

# Subject Acceleration in NSW Secondary Schools

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## Interview Result Analysis

### What age is it the most appropriate to begin subject acceleration?

Average age of respondents	15 years	7 months
Average age when acceleration commenced	14 years	5 months
Average time spent in the acceleration program	1 year	2 months

### Is radical subject acceleration rare?

Academic Year	No. of Students
1 year	255
2 years	20
3 years	3
No response	1

### What access to acceleration can be arranged?

Number of students attending classes in the same school	262
Number of students not attending classes in the same school	17

### Alternatives for when classes were not taken in the same school

- Skipped grade in year 7. Computing Studies at school. French at OTEN.
- Accelerated in Mathematics in year 6. Attended senior campus on the same site.
- "I didn't attend any classes" ...studied alone
- Attended Science classes but only assessments in English
- Attended Physics at the same school, but attended 3 unit Mathematics after hours
- Attended Saturday school
- Private tuition
- "I was enrolled in the Open High School.

### Do accelerants need to attend all periods in their assigned classes?

Ability to attend all periods of the class assigned

<b>Yes</b>	210
<b>No</b>	67
<b>X</b>	2

### Periods possible to attend

- 14 students were not able to attend any periods at all
- 7 students were able to attend 1 period
- 6 students - 2 periods

- 6 students - 3 periods
- 10 students - 4 periods
- 4 students - 5 periods
- 1 student - 6 periods
- 1 student - 7 periods

**Lesson notes needed from students/teachers**

**Yes** 103  
**No** 135  
**X** 41 \*accelerated classes

**Make up assignments for missed time**

**Yes** 70  
**No** 164  
**X** 45 \*accelerated classes

**Do accelerants have to be in a class on their own?**

**Yes** 50 18%  
**No** 226 82%  
**X** 3

**Other Accelerants in the Class**

- 26 students shared a class with 1 other accelerant
- 21 students - 2 other accelerants
- 21 students - 3 other accelerants
- 19 students - 4 other accelerants
- 192 students - whole class accelerated

**What pedagogical differences surround subject acceleration interventions?**

Aspect	Number	%
Independent study	167	59%
Complexity of the concepts presented	151	54%
Level of competition from classmates	151	54%
Level of analytical skills required	143	51%
Level of class discussion	111	40%
Way teachers express themselves	109	39%

**Was technology designed to assist distance learning used?**

**Yes** 34  
**No** 224  
**X** 21

Computer software	21	Internet	8
Video tapes	11	Email	6
Audio tapes	8	Video conferencing	2

**Is a resource room or learning centre available?**

Yes	189	69%
No	83	31%
X	7	

**Number of students who have experience with subject enrichment**

Yes	126	46%
No	148	54%
X	5	

Competitions	78
Special classes	48
Independent study	46
Extra assignments	43
Research projects	39
Camps/workshops	29

**How are students referred for acceleration interventions?**

Self referral	25
Teacher referral	147
Parent referral	5
Other	54
X	49

Comments	Combination of Methods
Students-teacher-parent+ interview/ reference	16
The school programme/policy	12
The whole grade was accelerated in Agriculture	10
The acceleration of a whole class	7
Skills test and interview	7
OLSAT test	4
Examination results	2
Friends	2

**What is the optimum number of accelerants in a class?**

*"It would have been better for me if more than one accelerant had joined the class."*

Strongly agree	7	Disagree	9
Agree	14	Strongly disagree	5

Undecided	6	No	41
X [in whole classes]	238		

### Why do you feel this way?

#### *Strongly agree/agree*

- Better learning environment
- Provides more motivation
- Give me somebody with a similar background to relate to
- Because we would be able to share our work
- You feel more comfortable and 'in'
- We could support each other – it was quite isolated
- Not enough consideration for single accelerant
- I get teased quite a great deal
- I was often distracted from my work
- Other people are in your situation
- Have someone the same year as you in the class
- This would provide competition, and someone to talk to about what I was doing other than a teacher
- Safety in numbers(!) In 1st semester I felt a little isolated but this made it hard to know what standard your work was as there was no one to compare it.

#### *Disagree/strongly disagree*

- I don't think it would have made any difference
- More people causes one to lose motivation
- Being the only accelerant forced me to integrate into the class
- It would have had no effect
- I enjoy and work better individually and my thoughts aren't interrupted

#### *Undecided*

- At first I met with a little bit of prejudice against me but then I made better friends with the year 12's who accepted me as equal/one of them
- It would be fun if there was another accelerant, but doing it alone taught me independence
- Originally there were difficulties, but hostility from classmates was lower with less accelerants
- Would not affect outcome
- It would have been a help
- It would depend who was accelerated

Would you prefer to stay with age mates in a lower year and do enrichment in best subjects rather than accelerate?

Yes	19	7%
No	180	68%
Undecided	65	25%
X	15	

*No*

<b>Time saved/extra time available</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Enjoyed the challenge</b>	<b>14</b>
Enjoyed accelerated program	8
<b>Companions to accelerate with</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Everyone in class accelerated</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Good to get units out of the way</b>	<b>14</b>
HSC experience	4
Lighter load of subjects	8
Spreads out HSC	2
<b>Work not challenging/boring in cohort class</b>	<b>17</b>
Concentrate on best subject	5
Pressure/stress lessened	4
Can concentrate on other subjects next year	5
Increased knowledge, faster pace	7
Best to work at your level, not age	4
Comfortable with accelerated classmates	6
Competition – harder	4
Happy and coping	3
Rewarding/interesting	2
Can do more units	4
Enrichment can be had as well – opportunities	4
Enrichment not as good as acceleration	5
Motivation improved	2

Acceleration allows you to make great friends, even though you may have rivals from a class higher than yourself. It's a wonderful learning experience and gives you first hand experience before the bulk of your HSC.

*Undecided*

<b>Benefits and disadvantages of acceleration</b>	<b>23</b>
Wish I'd stayed versus good experience of acceleration	3
Enjoy it more with friends versus early finish is good	2
2 units over +taste of senior work versus pressure and lack of people to talk to	
HSC easier over two years versus extra year of practice might get a higher mark	2

Good academically versus teasing torture	
First or second in year if stayed versus bored with work	
Challenge versus not mature enough to do all that study	
Work too hard versus work too easy	
Helpful spaced out workload versus less pressure	
More competition versus lost contact with friends	
High achievement versus pressure to do well	
Preparation for senior classes versus trouble with the pace	
Worthwhile but difficult to handle	
With people of my own age - whole class accelerated	4
Good experience of acceleration	5

### Good and bad factors

#### *Good*

- challenged at a good level
- increased knowledge
- retained good results
- made new friends

#### *Bad*

- my marks have suffered a little bit
- felt like I was the brunt of an experiment sometimes
- easy to get overlooked

#### *Yes*

Preferred to stay with friends	5
Would have a better mark if stayed	3
Rushed through the course by doing acceleration	3
Not matter, people are my age group	2
Want to be treated like everybody else	
Would have learnt more if not accelerated	
Acceleration sux	

**How did you feel about the partial separation from your age mates that occurred because of your subject acceleration?**

<b>Not troubled by separation from age mates</b>	<b>121</b>
No separation occurred	97
Lessened by friends made in class	13
Left out and lonely	9
Supportive age mates	3
Felt left out of school work conversations	3
Proud, privileged, excited, fine, elated, accepted	12
I didn't mind, it didn't worry me	18
Missed my friends	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>285</b>

**Comments**

- Sometimes I was made to feel 'different' as they made comments about my separation.
- My own age mates sort of distanced themselves from me because they felt that I was too high for them.
- I felt the variety of people I met was interesting, their maturity enjoyable and different competition fun.
- It has helped me to extend friendships beyond my year group.
- Didn't care, the year 12 class are very friendly and a very intelligent class, which makes it more enjoyable. I actually preferred it; meet more people who give good advice on studying in other subjects.
- I didn't feel separated, and nor did my friends. It happened gradually and so did not suddenly affect me.
- I think it was good, and improved my social skills. I never got along well with my age mates and made some new friends in my accelerated classes.
- It was hard in the beginning, but people become accustomed to the changes, and the new class soon learns to live with you.
- I wasn't in many of my friends' classes anyway. Sometimes I think it disadvantages me socially because I don't become close friends with as many people, but it generally doesn't bother me.

**Would you recommend subject acceleration to others of similar age and ability in your school?**

Yes	223
No	11
Undecided	42
X	3

**Yes**

More time to study, fewer periods, more options	34
Good to get subjects out of the way	29
If you can do it you should try	23
Excellent opportunity if you have the commitment	22
Boring to work at a lower level, slower pace	22
Good experience	21
Challenging work	21
Worked well for me	11
Gains of knowledge, skills, understanding	9
Gains in self confidence	8
Can always repeat the subject if result not good	8
Spreads out, breaks up the study	7
Good experience of, insight into the HSC	6
Students should be given a choice	4
Good to get things done quicker	4
It is worth it in the long run	4
Good to get competition against higher grades	3
Satisfaction from high achievement	3
Nothing to lose	3
Takes the stress off the HSC	3
TOTAL	186

**Comments**

- Others should have the same chance we did, but it should not just be based on academic achievement – some people might not be able to cope with the strain of being uprooted from a class.
- I feel that if someone has the ability and talent, and is capable of accelerated work, the school should cater for their giftedness – open more opportunities to learn.

**No**

Work too hard	4
Poor organisation of the school program	2
Did not like the experience	2
TOTAL	8

**Undecided**

It depends on the person – abilities, personality	10
Benefits are there, but you need commitment and you have to make sacrifices	4
Too early to tell; will await results	3
Acceleration suits some people but not others	3
TOTAL	20

**Comments**

- It depends on what sort of student they are and whether they can cope with stress – and their reasons for acceleration. They must know what they're getting into and not be pressured by teachers/parents just for status.
- It is something you must decide for yourself. It is a lot of hard work and very testing, especially when you don't have normal classes.
- This is something to be considered very carefully by individuals and their families. IT worked for me but not for the other student whom I consider to be equally able as me.
- You lose a lot of self esteem because you don't do as well as you used to and it's hard, except you get out of school faster.
- Acceleration gives students a chance to achieve further, however a great deal of self confidence is needed to cope.
- It would depend on the subject. I feel in some subjects eg the humanities, people might benefit from age and experience.