



Strictly Embargoed until 09.30 HRS on Thursday 12 August 2021

Northern Ireland GCSE Results 2021

- **GCSE students continue to perform well in an exceptional year**
- **Grades determined by schools and colleges based on a range of evidence**
- **A flexible approach to take account of varied levels of disruption**

Figures released this morning by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ^{CIC}) show Northern Ireland's GCSE students have continued to perform well and demonstrated remarkable resilience in an exceptional year.

This achievement by students is recognition of their hard work and resilience in overcoming the many challenges and disruption brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the cancellation of examinations, in January 2021 by the Education Minister, GCSE grades have been determined by teacher professional judgement using a range of evidence. The grades awarded reflect the actual work completed by the students, accounting for the varying levels of disruption experienced by schools, colleges, and individual students.

Throughout Northern Ireland, teachers have demonstrated great commitment and effort to ensure that students are able to progress on to the next stage of their journey this year, be it further education, employment or training.

Across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, similar approaches to centre determined grades were adopted by the awarding organisations, with extensive engagement and collaboration undertaken with schools, colleges, regulators, and the wider education system.

Awarding organisations provided a wide range of support to schools and colleges as the alternative arrangements were progressed. This included assessment materials, training, guidance, and an external quality review process.

As the means of determining grades in 2021 has been different to any other summer, it was anticipated that the overall distribution of grades would differ from that of a standard year.

GCSE

GCSE entries in Northern Ireland have increased by 2.6% from 162,035 to 166,172 in line with the rise in school population.

This year, the proportion of entries awarded grade A/7 has increased by 3.6 percentage points to 39.9%. The number of entries achieving A/7–C/4 has remained stable at 89.6%, previously 89.8% in 2020.

Outcomes increased at A/7 for both males and females, by 3.3 percentage points for males and 3.8 percentage points for females. The gap between genders across all grades, remains consistent with previous years.

In GCSE English Language, the percentage of entries achieving A/7 grade increased by 1.5 percentage points to 29.8%, with a slight decrease of 1.1 percentage points at grades A/7–C/4, from 87.2% in 2020 to 86.1% in 2021.

This year entries achieving A/7 grade in GCSE Mathematics increased by 0.8 percentage points to 30.5%, compared to 29.7% in the previous year. Grades A/7–C/4 also showed an increase of 2.4 percentage points to 81.5%, from 79.1% in 2020.

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects now account for 42% of all GCSE entries in Northern Ireland, with an increase of 3.9% on the previous year.

This is the fourth year of the 9–1 grade scale offered by England based awarding organisations. A small percentage of students in Northern Ireland (3%) will receive a 9–1 grade, with the vast majority (97%) of students continuing to take A* - G graded GCSEs.

Standards remain anchored at grades A/7, C/4 and G/1. Comparisons across years, subjects and jurisdictions are possible at these anchor points.

Ends

Media enquiries to:

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For information about the UK results, contact the JCQ^{CIC} press office on 020 7227 0671, or 07399 870337 or at pressoffice@jcq.org.uk

Further statistical details on the results for the UK, Wales, England, and Northern Ireland may be found at www.jcq.org.uk

Notes to Editors

Summer 2021: Alternative approach to assessment and grading

Following the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided that exams would not go ahead as planned, across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

This year schools and colleges were asked to use a range of evidence to arrive at a professional and academic judgement of a student's performance based only on the content they had been taught. The approach allowed for a high degree of flexibility for schools and colleges to take into account the variations in the level of disruption and learning experienced by students.

Further information on the alternative awarding arrangements for Summer 2021 is available at:

CCEA

Summer 2021 alternative awarding process

www.ccea.org.uk/summer-2021

Key documents

[GCSE, AS and A Level Awarding Summer 2021 Alternative Arrangements – Process for Heads of Centre](#)

[How GCSE, AS and A level qualifications will be awarded in Summer 2021: A Student Guide](#)

WJEC

WJEC Summer 2021 – www.wjec.co.uk/home/summer-2021-get-the-support-you-need

JCQ

Summer 2021 arrangements

www.jcq.org.uk/summer-2021-arrangements/

Ofqual - www.gov.uk/ofqual

Qualifications Wales www.qualificationswales.org/english/awarding-2021/

Further information on the GCSE grade changes is available

http://ccea.org.uk/regulation/gcse_grading

The statistics below represent the provisional Northern Ireland GCSE results from five JCQ awarding organisations: - AQA, CCEA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC

Table 1: Northern Ireland GCSE entries and provisional results

| | 2021 | 2020 |
|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| Entries | 166,172 | 162,035 |
| % A/7 | 39.9 | 36.3 |
| %A/7 - C/4 | 89.6 | 89.8 |
| % A/7 - G/1 | 99.2 | 99.7 |

Table 2: Northern Ireland GCSE provisional results by gender (combined A*-G/9-1)

| 2021 Provisional | Males | | Females | |
|------------------|-------------|------|-------------|------|
| | 2021 | 2020 | 2021 | 2020 |
| % A/7 | 32.7 | 29.4 | 46.6 | 42.8 |
| %A/7 - C/4 | 87.1 | 87.6 | 91.9 | 91.9 |
| % A/7 - G/1 | 99.0 | 99.7 | 99.3 | 99.8 |

1. The JCQ^{CIC} is a membership body and comprises AQA, CCEA, City & Guilds, NCFE, OCR, Pearson, SQA and WJEC – the eight largest providers of qualifications in the UK.
2. Detailed tabulations of the GCSE Full Course, GCSE Short Course, GCSE Double Award, Entry Level Certification, Level 1, and Level 2 Project are published separately, with the STRICT EMBARGO OF 09.30 HOURS THURSDAY 12 AUGUST 2021 and will be available on the JCQ website from 09.30 on 12 August at www.jcq.org.uk
3. These results are for qualifications taken by students across the UK but predominantly in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.
4. All awarding organisations are answerable to the regulatory authorities - Ofqual (England), Welsh Government (Wales) and CCEA Regulation (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.