

A-LEVEL RESULTS 2018



The number of top A-level grades is at a six-year high, despite the introduction of new “tougher” exams this year, national figures show.

In total, 26.4 per cent of students were awarded either an A or A* this year, the highest since 2012 when 26.6 per cent achieved these grades.

For the second year running, boys are winning more of the highest grades than girls, with 26.2 per cent of girls achieving As or A* compared to 26.6 per cent of boys.

This is the second year in a row that the A*-A pass rate has risen.

Students across the country are receiving their A-level results on Thursday, with many subjects re-designed so that coursework and modules are axed.

One in 12 (8 per cent) entries scored an A* grade this year, down 0.3 percentage points on last year, according to statistics published by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). This is the lowest it has been since 2013.

The overall A*-E pass rate has also fallen 0.3 percentage points to 97.6 per cent - the lowest level since 2010.

Boys continue to outperform girls at the highest grades, the figures show, with 26.6 per cent of boys' entries awarded at least an A grade, compared to 26.2 per cent for entries from their female peers.

Students celebrate their A-level results at Brighton College. Many courses have been re-designed this year, with coursework and modules axed

The statistics also show that STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths) are continuing to rise in popularity.

More than a third (36.2 per cent) of all A-level entries were in these subjects, up from 34.5 per cent last year, and 28 per cent in 2009.

Boys are still more likely to study a STEM subject than girls, but the balance is shifting, JCQ said. More girls take biology and chemistry than boys, while more boys take maths and physics.

But the data also shows that girls are closing in on the boys, with a 3.1 per cent increase in maths entries from female students (boys' entries for the subject have risen 2.1 per cent) and a 6.9 per cent rise in physics (2.4 per cent for boys).

The figures come in the wake of a major exams overhaul - with 24 A-level subjects now reformed.

Grades have been awarded for the first time this summer for new A-levels in languages, geography, dance, drama and theatre, music, PE and religious studies.



They join the 13 A-level subjects for which the first grades were handed out last summer.

Michael Turner, JCQ director general, said: “Students, and teachers, should be congratulated. They can be confident in their grades, knowing they have been achieved in a world-class system that is robust, challenging and fair.”

There have been concerns that changes to A-levels were leading to a rise in anxiety and stress in young people preparing for their exams.

Education secretary Damian Hinds said the reforms meant that teenagers would be sitting fewer public exams.

“We all have much more awareness these days about mental health in young people and the government is putting a lot of emphasis on that, both in the health service overall but also specifically in education,” he said.

Further maths remains the subject in which pupils are most likely to achieve top grades, with 58.1 per cent achieving A/A* this year.

Irish was in second place on this measure on 54.7 per cent although the comparatively small number of entries for the subject will affect the figures.

At the other end of the scale, English language was one of the subjects where students were least likely to scoop the top grades with just 11.8 per cent getting an A or an A*.

The biggest fall in top grades this year was in other sciences, with the proportion getting A/A*s down by 2.5 points, while drama saw the biggest increase (up 1.6 points).

Chinese now more popular A-level than German

The number of students sitting Chinese at A-level has surpassed those choosing German this year.

While 3,058 students sat exams for the European language, 3,334 chose Chinese - a rise of 8.6 per cent compared to last year.



Suzanne O’Farrell, curriculum and assessment specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said: “We’re seeing German just moving into extinction really. It is in severe decline.”

The change comes as the popularity of traditional languages continues to fall. French has seen an eight per cent decline in uptake this year and the number of students sitting Spanish has fallen by four per cent.

Drop in number of students accepted onto degrees

There has been a fall in the number of students accepted on degree courses at UK universities, early figures show.

In total, 411,860 students - from the UK and overseas - have taken up places, down one per cent compared to the same point last year, according to initial data published by admissions service Ucas.

A breakdown shows 353,960 UK students have been accepted on to undergraduate courses, down two per cent on 2017.

But there is an increase in international students, with 26,400 EU applicants accepted to study at UK universities - up one per cent on last year.