

# EARLY & MULTIPLE GCSE ENTRY: GRADE IMPROVEMENT

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**Date:** April 2021

**This Data Insight details grade attainment and change for early and multiple entry to GCSE mathematics subjects. It draws on analysis of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) data, extracted from the Welsh Examinations Database and conducted by the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD) Education Data Lab, working in collaboration with ADR Wales.**

## What we did

Using administrative data, we identified all GCSEs examinations taken prior to the end of Year 11, for pupils who finished Year 11 between 2006 and 2018, inclusive. We distinguished between pupils who were entered for a subject once and on-time, once and early, and those who were entered multiple times. Exams were considered to have been sat early if a grade was awarded prior to the last two terms of Year 11. We use this data here to illustrate the patterns and relationships found concerning grades awarded in single early entry and multiple entry. For the latter, we combined the results of Mathematics and Mathematics – Numeracy over the last two years to look at the changes in GCSE grade from first to last (usually second) attempt.

## Background

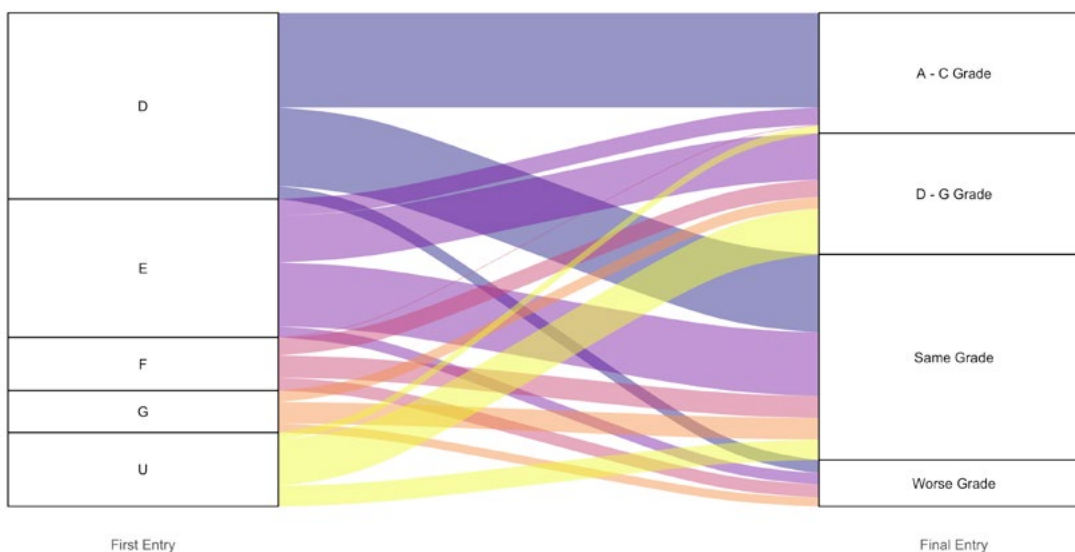
Prior to recent changes, GCSE entry practices in Wales have meant that many pupils may have sat their GCSE examinations, and thereby certified, before the traditional end-of-Year-11 point of their academic career. Not only will some pupils have experienced early entry, some will have been entered multiple times in an attempt to maximise the final grade awarded. Influences on the practice of early and multiple entry have been shown to fall under two main categories: those concerned with individual pupil achievement and progression, and those concerned with overall school performance<sup>1</sup>. Concerns have been raised that such practices may disadvantage some pupils, in a number of ways<sup>2</sup>. Coupled with the financial burden that early entry places on secondary schools in Wales (estimated to be £3.3m in 2016/17)<sup>3</sup>, recent reforms have seen changes to school performance reporting to discourage the practice<sup>4</sup>.

## What we found

Investigation of the different grades achieved by those who had a single early entry and the first attempt of those who had multiple entry, found two differing patterns. The proportion of those achieving a grade C or above in the single early entry group was higher (at 67%) than the proportion achieving a grade C or above for the first of multiple attempts (31%). This suggests distinction between the purpose of early entry for the two groups: single early entry for those being entered early in order to get that particular exam out of the way, by 'banking' the grade, and multiple entry for those who may need the opportunity to re-enter the GCSE, in order to maximise the potential for a highest possible grade.

The diagram shows the change in grade for those that did not meet the C threshold at the first attempt (62% of those that sat multiple times). It shows that, for these students, whilst around a half achieved a better grade only around a quarter moved to a grade C or above. In fact, of those who were entered for multiple entry (including those with higher grades at their first attempt), the proportion that move from below to a C or above is just 15%. The majority of these are those who gain a grade D at their first attempt, with just over half of these pupils meeting the C threshold.

Multiple GCSE Entry Grade Change  
Mathematics & Numeracy (2017-2018)



## Why it matters

The extent to which multiple entry improves pupils' final GCSE grade and whether any improvement is worth the potential impact this has on achievement and progression has been questioned. Whilst arguments around the use of multiple entry may be more nuanced in other subjects, there is a need for pupils to meet the grade C 'threshold' (i.e. achieved a grade C or higher) in mathematics particularly, for progression both to further study and into the wider labour market.

It is worth noting that it does not affect a pupil's overall grade if their grade goes down over the multiple attempts; pupils keep their best grade regardless. However, the relatively low proportions achieving higher grades and meeting the C threshold does lead to a question mark being placed over whether multiple entry has been used in the most efficient and effective way.

## What next?

Multiple entry practices within compulsory education are likely to decrease given the recent reforms to school performance reporting to discourage the practice. Rather than eradicate multiple entry, this is likely to shift multiple entry to late, rather than early, entry – a practice which already exists, as individuals try to obtain the important C grade in mathematics. This will be subject to further investigation as and when that data becomes available.

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## Acknowledgements

This material was first published as a WISERD Education Data Lab blog (<https://wiserd.ac.uk/news/early-gcse-entry-patterns-over-time>)

This work has been carried out by Dr Jennifer Hampton at WISERD Education Data Lab, an ESRC/Welsh Government funded initiative that is supported by and working in collaboration with ADR Wales.

WISERD Education Data Lab undertakes independent analysis of administrative education data, survey data and data linkage, alongside knowledge exchange and public dissemination of findings to inform national debate on some of the most contemporary and pressing educational issues facing Wales.

WISERD Education Data Lab is funded by Welsh Government, Economic and Social Research Council (award: ES/012435/1) and Cardiff University.



## References

<sup>1</sup>Sperring, R., Davey, J., Jones, K., & Anderson, T. (2017). Approaches to early and multiple entry for GCSE examinations in Wales (October 2017). Qualifications Wales.

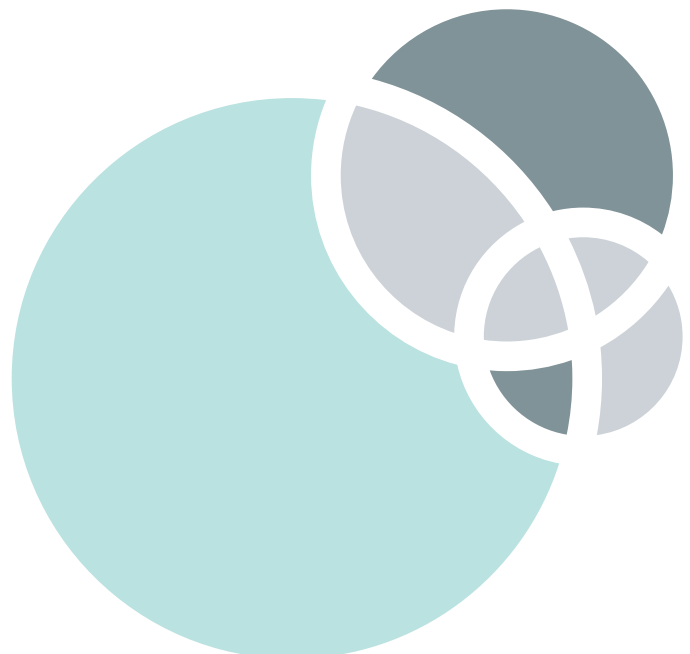
<http://www.qualificationswales.org/media/2825/approaches-to-early-and-multiple-entry-2017-e.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Welsh Government (2012). Review of qualifications for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales: Final report and recommendations (November 2012). Caerphilly, Wales: Department for Education and Skills, Welsh Government.

<http://qualificationswales.org/media/1234/121127reviewofqualification-sen.pdf>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.qualificationswales.org/media/2808/early-entry-qw-position-final-e.pdf>

<sup>4</sup><http://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-04/180129-school-performance-reporting-faq-en.pdf>



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