



Strictly Embargoed until 09.30 HRS on Tuesday 10 August 2021

Northern Ireland GCE results in 2021

- AS/ A level grades awarded in a year unlike any other
- Grades determined by schools and colleges based on a range of evidence
- A flexible approach to take account of varied levels of disruption

Today, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) published the A and AS level results for Northern Ireland.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this year's examinations were cancelled by the Education Minister, in January 2021. Alternative awarding arrangements were rapidly put in place, as schools, colleges, awarding organisations, regulators and the wider education system worked collaboratively to ensure that students could progress onto the next stage of their journey, be it further education, employment, or training. Similar approaches of teacher assessed grades were also adopted in England and Wales.

Teachers worked extremely hard, using their professional judgement and a range of evidence to determine students' grades. This flexibility, at the core of the process, ensured that schools and colleges were able to reflect what students had been taught and account for the various levels of disruption they experienced.

To support schools and colleges, awarding organisations provided extensive guidance, training and external quality assurance, to ensure grades were determined appropriately.

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.

The provisional figures released today, demonstrate the collaboration of schools, colleges, awarding organisations, regulators, and the wider education system to implement the Summer 2021 alternative awarding arrangements.

A level

At A level 15.8% of students achieved the top A* grade, a 2.3 percentage point increase from last year. The A* - A grade also increased by 7.5 percentage points to 50.8%. At grades A* - E there was a 0.4 percentage point decrease to 99.4%, compared to 99.8% last year.

Outcomes increased across grades A* to A this year for both males and females: by 7.0 percentage points for males, and 7.9 percentage points for females. The gap between genders, at the highest grades, is similar to previous years.

Entries for A levels in Northern Ireland are up by 3.8%, which is in line with the increase in the school-age population. This year Mathematics continues to be the most popular A level, accounting for just under 1 in 10 entries.

Participation in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) saw a small increase of 0.7 percentage points on the previous year, accounting for 36.5% of overall entries. This was largely driven by an increase in entries for Chemistry (+5%), Biology (+5.6%), Physics (+20.4%) and Mathematics (+5.9%).

AS level

AS level entries saw a further decline of 12.8% in Northern Ireland. This can be mainly attributed to the decoupling of the AS by the English based awarding organisations.

Provisional AS outcomes increased at grade A by 7.1 percentage points, with a decrease in the A - E of 0.7 percentage points.

ENDS

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For information about the UK results, contact the JCQ^{CIC}'s 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. Students' grades were based on their school or college's professional assessment of the evidenced standard at which the student was performing in the content they have covered.

The approach allowed for a high degree of flexibility for schools and colleges to take account of the varying levels of disruption 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/

A / AS level provisional results 2021

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

Table 1: Northern Ireland GCE A level entries and provisional results:

	2021*	2020*
Entries	32,111	30,922
%A*	15.8	13.5
%A* - A	50.8	43.3
%A* - E	99.4	99.8

Table 2: Five most popular subjects at GCE A level in Northern Ireland

	OVERALL	MALES	FEMALES
1	Mathematics (9.8%)	Mathematics (13.2%)	Health and Social Care (Single Award) (12.5%)
2	Biology (8.7%)	History (8.4%)	Biology (9.6%)
3	Health and Social Care (Single Award) (8.4%)	Business Studies (7.9%)	Mathematics (7.4%)
4	History (6.5%)	Biology (7.4%)	Religious Studies (6.6%)
5	Business Studies (5.9%)	Physics (6.9%)	English Literature (5.9%)

Table 3: GCE AS levels entries and provisional results

	2021*	2020*
Entries	35,533	40,735
%A	45.5	38.4
%A - E	98.9	99.6

* Note – prior to 2021 Health and Social Care (Single Award and Double Award) outcomes were not included in the JCQ provisional data sheets. This year the Health and Social Care provisional outcomes are now included in the overall A / AS level provisional data sheets. The 2020 outcomes have also been revised to include the Health & Social Care outcomes.

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 Tuesday 10 August 2021** and will be available on the JCQ website from 09.30 on 10 August 2021 at www.jcq.org.uk

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.

The JCQ comprises AQA, CCEA, City & Guilds, NCFE, OCR, Pearson, SQA and WJEC – the eight largest providers of qualifications in the UK.

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.