

Record numbers of students take up university places

More than 210,000 18-year-old students in England have had their university places confirmed, with 192,000 at their first choice and increases in top grades for students from all backgrounds.

A record rate of students from disadvantaged backgrounds will be starting university courses, up 11% proportionately on last year.

Nineteen per cent of entries are at grade A, with 44.3% at grade A or above – up 4.6 percentage points (ppt) and 6.0 ppt on 2020 respectively. This is lower than the uplift seen between 2019 and 2020, where As increased 6.6 ppt and A or above 12.7 ppt.

The uplift in top grades reflects the fact the grading process gave all students a chance to do their best, only being assessed on what they had been taught across multiple pieces of work.

This helped bring fairness between students with different levels of disruption to their learning, and helped limit any increase in historic disparities between different groups of students and types of schools.

Statistics published today show:

- Comparison of grades between this year and last year showed no notable changes in historic disparities between groups of students and types of school; 88.4% of grades are A* to C at A level, compared to 87.8% in 2020.
- There was a 15.8% increase relative to last year in the proportion of grades at A and A* in academies, compared with 15.2% in independent schools. That represents a 5.7pp increase in the proportion of grades at A and A* from last year in academies, compared with a 9.3ppt increase in independent schools.
- In real terms, this means there are 1.21 times more A and A* grades in academies, compared to 1.17 times more A and A* grades in independent schools, in 2021 compared to 2020.
- Maths remains the most popular subject at A level with a 3.8% increase in entries this year;
- 6.4% increase in STEM subjects, with 1.9% more girls taking A levels in Maths and 8.3% more in Physics, building on significant progress in this area since 2010.
- Over 340,000 certificates awarded to a wide range of students who have undertaken Level 3 vocational and technical qualifications, with results broadly similar to previous years.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Receiving results is always a huge milestone in people's lives and

after a difficult year, every student should be incredibly proud of what they have achieved. The results are testament to young people's hard work and resilience alongside the commitment and expertise of their teachers.

It's fantastic to see a record number of disadvantaged students going to university. While there has been an increase in the number of top grades awarded, young people and their families can be confident grades carry the same weight as any other year and will allow them to progress to the next stage of education or work.

While exams remain the fairest and best form of assessment, recognising the unprecedented disruption the pandemic has caused to education, the Government and Ofqual decided it would not be fair for GCSE, AS, A level and many vocational and technical qualification exams to go ahead this year.

Teachers were able to determine grades based on a range of evidence, in-class tests, mock papers, coursework and optional questions provided by exam boards – giving students the greatest opportunity to show their knowledge and abilities.

Grades were subject to internal checks in schools and colleges and one in five schools had a sample of their grades checked by exam boards, helping to ensure students, parents, employers, colleges and universities can have confidence in the grades.

This ensured fairness for students, enabling them to progress on to their next stage of education, training or employment.

Many students will go on to one of the UK's world leading universities, and today's data shows there has been a record 20,240 total acceptances of students to nursing courses, and 8,560 acceptances on to medicine and dentistry, up 23% on last year.

As in previous years, the government has been working closely with universities ahead of results day to ensure as many students as possible can progress if they get the grades they need.

STEM degrees offer some of the highest earnings returns for female graduates, and the further increases in girls studying STEM A Level subjects this year builds on the 31% increase in entries from women and girls between 2010 and 2019.

The Government intends GCSE, A level and VTQ exams to go ahead next summer, and together with Ofqual recently ran a consultation on arrangements for the assessments to recognise the disruption to students' education during the pandemic. The proposals include choices about the topics students will be assessed on for some subjects, and giving schools and colleges advance information about the focus of content of the exams for other subjects.

The Government has committed to an ambitious, and long-term education recovery plan, including an investment to date of over £3bn and a significant

expansion of our tutoring programme to support children and young people to make up for learning lost during the pandemic.

Just as they do in any normal year, UCAS will help thousands of students to find places through Clearing if they did not receive the grades they were hoping for, and there is also the option of sitting exams this autumn for those students looking to improve their grade.