

AS and A Level Choice

School type has an influence

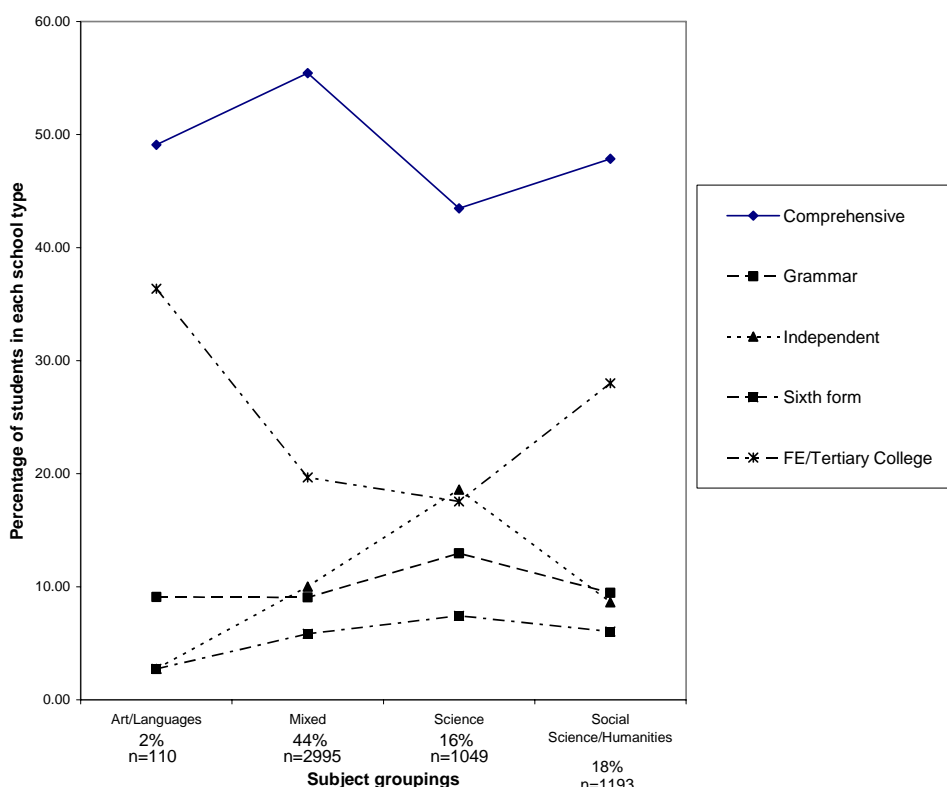
The choices of AS and A2 level subjects were influenced by the types of schools attended.

Students attending Grammar or Independent schools tended to take more AS level subjects compared with the number taken by students attending Comprehensive schools or 6th Form Colleges.

Students attending Independent schools, Grammar schools and 6th Form Colleges were oriented towards science subjects such as Biology, Chemistry and Physics, and this orientation was most noticeable in Independent schools.

Students attending FE/Tertiary colleges were more likely to take Arts subjects or subjects in the Socio/Humanities fields such as Business Studies, Law, ICT, Philosophy, Sociology and Psychology.

Students attending Comprehensive schools chose a mixture of subjects. Comprehensive schools usually offer a wider range of subjects than other centres. In some subjects, such as History, Geography, Music or Religious Studies, the patterns of uptake in Comprehensive schools were similar to those in Grammar and Independent schools but, in many other subjects such as Accounting, Business Studies, Chemistry, ICT, Media Studies and Sociology, the uptake in Comprehensive schools was more similar to the subject uptake in colleges.



The graph shows the percentages of students from each of the 5 school types taking AS level subjects solely in either Arts/Languages, Maths/ Science, Social Science/Humanities, or subjects from a mixture of these areas. These classifications are given in Appendix A of the full report, where English, other Languages and Arts subjects were combined to form the Arts/Languages group.

Top 10 A2 level Subjects chosen by Percentage of Students completing the survey and Type of School attended									
Comprehensive		Grammar		Independent		6 th Form College		FE/Tertiary College	
Subject	%	Subject	%	Subject	%	Subject	%	Subject	%
Maths	22.4	Chemistry	33.3	Maths	39.0	Maths	36.0	Psychology	35.5
Psychology	21.5	Biology	32.7	Biology	28.3	Biology	35.1	Sociology	19.7
History	20.8	Maths	31.3	Chemistry	27.7	Chemistry	34.2	Maths	19.3
B S	20.8	History	29.6	History	24.8	Psychology	32.4	Law	16.8
Biology	20.6	Physics	21.1	Art & Des	21.4	English Lit	18.0	Media	16.6
Geography	16.3	Psychology	19.7	Physics	18.9	B S	18.0	History	15.0
Chemistry	14.8	G S	19.0	R S	17.3	Sociology	17.1	B S	15.0
English Lit	14.3	Art & Des	16.3	Eng Lang	11.9	Media	15.3	Art & Des	14.0
Art & Des	13.5	D & Tech	16.0	Geography	11.9	Accounting	12.6	English Lit	13.5
Media	12.2	Geography	15.3	G S or B S	11.3	Physics	9.9	Biology	13.2

B S = Business Studies G S = General Studies R S = Religious Studies Art & Des = Art & Design

There were differences between school types in the levels of perceived importance of the subjects chosen by their students and in the reasons students gave for making their choices. For example, the perceived importance given to AS/A2 subjects by students in Independent schools was higher than that given by students in other schools. Further Maths was perceived as very important by a higher percentage of students in Independent and Grammar schools than in any of the other type of school. The most important reason given by students attending FE/Tertiary colleges for their choices was that the subjects would be useful for a future career, whereas students attending Independent, Grammar or Comprehensive schools chose subjects because they would be interesting. In addition, children attending Independent or Grammar schools acknowledged receiving more advice than those in any other type of school. Further details on the impact of school type, social class, demographic factors and advice given to students are provided in the full report and in other Factsheets in this series.

Context of research

Cambridge Assessment undertook this large-scale questionnaire survey of the choices made by 4,125 AS level students and 2,472 A2 level students to determine what subjects they chose to take and what influenced their decision-making. There were approximately the same numbers of boys and girls sampled from 60 schools (Comprehensive, Grammar, Independent) and colleges (Sixth Form, Tertiary and Further Education) throughout England and the students came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The proportions of student gender and school type were representative of the A level populations as a whole. Students were asked to list the subjects they chose at AS and A2 level, where advice had been obtained, what advice they had been given and what had influenced the choices they had made. The differences that emerged in this research between different social class groups, gender groups, ethnic groups, ability levels and school type with regard to subject choice may have implications for the widening participation agenda.

Further information

Full details of AS and A2 level subject choice are given in the full report available at www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk

In addition to this report, comprehensive details of some aspects of examination uptake can be found in the statistical reports section of the Cambridge Assessment website.

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