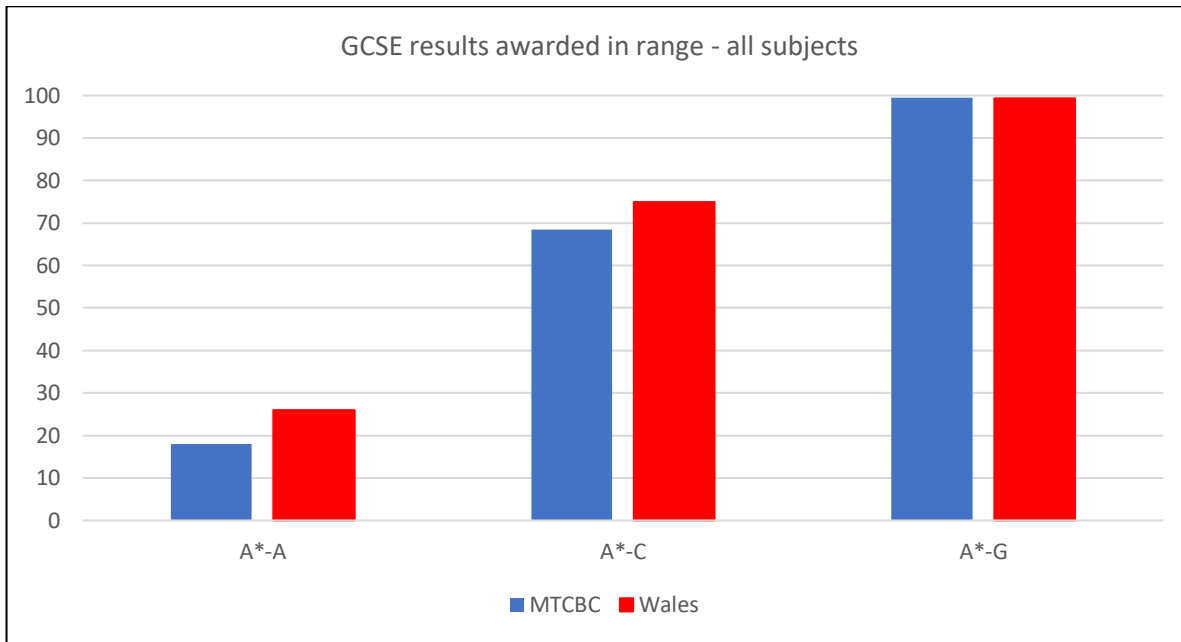
- Average Points Literacy (Best of Literature or Language (En or Cy))
- Average Points Numeracy (Best of Maths or Maths-Num)
- Average Points Science (Best) (*)
- Revised Average Capped 9 Points Score (3 + 6 others)
- Average Points Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate

Only the results of the first awarding of a complete qualification will count towards performance measures.

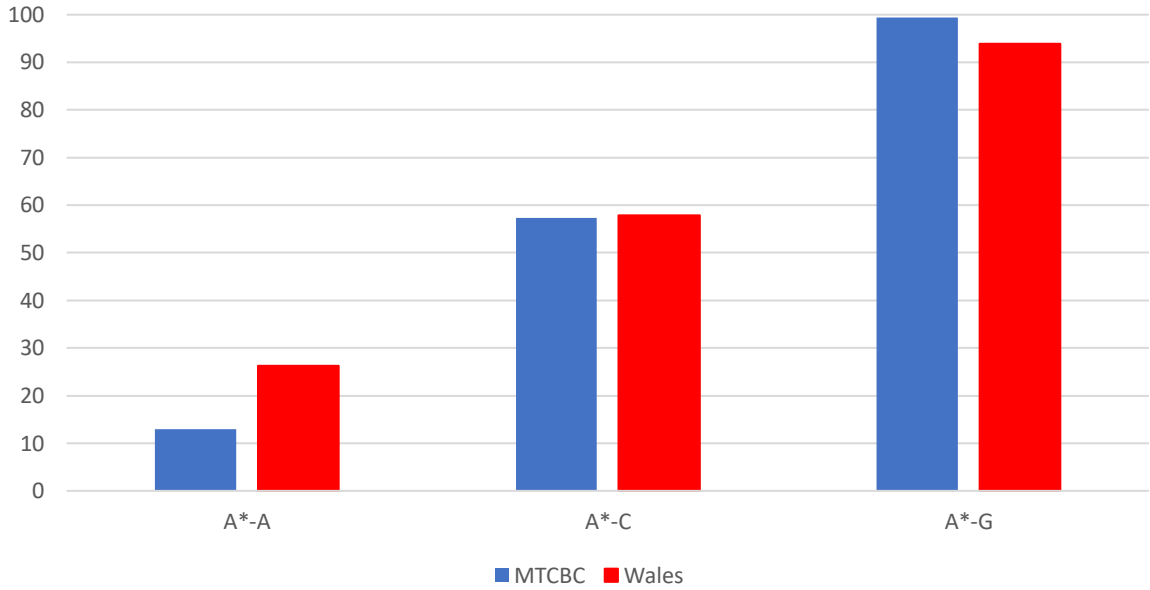
(*) – 'GCSE only' requirements for science indicators and components of the Capped 9 points score

Annex B – Key Stage 4 Grade Distributions

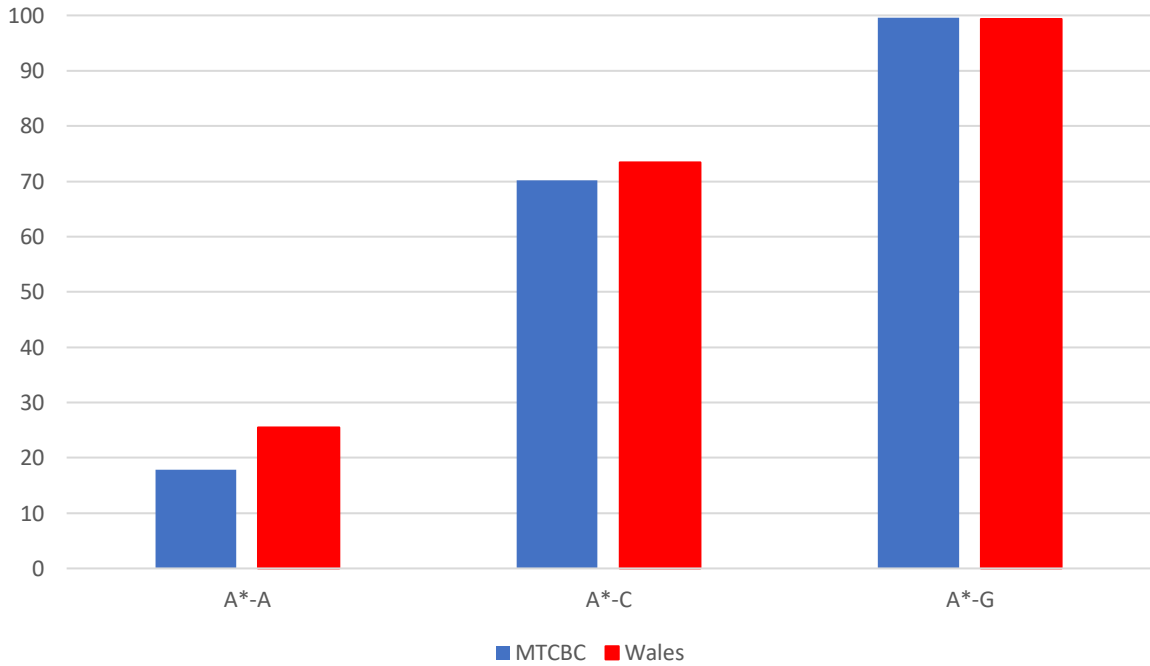
All Pupils



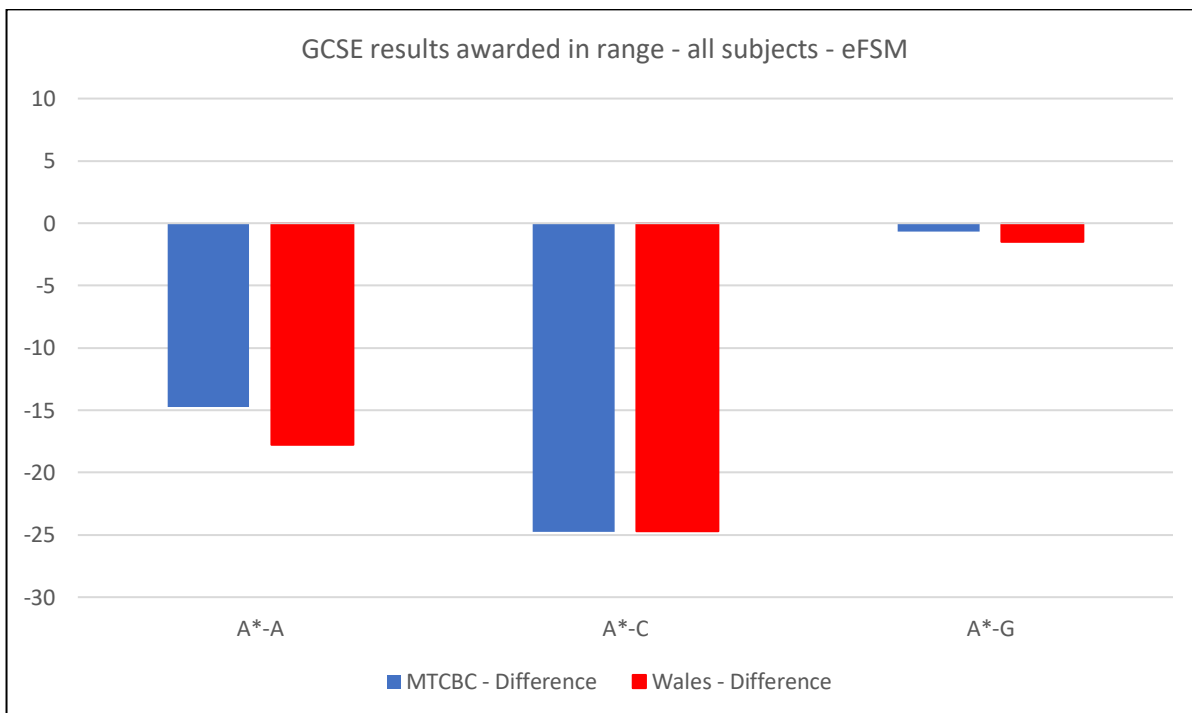
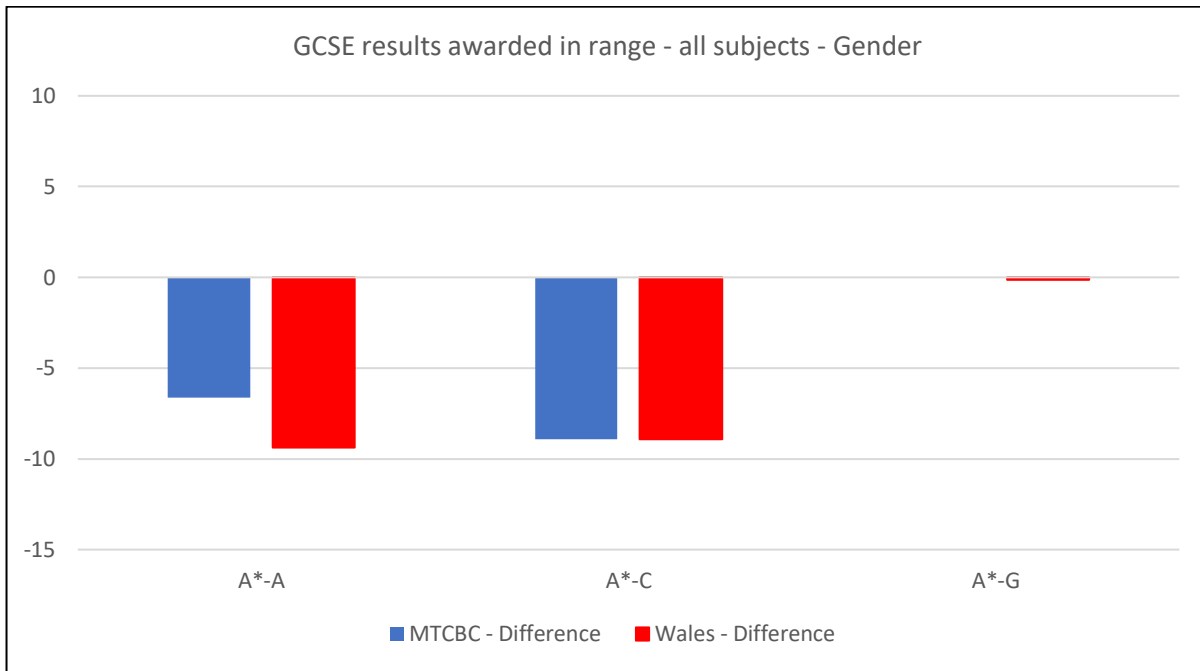
GCSE results awarded in range - Numeracy



GCSE results awarded in range - Science



Groups of pupils



GCSE results awarded in range - all subjects - SEN

