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The Effect of Personality Traits on Subject Choice and Performance in High School: Evidence from an English Cohort

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Evidence from an English Cohort**

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June 2014

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ABSTRACT

The Effect of Personality Traits on Subject Choice and Performance in High School: Evidence from an English Cohort

This paper investigates the relationship between personality traits in adolescence and performance in high school using a large and recent cohort study. In particular, we investigate the impact of locus of control, self-esteem and work ethics at age 15, on test scores at age 16, and on subject choices and subsequent performance at age 17-18. In particular, individuals with external locus of control or with low levels of self-esteem seem less likely to have good performance in test scores at age 16 and to pursue further studies at 17-18, especially in mathematics or sciences. We use matching methods to control for a rich set of adolescent and family characteristics and we find that personality traits do affect study choices and performance in test scores - particularly in mathematics and science. The results are stronger for adolescents from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. We establish the robustness of our results using the methodology proposed by Altonji et al. (2005) that consists in making hypotheses as to the correlation between the unobservables that determine test scores and subjects' choices and, the unobservables that influence personality.

JEL Classification: I10, I21

Keywords: personality, education, locus of control, self-esteem

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1. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to analyse the role of non-cognitive traits on performance in High School. In particular, we study the effect of locus of control, self-esteem and work ethics recorded when the child is 15-16 on subsequent test scores in English and Mathematics at age 16 and on the likelihood to choose different subjects and subsequent performance at age 17-18.

We contribute to the existing literature in several ways. First, we provide evidence from a recent dataset based on a large cohort of English children born in 1990 and followed for seven years, starting in 2004. Our analysis is focused on personality traits in adolescence. A variety of studies have shown that personality traits are relatively malleable, at least over the early life cycle and then tend to be stable during adult life (Cobb-Clark and Schurer, 2013). There is some evidence that policy interventions can promote useful traits and suppress harmful ones early in life and, while cognitive skills (such as IQ, for example) are believed to be relatively stable by the age of 8, other aspects of personality might be easier to change at a later age (see Carneiro and Heckman, 2003 for a discussion). Existing studies mostly rely on relatively dated data (for example NLSY1979 for Heckman et al., 2006 and Cebi, 2007; NELS1988 for Coleman and Deleire, 2003; UK NCDS1958 for Carneiro et al., 2007) or do not have a specific focus on adolescents (Chamorro et al., 2003; Delaney et al., 2013). Secondly, we have a great detail of information on test scores by subject at different ages, including students' choices of subjects which are very important for entry into higher education. We use this information to investigate the role of different personality traits on choice of study and performance. The existing literature is mostly focused on the broad effect of personality on education, using indicators such as years of schooling, or college graduation (Heckman et al. 2006; Coleman and Deleire, 2003; Cebi, 2007) and focusing on the role of one specific personality trait, such as locus of control or conscientiousness (Baron and Cobb-

Clark, 2010). Thirdly we use propensity score matching (PSM) to investigate the relationship between personality and high school performance as well as OLS estimation, and we examine the robustness of our results using the methodology proposed by Altonji et al. (2005) (the AET method). This method does not rely on any identifying exclusion restrictions but instead, uses observed differences between those with and without a particular personality trait to provide information regarding the likely magnitude and direction of selection along unobserved characteristics. OLS is widely regarded as providing an estimate of an upper bound on the causal effect and PSM, and AET may be regarded as a method that could tighten that bound.

Fourthly, we analyse the different impact of personality traits on children across various markers of deprivation. In particular, we look at disadvantaged families, where disadvantage is defined in a variety of ways, and we analyse the effect of different non-cognitive skills for them, compared to their advantaged peers. We examine whether personality traits can play a different role for children who are less likely to receive support in their education from their families. The results broadly support the idea that the effect of personality traits is particularly strong for the cognitive outcomes for children who come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds while the effect on advantaged children is limited. These results would support the use of policies that improve academic achievement for students from disadvantaged socio-economic background through encouraging positive personality traits.

Finally, we focus on understanding the role of personality traits on performance in different subjects at age 16 and on subject choices and performance at age 17-18. In particular, we try to understand whether some specific traits are more beneficial (or detrimental) for performance in some particular subjects. In particular, some research suggests that maths skills play an important role in determining earnings, even controlling for

educational attainment in general (see Joensen and Skyt Nielsen, 2009, for example). Here we distinguish between English and mathematics at age 16 and English, mathematics and Sciences at age 17-18. While the determinants of performance in a particular subject (rather than the overall school performance) are very hard to disentangle, it is possible that personality traits play a role in enhancing performance in one area, rather than another. The issue seems to be particularly relevant for the British population: the UK ranking of 15-year old pupils in Mathematics and Science in the OECD's PISA tests has been falling from 2000 to 2009 and was just below the OECD average in mathematics and only slightly above in Science. A key contributing factor to UK's STEM deficit is the very low General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) performance at 16 in science and mathematics subjects. High level passes in these subjects at this level is a pre-requisite for further study in these same subjects. Not surprisingly, the UK has one of the lowest shares of 15-year olds intending a STEM career among the OECD countries and still lags behind most OECD countries in women's aspirations to study a STEM subject and engage in a STEM career (see OECD, 2012).

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a brief overview of the existing literature; Section 3 presents the data and explains the personality indicators and outcomes that it contains; Section 4 and 5 discuss the estimation methods and the results; and Section 6 concludes with a discussion of the policy implications of the work. The headline finding of the research is that we broadly support the idea that non-cognitive skills are important in determining performance in high school: particularly in mathematics and science. Individuals with external locus of control, low self-esteem, and low levels of work ethics¹ are all less likely to achieve good results at the end of High School and to choose a

¹ These concepts are explained and defined in Section 3.

range of mathematical or scientific subjects for their final exams before applying to university.

2. Overview of the existing literature

The evidence on the effect of personality on educational outcomes has suggested a variety of transmission mechanisms, such as study behaviours, effort, and attention skills. Almlund *et al.* (2011) provides an excellent review of the studies conducted in this area.

Research in personality psychology has produced the widely shared taxonomy of traits, known as the Big Five. The Big Five are five factors (Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism or Emotional Stability) that represent personality traits at the broadest level of abstraction. They summarize a large number of distinct, more specific, personality facets (Almlund *et al.*, 2011). Almlund *et al.* (2011) conclude that personality traits have a strong effect on educational attainment, grades and test scores. In particular, they show that Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness are very important in determining years of education, grades and test scores; and that Conscientiousness might be as predictive as cognitive ability in determining good school results, with the effect being mediated through effort and positive study habits. On the other hand, locus of control and self-esteem are found to have important effects on adolescent schooling decisions.

Extensive research in psychology and sociology has shown that internal locus of control and high conscientiousness are associated with better academic performance, increased years of schooling and greater chances to go to university (see for example Goldberg *et al.*, 1998, and Wang *et al.*, 1999 for reviews). However, most of these studies tend to use small or unrepresentative samples and focus on correlation between personality and educational outcomes rather than on understanding the causal relationship. Duckworth

and Seligam, 2005, Ross and Broh, 2000, and Poropat, 2009 provide meta-analyses that aim to overcome the former shortcoming, but not the latter.

The number of studies in economics that analyse the importance of non-cognitive skills on educational outcomes has grown substantially in recent years. However, the economics literature in this area is mostly based on relatively dated data and sometimes provides conflicting findings. Furthermore, most of the existing studies focus on what happens at the end on individuals' education (college performance), or analyses broad indicators of educational achievements (years of schooling), rather than performance at a younger age and in specific subjects. Table 1 provides a summary of the most relevant and recent economics studies on personality and education.

Table 1 here

One of the most notable examples of the relevance of non-cognitive skills is provided by Heckman and Rubinstein (2001) who analyse the performance of Graduate Equivalence Diplomas (GED) recipients and conclude that their lower achievements in the labour market and the higher prevalence of criminal or risky behaviours can be attributed to the lack of non-cognitive skills such as discipline, patience or motivation. Other work by Heckman and collaborators has emphasized the importance of investing in promoting positive non-cognitive skills from a very early age (see for example studies on the Perry Preschool program, such as Heckman and Masterov, 2007 and Heckman et al., 2010). Heckman, et al. (2006) use data from the US NLSY1979 and show that locus of control and self-esteem affect years of schooling and college performance.

Coleman and Deleire (2003) use NELS1988 to incorporate locus of control into a human capital investment model and show that teenagers with internal locus of control are more likely to make educational investments, such as complete high school and attend a four-

year college. On the other hand, Cebi (2007) replicates the Coleman and Deleire (2003) study using NLSY and suggest that locus of control is not a significant determinant of educational outcomes, even if it is rewarded in the labour market.

Lundberg (2013) analyses the impact of cognitive ability and personality traits on college graduation in a recent cohort of young Americans, and how the returns to these traits vary by family background. Her work finds relevant differences across family background groups, particularly for men. Conscientiousness does not seem to have an effect on the education of disadvantaged men, while openness to experience has a relevant effect on college graduation only for less-advantaged men and women.

In the European context, several studies have suggested positive returns to non-cognitive traits, and point to the role of social skills (Carneiro *et al.*, 2007, Silles, 2010, Duckworth and Seligman, 2005, and Duckworth and Schoon, 2010) or the impact of positive study behaviours (Delaney *et al.*, 2013). Duncan *et al.* (2007) focuses on school readiness, comparing data from UK, US and Canada and show that attention skills are good predictors of educational achievements while other measures of socio-emotional behaviours seem less important. Borghans *et al.* (2008) show that, in an experimental setting, people with internal locus of control respond less to financial incentives when allocating effort to cognitive tasks, probably because they are more highly motivated. Finally, Baron and Cobb-Clark (2010) analyse the link between locus of control and high school graduation and university attendance using a recent cohort of Australian youths. Their work shows that people with internal locus of control are more likely to invest in their education and they do not find any significant relationship between family welfare history and young person's locus of control.

Our own analysis is particularly important because of the recent attention in the literature to quantify returns to literacy and numeracy skills, and returns to human capital investments in the so-called STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)

subjects. For example, Crawford and Cribb (2013) use the 1970 BCS to study the relationship between reading and mathematics skills measured at age 10 and weekly earnings and hourly wages at ages 30, 34 and 38. They control for a rich set of demographic and family background characteristics and they find that a one standard deviation increase in age 10 mathematics (reading) scores is associated with 10% (5%) higher earnings during one's 30s. Dolton and Vignoles (2002) also show a very large effect of having mathematics A-Level (typically at age 18) on subsequent earnings, even after controlling for higher education.

In the US, a few studies have taken advantage of curriculum reforms. For example, Cortes *et al* (2013) find that an extra high school mathematics course had large effects on test scores, high school graduation and participation in higher education. Finally, one of the most relevant studies in this area is Joensen and Nielsen (2009) who estimate the causal effect of studying advanced high school mathematics by exploiting an educational reform that changed the possible combinations of subjects with mathematics in Denmark. They show that taking an advanced mathematics course in combination with an advanced chemistry course increases earnings by 20% relative to chemistry without mathematics.

3. Data

This paper uses data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE). This is a large-scale cohort survey of English adolescents, selected to be representative of the young people in England but at the same time as oversampling specific groups. Adolescents were interviewed for the first time when they were in school year 9 in 2004 at the age of 14. LSYPE can be linked to the National Pupil Database (NPD), a pupil-level administrative database that matches pupil and school characteristics data to pupil attainment and contains detailed information on test scores for all the LSYPE children. We use this data to obtain information about LSYPE children's results in test scores at age 16 (GCSE scores) and age 17-18 (A levels scores).

In the first wave around 15,500 young people were interviewed. In the first four waves, parents/guardians were also interviewed. Our final sample includes around 5,000 observations of children with non-missing information on personality traits, test scores, and other essential information on the child's birth and family background (the selected observations were not significantly different from the original data in terms of their observable characteristics). The study is managed by the Department of Education and covers a wide range of topics, including academic achievements, family relationships, attitudes toward school, family and labour market, and some more sensitive or challenging issues, such as risky health behaviours (smoking, alcohol drinking, drug taking), personal relationships, etc.

3.1 Outcomes

We are interested in testing the effect of personality traits on a variety of cognitive outcomes (test scores) at various ages and in different subjects, and on the chances that a child will take further studies after compulsory education. Table 2 lists the outcomes we use in our analysis and the age of the child for each outcome. We focus on the following outcomes:

- GCSE at age 16: At the end of Key Stage 4 from 13 to 16, pupils generally take the national public GCSEs in most subjects studied – often in as many as 10 subjects. GCSE grades range from A* to G. Our dependent variables include: the number of subjects with “pass” grades from A* to C in GCSE exams; a binary variable indicating having 5 GCSE passes including Mathematics and English which is usually required for students following an academic track for progression beyond age 16; and two binary variables equal to 1 if the child attained A* to C in English and Mathematics.

- Decision to take General Certificate of Education Advanced (A levels): A level subjects are studied over a two-year period and students sit for an examination at the end of each year, administered by an official assessment body. Most students study three or four subjects simultaneously during Year 12 and Year 13 (ages 17–18), either in a secondary education institution or in a Sixth Form College, as part of their further education. A-levels are taken at age 18 and are the main admission criterion for university admission. Elite institutions or high demand courses usually require high grades, while the less prestigious institutions and less popular subjects will typically demand lower grades.²
- A level subjects: students usually select three to four subjects for their A levels, depending on their academic preferences and intentions toward further education. Some universities and/or some degrees will have specific requirements in terms of A level subject studied and grades. The most commonly demanded subjects in university entry requirements, known as ‘facilitating’ subjects, are: biology, chemistry, physics, English, geography, history, mathematics, modern and classical languages.
- Grades in A levels by subject: The passing grades for A-levels are A*, A, B, C, D and E. Grades are often translated into points as follows: 120 points for A, 100 for B, 80 for C, 60 for D, and 40 for E.

Table 2 here

3.2 *Personality traits*

Personality is complex and factor analysis has been utilised extensively in personality psychology to identify a number of common factors derived from a variety of questions (Cobb-Clark et al., 2014; Piatek and Pinger 2010; and Almlund *et al.*, 2011). While our data

² We do not consider the complex array of vocational training courses that less academic students can take from 16 to 18.

does not include information about the “Big Five” personality traits that have been the focus of some recent research (see Almlund *et al.*, 2011 for a review of possible alternatives), it does include a series of questions on locus of control, self-esteem and attitudes to work asked at age 15.

Locus of control refers to individual beliefs about whether life events are mostly internally or externally determined (Rotter, 1966). People with an external locus of control believe that what happens in life is largely determined by events beyond their control, while individuals with internal locus of control generally believe that life events are mostly caused by their own decisions and behaviours. We measure locus of control using children’s responses to six questions (see the Appendix for details). We follow the previous literature in the field (see for example Cobb-Clark *et al.*, 2014 and Piatek and Pinger 2010) and use factor analysis to create indices of internal and external locus of control. Children are coded as external if they have a score in the top quartile of the distribution of the external index, derived from factor analysis. We also examine the robustness of this definition, by classifying children as external if they have a score in the top third or fifth of the distribution of the external index. Self-esteem refers to an individual perception of her/his own value. LSYPE data includes two questions on self-esteem (see Appendix for details) asked at waves 2 and 4. We construct an indicator of low self-esteem equal to 1 if they have placed themselves in the most distressed category for one of the two questions at least once between the two waves (around 26% of the children in the sample)³.

Almlund *et al.* (2011) suggest that competence, dutifulness, self-discipline, perseverance and work-ethic are all facets of Conscientiousness. LSYPE includes four questions on working attitudes (see the Appendix for details) and we use factor analysis to

³ Alternative/more restrictive indicators of low self-esteem were constructed to test the robustness of our estimates and results are available on request.

create an index of work ethics. Children are coded as having high work ethics, if they have a score in the top quartile of the distribution of the index.

3.3 *Other explanatory variables*

We estimate two versions of our model, one more parsimonious than the other. All of the variables we control for are, arguably, pre-determined variables – that is, not themselves influenced by personality traits. Our more parsimonious model only includes at-birth characteristics such as: birth-weight; whether the child was premature; ethnic background; sex of the child; and family characteristics such as marital status and age of the mother at birth. In the second model we include other family's characteristics (measured at wave 1) such as: child's or parent's disability, maternal education and employment status, whether the child lives in a single parent family, grandparents' education, family income and older siblings.

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics on the outcome variables, broken down by personality traits. Individuals with external locus of control and low self-esteem seem less likely to perform well in their GCSE and A levels exams and to choose “core subjects” in their studies. On the other hand, children with a high level of work ethics seem to have better results both at GCSE and at A levels and to be more likely to continue with further education after GCSE.

Table 3 here.

We explore the possibility of heterogeneity in the effect of personality traits on children by socio-economic background and by various indicators of socio-economic disadvantage. We follow Ruhm (2008) and construct a multivariate indicator of socioeconomic status by regressing total family income on mother's age at birth, education,

and marital status. Youths are classified as “advantaged” (“disadvantaged”) if they live in households that are above (below) the median prediction. This SES index simultaneously accounts for a larger number of determinants than simple income and possibly reduces the endogeneity problem.

4. Estimation

While we begin by using Ordinary Least Squares, to control for observable confounders, this is well known to lead to biased estimates of the causal effects because of neglected heterogeneity. The linear model can be written as:

$$Y_i = \alpha + P_i' \beta + X_i' \gamma + \varepsilon_i$$

where Y_i represents educational outcomes (test scores in various subjects or subject choice at A levels), P_i' is a vector of psychological traits (binary indicators of external locus of control, low self-esteem, and high work ethics) and X_i' is a vector of child's and family's characteristics. We cannot, in this data, address the selection on unobservables problem because there is simply no quasi-experimental variation across our sample to exploit. However, we do try to lower the upper bound provided by OLS estimation, through the inclusion of a more detailed set of independent variables. Secondly, we exploit propensity score matching that does not rely on functional form assumptions and restricts inference to samples where we can find overlap in the distribution of covariates across the treatment.

PSM may be thought of as assuming the selection problem away because it relies on conditional independence that implies no selection on the unobservables conditional on the observables. On the other hand, matching methods have some desirable features: the observations used to estimate the causal effect are selected without reference to the outcome, as in a controlled experiment; it dominates other methods based on selection on observables (like OLS), thanks to its more convincing comparison of treated and control units; it offers

interesting insights for a better understanding of the estimation of causal effects; and there is some (debated) evidence suggesting that it contributes to a reduction in the selection bias (see Dehejia and Wahba 2002, Dehejia 2005, and Smith and Todd 2004). At the very least, matching provides a convincing way to select the observations on which other estimation methods can be based. Matching is more robust than OLS because it does not restrict the way in which personality may affect outcomes to be linear, and inference is limited to samples that are effectively comparable, based on the covariates distribution. Matching attaches appropriate weights to the observations in the control group, so that the distribution of their observable characteristics is realigned to the treatment group.

Propensity Score Matching has been used in various recent papers investigating the determinants of child well-being (see for example Ruhm, 2008, Berger *et al.*, 2005, and Goodman and Sianesi, 2005) and the effect of personality traits (Caliendo *et al.*, 2010). The idea of propensity score matching is to match children with different personality traits (for example, with and without low self-esteem) who are as comparable as possible in all other respects so that they have similar propensities to be treated. More specifically, we first estimate the conditional probability of having a specific personality trait, called the propensity score: such as having low self-esteem for each child, given our covariates. Then, estimated propensity scores are used to create a matched control group and for each treated child we find the comparison member with the closest propensity score. Non-matched individuals are dropped from the analysis. Our analysis is performed using *psmatch2* and appropriate tests have been run, in order to compare covariate distributions across our matched groups to ensure that adequate balance has been obtained (results available in Appendix Table A1)⁴.

⁴ Our approach is similar to Goodman and Sianesi (2005) and we use propensity score matching with the nearest neighbour method with replacement (as it has been shown to reduce bias relative to matching without

Lastly, we test our results using the methodology proposed by Altonji *et al.* (2005) (AET) that relies on using the selection on *observable* traits to provide information about the potential for selection on *unobservable* characteristics. This approach states that the part of an outcome (Y_i) that is related to the observables has the same relationship with personality traits as the part related to the unobservables. It requires some strong assumptions (see Altonji *et al.*, 2005 for the details) but has the advantage of not relying on identifying variables. The AET approach is based on the estimation of a bivariate probit model without any identifying restrictions but with a constrained correlation coefficient. Identification comes from this restriction as well as from functional form (Altonji *et al.*, 2005). Following the AET approach, if the observables determinants of an outcome are a random set of the complete set of determinants, then selection on observable characteristics will be equal to selection on unobservable characteristics. More formally, Altonji *et al.* (2005) show that we can consider the following bivariate probit model:

$$Y = \mathbf{1}(\alpha + P' \beta + X' \gamma + \varepsilon > 0)$$

$$P = \mathbf{1}(Z' \theta + u > 0)$$

$$\begin{pmatrix} u \\ \varepsilon \end{pmatrix} \approx N \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 1 & \rho \\ \rho & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

In this model, the parameter ρ is not identified and we use the degree of selection on the observables as a guide. The idea that “selection on the observables is the same as the selection on unobservables” is formalised as:

$$\frac{Cov(P, \varepsilon)}{Var(\varepsilon)} = \frac{Cov(P, X' \gamma)}{Var(X' \gamma)}$$

replacement, see Dehejia and Wahba, 2002) and then used the *common* option, so that off-support observations are automatically dropped. Similar results were obtained with other matching methods.

This condition holds under the following assumptions: the elements of X are chosen randomly from the full set of variables that determine Y ; and the number of observed and unobserved factors is large enough so that no element dominates the distribution of the outcome. These assumptions are very strong but, as argued in Altonji *et al.* (2005), weaker than the standard OLS assumption that $Cov(X, \varepsilon) = 0$.

Altonji *et al.* (2005) argue that if the observable determinants of Y are a random sample of the complete set of determinants, selection on observable characteristics should be equal to selection on unobservable characteristics. In practice, as noted in Altonji *et al.* (2005) there are reasons to believe that the relationship between the unobservables and any potentially endogenous treatment will be weaker than the relationship between the observables and the treatment. For instance, the set of independent variables X has been selected with the idea of reducing bias, rather than at random.

For these reasons, the final estimates from the AET approach will be interpreted as a lower bound of the true effect: so if these lower bound estimates point to a substantial effect of personality of various outcomes, we can interpret this as a strong evidence in favour of such an effect.

5. Results

The results from the estimation of the effect of personality traits on high school results by subject are presented in Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7. The effect of personality traits is very stable and the size and magnitude of the effects do not change when we include one or more traits at the same time. On the basis of these results we feel justified in examining the effects of each trait separately in our subsequent PSM and AET analysis (see Table 5, 6 and 7). The results presented in Tables 4, 5, 6 and 7 suggest that non-cognitive skills generally have significant effects on high school performance and the effects are sizeable. In our discussion, we will

focus on the results from PSM estimation of Model 2 (see Table 5), as this is our preferred specification.

Figures 1 and 2 show the distribution of propensity scores across treatment and control groups. Both graphs show that there is sufficient overlap between the treatment and control groups.

Figure 1 here

Figure 2 here

Table 4 here

Table 5 here

Personality has a notable effect on high school performance and on subject choices. In particular, individuals with external locus of control are less likely to have good results in test scores at age 16, and they are less likely to study for A levels exams (-14 percentage points – p.p.), and less likely to choose mathematics, sciences or English as their A levels subjects. At A level, the number of “facilitating subjects” (English, mathematics, sciences, history, geography and languages) chosen by these students is likely to be lower than the one selected by their peers without external locus of control. Their grades also tend to be lower, both for English and maths at GCSE level and for mathematics and sciences at A levels (by about 8 to 11 p.p., or 15% of a standard deviation). Low self-esteem has a similar effect on performance and subject choices, but to a smaller extent. On the other hand, students with high work ethics tend to perform better in tests, are more likely to take A levels (by about 5 p.p. or 11% of a standard deviation), choose core subjects for their exams and perform better in mathematics and sciences (+ 8 to +14 p.p. or 15% to 19% of a standard deviation).

The results from PSM and AET estimation are generally consistent with those reported from OLS estimation, with slightly lower effects, on average, reported from PSM

and AET estimation. Nonetheless the degree to which PSM tightens the OLS bound is surprisingly small. OLS seems to do a reasonable job despite our reservations. Results from balancing tests for PSM model are reported and discussed in Appendix Table A1.

Interestingly, in all different specifications of model 2, external locus of control and high work ethics seem to have a stronger impact on results in mathematics and sciences, than in English, especially at A levels. It is possible that these personality traits, which are closely related to motivation and hard-working attitude impact more on these subjects, while other non-cognitive traits (such as, for example, creativity or openness to experience) may have a stronger impact on performance in English.

The negative effects of external locus of control are not surprising. External individuals tend to think that their choices have less impact on their future, which they believe are mostly driven by luck and external circumstances. As a consequence, these children are less likely to put a strong effort in their school work, as they do not believe this will impact their future. This affects their performance and their chances to achieve high results in their education. Low self-esteem has a similar but smaller effect. Children with low self-esteem struggle to see themselves as valuable, and this will affect their aspirations and effort to achieve their potential, which in turn will affect their school results and their choices related to further education. Lastly, a high level of work ethics seems to have a positive effect on test scores and subject choices. Students who are conscientious with their school work and show a rigorous attitude seem more likely to perform well at GCSE level and to be willing to continue with their education. They are also more likely to invest their time and energy in choosing core subjects and perform well in Mathematics, and Sciences.

Our findings are consistent with previous literature from psychology and economics. For example, Almlund *et al.*, 2011 discuss findings from various studies showing that

conscientiousness has very strong associations with course grades, which seems almost as large as those between grades and cognitive ability (see for example Poropat, 2009).

Results are then split by socio-economic status in Table 6. Interestingly, personality has a stronger effect on high school performance for children who come from low socio-economic backgrounds. The negative effect of external locus of control is found for both socio-economic groups, but it is stronger for students with a disadvantaged background. The chances of getting at least 5 or more GCSE with grade A*-C improve by around 11 p.p. for disadvantaged children with high work ethics, and similar effects are found for performance in English and mathematics at GCSE level. The decision on whether to take A levels is strongly influenced by personality for disadvantaged students (+ 6 p.p for children with high work ethics and -10 p.p. for those with external locus of control), while there is no effect of personality traits on children who come from advantaged families. A strong negative effect of external locus of control is also found on A level scores in mathematics (-12 p.p.) and English (-15 p.p.). Low self-esteem also has a negative effect on GCSE performance and A level scores in mathematics and the effect is limited to the disadvantaged socio-economic group.

Table 6 here

These differences are not entirely unexpected: children from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to receive positive stimulation in the home environment and to have parents who closely supervise their school work. They are also more likely to continue their education after GCSE because of the higher expectations of their families. Therefore, the role of personality traits is less important and partially outweighed by family resources. On the other hand, results for students from disadvantaged families seem to be more affected by positive or negative personality traits. It is likely that individual non-cognitive skills will have more impact in families where the children receive less support and

stimulation through their education. One obvious concern in performing this type of analysis is that growing up in a deprived socio-economic environment may affect young people's personality. Previous research has investigated whether, for example, welfare receipt can influence non-cognitive traits (Gottschalk, 2005; Baron and Cobb-Clark, 2010) but the results are inconclusive. Baron and Cobb-Clark (2010) investigate this issue using a model in which locus of control is regressed against a series of measures of socio-economic disadvantage and their results show little evidence that young disadvantaged people have a more external locus of control once family demographics and background characteristics are taken into account.

Lastly, in Table 7 we present results from the empirical strategy proposed by Altonji *et al.* (2005), where the key assumption is that selection on unobservables is set equal to selection on observables. As already explained, this assumption is quite strong and unlikely to hold in reality, therefore the estimated coefficients can be considered to be a conservative estimate of the true effect of personality traits on high school performance and subjects' choice. Results presented in Table 7 are consistent with previous estimates and the effect of personality traits persists. External locus of control has a strong negative effect on GCSE performance and A level scores, while high work ethics seem to have a very positive effect on GCSE results, and on chances to take A levels and grades in Mathematics and Sciences.

Comparing results from the AET models with the ones obtained from OLS and PSM, we find that imposing equal selection on observables and unobservables yields estimates that are a little smaller in magnitude than those of the other models, but still economically relevant and significantly different from zero, and this is consistent with our original hypotheses.

Table 7 here

As shown in Appendix Table A2, the effects of personality traits are comparable with the effect of other important variables, such as family income, presence of older siblings, or growing up in a single parent household. The results from Appendix Table A2 are highly consistent with our expectations and with previous literature on education. Generally, children from high income and high education families perform better than their disadvantaged peers. Boys have worst results than girls at GCSE levels and they are also less likely to take A levels. However, they tend to have higher scores in mathematics and sciences when they do take A levels. Ethnic minorities (and especially children with an Asian background) perform well at all exams while children from single mother households, those whose mums were very young at birth, or those who grow up with a disability or a disable parent tend to have worst results both at age 16 and 18.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

This paper has highlighted the effect of personality on performance and subjects' choice in high school. We used the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England, which is a rich source of information on English teen-agers and can be linked to the National Pupil Database, in order to get detailed information on school outcomes. We find that personality traits have a significant effect on test scores at age 16 and 17-18 and this effect is particularly relevant for children who come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. The size of the effect is notable and is comparable to other important variables, such as family income, presence of older siblings, or growing up in a single parent household.

Our analysis is performed using Ordinary Least Squares, Propensity Score Matching and the methodology proposed by Altonji *et al.* (2005) which relies on using the selection on observable traits to provide information about the selection on unobservable characteristics. We make extensive use of the information contained in LSYPE and increase our set of

independent variables, in order to control for wider factors affecting both school outcomes and personality traits. Our results are stable over the two different specifications of our model. Moreover, Propensity Score Matching and AET allow us to better compare a group of children who did not have specific personality traits with observationally similar children who have those characteristics, given our independent variables.

The paper provides further evidence of the positive (negative) effects of high work ethics (external locus of control and low self-esteem) on cognitive outcomes that are well known to have important effects on lifecycle living standards. In particular, we show that external locus of control and high work ethics have strong and opposite effects on performance in mathematics and sciences, especially at A levels. Our results also show that the size of the effect is notable for children coming from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, who probably receive less support in their education from their families.

A variety of interventions have been suggested that exploit the early malleability of personality to improve long term outcomes. Selective personality-targeted interventions that focus on specific personality traits as risk factors for negative and harmful behaviours have recently been shown to be more effective than universal prevention programs (see for example Conrod *et al.*, 2010, Foxcroft and Tsertsvadze, 2011, Conrod *et al.*, 2013). In the UK, an example of these policies is SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning), a voluntary program designed to develop the social and emotional skills of all school pupils in the areas of self-awareness, managing feelings, empathy, motivation and social skills. SEAL is currently being implemented in around 90% of primary schools and 70% of secondary schools. Various evaluations of SEAL have been conducted. Hallam, Rhamie and Shaw (2006) concluded that primary SEAL “had a major impact on children’s well-being, confidence, social and communication skills, relationships, including bullying, playtime behaviour, pro-social behaviour and attitudes towards schools”. The evaluations of a number

of existing policies have shown that changing personality is possible and interventions are useful, especially when they target young children and adolescents. We believe that our study shows some of the ultimate benefits of these programs, which span a wide range of achievements, which might have important long lasting consequences on individuals' lives and society as a whole.

The results here strongly suggest that there is a potential for policies that exploit possible changes in personality to promote positive educational choices and achievements in adolescence – outcomes that are important determinants of long run living standards.

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Tables

Table 1 Summary of main findings in the literature on the effects of childcare on children outcomes (in alphabetical order)

Paper	Data	Method	Main findings
Baron and Cobb-Clark (2010)	Youth in Focus	OLS, Probit Ordered probit	A s.d. increase in locus of control increases the probability of high school graduation by 4.5 p.p.
Coleman and Deleire (2003)	NELS	Probit	A s.d. increase in youths' sense of control results in a 2 to 3pp increase in the probability of completing high school.
Cebi (2007)	NLSY	Probit	Locus of control is not a significant determinant of educational outcomes once cognitive ability is controlled for. However, locus of control is rewarded in the labor market later in life.
Borghans et al. (2008)	128 students from Maastricht University	Experimental analysis	Subjects with favorable personality traits such as high performance-motivation and an internal locus of control perform relatively well in the absence of rewards.
Heckman et al., 2006	NLSY79	Structural model	Non-cognitive skills affect years of schooling and college performance.
Delaney et al., 2013	Irish University Study	OLS with a broad set of covariates	Conscientiousness and future-orientation predict lecture attendance and additional study
Carneiro et al., 2007	NCDS58	OLS	Social maladjustment score at age 11 has an important effect on decision to stay at school after age 16 and education achievements at age 42
Lundberg, 2013	NLSAH-Add Health	LPM	Conscientiousness has no significant impact on the education of disadvantaged men, while openness to experience has an effect on chances of college graduation only for less-disadvantaged men and women.
Coneus et al., 2009	GSOEP	Probit and IV	Internal locus of control reduces the risk to drop out from education
Jacob, 2002	NELS	Probit and Oaxaca decomposition	Higher non-cognitive skills make women more likely to attend college
Silles, 2010	NCDS	OLS	Social maladjustment is associated with worst educational attainment (test score at age 16)
Kalil et al., 2010	NLSY97	OLS and Blinder Oaxaca decomposition	Non cognitive skills are strong predictor of educational attainment (years of education and college attendance)

Table 2 - Outcomes

<i>Test Scores</i>	<i>Variable</i>
Has 5 or more GCSE with A*-C	Binary (1/0)
Has achieved A*-C in GCSE Mathematics	Binary (1/0)
Has achieved A*-C in GCSE English	Binary (1/0)
Has A levels	Binary (1/0)
A level points	In points
Has A level - Mathematics	Binary (1/0)
A level points - Mathematics	In points
Has A level - Science	Binary (1/0)
A level points - Science	In points
Has A level - English	Binary (1/0)
A level points - English	In points
No. facilitating subjects (Maths, Science, English, History, Geography, Languages)	Number of subjects (from 0 to 6)

Table 3 – Descriptive statistics of outcome variables by locus of control, self-esteem and work ethics

	Whole sample	External	Low Self-Esteem	High Work ethics
Has 5 + GCSE with A*-C - %	55.4	32.8	53.0	63.7
Has GCSEA*-C in English - %	67.6	45.1	67.3	74.8
Has GCSEA*-C in Maths - %	62.6	40.6	58.1	69.3
Has A levels - %	39.6	22.4	38.8	47.4
Points in A levels – mean (sd)	260.9 (132.7)	232.72 (127.1)	260.26 (126.3)	264.53 (138.5)
Has A levels – Maths - %	8.9	3.2	6.7	11.3
Points in A levels Maths – mean (sd)	113.36 (52.1)	108.5 (53.0)	111.7 (54.6)	122.5 (57.6)
Has A levels – Science - %	12	4.8	10	16.1
Points in A levels Science – mean (sd)	135.18 (76.5)	133.33 (70.2)	129.62 (76.7)	141.85 (76.4)
Has A levels – English - %	12	7.2	12.7	14.8
Points in A levels English – mean (sd)	92.48 (28.9)	84.55 (24.8)	90.56 (26.6)	97.12 (29.0)
No. facilitating subjects (Maths, Science, English, History, Geography, Languages) mean (sd)	1.2 (0.9)	0.9 (0.8)	1.1 (0.9)	1.3 (0.9)

Table 4 Effect of personality traits on high school performance and subjects' choice – OLS Estimation Results

	5+GCSE A*-C	GCSE A*-C English	GCSE A*-C Maths	A levels	A levels points score	A level in Maths	A level points in Maths	A levels in Science	A level points in Science	A levels in English	A level points in English	No. facil. subjects
Model 1												
External Locus of Control	-0.272 (0.013)***	-0.273 (0.013)***	-0.260 (0.013)***	-0.194 (0.013)***	-36.520 (7.433)***	-0.040 (0.022)*	-5.969 (2.835)**	-0.056 (0.024)**	-7.311 (4.001)*	-0.063 (0.024)***	-8.015 (2.364)***	-0.240 (0.051)***
High Work Ethics	0.065 (0.014)***	0.052 (0.013)***	0.051 (0.014)***	0.075 (0.014)***	4.445 (5.978)	0.010 (0.018)	3.412 (2.280)	0.057 (0.020)***	11.402 (3.218)***	-0.001 (0.019)	0.911 (1.901)	0.128 (0.041)***
Low Self-Esteem	-0.002 (0.013)	0.013 (0.012)	-0.026 (0.013)**	0.013 (0.013)	0.812 (6.017)	-0.046 (0.018)***	-5.541 (2.295)**	-0.046 (0.020)**	-6.704 (3.239)**	0.055 (0.019)***	5.011 (1.914)***	-0.065 (0.041)
N. observations	6,964	6,964	6,964	7,053	2,810	2,810	2,810	2,810	2,810	2,810	2,810	2,810
F stat (p-value)	74.80 (0.00)	89.61 (0.00)	68.18 (0.00)	52.25 (0.00)	10.47 (0.00)	16.92 (0.00)	13.94 (0.00)	8.07 (0.00)	7.14 (0.00)	15.05 (0.00)	14.15 (0.00)	10.86 (0.00)
Model 2												
External Locus of Control	-0.218 (0.014)***	-0.221 (0.013)***	-0.210 (0.014)***	-0.153 (0.014)***	-33.198 (8.045)***	-0.059 (0.025)**	-7.464 (3.143)**	-0.066 (0.028)**	-7.329 (4.436)*	-0.044 (0.027)	-5.932 (2.708)**	-0.236 (0.057)***
High Work Ethics	0.069 (0.015)***	0.054 (0.014)***	0.049 (0.015)***	0.064 (0.015)***	9.332 (6.375)	0.020 (0.020)	5.713 (2.491)**	0.079 (0.022)***	13.765 (3.515)***	-0.016 (0.022)	0.208 (2.146)	0.152 (0.045)***
Low Self-Esteem	-0.005 (0.014)	0.015 (0.013)	-0.027 (0.014)**	0.005 (0.014)	0.197 (6.384)	-0.049 (0.020)**	-5.382 (2.495)**	-0.057 (0.022)***	-9.920 (3.521)***	0.049 (0.022)**	3.783 (2.149)*	-0.077 (0.045)*
N. observations	5,572	5,572	5,572	5,646	2,278	2,278	2,278	2,278	2,278	2,278	2,278	2,278
F stat (p-value)	58.99 (0.00)	64.14 (0.00)	52.23 (0.00)	44.99 (0.00)	12.49 (0.00)	7.66 (0.00)	7.04 (0.00)	5.29 (0.00)	6.29 (0.00)	5.09 (0.00)	4.62 (0.00)	7.91 (0.00)

Note: Standard errors are in brackets. * indicates that the underlying coefficient is significant at 10% level, ** at 5% and ***at 1%. Additional variables included in the analysis are listed at p. 12.

Table 5 *Effect of personality traits on high school performance and subjects' choice – PSM Estimation Results*

	5+GCSE A*-C	GCSE A*-C English	GCSE A*- C Maths	A levels	A levels points score	A level in Maths	A level points in Maths	A levels in Science	A level points in Science	A levels in English	A level points in English	No. facil. subjects
Model 1												
External	-0.293	-0.316	-0.258	-0.208	-50.808	-0.034	-6.882	-0.0946	-15.381	-0.044	-7.251	-0.300
Locus of	(0.030)***	(0.028)***	(0.0298)***	(0.029)***	(12.280)***	(0.036)	(4.691)	(0.041)**	(6.613)**	(0.040)	(3.966)*	(0.083)***
Control	7,331	7,331	7,331	7,428	2,903	2,903	2,903	2,903	2,903	2,903	2,903	2,903
High	0.079	0.079	0.073	0.084	-8.120	0.048	9.022	0.008	5.499	-0.014	-2.105	0.068
Work	(0.028)***	(0.027)***	(0.028)**	(0.027)***	(9.968)	(0.029)*	(3.524)**	(0.033)	(5.128)	(0.032)	(3.150)	(0.068)
Ethics	9,194	9,194	9,194	9,309	3,692	3,692	3,692	3,692	3,692	3,692	3,692	3,692
Low Self-	-0.045	-0.045	-0.054	-0.034	-17.62	-0.039	-4.247	-0.046	-3.126	0.035	1.651	-0.194
Esteem	(0.030)	(0.029)	(0.030)*	(0.028)	(10.74)*	(0.031)	(3.833)	(0.034)	(5.323)	(0.034)	(3.407)	(0.074)***
	10,458	10,458	10,458	10,611	3,987	3,987	3,987	3,987	3,987	3,987	3,987	3,987
Model 2												
External	-0.231	-0.164	-0.209	-0.145	-27.596	-0.068	-8.308	-0.115	-12.047	-0.024	-5.163	-0.287
Locus of	(0.021)***	(0.021)***	(0.021)***	(0.019)**	(11.058)**	(0.032)**	(3.928)***	(0.037)***	(5.494)***	(0.036)	(3.469)	(0.074)***
Control	5,857	5,857	5,857	5,936	2,331	2,331	2,331	2,331	2,331	2,331	2,331	2,331
High	0.108	0.073	0.091	0.052	21.714	0.052	7.972	0.092	14.095	0.001	1.931	0.228
Work	(0.020)***	(0.018)***	(0.019)***	(0.019)**	(8.517)**	(0.024)**	(3.094)**	(0.026)***	(4.303)***	(0.026)	(2.613)	(0.057)***
Ethics	7,310	7,310	7,310	7,403	2,981	2,981	2,981	2,981	2,981	2,981	2,981	2,981
Low Self-	-0.065	0.007	-0.078	-0.016	-2.002	-0.048	-4.296	-0.055	-7.572	0.033	-0.024	-0.099
Esteem	(0.017)***	(0.016)	(0.017)***	(0.016)	(7.704)	(0.022)**	(2.680)	(0.025)**	(3.941)*	(0.025)	(2.473)	(0.053)*
	8,293	8,293	8,293	8,414	3,215	3,215	3,215	3,215	3,215	3,215	3,215	3,215

Note: Standard errors are in brackets. * indicates that the underlying coefficient is significant at 10% level, ** at 5% and ***at 1%. Additional variables included in the analysis are listed at p. 12.

Table 6 *Effect of personality traits on high school performance and subjects' choice – PSM Estimation Results by socio-economic status*

	5+GCSE A*-C	GCSE A*-C English	GCSE A*-C Maths	A levels	A levels points score	A level in Maths	A level points in Maths	A levels in Science	A level points in Science	A levels in English	A level points in English	No. facil. subjects
Advantaged Children												
External Locus of Control	-0.163 (0.033)*** 2,713	-0.163 (0.028)*** 2,713	-0.139 (0.031)*** 2,713	-0.172 (0.033) 2,744	-34.417 (14.298)*** 1,485	-0.092 (0.043)*** 1,485	-12.912 (5.688)* 1,485	-0.0970 (0.047)** 1,485	0.097 (0.047)** 1,485	0.058 (0.045) 1,485	2.233 (4.453) 1,485	-0.320 (0.093)*** 1,485
High Work Ethics	0.042 (0.027) 3,307	0.026 (0.022) 3,307	0.025 (0.025) 3,307	0.049 (0.030) 3,343	16.446 (10.844) 1,846	0.010 (0.034) 1,846	8.020 (4.605)* 1,846	0.063 (0.0368)* 1,846	0.063 (0.0368)* 1,846	0.002 (0.035) 1,846	2.284 (3.767) 1,846	0.088 (0.075) 1,846
Low Self-Esteem	0.002 (0.024) 3,667	0.014 (0.021) 3,667	-0.014 (0.023) 3,667	-0.038 (0.025) 3,706	0.794 (9.788) 1,986	-0.021 (0.028) 1,986	-2.170 (3.751) 1,986	0.0367 (0.0317) 1,986	-0.037 (0.032) 1,986	0.042 (0.032) 1,986	4.961 (3.981) 1,986	0.073 (0.064) 1,986
Disadvantaged children												
External Locus of Control	-0.161 (0.025)*** 3,092	-0.195 (0.027)*** 3,092	-0.157 (0.026)*** 3,092	-0.100 (0.022)*** 3,136	-39.449 (17.352)*** 835	-0.118 (0.050)*** 835	-11.968 (5.316)*** 835	-0.102 (0.058)* 835	-4.094 (6.838) 835	-0.149 (0.055)** 835	-14.488 (5.425)*** 835	-0.322 (0.118)** 835
High Work Ethics	0.120 (0.026)*** 3,936	0.116 (0.026)*** 3,936	0.107 (0.026)*** 3,936	0.057 (0.025)** 3,991	-0.118 (11.911) 1,118	0.026 (0.033) 1,118	1.893 (3.844) 1,118	0.062 (0.038) 1,118	5.384 (5.975) 1,118	-0.021 (0.039) 1,118	-0.710 (3.625) 1,118	0.157 (0.082)* 1,118
Low Self-esteem	-0.040 (0.023)* 4,546	-0.006 (0.023) 4,546	-0.066 (0.023)*** 4,546	0.014 (0.020) 4,623	-6.996 (12.235) 1,211	-0.039 (0.032) 1,211	-5.940 (3.511)* 1,211	-0.006 (0.039) 1,211	-8.382 (5.894) 1,211	0.036 (0.041) 1,211	2.112 (3.936) 1,211	0.000 (0.086) 1,211

Note: Standard errors are in brackets. * indicates that the underlying coefficient is significant at 10% level, ** at 5% and ***at 1%. Additional variables included in the analysis are listed at p. 9.

Table 7 *Effect of personality traits on high school performance and subjects' choice – AET Test Results*
Assumption: Selection on observables = Selection on unobservables

	5+GCSE A*-C	GCSE A*-C English	GCSE A*-C Maths	A levels	A levels points score	A level in Maths	A level points in Maths	A levels in Science	A level points in Science	A levels in English	A level points in English	N. facil. subjects
Model 2												
External Locus of Control	-0.054 (0.018)***	-0.065 (0.018)***	-0.045 (0.018)**	0.019 (0.018)	-18.353 (10.088)*	-0.011 (0.031)	-2.194 (3.923)	-0.024 (0.036)	-2.033 (5.638)	-0.008 (0.035)	-2.596 (3.415)	-0.083 (0.070)
High Work Ethics	0.094 (0.011)***	0.082 (0.012)***	0.075 (0.013)***	0.098 (0.012)***	25.844 (7.783)***	0.057 (0.023)**	10.473 (3.099)***	0.090 (0.028)***	15.924 (4.463)***	0.004 (0.016)	3.136 (2.703)	0.250 (0.055)***
Low Self- Esteem	-0.042 (0.010)***	-0.026 (0.009)***	-0.058 (0.010)**	-0.012 (0.010)	-7.209 (4.785)	0.021 (0.022)	1.028 (2.955)	0.015 (0.027)	-3.739 (4.368)	0.032 (0.017)	2.641 (1.613)	-0.086 (0.033)

Note: Standard errors are in brackets. * indicates that the underlying coefficient is significant at 10% level, ** at 5% and ***at 1%. Additional variables included in the analysis are listed at p. 9.

Figure 1 - Histogram of propensity scores of treatment vs. control group

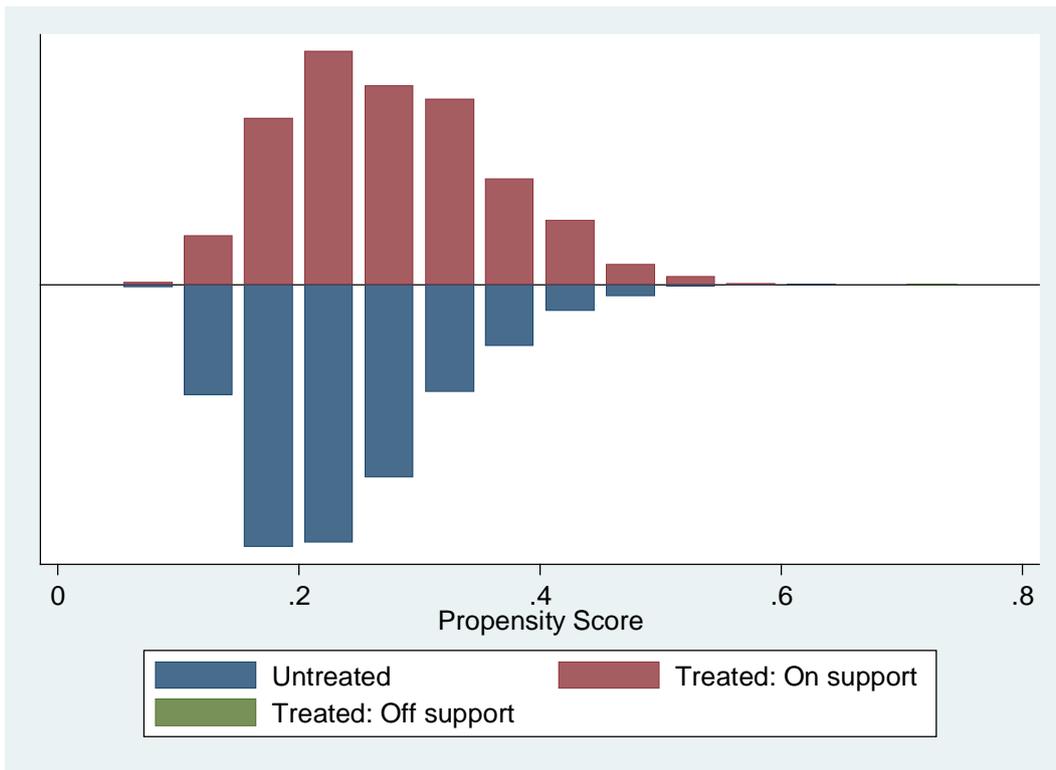
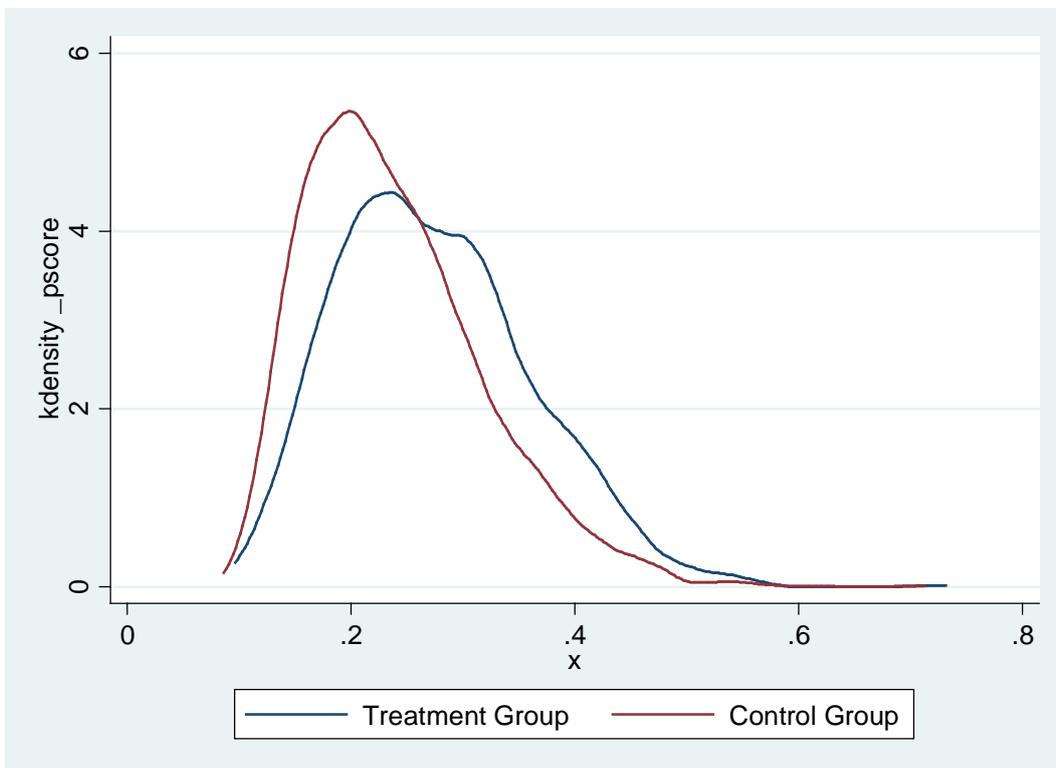


Figure 2 - Kernel graphs of propensity score for treated and control group



Model 2 – Effect of external locus of control on having 5 or more GCSE with A*-C.

Appendix

Locus of control – Questions in LSYPE

1. I can pretty much decide what happens in my life
2. If someone is not a success in life, it is usually his fault
3. How well you get in this world is mostly a matter of luck
4. Even if I do well at school, I will have a hard time
5. People like me do not have much of a chance
6. If you work hard at something, you will usually succeed

Possible answers:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Work ethics – Questions in LSYPE

1. Doing well at school means a lot to me
2. At school, I work as hard as I can
3. Working hard at school now will help me to get on later in life
4. If you work hard at something, you will usually succeed

Possible answers:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Self-esteem – Questions in LSYPE

1. How useful you have felt recently?
2. How much you have been thinking of yourself as a worthless person recently?

Possible answers:

- Not at all
- No more than usual
- Rather more than usual
- Much more than usual.

Table A1 Balance tests for Propensity Score Matching (Estimation of the effect of external locus of control on chances of getting 5+ GCSE A-C – Model 2)*

Variable	Mean - Treated	Mean Control	% Bias	% Fall in Bias	t	p
HH yearly income >31,200£	0.247	0.268	-4.5	82.9	-1.27	0.203
HH yearly income betw. 11,400£ and 31,200£	0.487	0.464	4.6	66.1	1.23	0.220
Birth weight	3.312	3.310	0.4	92.5	0.10	0.919
Premature birth	0.098	0.093	1.8	-22.2	0.50	0.614
Has older siblings	1.025	1.003	2.0	88.2	0.50	0.620
Grandparents went to university	0.069	0.061	3.0	64.1	0.90	0.368
Child has disability	0.169	0.183	-3.9	67.0	-0.97	0.330
Main parent has disability	0.219	0.222	-0.8	85.0	-0.22	0.823
Mother has a university degree	0.091	0.092	-0.2	98.8	-0.06	0.949
Mother has other higher education	0.119	0.135	-4.6	52.1	-1.28	0.200
Mother senior high school graduate	0.153	0.153	0.0	100.0	-0.00	1.000
Mother junior high school graduate	0.282	0.280	0.5	93.1	0.12	0.901
Mother has qualifications level 1 or below	0.112	0.127	-4.9	51.6	-1.20	0.230
Mother has other qualification	0.038	0.033	2.7	56.6	0.70	0.487
Male	0.543	0.545	-0.3	95.5	-0.07	0.941
Single parent at birth	0.252	0.238	3.3	76.7	0.86	0.388
Mother younger than 20 at birth	0.091	0.079	4.5	69.2	1.13	0.260
Black	0.054	0.047	3.0	-487.3	0.84	0.399
Asian	0.088	0.075	4.4	-302.2	1.22	0.223
Mixed	0.077	0.096	-7.3	-3.7	-1.78	0.076
Mother was unemployed at wave 1	0.015	0.015	-0.6	81.9	-0.15	0.881
Mother was out of the labour force at wave 1	0.288	0.274	3.2	80.7	0.83	0.409
Single mother at wave 1	0.274	0.266	2.1	88.1	0.54	0.587

A summary of the distribution of the absolute bias shows that before matching: Mean = 10.83 SD=8.70 and after matching: Mean = 2.81; SD=1.96

Table A1 shows results from balance tests of the estimation performed with Model 2 on the effect of external locus of control on the chances of getting 5 or more GCSE with grade A*-C. The output shows values of each variable for the matched sample. In each row, it shows the mean of the variable for the treatment group and the mean for the control group. It also shows the “%bias,” which is the standardized bias. This “bias” is defined as the difference of the mean values of the treatment group and the (not matched / matched) non treatment group, divided by the square root of the average sample variance in the treatment group and the not matched non treatment group. The

table also shows the % reduction in bias, which is how much of this bias was eliminated by matching. In this example, there are few variables exhibiting negative values for this column (meaning that the bias increased as a result of matching) and these are mostly cases in which the bias was already very low before matching. To assess balance, one should look at both the bias and the mean differences between treatment and control in the matched sample. In our example, the bias is significantly reduced after matching (the mean goes from 10.83 to 2.81). The last two columns present results from a t-test on the hypothesis that the mean value of each variable is the same in the treatment group and the non-treatment group after matching. If $p > 0.1$, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected on the 10% significance level. The null hypothesis that the mean values of the two groups do not differ after matching cannot be rejected for most of the variables included in our analysis. By matching, the differences between treatment group and non-treatment group are reduced considerably.

Table A2 Effect of other independent variables on high school performance and subjects' choice - OLS Estimation Results from Model 2

	5+GCSE A*-C	GCSE A*-C in English	GCSE A*-C in Maths	Has A level	A level points
HH income >31,200£	0.119 (0.018)***	0.129 (0.017)***	0.104 (0.018)***	0.111 (0.019)***	15.706 (8.530)*
Income betw. 11,400£ - 31,200£	0.014 (0.016)	0.022 (0.015)	0.015 (0.016)	0.012 (0.016)	3.589 (8.255)
Birth weight	0.032 (0.012)***	0.026 (0.011)**	0.043 (0.012)***	0.003 (0.012)	-3.922 (5.536)
Premature birth	-0.028 (0.022)	-0.023 (0.020)	-0.007 (0.022)	-0.016 (0.022)	-8.485 (10.513)
Has older siblings	-0.039 (0.006)***	-0.039 (0.005)***	-0.039 (0.006)***	-0.035 (0.006)***	-8.534 (3.041)***
Grandparents went to university	0.110 (0.021)***	0.073 (0.020)***	0.095 (0.021)***	0.075 (0.021)***	50.659 (8.437)***
Child has disability	-0.088 (0.017)***	-0.078 (0.016)***	-0.090 (0.017)***	-0.029 (0.017)*	7.860 (8.583)
Main parent has disability	-0.034 (0.015)**	-0.046 (0.014)***	-0.016 (0.015)	-0.030 (0.015)**	-1.970 (7.465)
Mother – University degree	0.333 (0.025)***	0.299 (0.023)***	0.303 (0.024)***	0.318 (0.025)***	89.468 (11.832)***
Mother – other Higher educ.	0.225 (0.024)***	0.257 (0.022)***	0.211 (0.023)***	0.216 (0.024)***	50.680 (11.952)***
Mother senior high school gr.	0.194 (0.023)***	0.216 (0.022)***	0.199 (0.023)***	0.148 (0.023)***	37.695 (12.133)***
Mother junior high school gr.	0.120 (0.020)***	0.146 (0.019)***	0.130 (0.020)***	0.067 (0.020)***	15.518 (11.195)
Mother has low qualification	0.015 (0.026)	0.024 (0.024)	0.036 (0.025)	-0.034 (0.026)	-9.850 (15.581)
Mother has other qualification	0.033 (0.038)	0.094 (0.035)***	0.076 (0.037)**	0.064 (0.038)*	41.881 (20.703)**
Male	-0.073 (0.012)***	-0.130 (0.011)***	-0.029 (0.012)**	-0.072 (0.012)***	-16.872 (5.595)***
Single parent at birth	-0.049 (0.017)***	-0.055 (0.016)***	-0.025 (0.017)	-0.041 (0.017)**	-27.793 (8.943)***
Mother younger than 20 at birth	-0.186 (0.026)***	-0.194 (0.024)***	-0.194 (0.025)***	-0.154 (0.026)***	-73.538 (17.073)***
Black	-0.055 (0.027)**	0.009 (0.025)	-0.035 (0.026)	-0.051 (0.027)*	-35.044 (13.428)***
Asian	0.136 (0.022)***	0.120 (0.021)***	0.141 (0.022)***	0.188 (0.023)***	8.481 (9.586)
Mixed	0.088 (0.025)***	0.083 (0.023)***	0.083 (0.025)***	0.027 (0.025)	22.888 (11.735)*
Mother unemployed at wave 1	-0.082 (0.055)	0.043 (0.052)	-0.070 (0.055)	-0.034 (0.056)	-18.188 (31.112)
Mother out of the labour force at wave 1	-0.033 (0.015)**	-0.022 (0.014)	-0.052 (0.015)***	-0.008 (0.015)	16.021 (7.577)**
Single mother at wave 1	-0.067 (0.017)***	-0.034 (0.016)**	-0.082 (0.017)***	-0.070 (0.017)***	-11.575 (9.043)
Constant	0.407 (0.046)***	0.551 (0.043)***	0.432 (0.045)***	0.338 (0.046)***	231.888 (22.789)***
R^2	0.22	0.23	0.20	0.17	0.13
N	5,572	5,572	5,572	5,646	2,278

Note: Standard errors are in brackets. * indicates that the underlying coefficient is significant at 10% level, ** at 5% and *** at 1%

*Table A2 Effect of other independent variables on high school performance and subjects' choice - OLS Estimation
Results from Model 2 - Cont.*

	A levels in Maths	A levels in Maths – Points	A level in Sciences	A level in Sciences –Points	A level in English	A level in English - Points	N. of facilitating subjects
HH income	0.055	5.941	0.048	6.450	-0.011	0.673	0.179
>31,200	(0.026)**	(3.333)*	(0.029)*	(4.704)	(0.029)	(2.871)	(0.060)***
Income 11,400£	0.028	2.125	0.028	1.976	-0.034	-0.924	0.030
-31,200£	(0.025)	(3.226)	(0.028)	(4.552)	(0.028)	(2.779)	(0.058)
Birth weight	0.005	-0.725	0.014	1.347	-0.018	-1.712	-0.002
	(0.017)	(2.163)	(0.019)	(3.053)	(0.019)	(1.864)	(0.039)
Prem. birth	-0.040	-3.573	-0.011	-2.052	-0.039	-3.511	-0.031
	(0.032)	(4.108)	(0.036)	(5.797)	(0.036)	(3.539)	(0.0580)
Has older siblings	-0.032	-3.419	-0.024	-4.230	0.002	0.039	-0.075
	(0.009)***	(1.188)***	(0.010)**	(1.677)**	(0.010)	(1.024)	(0.021)***
Grandp. went to university	0.053	5.195	0.072	15.484	0.029	4.382	0.156
	(0.026)**	(3.297)	(0.029)**	(4.653)***	(0.029)	(2.840)	(0.060)***
Child has disabilty	-0.006	0.761	-0.006	1.973	0.010	0.520	-0.046
	(0.026)	(3.354)	(0.029)	(4.733)	(0.029)	(2.889)	(0.060)
Main parent has disability	0.008	2.701	-0.015	-1.783	0.007	0.603	0.020
	(0.023)	(2.917)	(0.026)	(4.117)	(0.025)	(2.513)	(0.052)
Mother university degree	0.089	15.928	0.076	25.115	0.112	12.049	0.369
	(0.036)**	(4.623)***	(0.041)*	(6.525)***	(0.040)***	(3.983)***	(0.084)***
Mother has other higher educ.	0.019	5.858	0.035	9.424	0.128	11.755	0.227
	(0.037)	(4.670)	(0.041)	(6.591)	(0.041)***	(4.023)***	(0.084)***
Mother senior high school gr.	0.041	6.983	0.015	3.900	0.086	7.554	0.179
	(0.037)	(4.741)	(0.042)	(6.691)	(0.041)**	(4.084)*	(0.085)**
Mother junior high school gr.	0.029	4.355	-0.002	1.354	0.090	7.139	0.116
	(0.034)	(4.375)	(0.038)	(6.174)	(0.038)**	(3.769)*	(0.079)
Mother has low qualif.	-0.070	-5.092	-0.132	-13.144	0.069	5.655	-0.097
	(0.048)	(6.088)	(0.053)**	(8.592)	(0.053)	(5.245)	(0.110)
Mother has other qualification	0.079	6.224	0.076	14.474	0.039	3.399	0.205
	(0.064)	(8.090)	(0.071)	(11.417)	(0.071)	(6.969)	(0.146)
Male	0.128	14.531	0.076	6.616	-0.177	-16.369	0.015
	(0.017)***	(2.186)***	(0.019)***	(3.085)**	(0.019)***	(1.883)***	(0.040)
Single parent at birth	-0.067	-7.867	-0.040	-8.043	0.011	-0.552	-0.239
	(0.028)***	(3.494)**	(0.031)	(4.932)	(0.030)	(3.010)	(0.063)***

	A levels in Maths	A levels in Maths – Points	A level in Sciences	A level in Sciences –Points	A level in English	A level in English - Points	N. of facilitating subjects
Mother younger than 20 at birth	-0.047 (0.053)	-8.777 (6.671)	-0.067 (0.059)	-8.378 (9.415)	-0.023 (0.058)	-1.944 (5.747)	-0.289 (0.121)**
Black	-0.001 (0.041)	-3.246 (5.247)	-0.082 (0.046)*	-15.650 (7.405)**	-0.012 (0.046)	-0.508 (4.520)	-0.228 (0.095)**
Asian	0.193 (0.029)***	20.877 (3.746)***	0.124 (0.033)***	20.905 (5.286)***	-0.041 (0.033)	-4.466 (3.227)	0.034 (0.068)
Mixed	0.136 (0.036)***	17.084 (4.585)***	0.118 (0.040)***	19.777 (6.471)***	-0.070 (0.040)*	-6.151 (3.950)	0.172 (0.083)**
Mother was unemployed at wave 1	0.074 (0.096)	5.547 (12.157)	-0.061 (0.107)	-10.961 (17.157)	0.191 (0.106)*	10.265 (10.473)	0.248 (0.220)
Mother was out of the labour force at wave 1	-0.008 (0.023)	0.143 (2.960)	0.036 (0.026)	6.342 (4.178)	0.023 (0.026)	2.203 (2.550)	0.051 (0.054)
Single mother at wave 1	-0.026 (0.028)	-4.283 (3.534)	-0.025 (0.031)	-4.283 (4.987)	-0.023 (0.031)	-1.737 (3.044)	-0.070 (0.064)
Constant	0.092 (0.070)	10.674 (8.905)	0.162 (0.078)**	19.039 (12.567)	0.359 (0.078)***	31.868 (7.671)***	0.992 (0.161)***
R^2	0.08	0.08	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.08
N	2,278	2,278	2,278	2,278	2,278	2,278	2,278

Note: Standard errors are in brackets. * indicates that the underlying coefficient is significant at 10% level, ** at 5% and ***at 1%.