



**Strictly Embargoed until 09.30 HRS on Thursday 17th August 2017**

## **Northern Ireland GCE results 2017**

- Overall a continued strong performance for NI students
- Gender performance gap widens at the A\* and A grades
- Subject entries remain stable, with Mathematics the most popular subject

Figures released this morning by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ<sup>CIC</sup>), show a continued strong performance from Northern Ireland students in GCE examinations.

### **A level**

Performance across all grades remains stable, with Northern Ireland students continuing to perform well.

There was an increase in performance across all grades. Those awarded the A\* grade increased by 0.4 percentage points to 8.1% of entries. The percentage of entries achieving A\*– A grade increased by 0.9 percentage points to 30.4%. The overall A\*– E pass rate remains stable with a 0.1 percentage point increase to 98.3%.

The performance gap between females and males has widened across all grades. This was due to an increase in outcomes by females and a decrease in outcomes by males across all grades. Females now outperform males by 1.5 percentage points at the A\* grade and 6.5 percentage points at the A\*– A grade.

Female outcomes at the A\* grade increased by 0.9 percentage points to 8.7% and outcomes at the A\*– A grades increased by 2.0 percentage points to 33.3%.

Male outcomes at the A\* grade declined by 0.3 percentage points to 7.2% and outcomes at the A\*– A grade declined by 0.4 percentage points to 26.8%.

A-level entries have seen a slight decrease this year (-3.6%), however this is in line with the overall school population decrease (-3.4% year 14, -3.8% year 13).

Subject choices in Northern Ireland remain broadly stable at A-Level, with Mathematics continuing to be the most popular A-level, accounting for 1 in 10 of entries here.

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) entries have decreased to 39.2% of all A-level entries in Northern Ireland, down from 39.8% in 2016.

There are increases in entries in Computing (+28.6%), Physical Education (+4.7%), Design and Technology (+3.0%), Media/Film/TV (+2%) and Religious Studies (+2.3%).

There were declines in entries in Psychology (-16.3%), Geography (-8.7%), Physics (-8.6%) and History (-7.7%).

## AS level

This year was the first examination of the revised AS levels in Northern Ireland. Outcomes in AS remain stable. Outcomes at the A grade increased by 0.4 percentage points to 27.7%. The gender gap in AS qualifications has narrowed, with females outperforming males by 4.1 percentage points at the A grade.

There are increases in students choosing to study Software Systems Development (Computing +22.3%), Irish (+4.1%), Business Studies (+3.8%) and Media/Film/TV (+2.2%).

AS entries in Northern Ireland have declined by 8.1%, a greater decrease than the school population change (-3.8% year 13). This is likely due to the decision in England to decouple the AS from the final A-level grade. AQA, Pearson, OCR and WJEC Eduqas awarding organisations only offer the AS-level as a standalone option, whilst CCEA and WJEC's AS continue to contribute towards the A-level outcome.

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## Notes to Editors

The statistics below represent the provisional Northern Ireland GCE results from five JCQ awarding organisations:

- AQA
- CCEA
- OCR
- Pearson
- WJEC

**Table 1: Northern Ireland GCE A-level entries and provisional results:**

	2017	2016	2015
<b>Entries</b>	30,684	31,828	32,390
%A*	8.1	7.7	7.6
%A* – A	30.4	29.5	29.3
%A* – E	98.3	98.2	98.2

In Northern Ireland 98.3% of entries achieved the pass grades A\* – E, with 8.1% achieving a grade A\* and 30.4% achieving grades A\* – A.

**Table 2: Five most popular subjects at GCE A-level in N. Ireland**

	OVERALL	MALES	FEMALES
1	Mathematics (10.2%)	Mathematics (12.9%)	Biology (10.8%)
2	Biology (9.4%)	History (7.8%)	Religious Studies (9.0%)
3	History (7.0%)	Biology (7.7%)	English Literature (8.8%)
4	Religious Studies (6.9%)	Physics (6.8%)	Mathematics (8.1%)
5	English Literature (6.5%)	ICT (6.7%)	History (6.4%)

Traditional subjects such as Biology, Mathematics, History and English Literature remain popular in Northern Ireland. The top five subjects have been consistent since 2010. In 2017 overall, the subjects in the top 5 remain unchanged for both males and females, however a number have moved position. History is now the second most popular subject for males, and Religious Studies has climbed two places in the past year from fourth most popular to second for females.

**Table 3: Gender comparisons**

	NI 2017		NI 2016		NI 2015	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>%A*</b>	7.2	8.7	7.5	7.8	7.4	7.8
<b>%A* - A</b>	26.8	33.3	27.2	31.3	27.2	31.0
<b>%A* - E</b>	97.9	98.6	98.0	98.3	97.9	98.4

Females outperform males across the spectrum of grades:

1.5% at Grade A\* (7.2% male, 8.7% female)

6.5% at Grades A\* – A (26.8% male, 33.3% female)

0.7% at Grades A\* – E (97.9% male, 98.6% female).

**Table 4: GCE AS Levels entries and provisional results**

	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2015</b>
<b>Entries</b>	41,961	45,657	47,005
%A	27.7	27.3	27.2
%A – E	94.8	94.8	94.8

1. Detailed tabulations of the GCE AS and A-level, Applied GCE AS and A-level are published separately, also with the STRICT EMBARGO of 09.30 Thursday 17 August 2017 and will be available on the JCQ website from 09.30 on 17 August 2017– [www.jcq.org.uk](http://www.jcq.org.uk)
2. This is the 8th year of the A\*. In order to get an A\*, candidates have to get an A overall for their A level and score 90 per cent or more of the total A2 marks available. It is not awarded for AS or for individual units.
3. All awarding organisations are answerable to the regulatory authorities – Ofqual (England), Welsh Government (Wales) and CCEA (Northern Ireland) – for examinations standards. The regulatory authorities monitor the awarding bodies' standards. In addition, the awarding organisations themselves conduct a number of comparability studies to compare standards. Maintaining standards within and across all qualifications in order to ensure fairness to all candidates is the paramount concern of the awarding bodies.
4. The JCQ comprises AQA, CCEA, City & Guilds, Pearson, OCR, SQA and WJEC – the seven largest providers of qualifications in the UK.
5. The JCQ<sup>CIC</sup> is a membership organisation and enables member awarding bodies to act together in providing, where possible, common administrative arrangements for the schools and colleges and other providers which offer their qualifications; and in responding to proposals and initiatives in assessment and the curriculum.

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