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Top A Level grades are not a ticket to university

The new highest grade in A-level examinations - the A* - should not be regarded as a "ticket" to university, the head of the organisation which represents the higher education sector has warned.

Students check their A Level results. Institutions may in future have to spend more time looking outside candidates' academic records to get a more rounded view of each applicant Photo: PA

By [David Barrett](#)

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The A* grade was introduced as a new gold standard last year to help universities differentiate between the massive group of youngsters winning A grades.

However Nicola Dandridge, chief executive of Universities UK, warned that institutions may in future have to spent more time looking outside candidates' academic records to get a more rounded view of each applicant.

"The A* is very persuasive and universities will be taking them seriously. But most universities will not take them completely at face value and will want to look at that," she said.

"There is going to be a very significant difference between those at independent schools and those at state schools getting A*s. That suggests that universities are going to have to look very carefully at this in terms of relying on A*s.

"They cannot be seen as a ticket to university."

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Last week's A-level results saw the proportion of A*s rise to 8.2 per cent. Last week's figures showed the number of A*s in private schools was also 50 per cent higher than in state grammar schools.

Nationally, 8.2% of boys' entries were awarded the top grade this summer, up from 7.9% in 2010. At the same time, girls' performance slipped slightly, with 8.2% of their entries gaining an A*, down from 8.3% last year.

Tens of thousands of A-level students are still trying to find university places through the clearing system.

It emerged yesterday that a record number of people will miss out on university places this year as the number of students filling vacancies through clearing reached 13,000.

A spokesman for the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (Ucas), which operates the system which matches students who failed to achieve required grades with spare course places, said 419,000 students have been accepted to university so far.

The figure is due to rise to around 480,000, meaning around 200,000 people who applied to attend university this year will be left without a place.

But while some continue to search for places through clearing, others will have withdrawn their applications or rejected offers earlier this year, making the final total impossible to predict at this stage.

This year's clearing process is particularly important for A-level students who missed out on their grades because if they delay their studies until next year annual course fees will rise from £3,250 to a maximum of £9,000, under the Coalition's higher education reforms.

More than a quarter of students are awarded A* and A grades, with the proportion staying level at 27 per cent this year.