Distance learning students from Essex to Asia awarded A* in English IGCSE

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92.3% A*-C pass mark for National Extension College's distance learning students as grade A*-C passes in English GCSE show historic fall

As schools across the country consider the impact of the changes to this year's English exam papers on their overall GCSE performance, young people and adults studying English IGCSE at the National Extension College (NEC) have lots to be proud of. 92.3% of NEC students have been awarded a grade C or above and nearly a quarter of them (23.1%) were awarded the top A* grade.

In England as a whole, 61.7% of 16 and 17-year olds studying English GCSE in school classrooms were awarded a grade C or above, with 4.1% achieving the top grade. (*Source:* Joint Council for Qualifications)

From September this year, young people who fall short of a grade C or above in GCSE English and maths will have to carry on studying the subjects and take the exams again each year until they hit the C grade considered necessary to be able to read and write proficiently for work.

Distance learning offers a choice for adults and young people not able to attend a conventional school or college. They may have a disability or long-term illness, be people with full-time caring responsibilities or simply men and women who want a second chance at learning if they didn't do very well at school. Young people who opt for distance learning are often being home-educated or are in hospital.

In academic year 2013/14, 820 young people and adults enrolled with NEC to study online for GCSEs and IGCEs – a 4.8% rise on last year. NEC, founded in 1963 by social entrepreneur Michael Young to give people a second chance at learning, offers a full range of GCSE and IGCSE subjects, including English, maths, the arts and humanities, physical and social science, and business.

74.7% of NEC students taking GCSEs and IGCSEs across the subject range offered by the college have achieved grades A*-C in 2014 against GCSE performance in England of 68.6%. In maths GCSE and IGCSE, 76.5% of NEC students have been awarded grades A*-C against national GCSE performance of 62.4%. Modern Foreign Languages are also an area of strength for NEC students, with everyone taking IGCSE French and Spanish achieving A* and A grades. 75% of NEC students taking IGCSE History were awarded grades A*-C. NEC students taking physical sciences performed less well, reflecting this year's decline in GCSE grades for science subjects nationally. The A*-C grades achieved by NEC students taking IGCSs are: biology 50%, chemistry 50% and physics 62.5%.

Congratulating the college's students, NEC Chief Executive Ros Morpeth, who is the *Times Educational Supplement's* FE Leader of the Year 2014, said: 'Distance learning students are highly motivated, many of them making the decision to carry on studying beyond the compulsory education age. Their results are testimony to their determination to succeed, whatever their circumstances. We all have just one chance as young people to gain the skills and qualifications we need to help them lead fulfilling, independent lives as adults. It takes determination to grab hold of the opportunity for a second chance at learning. As we celebrate the success of NEC's students, we are also thinking about the pupils across the country who have been hit by the changes made to the GCSE English exam during their course of study and whose grades are lower than they expected.'

Learner case studies

Anna, being home educated in Essex: 15-year old Anna, who is from Colchester, took her English Language IGCSE, a year earlier than she would have taken it had she been attending school. She achieved an A*.

Heather, studying while back-packing in South East Asia and Australia: 24-year old Heather from Plymouth did most of her studying while backpacking around South East Asia and Australia. She was really pleased with her A* result in English Language. Now that she is back in the UK, she plans to sit GAMSAT (Graduate Medical School Admissions Test) and hopes to gain a place at medical school in Australia.

Ben, who has one foot on each side of the Channel: 29-year old Ben divides his time between France

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and the UK. He is studying 10 different courses with NEC. He said: ‘I am very pleased that I got an A* (95%) in my French IGCSE, largely thanks to my tutor’s help. And the fact that I live in France for half the time - though I prefer to leave that bit out! Nevertheless, I am pleased to get the top grade, especially as I spent my GCSE French exam 15 years ago smoking outside the school gates. The NEC has been a great help. One down, nine to go!’

Just under three quarters of a million students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland took GCSE and IGCSE examinations this year. There were 300,000 fewer candidates this year than last as a result of the 40% drop in year 10s (15-year olds) taking exams early because of changes announced by the government at the end of last year. These mean the results of exam re-sits do not count towards school league tables.

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Notes to Editors

1. EC offers more than 80 courses in subjects covering science, maths, the humanities, professional skills, book-keeping, education and training and creativity and the arts. Learners can choose to work towards GCSE, IGCSE, A level and accredited professional qualifications.

2. In 2013, 74% of NEC students were awarded GCSE or IGCSE grades of A* - C, compared with a national rate of 68%. Despite the widely reported fall in science grades after papers were made tougher, 73% of NEC students were awarded grades A* - C, compared with the national rate of 53.1%. The national GCSE pass rate was 98.8%, but the pass rate of NEC students was 100%.

3. Three quarters of a million people have improved their career prospects and broadened their education since NEC was set up 50 years ago by social entrepreneur Michael (later Lord) Young, the founder of The Consumers’ Association and one of the inspirations behind what became The Open University.

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