



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

Why study Economics? Perspectives from 16 to 19 year old students

Sanjana Mehta*, Irenka Suto, Gill Elliott, Nicky Rushton

Research Division, Cambridge Assessment

*Mehta.S@cambridgeassessment.org.uk

Paper presented at the International Association for Citizenship, Social and Economics Education annual conference, Bath Spa University, June 2011.

Abstract

Background

In England and Wales, 16 to 19 year old students are given considerable choice in what they study. Many follow Advanced (A) level courses in three or four subjects and Economics is a popular option. Within a wider study of A level teaching and learning, subject choice was explored. Two questions were considered:

1. Why do students choose to study A level Economics?
2. What skills and knowledge do students expect to gain which will help them when at university or in a job/career?

Methods

Questionnaires were sent to 16 to 19 year-old students in a sample of 100 schools/colleges following a popular A level Economics course. The sample represented the wider A level population in terms of social deprivation, academic achievement and school/college type, as measured by indicators derived using data from the National Pupil Database. Eighteen schools/colleges responded, returning 228 questionnaires in total. Additionally, four students were interviewed in depth about their experiences.

Findings

Quantitative analysis revealed that a large majority of students chose A level Economics because they thought they would enjoy it. Progression to university level study and career aspirations were also cited frequently as reasons for choosing Economics, whereas parental and teacher advice and previous enjoyment of the subject were less important. At least half the students believed they could gain an understanding of national and international economics which would help them subsequently. Only 15% identified more generic skills such as analysis and essay-writing as being of value later in life. The findings offer a useful overview of students' motivations for studying Economics in England and Wales.

