

Changing boards: Investigating the effects of centres

changing specifications for English GCSE

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Abstract

The Awarding Bodies and their regulator carry out research to maintain the equivalence of examination standards. However, some criticisms remains suggesting that examination boards may be lowering standards in specifications (syllabuses) in order to attract more centres (schools or colleges). This paper reports our investigations on whether centres that decide to change their specifications base their decision on the assumption that a specification with higher number of candidates achieving grade C and above means that the specification is easier. Using GCSE English data for years 2000-2003, we show that there is insufficient evidence for this assumption; instead, alternative explanations may be more plausible. We then consider whether centres that changed their specifications improve their mean level of performance more than centres that did not change. There was not enough evidence for this second assumption either.

Keywords: GCSE English, mean performance, specification, change, improvement

Additional Tables

Table II (a): Number of centres changing their specifications in GCSE English in 2002

New Specification	Old Specification					Total
	0150	1111	1202	1500	2400	
0150	X	26	1	1	5	33
1111	19	X	25	32	56	132
1202	2	16	X	4	8	30
1500	-	44	6	X	13	63
2400	3	67	9	18	X	97
Total	24	153	41	55	82	355

Table II (b): Number of centres changing their specifications in GCSE English in 2003

New Specification	Old Specification					Total
	0150	1111	1202	1500	2400	
0150	X	17	1	2	10	30
1111	12	X	21	29	72	134
1202	2	18	X	1	10	31
1500	4	19	2	X	19	44
2400	3	35	2	6	X	46
Total	21	89	26	38	111	285

Table II (c): Number of centres changing their specifications in GCSE English in 2000-2003

New Specification	Old Specification					Total
	0150	1111	1202	1500	2400	
0150	X	20	3	2	6	31
1111	40	X	16	13	37	106
1202	2	47	X	3	8	60
1500	6	65	4	X	18	93
2400	10	136	12	17	X	175
Total	58	268	35	35	69	465

Table II (d): Difference in mean results based on changes of specifications in GCSE English in 2001

New Specification	Old Specification					Overall mean
	0150	1111	1202	1500	2400	
0150	X	0.53	-0.69	-0.39	1.81	0.26
1111	-0.16	X	-0.07	0.19	0.76	0.20
1202	-	0.25	X	0.08	0.66	0.30
1500	0.97	-0.11	1.64	X	-0.01	0.04
2400	-0.25	0.01	0.42	-0.22	X	-0.02
Overall mean	-0.13	0.04	0.25	-0.10	0.54	0.07

Table II (e): Difference in mean results based on changes of specifications in GCSE English in 2002

New Specification	Old Specification					Overall mean
	0150	1111	1202	1500	2400	
0150	X	-0.62	-0.11	-1.94	0.08	-0.54
1111	0.22	X	-0.12	-0.29	0.10	-0.02
1202	1.53	-0.88	X	0.66	-0.98	-0.54
1500	-	0.21	-0.42	X	-0.24	0.06
2400	0.68	-0.13	-0.15	-0.002	X	-0.08
Overall mean	0.39	-0.19	-0.17	-0.16	-0.06	-0.11

Table II (f): Difference in mean results based on changes of specifications in GCSE English in 2003

New Specification	Old Specification					Overall mean
	0150	1111	1202	1500	2400	
0150	X	0.47	-	0.18	-0.44	0.14
1111	-1.04	X	-0.39	-0.08	0.09	-0.12
1202	-0.19	0.12	X	1.26	-0.53	-0.07
1500	-1.41	0.38	-1.54	X	-0.45	-0.23
2400	-0.38	0.16	0.002	0.24	X	0.13
Overall mean	-0.94	0.26	-0.45	0.02	-0.11	-0.07

Table II (g): Difference in mean results based on changes of specifications in GCSE English in 2000-2003

New Specification	Old Specification					Overall mean
	0150	1111	1202	1500	2400	
0150	X	0.77	-0.49	0.11	-0.44	0.37
1111	-0.52	X	0.29	0.07	0.29	-0.05
1202	0.12	0.21	X	0.50	0.20	0.22
1500	-1.29	0.53	0.79	X	-0.24	0.27
2400	-0.05	0.33	-0.11	-0.60	X	0.19
Overall mean	-0.50	0.39	0.12	-0.22	0.08	0.17

Table II (h): Differences in percentage gaining at least grade C for 2001 based on 1999 data

New Specification	Old Specification			
	1111	1202	1500	2400
1111	X	-6.44	-10.16	-6.08
1202	6.44	X	-3.72	0.36
1500	10.16	3.72	X	4.08
2400	6.08	-0.36	-4.08	X

Table II (i): Differences in percentage gaining at least grade C for 2002 based on 2000 data

New Specification	Old Specification				
	0150	1111	1202	1500	2400
0150	X	2.21	-3.85	-7.49	-2.82
1111	-2.21	X	-6.06	-9.70	-5.03
1202	3.85	6.06	X	-3.64	1.03
1500	7.49	9.70	3.64	X	4.67
2400	2.82	5.03	-1.03	-4.67	X

Table II (j): Differences in percentage gaining at least grade C for 2003 based on 2001 data

New Specification	Old Specification				
	0150	1111	1202	1500	2400
0150	X	0.20	-5.29	-11.00	-6.69
1111	-0.20	X	-5.49	-11.20	-6.68
1202	5.29	5.49	X	-5.71	-1.40
1500	11.00	11.20	5.71	X	4.31
2400	6.69	6.89	1.40	-4.31	X

Table II (k): Difference in mean results for centres that did not change their specification in GCSE English in 2001, 2002, 2003 and for the period 2000-2003

Specification	Year 2001		Year 2002		Yeas 2003		Years 2003-2000	
	N	Mean diff	N	Mean diff	N	Mean diff	N	Mean diff
1500	595	0.004	588	-0.01	561	0.03	535	0.03
1202	284	-0.05	282	0.06	252	0.01	236	0.03
2400	738	0.02	726	-0.04	651	0.01	628	0.04
1111	2622	-0.004	2653	0.04	2657	0.02	2485	0.06
0150	155	0.005	156	-0.03	163	-0.002	131	-0.04
Total	4394	-0.001	4405	0.02	4284	0.02	4015	0.04