

NI's Syrian refugees excel in Arabic GCSE

By Robbie Meredith BBC News NI Education Correspondent
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After-school and weekend lessons have paid off for the boys

For many pupils, getting their GCSE results marks the start of the next stage of their academic journey.

But some pupils at Corpus Christi College in west Belfast have travelled a long way just to be able to sit their GCSEs.

Omran Al-Hajkadour and his brother Ahmad, and their friend Mohamad Elzohby are all refugees from Syria.

They fled the devastating conflict in the country to settle in west Belfast and become pupils at Corpus Christi.

On Thursday, they received their first ever GCSE results, and they were good ones.

A* star grades

Omran and Ahmad got A* star grades in GCSE Arabic while Mohamad, who is only 14 years old, got an A grade.

Although they speak Arabic, Ahmad said that taking the subject at GCSE was a big test of their English language skills.

"The paper was in Arabic and English," he said.



Ahmad says *'English can be a problem'*

"The question was in English but I had to answer in Arabic.

"I'm now going to do ICT, Maths, English, Science, Religion and Construction GCSEs.

"I think I'll do well, but English is a problem as I don't speak much English."

Ahmad's English, however, sounds impressive to me, especially for someone who has only been in Northern Ireland for a relatively short time.

Summer school

The boys have been going to a special Saturday school run by the Full Service Community Network (FSCN), an education project in west Belfast.

Like many other Syrian pupils in the area they also go to an after-school homework club run by the Conway Education Centre in Conway Mill in Belfast.

Omran said they had even been going to a school at the weekend run by the FSCN and Corpus Christi.

The school's principal, Frank Maskey, had also helped organise trips for the Syrian pupils to help them feel at home in Belfast.

"The school opened on Saturday for some revision," Omran said.

"After we finished revising we would go on trips to have fun."



Omran says *'studying for the Arabic qualification also improved his English'*

He is also planning to do seven GCSEs similar to his brother, and also felt doing a GCSE in Arabic first had improved his English.

"I started to think about how I could make my English better, and improve my English result," he said.

"I feel very happy and very proud of my school, myself and my teachers who have helped me."



Mohamad is the youngest of the three, and wants to study maths, science and technology

Mohamad is also proud of his A grade and wants to study maths, science and technology when he takes further GCSEs.

Corpus Christi College has a number of other Syrian pupils who, like Omran, Ahmad and Mohamad, have come to Northern Ireland under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

Northern Ireland has so far welcomed 632 refugees on a phased basis since early 2016.