



Department
for Education

Ad-hoc Notice: Early Entry into GCSE Exams in England

**Entry and results data from academic
year 2018/19**

November 2020

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Summary

This note covers GCSE examination entries and results in England in 2019. It focuses on the rate of early entry (pupils entering their final examinations before the summer of Year 11) across different subjects. It then looks at how the results of early entrants differ from those of non-early entrants in the subjects with the highest rates of early entry.

This note focuses particularly on English Literature, Religious Studies and Statistics. On average, early entrants in English Literature and most early entrants in Religious Studies achieve lower grades than non-early entrants. Early entrants in Statistics who were also high performing in key stage 2 achieve higher grades than non-early entrants. Pupils who entered English Literature early in 2018 achieved grades in English Language in 2019 no higher than non-early entrants for English Literature.

Introduction

Most GCSE exams are taken in the summer of Year 11, at the end of two years of study (the practice of doing a three year Key Stage 4 is not accounted for by this analysis). Schools can enter pupils for exams early, most often in the summer of Year 10. The number of pupils who are entered early varies from subject to subject.

Early entry may affect examination results due to pupils receiving less teaching in the subject before the examinations. Therefore, this analysis also looks at the difference in examination results between pupils who entered early and those who did not. The note first identifies subjects of interest – those with a high rate and amount of early entry. Then, it compares examination results of pupils who entered subjects early in 2019 to similar pupils who entered at the end of Year 11 in 2019.

Methodology

This note covers all entries in GCSE examinations included in performance tables in state-funded mainstream schools in England in 2019.

All exam entries in a state-funded mainstream school are included, even if they did not count towards the school's results. If a pupil was in Year 10 or an earlier year group, they are defined as an early entrant. All other pupils are non-early entrants.

The note has three sections:

- 1) The number of pupils (and the percentage of total entrants) entered early in each GCSE subject in 2019.
- 2) A comparison of the grades of pupils entering early with those of non-early entrants in the same subject in 2019.
- 3) A comparison of the English Language grades in 2019 of pupils who were early entrants in English Literature in 2018 completing GCSEs in 2019, with pupils who entered English Literature in 2019. This was done because a higher English Language grade could 'make up' for a low English Literature grade.

More detail on the methodology for sections 2 and 3 is available in Annex A.

Section 1: Rate of early entry for different GCSE subjects

Figure 1 shows the GCSE subjects where more than 2.5% (for illustrative purposes) of the examination entries in 2019 were by pupils in Year 10 or below.

Statistics has the highest rate of early entry, with 40% of pupils entering a GCSE Statistics examination in 2019 being in Year 10 or below. English Literature and Religious Studies are the only other subjects where early entries make up more than 5% of their total entries, and have more than 1,000 early entries.

See Table 1 in Annex B for a list of all GCSE subjects and their rate of early entry.

Section 2: Comparison of grades between early and non-early entrants

Figures 2, 3 and 4 show the difference in grades between pupils who entered GCSE examinations early and non-early entrants in 2019 in English Literature, Religious Studies and Statistics respectively.

We split pupils by 'prior attainment band', which is used as part of the Progress 8 calculation¹. We use 34 bands based on pupil attainment at the end of primary school (key stage 2). This means that the GCSE results of early entrants are compared to pupils who had similar primary school results.

The bars in the charts give the difference in average grade between early and non-early entrants (a positive value means early entrants achieved higher grades). The bars are dark blue if the difference in the distribution of grades between early and non-early entrants was statistically significant. The numbers on the bars are the number of early entrants in that prior attainment band.

In English Literature (figure 2), early entrants achieved lower grades than non-early entrants across every prior attainment band. The difference was usually around two fifths of a grade and was significant for the majority of prior attainment bands.

In Religious Studies (figure 3), early entrants in most prior attainment bands achieved lower grades and, in the few bands where early entrants achieved higher grades, they were not significantly higher than non-early entrants. Early entrants in some prior attainment groups, mostly those who achieved level 4 at the end of primary school, achieved significantly lower grades than non-early entrants.

In Statistics (figure 4), there are few early entrants who achieved lower than level 4 at the end of primary school. Early entrants who achieved level 4 or higher usually achieved higher grades than non-early entrants. Early entrants in only three prior attainment bands achieved significantly higher grades.

¹ More details can be found at this link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/865079/Secondary_accountability_measures_guidance.pdf

Section 3: English Language grades of previous English Literature early entrants

The better grade a pupil achieves in either English Language or English Literature counts double towards Progress 8. Therefore, even though Section 2 shows that early entrants in English Literature achieve lower grades, if they achieved higher English Language grades it could still lead to a higher overall Progress 8 score.

Figure 5 shows that pupils who entered English Literature early in 2018 (in most prior attainment bands) achieved lower grades on English Language in 2019, compared to pupils who also entered English Literature in 2019. For the pupils who achieved the highest results at the end of primary school, their grades are significantly lower.

Figure 1: Early entry rate of GCSE subjects in 2019

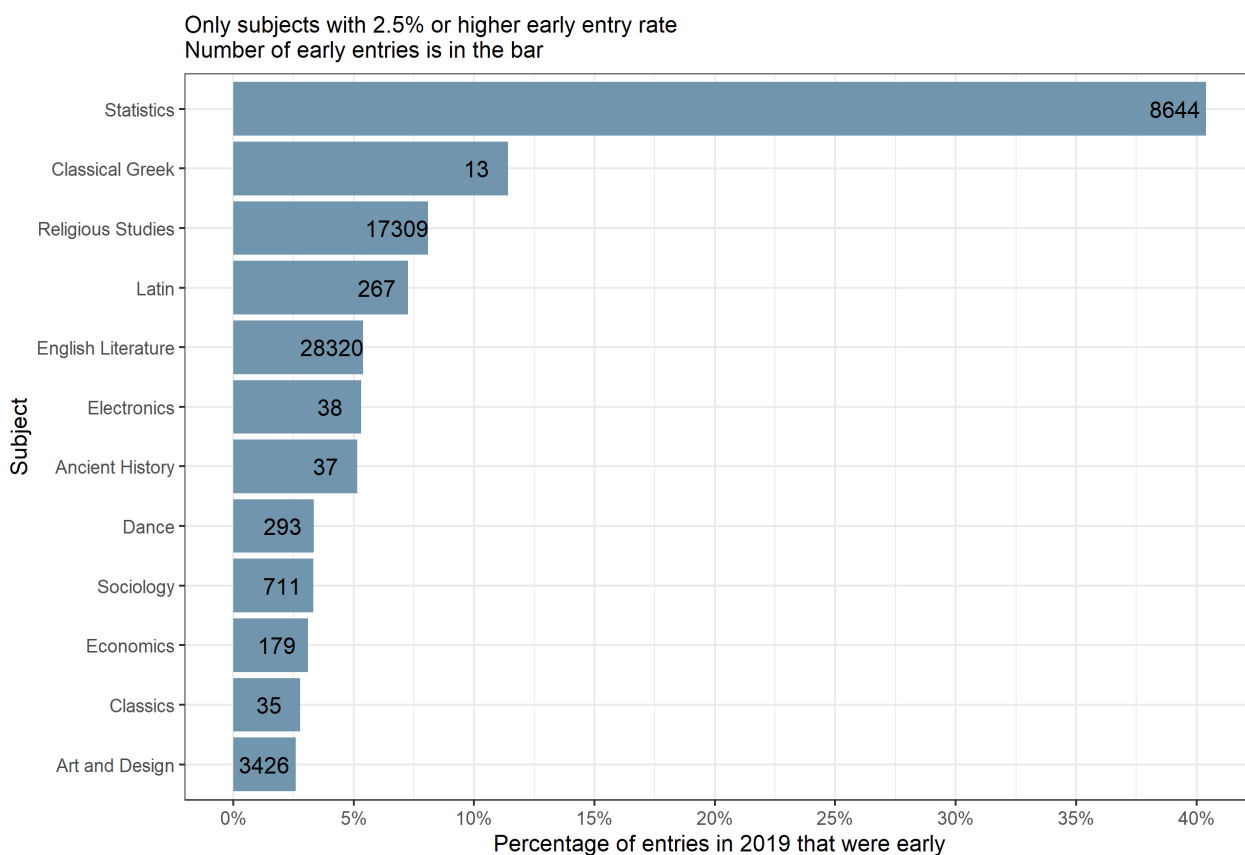


Figure 2: English Literature: Grade differences between early and non-early entrants in 2019

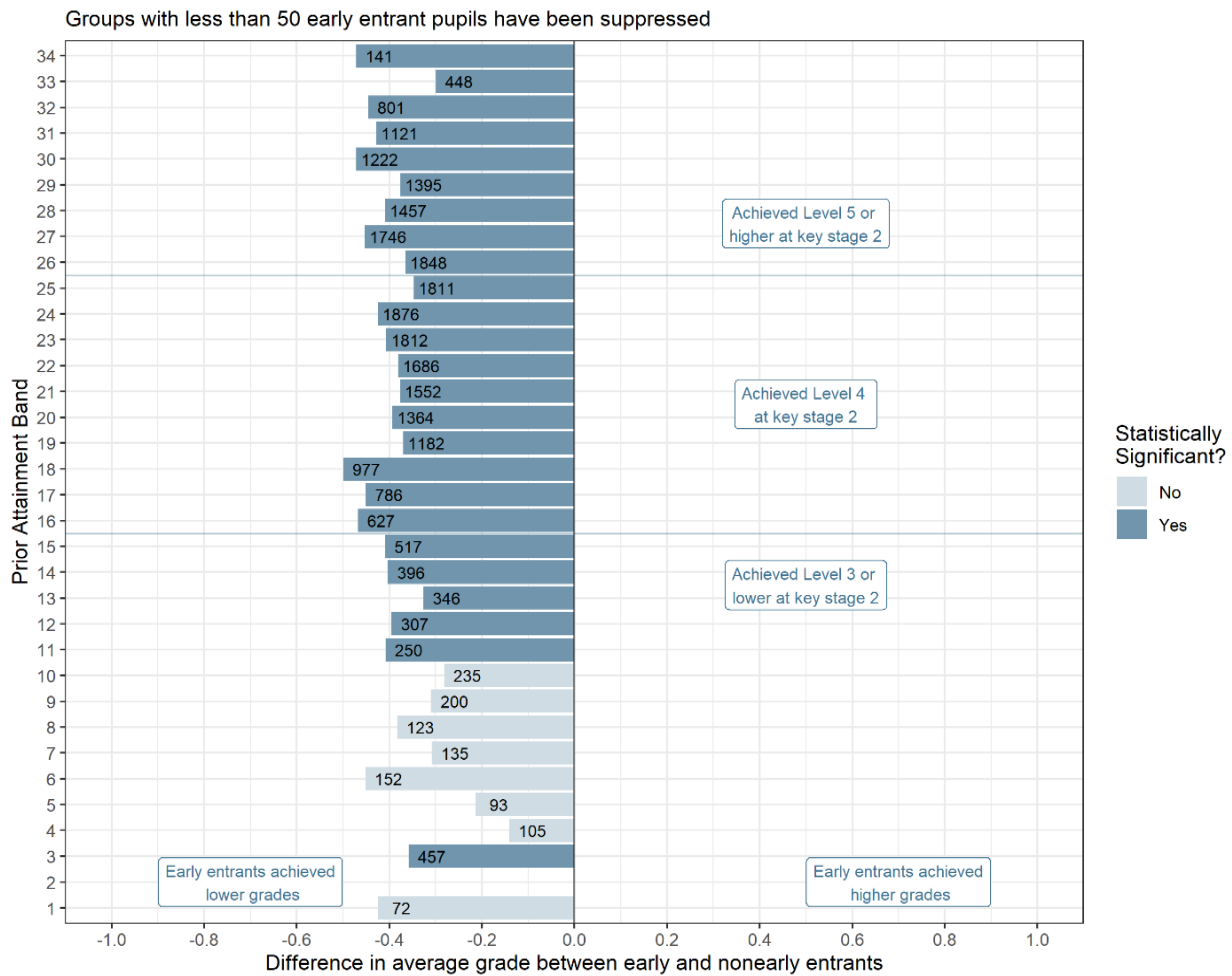


Figure 3: Religious Studies: Grade differences between early and non-early entrants in 2019

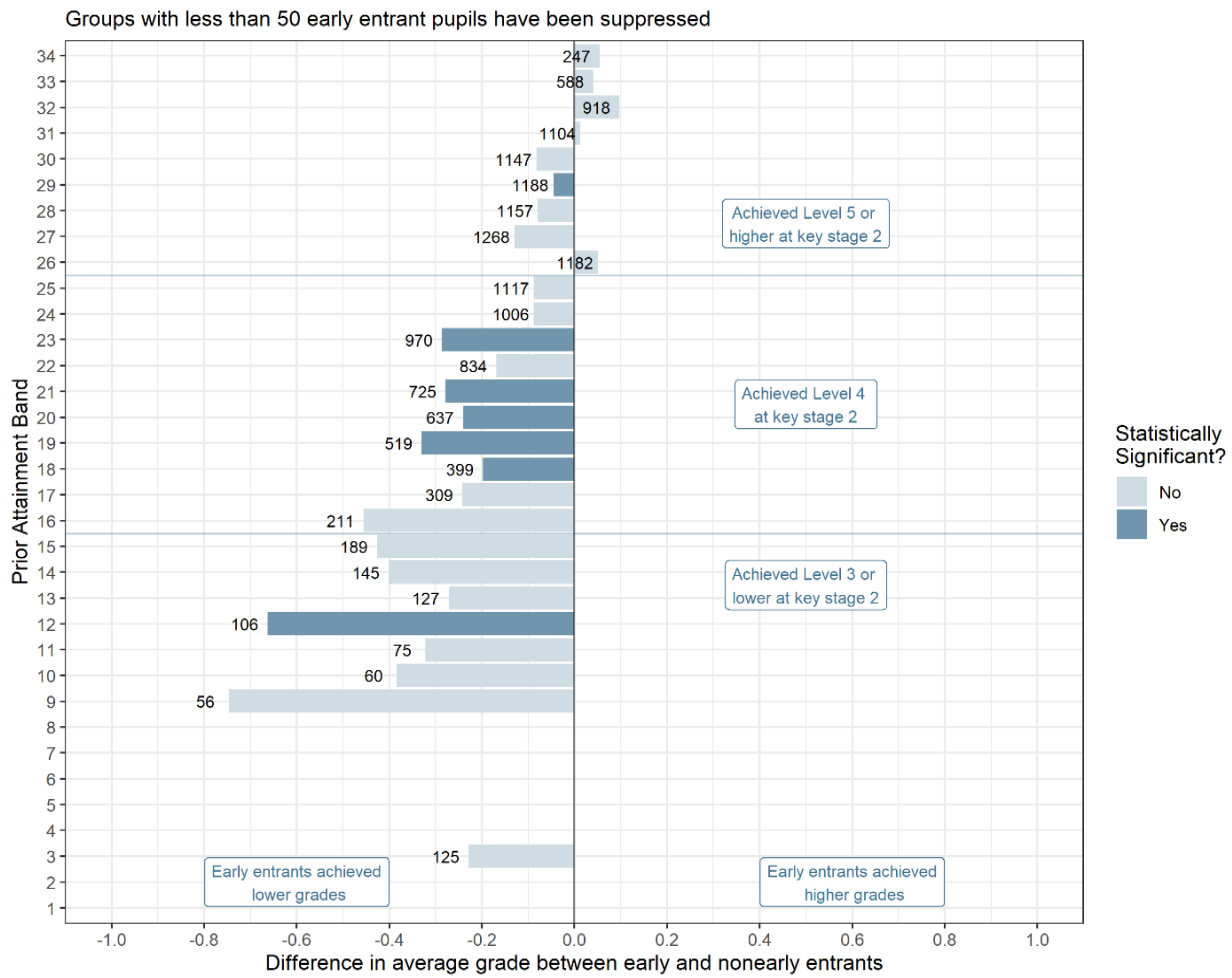


Figure 4: Statistics: Grade differences between early and non-early entrants in 2019

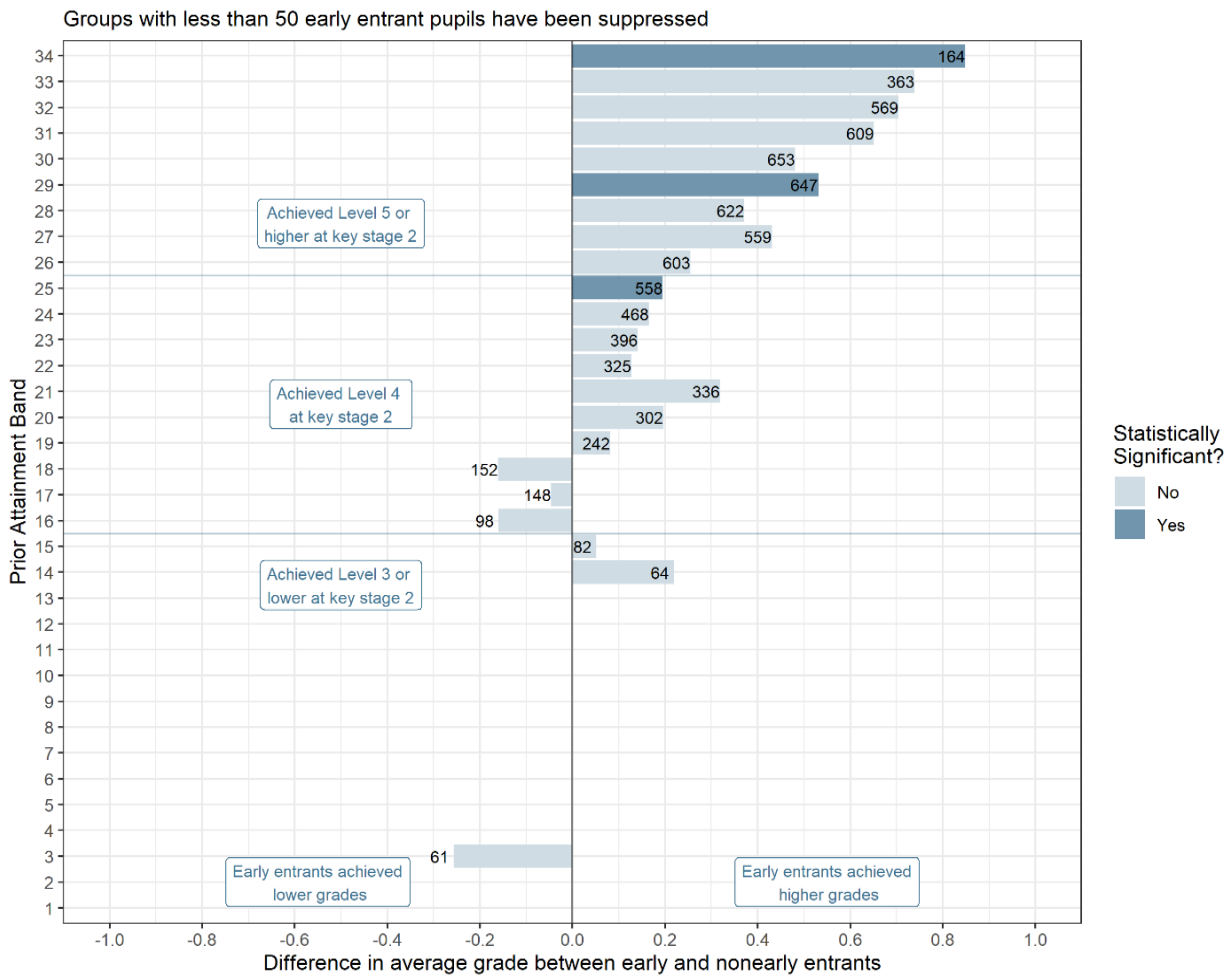
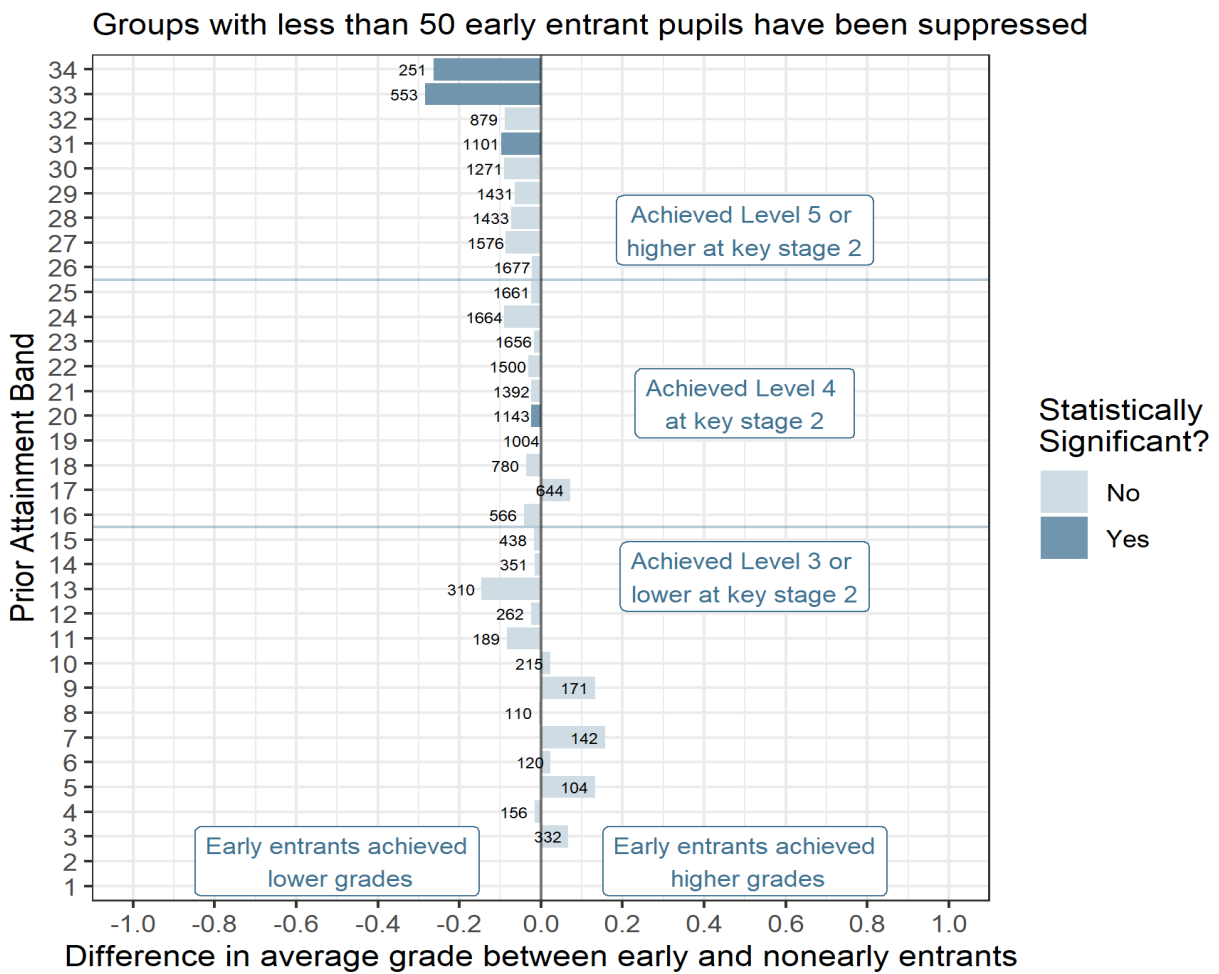


Figure 5: Grade differences in GCSE English Language in 2019 between early and nonearly entrants in GCSE English Literature in 2018



Annex A: Details on Comparing Grade Distribution

We split pupils into 34 bands based on their attainment in reading and maths at the end of key stage 2. The increase from each band to the next is approximately equivalent to one tenth of a level at key stage 2.

Within each prior attainment band, figures 2 through 5 give the average difference in grades between early and non-early entrants. The bars are colour coded as 'significant' if the difference in distribution of grades between the two groups is statistically significant.

GCSE results are not a strictly continuous variable, since the difference between grades may not be equal, for example the difference between a grade 3 and 4 might be different to that between a grade 4 and 5. For that reason, comparing simple averages of grades does not give the full picture. So, we treated grades as an ordinal categorical variable and compared the distribution of grades instead. We compared the two groups with a 'goodness of fit' (chi-square test) for each prior attainment band. This means that if the distribution of grades of early entrants was tested for whether it fit the distribution of grades of non-early entrants with similar key stage 2 attainment. A significant result means there is a significant difference between the distributions.

We used a 1% significance level to judge differences in grade distribution as significant, to avoid false positives which would be more likely with a 5% significance level.

The analysis only controls for prior attainment of pupils, so other differences between pupils who enter early and those that don't could have an effect unaccounted for by the analysis. This could be due to school-level factors, for example schools which enter pupils early could be different from those that don't, or pupil-level factors like motivation and other subjects taken.

Pupils were designated as early or non-early entrants using only the academic year they were in, rather than the amount of time taken studying the subject. This means that some early entrants might have had the same time studying the subject as nonearly entrants, such as by having studied the subject since Year 9.

Annex B: Early Entry Rate by GCSE Subject

Table 1: Percentage of GCSE entries in 2019 that were early, by subject

Subject	Percentage of entries in 2019 that were early
Statistics	40.4%
Classical Greek	11.4%
Religious Studies	8.1%
Latin	7.3%
English Literature	5.4%
Electronics	5.3%
Ancient History	5.1%
Dance	3.3%
Sociology	3.3%
Economics	3.1%
Classics	2.8%
Art and Design	2.6%
Media Studies	2.1%
Engineering	2.1%
Spanish	2.0%
Computer Science	1.9%
PE	1.7%
Music	1.7%
Food	1.7%
Design and Technology	1.6%
English Language	1.5%
Business	1.4%
Drama	1.4%
French	1.2%
German	0.9%
History	0.8%
Geography	0.7%
Biology	0.4%
Chemistry	0.4%
Maths	0.3%
Physics	0.3%
Combined Science	0.0%



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