

STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 09:30 HOURS, THURSDAY 13 AUGUST 2020

UK standards have been maintained and top grades A*-A rise by 2.4 percentage points

Today, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) publishes the 2020 national results for A and AS Levels.

The GCE A Level, AS and GCSE examinations were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic and this year's results are derived from Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) and rank orders submitted by schools and colleges.

Qualification standards have been maintained by combining these professional judgements with data on historical centre performance and cohort attainment held by exam boards. This process of standardisation, mandated by Ofqual in England and Qualifications Wales in Wales and CCEA Regulation in Northern Ireland¹, has ensured a level playing field across all schools and colleges, avoiding potentially significant grade inflation and preserving the value of these qualifications.

The approach to awarding grades this year is the fairest way of enabling young people to progress with their education or careers.

In the UK overall

- The profile of grades is similar to previous years, with A* grades increasing by 1.2 pp and A*-A 2.4 percentage points (pp) compared to 2019, and the overall pass rate is 0.7pp higher than in 2019 and 2018
- In England 96.5% of grades awarded were the same or within one grade of the submitted Centre Assessment Grade (CAG) (58.7 % awarded the same as the CAG with 35.6% receiving one grade lower and 2.2% one grade higher)
- Mathematics entries increased by 2.5% and English entries by 1.8% in 2020. In contrast, science entries fell by 4.9%. Spanish continues to increase as the most popular modern foreign language, with entries up 0.9%.
- Females achieved more A*-A grades 28.4% against males 27.3%. However, males achieved more A* grades 9.3% against females 8.8%.
- AS Level entries declined by 20.5% this year, following a decrease of 44.1% in 2019, suggesting entries may be beginning to level off.

¹ The differences in the standardisation processes reflect the different awarding systems in the three jurisdictions.

English and Mathematics subjects

Mathematics extended its lead as the most popular single subject with a total of 94,168 entries up from 91,895. Mathematics now accounts for 12.1% of all A Levels up from 11.5%.

A* grades increased to 17.0%, up from 16.5%, A*-A increased to 41.9% up from 41.0% and overall passes (A*-E grades) increased to 97.7%, up from 96.8%.

Overall A Level English entries increased by 1.8%. Within this subject group English Language (6.6%) and English Literature (1.3%) both increased while English Literature & Language continued its recent decline, dropping by 3.9% in 2020.

- English Literature increased by 1.3% to 41,367
- English Language increased by 6.6% to 15,052
- English Literature & Language declined by 3.9% to 7,877

There were small increases in all English subjects at A* and A*-A grades. Pass rates also showed a small increase.

Sciences

While overall total science entries (biology, chemistry, physics) fell in 2020 to 158,976 from 167,244, a 4.9% decline, they still accounted for over 20% of all A Level entries (20.4% in 2020, down from 20.9% in 2019)

- biology entries declined by 6.0% to 65,057 from 69,196 in 2019 (63,819 in 2018)
- chemistry entries declined by 5.2% to 56,026 from 59,090 in 2019 (54,134 in 2018)
- physics entries declined by 2.8% to 37,893 from 38,958 in 2019 (37,806 in 2018)

Female entries fell by less than male entries, and females now account for 50.9% of science entries, up from 50.3% in 2019.

The proportion of A* grades awarded in biology and chemistry were up marginally in 2020 compared to 2019 but were similar to results in 2018: biology A* grades increased to 7.6% from 7.0% in 2019, but was equivalent to 2018; and A*s in chemistry increased to 8.6% up from 7.6% in 2019, but only marginally higher than the 8.4% awarded in 2018.

Physics saw a larger increase in A* grades, increasing to 10.5%, up from 8.7% in 2019 and 9.4% in 2018. It is worth noting that 2019 saw a decline in science outcomes against the backdrop of increasing entry size.

Spanish A Level entries continue to increase

Spanish entries increased by 0.9% up to 8,705, while French entries declined by 1.1% to 8,260. German entries showed a more significant decline of 6.2%, dropping below 3,000 for the first time (to 2,845).

AS Levels

As expected, the decline in AS Level entries continued as a result of the policy changes in England a few years ago, with total entries declining 20.5% to 153,693: this follows reductions of 44.1% in 2019 and 52.5% in 2018.

Dr Philip Wright, Director General of JCQ said: *“Students across the UK receiving their A level results today should be proud of their grades, which reflect their hard work and commitment over the previous two years. Thank you to all the teachers, senior leaders and exams officers whose efforts to produce the Centre Assessment Grades will mean students are able to move on to the next phase of their education or into employment.”*

‘This is a moment for students to celebrate their learning and we wish them all the best as they take their next steps in life.’

-Ends-

Notes to Editors

1. Grades submitted by school and colleges (known as Centre Assessment Grades or CAGs) and rank orders formed the basis for the standardised final grades. Standardisation was necessary in order to ensure parity between the way grades were awarded from different schools and colleges, putting all students on a level playing field.

The mechanism to determine each grade was:

- to be based on each students’ ability in the subject, based on an exam centres’ assessment, supplemented by a range of evidence; and
- ensuring that qualification standards are maintained, and the distribution of grades follows a similar profile to previous years.

The exam boards and JCQ have worked to deliver results this year in a way that is as fair as possible given the circumstances, using the standardisation model developed by regulators. Ofqual has published information on their standardisation model, which is based on three key sources of information:

- i. Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) and rank orders of entered students in each subject, reflecting their achievements and work over the previous two years;
 - ii. the historical record of the centre; and
 - iii. the prior attainment of the cohort of students for each subject.
2. Detailed tabulations of the GCE AS and A Level, and Applied GCE AS and A Level results are published separately, also with the STRICT EMBARGO of 09.30 Thursday 13 August 2020 and will be available on the JCQ^{CIC} website from 09.30 on 13 August 2020 – www.jcq.org.uk
 3. These results are issued to students across the UK but predominantly in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

4. Other modern languages are Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Dutch, Gujarati, Italian, Japanese, Modern Greek, Modern Hebrew, Panjabi, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Turkish, and Urdu.
5. All awarding organisations are answerable to the regulatory authorities - Ofqual (England), Qualifications Wales (Wales) and CCEA Regulation (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.
6. 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. The JCQ^{CIC} comprises AQA, CCEA, City & Guilds, NCFE, OCR, Pearson, SQA and WJEC – the eight largest providers of qualifications in the UK.
7. Media contacts: The JCQ's press office can be contacted on 020 7227 0671/020 7638 4132/07905 683 816/07399 870 337