

STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 09:30 HOURS, THURSDAY 15 AUGUST 2019

Female Science Entries Overtake Males for First Time and Spanish Becomes Most Popular Foreign Language

Today, the Joint Council for Qualifications published the 2019 national results for A and AS Levels.

Highlights include:

- A Level entries have increased as a proportion of 18 year-olds, with a decrease of 2.9% in the 18 year-old population in 2019, while the number of entries fell by 1.3%
- Pass rates are stable from 2018 to 2019.
- Changing entry patterns – a slight decline in outcomes at A*-A from 2018 (down by 0.9pp).
- Entries for the sciences continued to increase with female entries for the first time overtaking males.
- Spanish became the most popular foreign language at A Level with entries overtaking French for the first time.
- Mathematics remained the most popular A Level subject.

The continued rise of the sciences – with female entries overtaking male entries

The entries for the sciences (Biology, Chemistry and Physics) continue to rise, reaching 20.9% of all A Levels (167,244) up from 19.2%, continuing the strong trend in recent years. Chemistry entries were up by 9.2%, Biology, up by 8.4% and Physics up by 3.0%.

In these sciences, this year female entries have overtaken male entries, reaching 50.3% (compared to 49.6% in 2018) for the first time.

The increase in entries was accompanied by a decline in A*-A outcomes across all sciences with a reduction of 1.0pp in Chemistry, 1.7pp in Physics and 1.8pp in Biology. The pass rate (A*-E) remained steady at 97.1%.

This year the increase in female entries were larger than male entries in Chemistry (11.2% compared to 6.9%) and Physics (4.9% compared to 2.5%). In the sciences reductions in A*-A outcomes were greater for males than females.

Spanish entries overtake French

For the first time, Spanish entries overtook those for French, making it the most popular foreign language. Spanish entries increased by 4.5% to 8,625 and French decreased by 4.1% to 8,355. German entries remained level.

Entries for French, German and Spanish combined, have levelled off, reversing the decline in recent years against the backdrop of a 2.9% decrease in the size of the 18-year old population.

Outcomes at A*-A and A* are largely unchanged for all three languages, although there is an increase of 2.5pp at A* in German. Males have higher outcomes than females at A*-A in all languages: 37.4% compared to 36.5% in French, 41.4% to 41.1% in German and 35.3% to 35.2% in Spanish.

Mathematics and English

Mathematics remained the most popular subject with a total of 91,895 entries down by 5.9%. Outcomes were mixed; a small improvement at A* with 16.5% achieving this grade (compared to 15.9% in 2018), whilst the number achieving A*-A declined by 1.2pp to 41.0%.

English Language and English Literature declined by 7.8% to 40,824, although English Language saw a larger decrease in entries of 21.8% to 14,114. In all English subjects the decline was larger in male entries compared to female entries, with females now outnumbering males by 3:1.

The outcomes at both A* and A*-A have largely remained unchanged in all English subjects.

Other subjects are increasing

Student choice has led to an increase in entries in other subjects, for example Political Studies (+9.8%), Psychology (+8.2%), History (+5.1%) and Geography (+4.2%). Where there have been significant increases in entries, slight but not unexpected, decreases in the percentage achieving the higher grades have occurred: for example, these subjects show a decrease of between 0.9 to 1.6pp at A*-A.

AS Levels

As expected, the decline in AS Level entries continued with recent policy changes in England, with total entries declining 44.1% (compared to a decline of 52.5% in 2018).

The outcomes for AS Levels were also down, with A grades declining to 21.5% in 2019 from 27.5%, a decline of 6.0pp, with the decline in male A grades of 8.3pp compared to a decline of 3.8pp for females.

Update on gender patterns

There are a number of changes in relation to gender. Increases in female entries outstrip those for males in several subjects. In fact, as has been previously highlighted, this has led to more female entries in the core sciences (Biology, Chemistry and Physics) with females now constituting 50.3% of entries. This was driven by an 11.3% increase in females in Chemistry and an increase of 4.9% in Physics.

Other subjects have also shown significant changes, for example Computing, whose entry has traditionally been dominantly male, saw female entries increase by 21.4%, albeit from a small entry.

Dr Philip Wright, Director General of JCQ said: *“All students across the UK receiving their A level results today should be proud of their achievements. They have worked hard over the last two years and it is a moment for them, together with their teachers, families and friends to celebrate.*

“This year’s pass rates are stable across all A levels and it is particularly encouraging to see the rise in young women being inspired to take science A levels. For the very first time, female entries have overtaken male entries in the sciences. We have also seen a rise in entries for subjects such as history, geography, computing and political studies. I wish all students success in their future courses of study and careers.”

Notes to Editors

1. Details on the reforms in England, including content changes and timetable can be found here: [GCSE, AS and A level reforms](#)
2. Details on reforms in Wales and Northern Ireland can be found here: Qualifications Wales – [A and AS Levels in Wales](#); and CCEA – [Regulation GCE and GCSE](#)
3. 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 15 August 2019 and will be available on the JCQ^{CIC} website from 09.30 on 15 August 2019 – www.jcq.org.uk
4. These results are for qualifications taken by students across the UK but predominantly in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
5. Other modern languages are: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Dutch, Gujarati, Italian, Japanese, Modern Greek, Modern Hebrew, Panjabi, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Turkish, and Urdu.
6. All awarding organisations are answerable to the regulatory authorities - Ofqual (England), Qualifications Wales (Wales) and CCEA (Northern Ireland). 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.
7. The JCQ^{CIC} comprises AQA, CCEA, City & Guilds, NCFE, OCR, Pearson, SQA and WJEC – the eight largest providers of qualifications in the UK.
8. The JCQ^{CIC} 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 responding to proposals and initiatives in assessment and the curriculum.
9. Media contacts: The JCQ’s press office can be contacted on: 020 7227 0671/020 7638 4132/07905 683 816