

A-LEVEL PASS RATE RISES TO RECORD HIGH

- Proportion of A-level entries receiving an A grade or higher increased to 38.1%
- Last Thursday results showed that some 27.6% of entries achieved an A or above
- Overall pass rate for grades A* to E has also risen to an all-time high at 99.7%

By Joe Middleton

More than ten per cent of A-level students results have been upgraded to an A or higher after the algorithm was ditched for teacher assessed marks following an outcry.

The proportion of A-level entries receiving an A grade or higher has increased to a record high for England, with 38.1% awarded the top grades. When this year's results were first released last week under the controversial moderation system, some 27.6% of entries achieved an A or above. Meanwhile, the overall pass rate for grades A* to E has also risen to an all-time high at 99.7% for England, up from the 98.2% who achieved the same in last Thursday's results, figures provided by the exams regulator Ofqual show.

It comes after the Government announced students would be able to receive grades based on teacher assessments, rather than an algorithm, after thousands of results were downgraded last Thursday.

The exams fiasco has piled pressure on Education Secretary Gavin Williamson, who is now under intense scrutiny to ensure students get back to school in September.

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Prior to the Government's U-turn, exam boards had downgraded nearly two-in-five (39.1%) grades in England, according to data from Qfqual - equating to about 280,000 entries being adjusted down after moderation.

Gavin Williamson is 'on his last life' after his exams fiasco and will be sacked if schools reopening is botched, Cabinet colleagues claim

Gavin Williamson is 'on his last life' after his humiliating exams fiasco and will be sacked if Boris Johnson's schools reopening is botched, ministers claimed today.

The under-fire Education Secretary has defied calls to resign from MPs across the board following his disastrously mishandled A-level grading debacle.

Cabinet colleagues now believe that Mr Williamson, who is desperately trying to cling to his job, cannot



survive another mishap if he also bungles the PM's promise to reopen schools in England in time for the new term in September.

A total of 35.6% of grades were adjusted down by one grade, 3.3% were brought down by two grades and 0.2% came down by three grades.

Teachers were told to submit the grades they thought each student would have received if they had sat the papers, alongside a rank order of students, after exams were cancelled amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, exam boards moderated the grades to ensure this year's results were not significantly higher than previously and the value of students' grades were not undermined.

Meanwhile, approximately 15,000 students who were rejected by their first-choice university will now meet the offer conditions set for them to study after the grading U-turn.

Ucas (the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) said universities had 'exercised flexibility' after it analysed the results from the four largest awarding bodies for 160,000 students who received upgraded A-level marks in England.

They showed that around 100,000 of those students had already secured a place at their first-choice university on results day last Thursday.

Of the remaining 60,000 students, around one in four, approximately 15,000, will now meet the A-level offer conditions of their original first choice university, Ucas said.

It comes as the proportion of GCSE entries in England awarded top grades has surged to a record high after a U-turn meant results could be based on teachers' estimated grades amid cancelled exams.

Hundreds of thousands of youngsters received their GCSE results on Thursday following major changes - but around 200,000 Btec pupils will not get their final results following a last-minute review of grades.

More than one in four (25.9%) GCSE entries in England scored one of the three top grades this year, up from just over a fifth (20.7%) last summer, figures from exams regulator Ofqual show.



The proportion receiving at least a 7 - the equivalent of an A grade - is a record high based on available data following the decision to award grades based on teachers' assessments, rather than an algorithm

A number of A-Level subjects have seen large jumps in pupils receiving A or higher compared to 2019 results

Figures from Ofqual show that 6.3% of entries in England were awarded a 9 - the highest grade under the new numerical grading system - this year.

More than three in four (76%) entries were awarded at least a 4 - which is broadly the equivalent of a C - in England, which is up 8.9 percentage points on last year when 67.1% achieved the grades.

Ofqual 'knew algorithm was doomed to failure'

Watchdog Ofqual knew its algorithm was 'doomed' in June, a whistleblower claimed last night.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, an adviser who helped to develop the software said it was evident 'there would be winners and losers' as soon as schools submitted teacher-assessed grades between June 1 and 12.

'There was a very specific point when it became doomed,' he said. 'There was clearly always a potential this could blow, because of the nature of it. There wasn't really even a need to discuss that point, because it was always lingering in the background.'

In a further blow to Gavin Williamson, it was also claimed that the Education Secretary was personally warned about the algorithm's shortcomings last month.

Sir Jon Coles, a former board member of the Department for Education who helped to found Ofqual, is said to have told Mr Williamson that the algorithm was only 75 per cent accurate. Mr Williamson and Sir Jon spoke about the issue in July but the minister decided to back the algorithm anyway, The Times reported.

Labour peer Lord Falconer has reportedly said the algorithm was unlawful. Ofqual and the Department for Education did not respond to requests for comment.

It comes after GCSE and A-level students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland were told they would now be awarded the higher of either their teachers' grade or the moderated grade following an outcry.

Last week, nearly two in five (39.1%) of the A-level grades submitted by schools and colleges in England - around 280,000 entries in total - were adjusted down after moderation.

But new Ofqual data shows that the proportion of A-level entries now receiving an A grade or higher has increased to a record high for England following the U-turn, with 38.1% awarded the top grades.

When this year's results were first released last week under the controversial moderation system, some 27.6% of entries achieved an A or above.

Exam boards had moderated the grades - using an algorithm from Ofqual - to ensure this year's results were not significantly higher than previously and the value of students' grades was not undermined.

Schools minister Nick Gibb apologised to students on Thursday morning for the 'pain and the anxiety' they felt prior to this week's exam grading U-turn.

Traditional A*-G GCSE grades have been scrapped and replaced in England with a 9-1 system with 9 the highest result. A 4 is broadly equivalent to a C grade, and a 7 broadly equivalent to an A.

Students receiving GCSE results this summer will get numerical grades for all their subjects as all courses have now moved over to the new grading system.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), is expecting staff to have 'challenging' conversations with GCSE students unhappy with results.

He said one sixth form college was threatened with a solicitor and had to deal with 'abusive' parents' after 'all hell broke loose' over the colleges' estimated grades for A-levels last week.

Speaking to the PA news agency on Wednesday ahead of GCSE results day, Mr Barton said: 'That will be repeated tomorrow I guess. I think people are expecting difficult conversations.'

'It will be around a misunderstanding of 'This is an individual teacher. She didn't like me. She has therefore marked me down.'

Colleges are urgently calling for more funding from the Government to cope with a surge of pupils who will be able to meet entry requirements for sixth form colleges amid the algorithm U-turn.

Some colleges are already at maximum capacity and there is a limit to the number of pupils they can admit amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA) has said.

But hundreds of thousands of Btec students are still waiting for their final grades after the exam board told schools and colleges not to release the results to pupils on Thursday.

Btec grades were not included in the original U-turn, but on Wednesday - with just hours to go until results day - examiner Pearson said it would regrade Btecs to 'address concerns about unfairness'.

Mr Gibb said he is hopeful that students will get their Btec results next week.

Speaking to BBC Breakfast, he said: 'To those hundreds of thousands of young people receiving their GCSE grades and the A-level students receiving recalculated grades, I will say this to them, congratulations on what you have achieved.'

'But also how sorry I am for the pain, the anxiety and the uncertainty that they will have suffered as a consequence of the grading issues we encountered last week.'