

Candidates awarded the A* grade at A-Level in 2011

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1. Aims, Data and Methods

In 2010 the A* grade was awarded at A-Level for the first time. This report investigates the awarding of A* in 2011, the second year in which A* grades were awarded. Specifically, this report investigates candidates who achieved A* grades overall, by school type, by gender and by level of deprivation. Only non-applied A-Levels are included. The report looks at those candidates 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).

In 2010 new A-Level specifications were certificated for the first time. These specifications included more demanding questions, and for the first time an A* grade was awarded. The A* grade rewards exceptional performance at A2, and aims to differentiate between the highest achieving candidates. The A* grade is being increasingly used in university offers, so statistics such as those included in this report indicate the make up and number of candidates achieving the A* as schools become accustomed to teaching the new specifications.

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

Data were extracted from the National Pupil Database (NPD) for 2011. The NPD is compiled for the Department for Education (DfE) from data supplied by the awarding bodies. It contains candidate details, such as gender, school type and level of deprivation, and the national examination results of all pupils within schools in England up to the age of 19. Records are only present if a candidate has sat an examination in a particular subject.

School type categories were those given in the National Centre Number (NCN) database. The following types of schools were included in the study:

- City Academy
- Comprehensive
- FE Establishment
- Independent
- Other
- Secondary Modern
- Secondary Selective
- Sixth Form College
- Tertiary College

Deprivation was measured using the IDACI rank for each candidate obtained from the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), provided by the Department for Education. Candidates were divided into three equal groups (low, medium and high deprivation) using percentile values. Deprivation data were only available from approximately 60% of candidates, mainly from City Academies, Comprehensive, Secondary Modern and Secondary Selective Schools (see Table 7).

Data analysis was carried out in SAS (Version 9.2). Where a candidate had taken the same subject examination twice (i.e. had re-sat the qualification) only the highest grade attained was included in the analysis.

2. Results

Only the 238,483 A-Level candidates whose 18th birthday fell in the school year 2010/11 were included in the results in this report. These accounted for approximately 80% of the total

number of A-Level candidates in the NPD, and approximately 36% of the population of the same age in England based on population estimates for 2011 (source: ONS, mid 2011 figures).

2.1. Candidates taking three or more A-Levels

Table 1a shows the number of candidates taking 3 or more A-Levels. Table 1b shows the same information, but excluding all General Studies and Critical Thinking results. There were 609 candidates who took only General Studies or only Critical Thinking, so the total candidates figure in Tables 1a and 1b is different.

Table 1a: A-Level candidates taking three or more A-Levels.

Number of A-Levels taken	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 3	60840	25.51
3 or more	177643	74.49
Total candidates	238483	100.00

Table 1b: A-Level candidates taking three or more A-Levels excluding general studies and critical thinking.

Number of A-Levels taken	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 3	65442	27.51
3 or more	172432	72.49
Total candidates	237872	100

Tables 1c and 1d show the number and proportion of candidates taking three or more A-Levels by school type, including and excluding General Studies and Critical Thinking. While slightly less than 60% of candidates at FE establishments take three or more non-applied A-Levels, over 90% of those at Secondary Selective schools take three or more non-applied A-Levels.

Table 1c: Number of A-Level candidates taking three or more A-Levels by school type including General Studies and Critical Thinking

Frequency Percentage of school type	City Acad	Comp	FE Est.	Ind	Other	Sec Mod	Sec Sel	Sixth Form College	Tertiary College	Total
Less than three	7745 24.92%	27225 30.80%	3384 40.62%	3496 11.43%	519 31.86%	1630 49.83%	781 6.10%	13049 25.01%	3011 29.46%	60840 25.51%
Three or more	23332 75.08%	61162 69.20%	4946 59.38%	27094 88.57%	1110 68.14%	1641 50.17%	12024 93.90%	39124 74.99%	7210 70.54%	177643 74.49%
Total	31077 13.03%	88387 37.06%	8330 3.49%	30590 12.83%	1629 0.68%	3271 1.37%	12805 5.37%	52173 21.88%	10221 4.29%	238483 100.00

Table 1d: Number of A-Level candidates taking three or more A-Levels by school type excluding General Studies and Critical Thinking

Frequency Percentage of school type	City Acad	Comp	FE Est	Ind	Other	Sec Mod	Sec Sel	Sixth Form College	Tertiary College	Total
Less than three	8403 27.11%	29185 33.13%	3449 41.38%	3599 11.77%	532 32.70%	1660 50.84%	1030 8.07%	14455 27.80%	3129 30.67%	65442 27.51%
Three or more	22592 72.89%	58912 66.87%	4885 58.62%	26984 88.23%	1095 67.30%	1605 49.16%	11739 91.93%	37546 72.20%	7072 69.33%	172430 72.49%
Total	30995 13.03%	88097 37.04%	8334 3.50%	30583 12.86%	1627 0.68%	3265 1.37%	12769 5.37%	52001 21.86%	10201 4.29%	237872 100.00%

2.2. Individual Grades awarded

Tables 2a and 2b show the numbers and percentages of individual grades awarded, including and excluding General Studies and Critical Thinking. These results show that approaching 9% of grades awarded were A* grades, slightly higher than in 2010 (Emery, 2012). The percentages of candidates awarded A or A* in 2011 were similar to those reported in 2010 (27.5% and 28.5% excluding GS and CT).

Table 2a: Results by grade (all subjects)

All results	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
*	59594	8.68	59594	8.68
A	132857	19.34	192451	28.02
B	176598	25.71	369049	53.73
C	160740	23.40	529789	77.14
D	100799	14.68	630588	91.81
E	43491	6.33	674079	98.14
U	12742	1.86	686821	100.00

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

Without GS and CT	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
*	57818	8.96	57818	8.96
A	128998	20.00	186816	28.96
B	168607	26.14	355423	55.09
C	150464	23.32	505887	78.42
D	91557	14.19	597444	92.61
E	37641	5.83	635085	98.44
U	10051	1.56	645136	100.00

2.3. Gender

Tables 3a and 3b show the proportion of candidates within each gender who met the four different A* and A grade criteria described on p2, including and excluding General Studies and Critical Thinking. For example, Table 3a shows that 1.86% of female candidates achieved at least three A-Levels at A*. The Total column shows the total number and percentage of candidates who achieved those criteria across all candidates. The Total row shows the total number and percentage of A-Level candidates in each gender.

Nearly 55% of candidates were female. Nearly 1.9% of female candidates achieved three A* grades or better, compared to 2.7% of male candidates. The percentage of candidates from each gender achieving three A* grades or better increased in comparison to 2010 (1.79% for females and 2.39% for males).

Table 3a: Number and Percentage of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria by gender including GS and CT.

	Female		Male		Total	
	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type
A*A*A* or better	2431	1.86	2915	2.70	5346	2.24
A*A*A or better	6251	4.79	6076	5.62	12327	5.17
A*AA or better	12095	9.28	10821	10.01	22916	9.61
AAA or better	16808	12.89	14886	13.77	31694	13.29
Total	130383	54.67	108100	45.33	238483	100.00

Table 3b: Number and Percentage of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria by gender excluding GS and CT.

	Female		Male		Total	
	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type
A*A*A* or better	2230	1.71	2796	2.59	5026	2.11
A*A*A or better	5934	4.56	5877	5.45	11811	4.97
A*AA or better	11560	8.89	10470	9.71	22030	9.26
AAA or better	16099	12.38	14417	13.37	30516	12.83
Total	130081	54.69	107791	45.31	237872	100.00

Tables 4a and 4b show the proportion of candidates, by gender, who met the four different A* and A grade criteria on p2, including and excluding General Studies and Critical Thinking. For example, Table 4a shows that 45.47% of candidates who achieved at least three A-Levels at A* were female. The Total column shows the total number and percentage of candidates who achieved those criteria across all candidates. The Total row shows the total number and percentage of A-Level candidates in each gender.

Table 4a: Number and Percentage of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria, by criterion including GS and CT.

	Female		Male		Total	
	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	%
A*A*A* or better	2431	45.47	2915	54.53	5346	2.24
A*A*A or better	6251	50.71	6076	49.29	12327	5.17
A*AA or better	12095	52.78	10821	47.22	22916	9.61
AAA or better	16808	53.03	14886	46.97	31694	13.29
Total	130383	54.67	108100	45.33	238483	100.00

Table 4b: Number and Percentage of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria, by criterion excluding GS and CT.

	Female		Male		Total	
	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	%
A*A*A* or better	2230	44.37	2796	55.63	5026	2.11
A*A*A or better	5934	50.24	5877	49.76	11811	4.97
A*AA or better	11560	52.47	10470	47.53	22030	9.26
AAA or better	16099	52.76	14417	47.24	30516	12.83
Total	130081	54.69	107791	45.31	237872	100.00

2.4. School Type

Tables 5a and 5b show the proportion of candidates within each type of school who met the four different A* and A grade criteria on p2, including and excluding General Studies and Critical Thinking. For example, Table 5a shows that 6.36% of candidates at independent schools achieved at least three A-Levels at A*. The Total column shows the total number and percentage of candidates who achieved those criteria across all candidates. The Total row shows the total number and percentage of A-Level candidates in each school type.

Table 5a: Number and Percentage of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria by school type including GS and CT.

	City Academy		Comprehensive		FE Establishment		Independent		Other		Secondary Modern		Secondary Selective		Sixth Form College		Tertiary College		Total	
	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	%
A*A*A* or better	744	2.39	1068	1.21	25	0.30	1947	6.36	17	1.04	18	0.55	624	4.87	813	1.56	90	0.88	5346	2.24
A*A*A or better	1727	5.56	2727	3.09	79	0.95	4216	13.78	44	2.70	37	1.13	1335	10.43	1925	3.69	237	2.32	12327	5.17
A*AA or better	3186	10.25	5372	6.08	179	2.15	7415	24.24	78	4.79	81	2.48	2430	18.98	3671	7.04	504	4.93	22916	9.61
AAA or better	4433	14.26	7546	8.54	271	3.25	9856	32.22	121	7.43	119	3.64	3383	26.42	5229	10.02	736	7.20	31694	13.29
Total A-Level candidates	31077	13.03	88387	37.06	8330	3.49	30590	12.83	1629	0.68	3271	1.37	12805	5.37	52173	21.88	10221	4.29	238483	100

Table 5b: Number and Percentage of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria by school type excluding GS and CT.

	City Academy		Comprehensive		FE Establishment		Independent		Other		Secondary Modern		Secondary Selective		Sixth Form College		Tertiary College		Total	
	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type
A*A*A* or better	681	2.20	1005	1.14	25	0.30	1912	6.25	17	1.04	16	0.49	558	4.37	725	1.39	87	0.85	5026	2.11
A*A*A or better	1630	5.26	2602	2.95	76	0.91	4161	13.61	42	2.58	33	1.01	1238	9.70	1794	3.45	235	2.30	11811	4.97
A*AA or better	3022	9.75	5153	5.85	176	2.11	7346	24.02	77	4.73	71	2.17	2252	17.64	3433	6.60	500	4.90	22030	9.26
AAA or better	4204	13.56	7242	8.22	268	3.22	9765	31.93	119	7.31	111	3.40	3170	24.83	4910	9.44	727	7.13	30516	12.83
Total A-Level candidates	30995	13.03	88097	37.04	8334	3.50	30583	12.86	1627	0.68	3265	1.37	12769	5.37	52001	21.86	10201	4.29	237872	100.00

Tables 6a and 6b show the proportion of candidates, by school type, who met the four different A* and A grade criteria on p2, including and excluding General Studies and Critical Thinking. For example, Table 6a shows that 36.42% of the candidates who got 3 A*s came from an independent school. The Total column shows the total number and percentage of candidates who achieved those criteria across all candidates. The Total row shows the total number and percentage of A-Level candidates in each school type.

Table 6a: Number and Percentage of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria by criterion including GS and CT.

	City Academy		Comprehensive		FE Establishment		Independent		Other		Secondary Modern		Secondary Selective		Sixth Form College		Tertiary College		Total	
	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	%
A*A*A* or better	744	13.92	1068	19.98	25	0.47	1947	36.42	17	0.32	18	0.34	624	11.67	813	15.21	90	1.68	5346	2.24
A*A*A or better	1727	14.01	2727	22.12	79	0.64	4216	34.20	44	0.36	37	0.30	1335	10.83	1925	15.62	237	1.92	12327	5.17
A*AA or better	3186	13.90	5372	23.44	179	0.78	7415	32.36	78	0.34	81	0.35	2430	10.60	3671	16.02	504	2.20	22916	9.61
AAA or better	4433	13.99	7546	23.81	271	0.86	9856	31.10	121	0.38	119	0.38	3383	10.67	5229	16.50	736	2.32	31694	13.29
Total A-Level candidates	31077	13.03	88387	37.06	8330	3.49	30590	12.83	1629	0.68	3271	1.37	12805	5.37	52173	21.88	10221	4.29	238483	100

Table 6b: Number and Percentage of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria by criterion excluding GS and CT.

	City Academy		Comprehensive		FE Establishment		Independent		Other		Secondary Modern		Secondary Selective		Sixth Form College		Tertiary College		Total	
	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	%
A*A*A* or better	681	13.55	1005	20.00	25	0.50	1912	38.04	17	0.34	16	0.32	558	11.10	725	14.42	87	1.73	5026	2.11
A*A*A or better	1630	13.80	2602	22.03	76	0.64	4161	35.23	42	0.36	33	0.28	1238	10.48	1794	15.19	235	1.99	11811	4.97
A*AA or better	3022	13.72	5153	23.39	176	0.80	7346	33.35	77	0.35	71	0.32	2252	10.22	3433	15.58	500	2.27	22030	9.26
AAA or better	4204	13.78	7242	23.73	268	0.88	9765	32.00	119	0.39	111	0.36	3170	10.39	4910	16.09	727	2.38	30516	12.83
Total	30995	13.03	88097	37.04	8334	3.50	30583	12.86	1627	0.68	3265	1.37	12769	5.37	52001	21.86	10201	4.29	237872	100.00

2.5. Deprivation

An IDACI rank score was only available for approximately 60% of candidates. Percentiles were used to split the level of deprivation into three groups (High, Medium and Low). Table 7 shows the number and percentage of candidates attending each school type who were in each group (or missing). This demonstrates that data on deprivation levels were typically only available for City Academies, Comprehensive, Secondary Modern, and Secondary Selective schools.

Table 7: Deprivation by school type

	City Academy		Comprehensive		FE Establishment		Independent		Other		Secondary Modern		Secondary Selective		Sixth Form College		Tertiary College		Total	
	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type
Missing	266	0.86	681	0.77	7888	94.69	29635	96.88	1155	70.90	12	0.37	145	1.13	49674	95.21	10162	99.42	99618	41.77
High	9312	29.96	30338	34.32	223	2.68	446	1.46	126	7.73	1106	33.81	3580	27.96	1117	2.14	40	0.39	46288	19.41
Medium	10576	34.03	28622	32.38	97	1.16	29	0.95	141	8.66	1151	35.19	4595	35.88	810	1.55	13	0.13	46297	19.41
Low	10923	35.15	28746	32.52	122	1.46	217	0.71	207	12.71	1002	30.63	4485	35.03	572	1.10	6	0.06	46280	19.41
Total	31077	13.03	88387	37.06	8330	3.49	30590	12.83	1629	0.68	3271	1.37	12805	5.37	52173	21.88	10221	4.29	238483	100.00

Tables 8a and 8b show the number and percentage of candidates within each deprivation level who achieved grades at each of the four criteria. About half as many candidates in the high deprivation group (1.14%) achieved three A*s or better compared to the low deprivation group (2.40%). A similar pattern was found for each of the other three criteria. Similarly, Tables 9a and 9b show that only a fifth of candidates who achieved three A*s or better came from the high deprivation group, compared to slightly more than two fifths in the low deprivation group.

Table 8a: Number and Percentage of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria with deprivation levels including GS and CT.

	High		Medium		Low		Total	
	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type
A*A*A* or better	529	1.14	853	1.84	1111	2.40	2493	1.80
A*A*A or better	1331	2.88	1962	4.24	2622	5.67	5915	4.26
A*AA or better	2636	5.69	3745	8.09	4870	10.52	11251	8.10
AAA or better	3737	8.07	5264	11.37	6744	14.57	15745	11.34
Total	46288	33.33	46297	33.34	46280	33.33	138865	100.00

Table 8b: Number and Percentage of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria with deprivation levels excluding GS and CT.

	High		Medium		Low		Total	
	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type	N	% of type
A*A*A* or better	499	1.08	774	1.68	1021	2.21	2294	1.66
A*A*A or better	1269	2.75	1842	3.99	2477	5.37	5588	4.04
A*AA or better	2526	5.47	3541	7.67	4601	9.97	10668	7.70
AAA or better	3594	7.79	4983	10.79	6405	13.88	14982	10.82
Total	46155	33.33	46171	33.34	46144	33.32	138470	100.00

Table 9a: Number and Percentage of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria by deprivation including GS and CT.

	High		Medium		Low		Total	
	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit
A*A*A* or better	529	21.22	853	34.22	1111	44.56	2493	1.80
A*A*A or better	1331	22.50	1962	33.17	2622	44.33	5915	4.26
A*AA or better	2636	23.43	3745	33.29	4870	43.29	11251	8.10
AAA or better	3737	23.73	5264	33.43	6744	42.83	15745	11.34
Total	46288	33.33	46297	33.34	46280	33.33	138865	100.00

Table 9b: Number and Percentage of candidates who met the A* and A grade criteria by deprivation excluding GS and CT.

	High		Medium		Low		Total	
	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit	N	% of crit
A*A*A* or better	499	21.75	774	33.74	1021	44.51	2294	1.66
A*A*A or better	1269	22.71	1842	32.96	2477	44.33	5588	4.04
A*AA or better	2526	23.68	3541	33.19	4601	43.13	10668	7.70
AAA or better	3594	23.99	4983	33.26	6405	42.75	14982	10.82
Total	46155	33.33	46171	33.34	46144	33.32	138470	100.00

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