

Press Release

Month of birth matters for children's well-being as well as for test scores

Previous research published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS)¹ has shown that children born at the start of the academic year achieve better exam results, on average, than children born at the end of the academic year. In England, this means that children born in the autumn tend to outperform those born in the summer. New research published today by IFS, and funded by the Nuffield Foundation, shows that month of birth also matters for other characteristics and outcomes of young people growing up in England today.

Relative to children born in September, children born in August, on average:

- score substantially lower in national achievement tests and other measures of cognitive skills;
- are 7 percentage points (20%) more likely to study for vocational qualifications if they stay on in post-compulsory education;
- are 1½ percentage points (20%) less likely to attend a Russell Group (high-status) university at age 19;
- have lower confidence in their academic ability and are less likely to believe that they control their own destiny (locus of control) as teenagers.

The impact of month of birth on these outcomes and characteristics is particularly important because of the long-term consequences they may have for young people's education and labour market choices.

Commenting on these findings, Claire Crawford, Programme Director at IFS and one of the authors of the report, said: "Studying for academic qualifications, attending a Russell Group university, and believing that you have control over your own life are all associated with a greater chance of being in work and having higher wages later in life. This suggests that Augustborn children may end up doing worse than September-born children throughout their working lives, simply because of the month in which they were born."

In terms of other skills and behaviours, we find that, relative to children born in September, children born in August, on average:

- are between 20 and 30 percentage points (2½ and 3½ times) more likely to be regarded as below average by their teachers in reading, writing and maths at age 7;
- exhibit lower socio-emotional development;
- are 7 percentage points (2½ times) more likely to report being always unhappy at school and 6 percentage points more likely (twice as likely) to report being bullied all the time at age 7;

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Embargo

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¹ C. Crawford, L. Dearden & C. Meghir (2007), When You Are Born Matters: The Impact of Date of Birth on Child Cognitive Outcomes in England, Centre for the Economics of Education Report to the Department for Children, Schools and Families: http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/4073.



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We also identify differences in some forms of parental investment after the children start school: parents of August-born children provide a richer home learning environment, on average, than the parents of September-born children. This provides some evidence to support the notion that parents attempt to compensate for the disadvantages that their August-born children face in school by spending more time at home helping them learn.

Commenting on these results, Ellen Greaves, Research Economist at IFS and another author of the report, said: "It is clear that the consequences of the month in which you were born extend beyond educational attainment. We find evidence that, particularly at younger ages, summer-born children are more likely to report being unhappy at school and to have experienced bullying than autumn-born children. In light of this, the government should be concerned about the wider educational experience of summer-born children, who appear to be at a disadvantage in terms of their well-being as well as their test scores."

In ongoing research, we are trying to identify what might be driving the differences in outcomes between children born in different months that this report has highlighted. This will enable us to better understand the most appropriate policy responses to help summer-born children overcome the disadvantages that the current education system foists upon them. We expect to report the results of this research in 2012.

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Notes to Editors:

- 1. For embargoed copies of the report or other queries, please contact Bonnie Brimstone: bonnie b@ifs.org.uk or 020 7291 4800.
- 2. The report Does When You Are Born Matter? The Impact of Month of Birth on Children's Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills in England, by Claire Crawford, Lorraine Dearden and Ellen Greaves, will be launched as part of the ESRC's Festival of Social Science from 10.30am on Tuesday 1 November. Please contact Bonnie Brimstone if you would like to register to attend. We are grateful to the ESRC for supporting this event.
- 3. The authors are grateful to the Nuffield Foundation (grant number EDU/36559) for funding this work and to the ESRC for funding via the Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Public Policy at IFS (RES-544-28-0001).
- 4. The Nuffield Foundation is an endowed charitable trust that aims to improve social well-being in the widest sense. It funds research and innovation in education and social policy and also works to build capacity in education, science and social science research. The Nuffield Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation. More information is available at www.nuffieldfoundation.org.