



British International School Riyadh

A Level results: Top Universities anxious

Overall entries for maths and science are up, but not enough state school students are doing these subjects, say universities

Elite universities have expressed concern that too few state school students are taking traditional subjects compared with their private school counterparts, as overall A-level results show a boom in maths and sciences.

Amid a scramble for places in clearing ahead of higher university fees next year, results show private school pupils make up 29% of entries in modern foreign [languages](#) and 29% of entries in further maths. Private [schools](#) account for 13.4% of the total number of A-level entries this year.

The figures published on Thursday morning show the rising popularity of maths and [science](#) subjects, while foreign languages are in long-term decline.

Entries for A-level maths are up by just over 40% over five years, in a trend that examiners say reflects teenagers making informed choices about a subject favoured by employers.

The number of entries for physics has risen by 19.6% over five years, while chemistry has risen by 19.4% in the same period.

Languages continue a long term decline, with combined entries for French, German and Spanish down by 6.3% over five years. General studies, a subject that few universities accept for entrance, has slumped over the past five years, down 26.4%.

Critical thinking sees the sharpest year-on-year drop, down 17% – though the number of entries is small.

The number of entries for A-level Chinese is up, from 2372 last year to 3237 this year.

The top 10 most popular subjects, in order, are: English, maths, biology, psychology, history, chemistry, art and design, general studies, media studies, and physics.

Wendy Piatt, director general of the Russell Group of leading universities, says: "It is encouraging to see another overall increase in the number of students taking and achieving good passes in A-level sciences and maths.

"However, we remain concerned that too few students from some state schools take or get the top grades in science, maths and language [A-levels](#), restricting their options at university and closing off certain career paths."

Dr Neil Bentley, deputy director-general of the CBI, says it is "positive news" that the number of young people studying Chinese has gone up.

"Companies will need many more people with strong language skills to help them enter new markets like China in the future," he says.

But Bentley adds that the overall numbers studying maths and science are still "far too low".

"There is already a skills gap emerging in this area, with over 40% of companies saying they are having difficulty recruiting people with science, technology, engineering and maths skills."

Schools minister Nick Gibb says: "It is worrying that take-up has fallen in French and German and flatlined in Spanish, even if it is rising in other languages.

"Languages are important to the social and economic future of this country, so we are concerned about the knock-on effect on A-levels from the decline in modern languages at GCSE."

The UCAS Track service, used by A-level students to confirm their place, crashed this morning under huge demand. It was restored by noon.

By midnight on Wednesday a record 384,649 applicants were accepted into university or college, compared with 379,411 on results day last year, UCAS says.

In Thursday's results, A-level pass rates have risen to 97.8% – another record high – but the share of entries getting the highest grade has remained unchanged from last year at 27%.

The overall pass rate has risen for the 29th successive year for 250,000 candidates in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

This year, 8.2% of boys have achieved an A*, up from 7.9% last year, while girls' performance has dipped from 8.3% to 8.2%.

Examiners suggest the rise of "quantitative subjects" such as maths may have helped boys draw level in results for the highest grade.

Private schools have taken 30% of A* grades, the same proportion as last year.