

# analysis of academy school performance in the 2011 and 2012 GCSEs

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# Analysis of academy school performance in the 2011 and 2012 GCSEs

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# Executive summary

Analysis has been carried out on the 2011 and 2012 school GCSE attainment results using data released by the DfE relating to performance tables. Data released by the Department identifying the current status of academy schools was also used.

Attainment outcome data was primarily the average capped GCSE score including equivalents and the percentage of pupils at 5+ A to C grades with English and maths, including equivalents. Additional analysis was run looking at the average capped GCSE score without equivalents, i.e. the best 8 GCSEs.

Longitudinal analysis of GCSE outcomes was carried out on data from 2007 to 2012:

- In 2011 and 2012 academy schools attained, on average, higher attainment outcomes and made more progress between KS2 and KS4 than non-academy schools.
- Analysis of the 2012 data using GCSE results **without equivalents** identified that, on average, academy schools that had held that status for more

than two years had average GCSE scores that were significantly lower than non-academy schools. This result occurred in models with and without the key stage 2 prior attainment measure. This may indicate alternative entry policies into GCSE and non-GCSE qualifications, or that pupils in academies perform particularly well in non-GCSE subjects.

- In analysing school-level GCSE data since 2007, no significant improvement is seen in the rate of improvement of GCSE results for academy schools over and above the rate of improvement in all schools. An association was seen in the 2011 GCSE results, but as this disappeared in 2012, this may be a cohort effect rather than an effect of being an academy school. This analysis is not looking at the progress made between KS2 and KS4, as identified above, but at the raw attainment levels achieved at KS4.

Further analysis of the 2013 and 2014 GCSE results will look closely at the issue of equivalents and will look specifically at the issue of sponsored and convertor academies.

# 1 Introduction

Over the last three to four years the Government has pushed its desire for schools to achieve academy status. This status takes much of the decision making of how a school operates away from the local authority and gives it to the schools themselves. Schools have the ability to make more of the decisions about how their financial resources are spent, who to hire and what to study within the curriculum. The rationale is that by having the decision-making powers within schools, they are better placed to make the right decisions to raise standards for all their pupils.

Whilst the initial conversion to academy status was primarily for failing schools, the recent increase in numbers has seen high- and low-achieving schools take on academy status as well as different types of school, e.g. comprehensives and grammars, take up the opportunity of converting to academy status.

This report highlights analysis undertaken on the 2011 and 2012 school-level GCSE results to identify any differences in the performance of academy and non-academy schools.

## 2 Methodology

There are approximately 2500 academy schools in England and Wales, based on data available from the Department of Education for November 2012. Approximately 60 per cent of these are secondary schools with the rest made up of primary schools and a small number of special and middle schools.

One way of understanding whether academy status has had a positive effect on raising standards within schools is by carrying out quantitative analysis of school-level GCSE results. This report replaces an earlier NFER report (2011), looking at the performance of academy schools and comparing this to the performance of non-academy schools. This analysis of the 2012 GCSE results will be followed with further analysis of the 2013 and 2014 GCSE results. Throughout this report reference will be made to attainment and progress.

When attainment is discussed this refers to academic attainment at a single testing period, for example, at the end of year 6 and a pupil's key stage 2 results (KS2), and at the end of year 11 and a pupil's key stage 4 (KS4) results, otherwise known as GCSEs. Progress identifies the academic progress a pupil makes between KS2 and KS4. Therefore, a pupil in school Z who gets a C grade (5 points) in maths has attained less than a similar pupil in school X who got a B grade (6 points) in maths. But, the pupil in school Z has made the same amount of progress as the pupil in school X as they had different results at KS2. The pupil in school Z attained 2 points at KS2 and pupil in school X attained 3 points, therefore both pupils have made 3 points of progress.

Included in the datasets was the date an academy opened, and from this, variables were created that identified the length of time a school had held academy status. The notion being, that the effect of being an academy for two years may be different from the effect of being an academy for a few months. This resulted in new variables that identified whether an academy had been open for up to 12 months, between 12 and 24 months or if it had been open for more than two years. It is also likely that many of the schools that became an

academy after the 1 June 2012 cut-off are in some way different from those that converted before. To control for this, an additional variable was created identifying schools that obtained academy status after this cut-off.

Other variables that were included in the analysis were:

- school-level factors that identify the percentage of pupils in the school who are eligible for free school meals
- the percentage of pupils that have special educational needs
- the percentage of pupils with English as an additional language.

Also included were geographical indicators allowing for the comparison of average performance of, for example, London schools with that of schools in the South East. Interaction terms were also included to determine whether the relationship between eligibility for free school meals and attainment was the same for all schools or whether the slopes that identified this association were different for academy and non-academy schools. An interaction term was also included for special educational needs and English as an additional language.

Prior attainment is generally a very strong predictor of future attainment and even though this was a school-level analysis it was still possible to include a school-level prior attainment measure which controls for schools having a different intake of pupil abilities. This indicator was the key stage 2 (KS2) average points score for the year 11 pupils and it would have been preferable to undertake analysis on all schools. However, for the 2011 analysis, the dataset available from the DfE only had prior attainment data for a subset of schools, so analysis is restricted to a smaller subset of schools. For 2012 this data was almost complete. As well as models that included the prior attainment measure, an interaction of this with

academy status was also included in the analysis, to determine whether there were any differential effects in the average pupil progress between schools with lower- and higher-attaining pupils.

Two outcome variables were used in the analysis looking at performance: average (capped) total GCSE points score; and the percentage of pupils who attained 5+ A\* to C grades in English and maths (both measures include equivalents). An alternative GCSE points score measure was introduced into the 2012 analysis when using a points score measure calculated without equivalents. Analysis of GCSE outcomes used to be only carried out on GCSE qualifications and the list below lists qualifications that are currently considered GCSEs:

- Full GCSEs
- Short course GCSEs
- Double award GCSEs
- Vocational GCSEs (single and double award)
- Accredited Cambridge International Certificates and their legacy iGCSEs
- Accredited Edexcel Certificates and their legacy iGCSEs.

With the rise of vocational and other qualification types that did not fit the GCSE design, or scoring system, it was necessary to determine equivalent scores for these non-GCSE qualifications, so that all qualifications could be placed on the same scale. This allows schools and pupils not to be penalised because they took qualifications that were an alternative to GCSEs and allowing a better comparison between schools that entered pupils for different combinations of GCSE and non-GCSE qualifications.

Most vocational qualifications, known as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), have a scoring system of fail, pass, merit and distinction and, depending on whether the qualification is at level 1 or level 2 (level 3 and above refer to higher qualifications), an equivalent point score is created. A number of factors would be taken into consideration, notably hours of study, when creating this equivalence score.

This resulted in some qualifications being worth, in equivalence terms, more than one GCSE. For example, a student who studied a single vocational qualification over a two-year period and received a distinction for their work may, as an equivalence, receive two GCSEs at a grade of A\*. When creating a KS4 attainment score for a student's best eight results, these two A\* grades would be included in the measure for GCSEs with equivalents and excluded for the measure that was for GCSEs only. The following link explains a little more about the equivalence of different qualifications: <http://www2.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2011-08-22-qualifications-leaflet-rough-guide.pdf>

The first analysis conducted was a linear model for each of the two outcome variables in 2011 and for the three outcome measures in 2012. Models additionally made use of the independent variables previously described. The academy variable was a dichotomous variable, identifying whether a school was an academy or a non-academy school.

The second set of analyses, again on both outcome variables in 2011 and the three outcome variables in 2012, separated the academy variable into the length of time a school had held academy status. This created three dichotomous variables, each identifying one of the time periods described earlier. The above set of analyses resulted in four models in 2011 and six models in 2012, and these were repeated on a subset of schools so that a KS2 prior attainment measure could be included.

The analysis incorporating KS2 allows us to identify the relative progress made between KS2 and KS4 for different school types. It is worth adding here that the most powerful analysis is to look at progression between two attainment time points and to undertake multilevel analysis, with pupils at the lowest level. However, the school-level progress models presented here still demonstrate genuine associations of interest.

The above design allows for any differences between academy and non-academy schools to be identified at a single attainment time point, i.e. the GCSE results of 2012. This allows statements as to whether pupils in academy schools make more, or less, progress than pupils in non-academy schools. However, this analysis does not identify how results have changed over time. If we plot progress for every year we may see that

a school has always been above average and that that has not changed since becoming an academy school. Additional longitudinal analysis looks at this trend for all schools to see if their long-term trajectory has changed since taking on academy status.

It is not possible to conclude causal relationships between academy status and KS4 results from

the presented models. Rather, they demonstrate associations between academy status and attainment. It may be other characteristics of the school rather than academy status *per se* that are responsible for any differences seen, for example, the quality of teaching or the effectiveness of school leadership.

## 3 2011 Results

In matching the 2011 school-level results file to the department's December 2012 academy file resulted in a usable dataset of 2969 maintained secondary schools. Of these, 1415 held academy status. In total, 822 academy schools from this file were not treated as such in the analysis as they achieved academy status after our cut-off date of 1 June 2011. This resulted in 593 schools with academy status, whose performance at KS4 would be compared with that of non-academy schools. Within this cohort of schools there is a fairly large range relating to the length of time each school has been a designated academy. This resulted in new variables that identified:

- 390 academy schools that had been open for up to 12 months
- 70 academy schools that had been open between one and two years
- 133 academy schools that had been open for more than two years.

It is also likely that the 822 schools that had become an academy after the 1 June 2011 cut-off are in some way different from those that have not taken academy status. To control for this an additional variable was created identifying schools that would have academy status post 1 June 2011.

### 3.1 Analysis without a prior attainment indicator

Regression models were run, as identified above, and after taking into account the effects of geographical location, the extent of free school meal eligibility, special educational needs, English as an additional language, and whether the school was a single sex school, the following associations were identified:

- 1 Academy schools, on average, had a higher average capped points score than non-academy schools.
- 2 Schools that had become academies after the 2011 GCSE examinations, on average, had a higher average capped points score than non-academies, but not as high as those schools that were already academies.
- 3 With everything else remaining equal, the academy effect identified above disappears when the percentage of pupils designated with special educational needs is 28 percentage points above the average for all schools. This was the result of an additional negative interaction between academy status and the proportion of pupils designated as having special educational needs. In practice, this means that the slopes for academy schools and non-academy schools are different and that eventually, after controlling for all factors, they cross. The population average is approximately 22 per cent, so when the proportion of SEN pupils within an academy school reaches 50 per cent, an academy school tends to perform less well than other non-academy schools with the same proportion of SEN pupils.
- 4 A positive interaction was also found between academy status and the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language. In practice this means that the slopes for academy schools and non-academy schools are different and are diverging, with the gap increasing as the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language also increases.
- 5 Results for analysis using the percentage of pupils attaining 5+ A\* to C grades including English and maths were broadly similar with the only difference being a non-significant interaction between academies and the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language.
- 6 There was no interaction between academy status and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals.

The above models had adjusted Rsquares of between 0.45 and 0.57. This identifies that the models explained between 45 and 57 per cent of the variation in outcome.

The design of this analysis wished to take into account the length of time a school had been designated an academy, as it was possible that analysis with a single dichotomous variable would overemphasise academy effects. Therefore, instead of a single dichotomous variable, three additional dummy variables were created that identified whether an academy had been open for 12 months, between 12 and 24 months or over two years. This analysis found that:

- 1 Academy schools that had opened in the last 12 months, and academies that had been open for more than 24 months, had similar higher levels of attainment. The attainment of academies that had been open between 12 and 24 months was significantly higher than non-academy schools, but not as high as the other two types of academy.
- 2 Academies that opened after June 2011 also had significantly higher attainment than non-academy schools.

Other effects for the above models with additional academy variables were consistent with earlier models.

### 3.2 Analysis with a prior attainment indicator

For a subset of 2156 schools (276 academy schools and 1883 non-academy schools) it was possible to include a KS2 prior attainment indicator based on the performance of the year 11 cohort at KS2. This was a key stage average points score and allowed analysis to look at the average school-level progress made between KS2 and KS4. The same variables that were included above were included in this new analysis with additional variables for KS2 average point scores and an interaction term between academy status and KS2 average point score. These models explained slightly more of the variation at GCSE ranging between 0.55 and 0.72.

The main findings for this set of analyses were:

- 1 Academy schools performed better than non-academy schools, including those which became academies after June 2011. Schools that became academies after 1 June also performed better than non-academy schools.
- 2 Prior attainment was a strong positive predictor of KS4 attainment. There was no difference between academy and non-academy schools in terms of the relative association with prior attainment.
- 3 After controlling for prior attainment, there were no additional interaction effects between academy status and the proportion of pupils designated with special educational needs and the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language.
- 4 The longer an academy school had held academy status, the more progress, on average and at school level, was made between the average KS2 point score and the average GCSE point score.
- 5 For the proportion of pupils attaining 5+ A\* to C grades with English and maths and after controlling for average attainment at KS2, there was no significant difference between academy schools that had been open for less than two years and non-academy schools. Only when an academy had been open for more than 24 months was there a significant difference, and an increase, on average, of approximately three percentage points in the proportion of pupils attaining 5+ A\* to C grades.

### 3.3 Longitudinal model of GCSE attainment

A further approach exploring the association between academy status and school attainment was to analyse aggregated GCSE results over a period of time. Capped GCSE results were included from 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2011. Schools were identified as academies at a given exam season if they had converted at least one academic year previously. A longitudinal model was constructed and the interaction between academy status and time was explored. As expected,

there were significant improvements in capped GCSE score in subsequent years as compared to 2007; the greatest improvement being by 2011. For 2008 and 2009, this attainment trajectory was not

significantly different for academy schools as compared to non-academy schools. For 2011, the attainment progression was significantly greater, on average, for academies as compared to non-academy schools.

## 4 2012 Results

Matching the 2012 school level results file to the department's January 2013 academy file resulted in a usable dataset of 2918 maintained secondary schools. Of these, 1498 held academy status. In total, 222 academy schools were not treated as such in the analysis as they achieved academy status after the cut-off date of 1 June 2012. This resulted in 1276 schools with academy status, whose performance at KS4 would be compared with that of non-academy schools. Within this cohort of schools there is a fairly large range relating to the length of time each school had been a designated academy. This resulted in new variables that identified:

- 715 academy schools that had been open for up to 12 months
- 359 academy schools that had been open between one and two years
- 202 academy schools that had been open for more than two years.

It is also likely that the 222 schools that had become an academy after the 1 June 2012 cut-off are in some way different from those that have not taken academy status. To control for this, an additional variable was created identifying schools that achieved academy status after this cut-off.

### 4.1 Analysis without a prior attainment indicator

Regression models were run, as identified above, and after taking into account the effects of geographical location, the extent of free school meal eligibility, special educational needs, English as an additional language and whether the school was a single sex school, the following associations were identified:

- 1 Academy schools, on average, had a higher average capped points score than non-academy schools.
- 2 Schools that had become academies after the 2012 GCSE examinations, on average, had a higher average capped points score than non-academies but not higher than those schools that were already academies.
- 3 With everything else remaining equal, the academy effect identified above, disappears when the percentage of pupils designated with special educational needs is 30 percentage points above the average for all schools. This was the result of an additional negative interaction between academy status and the proportion of pupils designated as having special educational needs. In practice, this means that the slopes for academy schools and non-academy schools are different and that eventually, after controlling for all factors, they cross. The population average is approximately 22 per cent, so when the proportion of SEN pupils within an academy school reaches 52 per cent, an academy school tends to perform less well than other non-academy schools with the same proportion of SEN pupils.
- 4 A positive interaction was observed between academy status and the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language. In practice this means that the slopes for academy schools and non-academy schools are different and are diverging, with the gap increasing as the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language also increases.
- 5 Results for analysis using the percentage of pupils attaining 5+ A\* to C grades including English and maths were broadly similar with other attainment models, although there were no significant interactions between academies and the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language.
- 6 The above models had adjusted Rsquares of between 0.42 and 0.47. This identifies that the models explained between 42 and 47 per cent of the variation in outcome.

The design of this analysis was to take into account the length of time a school had been designated an academy, as it was possible that analysis with a single dichotomous variable would overemphasise academy effects. Therefore, instead of a single dichotomous variable, three additional dummy variables were created that identified whether an academy had been open for 12 months, between 12 and 24 months or over two years. This analysis found that:

- 1 All academy schools, irrespective of how long they had held that status, had significantly higher average GCSE scores than non-academy schools. Of the three types of academy those that been open for more than 12 months had, on average, the highest average GCSE scores.
- 2 On the 5+ A\* to C grade measure, academies again had a higher proportion of pupils attaining 5+ A\* to C grades.
- 3 Academies that opened after June 2012 also had significantly higher attainment than non-academy schools on both attainment measures.

Other effects for the above models with additional academy variables were consistent with earlier models.

## 4.2 Analysis with a prior attainment indicator

Whilst prior attainment data in the 2011 dataset was only available for a subset of 2917 schools, in 2012 data was available on almost the full dataset that was used in the above analysis. Data was missing or contained invalid scores for about 100 schools and these were excluded from the analysis. Prior attainment data available and used in this analysis was the KS average points score and allowed analysis to look at the average school-level progress made between KS2 and KS4. The same variables that were included above were included in this new analysis with additional variables for KS2 average point score and an interaction term between academy status and KS2 average point score. These models explained slightly more of the variation at GCSE, ranging between 0.62 and 0.68. The main findings for this set of analyses were:

- 1 Academy schools made more progress between KS2 and KS4 than non-academy schools, including

those which became academies after June 2012. Schools that became academies after 1 June 2012 performed better than non-academy schools.

- 2 When the length of time as an academy was included in the analysis, results were broadly in line with previous findings in that academies that had held that status for more than 12 months had higher average GCSE scores than academies that had only been open up to 12 months.
- 3 Prior attainment was a strong positive predictor of KS4 attainment. There was no significant effect for the interaction between academy status and average KS2 score.
- 4 After controlling for prior attainment, there were no additional interaction effects between academy status and the proportion of pupils designated with special educational needs (SEN), the proportion of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM).
- 5 For the proportion of pupils attaining 5+ A\* to C grades with English and maths, and after controlling for average attainment at KS2, academy schools, whenever they opened, had a higher percentage of pupils at 5+ A\* to C grades than non-academy schools. There were no significant interactions between academy status and the proportion of SEN, EAL or FSM pupils.

Additional models using average total GCSE score without equivalents found that those academies that had been open for more than two years had significantly lower average GCSE outcomes than non-academies, whilst there was no significant difference between non-academies and academies that had been open for less than two years. This could be an indication that those academies that had been open for more than two years, either, entered pupils for more non-GCSE qualifications, so increasing the chance of getting one in their top eight, or, entered pupils for the same proportion of non-GCSEs as other academy schools, but just got better results in these type of qualifications. Of course there may be an alternative explanation and further investigation of examination entries may uncover differences between academy and non-academy schools.

### 4.3 Longitudinal model of GCSE attainment

A further approach exploring the association between academy status and school attainment was to analyse aggregated GCSE results over a period of time. Capped GCSE results were included from 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2012. Schools were identified as academies at a given exam season if they had converted at least one academic year previously. A longitudinal model was constructed and the interaction between academy status and time was explored.

As expected, there were significant improvements in capped GCSE scores in subsequent years as compared to 2007; the greatest improvement being by 2012. For 2008 and 2009, this attainment trajectory was not significantly different for academy schools as compared to non-academy schools. For 2011, the attainment progression was significantly greater, on average, for academies as compared to non-academy schools. However, for 2012 the attainment progression was not significantly different between these school types.

## 5 Conclusion

Based on school-level analysis of the 2012 GCSE results **academy schools**, on average, achieved a **higher average GCSE point score** and had a **higher proportion of pupils attaining 5+ A\* to C grades**, than non-academy schools. This effect remained, even when analysis controlled for the length of time a school had been designated an academy and prior attainment. As there was almost complete data for the models that contained prior attainment, these are the preferred models to understand the relationship between academy status and attainment at GCSE.

Where we observed a difference in the 2012 analysis was when we explored the relationship between academy status and the average **GCSE score without equivalents**, i.e. the best eight GCSE results. Analysis indicated that there was a different association between academy status, the length of time designated as an academy and average school level attainment. In the models that included prior attainment we saw no significant difference in the progress made between KS2 and KS4 for non-academy schools and academies that had been open for less than two years. A significant difference was seen for academy schools that had been open for more than two years. These schools, on average, made less progress between KS2 and KS4 than non-academy schools. This may be an indication of different examination entry policies but does indicate that academies that have been open for more than two years do appear to perform particularly well in the GCSE equivalent examinations.

The **longitudinal analysis** is looking at GCSE attainment in a slightly different way to the cross-sectional analysis. The cross-sectional is looking at the difference at one point in time, i.e. in 2012, whilst the longitudinal analysis is looking at change since 2007 and whether there is an increase in a school attainment trajectory since becoming an academy school. Although we saw a significant increase in progress for the 2011 GCSE, which may indicate a change in the attainment trajectory, this was not seen in 2012, where schools with academy status were not significantly different

for their rate of improvement in GCSE results, when compared to non-academy schools. What this means in practice is that, based on the 2012 GCSEs, we do not see a jump in attainment following a school taking academy status. Whilst we did see a difference when analysing the 2011 GCSE results, this then disappeared in 2012. Future analysis will need to look closely at this association. Because the change in trajectory seen in 2011 is not maintained in 2012 it does not allow this analysis to confirm, or refute, the claim that academy schools lead to improved progress. A question for policy leads may be how long would we expect to wait until an effect should be seen? An alternative issue to be considered is that academy schools could be having an effect on things other than KS4 attainment.

Any of the associations described above between academy status and GCSE attainment may not be due to academy status *per se* but could be due to other features of academies, for example, the quality of teaching or the effectiveness of school leadership. Whilst there may be practices academy schools are following that do have a positive association with attainment outcomes, they have not been measured here. It is highly likely that the quality of school leadership or the quality of teaching have a positive association with GCSE attainment and also, that these factors exist in non-academy schools. If we were able to run models that had reliable measures for these factors they may have a strong positive association with GCSE attainment, and, in identifying that association we may further see that the association between academy status and attainment becomes much reduced, or, disappears entirely.

Further analysis of the GCSE results for 2013 and 2014 will see whether these effects remain stable over these years or if associations seen in earlier analyses re-appear. As the 2012 data released by the department included prior attainment data for nearly all schools, future data analysis, if as complete, will only run models that include prior attainment as these will always be the more robust models.

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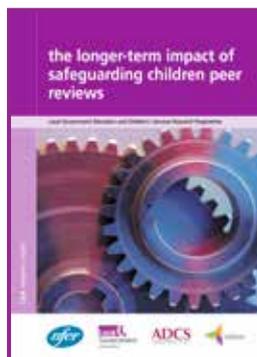
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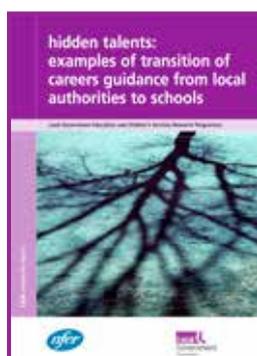
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This report highlights how schools are trying to meet the challenge to provide impartial and independent careers guidance to their students and how LAs are supporting schools to meet their new duty. Drawing on eight telephone case studies where key staff in schools and LAs were interviewed, this report features ways in which to support schools to meet their new duty.

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This report is one of a series of analyses looking at school level GCSE results for 2011 through to 2014. The purpose is to determine whether there is any differential progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 that can be associated with schools status, i.e. do academy schools, on average, make more progress between KS2 and KS4 than non academy schools. The report highlights the performance of academy schools in 2012 and the alternative interpretations of GCSE outcomes depending on whether analysis includes or excludes GCSE equivalent examinations. The long term trajectory of school performance is also explored.