Uptake of GCSE subjects 2015

Statistics Report Series No.107

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Introduction

This report looks at the uptake of GCSE (and IGCSE) subjects in England in 2015. The data for these analyses were taken from the National Pupil Database (NPD). This is a database held by the Department for Education, consisting of results for all students in all subjects in schools and colleges in England, as well as pupil and school background characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity and level of deprivation.

For the analysis of uptake at GCSE the Key Stage 4 (KS4) extract of the NPD was used, consisting of all students who were at the end of KS4 in 2015 (i.e. in year 11). Uptake in this report is defined as the percentage of these students taking a GCSE in the subject, and includes exams taken by these students in previous years. Only accredited IGCSEs were counted in this report as non-accredited qualifications are no longer included in the NPD extract.

Table 1 presents a breakdown of the number of GCSEs taken by students. This shows that around 20% took 9 GCSEs and around 20% took 10. The mean number of GCSEs taken was 8.3.

Table 1: Number of GCSEs taken (% of GCSE students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of GCSEs</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12+</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean no. taken</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of candidates</td>
<td>590,238</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Uptake of GCSEs in this report is presented by different student classifications: gender, school type, prior attainment, school gender and deprivation level. In the following tables the numbers of students in each of the classifications are presented.

School type

There are several different types of school where students study for GCSEs. For this report these were classified into five groups. Table 2 presents the number and percentage of GCSE students attending each school type.

Table 2: GCSE students by school type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School type</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academy</td>
<td>262,584</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>254,579</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>9,668</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>49,854</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Modern</td>
<td>13,158</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Pupil attainment**

Students were classified by their attainment at GCSE. GCSE grades were converted into scores (A* = 8, A= 7, B= 6 etc.) and a mean GCSE was calculated for each student, which was then used to divide students up into three approximately equally sized attainment groups: low, medium and high. Table 3 presents the number in each group as well as the mean, minimum and maximum value of mean GCSE for each group.

**Table 3: GCSE students by attainment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior attainment group</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>193,411</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>197,631</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>196,374</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Deprivation level**

The level of deprivation that a student experiences was measured by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). This is a measure of the proportion of children in a very small geographical area (Lower Layer Super Output Area or LSOA) who live in families that are income deprived. It varies between 0 and 1, with 0 representing minimum deprivation and 1 maximum deprivation.

It should be noted that there was some missing data for this measure (almost 10% of students had no record). Students who did have a measure of deprivation were divided up into three equally sized groups. Table 4 presents the number of students and the mean, minimum and maximum IDACI values in each group.

**Table 4: GCSE students by deprivation level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deprivation Group</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>179,168</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>179,152</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>179,156</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School gender**

The school gender variable was determined by the female ratio (number of females over the total number of students) in the school. If this ratio was greater than 0.95, the school was considered to be a “Girls” school. If the female ratio was less than 0.05, then the school was designated a “Boys” school. The rest of the schools were considered “Mixed” schools. Table 5 shows the numbers and percentages of students attending the different types of schools.

**Table 5: GCSE students by school gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School gender</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys School</td>
<td>30,587</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls School</td>
<td>45,223</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed School</td>
<td>514,428</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number of GCSEs taken

The number of GCSEs taken by students in each of the classifications is presented in Tables 6-9. For example, Table 6 shows that 21.5% of students in academies took 10 GCSEs, compared with 37.3% of students in grammar schools. In academies the mean number of GCSEs taken was 8.5, compared with 10.3 in grammar schools. Table 7 shows that 6.7% of students with low attainment took 10 GCSEs, compared with 31.1% of students with high attainment.

Table 6: Number of GCSEs taken, by school type (% of students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of GCSEs</th>
<th>Academy</th>
<th>Comprehensive</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Modern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12+</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean no. taken</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of candidates</td>
<td>262,584</td>
<td>254,579</td>
<td>9,668</td>
<td>49,854</td>
<td>13,158</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Number of GCSEs taken, by attainment (% of students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of GCSEs</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12+</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean no. taken</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of candidates</td>
<td>193,411</td>
<td>197,631</td>
<td>196,374</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8: Number of GCSEs taken, by deprivation level (% of students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of GCSEs</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
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<td>22.7</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12+</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean no. taken 9.1  8.5  7.9
No. of candidates 179,168 179,152 179,156

Table 9: Number of GCSEs taken, by school gender (% of students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of GCSEs</th>
<th>Boys school</th>
<th>Girls school</th>
<th>Mixed school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12+</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean no. taken 8.4  8.7  8.2
No. of candidates 30,587 45,223 514,428

Uptake of individual GCSE subjects

In the following tables the uptake of individual subjects is presented, broken down into the classifications outlined above. Subjects with an overall uptake level of less than 1% are not included. In each table the subjects are ordered by overall uptake (highest first). Thus, mathematics had the highest level of uptake, being taken by 92.6% of all GCSE students, 92.2% of males and 93.0% of females.

It is worth noting that the expectation is that virtually all pupils take some core subjects, such as English, mathematics and science. However, there are alternatives to GCSEs in these subjects which are increasingly popular, such as (unaccredited) IGCSEs, BTECs and OCR Nationals (particularly in science). This means that the percentages for these subjects are reduced somewhat in these tables. For a detailed analysis of uptake of alternative qualifications in English schools see Gill (2016).
Table 10: Uptake of individual subjects by gender (% of students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td>92.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Literature</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>83.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science (Core)</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Science</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Studies</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education/Sports Studies</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information &amp; Communications Technology</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Design</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Studies: Single</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama &amp; Theatre Studies</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language &amp; Literature</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media/Film/TV Studies</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Design (Fine Art)</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;T Resistant Materials</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;T Food Technology</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;T Product Design</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Studies/Computing</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;T Graphic Products</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;T Textiles Technology</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further additional science</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Design (Photography)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Table 12: Uptake of individual subjects by attainment (% of students)

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Table 13: Uptake of individual subjects by deprivation group (% of students)

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Table 14: Uptake of individual subjects by school gender (% of students)

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