



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

An investigation into the numbers and candidates with incomplete entries at AS/A level

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Abstract

AS and A levels are undergoing a comprehensive reform. In particular, from 2015, the AS level will be de-coupled from the A level and will become a standalone qualification, rather than being part of an A level. This move has raised concerns, as without a direct link to A levels, the new AS levels could reduce participation in subjects such as Mathematics or languages and may not be as beneficial. For example, the existing AS levels have allowed the study of a wide range of subjects and, in some instances, have provided the chance to try out subjects not studied before. It has been argued that the AS levels in their current form are valued by universities and can encourage pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to continue their studies.

This research aimed to understand the numbers and types of students who start but do not complete their AS and A levels. Its outcomes will add to the debate surrounding the AS/A level reform, a controversial issue in current education policy, and could help to anticipate changes in the uptake of the new AS levels.

Data was obtained from the OCR awarding body and the National Pupil Database. It covered students at the end of Key Stage 5 in 2012/13 who had taken at least one AS/A level unit in Biology, Psychology or English Literature. Descriptive analyses and multilevel logistic regression models were employed to address the researched issues.

The outcomes of this work showed that:

- In the three subjects, the majority of the candidates certificated in both AS and A level.
- Students who dropped subjects from AS to A level usually had a worse result for the AS part than students who continued to achieve the full A level.
- Early interest in a subject (e.g. at GCSE) increased the likelihood of obtaining an A level rather than just an AS level.
- There was no association between the type of school attended by the student and the likelihood of dropping out Psychology and English Literature. In Biology, candidates in independent schools and in sixth form colleges were more likely to drop out from AS to A level than candidates in state-selective schools.

The subjects taken in the sixth form have implications for university recruitment and, therefore, a good understanding of how students refine their subject choice at the end of the first year of advanced study is crucial.

Full paper

<http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/202665-research-matters-19-winter-2015.pdf>