**Summer birth penalty persists into Higher Education**

Children born later in the school year are significantly less likely to go to university at age 18 or 19 than children born earlier in the school year, according to new findings from the IFS. This suggests that summer-born children may face potentially damaging long-term labour market consequences.

**Key results:**

IFS research published in October 2007 showed that, at age 7, children born in August (at the end of the academic year) were around 25 percentage points less likely to reach the expected level at Key Stage 1 than children born in September (at the start of the academic year). This gap was smaller, but still significant, at age 16, when August-born girls were 5.5 percentage points less likely (than September-born girls) to achieve 5 GCSEs at Grades A*-C, and August-born boys were 6.1 percentage points less likely.¹

Building on these findings, new IFS research shows that, far from having disappeared by age 19, these gaps in educational attainment by month of birth actually persist into Higher Education (HE).

**Table 1** Comparison between the percentages of August- and September-born children participating in HE and attending a “high status” institution by age 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE participation (by age 19)²</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in a “high status” institution (by age 19)</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our results show that while 37.0% of September-born girls and 29.6% of September-born boys have started university by age 19, only 35.2% of August-born girls and 28.0% of August-born boys have started by the same age – a difference of 1.8 percentage points for girls and 1.6 percentage points for boys.

Our work also shows that August-born children are significantly less likely to attend a “high status”³ institution than September-born children: August-born girls are 1.2 percentage points less likely (than


² These results apply to the cohort born in 1985-86.
September-born girls) to attend a “high status” university by age 19, while the difference for boys is 0.8 percentage points.

Given that a degree (particularly one from a “high status” institution) often earns its holder a substantial wage premium, these differences suggest that children born at the end of the school year may not only face lower educational opportunities, but also lower lifetime earnings, simply because of the month in which they were born.

Claire Crawford, one of the authors of the research, said “These findings underline the potentially damaging long-term education and labour market consequences faced by August-born children, simply because they were unlucky enough to be born at the end of the school year.”

Lorraine Dearden, another of the authors, said “The government is committed to widening participation in HE. If they could ensure that all children had as good a chance of going to university as those born in September, then around 2,600 more children per year would participate in HE by age 19.”

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. The authors gratefully acknowledge funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number RES-139-25-0234) via its Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). They are also grateful to the Department for Children, Schools and Families for putting together the dataset on which these results are based.

2. The universities defined as “high status” institutions on our measure are as follows: University of the Arts (London), Aston University, University of Bath, Birkbeck College, University of Birmingham, University of Bristol, University of Cambridge, Cardiff University, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of Durham, University of East Anglia, University of Edinburgh, University of Essex, University of Exeter, University of Glasgow, Homerton College, Imperial College London, King’s College London, University of Lancaster, University of Leeds, University of Liverpool, London School of Economics & Political Science, University of London (Institutes & Activities), University of Manchester, Newcastle University, University of Nottingham, University of Oxford, Queen Mary & Westfield College, Queen’s University Belfast, Royal Holloway & Bedford New College, Royal Veterinary College, School of Oriental & African Studies, School of Pharmacy, University of Reading, University of Sheffield, University of Southampton, University of Surrey, University of Sussex, University College London, University of Warwick, University of York.

3 We define “high status” institutions as those who are members of the Russell Group, together with any UK institution with an average 2001 RAE score greater than the lowest amongst the Russell Group universities.