GCSE early entry: Is it a good thing?

Evidence from national data

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Perspectives from Cambridge Assessment
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Research questions

1. What are the patterns of early certification in GCSE subjects in recent years and the profile of candidates certificating early?

2. How do candidates who certificate in a GCSE prior to June of year 11 perform relative to candidates certificating in June of year 11, after accounting for prior attainment?

3. What effect does certificating in a GCSE early have on uptake and performance in the same (or a related) subject at A level, after accounting for prior attainment?
Data

- National Pupil Database – national data for all English schools
- KS4 – all students at end of KS4
- KS5 – students aged 16-18
- Two years – 2009 and 2011
Results – entry patterns (1)

Percentage of early entries at GCSE

- Jan Year 11
- June Year 10
- Pre-June Year 10
- All early

Cohort

- 2009: .6 (Jan Year 11), 2.8 (June Year 10), 4.7 (Jan Year 11)
- 2011: 1.1 (Pre-June Year 10), 6.0 (June Year 10), 8.0 (Jan Year 11), 15.1 (All early)
Results – entry patterns (2)

Percentage of early entries by GCSE subject

- Statistics
- English
- Mathematics
- French
- Science (Core)

Cohort

Percentage of entries

2009 2011
Results – entry patterns (3)

Number of early entries by GCSE subject

- English
- Mathematics
- Science (Core)
- Statistics
- French

Cohort:
- 2009
- 2011

Entries:
- 0
- 25000
- 75000
- 125000
- 175000
- 225000
- 250000
Results – entry patterns (4)

• Prior attainment
  • English - Early entry tend to be lower ability
  • Maths – Jan Y11 entry lower ability. June Y10 higher ability

• School type
  • Independent & Grammar less likely to enter early
  • English (2009) – 5% in ind, 19% in comps
  • English (2011) – 11% in ind, 44% in comps
Results – GCSE performance

- English and Maths
- First grade and best grade separately
- Accounting for KS2 level
- % A or better, % C or better
Results – GCSE performance

English 2009

Grade A (first grade)

Grade A (final grade)

Grade C (first grade)

Grade C (final grade)
Results – GCSE performance

English 2011

Grade A (first grade)

Grade A (final grade)

Grade C (first grade)

Grade C (final grade)
Results – GCSE performance
Maths 2009

Grade A (first grade)

Grade A (final grade)

Grade C (first grade)

Grade C (final grade)
Results – GCSE performance
Maths 2011

Grade A (first grade)

Grade A (final grade)

Grade C (first grade)

Grade C (final grade)
Results – A level uptake

- Early certification may affect uptake
- First certification & final certification
- Any English A level & Maths
- % of A level students taking subject, by final GCSE grade and certification session
- Candidates from 2009 GCSE cohort
Results – A level uptake
Any English

![Graphs showing the percentage of students taking A level English vs. GCSE English grade for different certification sessions.](image)
Results – A level uptake

Maths

Maths A level

Percentage taking A level

GCSE Maths grade

First certification session

Jan Y11

June Y11

Pre June Y10

Maths A level

Percentage taking A level

GCSE Maths grade

Final certification session

Jan Y11

June Y11

Pre June Y10
Results – A level performance

• Early certification may affect A level performance

• First certification & final certification

• All English A level & Maths

• Also science A levels

• % A or better, % C or better – by final GCSE grade and certification session.

• Candidates from 2009 GCSE cohort
Results – A level performance
All English
Results – A level performance

Maths
Results – A level performance

Biology
Results – A level performance
Chemistry

Chemistry

Chemistry

Chemistry

Chemistry

Chemistry

Chemistry
Results – A level performance

Physics
Summary – entry patterns

• Large increase in early entry between 2009 and 2011
• Particularly English and maths
• Fewer early entries in Independent/Grammar
Summary – impact

• GCSE performance – some evidence that early entry is detrimental to high attainers

• A level uptake – No evidence of lower uptake by early entry candidates

• A level performance – Almost no evidence of poorer performance by early entry candidates