

STRICT EMBARGO: 09.30 hours Thursday 15 August 2013

Small dip in top grades, Maths and Science remain strong, but languages continue to fall

The number of A levels awarded A* or A grades this summer has dipped slightly by 0.3 percentage points to 26.3 per cent while the overall pass rate (A*-E) increased marginally by 0.1 percentage points to 98.1 per cent.

A level results, published today by the Joint Council for Qualifications, show that the percentage of A*s achieved was 7.6 per cent, down on last year's total of 7.9 per cent. 37 per cent of all 18 year olds in the UK take at least one A level.

Students continue to opt for A levels in the sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics), which have seen continual increases in entries in recent years. This year, these subjects accounted for 17.8 per cent of all A levels taken compared with 17.0 per cent in 2012 and 15.0 per cent in 2009. Similar increases in the proportion of total entry can be seen in Mathematics and Further Mathematics, which together account for 12.0 per cent of all A levels taken (11.5 per cent in 2012 and 9.8 per cent in 2009).

Results show that in 2013 there were 23,914 more entries for the sciences (Biology, Chemistry Physics) compared with 2009. For Mathematics and Further Mathematics the figure was 18,933.

Other subjects that have witnessed significant increases in entries since last year include Chemistry (5.2 per cent); Further Mathematics (4.5 per cent); Spanish (4.1 per cent); and Physics (3.1 per cent).

Economics had the biggest percentage increase in entries, rising 7.4 per cent to 26,139. This rise follows the trend that has seen the number of entries for Economics increase 50.0 per cent since 2007.

Traditional Modern Foreign Languages continue to be a less popular choice for students. Although entries for Spanish increased 4.1 per cent compared with last year, entries for French and German have fallen 9.9 per cent and 11.1 per cent respectively. Collectively, these subjects have seen entries fall 6.0 per cent since 2012 and 17.8 per cent since 2008.

This year's results show that subject choices being made by males and females reinforce existing gender differences. For example, English entries are dominated by females, who account for 71.8 per cent of the total entries. This year, 2.3 per cent fewer males took English compared with an increase of 0.6 per cent in the number of females. In Physics 79.3 per cent of entries were by males who increased their entries by 3.8 per cent this year compared with a 0.2 per cent increase for females.

AS

Entries for AS this year were down 0.4 per cent despite the number of 17 year olds increasing by 0.2 per cent. Despite this, entries for Computing increased 15.1 per cent; Further Mathematics 7.9 per cent; Economics 5.0 per cent; and Chemistry 3.9 per cent.

Extended Project

The Extended Project continued to be popular with students. Entries rose 6.4 per cent to 30,401 building on last year's increase of 18.6 per cent.

Applied AS and A level

Entries for the Applied Single and Double Awards at A and AS level continued to decline. The number of entries for the Double Award declined 19.2% per cent to 5,360 and there was a 4.2 per cent drop for the Single Award to 31,081.

Commenting on this year's A level results, Michael Turner, Director of the Joint Council for Qualifications said:

"This year, over 850,000 A level grades and over 1.3 million AS grades were issued. This is an opportunity to thank the tens of thousands of examiners, who are mostly teachers, who each year work tirelessly to mark the examination papers.

"The continued rise in subjects such as the sciences, Mathematics, and the Extended Project, will be welcomed. However, that so few students take a language at A level is disappointing and although Spanish continues to show growth the overall trend remains downwards. With any reverse in this decline likely to emerge first at GCSE, it will be interesting to see whether the Ebacc* has had an impact on this year's GCSE entry patterns.

"A huge amount of hard work and commitment has gone into achieving these results and we should all join in congratulating students across the country and wish them well for whichever path they chose next."

** The English Baccalaureate (Ebacc) is a new performance measure by the Department for Education introduced in the 2010 performance tables. It recognises the success of pupils who attain GCSEs or iGCSEs at grades A*-C across a core of academic subjects - English, mathematics, history or geography, the sciences and a language.*

Notes for editors

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 15 August 2013 and will be available on the JCQ website from 09.30 on 15 August 2013 – www.jcq.org.uk
2. These results are for qualifications taken by students across the UK but predominantly in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
3. This is the fourth 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.
4. 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.
5. The approach to maintaining standards in awarding is informed by 'comparable outcomes' as described in the Ofqual document available at: <http://ofqual.gov.uk/standards/summer-exams-2013/setting-standards/>
6. The JCQ comprises AQA, CCEA, City & Guilds, Pearson, OCR, SQA and WJEC – the seven largest providers of qualifications in the UK
7. The JCQ was established in 2004 and superseded the Joint Council for General Qualifications (JCGQ 1998-2003). The JCQ 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.
8. **Media contacts: The JCQ's press office can be contacted on: 020 7227 0671/020 7638 4132/07905 683 816**