

Candidates awarded the new A* grade at A-level in 2010

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(GS = General Studies, CT = Critical Thinking)

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Aims, Data and Methods

The A* grade was awarded at A-level for the first time in summer 2010. This report investigates the numbers and percentages of A level candidates in England in 2010 who achieved this top grade, in total, by school type and by gender. Specifically, it looks at those awarded:

- three A* grades (or better)
- two A* grades and an A grade (or better)
- one A* grade and two A grades (or better)
- three A grades (or better)

As HE institutions start to use the A* grade in their offers, statistics such as these will indicate the size and make-up, in terms of gender and school type, of the candidate pools from which they can recruit.

Results are given both including and excluding General Studies (GS) and Critical Thinking (CT) results. This is because some HE institutions / courses exclude these subjects from A-level offers.

Data were extracted from the National Pupil Database (NPD) for 2010 (Department for Education). The NPD is compiled for the DfE from data supplied by the awarding bodies. It contains candidate details, such as gender and school type, and the national examination results of all pupils within schools in England up to the age of 19. Records are present only if the candidate has sat an examination in a particular subject, not just attended classes. School type categories were those given in the NPD. However, the category 'secondary modern' was merged with 'comprehensive' due to small numbers of the former. The categories 'other' and 'unknown' were also merged due to small numbers.

Population estimates were obtained from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15106>

Data merging and analyses were carried out in SAS (Version 9.1). Multiple incidences of the same subject examination for a candidate (i.e. where resits had occurred) were deleted to leave only the highest grade attained.

Results

N.B. All results in this report are restricted to the 241835 A-level candidates in England whose 18th birthday fell in the school year 2009/2010 (i.e. the expected A-level age cohort). These accounted for 82% of the total number of A-level candidates in the NPD.

These 241835 A-level candidates constituted around 35% of the population of the same age in England, based on the most recent population estimates (source: ONS, mid-2009 figures). The 180181 candidates taking three or more A-levels constituted around 25% of the population of the same age in England.

Table 1a shows the numbers and percentages of candidates taking less than three versus three or more A-levels. Table 1b shows the same information but excluding all General Studies and Critical Thinking results. The 770 fewer candidates in the Table 1b total, therefore, are those who were taking *only* General Studies and / or Critical Thinking.

Table 1a: Number of A level candidates

Number of A Levels Taken	count	%
less than 3	61654	25%
3 or more	180181	75%
total candidates	241835	100%

Table 1b: Number of A level candidates, excluding GS and CT results

Number of A Levels Taken	count	%
less than 3	67464	28%
3 or more	173601	72%
total candidates	241065	100%

Tables 2a and 2b show the numbers and percentages of individual grades awarded, with and without the inclusion of General Studies and Critical Thinking results, respectively. These show that around 8% of results were awarded an A* grade (around 8.5% if General Studies and Critical Thinking results are excluded). The percentages of results awarded either an A* or an A grade in these tables (27.5% and 28.5%, respectively) are very similar to the percentages awarded an A grade in 2009 (Statistics Report Series No. 14, Tables 5.i and 5.ii). Only around 2% of results were not passes (i.e. were U grades).

Table 2a: Results by grade (all subjects)

Grade	count	%
*	57243	8.18
A	135114	19.30
B	177221	25.32
C	162448	23.21
D	105511	15.07
E	47512	6.79
U	14888	2.13
total grades	699937	100

Table 2b: Results by grade (excluding GS & CT)

Grade	count	%
*	55229	8.45
A	130971	20.05
B	168597	25.81
C	151362	23.17
D	94794	14.51
E	40685	6.23
U	11706	1.79
total grades	653344	100

Table 3 shows the numbers of candidates who met the four different A* and A grade criteria listed on p.2, both including and excluding General Studies and Critical Thinking results. Only around 2% of the total number of candidates, and under 3% of those taking three or more A-levels, achieved three A* grades or better (N=4993). The exclusion of General Studies and Critical Thinking results reduced these percentages by around 0.2 (N=4639). The percentages of candidates achieving three A grades or better are very similar to those reported for 2009 (Statistics Report Series No. 14, Tables 3.i to 4.ii).

Table 3: Numbers and percentages of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria

Met Criteria:	count	% of all candidates (N=241835)	% of candidates with 3+ results (N=180181)
A* A* A* or better	4993	2.06	2.77
A* A* A* or better, excluding GS & CT	4639	1.92	2.57
A* A* A or better	11784	4.87	6.54
A* A* A or better, excluding GS & CT	11180	4.62	6.20
A* A A or better	22145	9.16	12.29
A* A A or better, excluding GS & CT	21232	8.78	11.78
A A A or better	31370	12.97	17.41
A A A or better, excluding GS & CT	30144	12.46	16.73

Table 4a shows the numbers of candidates within each school type who met the four different A* and A grade criteria. Percentages are calculated out of 1) all A-level candidates in each school type ('N1') and 2) those with three or more results in each school type ('N2'). Comparisons of the N1 versus N2 values for each school type show that 67% of the comprehensive / secondary modern school candidates had three or more results, compared to 95% of the selective school candidates, 90% of the independent school candidates, 75% of the sixth form college candidates and 63% of the FE /

tertiary college candidates. As data were restricted to the 17-18 year old age cohort, this variation may be due partly to resit patterns or differences in the typical age ranges of candidates for different school types.

Other than the 'other / unknown' category (for which numbers are small), FE / tertiary colleges had the lowest percentages of candidates attaining each of the four A* and A grade criteria. Under 1% of FE / tertiary college candidates with three or more results attained three A* grades or better (and only around 0.5% of their total numbers). Independent schools had the highest percentages of candidates attaining each of the four criteria, followed by selective schools. Around 6.5% of independent school candidates with three or more results attained three A* grades or better and over one third attained three A grades or better. The percentages of comprehensive / secondary modern school candidates and sixth form college candidates attaining each of these four criteria were similar (the latter being slightly higher) but were closer to those of FE / tertiary college candidates than to those of independent and selective school candidates.

Table 4b shows the percentage breakdown, by school type, of the total numbers of candidates attaining each of the four A* and A grade criteria. The percentage breakdown, by school type, of A-level candidates and of A-level candidates with three or more results is given in the final two rows for comparison. Comprehensive / secondary modern school candidates make up almost 50% of the A-level candidature (around 45% of those with three or more results) but account for only around 25% of those with three A* grades or better and around 30% of those with three A grades or better. Independent school candidates account for around 13% of the A-level candidature (around 16% of those with three or more results) but account for almost 40% of those with three A* grades or better and around 32% of those with three A grades or better. Selective school candidates constitute around 9% of the A-level candidature (11% of those with three or more results) but account for around 21% of those with three A* grades or better and around 18% of those with three A grades or better. Independent and selective school candidates are increasingly over-represented, and candidates of all other school types increasingly under-represented, towards the top of Table 4b.

Table 4a: Numbers and percentages of candidates within each school type who met the A* and A grade criteria

Met Criteria:	comprehensive / secondary modern (N1=117895, N2=80934)			selective (N1=21561, N2=20396)			independent (N1=31400, N2=28227)			sixth form college (N1=48195, N2=36209)			FE / tertiary college (N1=22077, N2=14015)			other / unknown (N1=707, N2=400)		
	count	%N1	%N2	count	%N1	%N2	count	%N1	%N2	count	%N1	%N2	count	%N1	%N2	count	%N1	%N2
A* A* A* or better	1272	1.08	1.57	1078	5.00	5.29	1893	6.03	6.71	626	1.30	1.73	120	0.54	0.85	4	0.57	1.00
A* A* A* or better, excluding GS & CT	1182	1.00	1.46	965	4.48	4.73	1826	5.82	6.47	545	1.13	1.51	117	0.53	0.83	4	0.57	1.00
A* A* A or better	3351	2.84	4.14	2320	10.76	11.37	4127	13.14	14.62	1629	3.38	4.50	345	1.56	2.46	12	1.70	3.00
A* A* A or better, excluding GS & CT	3148	2.67	3.89	2152	9.98	10.55	4029	12.83	14.27	1503	3.12	4.15	337	1.53	2.40	11	1.56	2.75
A* A A or better	6694	5.68	8.27	4161	19.30	20.40	7275	23.17	25.77	3250	6.74	8.98	742	3.36	5.29	23	3.25	5.75
A* A A or better, excluding GS & CT	6364	5.40	7.86	3909	18.13	19.17	7150	22.77	25.33	3058	6.35	8.45	728	3.30	5.19	23	3.25	5.75
A A A or better	9629	8.17	11.90	5811	26.95	28.49	10013	31.89	35.47	4744	9.84	13.10	1140	5.16	8.13	33	4.67	8.25
A A A or better, excluding GS & CT	9191	7.80	11.36	5481	25.42	26.87	9875	31.45	34.98	4442	9.22	12.27	1122	5.08	8.01	33	4.67	8.25

N1 = number of A-level candidates

N2 = number of A-level candidates with 3 or more results

Table 4b: School types (%) of the candidate numbers who met the A* and A grade criteria

Met Criteria:	comprehensive / secondary modern	selective	independent	sixth form college	FE / tertiary college	other / unknown	total N of candidates
	%	%	%	%	%	%	count
A* A* A* or better	25.48	21.59	37.91	12.54	2.40	0.08	4993
A* A* A* or better, excluding GS & CT	25.48	20.80	39.36	11.75	2.52	0.09	4639
A* A* A or better	28.44	19.69	35.02	13.82	2.93	0.10	11784
A* A* A or better, excluding GS & CT	28.16	19.25	36.04	13.44	3.01	0.10	11180
A* A A or better	30.23	18.79	32.85	14.68	3.35	0.10	22145
A* A A or better, excluding GS & CT	29.97	18.41	33.68	14.40	3.43	0.11	21232
A A A or better	30.69	18.52	31.92	15.12	3.63	0.11	31370
A A A or better, excluding GS & CT	30.49	18.18	32.76	14.74	3.72	0.11	30144
A-level candidates	48.75	8.92	12.98	19.93	9.13	0.29	241835
candidates with 3+ results	44.92	11.32	15.67	20.10	7.78	0.22	180181

Table 5a shows the numbers of candidates within each gender who met the four different A* and A grade criteria. Percentages are calculated out of 1) all A-level candidates of each gender ('N1') and 2) candidates of each gender with three or more results ('N2'). A comparison of the N1 versus N2 values for each gender shows that similar proportions had three or more results (75% of the females and 74% of the males). There were 21461 more female than male candidates. A slightly higher percentage of males than females attained each of the four criteria, as a percentage of both N1 and N2 values and including / excluding General Studies and Critical Thinking results. However, the difference was much smaller than that between school types. Around 3% of males with three or more results attained three A* grades or better (compared to around 2% of females with three or more results). Around 18% of males with three or more results attained three A grades or better (compared to around 17% of females with three or more results). Comparing the raw numbers of males and females attaining each of the four criteria, a higher number of males attained three A* grades or better but a higher number of females attained each of the remaining criteria.

Table 5b shows the percentage breakdown, by gender, of the total numbers of candidates attaining each of the four A* and A grade criteria. The percentage breakdown, by gender, of A-level candidates and of A-level candidates with three or more results is given in the final two rows for comparison. Females make up around 55% of both the A-level candidature and those with three or more results. However, males make up over half of the candidate numbers with three A* grades or better. Males are slightly over-represented on each of the different A* and A grade criteria in Table 5b, although less so for the criterion A*, A, A or better than for the criterion A, A, A or better.

Table 5a: Numbers and percentages of candidates within each gender who met the A* and A grade criteria

Met Criteria:	female (N1=131648, N2=98816)			male (N1=110187, N2=81365)		
	count	%N1	%N2	count	%N1	%N2
A* A* A* or better	2357	1.79	2.39	2636	2.39	3.24
A* A* A* or better, excluding GS & CT	2129	1.62	2.15	2510	2.28	3.08
A* A* A or better	6124	4.65	6.20	5660	5.14	6.96
A* A* A or better, excluding GS & CT	5738	4.36	5.81	5442	4.94	6.69
A* A A or better	11965	9.09	12.11	10180	9.24	12.51
A* A A or better, excluding GS & CT	11401	8.66	11.54	9831	8.92	12.08
A A A or better	16851	12.80	17.05	14519	13.18	17.84
A A A or better, excluding GS & CT	16093	12.22	16.29	14051	12.75	17.27

N1 = number of A-level candidates

N2 = number of A-level candidates with 3 or more results

Table 5b: Genders (%) of the candidate numbers who met the A* and A grade criteria

Met Criteria:	female	male	total N of candidates
	%	%	count
A* A* A* or better	47.21	52.79	4993
A* A* A* or better, excluding GS & CT	45.89	54.11	4639
A* A* A or better	51.97	48.03	11784
A* A* A or better, excluding GS & CT	51.32	48.68	11180
A* A A or better	54.03	45.97	22145
A* A A or better, excluding GS & CT	53.70	46.30	21232
A A A or better	53.72	46.28	31370
A A A or better, excluding GS & CT	53.39	46.61	30144
all candidates	54.44	45.56	241835
candidates with 3+ results	54.84	45.16	180181

Reference:

Emery, J.L. (2010) A-level candidates attaining 3 or more 'A' grades in England 2006-2009. *Statistics Report Series No. 14*. Cambridge Assessment. Available online at:

http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/ca/digitalAssets/184873_JE_Stats_Report_no_14.pdf