



## **Strictly Embargoed until 09.30 HRS on Thursday 13 August 2020**

### **Northern Ireland GCE results in 2020**

- **Exceptional circumstances due to exams cancellation**
- **Results retain same value and currency this year**
- **Increased outcomes for both males and females**
- **Small increase in STEM and Languages entries**

This year's summer exams were cancelled, for the first time, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Due to this exceptional circumstance, alternative awarding arrangements were rapidly put in place.

Across England, Northern Ireland and Wales a similar approach and methodology was adopted for all students, where possible, reflecting the different awarding systems in each jurisdiction. This was the fairest system that would enable young people to receive awards and progress onto the next stage of their journey, be it further study or employment.

The standardisation process, ensured that standards were maintained and grades continue to reflect the same value as those in any other year.

The provisional grades released today were calculated using a combination of teacher professional judgement and statistical standardisation. The effort of schools and colleges to provide grades and ranks orders on time demonstrated a commitment by the whole education system to the alternative awarding arrangements.

### **A level**

At the A\* Grade, 9.8% of students achieved the top grade, a 1 percentage point increase from last year. A\* - A grade increased 2.3 percentage points to 33.2%. There was also an increase in the A\*- E pass rate, of 0.8 percentage points to 99.1%.

Both male and female outcomes increased across all grades this year. At the A\* grade, a 0.9 percentage points increase for males and 1.1 percentage increase for females. The gap between males and females, at the highest grade, remains consistent with previous years.

A level entries remained stable in Northern Ireland, this year, with Mathematics accounting for over 1 in 10 entries.

Participation in STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) saw a small increase this year, accounting for 39.8% of overall entries. This was largely driven by an increase in entries for Biology (+2.7%), Chemistry (+7.5%), Computing (+9.1%) and Mathematics (+2%).

Language entries, as a proportion of the overall entry, increased by 0.2 percentage points, with increases in entries for German, Irish and Spanish.

## AS Level

AS Level entries in Northern Ireland, saw a further decline of 4.8%, however this is in line with school population decrease (-4.4%).

Provisional outcomes at AS increased across all grades, with subject choices remaining broadly stable.

## ENDS

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## Notes to Editors

Grades submitted by school and colleges (known as Centre Assessment Grades or CAGs) and rank orders formed the basis for the standardised final grades. Standardisation was necessary in order to ensure parity between the way grades were awarded from different schools and colleges, putting all students on a level playing field.

The mechanism to determine each grade was:

- to be based on each students' ability in the subject, based on an exam centres' assessment, supplemented by a range of evidence; and
- ensuring that qualification standards are maintained, and the distribution of grades follows a similar profile to previous years.

The exam boards and JCQ have worked to deliver results this year in a way that is as fair as possible given the circumstances, using the standardisation model developed by regulators.

Further information on standardisation and the alternative awarding arrangements for this year are available on the following examination regulator websites:

CCEA Regulation [www.ccea.org.uk/summer-awarding](http://www.ccea.org.uk/summer-awarding)  
Ofqual [www.gov.uk/ofqual](http://www.gov.uk/ofqual)  
Qualifications Wales [www.qualificationswales.org](http://www.qualificationswales.org)

## A / AS level provisional results 2020

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

**Table 1: Northern Ireland GCE A Level entries and provisional results:**

	2020	2019	2018
<b>Entries</b>	27,791	28,332	29,005
%A*	9.8	8.8	8.2
%A* - A	33.2	30.9	30.4
%A* - E	99.1	98.3	98.2

In Northern Ireland, 99.1% passed (grades A\* – E), with 9.8% achieving a grade A\* and 33.2% achieving grades A\* - A.

**Table 2: Five most popular subjects at GCE A level in N. Ireland**

	<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>MALES</b>	<b>FEMALES</b>
<b>1</b>	Mathematics (10.6%)	Mathematics (13.8%)	Biology (11%)
<b>2</b>	Biology (9.5%)	Business Studies (8.7%)	Religious Studies (8.6%)
<b>3</b>	Business Studies (7%)	Biology (7.4%)	English Literature (8.3%)
<b>4</b>	Religious Studies (6.5%)	History (7.3%)	Mathematics (8.3%)
<b>5</b>	Chemistry (6.4%)	Physics (6.3%)	Chemistry (6.6%)

Traditional subjects such as Mathematics, Biology, and Religious Studies remain popular in Northern Ireland. Chemistry has entered the overall top five, due to the increase in female entries in the subject (+0.8%)

**Table 3: Gender comparisons**

	<b>NI 2020</b>		<b>NI 2019</b>		<b>NI 2018</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>%A*</b>	9.2	10.3	8.3	9.2	8.4	8.0
<b>%A* - A</b>	30.5	35.2	29.1	32.3	29.7	30.9
<b>%A* - E</b>	98.9	99.3	97.9	98.6	97.6	98.7

**Table 4: GCE AS Levels entries and provisional results**

	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>
<b>Entries</b>	36,256	38,069	40,325
<b>%A</b>	29.4	27.3	27.3
<b>%A - E</b>	96.4	95.5	95.1

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 13 August 2020** and will be available on the JCQ website from 09.30 on 13 August 2020 [www.jcq.org.uk](http://www.jcq.org.uk)

The A\* Grade was introduced in 2009 and first awarded in 2010. It is not awarded for AS or for individual units.

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, OCR, Pearson, SQA and WJEC – the seven largest providers of qualifications in the UK.

The JCQCIC 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.

Media contacts: The JCQ's press office can be contacted on: 020 7227 0671/020 7638 4132/07905 683 816