How did distance learning students do in A levels and GCSEs compared to those in schools?

Friday 20 August, 2021

NEC students achieved a high overall pass rate of 98.5% in both GCSEs and A levels.

Background

2021 saw another year of exam cancellations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The government decided in January that with ongoing cases and intermittent lockdowns, results would this time be based on Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs).

In comparison to the exam fiasco caused by the government's algorithm and U-turn in 2020, Teacher Assessed Grades were designed to ensure that results were given more fairly, with the aim of students' abilities being reflected more fairly. Based on a range of evidence, teachers assigned grades, assessing work on modules that had been taught by that point in the academic year, making results more equitable. This was particularly important given the widening gaps in education between state and private schools, exacerbated by the pandemic.

Analysis of national statistics from Ofqual shows that GCSE and A level results were both higher than last year, but with variance across different subjects. A level and GCSE results from 2021 also fit a general trend of increasing grades.

Given that exams were unable to take place in person, Teacher Assessed Grades ensured that students were able to get the qualifications they needed to progress in their education journey. This was thanks to the hard work of teachers, who were praised by Education Secretary Gavin Williamson for "ensuring that, despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, all students were able to get grades this year and so can take their next steps and make their choices about further study or entering the workplace."

However, not all students were able to get grades. Private candidates and those on a less traditional path may not have met the requirements needed to be given a Teacher Assessed Grade. Based on our experience, particularly in the last two years, it is important that these students are not forgotten in ongoing policy discussions surrounding curriculum and assessments. Cambridge University Press and Assessment have been discussing such issues in their 'Future of Education' series.

National statistics

In 2021, there were 12,660 total entries for GCSE exams from private candidates and 7,424 total entries for A levels from private candidates (Ofqual, 2021). Overall there was a 4.7% increase in A level exam entries from last year and a 1.5% increase in GCSE entry. It is important to recognise that this increase in GCSE candidates was due to a larger population of 16-year-olds in the UK (FFT Education Datalab).

Nationally, 87.5% of A level students gain grades A*-C at A level with 44.3% achieving A*-A. Similarly, national averages for GCSE results this year saw 30.2% of students gain grades 9-7.

For distance learning providers such as NEC, grades were also assessed on students' work throughout the year and assigned by their tutors - allowing for a holistic reflection of our students' hard work on results day, and reducing the possibility of surprises.

How did NEC students perform?

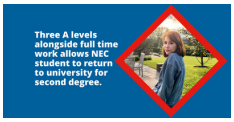
NEC students achieved a high overall pass rate of 98.5% in both GCSEs and A levels. We're proud to report that our students achieved a 100% pass rate in most subjects. A level History of Art students did especially well, with 87.5% achieving the highest grades of A*-A, as did A level Religious Studies students, 93% of whom also achieved grades A*-A. GCSE results were very good across the board, with a 100% pass rate in 14 of our 16 subjects. Particularly high achieving GCSE subjects included Chemistry, in which 94% achieved grades 9-7, and French, in which 93% achieved grades 9-7. In GCSE Geography, 100% of NEC students achieved the top grades of 9-7.

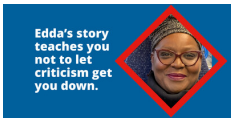
Compared the national averages for A levels, NEC students results saw 4% more A*-C grades. For GCSEs, there was a significantly higher number of grades 9-7 awarded, a whopping 44.3% increase on

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the national average.

What is clear is that despite the challenging circumstances that many students experience, online distance learning with NEC generated exceptional GCSE and A level results. The achievements of NEC students are incredible and have been the result of a great deal of hard work and determination.

“I would like to personally congratulate all of our students who have received results last week. It has been a disruptive and challenging 18 months. Our students have needed to demonstrate independence and determination to complete their studies. All have shown resilience and remarkable adaptability. All at NEC are truly honoured to have been part of each of your journeys.

I am very pleased with how the team at NEC has been able to ensure students were given the opportunity to be assessed in a rigorous and robust way. I am incredibly proud of the commitment shown by our staff, tutors and students.” - Esther Chesterman, CEO of the National Extension College

Hear from some of our students:

“I made the decision to study A levels (Maths, Further Maths and Physics) at NEC. My experience with NEC has been amazing and beyond my expectation. The course materials provided were comprehensive and easy to follow. I found the practising questions very helpful and were enough to prepare me for the exams. My tutors were brilliant, they provided detailed feedback on every assignment and answered my questions promptly. The other NEC staff were also very supportive and friendly. NEC guided me through UCAS submission and exams booking. Now I've completed A level courses and will study at my dream university this September. NEC, thank you!” - Yue studied A level Maths (A*), A level Further Maths (A*) and A level Physics (A) and will be studying Computer Science at her dream university in September.

“I would not have applied without the confidence I have gained by doing this A level course and the encouragement I received from my tutor who was fantastic.” - Edda studied A level French whilst working full-time in international development and was able to use her new language skills to get a job in Senegal.

“I found that distance learning teaches you plenty of valuable skills which can be transferable into a variety of things, in particular for me, university. Over the past year I have definitely learnt the importance of time management and remaining motivated […]. NEC are great at helping you as on your student dashboard there are dates set out for you to follow and complete certain topics and assignments […]. If I ever did have any problems or queries though, my tutors were always more than happy to help and go the extra mile.” - Kayleigh completed A level Biology in a year through our Structured Fast Track option and is heading to university to study nursing in September.

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