



Department of
Education

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AN ROINN
Oideachais

MINISTRE O
Lear

John Simmons
Clerk to the Committee
Committee for Education
Room 241
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Rathgill
Bangor
BT19 7PR

Tel No: (028) 9127 9693
Fax No: (028) 9127 9100

Email: john.leonard@deni.gov.uk

Your Ref: 065/10/C/04

31 January 2011

Dear John

I refer to your letter of 26 November 2010 to Stanley Goudie, Chief Inspector.

Following my letter of 2 December, which provided the information you requested on GCSE grades obtained by pupils in English and Maths, I am now writing to provide the information requested on how GCSE grades D and E compare with grade C in terms of pupils' capabilities in literacy and numeracy. I apologise for the delay in replying.

GCSE pass grades run from A* (very high performance) to G (very basic performance). Within each GCSE specification, grade descriptors are provided for the baseline grades of A, C and F: these give a general indication of the standards, in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills, necessary for students to achieve these grades. The other grades are calculated based on these reference grades. The descriptors are set out in the context of the subject.

The grade awarded is dependent upon the extent to which the candidate has met the assessment objectives. Shortcomings in some aspects of the assessment may be balanced by better performance in others – for example, a candidate may perform better in the speaking/listening component of English as compared to the writing component. The subject grade will reflect an aggregation of the overall performance across components. Grades reflect a continuum of achievement and no particular point between grades, e.g. C and D, can be seen as a 'watershed' in performance terms.

EDUCATION COMM

31 JAN 2011



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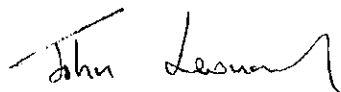
065/10/C/05

For most of 14 to 16 year olds literacy and numeracy skills are developed through the teaching of GCSE English and Mathematics. In the recent revision of these specifications (for first teaching from September 2010) detailed work was done to embed skills requirements in relation to functional literacy and numeracy. This means that achievement in GCSE English and Maths at grade C and above indicates performance at Level 2 in communication and application of number respectively. Grade D and below is aligned with Level 1 achievement.

In the main the Level 2 standard is characterised by a greater depth of understanding and the ability to work more independently. For example, in communication at Level 1 the requirement is to respond to information and follow explanations and instructions, whereas at Level 2 there is a requirement to listen and respond to extended information and follow detailed explanations and multi-step instructions.

There is a general recognition that if young people are to progress to higher education and/or employment, and hence live effective and fulfilling lives, they need to have achieved Level 2 skills. A portfolio of Level 2 qualifications is increasingly the minimum platform of skills required for employment. Indeed, Level 2 is the lowest level of attainment recognised by the Organisation for Economic Development for an individual to function effectively in society.

I trust this information is helpful but, should members feel it would be useful, officials from the Department and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) would be happy to provide an oral briefing on this issue to the Committee.



JOHN LEONARD
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer





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Your Ref: 065/10/C/04

2 December 2010

Dear John

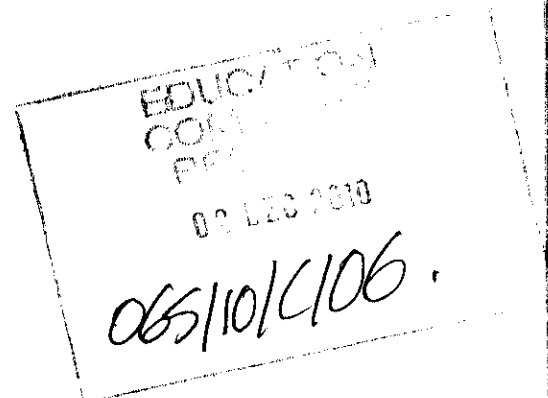
I refer to your correspondence of 26 November 2010 addressed to Stanley Goudie, Chief Inspector.

Please see attached the percentage of pupils, broken down by gender, who have attained 5+ GCSEs at grades A* - C, A* - D, A* - E over the last five years.

The further information you requested will follow in due course.

Yours sincerely

JOHN LEONARD
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer



Percentage of Year 12 pupils achieving selected grades in English and mathematics by gender, 2005/06 - 2009/10

Gender	Indicator	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Female	maths A*-C	61.4	61.5	63.2	61.3	63.4
	English A*-C	71.0	71.5	72.2	71.4	73.1
	maths A*-D	73.5	73.7	75.1	74.9	76.4
	English A*-D	84.4	85.2	84.7	84.3	85.2
	maths A*-E	83.3	83.1	83.4	83.2	84.4
	English A*-E	90.1	90.4	89.7	90.0	90.4
Male	maths A*-C	54.5	55.8	58.6	59.7	59.7
	English A*-C	54.4	55.1	55.9	57.3	57.0
	maths A*-D	66.2	68.3	70.7	72.8	73.2
	English A*-D	71.3	72.0	72.6	73.8	73.7
	maths A*-E	77.1	78.1	79.8	80.9	81.4
	English A*-E	80.1	81.0	81.4	82.3	82.2
Total	maths A*-C	57.9	58.6	60.9	60.5	61.5
	English A*-C	62.6	63.2	63.9	64.3	65.0
	maths A*-D	69.8	71.0	72.8	73.8	74.8
	English A*-D	77.8	78.5	78.5	79.0	79.4
	maths A*-E	80.1	80.5	81.6	82.0	82.9
	English A*-E	85.0	85.6	85.4	86.1	86.2

Year 12 figure is taken from the NI school census

Source: Forvus/RM solutions database.



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

*Mr Mervyn Storey
Chairperson, Committee for Education*

Mr S Goudie
Chief Inspector
The Education Training Inspectorate
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Bangor
BT19 7PR

Ref No: 065/10/C/04

26 November 2010

Dear Stanley

GCSE Grades

Thank you for your letter dated 16 November 2010 which the Committee considered at its meeting on the 24 November 2010.

The Committee noted with interest the percentages of pupils achieving grade D in English and Maths and agreed to write to ETI to request the following additional information:

1. The percentage of pupils, broken down by gender, who have attained 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C, A*-D and A* - E, over each of the last five years.
2. Information to enable the Committee to understand how grades D and E compare to grade C in Maths and English in terms of the relative levels of numeracy and literacy that each grade indicates; and to understand whether lower grades, eg D and E, indicate a level of literacy and numeracy such that pupils holding them would not normally experience any significant problems of literacy and numeracy in their everyday work and life following school.

*Committee for Education
Room 242, Parliament Buildings, Ballymiscaw, Stormont, Belfast, BT4 3XX
Telephone: (028) 90521787 Fax: (028) 90521371
E-mail: John.Simmons@niassembly.gov.uk*

It may be of assistance to the Committee to have sight of some practical examples of the differences in levels of attainment which are reflected in grades C to E.

I have copied this letter to the Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer should you wish to involve colleagues in the Department and/or CCEA in dealing with these Committee requests.

Yours sincerely

John Simmons

**John Simmons
Clerk
Committee for Education**

Copy to John Leonard, DALO, Department of Education

*Committee for Education
Room 242, Parliament Buildings, Ballymiscaw, Stormont, Belfast, BT4 3XX
Telephone: (028) 90521787 Fax: (028) 90521371
E-mail: John.Simmons@niassembly.gov.uk*