

Evaluation of 'Advanced Learning Centres' for Gifted and Talented Pupils

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Centres' for Gifted and Talented Pupils*

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

'Advanced Learning Centres' (ALCs) are special out-of-school classes for very able pupils, often (but not always) in their final year of primary schooling. The growth and development of these Centres has been coordinated by the Gifted and Talented Unit of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) through the Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative, in partnership with a national charity, the National Primary Trust (NPT).

This evaluation stems from original research, designed to analyse equality of access to the provision, evaluate pupils' enjoyment, engagement and learning, and examine possible impact of that learning on achievement.

2. Background

Children typically meet for their Advanced Learning Centre for around two hours on Saturday mornings or after school. Centres operate differently with a common aim of providing study support to gifted and talented pupils. The great majority pursue a coursework or 'enrichment' curriculum, often working from guidelines and resources developed by the National Primary Trust.

In 2004-05 some Centres ran over much of the school year; rather more lasted for a term or eight weeks. Nearly all brought together pupils from a range of schools. Some geographical areas ran one Centre; some ran several, for different ages or in different subjects.

The majority of pupils were in Year 6 at school. In most cases schools were invited to select two or more of their pupils for the Centre, based on such criteria. At least 54 Centres, and possibly more, ran during 2004-05. The overall number of pupils starting ALC courses in 2004-05 was around 2,000, with a drop-out rate of around 20% as courses progressed.

3. Methodology

The main data-collection methods for this evaluation were a pupil survey and analysis of the results from their Standard Assessment Tests (SATs). Feedback from Centres and from pupils' schools also contributed to the data.

4. Analysis

A. Access

To what extent are Advanced Learning Centres accessible to a diverse range of more able pupils?

- **Subjects of ALCs:** Most ALCs served pupils with high ability in mathematics; those of high ability in English and science appeared less well served; in the last two years the number of Centres catering for pupils of high ability in ICT and in other subjects has grown.
- **Year-groups:** A majority of pupils at ALCs were in Year 6; pupils in other years had fewer opportunities to take part in ALCs.
- **Month of birth:** Most pupils at the surveyed ALCs were born in the first half of the school year. This imbalance applied to most Centres, all subjects and year groups, both genders, and to white and non-white pupils.
- **Gender:** Overall more boys attended the surveyed ALCs than girls. There was a bias towards boys in mathematics and ICT, and a bias towards girls in arts-subject ALCs. There was a strong bias towards girls in the surveyed English ALCs.
- **Ethnicity:** There was a range of ethnicities amongst ALC pupils; more than three-quarters of pupils at the surveyed ALCs gave their ethnicity as white. There were considerable differences between ethnic profiles of individual Centres; ethnic diversity of Centres increased with pupils' age.
- **Home language:** 94% of pupils spoke only English at home; 4% spoke only a language other than English; 2% spoke dual languages including English.
- **Special educational needs:** It was estimated that 1.13% of pupils on ALC registers had special educational needs.
- **Means of travel:** Nine out of ten pupils used a car to get to their ALC. There was some evidence of car-sharing among pupils and some lessening of car use as pupils got older; bus travel increased where special arrangements were made by an ALC.

B. Enjoyment

What is the extent and nature of pupils' enjoyment and appreciation of their ALC?

- The great majority of pupils indicated strong anticipation and enjoyment of their ALC and appreciation of what they gained from it. A very small number of pupils indicated less appreciation of the work.

- The majority associated their appreciation with aspects of work – curriculum, aspects of teaching and learning, special resources including computers, or the difficulty of ALC study.
- About one fifth of pupils highlighted more social aspects as sources of their enjoyment, for example being with friends or with staff. Break-times were very popular with the great majority of pupils. It was the whole of the ALC experience which may have convinced pupils that this was an enjoyable, worthwhile and advantageous way to spend a part of their out-of-school time.

C. Engagement

What is the extent and nature of pupils' engagement with their ALC work and its level of difficulty?

- More than half of surveyed pupils suggested they had missed just one ALC session in their course or none at all.
- Pupils indicated a fairly balanced view that their ALC work was generally or mostly or even always manageable. A very small number indicated that it could be too hard or too easy.
- Most found ALC work more difficult than school to greater or lesser extents; one in ten surveyed pupils saw the level of difficulty at ALC and at school as the same.
- Pupils were generally confident about understanding their ALC work, with four out of five indicating few if any problems in this respect.
- Most commonly sources of difficulty related to aspects of curriculum which had proved difficult to tackle; a small number of pupils suggested social or practical difficulties.

D. Learning

How do pupils perceive the extent and nature of their learning and personal development at their ALC?

- The majority of pupils felt that they learnt and learnt well at their ALC.
- Most highlighted gains in curriculum, but some focused on strengthened pride and self-esteem.
- For most pupils it was activities and curriculum which most differentiated ALC and school, rather than the extent and nature of learning which took place.
- Pupils studying maths or English at their ALC felt strongly the impact of their ALC work on preparation for SATs and on their interest in the subject. They perceived less strongly an impact on general school work and on everyday life. The extent to which the ALC subject related to pupils' career intentions was unclear.

E. Achievement

To what extent is pupils' ALC learning evident in results of their Key Stage 2 SATs?

- Year 6 ALC pupils demonstrated high levels of achievement before starting their ALC courses, in comparison with their peers.
- These pupils continued to achieve well during their Year 6 when they were attending their ALCs.
- There were indications that pupils at English ALCs found it more difficult to attain Level 5 in their Year 6 SATs than pupils at maths ALCs.
- Separation of Level 5 attainments into notional '5c', '5b' and '5a' sub-levels indicated that around half of surveyed pupils at maths ALCs who achieved Levels 3 or 4 in their optional Year 5 SATs seemed to progress by one national curriculum level or more during their Year 6, while attending their ALC course. This level of progress was beyond expectations that pupils will progress by half of one level each year.
- This indication of special advancement during this year could not be confirmed by examination of age-standardised scores, which suggested that the progress of almost all ALC pupils during their Year 6 was within normal expectations.
- The extent to which pupils' ALC learning was evident in results of their Key Stage 2 SATs therefore remained unclear.

5. Trends and differences

- **Subjects:** For maths pupils the difficulty of work was an important aspect of their ALC; English-Centre pupils most readily indicated the highest levels of enjoyment and engagement, especially of cooperative and social aspects of their ALC. Most ICT pupils enjoyed their individual (rather than shared) access to computers, the opportunity to use new computer programmes and to undertake new tasks; arts-subject pupils most readily expressed interest in their subject as a result of their ALC.
- **Year-groups:** The youngest pupils showed their enthusiasm for their ALC work most readily. For Year 6 pupils, styles of learning - the different way of doing things at their ALC – was often most important. Cooperative and social aspects were important to pupils from Year 7. Amongst pupils from Year 8 and above there was an emerging clarity about the role of education and study and its separation from relaxation and leisure.
- **Gender:** Overall girls showed themselves to be more ready to indicate more positive responses than boys. In end-of-Key Stage 2 maths SATs, ALC boys tended to achieve higher scores than girls.
- **Ethnicity and home language:** ALC pupils of minority ethnic backgrounds and those speaking only a language other than English at home gained at least the same enjoyment, engagement and sense of learning from their participation at ALCs as their

majority ethnic peers. In maths Year 6 SATs white ALC pupils outperformed non-white ALC pupils in the highest clusters at Level 5.

- **Attendance:** Pupils indicating the most regular ALC attendance gave the most consistently positive responses. Pupils indicating most irregular attendance were least likely to answer questions in the most positive way.

6. Recommendations

To strengthen equality of access to ALCs, the following points may be considered:

- Encourage increase in number of Centres for English
- Examine profile of ALC pupils in relation to their month of birth; consider action to address potential imbalance and disadvantage to pupils born later in the school-year.
- Strengthen attendance of girls at maths Centres, boys at English Centres
- Encourage attendance of younger pupils from minority ethnic communities
- Consider means to strengthen access to ALCs for pupils with special educational needs
- Investigate and consider means of providing alternative travel arrangement to car use
- Consider collection of free school meal data as further indication of access to ALCs by pupils from a range of socio-economic groups.

In relation to the work of Advanced Learning Centres in general, the following points may be considered:

- Continue to strengthen ALC network as a positive and worthwhile way of stimulating enjoyment of and engagement in higher-level learning by able pupils and extending their learning
- Ensure full monitoring of pupil attendance as broad indicator of the nature of pupils' relationship with their ALC learning
- Take into account the particular interest of some Year 6 pupils in styles of learning which are alternative to and more enjoyable than those which they may experience in school
- Consider special monitoring of the level of challenge presented by ALC work to Year 7 pupils
- Monitor and continue to strengthen cooperative and social aspects of out-of-school learning to meet needs of many pupils for whom this is an important aspect of their ALC experience
- Seek ways of establishing and maintaining close links with pupils' schools
- Share best practice in ALCs as part of ongoing development: for example, high levels of challenge as at maths Centres; co-operative learning as at Centres for English; keen engagement with new technology as at ICT Centres; strong subject interest as at Centres for arts.

Specific areas deserving of further investigation include:

- Experiences and perceptions of pupils leaving ALC courses early
- Influences and imbalances in schools' selection of pupils
- Indications from free school meal data of access to ALCs by pupils from a range of socio-economic groups
- Extent and nature of wider issues of access for disadvantaged pupils, including those with special educational needs
- Strategies for establishing and maintaining challenging work
- Social experiences of pupils attending ALCs
- Learning of Year 7 pupils attending ALCs
- Gendered perceptions of out-of-school learning
- Comparisons between ALC and school learning
- Transfer of learning between ALC and school
- Relationship between pupils' ALC learning and their achievements in SATs.

1. Introduction

'Advanced Learning Centres' are special out-of-school classes for very able pupils, often (but not always) in their final year of primary schooling. The growth and development of these Centres has been coordinated by the Gifted and Talented Unit of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) through the Excellence in Cities (EiC) initiative, in partnership with a national charity, the National Primary Trust (NPT).

In 2003 the DfES, in collaboration with the NPT, commissioned a three-year national evaluation, with a specific focus on the impact of the Centres on pupils' learning. The first stage of this national evaluation was a meta-evaluation of reports already carried out by Centres or others, together with examination of other material. It focused on Centres which ran during the academic year, 2002-03. The meta-evaluation report, Lambert (2004), was submitted to the DfES and the NPT in Spring 2004.

The second stage was original research, designed to analyse equality of access to the provision, evaluate pupils' enjoyment, engagement and learning, and examine possible impact of that learning on achievement. This is the report on that research.

2. Background

2.1 Advanced Learning Centres

In 1996 Year 6 pupils, aged 10 and 11, together with some younger pupils of high ability, started to attend Saturday-morning classes at Grove Primary School in Birmingham. They followed an accelerated learning programme and at the end of the year sat a GCSE examination, normally taken by 16-year-olds. In 1998 a formal 'Advanced Maths Centre' was established at the school, which was to provide these opportunities for up to 40 children from across Birmingham each year. The scheme was followed in 1999 by a similar scheme at Moat Farm Junior School in Sandwell, West Midlands (Matty and Taylor, 2004).

Encouragement and co-ordination of the development of these Centres was taken up by a national charity, the National Primary Trust, with the aim 'to generate a variety of ideas and approaches that can then be made available to all participating areas (NPT, n.d:a). The then Department for Education and Employment established a partnership with the charity to replicate the model beyond the West Midlands, as part of developments in education for gifted and talented pupils in the 'Excellence in Cities' (EiC) programme (DfES, 2002a).

The number and focus of these Centres subsequently grew. 'Pilot' Centres were set up to introduce new curricular subjects and develop guidance and materials. A steering group consisting of DfES officials, NPT officers, LEA co-ordinators and Centre teachers oversaw developments. The initial term of 'Advanced Maths Centres' became the umbrella term, 'Advanced Learning Centres' (ALCs).

2.2 Nature of Centres

'The typical model is for children across an area to meet on Saturday mornings in a school or centre for two hours. The approach is a good balance of enrichment and acceleration, and the atmosphere in classes is infectious and collaborative' (NPT, n.d:b, p.12). There is a common framework to the Centres' work, agreed by the steering group (DfES, 2002b). The number of pupils attending a Centre ranges from around eight to over 50 pupils, with 20-25 being a common number. Staffing is by secondary or primary-school teachers, sometimes a combination of the two. Non-teaching assistants and sixth-form mentors often provide additional support. Some Centres, particularly those run as part of the EiC programme, run with strong LEA involvement, as an important part of regional educational development. Others, often pilot programmes initiated by the NPT, are run by schools and individual teachers without significant LEA oversight (Lambert, 2004). LEAs and Centres are now pursuing non-EiC sources of funding so that these out-of-school opportunities can continue to be offered to pupils on a secure basis.

A DfES conference presentation (DfES, 2002b) described the aims of the growing network: 'All the centres operate slightly differently, but have as their core aim the provision of long-term study support opportunities to gifted young [pupils], particularly those in years 3 to 7 ... Over time we would like to encourage such centres to become test beds for innovatory practice in primary gifted and talented education'. The framework for pilot ALCs, drawn up by the DfES and incorporated into the mathematics manual (NPT, 2002), included a strong focus on learning: 'Measurably improve the attainment of all participating pupils in maths ... Measurably improve the motivation and self-esteem of participating pupils' (p.20). Interviews carried out for the meta-evaluation indicated that aims set by Centres themselves largely mirrored those envisaged in such documentation.

2.3 Curriculum

The first Advanced Maths Centres helped pupils towards an early GCSE examination (Matty and Taylor, 2004). A small number of Centres, possibly just two, followed this route in 2002-03, similarly in 2004-05. The great majority of Centres followed instead a coursework or 'enrichment' curriculum, often working from subject-based guidelines, procedures, manuals and other resources developed by the National Primary Trust.

Observations carried out for the evaluation indicated that curricular approaches varied. For example, one Centre covered one topic each term, with an emphasis on practical use of the subject. Another (in maths) consciously avoided a topic approach and focused on developing pupils' investigation and structured thinking. Some Centres drew extensively from Internet sites, for example as a source of mathematical problems.

2.4 Sessions

In 2004-05 the number and timing of teaching sessions varied. Most Centres which provided data for the evaluation ran on Saturday mornings; in a few, pupils met after school during the week. Some Centres ran over much of the school year; rather more lasted for a term or eight weeks. Nearly all Centres met weekly; at least one Centre had two groups of pupils alternating their attendance each week but following the same programme. All but one Centre brought together pupils from a range of schools; the other Centre included pupils from only one school. Some geographical areas ran one Centre; some ran several, for different ages or in different subjects. A few were developing a series of Centres in one particular subject so that pupils could continue to attend from year to year.

2.5 Selection of pupils

The DfES framework for pilot Centres stipulated criteria for selection of Year 6 pupils to the ALCs. All selected pupils in this year-group should have achieved, or be capable of achieving, level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2 (NPT, 2002). Investigations for the meta-evaluation indicated that most Centres appeared to follow these general guidelines, although different curriculum subjects sometimes required variations in the criteria used. The development of Centres catering for younger or older pupils has led to further adaptation of these criteria. In most cases schools were invited to select two or more of their pupils for the Centre.

2.6 Number of Centres

In many situations one group of pupils followed a particular subject at a specific venue. In others the teaching of two groups of pupils ran in parallel, or on alternate weeks. Some ALC pupils remained at one venue but moved from one subject to another.

In this evaluation a Centre is defined as a group of pupils following a common programme of learning at a specific venue over a defined period of time. Their work is intended to be at an

advanced level compared with the usual school curriculum for that age. In most cases, pupils follow one curricular subject only, but on occasions more than one subject can be covered.

This survey received questionnaire responses from 36 such Centres. At least six of these Centres had more than 40 pupils; at least 11 had fewer than 20 pupils. A further 18 Centres were known to have taken place during 2004-05, but for a variety of reasons, did not provide responses for the evaluation. There were also six areas of the country where it was not clear if Centres took place or not.

The data suggested therefore that at least 54 Centres, and possibly more, ran during the year. This was probably an increase on the number which ran in 2002-03, which was estimated by the meta-evaluation report to be 'around 50'. It appears that since that time there has been an increase in Centres run by certain areas, some new areas have taken on development of Centres, and a few areas have not continued with ALCs.

2.7 Number of pupils

The meta-evaluation provided a 'possibly conservative' estimate of 1,500 pupils participating in ALCs in 2002-03. The survey feedback form for 2004-05 asked teachers and coordinators to provide data about pupils on the register to attend the Centre, also the number of pupils who had started the course but had dropped out. In some instances these numbers were given as approximations or estimates.

According to these figures (Appendix 1) the overall number of pupils taking part in ALCs in 2004-05 was around 2,000. This was the estimate for the number of pupils starting courses – the figures indicated a drop-out rate of around 20% as courses progressed.

3. Methodology

3.1 Key questions

Key questions, drawn from issues raised by the meta-evaluation and by DfES and NPT concerns, defined this evaluation. These were:

A. Access

To what extent are Advanced Learning Centres accessible to a diverse range of more able pupils?

B. Enjoyment

What is the extent and nature of pupils' enjoyment and appreciation of their ALC?

C. Engagement

What is the extent and nature of pupils' engagement with their ALC work and its level of difficulty?

D. Learning

How do pupils perceive the extent and nature of their learning and personal development at their ALC?

E. Achievement

To what extent is pupils' ALC learning evident in results of their end-of-Key Stage 2 Standard Assessment Tests (SATs)?

3.2 Rationale

Data-collection methods for this evaluation focused primarily on perceptions of pupils themselves. This approach reflected current concerns to pay regard to children's views about their education (DfES, 2004). It drew on the experiences of those most closely involved in the learning processes of the Centres, acknowledging the kind of gap identified by Gentry et al. (2002) between perceptions of pupils and their teachers about educational activity.

Methods were designed to be as relevant as possible to a range of situations, and to pupils of different ages taking different ALC subjects. They were chosen so as not to impact unduly on the time and normal activity of ALC sessions; the approach was intended to be 'facilitative and non-intrusive' (Lewis and Lindsay, 2000, p.195).

Participation in the evaluation was subject to the consent of pupils, parents, ALC staff and coordinators. Information arising from the investigation was treated as anonymous and confidential. No child or adult or ALC has been identified by name in this report. Some small changes in details have been made to obscure identification.

3.3 Data-collection and analysis

Several sources of data were used in the evaluation:

Pupil survey

The principal source of data was a survey of pupils. This involved a four-page written questionnaire (Appendix 2). It had two main parts: questions about pupils' work and learning at their ALC, and questions about the pupils themselves, e.g. gender, ethnicity. This format made possible an overall examination of findings and more specific analysis of differences and similarities between a range of groups.

Most questions were 'closed' questions. Each of these identified a specific facet of participation in ALCs, and asked pupils to indicate the frequency with which they experienced this at their ALC: 'always', 'usually', 'sometimes', 'rarely' or 'never'. A few questions in the survey were 'open' – these asked pupils to express their views on particular aspects of their ALC in a less directed way.

Requests to administer the survey were made to most Centres known to be running in the year 2004-05. Some of these Centres were not able to take part or declined to do so, some did not reply to the approach. Several Centres which were running 'pilot' schemes to test out new subjects in the ALC programme were not asked to take part. Ultimately pupils from 36 Centres participated in the survey; 787 completed questionnaires were received for analysis.

Pupils and parents were informed about the survey in advance. ALC coordinators and teachers administered the questionnaire; pupils had the option not to take part.

SATs analysis

The questionnaire included a request to pupils in Year 6 attending ALCs in maths or English for their permission for the researcher to request information from their school about their attainments in Standard Assessment Tests - SATs. Where pupils gave this permission, schools were asked to provide information on these pupils' results in optional Year 5 SATs and end-of-Key Stage 2 (Year 6) SATs.

Other sources

When returning questionnaires, Centre teachers and coordinators were also encouraged to provide information about their Centres and comments on pupils' completion of the questionnaire. When returning SATs information, pupils' schools were encouraged to provide written feedback on the involvement of their pupils in ALCs - 55 schools did so.

Data analysis

Much of the information received was examined using SPSS®, a software package for conducting statistical analyses. Those employed in this evaluation were basic descriptive statistics, indicating frequencies and cross-tabulations between groups. These calculations can indicate general differences and trends, but are not sufficient to come to reliable conclusions about the significance of findings or about causes and effects.

3.4 Reliability and validity

Reliability is the extent to which a research procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions. Validity is the extent to which an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe (Bell, 2005). Examples of threats to reliability and validity include bias in questions, low number of responses, imbalances in sets of responses, and inaccuracies in interpreting data.

Reliability and validity in this evaluation were strengthened in several ways. For example:

- Pupil questionnaires were piloted and changes made to the questionnaire before being distributed to all ALCs.
- Standard instructions were given to ALC teachers about how to collect pupil data.
- Procedures encouraged pupils to approach the survey questionnaire in a serious and thoughtful manner.
- Procedures tried to ensure that pupils did not collaborate and that responses were kept confidential.
- The way in which responses were interpreted was checked by others.

Threats to reliability and validity in the evaluation included:

- The questionnaire was applied to a range of pupil ages and ALC subjects.
- ALC staff may have administered the questionnaire in different ways.
- Pupils completed the questionnaires at different stages of their courses – some after a few weeks of a year-long course, others at the very end of their course; some before their end-of-Key Stage 2 SATs, some after SATs.
- Pupils may have collaborated on some of their answers – responses showed evidence of this on occasions.

- A relatively small number of pupils returned questionnaires from Centres for English and arts subjects, in comparison with much larger numbers from pupils at maths Centres. There was a concentration of girls in English Centres, and a small number of pupils from different ethnic groups and of those who spoke a language other than English at home.

3.5 Generalisability and reliability

Generalisability 'implies that findings in one situation can be transferred to another' (Allan, 2003). In relation to this evaluation, therefore, it means the extent to which findings from this evaluation can be applied to all Centres running in 2004-05, and to those running in other years too.

Factors influencing this included the number of pupil respondents in comparison to the overall number who could have provided information. Also relevant is the extent to which the pupils who provided information were representative of all pupils who took part in ALCs in 2004-05, and of those participating in future years as well.

In this regard, particular note should be taken of the response rate of the pupil survey. The number of pupils completing the questionnaire was 787. Using estimates of pupil numbers (Appendix 2), this represents approximately:

- 77% of all pupils registered at the Centres which returned questionnaires
- 49% of pupils registered at all 2004-05 Centres towards the end of their course
- 40% of all pupils who started all Centres in 2004-05.

Note should also be taken of the fact that pupils completed the questionnaire towards the end of their ALC course. Pupils who had left their course early – perhaps because of dissatisfaction or a perception that the course was not appropriate for them – were therefore not included in the survey.

With this in mind, the concept of 'reliability' seems to be more relevant to this investigation. This implies that 'there are sufficient similarities between situations to inform practice without making predictions' (Allan, 2003).

4. Analysis

A. Access

To what extent are Advanced Learning Centres accessible to a diverse range of more able pupils?

A1. Subject of Centres

Amongst the 36 Centres from whom completed questionnaires were received, 9 subjects were covered overall, falling into 4 main subject groups. These groups were mathematics; English; information and communication technology (ICT); and arts subjects (including art, drama and music). One extended Centre offered mixed subjects and pupils moved from one to another.

Mathematics accounted for half of these Centres, catering for 56% of all pupils from Centres responding to the questionnaire. Just over a quarter were for ICT, with 21% of pupils. English had 3 Centres with 8% of pupils; arts subjects had 4 Centres with 7% of the pupils. The mixed-subject ALC had sessions in maths, English, art, technology and thinking skills – this had 7% of pupils (Table 1).

Subject	No. of Centres	No. of pupils
Maths	18	438
English	3	67
ICT	10	165
Arts	4	58
Mixed subjects	1	59
Total	36	787

Table 1: Subjects and pupils of Centres responding to the survey

Further investigation indicated that at least 20 other Centres ran during the year whose pupils did not take part in the survey. The subjects of these other Centres were believed to be: maths (7 Centres); English (3); science (3); Spanish (2); geography (1); history (1); religious education (1); dance (1); sport (1).

Table 2 shows details of all Centres – those participating in the survey and those not. They show a predominance of maths Centres (25 out of 56 – nearly 50%). Of the remaining 31 Centres, 10 were for ICT; 6 for English; 5 for arts subjects; 3 for science; 3 for humanities; 2 for modern foreign languages; 1 for sport; and 1 ‘mixed-subject’ Centre.

Subject	No. of Centres	% of total
Maths	25	45
ICT	10	18
English	6	11
Arts	5	9
Humanities	3	5
Science	3	5
Modern foreign languages	2	4
Sport	1	2
Mixed subjects	1	2
Total	56	

Table 2: Subjects of all Centres in 2004-05

In 2002-03 the meta-evaluation estimated that around 50 Centres ran during that year. It calculated that around 50% of these were for mathematics, almost a quarter were for English and the rest included science, ICT, modern foreign languages and art. Comparison of data from 2004-05 with these previous figures therefore suggests three main changes since that time:

- a decrease in English Centres
- an increase in Centres for ICT
- development of a wider range of subjects.

A2. Year-group

The questionnaire asked pupils for their year-group at school. 10 year-groups were represented among the responses. Most pupils - 61% - were in Year 6, 15% were in Year 5, 8% were in Year 7. 10% were in Years 4 and below; 5% were in Years 8 and above (Figure 1). The youngest child in the survey was in Year 1, aged just 6 years 5 months when completing the questionnaire (which she did independently). The oldest was in Year 10, aged 15 years 8 months.

Centre profiles varied. 7 Centres, with 175 pupils in total, had only pupils from Year 6. 3 Centres, with 62 pupils, had only pupils from Year 5. 9 Centres had pupils from 3 separate year-groups; 2 Centres had pupils from 4 year-groups. Mathematics was the most common subject for pupils in all major year-groups – Years 5, 6 and 7.

A3. Month of birth

The survey asked for pupils' date of birth. This allowed an analysis of the extent to which ALCs were accessed equally by pupils born at different times of the school year, September to August.

102 of the surveyed ALC pupils were born in September. There was a general but irregular reduction in that number in relation to pupils born in other months during the year. There were 40 ALC pupils born in August (Figure 2). 59% of the surveyed pupils were born between September and February; 41% were born between March and August.

The picture varied between Centres, but most had an early-year birth bias. 27 out of the 36 had more pupils born between September and February than between March and August; 9 had more pupils born between March and August. The bias was evident in each of all the year-groups except amongst pupils in Year 8 and above, in all subjects, amongst girls and boys, and white and non-white pupils.

A4. Gender

The survey allowed analysis to be made of the gender balance amongst ALC pupils. The data from pupils who provided this information indicated that rather more boys than girls attended the surveyed Centres: female 361, male 419. There was considerable variety between individual ALCs. 4 Centres were 75% female or more; 5 Centres were 75% male or more.

There were differences between ALC subjects. In maths most pupils were male (63%). English ALCs were predominantly female (87%). ICT Centres had a small majority of boys (57%); in arts subjects there was a majority of girls (60%). All but one year-group showed a slight preponderance of boys - the exception was Year 7 pupils, amongst whom there was a small majority of girls. A small majority of white (52%) and of non-white pupils (57%) was male; there was a larger male majority amongst those who declared themselves to be Asian or Asian British (60%).

A5. Ethnicity

The questionnaire allowed analysis to be made of the access to ALCs by pupils of a range of ethnicities. 22 pupils did not provide information in this part of the questionnaire.

15 ethnicities were identified in the responses of ALC pupils. The majority of those responding (79%) gave their ethnicity as white. Other major groups identified were Asian or Asian British (11%), mixed Asian and white (3%), black or black British (3%) and mixed black and white (3%). Overall four-fifths of pupils were white, one-fifth was non-white. There were differences between individual Centres: 6 Centres had only white pupils; 3 Centres were 60% or more non-white.

Profiles differed between subjects: non-white pupils comprised 32% of pupils at English ALCs; 29% at arts Centres; 24% at ICT Centres; and 19% at maths Centres. The arts Centres surveyed had no Asian or Asian British pupils. Of all girls 80% were white, 20% non-white; of all boys 78% were white, 22% non-white.

White pupils were the majority in each year-group. The proportion of non-white pupils increased steadily as pupils got older, from 4% of ALC pupils in Year 3 and below to 29% of ALC pupils in Years 8 and above. This progression was most evident amongst black/black British pupils, where participation increased steadily from 2% to 12% amongst pupils from Years 4 and 8. Among Asian/Asian British pupils the proportion remained fairly constant between 9% and 11% for these year-groups.

A6. Home language

Pupils indicated the languages they spoke at home. A large majority (728 – 94% of those responding) indicated that they spoke only English at home. 4% said that they spoke only a language other than English at home – these included Punjabi, Urdu, Gujarati, Bengali and Chinese. The remaining pupils indicated that they spoke English and another language at home.

Amongst subjects, English ALCs had the highest proportion of pupils only speaking a language other than English at home – 12%. ICT Centres and maths Centres had below 5%; arts ALCs had no such pupils. 19% of non-white pupils (30 out of 161) spoke only a language other than English at home; for just over half of these this was an Asian language. All but two white pupils only spoke English at home.

A7. Special educational needs

ALC coordinators and teachers were asked on their survey feedback sheet to provide information about ALC pupils with special educational needs (SEN), together with the number of pupils in total registered at the Centre. Of the 36 Centres returning questionnaires, 28 provided this information in full. Two further Centres supplied SEN data, but no data on registered pupils.

The 28 Centres had 734 pupils on their registers overall and returned 562 pupil questionnaires. The two Centres which gave partial information provided 50 completed questionnaires. Based on the calculation that 76.6% of pupils registered at Centres returned completed questionnaires (Appendix 2), it is estimated that these two Centres had 65 registered pupils. The 30 Centres which supplied SEN information therefore had an estimated 799 pupils on their registers.

These 30 Centres identified 9 of their pupils as having SEN. The SEN or disability of these pupils were identified as: behaviour difficulty (3); autistic spectrum disorder (2); attention deficit hyperactivity disorder/hyperactivity (2); Asperger's syndrome (1); visual difficulty (1). The nine pupils represent 1.13% of the registered pupils estimated to be registered to attend these Centres at the time of the survey.

A8. Means of travel

The questionnaire allowed analysis to be made of the means by which pupils travelled to and from their ALC. Pupils overwhelmingly (89%) used a private car for their travel. Of these 96% used only a car; 4% used a car and another means of travel, for example bus or walking.

Of the pupils who travelled only by private car, 74% only used their parents' car, 12% only used a friend's car, 3% only used a relative's car, and 10% used a mixture of cars – invariably their parents' car and a friend's car – possibly as a result of a car-sharing rota. Other means of transport were walking (6%), bus (4%), taxi and bicycle (both less than 1%).

Pupils' means of travel differed amongst Centres. For instance, at 6 Centres 80% or more of pupils travelled in their parents' car; at 5 Centres it was below 40%. At 20 ALCs, no pupils travelled by bus. At 3 ALCs which appeared to organise transport for pupils, rates of bus travel were 28%, 21% and 17%.

The proportion of travel by parents' car decreased somewhat as pupils got older, from 72% in Year 4 to 57% in Year 8 and above. The extent of car travel between genders was almost identical. Non-white pupils in general were more likely than white pupils to travel in their parents' car – 70% did so, compared with 62% of white pupils. They were also more likely to use the bus – 7% compared to 3%. Black/black British and mixed black and white pupils were considerably more likely to travel by bus than other groups - 8 out of 41 did so, 20%, compared with less than 3% of other pupils.

In feedback two schools highlighted the significance of parents' support in respect to travel:

Parents value the sessions and are prepared to commit to the travelling and time.

Pupils are reliant on their parents being willing and able to take them so therefore not fully inclusive.

One highlighted how pupils without car travel might be disadvantaged:

We appreciate the opportunity for our moveable pupils. Unfortunately many of our parents do not have transport readily available so the commitment may not always be there.

A9. Summary and review

Subjects of ALCs: Pupils with high ability in mathematics appeared well served by the ALC opportunities; those with high ability in English and science less so. Growing diversity of subjects on offer to pupils will help those with high abilities and potential in a range of areas. This would seem to be an important step towards having a 'broad and balanced' set of curricula out of their formal school time.

Year-groups: As with the growth of subjects, there have been efforts to diversify the opportunities to year-groups other than the majority Year 6. Principles of expanding access and of strengthening continuity within the ALC programme would justify continuing to develop opportunities for this full age range.

Month of birth: The bias towards pupils born in the first half of the school year does not reflect the national profile. This indicates fairly haphazard birth rates at different times of the year. Between September 1993 and August 1994 (the time of birth for all Year 6 pupils in this evaluation) there were more late-year than early-year births (Office for National Statistics, 2005). It seems likely that pupils born early in the school year were more likely to be selected by schools for attendance at an ALC. If this tendency was a regular occurrence, the result would be to disadvantage late-year birth pupils gaining access to ALC programmes from year to year.

Gender: There is room to encourage greater balance within subjects – more girls in Centres for mathematics and ICT, more boys in English and arts-subject ALCs.

Ethnicity and home language: There were considerable differences between ethnic and language profiles of individual Centres. Ethnic diversity of Centres increased with pupils' age.

Special educational needs: It was estimated that 1.13% of pupils on ALC registers had special educational needs - it is not known if the needs of these pupils were significant enough to require extra provision through a statement of special educational needs. Schools in England and Wales have typically identified around 20% of pupils as having special educational needs; around 3% of pupils have been seen to have needs beyond those for which the school can normally provide and require provision of a statement (Audit Commission, 2002). Montgomery (2003) has suggested that 'gifted pupils with special needs exist and are more widely found than perhaps had been expected' (p.5) and written of the masked potential of such children and the way in which their high ability may not be attended to.

Means of travel: The strong reliance on car travel can only hint at the problems of access to Centres by pupils from disadvantaged circumstances. A pupil questionnaire was not the

means by which to examine such issues in detail, but other means might be considered undertaken by Centres themselves. The area is one of importance for the further development of ALC provision.

B. Enjoyment

What is the extent and nature of pupils' enjoyment and appreciation of their ALC?

B1. Looking forward to sessions

In their questionnaire responses 83% of pupils indicated that they 'always' or 'usually' looked forward to their ALC sessions; 13% indicated 'sometimes'; 4% 'rarely' or 'never' (Figure 3). In their responses to open questions, 6 pupils chose to highlight a sense of anticipation, for example:

I have looked forward to every single Saturday because of ALC.

It gives me something to look forward to.

B2. Enjoyment of ALC sessions

54% of pupils indicated that they 'always' enjoyed their session, 36% said they 'usually' did so - 90% in total indicating these two categories. 8 pupils indicated 'rarely'; 5 pupils indicated 'never' (Figure 4).

In open responses 256 of the 787 pupils chose to give indications of the extent of their appreciation. Of these, 241 expressed overall enjoyment of the sessions; 9 indicated partial appreciation; 6 indicated lack of appreciation. For example:

It was a very good experience and I enjoyed all of it.

Its brill coming here.

I sometimes enjoy it.

ALC is not that fun.

I like the break times that's it.

58 pupils used open responses to compare their general appreciation of ALCs with that of school. 51 of these expressed their greater general appreciation of ALCs; 4 felt that their ALC and school were equally enjoyable; 3 pupils felt that their school was more enjoyable than the ALC:

It is boring at school and more enjoyable here.

It is different because it is more fun.

It is similar because your having fun.

...this work is more boring here.

38 pupils expressed a wish that their ALC could continue, or that they could attend one in the next school year.

It's really great! I just hope there will be something like that at high school.

If I had a chance to go again, I would.

Of the 55 responses from schools, 23 expressed appreciation on behalf of pupils; none indicated that pupils may not have enjoyed their ALC attendance. 11 indicated more general appreciation of ALC opportunities; 3 schools indicated in feedback that they would like more such opportunities for their children:

All the children enjoyed the course, found it stimulating and enjoyable.

A wonderful opportunity for pupils from a disadvantaged ward to access additional learning opportunities.

ALCs are a valuable provision, particularly for those pupils who are unable to access other opportunities to develop their gifts and talents beyond school.

We would appreciate the opportunity for more pupils to take part.

B3. Sources of appreciation: work

In open responses most pupils identified particular aspects of ALC activity as sources of their enjoyment and appreciation. About 80% of these responses identified aspects of work and activity, for example, specific aspects of the curriculum or of teaching and learning, the difficulty of the work. 20% identified more social aspects such as being with friends and break-times.

General

31 pupils chose to identify their work and activity in general as a source of appreciation; 20 chose to identify their ALC subject itself a source of appreciation.

I have found the work very enjoyable.

Drama rules!

I enjoy working in maths.

Specified aspects of curriculum

183 pupils chose to identify specific aspects of their ALC curriculum which they enjoyed or found useful. At ICT Centres, this response most commonly 'making a website' or 'animation'. At maths Centres 'challenges' or maths problems were popular, especially if done on a computer. Aspects of writing were cited by pupils from English Centres and 'doing the performance' was often identified by pupils at ALCs for drama. 6 pupils chose to identify specific aspects of curriculum which they did not like or which they thought could be improved:

I enjoy building things and solving problems.

I enjoy writing the stories and scripts.

Animation was the best because you could make little people.

I enjoy making shapes.
I didn't like doing the crossword.
Every little bit at the end I would like to play games.

New and different things

33 pupils chose to identify the idea of doing 'new' or 'different' things as an aspect of ALC work which they appreciated:

We do different things that I haven't done before.
I think that how we do a variety of things is good.

Difficulty of ALC work

38 pupils chose to highlight the difficulty of their ALC work; 3 highlighted the ease of the ALC work itself; 21 pupils highlighted the ease of understanding the work:

I enjoy the way that at the ALC most of the work is challenging.
I enjoy doing harder work because I find it more interesting.
It was fun because it was easy.
I always leave understanding what I have been taught.

Working with other pupils

61 pupils chose to highlight opportunities to work with others as a source of appreciation; 5 indicated particular appreciation of opportunities for discussion in lessons; 7 indicated that they liked the opportunity to work with others of similar ability or interests:

When we work together is helpful because we share our ideas.
I enjoy working with my mates.
Talking about the work in the middle of the room.
I enjoy working with other people around my level in maths.
[I enjoy] working with other people who like to act.

3 schools also pointed to this benefit:

Very good for ... those who do not wish to stand out as more able.
...provided her with the stimulus and challenge amongst other children of her ability.

Further to this the questionnaire asked pupils to indicate to what extent they enjoyed working with other pupils. In answer 80% of pupils indicated that they 'always' or 'usually' enjoyed this; 5% indicated 'rarely' or 'never' (Figure 5).

Working with staff

40 pupils chose to highlight work with or help from staff as a source of appreciation.

When you are stuck there is always someone there to help.
I enjoy working with the staff.

Further to this the questionnaire asked pupils to indicate to what extent they enjoyed working with staff. A large proportion (80%) indicated they 'always' or 'usually' enjoyed this aspect of the ALC sessions (Figure 6).

Computers, facilities, resources

76 pupils chose to identify use of computers as a source of appreciation; 20 pupils chose to highlight other facilities and equipment, including interactive whiteboards, computer software and cameras.

I enjoy using computers because its an enjoyable way to learn.

I like using the computer for a long time and by myself.

Using advanced software such as medeator8 and all of the good programs we have been on.

Doing things in a fun way

33 pupils highlighted the 'fun' nature of learning at ALCs as a source of their enjoyment:

...it makes learning fun!

It is taught in a fun way.

Other aspects of work

Small numbers of pupils cited other aspects of work:

I enjoy when we make the work practical and we're not all writing with pens and paper.

I enjoy been able to do my own ideas.

When we do whole class discussions and meeting new people.

...trying to solve [problems] on my own.

B4. Sources of appreciation: social aspects

Being with friends

58 pupils chose to highlight the opportunity to be with friends (as opposed to working with them); 6 further pupils indicated appreciation of being with pupils of similar ability; 3 pupils indicated some dissatisfaction with their lack of friends at the ALC:

It was nice meeting children from other schools.

I get to meet people who are at the same standard as me.

I tink my school ... shoud have one more childle [I think my school ... should have one more child].

Appreciation of staff

37 pupils chose to highlight in open responses their general appreciation of staff; 3 pupils expressed some dislike or criticism of their teacher:

I enjoy it because the teachers are friendly.

...the teacher is too strict.

Break-time and out-of-lesson time

The questionnaire asked pupils to indicate to what extent they enjoyed times outside lessons. More than two-thirds indicated that they 'always' enjoyed these times; more than one fifth indicated that they 'usually' did so. 10% indicated that they 'sometimes', 'rarely' or 'never' did so (Figure 7).

16 pupils highlighted this enjoyment in open responses:

Break time is mint.

Atmosphere

8 pupils chose to highlight their appreciation of the informal atmosphere at their ALC, in particular the opportunity to talk with friends while working; 7 pupils highlighted the perception that they were treated well – in a more adult way – at their ALC:

I enjoy the fact that we are allowed to chat and chill and our own thing while learning.

We are treated more grown up.

B5. Summary and review

The great majority of pupils indicated strong anticipation and enjoyment of their ALC and appreciation of what they gained from it. Anticipation of sessions, though strong, was less strong than the sense of enjoyment once there. Of those who compared their ALC with school, nearly all preferred their ALC.

The majority associated this appreciation with aspects of work – curriculum, aspects of teaching and learning, special resources including computers, or the difficulty of ALC study. Working with other pupils or with staff was a strong source of enjoyment for many. A very small number of pupils indicated less appreciation of the work – a lack of challenge, a sense of boredom.

About one fifth of pupils highlighted more social aspects as sources of their enjoyment, for example being with friends or with staff. Break-times were very popular with the great majority of pupils.

What emerged was a sense of the importance of the whole of the ALC experience, not any one particular aspect - all of which may have attracted pupils and convinced them that this was an enjoyable, worthwhile and advantageous way to spend a part of their out-of-school time.

C. Engagement

What is the extent and nature of pupils' engagement with their ALC work and its level of difficulty?

C1. Attendance

The questionnaire asked pupils to estimate their attendance at their ALC against four categories: no sessions missed, one session missed, two sessions missed, and more than two sessions missed. Roughly a quarter indicated each category (Figure 8). Response would have been influenced by the stage at which pupils completed the questionnaire – some did so after six or seven sessions of an eight-week course, others were near the end of a 30-week course.

In feedback given with SATs information, 5 schools commented on their pupils' regular attendance, one school indicated a difficulty:

Both pupils were good attenders.

Andrew had perfect attendance – 100%.

...it was difficult for children to attend every Saturday.

C2. Engagement with work

Relationship with work

The questionnaire asked pupils to estimate how hard they worked at ALC sessions and the extent of their concentration. Between a half and two-thirds of pupils indicated 'always' (Figures 9 & 10). Pupils were also asked about the extent to which they found their work boring. Nearly half of the pupils indicated that they 'never' found their ALC lessons boring; two-fifths indicated 'rarely'. 26 pupils indicated that they 'usually' or 'always' found them boring (Figure 11).

In open responses, 9 pupils indicated a sense of boredom with aspects of their work, for example:

Some of the games are boring in fact most of them are.

They should make the work more understandable and make the topics more interesting.

It is good but a bit boring.

Perceptions of difficulty

Level of difficulty

Pupils were asked about the extent to which they found their work easy. Over half indicated 'sometimes', with a majority of others choosing 'usually' or 'always' (Figure 12).

310 pupils used open responses to provide further estimation of the level of difficulty of their ALC work. 58% of these pupils said that they found nothing difficult. 29% said they found nothing difficult with a qualification (e.g. 'not much' or 'nothing really'). 11% said they found some things difficult; 5 (2%) said they found everything or almost everything difficult (Figure 13).

A small number of pupils expressed dissatisfaction with the level of difficulty of the work. 5 indicated that it could be too difficult; 9 indicated that ALC work was too easy or repeated work already done:

Sometimes puzzles and problems are too challenging.

Sometimes I got really upset at the scores I get, once a piece of work took me 3 hours and 6 minutes and my score was 4C! I felt like crying.

It is a bit easy because I am in year 7 and it sometimes is Y6 work.

.. it's boring!! Doing something that we have done before.

Comparison with school

The questionnaire also asked pupils to compare the level of difficulty of ALC work with that at school. Responses were more balanced than for other questions – a quarter of pupils indicated that ALC work was 'always' more difficult; a quarter also indicated that it was 'usually' so. Rather fewer indicated greater similarity between ALC and school work. 86 pupils (11%) indicated that ALC work was 'never' more difficult (Figure 14).

256 pupils chose to identify in open responses the more difficult nature of ALC work as a difference to school. 12 indicated that they found their ALC work easier than work at school; 7 others highlighted the nature of help available at the ALC, which made the work easier. 7 pupils chose to indicate a perception that work was equally difficult or equally easy at the ALC and at school:

It's different because here we do hard sums.

ALC was really challenging, I hope regular school was as challenging.

It is easier at ALC than at school.

It is different because the teachers ... make it easy for us.

...sometimes its quite easy like school.

C3. Sources of difficulty

Pupils were asked in open questions what they found difficult at their ALC. Most indicated elements of curriculum, others cited features of teaching and learning, a few highlighted social and practical aspects.

Curriculum

67 simply cited the work or some of the work in general terms:

The work is always challenging.

216 pupils specified particular elements of their ALC curriculum. ICT pupils often highlighted aspects of web-page production; maths pupils often cited different kinds of puzzles and problems or specific aspects of mathematical learning such as algebra, coordinates or trigonometry; English pupils often cited aspects of writing:

The animation is a little bit complicated for me.

Sometimes we do questions which need a formula that is quite hard.

I find having to act things out difficult.

Sometimes I find it difficult to think of interesting similes when writing stories.

37 pupils cited doing new work or work they had not done before; 3 pupils cited the amount of work:

New ideas can be difficult when first introduced.

You have to do lots of work.

Teaching and learning

6 pupils indicated difficulty working with other pupils; 5 pupils highlighted difficulty working independently or on their own; 8 pupils indicated difficulty with equipment:

When working in a team, people who want their own way.

When we work independently at work that I am not used to.

Using a compass.

Social and practical aspects

8 pupils indicated difficulty making friends at the ALC; 12 pupils indicated difficulty getting on with other pupils - 8 of these (4 from girls, 4 from boys) were expressing annoyance with the other gender:

That there is few people from my school and so not many to talk to.

People being silly.

Co-operating with boys because they act stubborn.

10 pupils indicated practical difficulties, such as getting to their ALC on time, or conflict with other possible activities:

Getting up in the morning for it!

*It is sometimes difficult to work to the best of my ability so early on in the morning.
It clashes with my timetable.*

C4. Understanding ALC work

The questionnaire asked pupils about the extent to which they found their ALC work difficult to understand. Nearly half indicated 'rarely'; a further one third indicated 'never'. 12 pupils indicated that they 'always' found it difficult to understand (Figure 15).

In open responses 49 pupils indicated difficulty understanding what to do: 23 chose to indicate difficulty keeping up with the work. 7 pupils indicated difficulty concentrating; 8 others indicated difficulty remembering things:

Understanding some of the words and what they mean.

When they don't give instructions properly.

Working quickly because often I don't have enough time to take in what I'm learning properly.

Sometimes I find it difficult to listen to the teacher when people are talking.

Remembering how to do something or all the things we have learnt.

C5. Summary and review

Given the approximate method of collecting data, rates of attendance seemed generally high, especially so in view of the voluntary nature of attendance and the pressures for pupils to be doing other things. From the figures available to the evaluation, a broad estimate would be that the overall attendance of pupils surveyed averaged around 75%.

Responses suggested that most pupils had a fairly balanced view that their ALC work was generally or mostly or even always manageable. A very small number indicated an overall problem with the difficulty of the work, some of these saying it was too difficult, some saying it needed to be more challenging.

Most found ALC work more difficult than school to greater or lesser extents, and a large number saw the greater difficulty of ALC work as a distinguishing feature of their Centre activity. One in ten surveyed pupils saw the level of difficulty at ALC and at school as the same.

Perceptions were sometimes not straightforward. Some pupils seemed to see 'easy' work as a compliment to their ALC, a consequence of clear explanations from teachers rather than a negative feature highlighting a lack of extra challenge. This view was strengthened by pupils' apparent confidence in understanding their ALC work, with four out of five indicating few if any problems in this respect.

Most commonly, sources of difficulty related to aspects of curriculum which had proved difficult to tackle. Some pupils cited difficulty understanding instructions or specific vocabulary, or keeping up with the pace of work; a small number suggested social difficulties. Attending an ALC can be a challenge for some pupils in this respect. It would be wrong to downplay the importance of careful planning and promotion of a supportive atmosphere at the Centres, during and outside the formal work.

D. Learning

How do pupils perceive the extent and nature of their learning and personal development at their ALC?

D1. Extent of learning

The questionnaire investigated pupils' perceptions of the extent to which their ALC work helped them with their learning of new knowledge, skills and understanding. For each aspect, just over half of pupils estimated that their ALC 'always' helped their learning; around one third indicated that it 'usually' did so; about 10% said that it 'sometimes' did so (Figures 16, 17, 18).

D2. Nature of learning

In open responses many pupils took the opportunity to highlight the nature of their learning at their ALC, in its own terms and in comparison with school.

General

239 pupils took the opportunity in open questions to indicate the nature of their learning in a general way; one of these suggested lack of learning:

I learn something new each Saturday.

I enjoy learning more in maths.

I haven't learnt anything because I was already so smart.

In schools' feedback 10 schools chose to highlight pupils' learning in general terms:

The pupils ... have gained greatly from the work they have covered.

It ... 'stretched' their mathematical ability/knowledge.

We were very impressed by the progress Kate made as a result of her attendance.

Specified elements of curriculum

47 pupils chose to highlight their learning of specific elements of their ALC curriculum:

It helps me learn more about different programs.

I can learn new words.

3 schools also highlighted aspects of the curriculum which pupils had learnt:

The sessions developed his ability to explain his reasoning as well as him offering more than one strategy to solve a problem.

They have particularly gained from the wider experiences of writing in different genres and also the visit to the theatre to help to enhance their writing skills.

Gains in confidence

12 pupils chose to indicate that the ALC had strengthened their confidence; 7 further pupils suggested a sense of pride in their ALC attendance or their work there:

I find that it has boosted my confidence.

I am glad I have been chosen to come here.

3 schools also highlighted this aspect:

Very good for self esteem of sometimes quiet children or those who do not wish to stand out as more able.

T. has A.D.H.D. and has benefited greatly from his attendance at the ALC. It has given him the confidence to achieve high standards in maths despite his condition.

Comparison with school

12 pupils felt that they learnt at their ALC and at their school; 5 pupils felt that they learnt the same things in both places:

It is similar because you're always learning.

It's similar because we learn the same things.

It may be what I am learning that week at school.

25 pupils indicated a feeling that they learnt different things at the ALC and at school; 6 identified specific elements which they learnt at their ALC and not at school; 4 indicated that they felt more motivated or were able to concentrate better at the ALC:

Nearly every time you learn new things that you have not done in school.

We don't do that much drama in school so it is something new to learn.

...we learn about algebra and we don't at school.

I don't think it is similar to at school because school is a boring way of learning; here we are interested and want to learn.

It is different because there is less people here and I find it easier to concentrate.

D3. Impact

On school work

The questionnaire asked pupils to estimate the extent to which their ALC work helped them to do their work at school better. Less than one third of pupils indicated 'always'; rather more than one third of pupils indicated 'usually'; less than one quarter indicated 'sometimes'. 73 pupils (just over 4%) indicated 'rarely' or 'never' (Figure 19).

In open responses 94 pupils indicated how they felt their ALC work helped them with school work; 8 pupils indicated that they did work at their ALC before they did the same work at school.

I enjoy coming because when I go back to school I can take things I have learnt from ALC to get a good mark.

I feel that I know more about maths and I answer more questions at school.

I usually cover the topics at my ALC before I do at school so at school I can do better.

14 pupils indicated that the ALC would help them prepare for secondary school:

I enjoy knowing that I will be able to do maths well in high school.

I find useful doing algebra because in high school we are gonna do it there.

3 responding schools pointed to impact on ALC pupils' school work; 9 suggested some wider contribution to class learning; 2 schools indicated a need for feedback from ALCs about their pupils' learning:

Both our students last year brought back strategies to support their work in school.

Trevor shared the outcome of his work with his class thus modelling high standards in English.

Pupils returned to school fully enthused and willing to talk about their maths, activate their thinking and share their ideas.

I had no information from the ALC about the work she was doing or how she was progressing.

On preparation for Standard Assessment Tests (SATs)

The survey asked pupils about the extent to which they felt that their ALC work helped them to prepare for their end-of-Key Stage SATs. 42 pupils did not respond, largely pupils not in Year 6 or those not studying a core-curriculum subject at their ALC.

Responses from pupils at Centres for maths and English indicated general confidence that ALC work helped with SATs. 50% of English pupils and 45% of maths pupils indicated that their ALC 'always' helped in their preparation; a further 32% of each indicated that it 'usually' did so. 8% of maths pupils indicated that it 'rarely' or 'never' did so; only 2 pupils out of 66 English pupils gave these responses (Figures 20, 21).

The pupils at other, non-SATs subject Centres who did respond to this question indicated this role of ALCs much less strongly. One third of ICT pupils who responded (34%) and over half of arts pupils (59%) felt that the ALC 'rarely' or 'never' helped with SATs.

30 pupils, all at maths and English Centres and nearly all in Year 6, used open responses to highlight further the influence of ALC work on their preparation for SATs. A further 7 pupils highlighted its influence on their performance in 'tests', 2 others suggested an influence on their preparation for GCSE examination.

I find this valuable work for my SATS.

It teaches me extra information towards the Sats.

I found useful learning about play scripts because a play script appeared in my SATS.

I found pi and hypotenuse useful in my test.

One school, writing after SATs had taken place, felt that the ALC course had not influenced the pupil's SATs work:

I felt that the course did not enhance Dalvinder's SAT result.

On interest in subject

The survey asked pupils to indicate the extent to which the ALC made pupils more interested in the subject. Responses were confident: over half of pupils indicated 'always', a quarter indicated 'usually', 48 pupils (6%) answered 'rarely' or 'never' (Figure 22).

6 pupils also indicated in open responses that they felt that the ALC increased their interest or motivation in the ALC subject; 3 schools also highlighted this aspect:

I like learning about new things which get me interested in maths.

[It] helps me to enjoy writing more.

...it increased her enjoyment and enthusiasm for writing as a hobby.

On everyday life

The questionnaire asked pupils about the extent to which their ALC work helped them to do things in their everyday life. Pupils were rather cautious in their responses. Around a third indicated that it 'sometimes' did so, rather fewer indicated 'usually'. Less than one fifth indicated 'always', a few more than this indicated 'rarely' or 'never' (Figure 23).

26 pupils used open responses to indicate their feeling that their ALC helped them in their everyday life; 34 pupils indicated that the ALC helped them to make friends at the ALC; 8 further pupils indicated that their ALC helped them with 'things' in general:

I think it is good because I use these things at home.

It helps me to make new friends and talk to new people.

It helps me with other things.

On career intentions

Pupils were asked what job they would like to do when they finished their education. 13% chose a job which was related to their ALC subject, and a further 9% gave two or more alternatives, at least one of which was related to the ALC subject. For 17% their intention was partially related to their ALC subject. Nearly half had in mind a job not related to the subject of their ALC. 14% stated that they did not know what they wanted to do; 20 did not answer the question (Figure 24).

D4. Summary and review

The majority of pupils were in no doubt that they learnt and learnt well at their ALC. Most highlighted gains in curriculum, but some focused on gains associated with strengthened pride and self-esteem. Some schools backed up these views in their comments as well. However, for most pupils it was activities and curriculum which most differentiated ALC and school, rather than the extent and nature of learning which took place.

In terms of the perceived impact of ALC work, pupils felt most strongly its impact on preparation for SATs and on their interest in the subject. They perceived less strongly an impact on general school work and on everyday life. The extent to which the ALC subject related to pupils' career intentions was unclear.

There may have been wider influences on pupils' focus on SATs – an eagerness at home and school for pupils to do well in these tests, a sense that giving up Saturday mornings will be made worthwhile by improved performance when the tests come round. Most questionnaires were indeed filled in around SATs-time – for many pupils end-of-Key Stage SATs or optional equivalents in other years would have been of real and current importance.

E. Achievement

To what extent is pupils' ALC learning evident in results of their Key Stage 2 SATs?

Pupils in Year 6 attending ALCs in maths and English were requested to give permission for the researcher to ask their school for SATs results. Of 263 maths pupils, 224 gave permission, 39 did not. Of 66 pupils at English Centres, 61 gave permission, 5 did not.

Responses relating to 158 pupils were received from schools. 120 were for pupils taking maths, 38 for those taking English. The data received varied: some gave levels only, some gave raw scores only, some provided both. This variety caused some difficulty in reaching a firm set of conclusions from the attainment data.

The focus for analysis was the pupils' year 6, the year during which they attended their ALC. Examination was made of their level of attainment at the end of Year 5, their level of attainment at the end of Year 6 and the progress or added value over the year which was indicated. This was done in two ways: firstly through analysis of levels and sub-levels, secondly by looking at pupils' age-standardised scores from one year to the next.

There were various difficulties associated with this focus, for instance:

- Nationally not all schools undertake optional Year 5 SATs.
- Those who undertake these tests may do so at different times of the school year. In this evaluation it was assumed that schools carried out Year 5 optional SATs in the same week in May as Year 6 pupils completed their end-of-Key Stage SATs.
- Not all schools whose pupils take the tests submit data – national data are therefore based on a limited sample.
- End-of-Key Stage Year 6 SATs results are not formally divided into alphanumeric sub-levels - a, b, and c - as is done with the results from other years.

E1. Maths

Levels

Optional Year 5 SATs: Optional Year 5 data were submitted relating to 81 pupils. They had taken these tests near the end of the school year before attending their ALC. 38 of these pupils had gained Level 5; 41 had gained Level 4; 2 had gained Level 3.

For 78 of these pupils, sub-levels of a, b and c were indicated. Of these nearly one third had gained Level 4a; another one third had gained Level 5c. The highest Level achieved was 5b (the highest available in these optional SATs), the lowest was 3b (Figure 25).

Comparison of these findings with national data for 2004 (QCA, 2004) illustrated the high levels already attained by nearly all ALC pupils before starting their ALC course, in comparison with their year-group peers (Table 3).

	4c	4b	4a	5c	5b
% of ALC pupils who had gained this level	8	12	32	35	12
% of national pupils who had gained this level	16	11	7	4	1

Table 3: Comparison of Year 5 optional results in maths for surveyed ALC pupils and pupils nationally

Year 6 SATs: There was information about Year 6 SATs results relating to 117 pupils. The ALC pupils had taken these tests near the end of their ALC course or after it had ended. 114 of these pupils gained Level 5 – this compares with 31% of all pupils nationally reaching this level in maths (DfES, 2005a). The other 3 pupils attained Level 4.

Value-added in Year 6: Information relating to the progress made by pupils between their Year 5 optional SATs and their Year 6 end-of-Key Stage SATs was provided in relation to 76 pupils. This was the period of time in which they had attended their ALC course. More than one third of these pupils had progressed from Level 4a in Year 5 to Level 5 in Year 6; just under one third had gained Level 5c in Year 5 and Level 5 at the end of Year 6 (Figure 26).

The ten levels of the national curriculum are an indication that pupils will normally progress by half of one key stage in one year (Wiliam, 2001). Of particular interest therefore are those ALC pupils who progressed by more than this during their Year 6 when they were attending their Centre. 8 pupils clearly did so here – from 4c to 5 (6 pupils), from 3a to 5 (1 pupil) and from 3b to 5 (1 pupil).

Given that there is no subdivision of Levels in Year 6 SATs, it is not straightforward to gauge the advancement made by pupils who progressed from Level 4b or 4a at Year 5 to Level 5 at Year 6. One way to try and do this is to separate their raw scores at Level 5 into three groups: 78-85; 86-93; 94-100, notionally '5c', '5b' and '5a'.

Of all the pupils attaining Level 5 at Year 6, most clustered around the higher raw scores within the range (Figure 27). When these raw scores were subdivided into the three groups - notionally '5c', '5b' and '5a' - the balance towards the higher scores could be seen (Figure 28).

Using these figures as a guide, and assigning to the three groups the notional alphanumeric sub-levels of '5c', '5b', and '5a', it is possible to examine further the progress made in Year 6 by pupils for whom raw-score data were available. Figure 29 shows the details. These suggest that a quarter of pupils made progress from 5c at Year 5 to '5a' at Year 6; 16% progressed from 4a to '5b'; 10% progressed from 4a to '5a'; 10% stayed at the very top of the grades available – 5b at Year 5, '5a' at Year 6.

From these figures it is possible to gauge the number of pupils who achieved Levels 3 or 4 in Year 5 and who progressed by one whole key stage or more in Year 6. These would be those progressing from 3b to 4b or above, from 3a to 4a or above, from 4c to '5c' or above, from 4b to '5b' or above, and 4a to '5a'. Excluded from such calculations are pupils already achieving 5c or 5b in their Year 5 SATs, who can only achieve '5a' in Year 6.

These calculations indicated that no children made no increase at all; 16 of the 37 pupils gained one or two sub-levels; 12 pupils gained one whole level, and 9 pupils gained more than one whole level (Figure 30). From this small sample, therefore, and using notional measures of sub-levels at Level 5, 57% of relevant ALC pupils gained one level or more between their Year 5 optional SATs and their Year 6 SATs.

Age-standardised scores

Age-standardised scores provide a way of compensating for a child's age when analysing test results. The average score is 100, more able pupils will score above this. A child's progress can be monitored by calculating these scores and comparing them from year to year. The score should remain the same – with a 10% margin of error (QCA, 2003). Scores rising or decreasing above 20% from one year to the next suggest that something special and additional has happened to create an extra increase or decrease in achievement.

One difficulty of using this means of comparison in maths for these ALC pupils was that the way scores were presented for Year 5 optional SATs in 2004 was different from the way in which they were presented for the Year 6 SATs in 2005. The age-standardised scores for optional Year 5 SATs, calculated in 2003 (QCA, 2003) and used in 2003 and 2004, gave one overall score for both written and mental tests. For 2005 there were two separate sets of scores – one set for mental maths and one set for written maths (QCA, 2005).

Optional Year 5 age-standardised scores: Data on 56 maths-ALC pupils were provided. Age-standardised scores ranged from 105 to the maximum of 141, with the largest cluster between 118 and 129 (Figure 31).

Year 6 age-standardised scores: Schools provided an overall raw score for maths, they did not separate it into mental and written maths scores which would allow calculation against the separate age-standardised score tables from Year 5. It was necessary therefore to derive notional 'raw scores' for mental and for written tests, then to combine these to derive a notional 'overall age-standardised score' for Year 6.

In order to do this, the overall raw score was divided on a proportionate basis (one-fifth mental maths, four-fifths written maths, in line with weighting of the tests) in order to derive notional age-standardised scores for mental and written mathematics. These were combined, again on a proportionate basis, to derive the notional 'overall' age-standardised score.

As a result of these calculations, the range amongst the 110 pupils was from 101 to 138 - the highest possible, which 8 pupils achieved (Figure 32). The largest number were clustered

between 119 and 128, very similar to the main cluster in age-standardised scores relating to the optional Year 5 SATs for these pupils.

Increases in age-standardised scores: Comparison between age-standardised scores in Year 5 and those in Year 6 offered potential to confirm progress made by pupils above that which might normally be expected.

55 pupils had data which allowed this comparison to be made in this evaluation (Figure 34). The 'lowest' profile was a pupil who 'lost' 19 points between Year 5 and Year 6. The highest was a pupil who raised the score by 28 points between Year 5 and Year 6. Most pupils showed an increase or decrease within 10% of the Year 5 score. No pupils showed a decrease of more than 20% which might indicate that something detrimental had happened during the year. Two pupils showed an increase of more than 20% - these were pupils who moved from Level 4c at Year 5 to a notional '5a' level in Year 6. This increase suggested that something particularly advantageous happened during the year. The third pupil who moved from 4c to a notional '5a' level increased her age-standardised score by 19 points.

The pupil who moved from Level 3b in Year 5 to a notional '5c' in Year 6 and the pupil who moved from 3a in Year 5 to a notional '5b' in Year 6 did not have Year 5 raw scores to allow them to be included in the analysis. However looking at the range of raw scores relevant to their 3a and 3b levels, they would have increased their age-standardised scores by between 11 and 17 points in one case, and between 15 and 21 points in the other.

E2. English

Levels

Analysis of results in English was complicated by the variety of data submitted by schools – some provided overall levels, some provided separate levels for reading and writing, some provided raw scores for all or some of these elements.

Optional Year 5 SATs: In English optional Year 5 SATs are not subdivided into alphanumeric grades of a, b and c. Data on reading were submitted relating to 11 pupils. Of these 6 had gained Level 4; the other 5 had gained Level 5. Data on writing were submitted relating to 8 pupils. Of these 6 had gained Level 4; 2 had gained Level 5.

Comparison of these very restricted findings with national data for 2004 (QCA, 2004) again indicated high levels already attained by ALC pupils before starting their ALC course in comparison with their year-group peers (Tables 4 and 5).

	4	5
% of ALC pupils who had gained this level	55	45
% of national pupils who had gained this level	42	11

Table 4: Comparison of Year 5 optional results in reading for surveyed ALC pupils and pupils nationally

	4	5
% of ALC pupils who had gained this level	75	25
% of national pupils who had gained this level	25	3

Table 5: Comparison of Year 5 optional results in writing for ALC pupils and pupils nationally

Year 6 SATs: There was information about Year 6 SATs for 38 pupils, providing an overall level for English. 30 of these pupils gained Level 5 - 79%. According to national data (DfES, 2005a) 27% of all pupils nationally reach this level in English. 8 ALC pupils gained Level 4.

Value-added in Year 6: The very small numbers made analysis of progress during Year 6 very problematical. Data at a very broad level emerged in relation to 29 pupils. Of these, 20 progressed from one overall level to the next: 18 from Level 4 to Level 5, 2 from Level 3 to Level 4. This does not mean that all made progress of one level – the numbers would include pupils progressing by one sub-level (e.g. from a notional '4a' to a notional '5c'), or by two sub-levels (e.g. '4a' to '5b'). 9 pupils stayed at the same overall level: 5 at Level 4, 4 at Level 5 (Figure 35).

Age-standardised scores

Optional Year 5 age-standardised scores: In English age-standardised scores are provided for reading only. Data on just 7 pupils were provided for the evaluation. Their age-standardised scores ranged from 101 to 126.

Year 6 age-standardised scores: Only two sets of reading data were available, showing age-standardised scores of 119 and 122.

Value-added: Reading data from Year 5 and Year 6 were available for two pupils. One showed an increase of 8 points; the other showed a decrease of 5 points.

E3. Summary and review

The examination of levels in this evaluation indicated that many ALC pupils made good progress in their final year, compared with an expectation of progress by half of one national curriculum level in a year. Most notable were ALC pupils progressing from a Level 3 at the end of Year 5 to a Level 5 at the end of Year 6. When the Level 5 maths results were divided into notional sub-levels of '5c', '5b' and '5a', more than half of pupils at maths ALCs who were at Levels 3 or 4 at the end of Year 5 progressed by one national curriculum level or more into a Level '5c', '5b' or '5a'.

However, these findings were not confirmed by examination of pupils' age-standardised scores in maths. These scores indicated that the great majority of ALC pupils maintained a similar score, within margins for error, between their Year 5 optional SATs and their Year 6 SATs, suggesting expected but not special progress during the year in which they attended their ALCs.

It is important to note that even if progress of ALC pupils above expectations could be securely detected, there would be many possible explanations for this. It could come as a result of extra effort by these pupils in their final year of primary schooling, especially in the run up to end-of-Key Stage SATs tests. There may be extra effort by schools or more skilled teaching in Year 6 for these pupils than in other years. The strong support of parents, already seen in their provision of transport for ALC pupils, may be manifested in other ways too, for instance in provision of external private tuition, or in an ethos at home which stresses the importance of SATs and encourages pupils to study hard and do well. ALC attendance would also be a possible reason for any additional progress made by ALC pupils in their Year 6.

5. Trends and differences

Cross-tabulation of data highlighted trends and differences between responses of a range of groups.

5.1 Centres

Centres showed varied profiles in nearly all aspects of the evaluation. For instance, at 4 Centres over 80% of pupils indicated that they 'always' enjoyed working with other pupils; at 6 Centres under 30% did so. At 12 Centres more than 40% of pupils indicated that their work was 'always' more difficult than that at school; at 7 Centres less than 10% did so. At 7 Centres more than 50% of pupils indicated that their work was 'rarely' or 'never' more difficult than school work; at 6 Centres none did so. Such differences, combined with variations in size, course length, age of pupils, gender and ethnicity profiles and other elements, emphasised how diverse the Centres themselves can be within a common framework of working at advanced levels with more able pupils.

5.2 Subjects

Maths

For maths pupils the difficulty of work was an important aspect of their ALC. They were more likely than pupils of other subjects to highlight this as a distinguishing feature of their Centre and as a main difference to their work at school. They indicated more frequently than pupils from other subjects that they found aspects of the work difficult, yet it was this feature they appreciated most, more so than other aspects of learning or social aspects. Enjoyment of sessions appeared a less important consideration for these pupils (although indicated levels were still high), levels of engagement were also slightly below those of other subjects (although again still high). This appreciation was sufficient for many (proportionately more than other subjects) to suggest that they would like to continue their ALC in the future. Allied to this was a strong perception that their ALC helped them with SATs and (less strongly) with school work in general. This seemed more important to them than increases in interest in mathematics derived from their ALC work.

English

The number of pupil respondents from English Centres was relatively small, and responses would be influenced too by the high proportion of girls attending these Centres. Pupils from English Centres appeared particularly enthusiastic about their ALC. They most readily indicated the highest levels of enjoyment and engagement. Cooperative and social aspects

of their ALC - working with other pupils and making new friends – seemed more significant to them than to pupils elsewhere. They were also most likely to indicate the highest levels of enjoyment of working with staff and to suggest appreciation of their teachers and helpers. By some margin these pupils were most likely to indicate highest levels of appreciation of time outside lessons.

The difficulty of the work seemed to have less significance for them overall. They were least likely to indicate more than occasional difficulty with the work and least likely to see it as more difficult than school. Clear preparation may have played a part here - they were even less likely than other ALC pupils to indicate difficulty in understanding what to do. English pupils were (with maths) likely to see links to SATs and to school work – indeed they were least likely to see their ALC work as different to work at school.

Of interest were the 7 pupils from English Centres who did not achieve Level 5 in their Year 6 SATs, proportionately more than pupils from maths Centres who remained below this level at the end of their primary schooling. The number of surveyed pupils was small, and it would be wrong to rely too much on this figure. If it is worthy of note, it may indicate that ALC pupils in English were not always the high achievers in formal SATs, but had other qualities which helped them to stand out in this subject. These other reasons – less reflected in formal SATs assessment – may have been more influential in leading schools to select pupils for attendance at English ALCs than was the case in maths.

ICT

Pupils at ICT Centres indicated similar very high levels of enjoyment to English pupils. In contrast, however, ICT pupils were less concerned with the cooperative and social aspects of their ALC. They were the least likely to indicate the highest level of enjoyment of working with or being with other pupils; working with staff was also less significant to them. Of all the subjects, ICT pupils were least likely to indicate highest level of enjoyment of time outside lessons - perhaps ICT activity itself tends to blur distinctions between work and pastime?

A more important focus for most ICT pupils seemed to be dedicated and often individual (rather than shared) access to computers, the opportunity to use new computer programmes and to undertake new tasks such as website design. These distinctive curricular features, rather than perceived difficulty of work, seemed to lie behind the greater tendency of ICT pupils to see their ALC as different to school. The general perception was that ALC work was different to school work but that level of difficulty not the main aspect of this.

ICT pupils indicated strong perceptions of learning at their ALC. In general though they may have seen their ALC as a very enjoyable and educational alternative to school - perhaps closer to everyday interests, to strengthening of those interests and expansion of skills than to

school work, offering enjoyable opportunities to learn more about and get to grips with new ICT activity.

Arts subjects

Arts-subject Centres covered a range of creative and performance activities. One of the strongest features suggested in pupils' responses was their interest in these subjects. Pupils at these Centres most readily expressed the highest levels of enjoyment; with ICT pupils they were most likely to indicate an increased interest in their subject as a result of their ALC; they were even most likely to indicate career intentions related to their ALC subject.

Arts subjects – in particular performing arts – set particular social challenges for young people. There is a stronger need to work together, social as well as a personal importance on doing it well, cooperation is more active and physical, participants are more exposed to observation by others. Responses seemed to indicate that most pupils found this aspect enjoyable and challenging, but that it caused difficulty for some. Of all the subjects, arts pupils were most likely to offer the idea that they enjoyed working with and being with other pupils, yet were less likely than others to indicate high levels of this in response to the direct, closed question.

The difficulty of the work in general was not highlighted as a key issue, although understanding what to do was an area of difficulty for some. As with ICT the impression was that pupils saw the activity itself rather than its difficulty as a key difference to school work.

5.3 Year-groups

Year 4 and below

The youngest pupils showed their enthusiasm most readily in several respects. They were the most likely of the year-groups to indicate the highest levels of anticipation and enjoyment and to express the wish that their ALC might continue. They indicated the highest levels of enjoyment of working with staff and of engagement with their work. Their focus seemed more on interest in the subject and in its connection with everyday life, than on its difficulty in comparison with school.

Year 5

The general features of responses from pupils in Year 4 and below were largely mirrored in Year 5 responses.

Year 6

Being the majority, and with the SATs year being of considerable importance, the perceptions of Year 6 pupils were perhaps of most interest. The overall picture was not straightforward.

With Year 7, they were less likely than other groups to indicate the highest levels of learning (although responses were still positive), or to see most clearly greater difficulty of ALC work to that of work at school. Interestingly Year 6 pupils were the least likely of the year-groups to see the contribution of ALCs to their school work. Most were reasonably confident of an impact on preparation for SATs, although older year-groups felt this equally or more strongly. They were less likely than other groups to indicate impact on interest in the subject or on everyday life, although both of these could be influenced by the large number of maths Centre pupils amongst the Year 6 pupils – the subject could be more influential here than the year group itself.

What did Year 6 pupils appreciate most? There were suggestions that it was the ‘fun’ nature of work at their ALC, the different way of doing things. Styles of learning, rather than the nature of the curriculum itself, may have been a key feature for many of these pupils. Social aspects were important to them too – with Year 7 pupils they were most likely to indicate how they had made new friends at their ALC. Perhaps these aspects provided the contrast with a more formal SATs orientation in this year-group at school and it was this that attracted Year 6 pupils most to their ALCs.

Year 7

As with Year 6 pupils, cooperative and social aspects were important to pupils from Year 7. They were most likely of the year-groups to indicate enjoyment of working with other pupils, strong too in their enjoyment of working with staff. With Year 6 pupils, they were most likely to highlight how they had made new friends at the ALC.

The overall relationship to ALC work of Year 7 pupils was a little less strong. They were most likely of the year groups to indicate that they found their ALC work easy. Indications of engagement were not the highest, although they coincided with general lessening of indicated levels with pupils’ age. They were, however, least likely (with Year 6) to indicate the highest level of learning, and least likely to highlight or identify their learning in open responses. They were also least likely amongst the year groups to see ALC work as more difficult than work at school, and perceptions of impact on school work were not as strong as some other year groups. While overall responses for these pupils were still positive in every respect, these were indications of the need for extra vigilance in ensuring appropriate levels of challenge for these pupils, perhaps especially where they are working jointly with Year 6 pupils.

Year 8 and above

Pupils from Year 8 and above presented interesting trends in perceptions. These pupils were the least likely of the year-groups to indicate anticipation and enjoyment of their ALC sessions (although responses were still positive in both respects) and were least likely to indicate

enjoyment of working with staff. They indicated the least regular attendance profile and lower levels of engagement with their work than other year groups. Above all the year-groups they enjoyed times outside their formal ALC lessons.

On the other hand they were most likely (with Year 4) to indicate the highest levels of learning at their ALCs, to see the greater difficulty of ALC work compared with school, most likely to perceive impact on school work and on SATs. They were least likely to see impact on interest in subject.

One senses in the trends for these older year-groups a growing sense of independence. There is perhaps an emerging clarity about the role of education and study and its separation from relaxation and leisure.

5.4 Month of birth

No clear differences in responses were evident between pupils born early in the school year and those born late in the school year. Pupils in each group showed similar levels of enjoyment, engagement and sense of learning. In Year 5 optional SATs in maths, early-year births were slightly more likely to reach the highest raw scores than late-year births. The profiles for increase in maths levels between Year 5 and Year 6 were almost identical. Raw scores from end-of-Key Stage 2 maths SATs, showed that early-year births had a stronger profile amongst the middle scores but late-year births had a stronger profile amongst the highest scores. There seemed to be no reason to think that pupils born between March and August did any less well at ALCs than pupils born in the first half of the school year.

5.5 Gender

Gender differences in the evaluation were never strong and persuasive. However, overall girls showed themselves to be more ready to indicate more positive responses than boys.

Girls were slightly more ready than boys to indicate the highest levels of anticipation and overall enjoyment, and rather more ready to highlight their enjoyment of computers and other resources. They were more likely to indicate higher levels of engagement and more likely to choose to highlight their learning in open responses. They were a little more ready to indicate highest levels of enjoyment of working with other pupils, of being with friends and of break-times, also more ready to indicate appreciation of staff.

Girls showed themselves to be rather more confident about managing the difficulty of ALC work than boys, and less likely to indicate difficulty in understanding. Boys were more likely to indicate that ALC work was more difficult than school. One could surmise that because

girls appreciated teacher help more than boys and used it more successfully, then they may have been more likely to find the work less difficult.

Such differences in the data were however never profound, and boys' responses showed plenty of evidence of positive interaction with their Centres. In some cases there were similar profiles for both genders, for example in perceptions of the extent of learning. In some instances girls seemed more ready to indicate extremes in views, for instance when indicating more strongly than boys both the impact and the lack of impact of ALC work on their school work. Boys seemed more reserved in their views, more cautious about indicating the highest level of response. One can surmise whether such differences related to characteristics of ALCs or to more general gender differences, differences in maturity and attitudes to learning in general - even whether they simply reflected different approaches to the task of revealing one's feelings in a written questionnaire. In Year 5 optional and in end-of-Key Stage 2 maths SATs, ALC boys – despite their more reserved responses in the survey - tended to achieve higher scores than girls, reflecting national trends also (DfES, 2005a).

5.6 Ethnicity

While a range of ethnicities was represented at the surveyed ALCs, numbers in some minority groups were small. Most comparisons in the evaluation were therefore made between the broader groups of white and non-white pupils.

In many instances there were small differences reflecting a slightly more positive profile of responses amongst non-white pupils. For instance these pupils were more likely to indicate anticipation and overall enjoyment, more likely to indicate enjoyment of working with other pupils and with staff. They indicated higher levels of engagement; they generally showed more regular attendance. They were more likely to indicate highest levels of learning, more likely to highlight learning in open responses and more likely to see impact on school work. They were a little more confident in finding work easy, less likely to see work as more difficult than school, and slightly less likely to see difficulty in understanding work.

Such differences were small but frequent. The overall impression was that ALC pupils of minority ethnic backgrounds gained at least the same enjoyment, engagement and sense of learning from their participation at ALCs as their majority ethnic peers. The only contrast to this was in actual achievement levels in maths Year 6 SATs, where white ALC pupils outperformed non-white ALC pupils amongst the highest raw scores at Level 5.

5.7 Home language

The number of ALC pupils speaking only another language than English at home was smaller than ratios for ethnicity. Despite this small differences between groups were evident. Pupils who spoke only a language other than English at home were more likely than pupils speaking only English at home to indicate enjoyment of working with other pupils and with other staff, and to indicate enjoyment of break-times. They more readily indicated the highest levels of engagement, were more likely to highlight learning in open responses, and suggested slightly greater confidence in dealing with the difficulty of the work. They were more likely to perceive higher levels of impact on school work, and slightly more likely to perceive impact on SATs.

In other areas there were no clear differences between the language groups. For instance profiles were similar when considering anticipation and overall enjoyment, when comparing the difficulty of ALC work with that at school, and in understanding ALC work. The overall impression, as in analysis of ethnicity, was that ALC pupils speaking only a language other than English at home, gained at least the same enjoyment, engagement and learning from their participation at ALCs as pupils who had English as their home language.

5.8 Attendance

Information provided by pupils provided interesting findings about the importance of attendance in relation to perceptions of enjoyment, engagement and learning.

Very frequently in this evaluation it was the pupils who indicated that they attended most regularly who gave the most consistently positive responses. By the same token it was the pupils who indicated most irregular attendance who were least likely to answer questions in the most positive way. In many cases responses were staged in relation to the extent of absence noted.

For instance, indications of anticipation and enjoyment were progressively less strong in relation to the number of sessions which pupils said they had missed. The same was true for enjoyment of working with other pupils and with staff, also in relation to perceptions of difficulty – pupils with less regular attendance profiles suggested progressively greater difficulty with the work, its comparison with the difficulty of work at school and with understanding what to do. The more regular the attendance, the greater the likelihood of the pupils indicating more frequent learning.

Exceptions to this were few: impact on everyday life had a less clear pattern of responses, perceptions of break-time and impact on school work were generally similar across the attendance categories.

Why did the most positive responses so frequently come from those who attended most? It could be that pupils who indicated less regular attendance tended to be more critical in general, more prepared to be open about small failings, both in themselves, and in the ALC courses and their learning from them. By the same token, those who professed to full attendance may have been pupils more likely to put the best gloss on everything – on their own regular commitment to the course, on their ALC, on their own gains from its activities.

On the other hand, differences in professed levels of attendance could be quite real, a broad but useful reflection of levels of commitment amongst the pupils, and an accurate, if generalised, indication of how much pupils derived from their ALC courses. Perhaps those who indicated fuller attendance appreciated their work more and gained more from it.

It would make sense if this latter view was the case. Regular attendance at school is regarded as a high priority for pupils' successful learning (DfES, 2005b). There seems no reason to doubt that it should be a priority for learning at out-of-school Centres as well.

Differences in attendance were not reflected in differences in Year 6 SATs results – perhaps this would be too much to expect with so many factors playing a part in what pupils achieve in these tests. The evaluation lent support to those Centres who stress the need for regular attendance when advertising courses and keep careful records once their courses are under way. The regularity of attendance is likely to be one clear and easy way to measure the engagement and involvement of pupils in their ALC learning. As one pupil responded: 'If you miss one week then it is more difficult the next week'.

6. Recommendations

To strengthen equality of access to ALCs, the following points may be considered:

- Encourage increase in number of Centres for English
- Examine profile of ALC pupils in relation to their month of birth; consider action to address potential imbalance and disadvantage to pupils born later in the school-year
- Strengthen attendance of girls at maths Centres, boys at English Centres
- Encourage attendance of younger pupils from minority ethnic communities
- Consider means to strengthen access to ALCs for pupils with special educational needs
- Investigate and consider means of providing alternative travel arrangement to car use
- Consider collection of free school meal data as further indication of access to ALCs by pupils from a range of socio-economic groups.

In relation to the work of Advanced Learning Centres in general, the following points may be considered:

- Continue to strengthen ALC network as a positive and worthwhile way of stimulating enjoyment of and engagement in higher-level learning by able pupils and extending their learning
- Ensure full monitoring of pupil attendance as broad indicator of the nature of pupils' relationship with their ALC learning
- Take into account the particular interest of some Year 6 pupils in styles of learning which are alternative to and more enjoyable than those which they may experience in school
- Consider special monitoring of the level of challenge presented by ALC work to Year 7 pupils
- Monitor and continue to strengthen cooperative and social aspects of out-of-school learning to meet needs of many pupils for whom this is an important aspect of their ALC experience
- Seek ways of establishing and maintaining close links with pupils' schools
- Share best practice in ALCs as part of ongoing development: for example, high levels of challenge as at maths Centres; co-operative learning as at Centres for English; keen engagement with new technology as at ICT Centres; strong subject interest as at Centres for arts.

Specific areas deserving of further investigation include:

- Experiences and perceptions of pupils leaving ALC courses early
- Influences and imbalances in schools' selection of pupils
- Indications from free-school meal data of access to ALCs by pupils from a range of socio-economic groups
- Extent and nature of wider issues of access for disadvantaged pupils, including those with special educational needs

- Strategies for establishing and maintaining challenging work
- Social experiences of pupils attending ALCs
- Learning of Year 7 pupils attending ALCs
- Gendered perceptions of out-of-school learning
- Comparisons between ALC and school learning
- Transfer of learning between ALC and school
- Relationship between pupils' ALC learning and their achievements in SATs.

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Figures

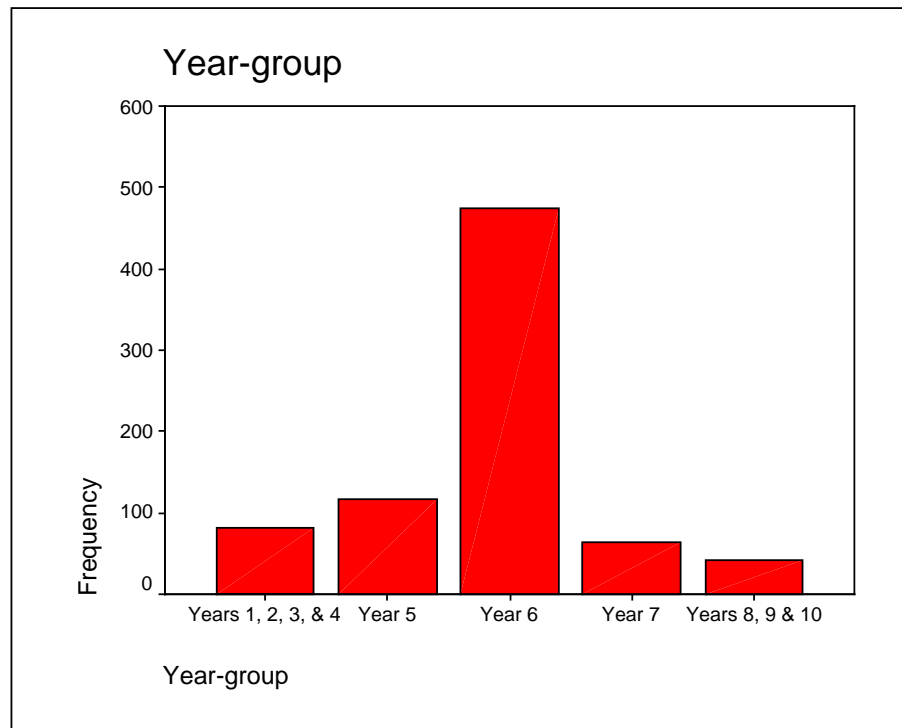


Figure 1: Surveyed ALC pupils by year-group (n=780)

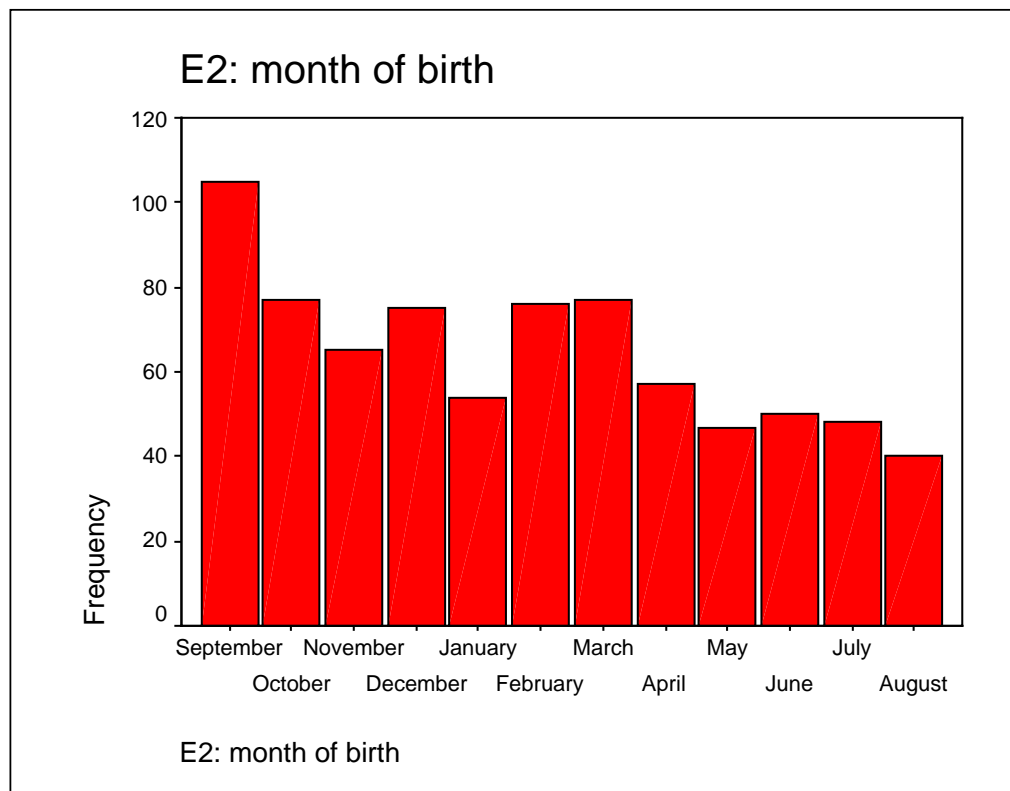


Figure 2: Surveyed ALC pupils by month of birth (n=771)

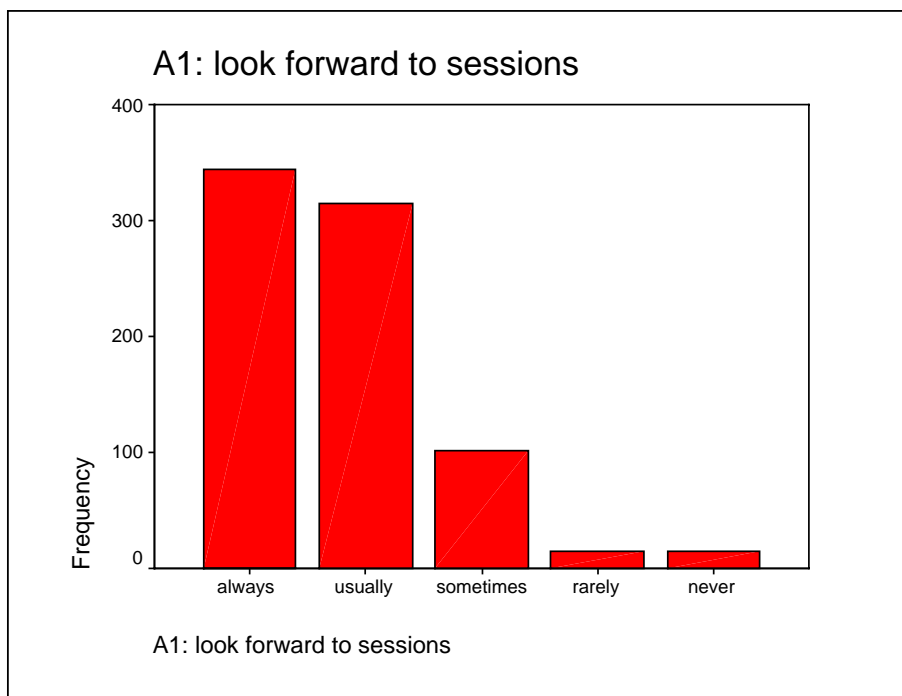


Figure 3: Extent to which pupils looked forward to ALC sessions (n=787)

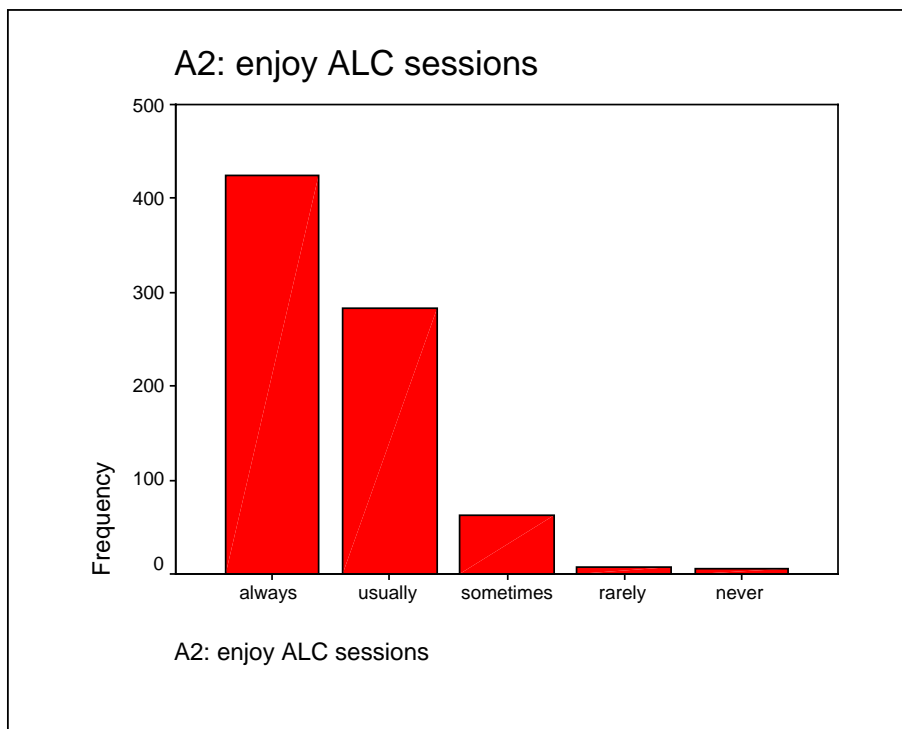


Figure 4: Extent of pupils' enjoyment of sessions (n=783)

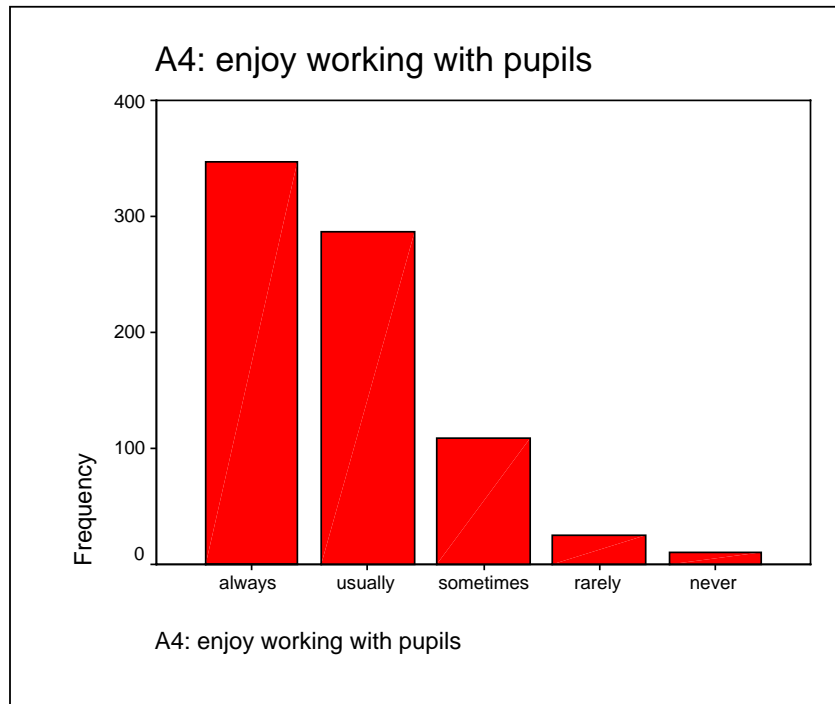


Figure 5: Extent of enjoyment of working with other pupils (n=778)

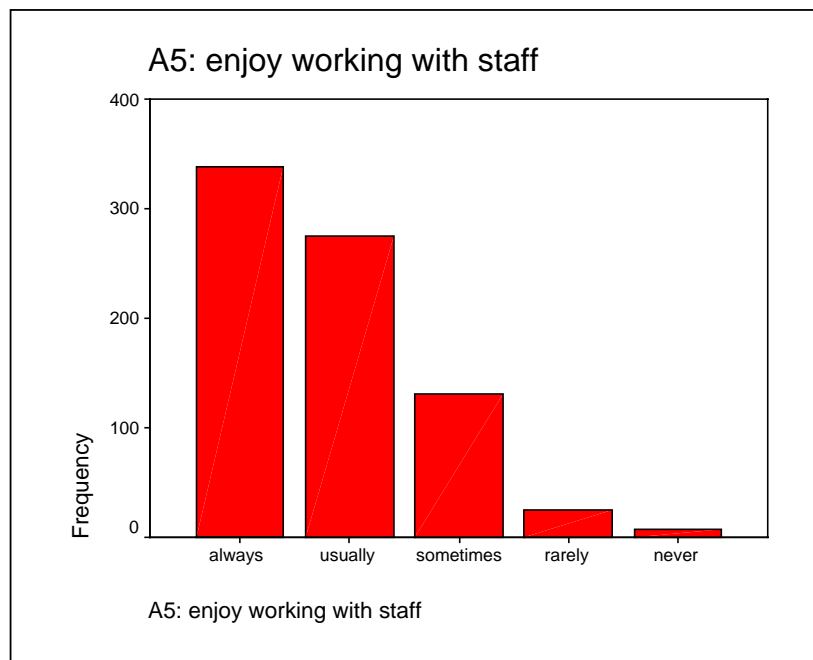


Figure 6: Extent of appreciation of working with staff (n=776)

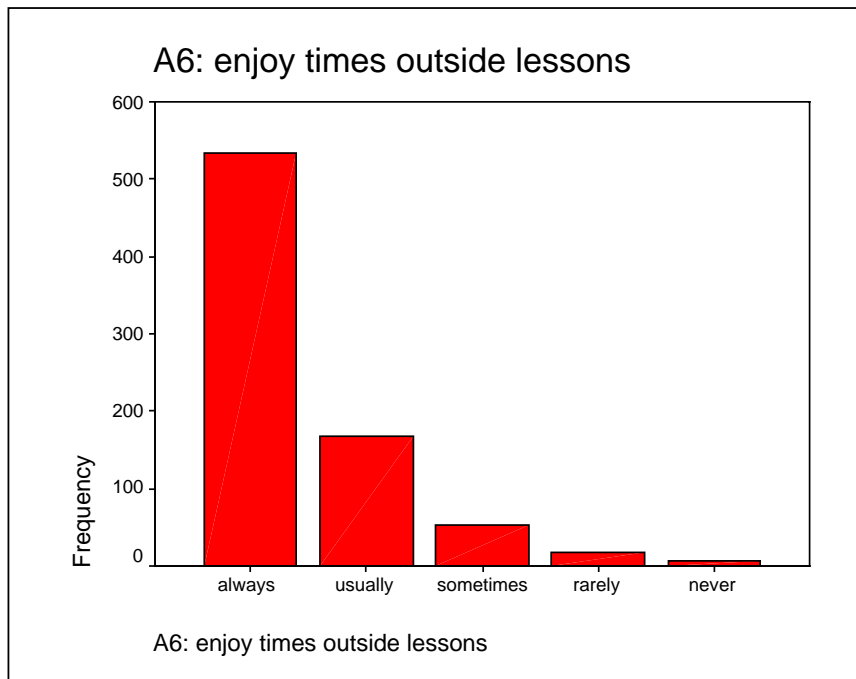


Figure 7: Extent of enjoyment of times outside lessons (n=780)

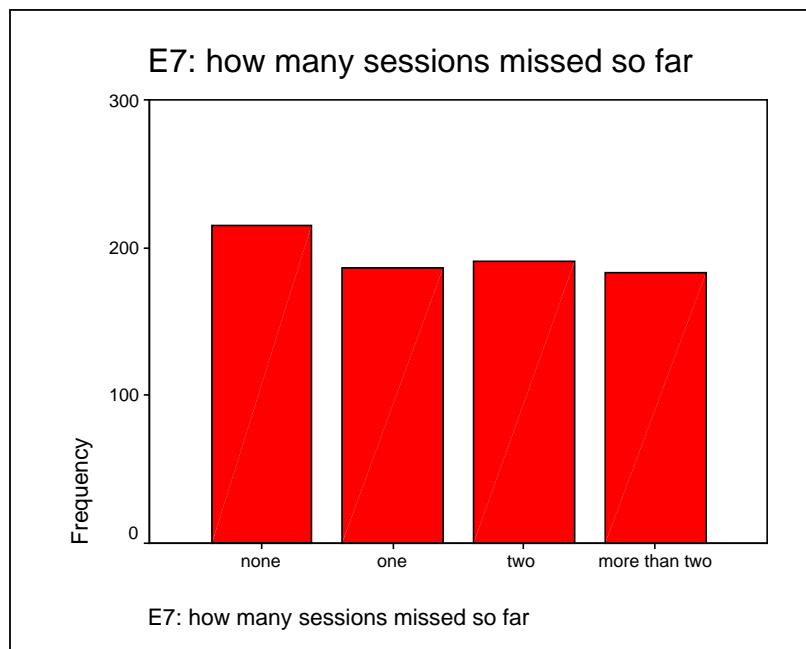


Figure 8: Pupils' estimate of the number of ALC sessions missed (n=775)

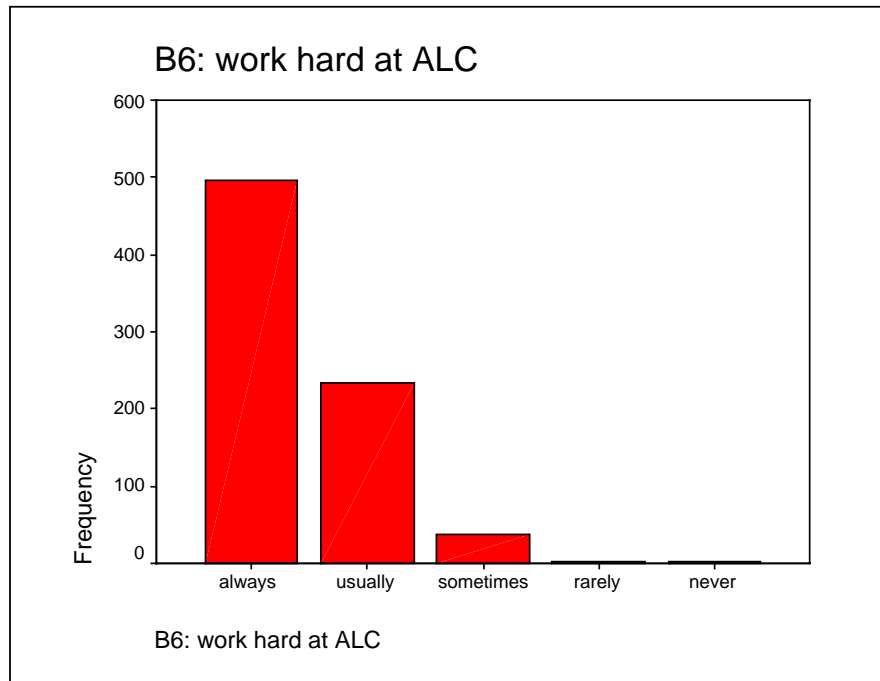


Figure 9: Extent to which pupils felt they worked hard at their ALC (n=772)

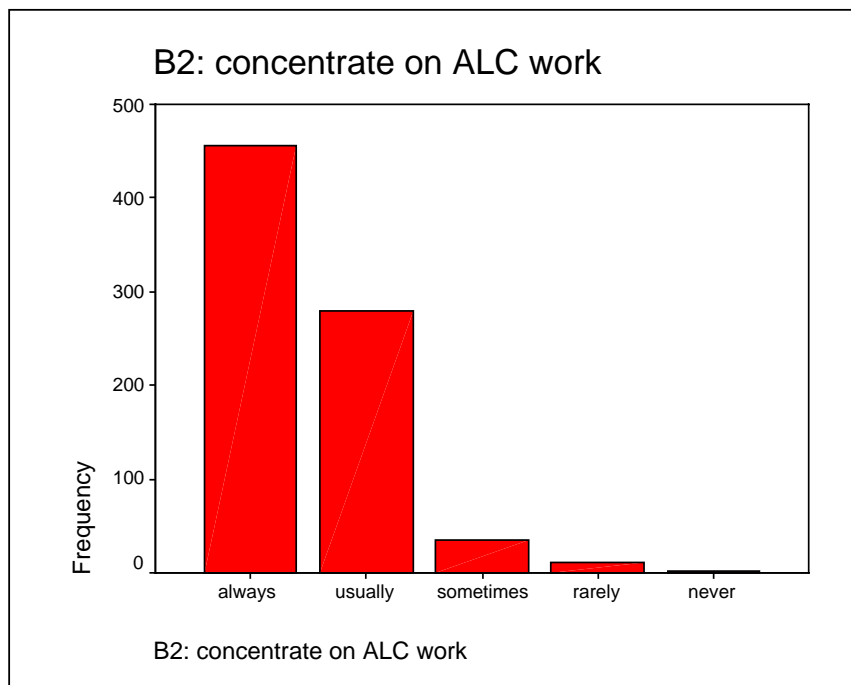


Figure 10: Extent of concentration on ALC work (n=783)

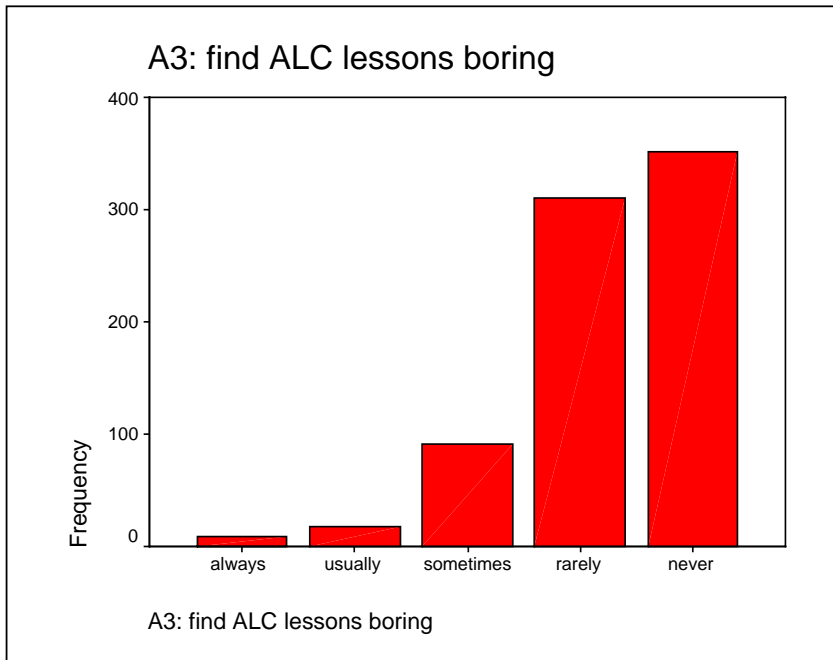


Figure 11: Extent to which pupils found ALC lessons boring (n=780)

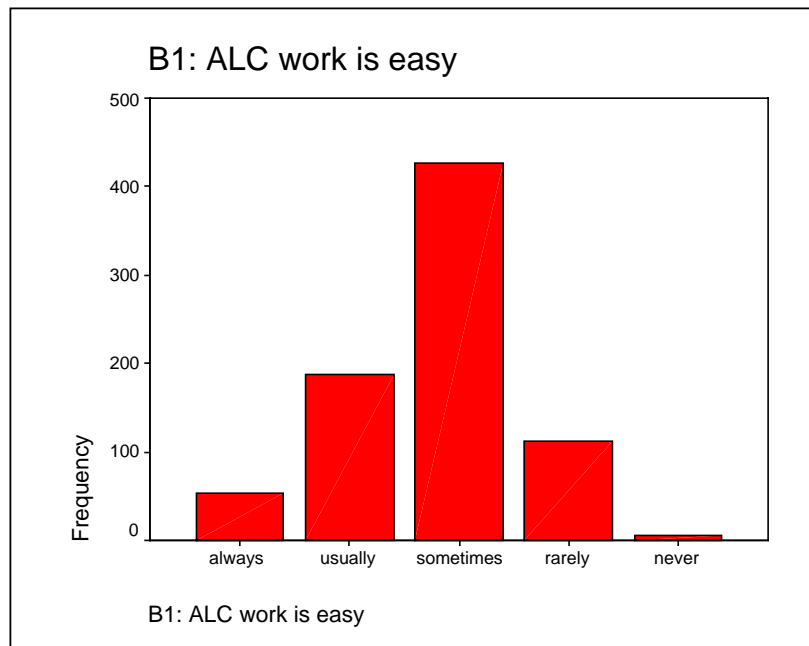


Figure 12: Extent to which pupils found ALC work easy (n=785)

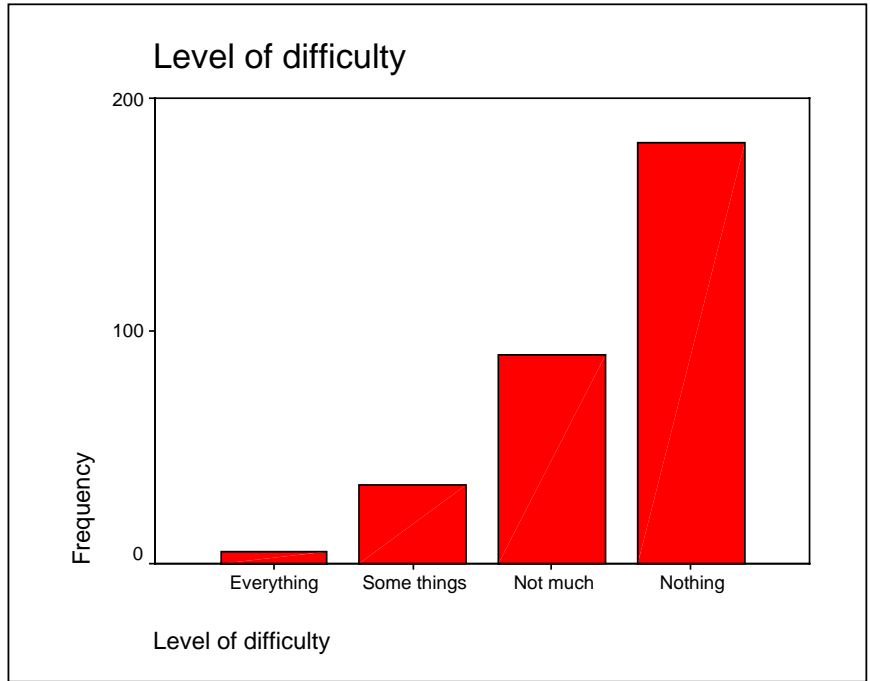


Figure 13: General level of difficulty indicated in open responses (n=322)

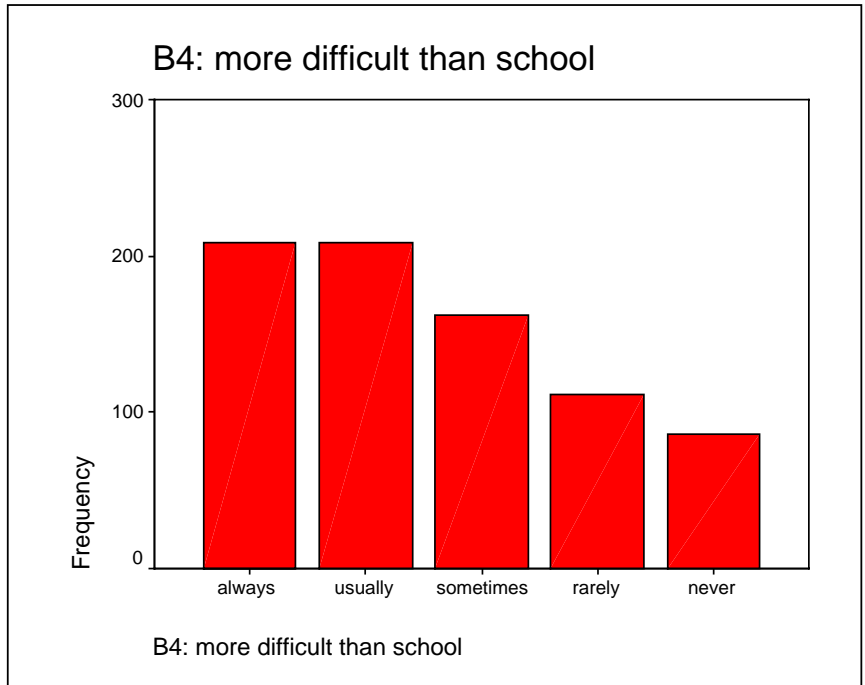


Figure 14: Extent to which pupils found ALC work more difficult than work at school (n=775)

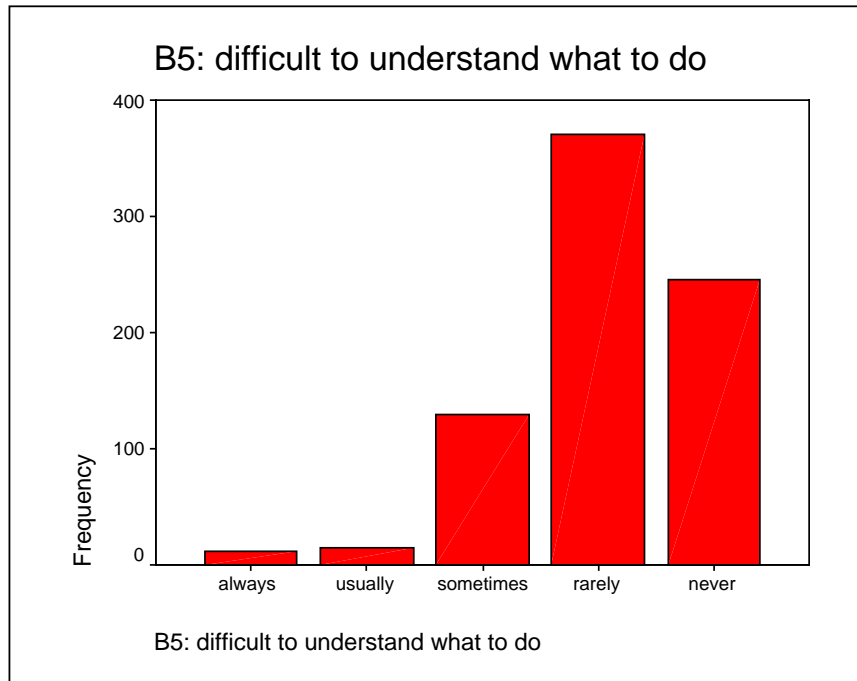


Figure 15: Extent to which pupils found ALC work difficult to understand (n=772)

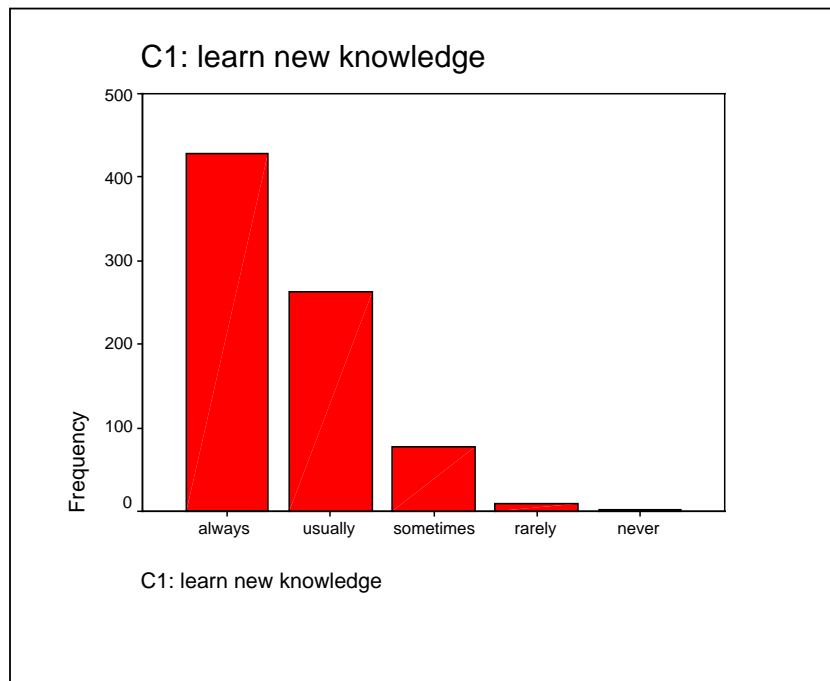


Figure 16: Extent of learning of new knowledge (n=781)

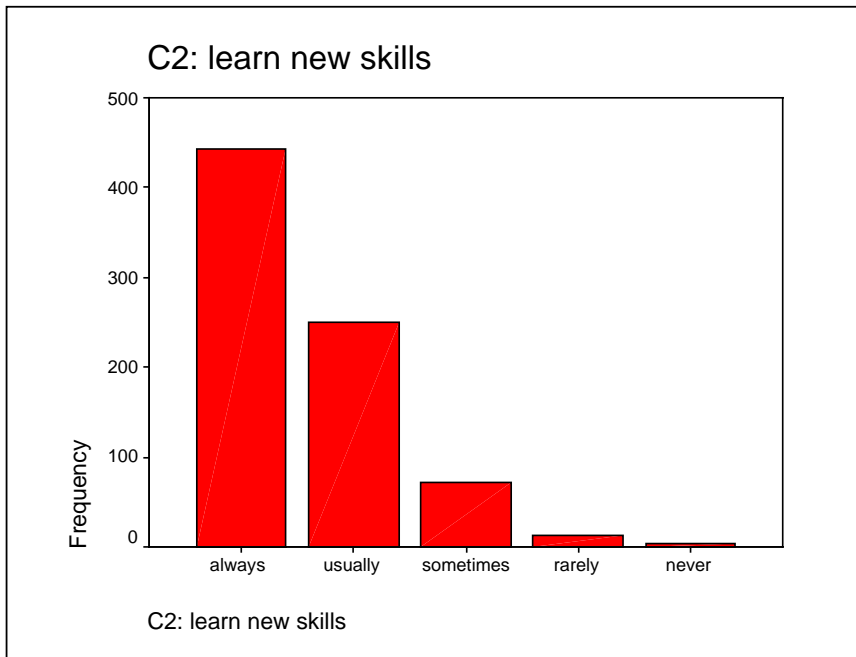


Figure 17: Extent of learning of new skills (n=780)

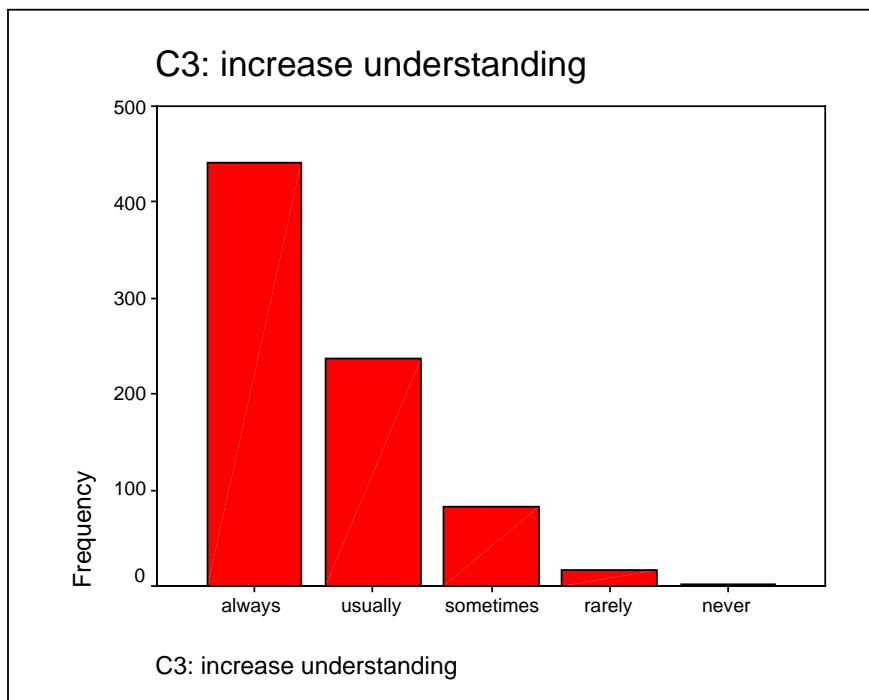


Figure 18: Extent of increase in understanding (n=781)

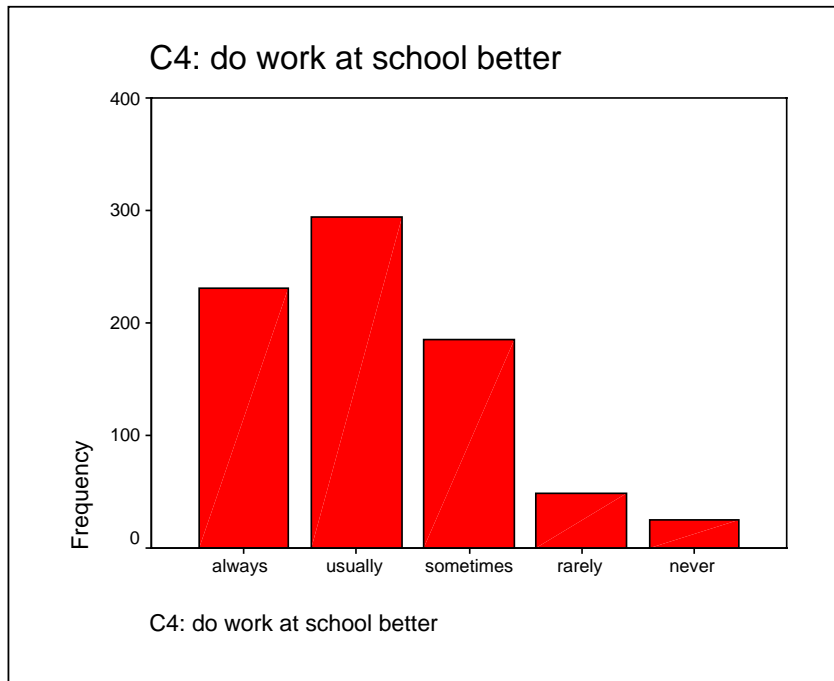


Figure 19: Extent to which ALC work helped pupils to do their work at school better (n=783).

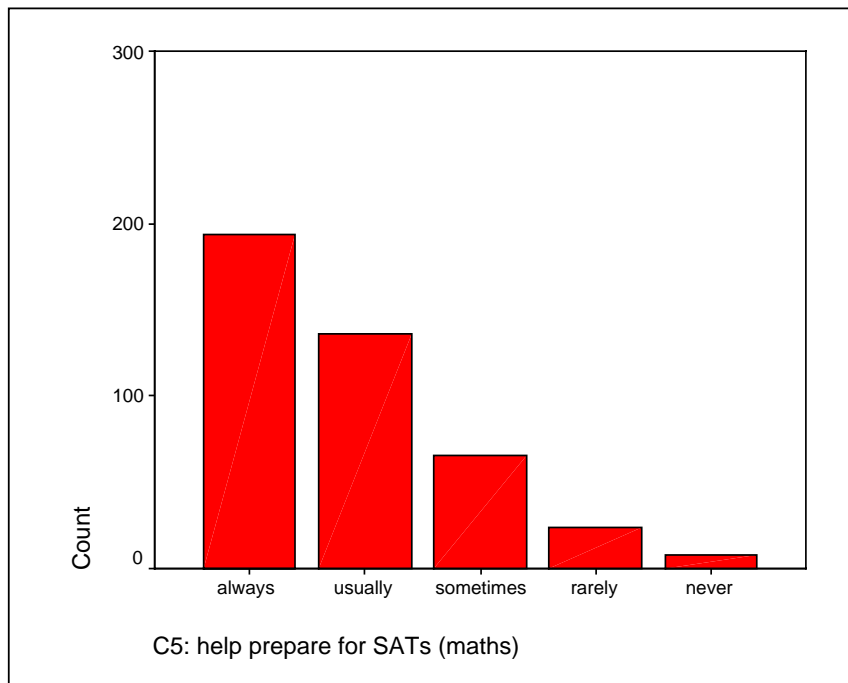


Figure 20: Extent to which maths ALCs helped pupils to prepare for SATs (n=428)

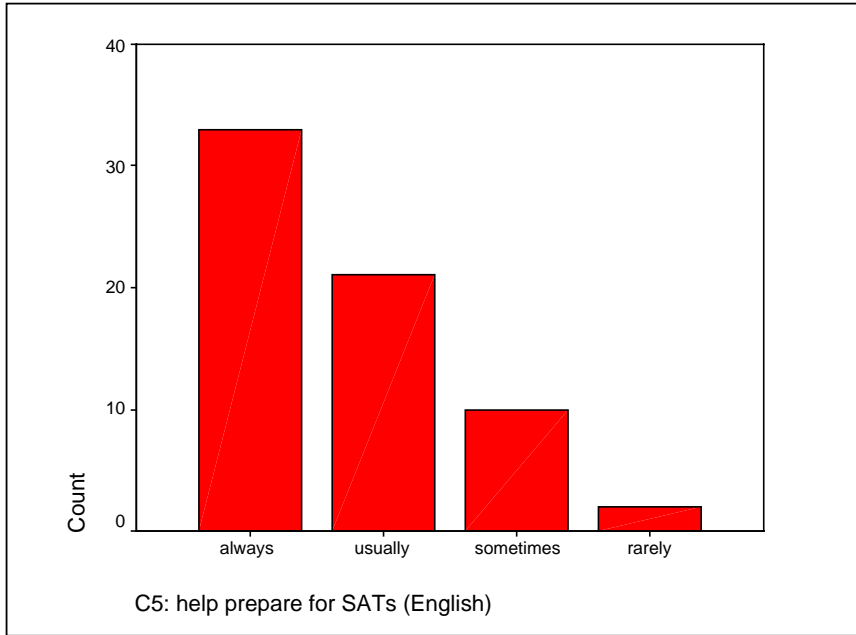


Figure 21: Extent to which English ALCs helped pupils to prepare for SATs (n=66)

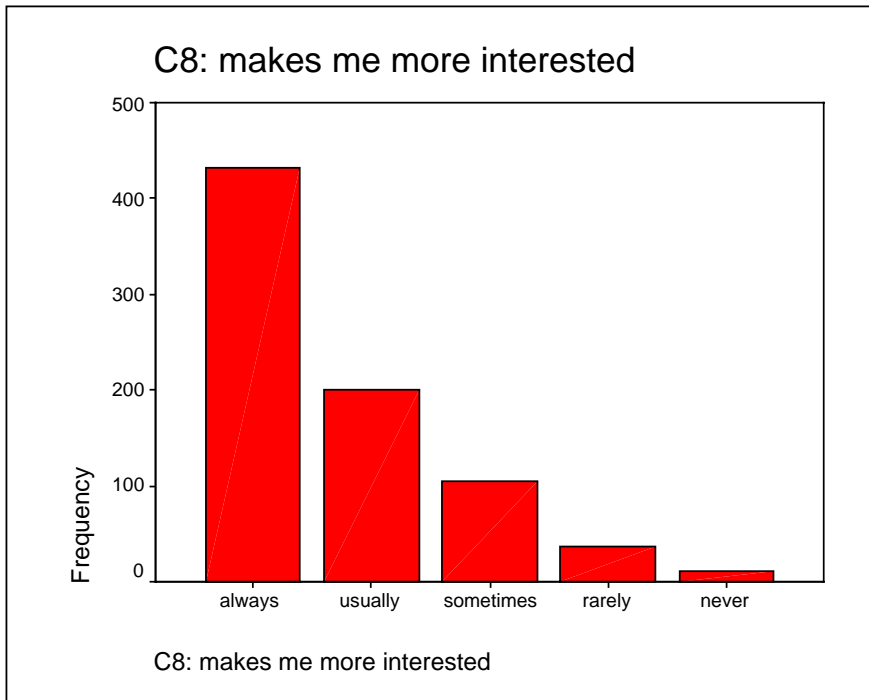


Figure 22: Extent to which ALCs made pupils more interested in subject (n=784)

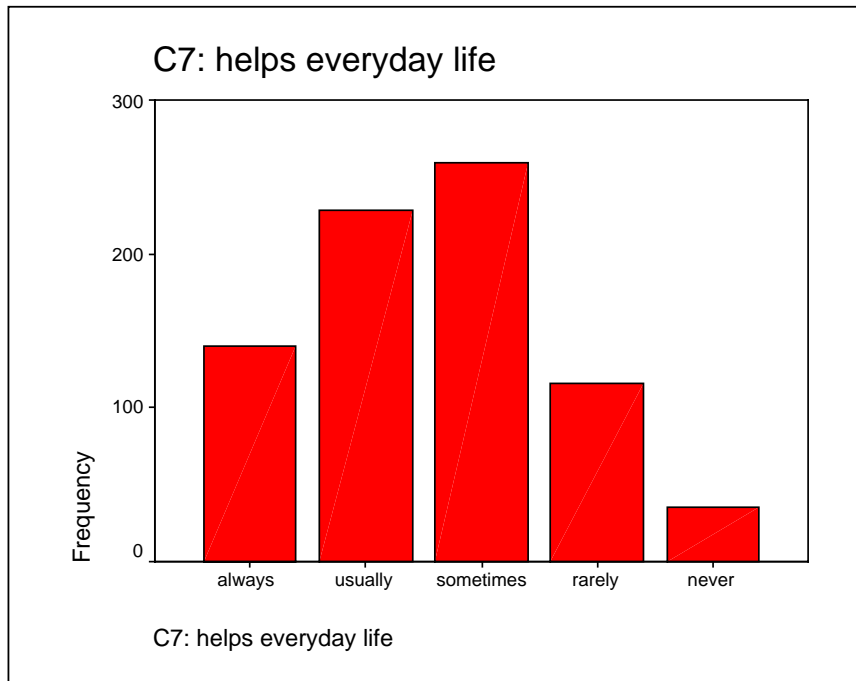


Figure 23: Extent to which ALCs help pupils to do things in their everyday lives (n=778)

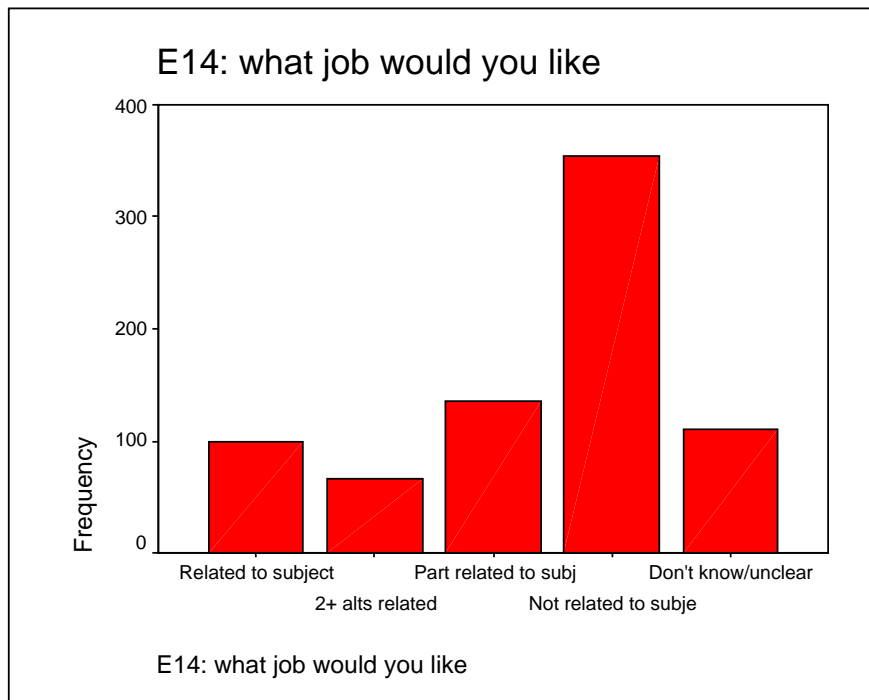


Figure 24: Relation of job intentions to subject of pupils' ALCs (n=767)

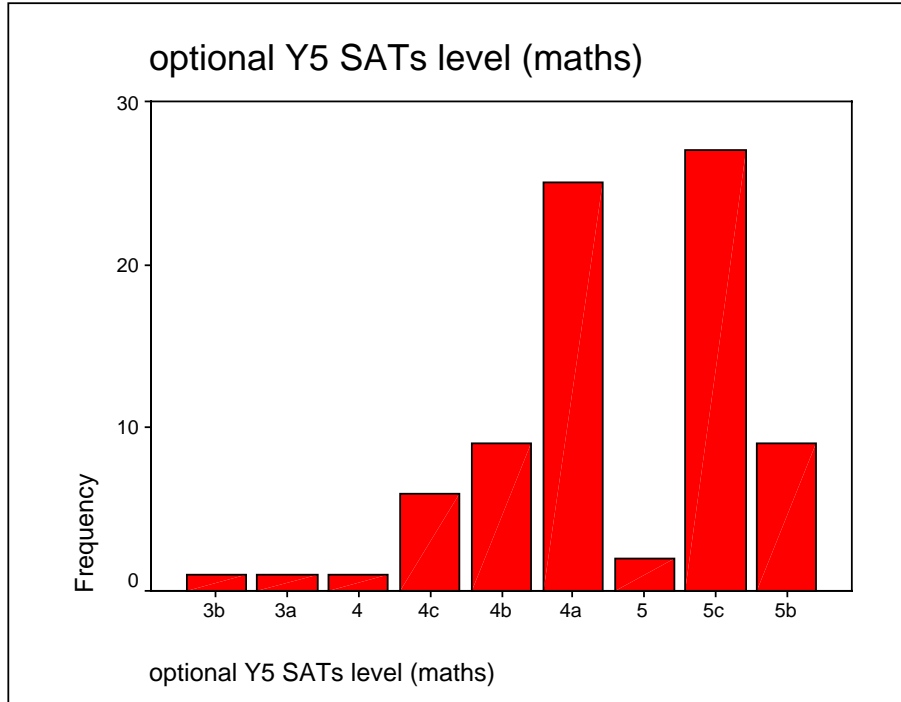


Figure 25: Maths achievement levels of ALC pupils at Year 5 optional SATs (n=77)

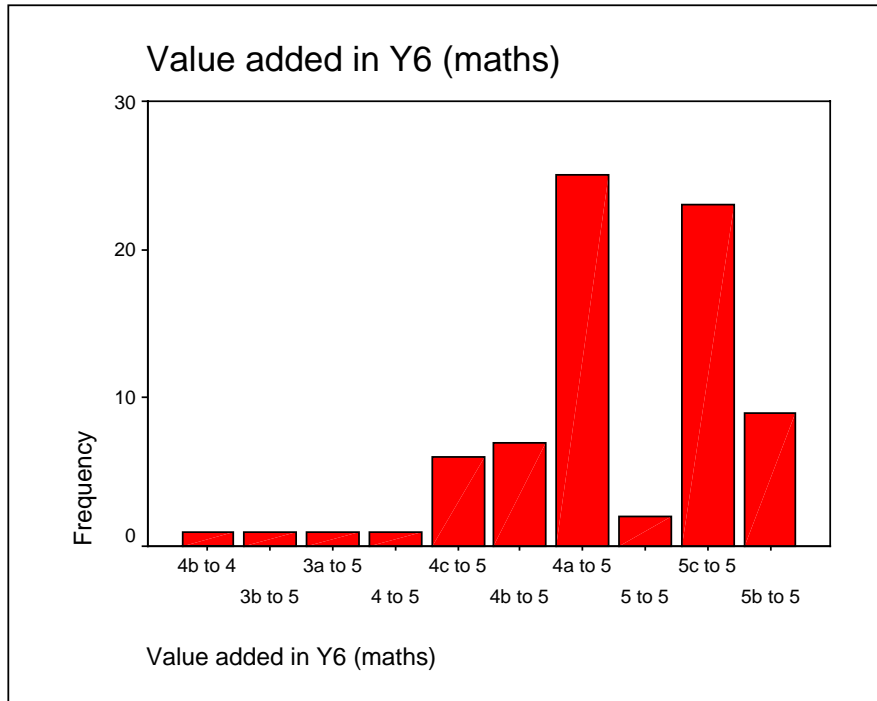


Figure 26: Progress in maths of ALC pupils from Year 5 optional SATs to Year 6 SATs (n=76)

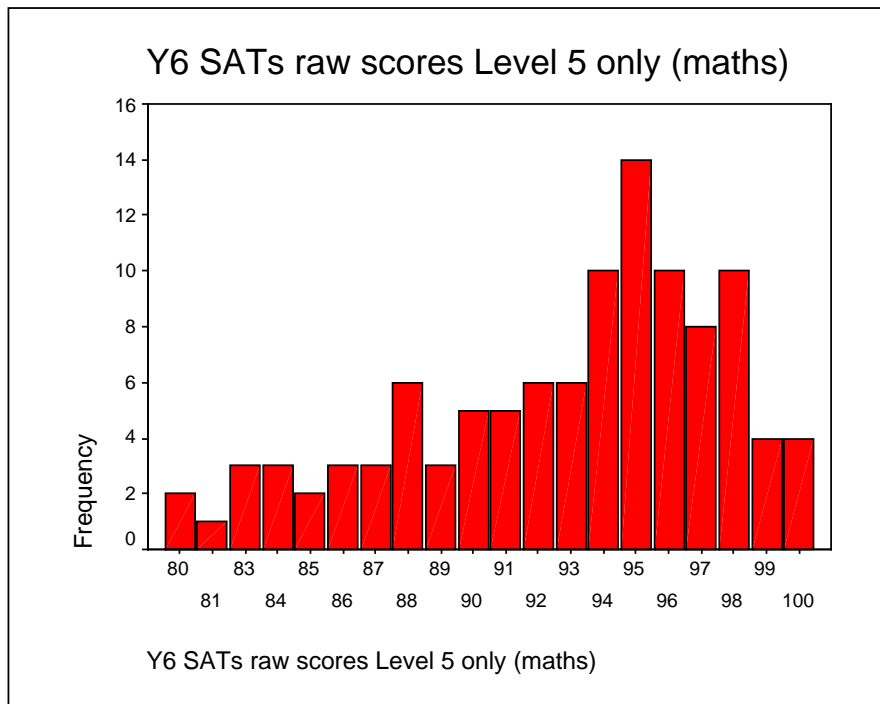


Figure 27: Raw scores of pupils attaining Level 5 in maths in Year 6 SATs (n=111)

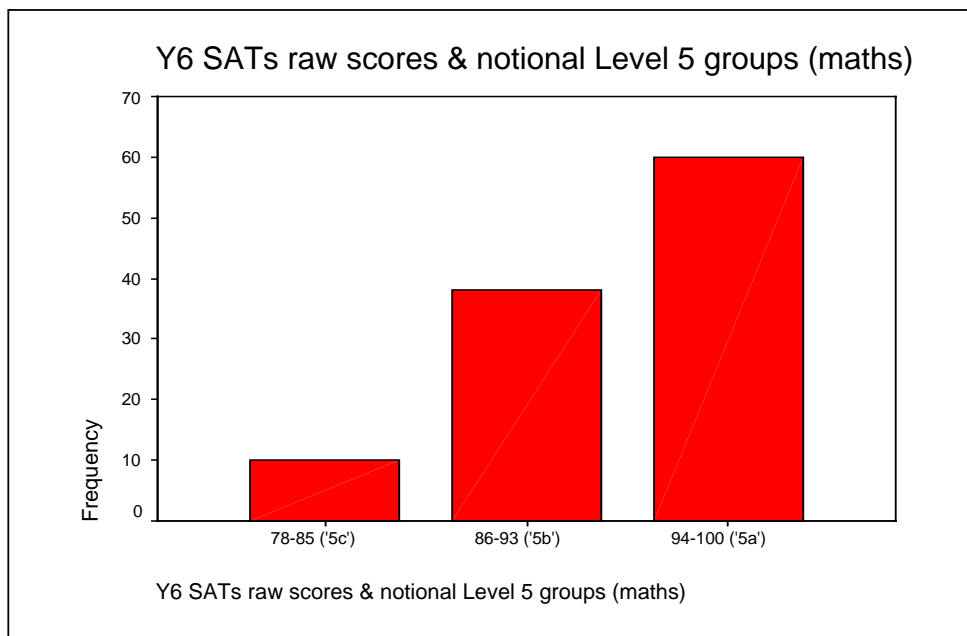


Figure 28: Notional groupings of ALC pupils reaching Level 5 in Year 6 SATs in maths (n=108)

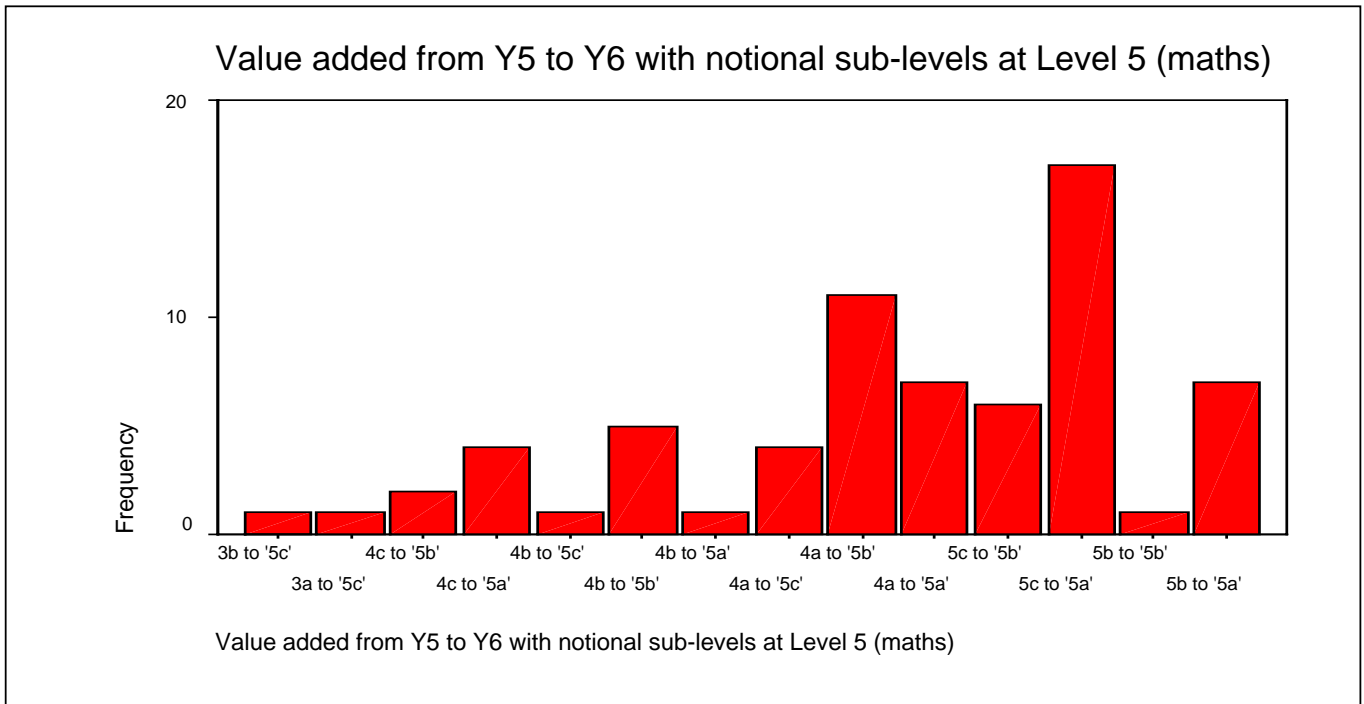


Figure 29: Progress made in Year 6, using notional alphanumeric sub-levels at Level 5 (n=68)

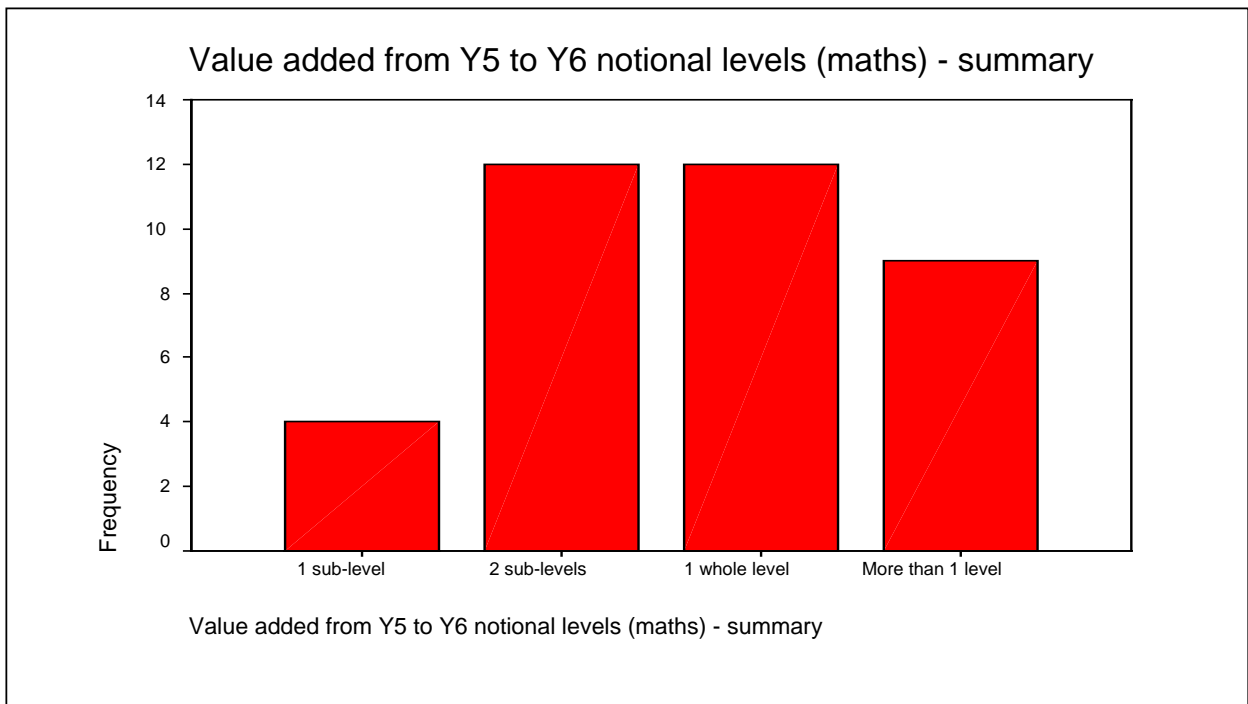


Figure 30: Progress made by pupils in maths in Year 6, using notional sub-levels of '5c', '5b' and '5a' (n=37)

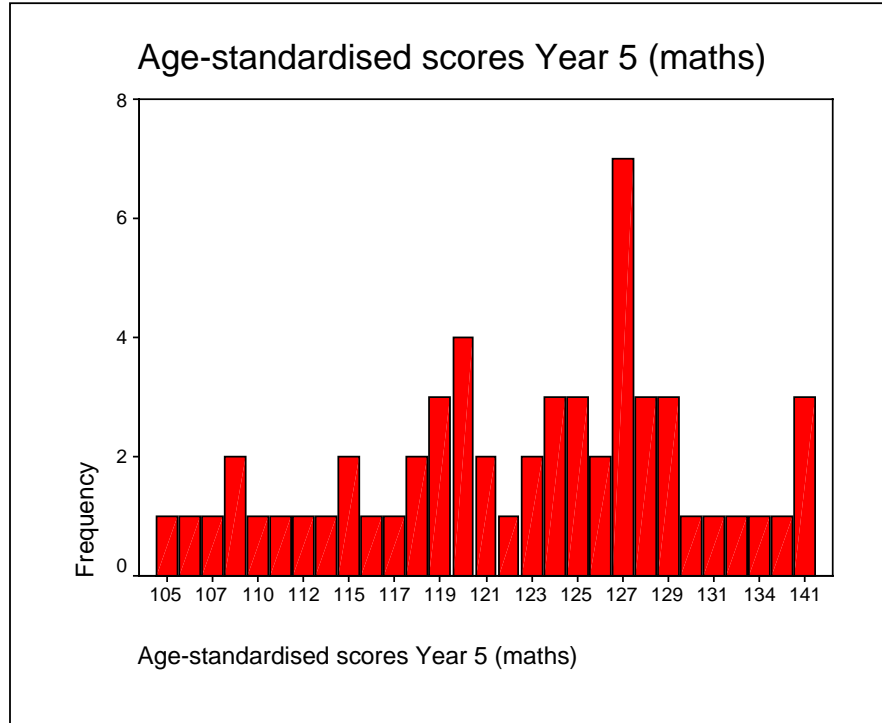


Figure 31: Age-standardised scores in maths of ALC pupils at Year 5 optional SATs (n=56)

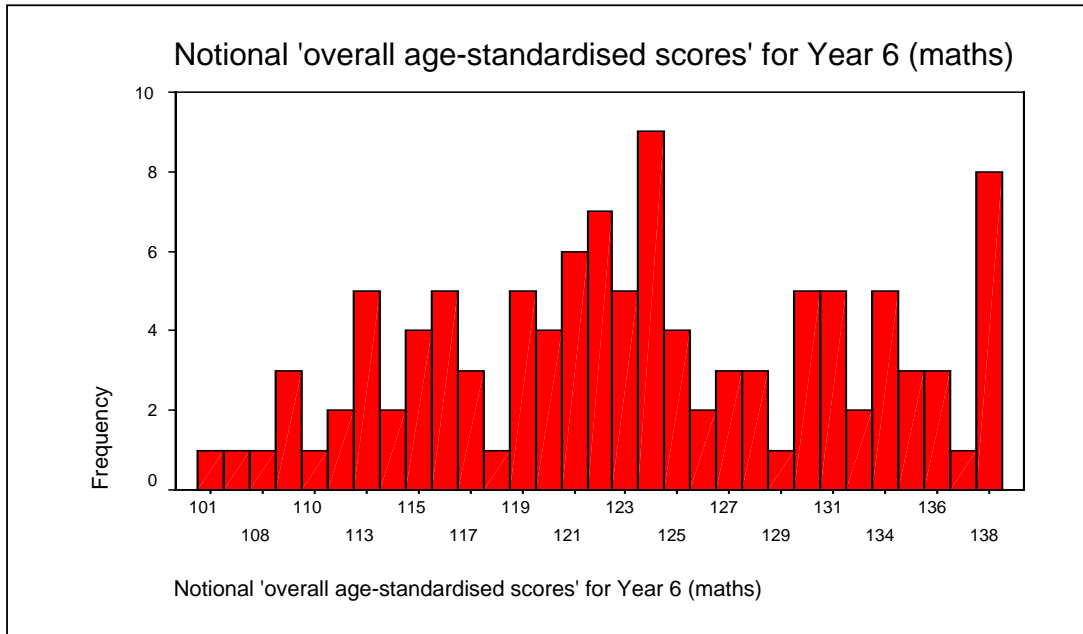


Figure 32: Notional 'overall' age-standardised scores' in maths of ALC pupils at Year 6 SATs (n=110)

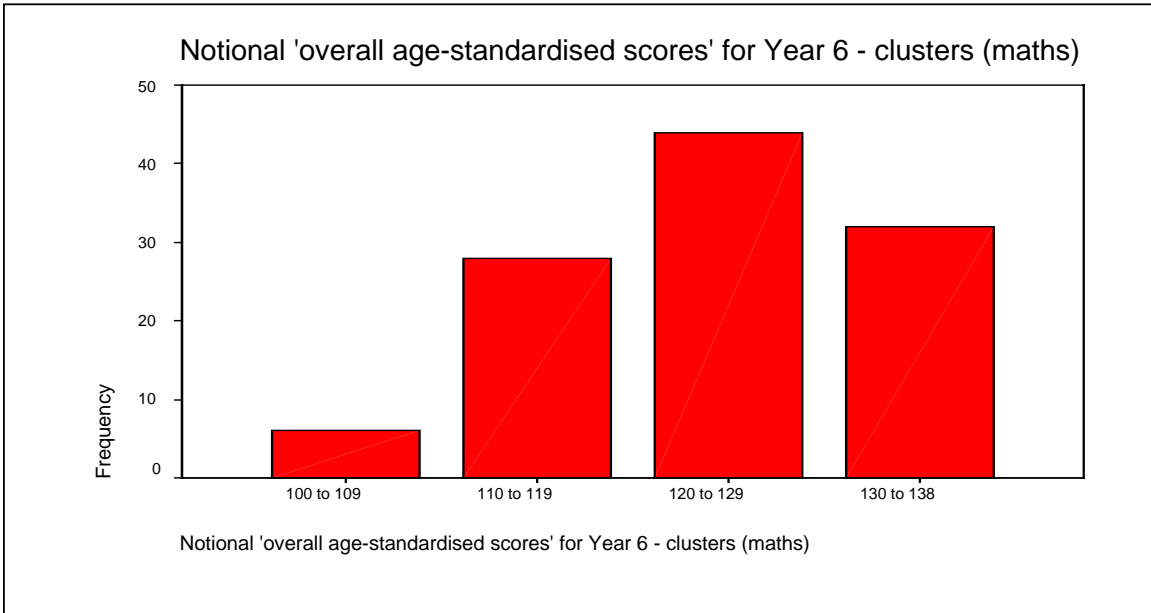


Figure 33: Notional 'overall' age-standardised scores for Year 6 SATs in maths – notional clusters (n=110)

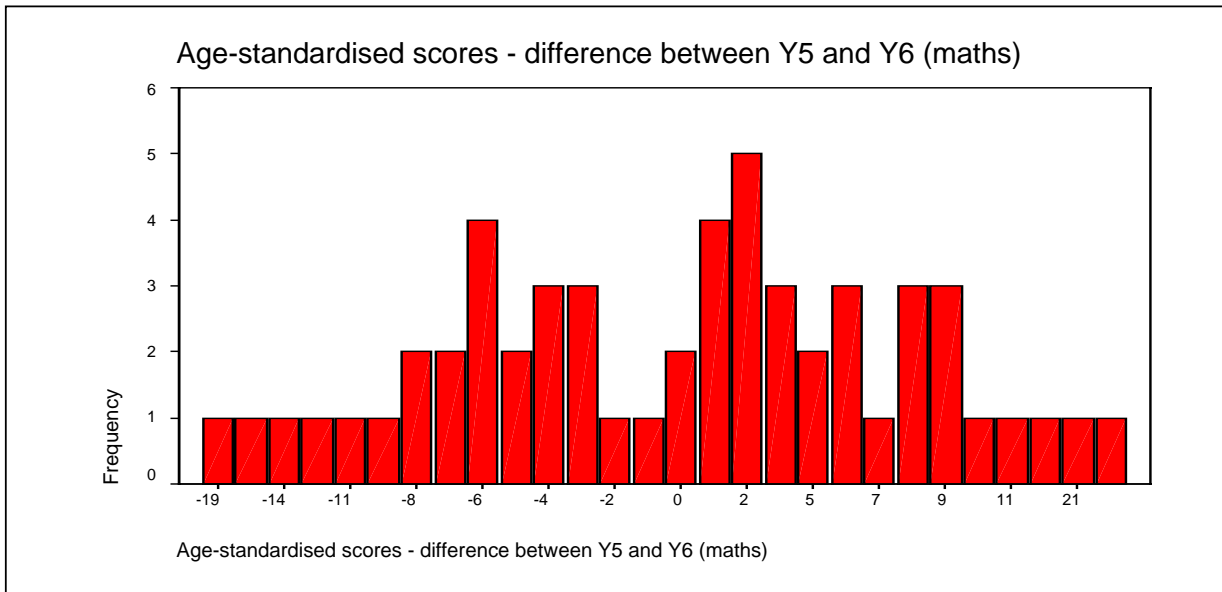


Figure 34: Age-standardised scores in maths – differences between Year 5 and Year 6 (n=55)

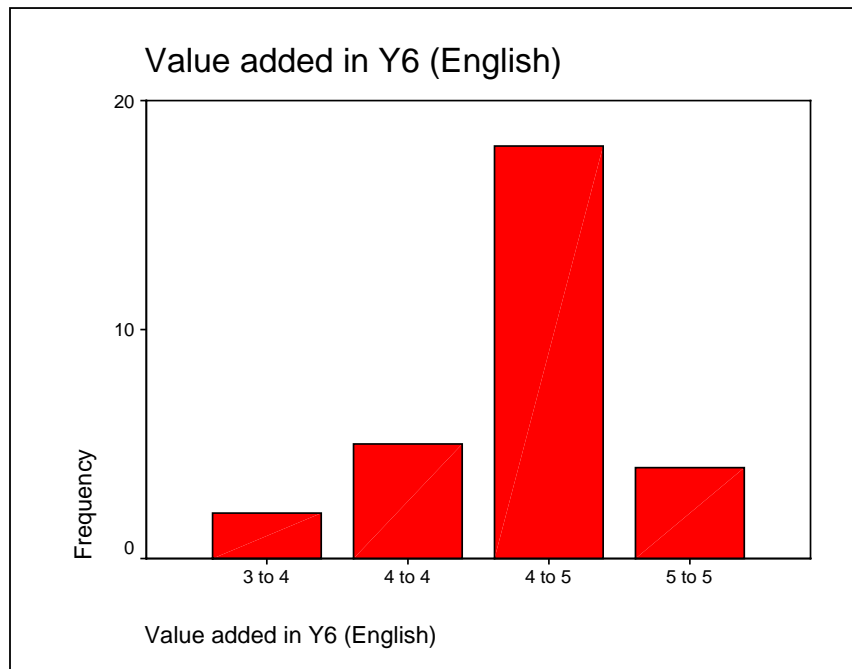


Figure 35: Value-added for pupils in English from Year 5 optional SATs to Year 6 SATs (n=28)

Appendix 1: How many pupils attended ALCs in 2004-05?

Registered pupils at Centres which returned questionnaires

28 Centres provided data about pupils registered to attend the Centre. The number of pupils on register at these Centres was 734. The number of questionnaires returned from these Centres was 562. The percentage of registered pupils returning questionnaires from these Centres was therefore 76.6%

There were 8 other Centres which did not return information about registered pupils. The number of questionnaires returned by these Centres was 225. Using the 76.6% as a guide, it can be estimated that these 8 other Centres had 294 registered pupils.

This gives a total at the 36 Centres of 1028 registered pupils, an average of 28.5 pupils per ALC.

Registered pupils at all Centres in 2004-05

There were 20 other Centres which did not return questionnaires. Using the average of 28.5 pupils per Centre as a guide, it can be estimated that there were 570 registered pupils at these Centres.

That gives a total for all ALCs in 2004-05 of 1598 registered pupils.

Drop-outs since start of course.

27 Centres gave information giving information about the number of pupils who had dropped out since the start of the ALC course.

The number of pupils on register at these Centres was 689. The number of pupils they said had dropped out was 163. The total number of pupils starting these Centres was therefore 852, and the average drop-out rate was 19.1%.

Pupils starting at Centres which returned questionnaires

Using this percentage as a guide, it is estimated that the total number of pupils starting at Centres which returned the questionnaire was 1270. With a 19.1% drop-out rate, this means that 242 pupils dropped out, leaving the number of registered pupils recorded above: 1028.

This gives an average starting rate per Centre of 35.28 pupils per Centre.

Total pupils starting

Using this a guide, it is estimated that the total pupils starting for all 56 Centres running in 2004-05 was 1976.

Questionnaire sample size

The number of pupils completing the questionnaire was 787. This represents:

- 77% of all pupils registered at the Centres which returned questionnaires
- 49% of pupils registered at all Centres towards the end of their course
- 40% of all pupils who started all Centres in 2004-05.

Appendix 2: Pupil questionnaire

Advanced Learning Centres (ALCs) 2004-05

Pupil Survey

for the National Primary Trust & Department for Education and Skills

Thank you for agreeing to complete this confidential questionnaire. The first three sections ask about your work at your ALC. Read each statement carefully and think carefully about the possible responses. Then tick the box which seems most correct for you

A. Questions about how you feel about your ALC

		Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I look forward to my ALC sessions					
2	I enjoy my lessons at my ALC					
3	I find the lessons at my ALC boring					
4	I enjoy working closely with the other pupils at my ALC					
5	I enjoy working closely with the staff at my ALC					
6	I enjoy the times at my ALC outside my lessons, e.g. breaktime, chatting					

B. Questions about your work at your ALC

		Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	The work I do at my ALC is easy					
2	I concentrate on my work in my ALC lessons					
3	My work at the ALC is different from my work at school					
4	My work at the ALC is more difficult than my work at school					
5	It is difficult for me to understand what to do at the ALC					
6	I work hard in the sessions in my ALC					
7	I make lots of mistakes in my work at my ALC					

C. Questions about how your work at your ALC affects you

		Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	My work at the ALC helps me to gain new knowledge - to learn new facts					
2	My work at the ALC helps me to gain new skills - to learn how to do new things					
3	My work at the ALC helps me to increase my understanding of new ideas					

		Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
4	My work at my ALC helps me to do my work at school better					
5	My work at the ALC helps me to prepare for my SATs					
6	My work at the ALC makes me want to know more					
7	My work at the ALC helps me to do things in my everyday life					
8	My work at the ALC makes me more interested in the subject					

D. General questions

1. What do you enjoy or find useful about your work at your ALC?

2. What do you find difficult at your ALC:

3. How is your ALC work similar to what you do at school? How is it different?

4. Please write anything else you would like to say about your learning at your ALC:

Thank you for answering these questions about your ALC. The next section, Section E, asks questions about yourself. Please write your answer in the empty box, or - where you need to choose an answer - tick the appropriate box.

E. Questions about you

1	Your name:				
2	Your date of birth:				
3	Today's date:				
4	What is the subject of your Advanced Learning Centre? (e.g. maths, English, etc...)				
5	How do you usually get to the Advanced Learning Centre? <i>(please tick)</i>	By car	By bus	Walk	Other <i>(describe)</i>
6	If you travel by car, whose car is it usually? <i>(please tick)</i>	Parent's or carer's car	Other relative's car	Friend's car	Taxi
7	How many sessions have you <u>missed</u> so far during your ALC course? <i>(please tick)</i>	More than two	Two	One	None
8	Which Year are you in at school?				
9	Which school do you go to?				
10	What is your gender? <i>(please tick)</i>	Girl		Boy	
11	How would you best describe your ethnicity? <i>(please tick)</i>	White	Mixed Asian and White	Mixed Black and White	Black or Black British
		Asian or Asian British	Chinese	Other (please describe)	
12	Which language do you speak most of the time at home?				
13	Which secondary school do you think you will go to?				
14	What kind of job would you like to have when you finish your education?				

The next section, Section F, is about SATs. If your ALC is in English, maths or science, and you are currently in Year 6, please answer the question in this section. If your ALC is in a different subject (for example drama or ICT), or if you are not in Year 6, you do not need to answer the question in Section F – you can go straight to Section G.

F. Question about SATs

1. SATs results

I would like to ask your school for your SATs results in the subject of your ALC - at Key Stage 1, at Key Stage 2 (when you take them), and in 'optional Year 5 SATs' (if you took them). Do you give permission for your school to give me this information?

Yes	No

G. Signature

Please sign here to indicate that you have tried to answer the questions in this survey honestly and carefully:

Signed.....

Date.....

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please put it in the envelope and seal it. Then give the sealed envelope to your ALC teacher.

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