# London’s lead widens as A‑level top‑grade gap with North East hits 9.2 points



London emerged again as the strongest-performing English region in this year’s A‑level tables, with 32.1% of entries awarded A*–A, while the North East recorded the lowest share at 22.9%. According to aggregated awarding‑body figures compiled by the Joint Council for Qualifications, the difference between the highest‑ and lowest‑performing regions widened to 9.2 percentage points in 2025 — up from 8.8 points the previous year — even as the overall national proportion of A*–A grades rose to around 28.3%.

Myles McGinley, head of exam board OCR, put the change bluntly to the Evening Standard: “If you look at the gap between the highest performing region this year, which is London, and the lowest performing region, which is the North East, we have seen an increase in the gap. Last year that gap was 8.8 percentage points, and this year, that gap is 9.2 percentage points.” His remarks reflect concern among awarding‑body leaders that headline gains mask growing geographic divergence. JCQ’s published tables were the basis for much of this reporting.

Independent analysis of the 2025 figures points to a record proportion of top grades outside the Covid years, but commentators have emphasised that the headline improvement sits alongside entrenched regional divides. Ofqual’s analytics portal — which allows county‑level inspection of A‑level outcomes — shows persistent county‑by‑county variation and helps explain why national averages can obscure sharp local differences in attainment. Journalists and policymakers have used those visualisations to map where top‑grade shares have risen and where they have fallen.

More detailed sector reporting identifies a number of sub‑trends behind the regional picture. Schools Week’s round‑up of eight key trends in the data highlights subject‑level shifts, gender differences and substantial county‑level variation, while national coverage also flagged falls in particular areas such as the West Midlands and the North East. Exam board and school leaders quoted across the coverage warned that socioeconomic factors remain a powerful driver of the uneven geography of results.

The unequal distribution of high grades has immediate consequences for progression to higher education. Education leaders and ministers responding to the results have pointed to the risk that pupils from lower‑scoring regions will face reduced access to top universities and the long‑term labour‑market opportunities that follow. Commentators have called for targeted policy responses to prevent the current pattern from reinforcing existing social mobility gaps.

Analysts and campaigners suggest several plausible explanations for the divergence. Coverage has explored how longstanding socioeconomic disparities, differences in school resources and disruption during the pandemic combined to tilt recovery in attainment towards more advantaged areas. Schools Week and Guardian analysis both emphasised that these are structural issues: short‑term fluctuations in grading cannot be disentangled from broader inequalities in funding, recruitment and local opportunity.

The official datasets that underpin this debate are publicly available: JCQ’s examination‑results hub provides the aggregated awarding‑body statistics used in media reporting, while Ofqual’s county‑level tools supply downloadable charts and interactive maps that allow closer scrutiny. Together, those resources give ministers, local authorities and school leaders the means to pinpoint where interventions are most needed.

Calls for action from across the sector have been consistent: allocate more targeted funding, address teacher recruitment and retention in harder‑hit counties, and design outreach to ensure disadvantaged pupils in lower‑scoring regions can access competitive university courses. Exam board executives and school leaders quoted in the aftermath urged both immediate and long‑term measures to narrow the gap rather than letting the current pattern become the new normal.

The paradox of 2025 is clear: while the national share of top grades has risen, the benefits of that improvement have not been evenly shared. As the JCQ and Ofqual datasets make plain, the growing gulf between London and the North East crystallises a broader policy challenge — how to translate overall grade inflation into genuine, geographically balanced opportunities for pupils across England.

### 📌 Reference Map:

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-best-a-level-results-country-top-grades-b1242892.html), [[6]](https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/), [[3]](https://news.sky.com/story/a-level-top-grades-rise-again-but-regional-inequalities-getting-worse-13411465)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-best-a-level-results-country-top-grades-b1242892.html), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-best-a-level-results-country-top-grades-b1242892.html), [[6]](https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/aug/14/record-a-level-students-top-grades-england), [[7]](https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/Alevel/County/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://schoolsweek.co.uk/a-level-results-2025-8-key-trends-in-englands-data/), [[3]](https://news.sky.com/story/a-level-top-grades-rise-again-but-regional-inequalities-getting-worse-13411465)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://news.sky.com/story/a-level-top-grades-rise-again-but-regional-inequalities-getting-worse-13411465), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/aug/14/record-a-level-students-top-grades-england), [[5]](https://schoolsweek.co.uk/a-level-results-2025-8-key-trends-in-englands-data/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/aug/14/record-a-level-students-top-grades-england), [[5]](https://schoolsweek.co.uk/a-level-results-2025-8-key-trends-in-englands-data/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[6]](https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/), [[7]](https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/Alevel/County/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[5]](https://schoolsweek.co.uk/a-level-results-2025-8-key-trends-in-englands-data/), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-best-a-level-results-country-top-grades-b1242892.html), [[3]](https://news.sky.com/story/a-level-top-grades-rise-again-but-regional-inequalities-getting-worse-13411465)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-best-a-level-results-country-top-grades-b1242892.html), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/aug/14/record-a-level-students-top-grades-england), [[6]](https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-best-a-level-results-country-top-grades-b1242892.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/london-best-a-level-results-country-top-grades-b1242892.html> - The Evening Standard reports that London recorded the highest proportion of A‑level top grades in 2025, with 32.1% of entries awarded A\*–A, while the North East recorded the lowest at 22.9%. The story highlights concerns that the gap between the best and worst performing English regions has widened — quoted the head of OCR, Myles McGinley, saying the difference grew from 8.8 percentage points last year to 9.2 points this year. The article cites national figures from the Joint Council for Qualifications and notes wider debate about entrenched regional inequalities and their impact on university access and social mobility today.
3. <https://news.sky.com/story/a-level-top-grades-rise-again-but-regional-inequalities-getting-worse-13411465> - Sky News reports that A‑level top grades rose nationally in 2025 but that regional inequalities deepened, with London achieving 32.1% A\*–A compared with 22.9% in the North East. Citing Ofqual and JCQ data and comments from exam board leaders, Sky highlights that the gap between the highest and lowest performing English regions has widened to 9.2 percentage points. The piece outlines county‑level variation, notes falls in the West Midlands and North East, and quotes education leaders urging government action to address entrenched disparities that affect university progression and long‑term opportunities for students from disadvantaged areas across England and Wales again.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/aug/14/record-a-level-students-top-grades-england> - The Guardian’s analysis of 2025 A‑level data notes a record proportion of top grades outside the Covid years and draws attention to widening regional divides. It reports London at 32.1% A\*–A and the North East at 22.9%, a 9.2 percentage‑point gap, linking the figures to JCQ and Ofqual data. The piece explores causes including socioeconomic disparity and pandemic disruption, cites education ministers and experts calling for policy responses, and discusses university access consequences. It situates the 2025 results in a longer trend, comparing outcomes with 2019 and emphasising concern about entrenched inequalities that limit social mobility, and public debate continues.
5. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/a-level-results-2025-8-key-trends-in-englands-data/> - Schools Week’s round‑up of 2025 A‑level data presents eight trends and highlights growing regional inequality. Using JCQ and Ofqual figures, it records London at 32.1% A\*–A and the North East at 22.9%, noting the gap widened to 9.2 percentage points from 8.8 the previous year. The piece analyses subject trends, gender differences and county‑level variation, and quotes exam board and school leaders warning that socioeconomic factors underpin the disparities. Schools Week stresses implications for disadvantaged pupils’ progression to university and calls for targeted policy and resource allocation to narrow the attainment gap between regions over the coming academic years urgently.
6. <https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/> - The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) collates and publishes collective A‑level results across its member awarding organisations. Its examination‑results hub provides national tables, press notices and regional charts which form the basis for media reporting of the 2025 results. JCQ’s data shows the UK‑wide rise in top grades to around 28.3% and is frequently cited by outlets and commentators when describing regional breakdowns such as London’s 32.1% and the North East’s 22.9%. The JCQ resource is the official repository of aggregated awarding‑body figures and is referenced by Ofqual, schools and journalists for authoritative summary statistics and historic comparisons each year.
7. <https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/Alevel/County/> - Ofqual’s analytics portal offers interactive maps and statistical releases that break down A‑level outcomes by county and region, allowing users to inspect proportions of A\*–A grades across England. The A‑level county map and accompanying visualisations display historical and 2024/2025 comparisons, highlighting regional variation such as London’s higher top‑grade share versus the North East’s lower share. Ofqual’s tools underpin much of the commentary about widening gaps, enabling journalists and policymakers to verify figures and county‑level trends. The portal provides downloadable datasets and graphics used by analysts to assess where attainment has changed and to inform debate on policy responses and planning.