

Numbers of A-level examinations taken by  
candidates in England 2006 and the  
percentages attaining 3 or more A grades

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## Aims, Data and Methods

This report investigates the numbers of A level examinations taken by candidates in 2006 and the percentages of students attaining 3 or more A grades. Data were extracted from the 16+/18+ databases for 2006, for candidates who had their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in the school year 2005/2006. These databases are compiled for the DFES from data supplied by all the awarding bodies in England. They contain candidate details and national examination records for all candidates in England who have their 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays in a particular school year. Records are present only if the candidate has sat an examination in a particular subject, not just attended classes. School type information was obtained from the Edubase database. Data merging and analyses were carried out in SAS (Version 9.1). For comparison, the numbers and percentages achieving 3 or more A grades in 1996 are given in the appendices.

## Results

**N.B.** Results here are restricted to A level candidates in England who turned 18 in the school year 2005/2006 and who sat their examinations in 2006.

Tables 1a and 1b show the total number of candidates taking at least one A level. The total number of A level candidates represents around one third of the population of England who had their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in the school year 2005/2006. The modal number of examinations taken was 3. This figure increases from around 49% of candidates to around 63% of candidates if General Studies is excluded. The numbers taking 4 examinations decreases from around 24% of candidates to around 8% of candidates if General Studies is excluded.

**Table 1a: Number of A level results in 2006 (% of candidates)**

Number of A Levels Taken	count	%
1	22490	10.05
2	32268	14.42
3	109510	48.95
4	53713	24.01
5+	5729	2.56
total candidates	223710	

**Table 1b: Number of A level results in 2006, excluding General Studies (% of candidates)**

Number of A Levels Taken	count	%
1	24364	10.95
2	37742	16.96
3	141158	63.43
4	18163	8.16
5+	1126	0.51
total candidates	222553	

Tables 2a and 2b show the numbers of A level examinations taken by candidates from different school types. Independent, grammar and sixth form candidates had the smallest percentages taking less than 3 A level examinations and the highest percentages taking more than 3 A level examinations. This was the case regardless of whether General Studies results were excluded from the analysis.

**Table 2a: Total number of A level results in 2006 (% of candidates) by school type**

School Type	Number of A level examinations taken, including General Studies				
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5+ %
Comprehensive	11.55	18.17	48.99	19.51	1.78
FE / Tertiary College	18.15	19.88	47.63	13.73	0.61
Grammar	1.22	3.55	39.91	48.19	7.13
Independent	4.35	5.14	64.12	23.18	3.21
Sixth Form College	9.87	13.92	42.84	30.40	2.96
Unidentified	22.73	20.76	50.65	5.38	0.48

1186 candidates were missing school type information

**Table 2b: Number of A level results in 2006, excluding General Studies (% of candidates) by school type**

School Type	Number of A level examinations taken, excluding General Studies					
	0 %	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5+ %
Comprehensive	0.62	12.70	21.12	59.60	5.71	0.24
FE / Tertiary College	0.33	18.35	21.60	53.00	6.54	0.19
Grammar	0.10	1.57	6.53	77.31	13.52	0.98
Independent	0.09	4.42	5.45	73.87	14.53	1.64
Sixth Form College	0.84	11.05	16.91	63.06	7.87	0.27
Unidentified	0.53	22.78	20.71	50.50	5.05	0.43

1186 candidates were missing school type information

**N.B.** The '0' column here refers to candidates who sat only a General Studies examination, not to candidates who sat no A level examinations

Tables 3a to 3d show the percentages of candidates achieving 3 or more A grades at A level in 2006. Analysis was carried out for both the whole population of candidates (i.e. those taking at least one examination) and then restricted to candidates who took 3 or more A level examinations. Results show that almost 26000 candidates achieved 3 or more A grades if General Studies was included and 24558 candidates achieved 3 or more A grades if General Studies was excluded. This represents around 11% of all the candidates and around 15% of those taking 3 or more A level examinations. For comparison, figures for 1996 are given in the appendices (Tables 5a to 5d).

**Table 3a: Percentage of all A level candidates in England attaining 3 or more A grades**

Attained 3 or more A grades	count	%
no	197761	88.4
yes	25948	11.6
total candidates	223710	

**Table 3b: Percentage of all A level candidates in England attaining 3 or more A grades, excluding General Studies**

Attained 3 or more A grades	count	%
no	197995	88.97
yes	24558	11.03
total candidates	222553	

**Table 3c: Percentage of candidates in England taking 3 or more A levels attaining 3 or more A grades**

Attained 3 or more A grades	count	%
no	143004	84.64
yes	25948	15.36
total candidates	168952	

**Table 3d: Percentage of candidates in England taking 3 or more A levels attaining 3 or more A grades, excluding General Studies**

Attained 3 or more A grades	count	%
no	135890	84.69
yes	24558	15.31
total candidates	160447	

Table 4 shows the numbers and percentages of candidates from different school types who attained 3 or more A grades, excluding General Studies (analysis was restricted to those who took 3 or more A levels). FE / tertiary colleges had the lowest percentage of candidates attaining 3 or more A grades (7.84%) whilst independent and grammar schools had the highest percentages of candidates attaining 3 or more A grades (31.35% and 23.01%, respectively). The final two columns of Table 4 show the breakdown, by school type, of all candidates and of candidates who attained 3 or more a grades. Although around 43% of candidates are from comprehensive schools, comprehensive school candidates account for less than 28% of the 3 A grade students. Less than 18% of the candidates attended independent schools but accounted for around 36% of the 3 A grade results.

**Table 4: Percentages of candidates in England taking 3 or more A levels and attaining 3 or more A grades (excluding General Studies) by school type**

School Type	Attained 3 or more A grades (excluding General Studies)				% of candidates belonging to each school type	% with 3 or more A grades belonging to each school type
	no		yes			
	count	%	count	%		
Comprehensive	62000	90.05	6850	9.95	43.09	27.96
FE / Tertiary College	10996	92.16	936	7.84	7.47	3.82
Grammar	13757	76.99	4111	23.01	11.18	16.78
Independent	19308	68.65	8817	31.35	17.60	35.99
Sixth Form College	28181	88.46	3676	11.54	19.94	15.00
Unidentified	1055	90.56	110	9.44	0.73	0.45

**Appendices: Numbers and percentages of candidates achieving 3 or more A grades at A level in 1996.**

**Table 5a: Percentage of all A level candidates in England attaining 3 or more A grades**

Attained 3 or more A grades	count	%
no	169559	93.05
yes	12656	6.95
total candidates	182215	

**Table 5b: Percentage of all A level candidates in England attaining 3 or more A grades, excluding General Studies**

Attained 3 or more A grades	count	%
no	170573	94.01
yes	10861	5.99
total candidates	181434	

**Table 5c: Percentage of candidates in England taking 3 or more A levels attaining 3 or more A grades**

Attained 3 or more A grades	count	%
no	130445	91.16
yes	12656	8.84
total candidates	143101	

**Table 5d: Percentage of candidates in England taking 3 or more A levels attaining 3 or more A grades, excluding General Studies**

Attained 3 or more A grades	count	%
no	122544	91.86
yes	10861	8.14
total candidates	133405	