

Schools' use of early entry to GCSE examinations

Its usage and impact

Between 2008 and 2010 there was a dramatic increase in schools' use of early entry to GCSE examinations in English and mathematics. This survey and associated data work investigated why schools have followed this strategy, which schools are most affected, and what the impact has been on student achievement. The survey raises concerns about the overall impact of early entry on the achievement and progress of students who could attain the top grades at GCSE. However, it also finds that some schools have used early entry intelligently and effectively as part of their wider work to raise standards.

Age group: 11–16

Published: March 2013

Reference no: 120198



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Executive summary

Between 2008 and 2010 there was a very large increase in schools' use of early entry to GCSE examinations in English and mathematics, as shown in the Department for Education (DfE) paper *Early entry to GCSE examinations*.¹ By 2010 around one quarter of students sat their examination in each of these subjects before the end of Year 11. Data for 2011 showed a continuation of this upward trend with further large increases in the numbers of early entries to GCSE examinations in both English and mathematics.

The aims of this survey were to investigate the reasons why schools are using early entry, its current levels of usage and its impact on students. The survey consisted of three main strands: a telephone and online questionnaire; analysis of data; and gathering the views of national subject associations, Ofsted's subject advisers and inspectors.

Between 14 and 30 May 2012 Her Majesty's Inspectors contacted 200 secondary schools to gather their views on early entry to GCSE examinations. The schools were given the option of completing the questionnaire over the telephone or online. In total 59 schools participated via telephone and another 54 completed the online version.

Early entry to GCSE examinations was very popular with these schools. A large majority used early entry and intended to continue to do so, although the survey also saw evidence that its growth would now slow even in the absence of planned changes to examination policies. The main subjects affected were English and mathematics; early entry was applied less frequently in other subjects. In 2011 there was a large increase in the proportion of schools entering all – or almost all – of their students early in one or both of these subjects.

The main reasons given by schools for using early entry were to raise standards and to improve student motivation. The senior leaders responding provided a variety of reasons for deciding which students to enter early for examinations, ranging from entering the whole cohort to only entering those with specific talents and abilities. Most entered students in Year 10 or early in Year 11. A few schools had identified some disadvantages to early entry, such as students being discouraged by results that were not as good as they hoped for, or being reluctant to resit an examination they had already 'passed' in order to achieve a higher grade.

Analysis of national attainment data does not fully support the views of respondents that the use of early entry raises standards, and in some respects – notably for more able students – contradicts it. Schools that do not use early entry have attainment that is slightly better when comparing the average proportion of students achieving five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics. Schools with high levels of

¹ *Early entry to GCSE examinations*, Department for Education, 2011; www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/AllRsgPublications/Page1/DFE-RR208.

attainment on entry are less likely to use early GCSE entry extensively than other schools. However, some schools with high levels of early entry do achieve good levels of success in terms of attainment and value-added. This is because they take a carefully considered approach and then use the early examination results to plan how best to raise students' grades in subsequent entries. For both high and low levels of early entry, value-added and attainment vary from very strong to very poor. This is the case for early entry in both English and mathematics.

The main negative impact of early entry is on students who should achieve the highest grades. Overall, students are less likely to achieve high grades in English and mathematics if they are entered for the subject early, even if they then re-take the examination. The proportion of students who achieve high grades is lower for both subjects in schools where high levels of early entry are used. The clearest disadvantages collected from the survey responses are for those higher ability students who take the examinations in Year 10 or early in Year 11 and then cease studying English or mathematics. It is reasonable to suppose that many of these students could have gained higher grades if they had continued these subjects rather than moving on to other subjects.

Note: This paper does not look at the 2012 results as data were not available, and so does not refer to the debate over 2012 GCSE English results. At the time of writing there is continuing debate about the grading of GCSE English and it is important that this is not confused with the issue of early entry. In addition, recent qualification policy changes will have a significant impact on early entry by preventing multiple resits.

Key findings

- The use of early entry has exploded in English and mathematics in the last few years, with only limited use in other subjects. Some schools enter all of their students early in one or both subjects. In 2011, 458 schools entered 99% or more of their students early in English and 321 did so in mathematics.
- Whereas early entry was initially targeted at groups of highly able students, now all, or nearly all, the students in many schools are entered early for English and mathematics.
- Students who take English and mathematics early are less likely to achieve the highest grades. For both GCSE English and mathematics the proportion of students who achieve grades A or A* shows a general decline as the percentage of early entry increases, although this is also related to their attainment on entry to the school.

- In some of the schools responding to the questionnaire, students moved on to different courses once they had achieved a 'target' grade in English or mathematics, even if this was below their full potential.²
- The use of early entry is found across all types of school but is much less common in schools with higher levels of attainment on entry. Schools with low standards and that have been judged in inspections to be no better than satisfactory, appear to be using early entry more extensively.
- Some schools are using early entry highly effectively as part of an overall strategy to raise standards. However, other schools are using high levels of early entry where there is no, or limited, evidence of positive impact on raising standards and yet the view the school has of early entry is still very positive.
- It is the view of some subject specialists and advisers that early entry might weaken Key Stage 4 as a firm foundation for further study post-16, due to its impact in limiting higher grades, constraining the curriculum and restricting future choices post-GCSE.

Recommendations

School leaders should:

- review their use of early entry to GCSE examinations. They should ensure their approach meets the needs of all students for the highest possible attainment at GCSE and their progress beyond it
- give particular consideration to the danger of limiting achievement and subsequent progression for students who are potentially high attaining
- ensure that the regular weekly teaching of English and mathematics always continues until the end of Year 11.

School governing bodies should:

- hold school leaders to account for the effective use of early entry, including its impact on attainment and students' progression into post-16 courses.

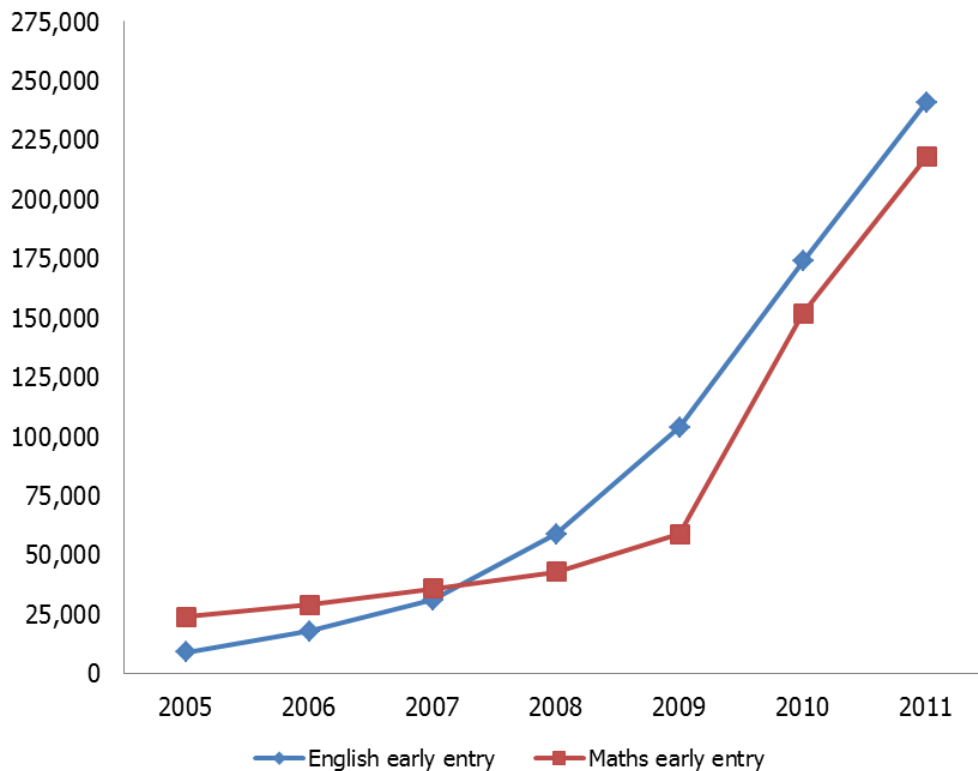
Ofsted should:

- carry out further analysis of data for 2012 to compare the attainment and progress of students who are early entrants.

² Ofsted does not have data on what courses students do instead. In the case of mathematics, some students may take a further qualification while in some schools students start work on AS courses – but students remain with their original GCSE grade in a key subject.

Part A: The increase in usage of early entry

Figure 1: Numbers of early entrants to GCSE examinations between 2005 and 2011

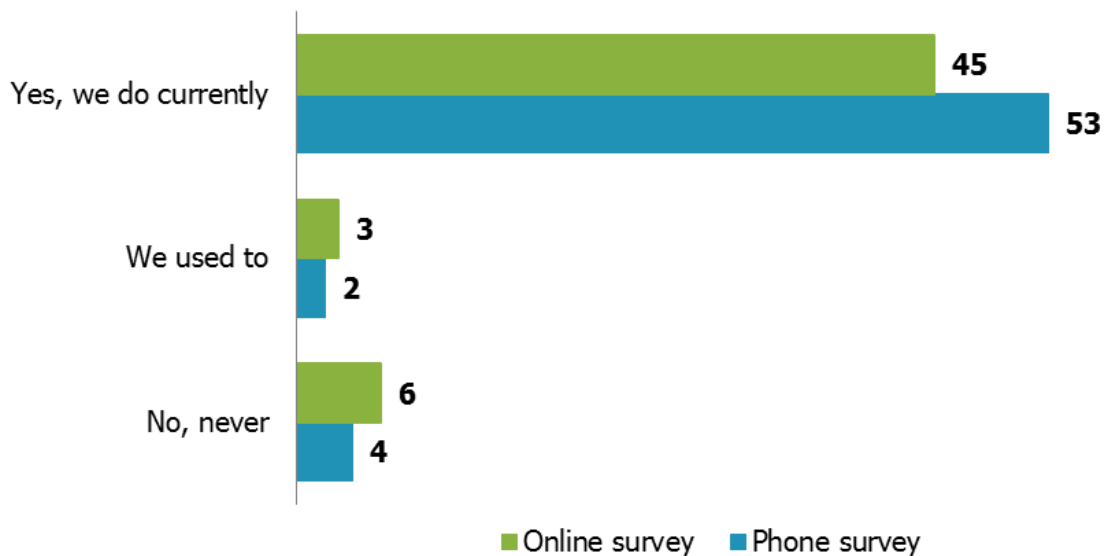


1. As can be seen from the chart above the number of early entrants showed relatively small increases for a number of years, but then started to climb rapidly in English in 2008 and in mathematics from 2009. By 2011 there were well over 200,000 early entrants in each of the subjects, compared with 9,000 in English and 24,000 in mathematics in 2005. There were wide variations in the extent to which schools were using early entry to GCSE examinations in English and mathematics, from entering no students to entering all students.
2. Data were available for 2011 from 2,880 maintained schools. In 2011, 458 schools entered 99% or more of their students early in English and 321 in mathematics; 165 schools entered 99% or more of their students early in both English and mathematics. Whereas early entry began as a technique for recognising the qualities of very able students and providing curriculum extension into areas such as additional mathematics, it is now being used in a much more wholesale fashion.
3. In 2011, 1,793 schools entered 10% or more of their students early in mathematics and 1,069 of these entered 50% or more. However, 607 schools entered no students early. In English, there were 1,589 schools that entered 10% or more of their students early of which 1,270 entered 50% or more; 981 schools did not use early entry in English. Early entry is therefore being used very extensively in more than a third of maintained secondary schools.

Part B: Why and how do schools use early entry?

4. Her Majesty's Inspectors contacted schools to talk about their use of early entry and received feedback from 113 of them. The vast majority of the schools that responded, either through the online or the telephone questionnaire, were using early entry to GCSE examinations. The questionnaire, conducted in summer 2012, suggested that the rate of schools using early entry was above that found in 2011 data, albeit based on a much smaller sample (Figure 2).

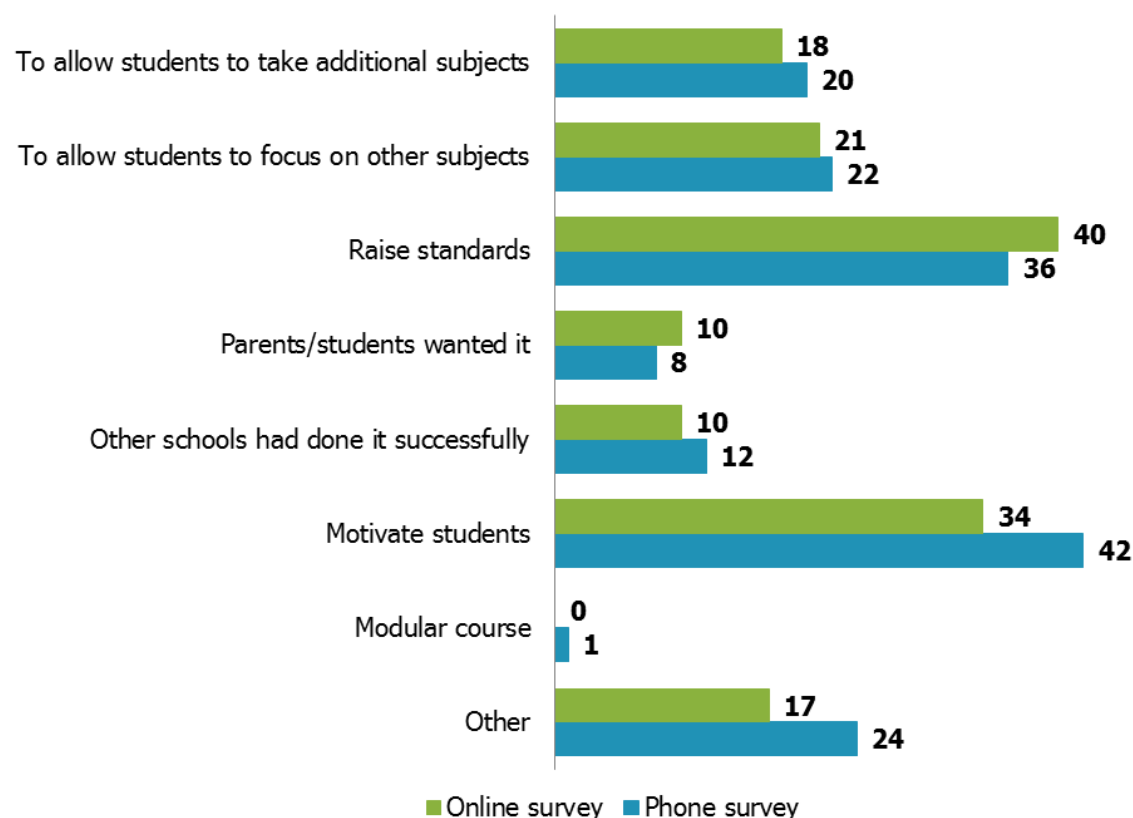
Figure 2: Responses to the question, 'Does your school use early entry for GCSE currently, or has it done so in the past?' (by number of responses)



Based on responses from 113 schools.

5. Schools that said they do or did use early entry were then asked for their reasons why (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Responses to the question, 'From the following list, please indicate which factors influenced you in deciding to use early entry?' (by number of responses)



Based on multiple responses from 98 schools.

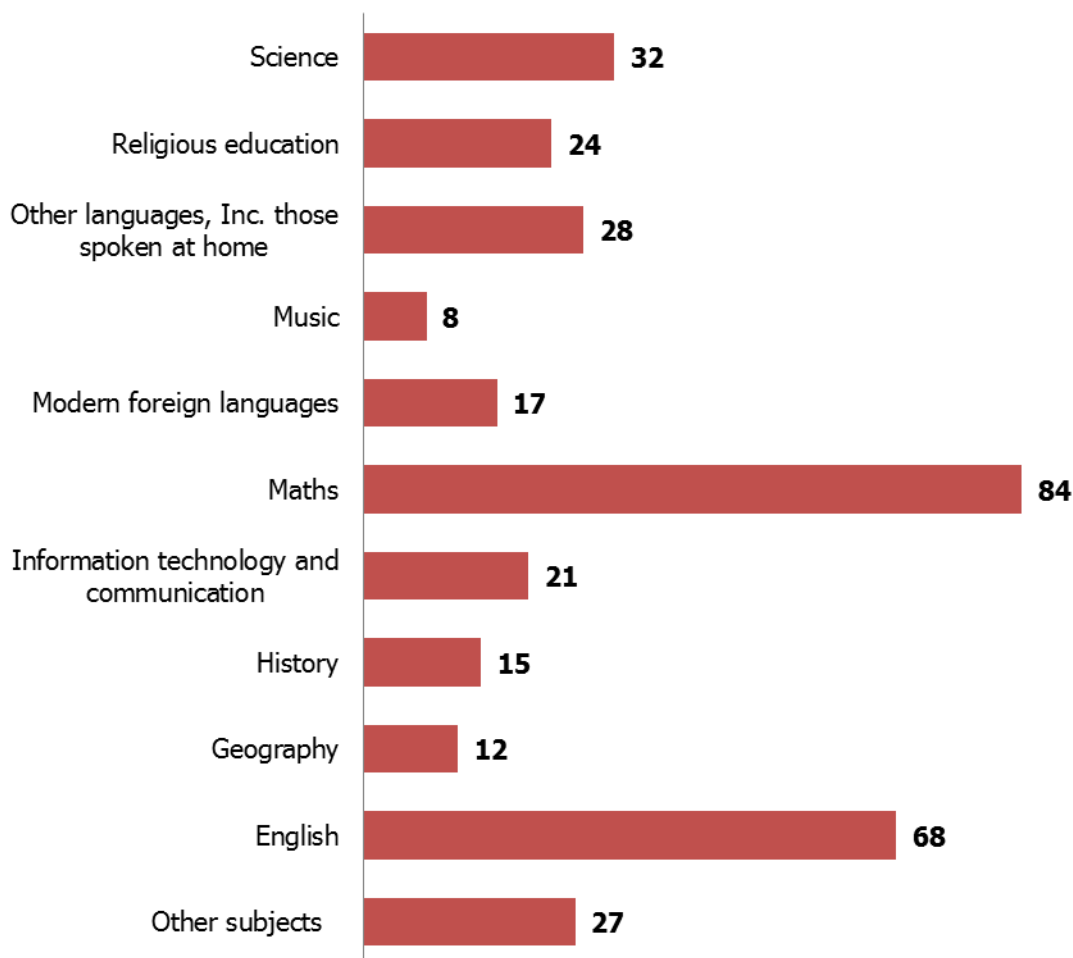
6. Respondents gave a variety of reasons for choosing to use early entry, with the most common response being student motivation and the raising of standards. Although the findings of the DfE analysis had been available for several months by the time Ofsted contacted schools, many remained strongly convinced that early entry improved motivation and raised standards.³ Some schools were able to explain the approaches they used to improve the impact of early entry:

'We are able to use the accurate data from the examination results to target support and teaching to enable further success. As a school we received robust data on student understanding and knowledge which we used to motivate and encourage further progress. This was a problem for the department previously.'

³ *Early entry to GCSE examinations*, Department for Education, 2011: www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/AllRsgPublications/Page1/DFE-RR208.

7. Nearly half of the schools contacted asserted that early entry in core subjects benefited other subjects, allowing students either to focus on their other subjects, or to take additional subjects. This was often part of a strategy in which students who had attained a target grade in a particular subject – usually English or mathematics, then ceased this and used the time for other studies.
8. A small number of schools believed that early entry in English and/or mathematics was particularly helpful to vulnerable students because they saw it as providing earlier evidence of success or helping to discourage non-completion. For example, one school said it was using this strategy, 'In order to ensure that students identified at risk of non-completion of Key Stage 4 are given access to achieve GCSE grades in Maths and English.'

Figure 4: Responses to the question, 'In which subjects have you entered students early?' (by number of responses)

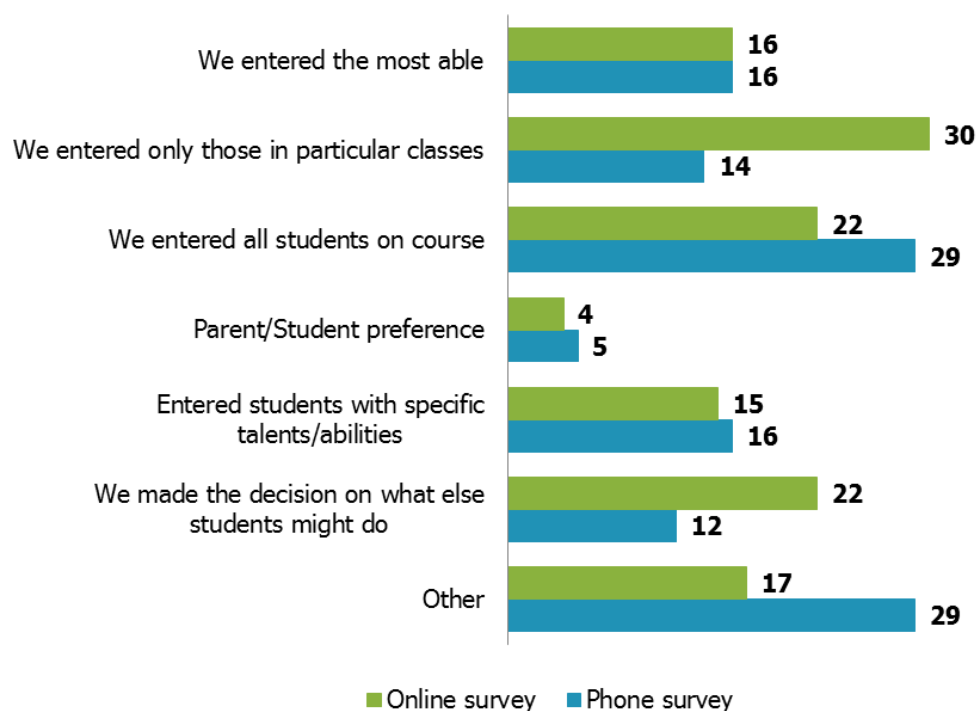


Based on multiple responses from 101 schools.
Responses from telephone and online surveys have been combined.

9. Early entry was mainly used for the core subjects of mathematics and English. Most other subjects in the schools surveyed had a lower frequency of early entry (Figure 4). However, there were some exceptions. There were relatively high levels relating to languages, compared with most other subjects, with just fewer than 30 schools using early entry here, stating that this was to meet particular needs, such as, 'To meet the specific aptitude, i.e. native French or German speaker.' For religious education this reflected the practice of some schools entering all students early for the GCSE short course. In relation to science this response was affected by the complex pattern of subjects and examination arrangements, with many students sitting 'core' science in Year 10 and 'additional' science in Year 11.

10. Under current arrangements there is nothing to prevent schools from allowing students to cease studying mathematics or English if, for example, they have reached a 'target' grade early. Ofsted has seen examples of schools where this means that English or mathematics become optional for some Year 11 students. In one case a school's letter to parents explained that students 'privately studied' other courses while still sitting in lessons with their mathematics teacher. In others the planned additional work did not materialise. In addition, the national subject associations and Ofsted's subject advisers spoken to were concerned about those subjects taken early that were no longer being studied for the rest of Key Stage 4, impacting on post-GCSE subject choice and continuity.

Figure 5: Responses to the question, 'Within those subjects how have you decided which students to enter early?' (by number of responses)

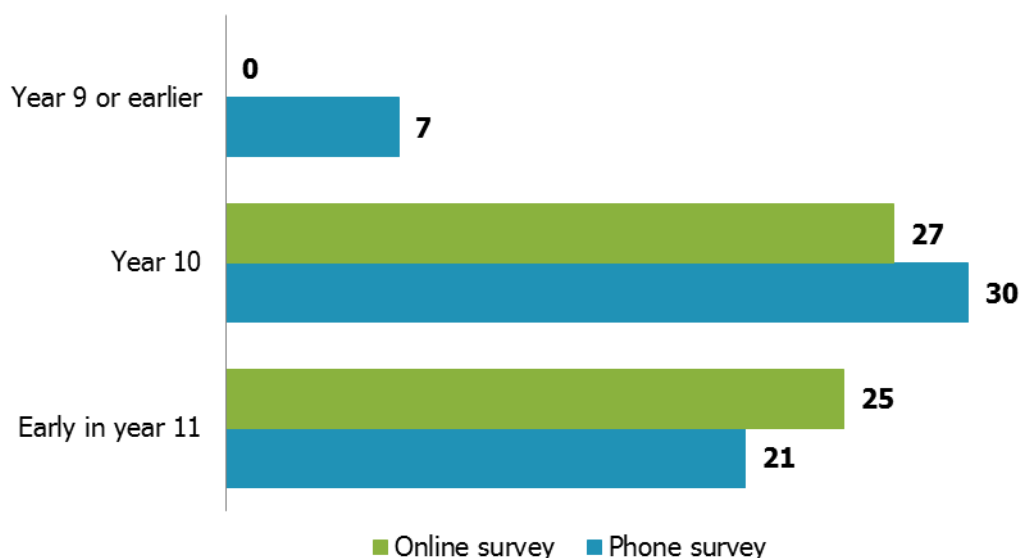


Based on multiple responses from 101 schools.

11. There was a great variation among the schools surveyed in deciding which students to enter early (Figure 5). Common reasons given included entering all students on the particular course, entering only those who have specific talents, and entering the most able. Less than 10 schools said that they used early entry because parents and/or students asked for it, which appears to contradict the views of schools that they are using early entry to personalise the curriculum. There is little evidence that parental pressure is a factor here, and indeed one inspector reported coming across a school where parents were campaigning against early entry.

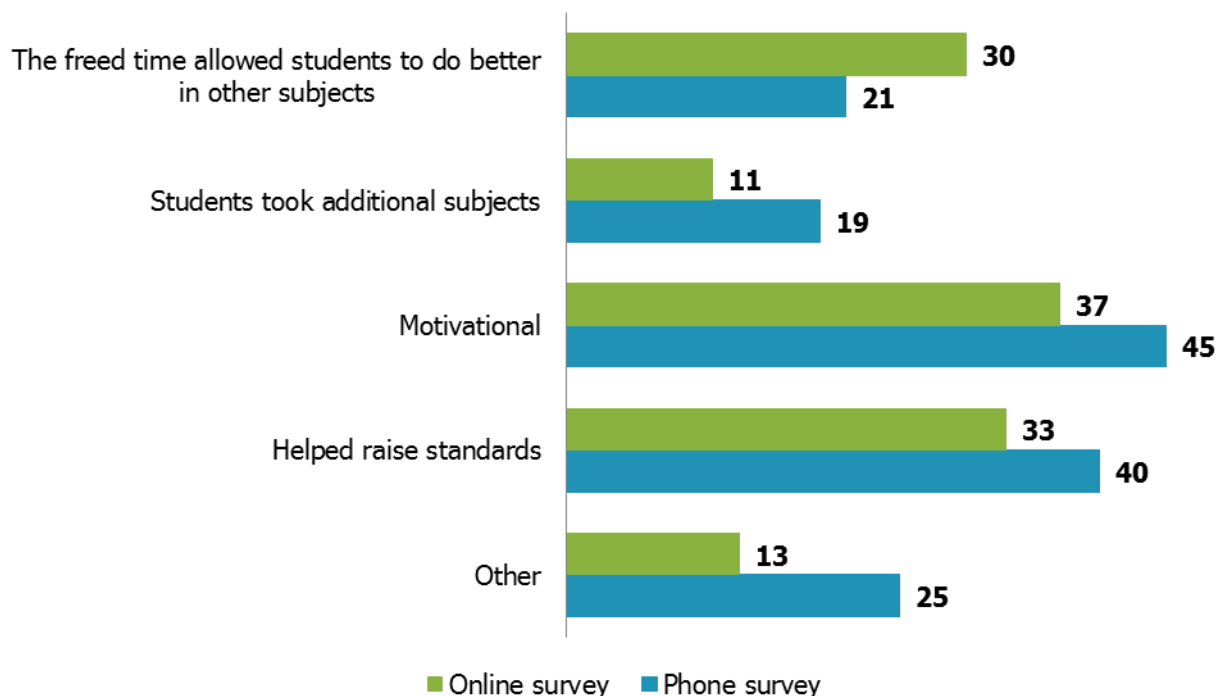
12. As shown in Figure 6, most of the schools surveyed entered students in Year 10 and early on in Year 11, with the main time of entry varying between subjects. There is very limited early entry in Year 9 or earlier, usually relating to the specific talents or abilities of a student, including home languages. For example, one school stated, 'We are entering a Year 8 boy for GCSE mathematics this summer. We are confident he should gain an A*.'

Figure 6: Responses to the question, 'Which of the above is the main time when you enter students early?' (by number of responses)



Based on multiple responses from 97 schools.

Figure 7: Responses to the question, 'Given the benefit of your experience, what do you now see as the advantages of early entry?' (by number of responses)



Based on multiple responses from 100 schools.

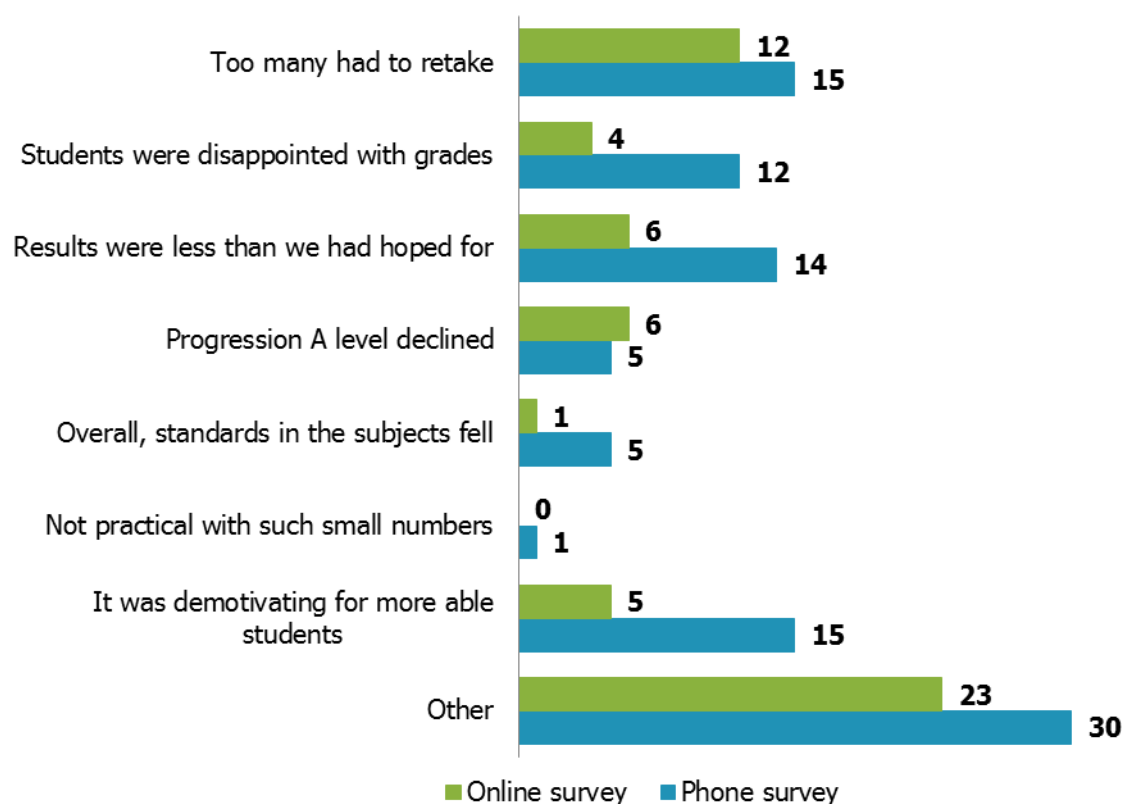
13. The schools surveyed were asked to comment on what they had learnt about the benefits or disadvantages of early entry (Figures 7 and 8). Respondents identified many perceived advantages to early entry, which covered the whole range of students. For example, some schools suggested that there were key benefits for the most able, with a typical response being, 'It has allowed very able students to take more courses appropriate to their educational needs. It has allowed students to take courses not otherwise available in the sixth form.' Other schools perceived that the benefits were strongest for those less likely to do well with one respondent stating, 'Some students from disadvantaged backgrounds with low expectations and low self-esteem saw they could achieve and this supported them in the last year to achieve their potential.'

14. Other respondents saw more general benefits with a typical comment being:

'Early entry has built students' confidence and experience of taking examinations. Analysis of results allows for more informed planning for further intervention/support. Student feedback tells us that they like the programme of support offered in preparation for the examinations, without the additional pressure of revising for several examinations at the same time.'

It should be noted that this school did not see early entry as an end in itself, but analysed the results to improve planning for further improvement.

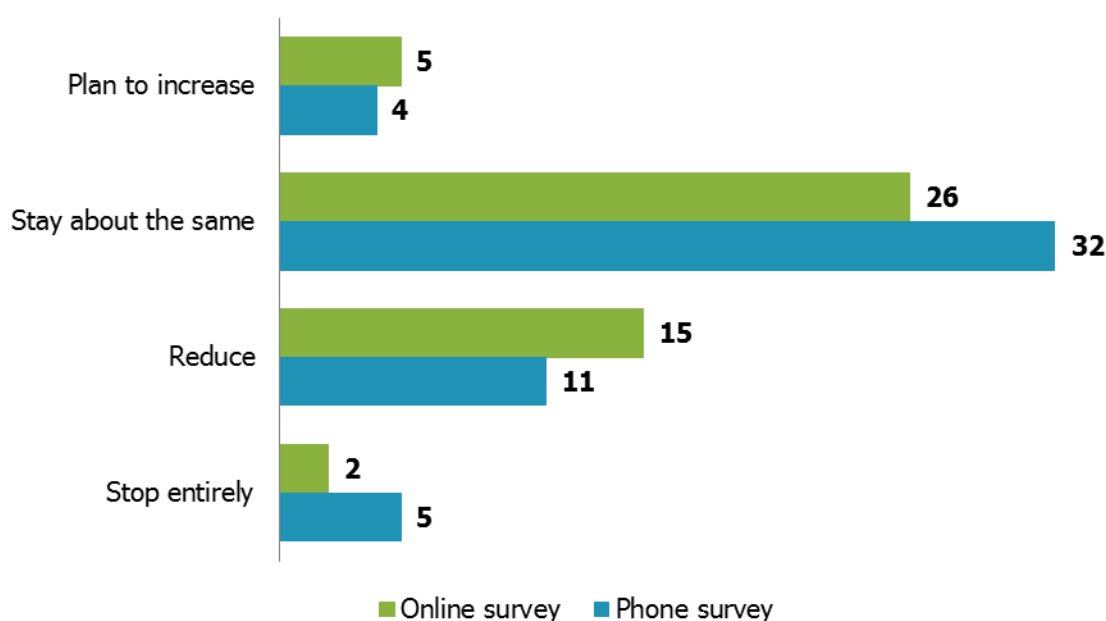
Figure 8: Responses to the question, 'And what do you see as the disadvantages?' (by number of responses)



Based on multiple responses from 75 schools.

15. While the respondents from 10 schools felt there were no disadvantages to early entry, others highlighted some drawbacks to the practice. As shown above, those most frequently cited focused around results not being as strong as expected, with associated higher levels of retakes and student disappointment. Respondents from 15 schools also commented on students not wishing to resit once they achieved a grade C or above. For example, 'It demotivated students targeted a B who then hit a C grade at the end of Year 10 and were then not interested in improving this grade in Year 11.' In addition there are the cost implications of significant numbers of retakes. Data from the DfE paper show that nearly 70% of mathematics early entrants retook the examination at the end of Year 11, as did slightly fewer than 55% of English early entrants. This is likely to mean that repeat examination entries in English and mathematics are costing millions of pounds per year nationally.
16. As expected from the generally positive views of the schools described above, most respondents were planning to continue with early entry at least in some subjects, although about a quarter planned to reduce it (Figure 9).

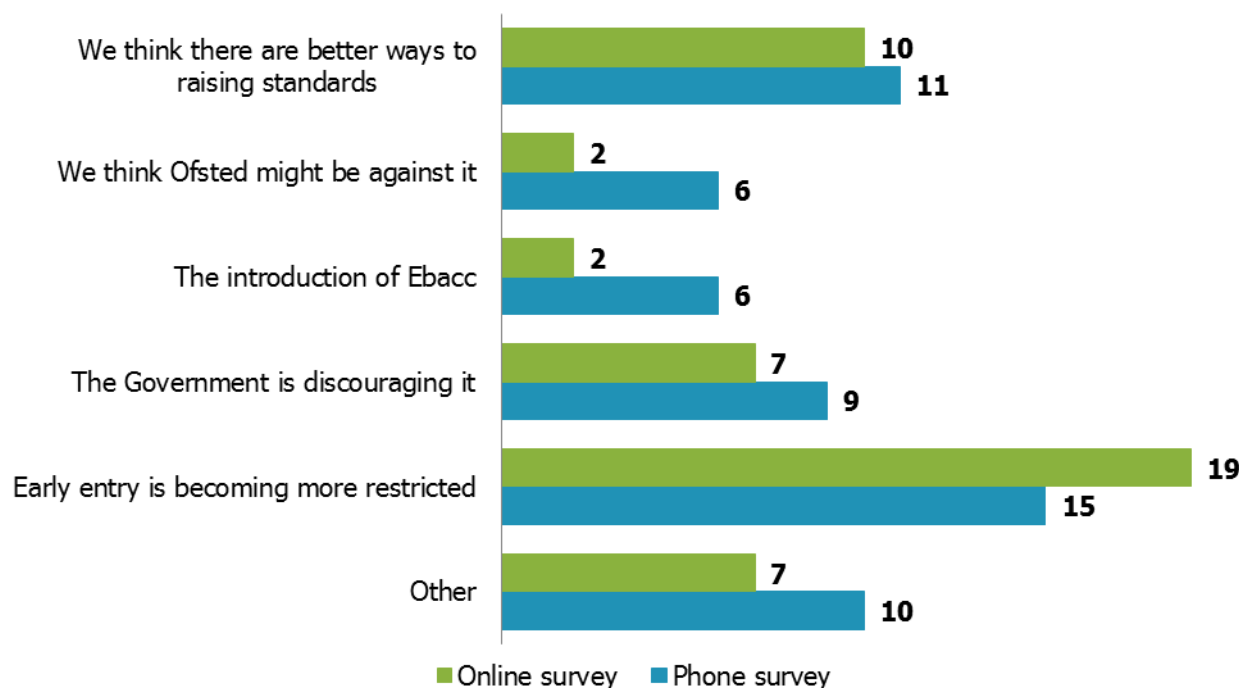
Figure 9: Responses to the question, 'If you are currently using early entry, would you say that you are planning to increase the use of early entry, keep it about the same, reduce it or stop entirely?'(by number of responses)



Based on multiple responses from 100 schools.

17. It appears from Figure 9 that the increase in the use of early entry seen over the past few years is unlikely to expand further on the levels that schools are reporting in 2012, and that the very large increases seen from 2008 to 2011 will not be repeated beyond 2012. In addition, proposals for the future of GCSE made in late 2012 – after the fieldwork for this survey – will significantly limit the practice by preventing multiple resits.
18. Figure 10 indicates that for those schools reducing or stopping their early entry provision, external factors such as changes to examination practices, with the move away from modular to linear courses, are having a strong impact on their decision-making. This was before changes in government policy announced in September 2012.

Figure 10: Responses to the question, 'If you are reducing or stopping your use of early entry, what are the reasons?' (by number of responses)



Based on multiple responses from 55 schools.

Two case studies – indiscriminate and targeted use of early entry

School one

The students at this school have much lower attainment on entry than average, a much higher proportion than average are entitled to free school meals, and the school deprivation indicator is more than twice the national average. All students on the course are entered early for their GCSE examinations in mathematics and English, and students are also entered early in history, geography, modern foreign languages, IT, music and religious education.

Data from RAISEonline show that over the last three years the percentage of students who have achieved five GCSE A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, has increased very slowly from 37% in 2009 to 40% in 2011, and remains significantly below the national average. For 2011, overall value-added is significantly negative, as it is for both English and mathematics separately. Relative attainment for mathematics is slightly negative but for English is significantly positive.

19. In the survey, respondents from this school appeared to give conflicting feedback, stating they were 'pleased with overall increases in attainment, but not with the impact on student progress rates'. Also the overall standards,

'varied between subjects; some rose and some fell'. An advantage given was, 'It is motivational', but this was qualified by saying, 'not for all students, it was a mixed picture'. In addition, a disadvantage given was that too many students had to retake. When asked about their future intentions regarding early entry, senior managers at this school were planning to keep to the same level of use.

20. For this school the evidence does not support their view that the widespread use of early entry is supporting the raising of standards.

School two

The students at this school have just above average attainment on entry, a slightly higher proportion than average are entitled to free school meals and the school deprivation indicator is above the national average. A high proportion of students are entered early for their GCSE examinations in mathematics and English; around 60% for each subject. A very high percentage of students have English as an additional language and students are entered early for community languages.

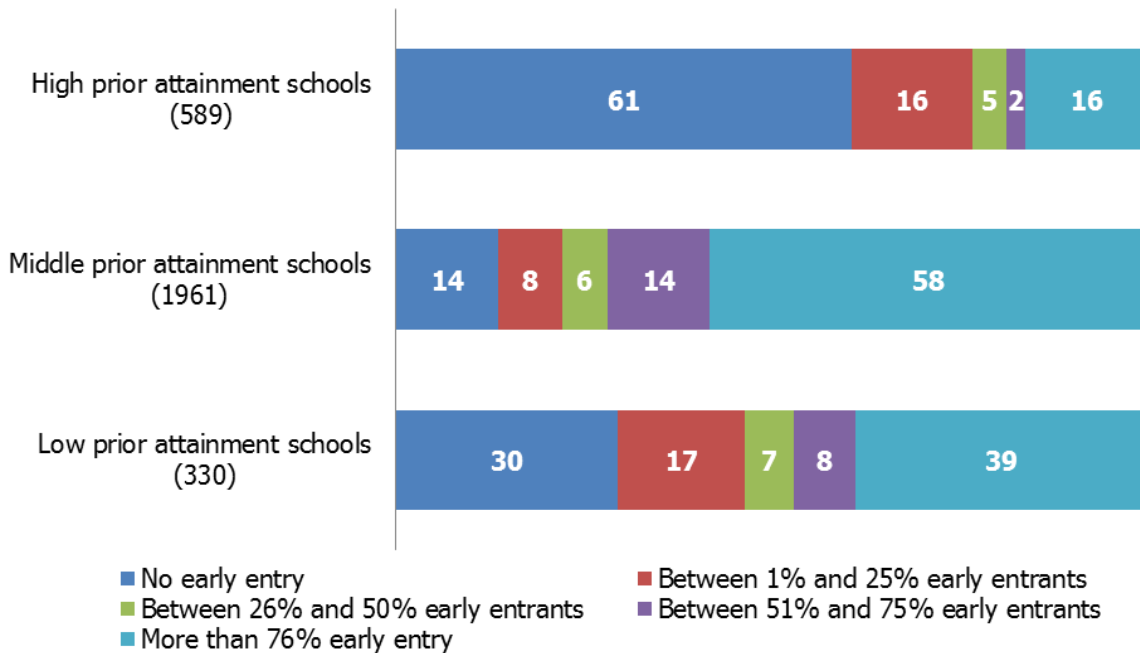
Data from RAISEonline show that over the last three years the percentage of students who have achieved five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics has increased incrementally from 73% in 2009 to 76% in 2011, and has been significantly above average for these three years. For 2011, overall value-added is significantly positive, as it is for both English and mathematics separately. Relative attainment for mathematics is positive but that for English is negative.

21. In the survey, the headteacher stated that the school 'has made a success of early entry because of the very effective personalisation of the school's curriculum and finely tuned approach to mentoring'. She considers the school's tracking system to be very effective so that staff have an excellent awareness of those students who would or would not benefit from early entry. In addition, the school does not enter all students early and believes that this would be a retrograde step. The school targets the lower 60% for early entry and stated that 'this gives the opportunity for "another chance" that can be potentially life changing'. In relation to the higher ability students the school believes that, 'the top 40% should focus on getting A/A* grades and [do not] need to be early entered and/or re-entered'.
22. Overall, for this school the evidence supports its view that the targeted approach to early entry is supporting the maintenance of high standards.

Part C: What types of school are taking up early entry?

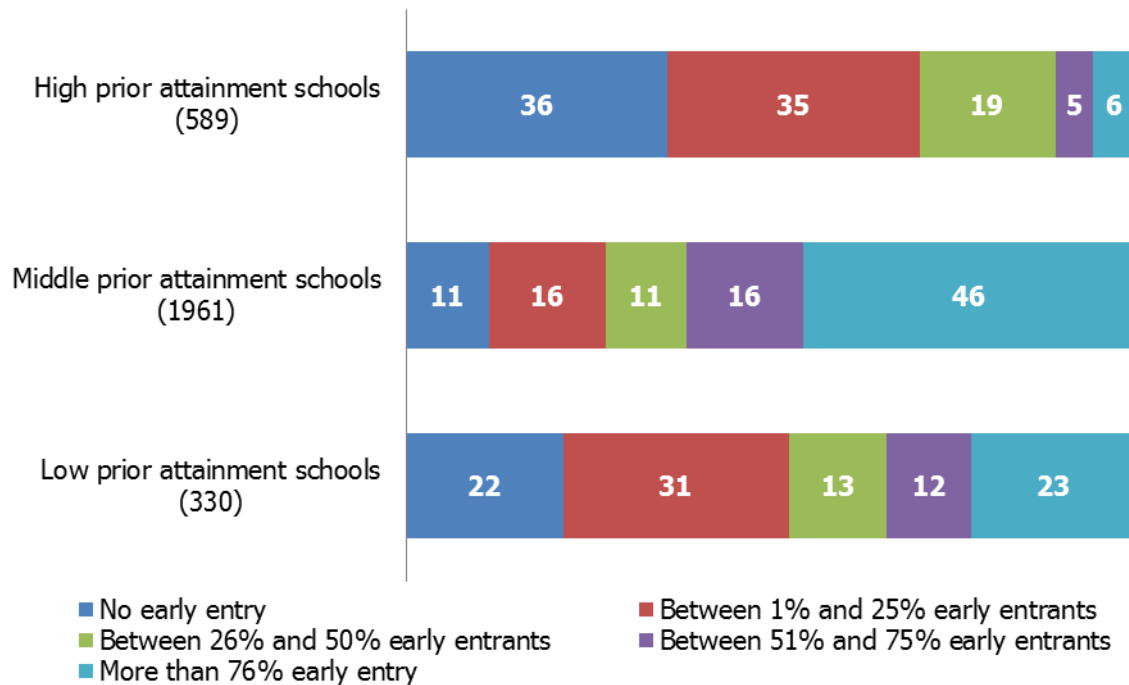
23. While it is true that all types of schools use early entry it is also clear that it is far more common and used to a greater degree in certain types of school.

Figure 11: Comparison of student prior attainment on entry to secondary school with percentage of students entered early for GCSE English in 2011 (in percentages)



Attainment categories classified by the proportion of students in each school who attained Level 4 or above at Key Stage 2. High-attaining schools had 90% or more students reaching this threshold; low-attaining schools had 70% or fewer students reaching this level.

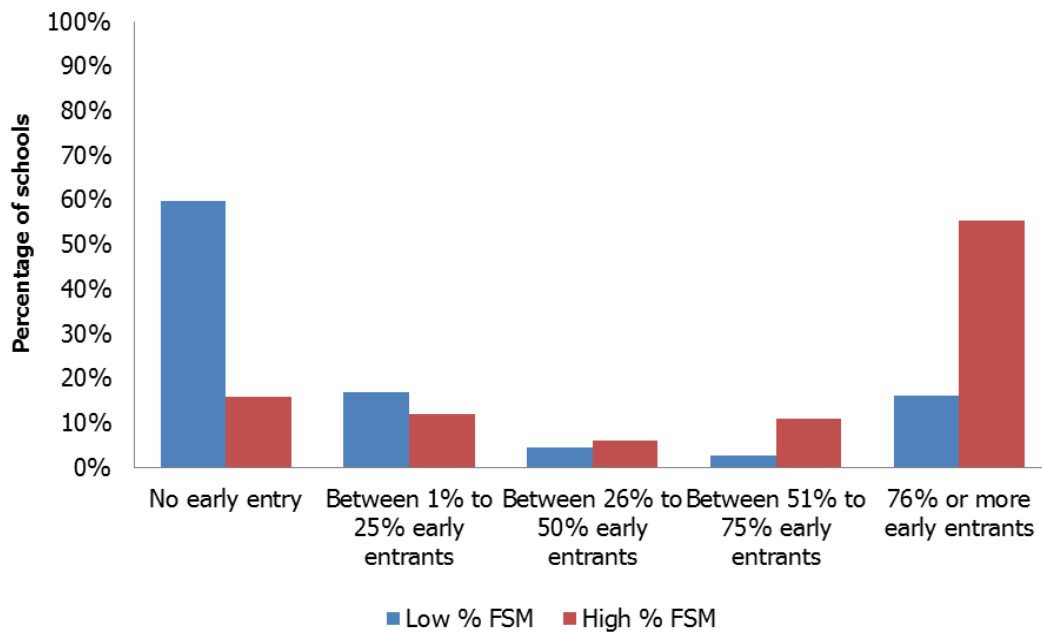
Figure 12: Comparison of student attainment on entry to secondary school with percentage of students entered early for GCSE mathematics in 2011 (in percentages)



Attainment categories classified by the proportion of students in each school who attained Level 4 or above at Key Stage 2. High-attaining schools had 90% or more students reaching this threshold; low-attaining schools had 70% or fewer students reaching this level.

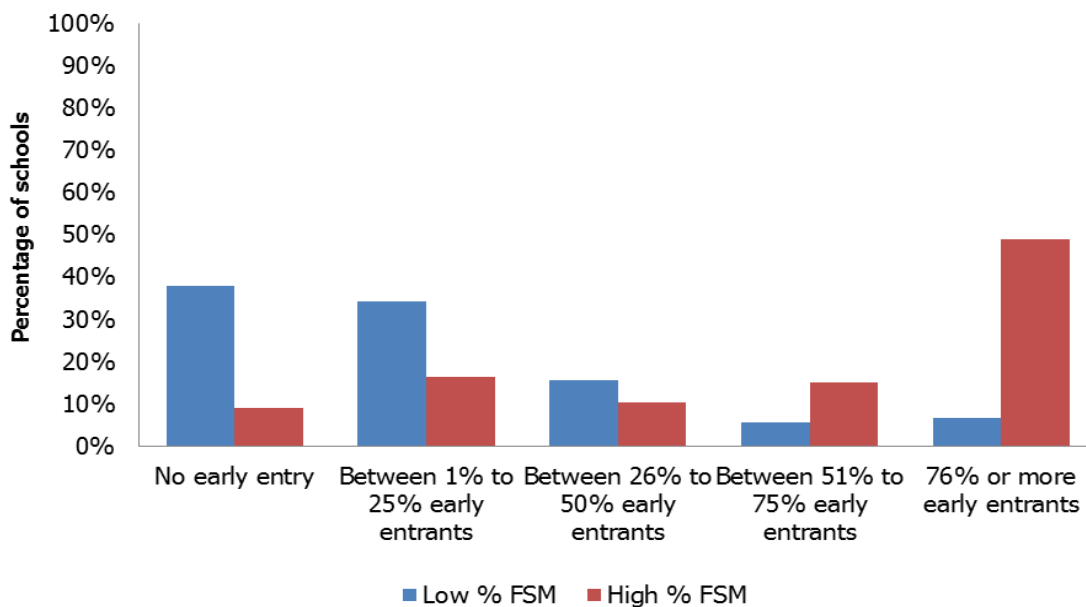
24. As Figures 11 and 12 show, schools with students who have high levels of prior attainment at Key Stage 2 are much less likely to have high levels of early entry for both mathematics and English. Schools with over 90% of the students on roll having reached Level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 use early entry much less than those with more middle and lower attainers. The same pattern is seen for both subjects but the trend is much more pronounced for English than for mathematics. Many schools with lower levels of attainment on entry are, therefore, more enthusiastic about taking up early entry than higher attaining schools; as we have seen from the schools surveyed, there is little evidence of pressure from parents or students to take examinations early, and it is also an unpopular practice in the independent sector.

Figure 13: Percentage of schools entering students early in English, by free school meal eligibility in 2011



A low percentage of free school meals (FSM) refers to 613 schools with 6.1% or fewer of the students on roll eligible for free school meals. A high percentage of FSM refers to 572 schools with 25.9% or more of the students on roll eligible for free school meals. The low percentage and high percentage represent the 1st and 5th quintiles in this analysis and are not arbitrary values.

Figure 14: Percentage of schools entering students early in mathematics, by free school meal eligibility in 2011

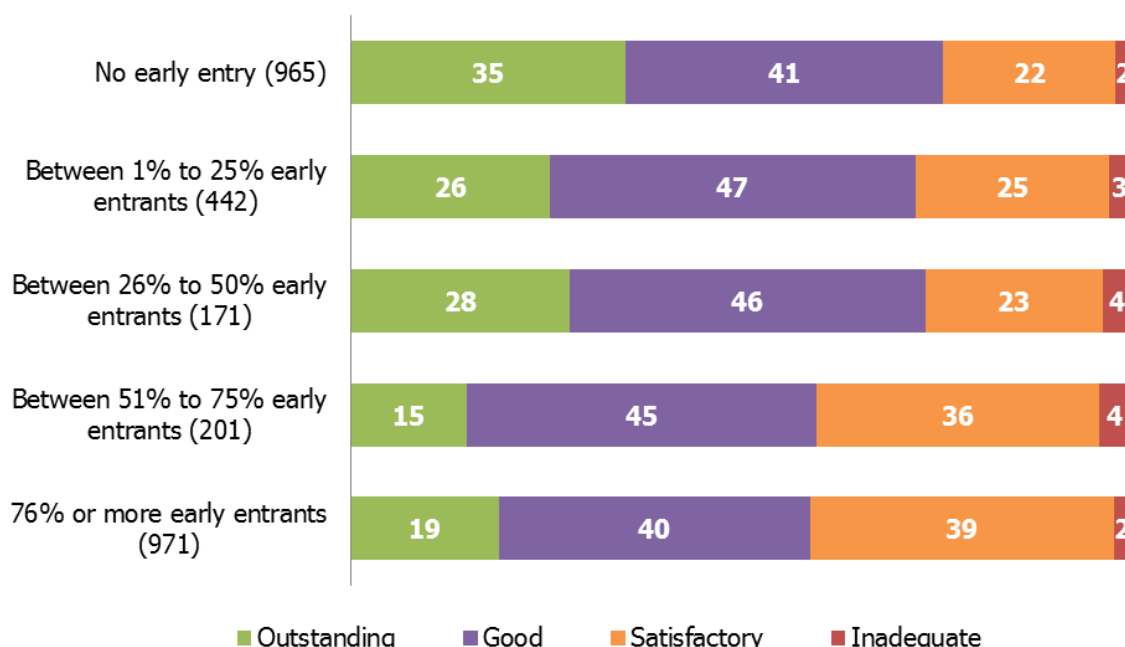


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more of the students on roll eligible for free school meals. The low percentage and high percentage represent the 1st and 5th quintiles in this analysis and are not arbitrary values.

25. Schools with lower levels of eligibility for free school meals are less likely to use early entry. Where free school meal eligibility is typically above national averages, a greater proportion of schools enter their students early. The pattern is similar for both English and mathematics. This suggests that schools in certain contexts are more likely to turn to early entry as a strategy for improvement. When comparing schools' levels of use of early entry in English and their overall effectiveness judgements from routine Ofsted inspections, we can also see that schools judged outstanding are less likely to use early entry to a great extent (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Comparison of overall effectiveness judgements with maintained schools using early entry in English (in percentages)

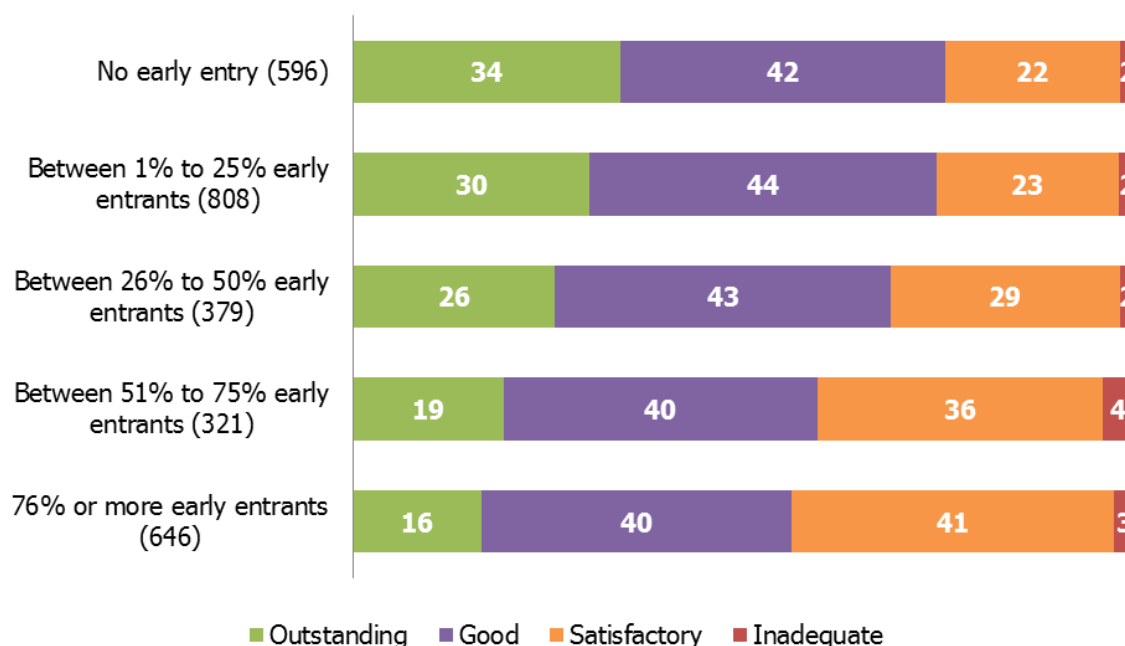


Number of schools in parentheses. Figures are in percentages and may not add to 100. Data are based on overall effectiveness judgements at 31 August 2011. A further 130 schools with early entry data were not included due to the school having no section 5 inspection data available.

26. A similar pattern is seen for judgements of overall effectiveness related to early entries in mathematics; higher proportions of schools with no early entry are judged outstanding than those with high levels of early entry (Figure 16).

27. This evidence suggests that schools which are under some immediate pressure to raise standards are especially likely to turn to early entry as a strategy to meet the needs of the school for rapid improvement. There is, however, no convincing evidence that such approaches on their own serve the best interests of their students in the long term or, indeed, securely meet the needs of all schools that use them.

Figure 16: Comparison of overall effectiveness judgements with maintained schools using early entry in mathematics (in percentages)



Number of schools in parentheses. Figures are in percentages and may not add to 100. Data are based on overall effectiveness judgements at 31 August 2011. A further 130 schools with early entry data are not included due to the school having no section 5 inspection data available.

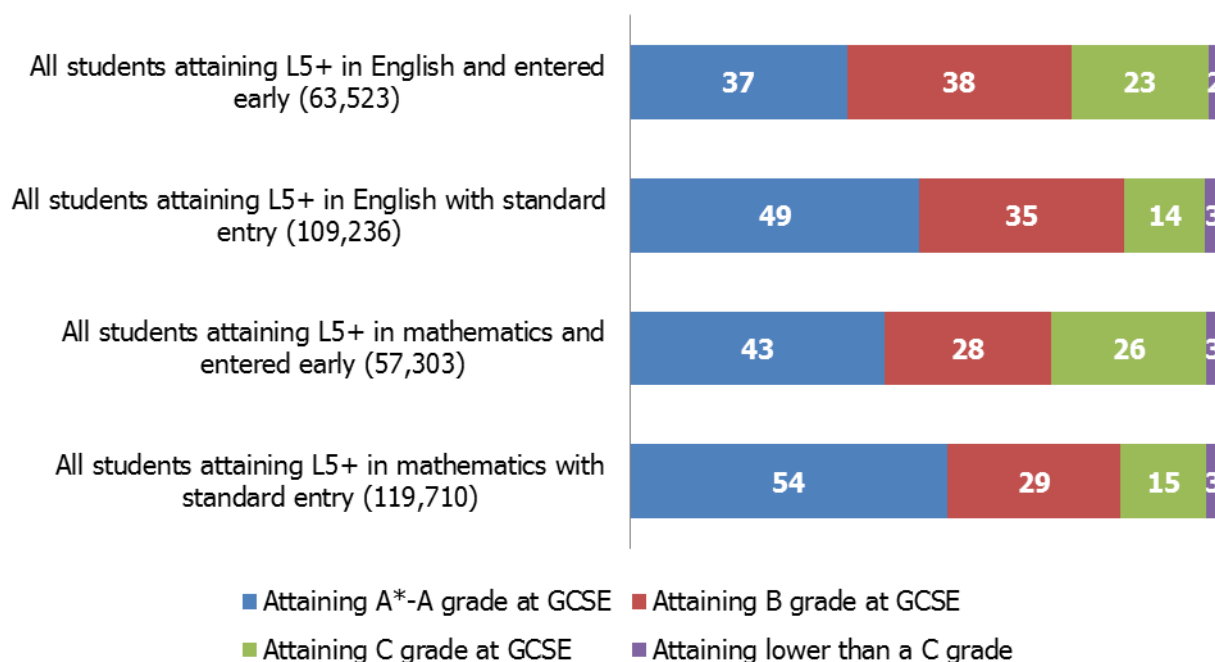
Part D: Does early entry to GCSE work?

Figure 17: Percentage of GCSE grades attained by early entrants compared with standard entrants in the 2011 cohort for English and mathematics

Grade attained	Percentage of early entrants in English (238,628 students)	Percentage of standard entrants in English (323,418 students)	Percentage of early entrants in mathematics (214,174 students)	Percentage of standard entrants in mathematics (347,872 students)
A*	2%	6%	5%	7%
A	9%	15%	9%	15%
B	20%	23%	15%	19%
C	39%	25%	37%	24%
D	17%	15%	13%	12%
E	7%	7%	9%	9%
F	3%	3%	7%	7%
G	1%	1%	4%	3%
U	1%	5%	1%	4%

28. When comparing the achievement of early entrants with those who sit the examination at the end of Year 11 only, Figure 17 shows there is very little difference in the percentage of students achieving A* to C grades in mathematics. However, early entrants are less likely to achieve grades A*, A and B, and more often achieve grade C. The same pattern is seen for English where there is a slightly higher percentage of early entrants achieving A* to C grades, 71% compared with 69%, but fewer achieving grades A*, A and B.

Figure 18: Comparison of early entry and standard entry attainment at GCSE in 2011 for high ability students with prior attainment at Level 5+ at Key Stage 2 (in percentages)



For this analysis, high ability students have been defined as those students with prior attainment at Level 5 or above at Key Stage 2.

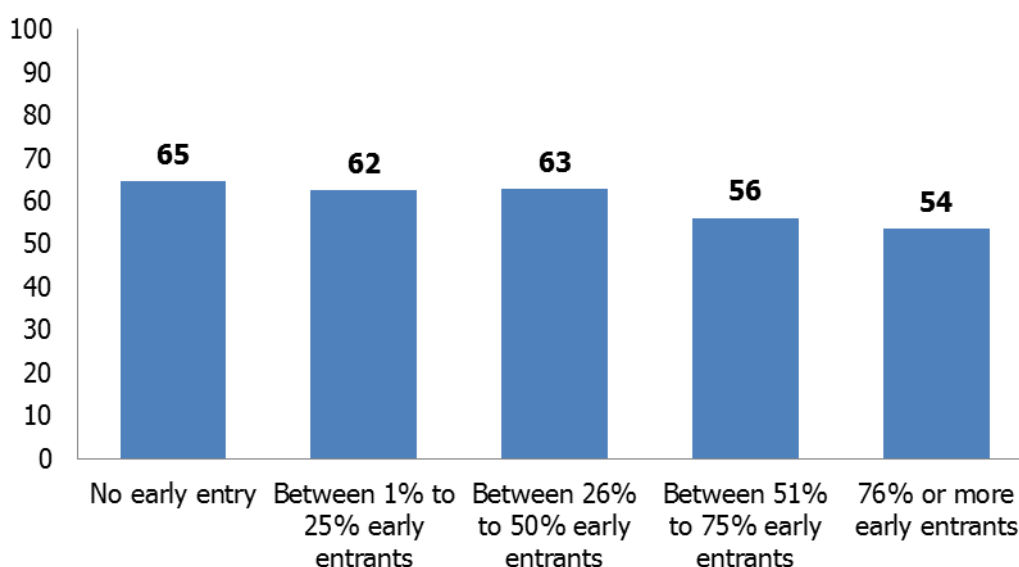
29. When the analysis is taken further, looking at those who achieved Level 5+ at Key Stage 2, the chart at Figure 18 above shows a similar pattern. The percentages achieving A* to C grades are very similar but the grade profiles vary markedly. For English, nearly half the standard entrants at the end of Year 11 achieve grades A and A*, whereas under two fifths of early entrants achieve these grades. For mathematics over half of entrants at the end of Year 11 achieve grades A* and A, and 83% achieve grades B and above. For early entrants these figures are just over two fifths and 71%, respectively.

30. In 2011, 62,500 students were entered for GCSE English at the end of Year 10, which is approximately a quarter of early entrants. For mathematics it was 69,400 students, equating to almost a third of early entrants. Of these early entrants a high proportion subsequently re-took the examination; almost two-thirds of the Year 10 English early entrants and three quarters of the mathematics early entrants. These high levels of re-entry raise a number of

concerns as to whether the students were sufficiently prepared to sit the examination early and the cost of the high numbers of re-entries. In addition, although some students raised their grades on resitting, this was not universally the case, only around half of those who originally achieved grades B and C achieved a higher grade in their resits; this calls into question arguments that early entry is motivational and also raises concerns about how schools use assessment information from those entries to ensure further progress.

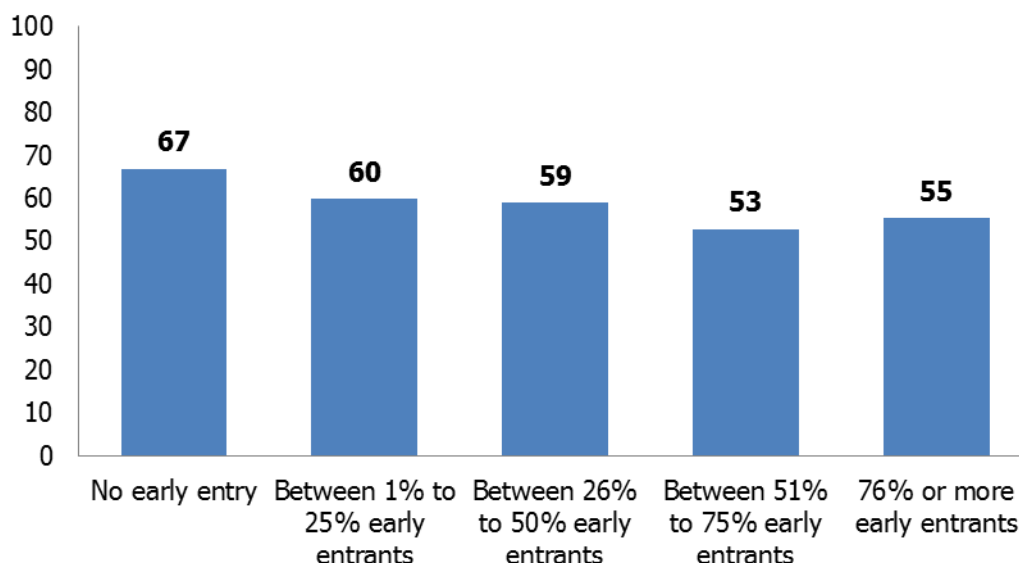
31. However, there is also a concern over those who did not retake. In 2011, 13,800 students who got a grade B or C in English in Year 10 did not retake it in Year 11. The same applied to 6,000 students in mathematics. Although this is only 6% and 3%, respectively, of the early entry cohort, it raises concerns that these students did not get the grades that they were capable of in key subjects.

Figure 19: Percentage of students achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, when entered early for mathematics in 2011



32. Further analysis of the data shows that schools that do not use early entry in mathematics have much higher levels of attainment than those schools with up to half of their 2011 cohort entered early (Figure 19). Many factors affect these outcomes, although these data tend to support the view that schools which are confident about attaining high standards feel less need to try early entry.

Figure 20: Percentage of students achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, when entered early for English in 2011



33. A similar pattern can be seen with early entry in English, with higher attainment found where schools are not offering early entry. However, it is nonetheless the case that schools across the whole spectrum of attainment at 16 do use early entry in mathematics and English, including some schools with high levels of attainment.

Figure 21: Percentage of students achieving A* or A grade at GCSE in mathematics when entered early (2011 cohort)

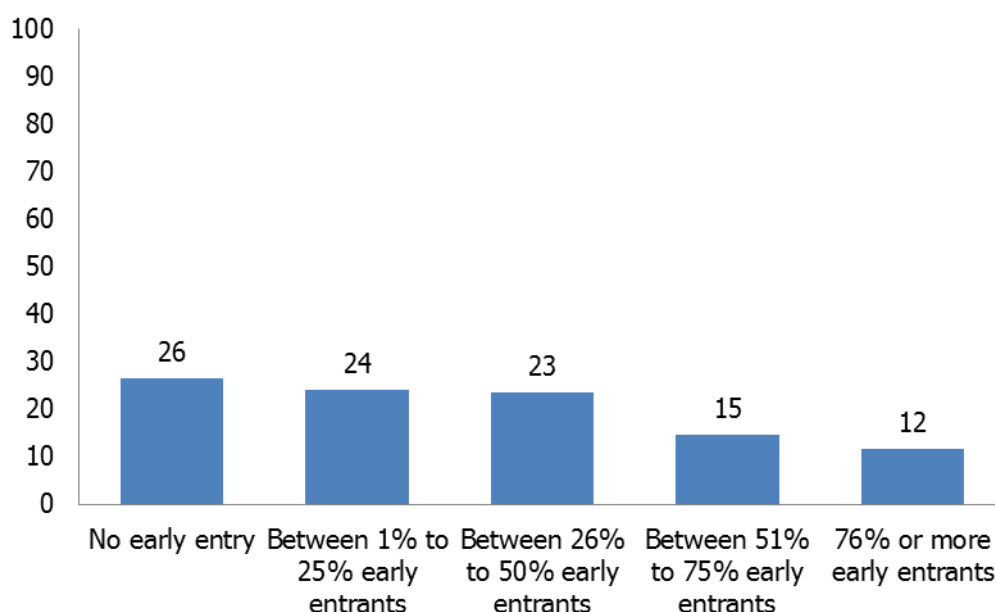
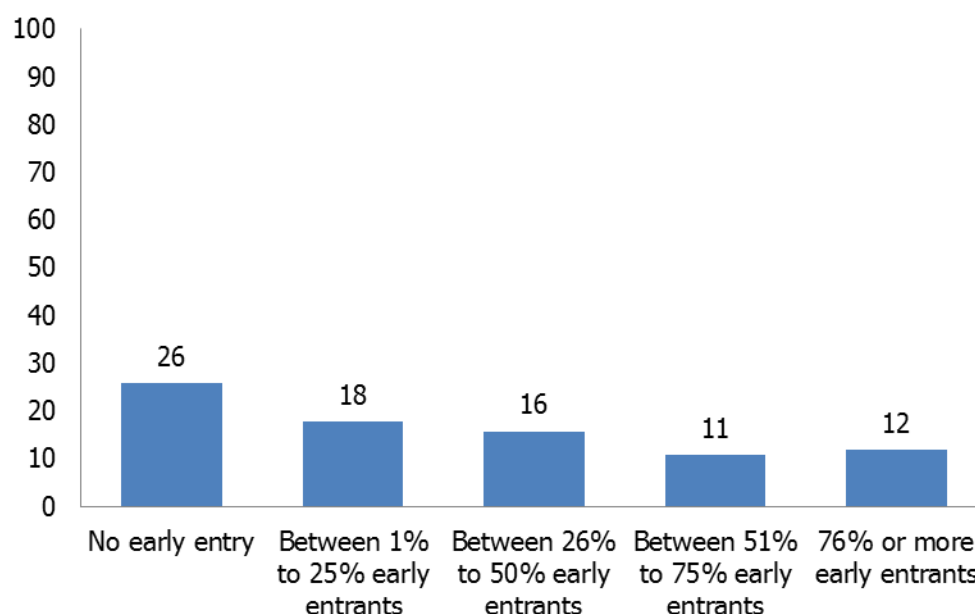


Figure 22: Proportion of students achieving A* or A grade at GCSE in English when entered early (2011 cohort)



34. Focusing on the proportion of students achieving A* and A grades at GCSE shows less positive outcomes for both English and mathematics when early entry has been used extensively. More students gain the highest grades where there is no early entry than where there is greater than 51% early entry – even allowing for re-takes. This fits in with the perceived disadvantages from the telephone and online survey evidence, the views of the subject associations and Ofsted’s national subject advisers, and data shown in Figure 18. Early entry students are less likely to achieve the highest grades.
35. The evidence also shows how schools are making strategic decisions about early entry, some of which are ill-advised. More schools with high-attaining students are not using early entry or using it only sparingly, whereas the schools using early entry more frequently have lower attainment at the highest grades in comparison.

Notes

This report is based on evidence from a number of sources. First it is based on the evidence from a survey of a sample of secondary schools carried out by Her Majesty’s Inspectors between 14 and 30 May 2012, using a standard script and questionnaire. The sample of 200 schools represented different levels of attainment (based on the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics), deprivation, size, governance model, age range (11 to 16 or 11 to 18) and geographical distribution. The schools were divided into four subsets, each containing a balanced sample, and given as a caseload to one of Her Majesty’s Inspectors. The headteachers of all of the schools were telephoned and the rationale for the survey was explained to them. They were offered a choice of methods for taking part in the survey. First, they could complete a questionnaire by

telephone at that time; second, they could arrange for the inspector to call back and to complete the survey at a later time; or third, they could be sent a link to an online version of the questionnaire to complete and return by a set deadline. By the end of the survey period 59 schools had completed the telephone survey and 54 schools had completed the online survey.

In addition to the evidence from the questionnaire, data analysis was carried out using information from the Department for Education, RAISEonline and the most recent inspection outcomes for secondary schools. Evidence was also gathered from Ofsted's national subject advisers and national subject associations.