



British International School Riyadh

A Level Results 2011 – record high

Boys achieve as many top grades as girls – and entries for maths soar

The pass rate for A-levels reaches a new record high. Photograph: Matt Cardy/Getty Images

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 in results published on Thursday 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%.

There has been an increase in entries for maths, biology, chemistry and physics. Maths entries have risen dramatically, up 40.2% over five years. Entries for physics are up 19.6% over five years and chemistry up 19.4% over that period.

But foreign languages continued to decline. Entries for French are down 4.7% on last year and German down 6.9%. The number of entries for A-level Chinese is up on last year.

The number of entries awarded an A or A* has remained level, the first time since 1997 that the percentage of top grades has not increased.

The proportion of candidates awarded an A* has risen marginally from 8.1% last year to 8.2%. This is the second time the A* grade has been included, reflecting a reform that was introduced to challenge the most able candidates with more complex questions.

Private [schools](#) have taken 30% of A* grades, the same proportion as last year.

The scramble for places in clearing has kicked off, with Ucas announcing that 185,000 candidates are chasing 29,000 unfilled places on degree courses.

The number of applicants to UK universities has risen to 673,570, a record high, and a rise of 1.3% on last year. There were around 487,000 undergraduates accepted at UK universities last year, and there are a similar number of places this year.

In last year's results, 97.6% passed, and 27% of entries secured an A or A* grade. The A* grade requires marks over 90% in a candidate's second-year exams.

Last year's results showed that private schools did disproportionately well, getting 30% of the total number of A* grades although their pupils accounted for only 14% of entries.

The A* grade is being used to discriminate between the best candidates at an increased number of universities this year. Oxford is demanding the grade for 15 of its courses, while students applying for some courses at Bristol, Exeter and Sussex have been asked for it.

UCL, Imperial and Warwick have all increased the number of courses requiring the top grade.

Last year, the only universities to demand an A* were Imperial, Cambridge, UCL and Warwick. The standard offer at Cambridge is an A* and two As.

Following last year's results, examiners highlighted a gap in achievement between north and south.

In 2010, pupils in the south-east, which accounted for 19% of entries, were awarded 23% of A* grades. By contrast, the north-east achieved just 3% of A*s from 4% of entries.

While getting into university has always been competitive, the surge in demand and rising achievement in recent years has led to many qualified candidates failing to win places.

Last year, out of 210,000 unplaced applicants for university, around 113,000 either failed to make the grade or did not receive an offer.

The remaining 97,000 unplaced candidates declined offers or withdrew, according to figures from Ucas.

Places at English universities are capped to control student loans costs. The squeeze on government-funded university places has prompted a growth of interest in alternatives.

Thousands of school-leavers have applied for new corporate-sponsored degree courses or apprenticeship schemes that offer a direct route into a graduate level job

A new KPMG programme aimed at school-leavers – in which the firm pays fees for sponsored students of an accountancy degree at Durham or Exeter university – has had more than 1,000 applications for 100 places.

The students, who become salaried employees of KPMG, will live radically different university lives, sacrificing long summer holidays for a busy programme of combined work and study.

Experian is sponsoring 15 undergraduate places on an honours degree in management and leadership at Nottingham Business School, starting this autumn.

The accountancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers has received 1,600 applications for 100 positions in its school-leaver programme this year, a 56% increase on 2010, while Network Rail has seen 8,000 candidates competing for around 200 places.

Ernst and Young launched a school-leaver programme today. There are 60 places on the scheme which starts in September 2012