



A-level results in England, 2024

A-level students in England achieved extremely good grades overall — but does success conceal important differences?

Joan Garrod investigates

For the second year in a row since the pandemic, A-level students sat exams rather than their grades being based on teacher assessments. Overall, they did extremely well, with 27.6% of entries achieving A* or A, including 9.3% awarded A*. However, a more detailed analysis reveals important differences in these overall achievements.

Type of school

The long-established gap between top grades awarded to those attending independent schools

and those at state schools actually widened, with almost half (49.4%) of private school entries gaining A* or A, compared to just over a fifth (22.2%) gained by state non-selective secondary schools. There were also differences within the state sector, with 41% of grammar school entries achieving top grades against 22.3% in comprehensive schools.

Regional disparities

While the percentage of top grades increased in England, those gained by pupils in both Wales and Northern Ireland fell compared to the previous year. Within England, significant regional differences occurred. The broad north–south divide in results, which existed before the pandemic, was still in evidence. The highest performing region was

London, with 31.3% of entries gaining A or A*, and the worst performing region was the East Midlands, where the figure was 22.5% (see Figure 1).

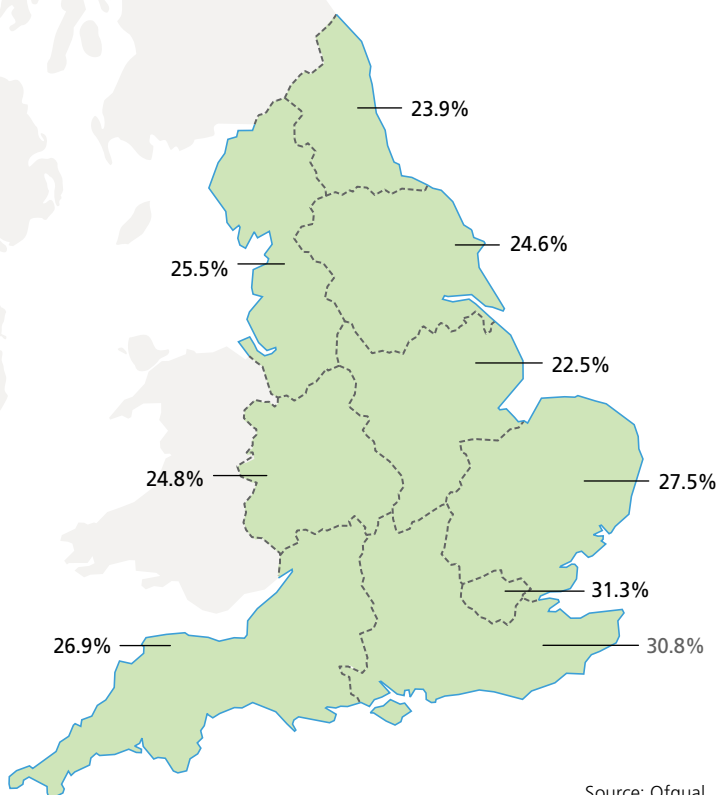
Subject choice

Maths was the most popular subject chosen, but there was an increase in entries for all STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths). Entries for the humanities and some social sciences (including sociology) were down, but English literature remained popular.

Gender differences in subject choice

While a few subjects, including history, geography, music and political studies showed relatively little difference by gender, others showed a marked difference in the proportion of entries by gender.

Figure 1 Percentage of A and A* grades achieved by region



Source: Ofqual

Entries from females were considerably higher for health and social care, the expressive arts, sociology and English language and literature, while computing, physics, digital technology and further maths were dominated by entries from males. While there has been an increase in the number of entries from females taking maths and science subjects at A-level, they are still considerably less likely to do so than males. Females still out-perform males in gaining A or A* grades, although the gap is narrowing. In 2024, 28% of females gained one of the two highest grades, as against 27.6% of males.

Questions and activities

These various differences in the overall pattern of results are worthy of sociological consideration. As part of a class discussion, consider the following questions:

- Why should the type of educational establishment make such a difference to grades?
- What are some of the key features of independent schools that play a part?
- What reasons could there be for the significant regional differences? Consider factors such as typical socioeconomic levels, culture and aspirations, ethnicity and language and levels of health.
- Why should there be stark differences by gender in some subjects? What are the implications of this in terms of future employment and earnings? Should anything be done to try to reduce these differences? If so, why, and how?

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