The Institute of Physics is a leading scientific membership society working to advance physics for the benefit of all. We have a worldwide membership, from enthusiastic amateurs to those at the top of their fields in academia, business, education and government. Our purpose is to gather, inspire, guide, represent and celebrate all who share a passion for physics. And, in our role as a charity, we’re here to ensure that physics delivers on its exceptional potential to benefit society. Alongside professional support for our members, we engage with policymakers and the public to increase awareness and understanding of the value that physics holds for all of us.

This briefing outlines a short set of statistics on A-level entrants to physics, analysed by area of the UK, gender, and against comparable A-level subjects and previous years. The data includes all students taking physics A-level in the 2016–2017 academic year, including all 16-to-19 year olds and adult learners.

The data is published annually by the Joint Council for Qualifications. Separate briefs are produced for Scottish Highers results and the Leaving Certificate in Ireland.

2017 entrants in summary:
- Entrants to A-level physics rose by 3.5% on 2016 levels to 36,578 entries.
- In Wales, entrants rose by 3.8% on 2016.
- In Northern Ireland, entries were down 8.6% on 2016.
- Females made up 21.5% of all entrants.
- As a proportion of all A-level entries, physics made up 4.4% of all entries in England, 4.7% in Wales and 4.2% in Northern Ireland.

Entrants to A-level physics
The number of physics A-Level entrants was 2017 is 36578. 88% of those entrants were in England. In 2017, the number of entrants to physics A-Level rose by 3.5% after two years of falling numbers of entries. The increase this year was in spite of a fall in the population of 18 year olds, and overall A-level entries.
As a proportion of all entries, physics entrants made up 4.4% of total A-level entries in England in 2017. In Wales, the proportion was 4.7%. In Northern Ireland it was 4.2%.

The number of entries to A-level physics rose by 3.3% in England in 2017 from 2016. In Wales, numbers rose by 3.8% but in Northern Ireland but entries dropped by 8.6%, its lowest proportion of total entries since 2007.

**Entrants by gender**

21.5% of entrants to A-level physics in 2017 were female. The number of girls taking A-level physics has increased since 2010, in line with the overall rise in the number of entrants. Since the early 1990s, the proportion of girls has remained between a minimum of 20.7% and a maximum of 23.1%.

In other subjects, the proportion of girls taking biology is higher than boys, with 61.7% of the cohort female in 2017. In chemistry girls also surpassed boys in 2017 as 50.9% of the entrants were female, up from 49.9% in 2016. The only subject to have a smaller proportion of girls than physics in 2017 was computer science, where females made up only 9.8% of the 8299 entrants.
When dividing up entrants by the area of the UK, in England, 22% of entrants to A-level physics were female in 2017. This represents little deviation from the average proportion of female entrants in England between 2001 and 2017 in England, which was 21.5%.

In Wales, 21.6% of entrants were female in 2017. Wales has seen a similar trend to England in the proportion of entrants to A-level physics who were girls, but within a slightly wider range: between 17.9% in 2013 and 24.4% in 2001.

Northern Ireland has consistently seen a higher proportion of girls entering A-level physics than England or Wales. The proportion of female A-level physics entrants in Northern Ireland was 28.5% in 2017.

**Comparisons with chemistry, biology and maths**

Since 2001, physics has had a smaller proportion of all entrants than chemistry, biology and mathematics. However, there was a small rise in the number of entrants as a proportion of the total entries this year.

Entrants to physics as a proportion of all entrants was 4.4% in 2017, compared to 6.3% in chemistry, 7.5% in biology and 13.5% in maths and further maths combined.