



## CLOSING THE REGIONAL ATTAINMENT GAP



## All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility



## FOREWORD

The attainment gap, the gap in school exam results between pupils from different social backgrounds, is one of the key challenges in our education system. Differences in school achievement act as a block on social mobility and have real consequences for the life chances of those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Children with poor vocabulary age five are more than twice as likely to be unemployed aged 34. Such differences are not just social in origin, they are also geographical.

It was for this reason that the All-Party Parliamentary Group's inquiry into the regional attainment gap across England was initiated in late 2017. We find ourselves an increasingly divided country; divided by politics, by life prospects, but also divided geographically. The inquiry sought to explore the origins of differences in school outcomes between areas, what efforts have been made to close the gap, along with what we can learn from best practice across the country and how it could be shared and implemented.

In December 2017, the government published its Social Mobility Action Plan, putting social mobility at the heart of education policy and reflecting the Prime Minister's publicly stated commitment to rectifying the 'burning injustices' of life chances limited by the circumstances into which one is born. Narrowing the attainment gap was one of the major ambitions outlined in the Action Plan. But equally importantly, one of its key pillars was an emphasis on place.

While indications are that the attainment gap is narrowing, at its current rate, we are still over 40 years away from closing the gap between disadvantaged five-year-olds and their more advantaged counterparts. Progress is also spread unevenly across the country. In particular, London has been significantly ahead of the rest in raising the attainment of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Three major themes emerged from the evidence sessions held by the enquiry. Firstly, the importance of a sense of place and local buy-in to any strategy to narrow the gap. Secondly, the necessity for collaboration at a local level, across schools and local communities. Thirdly, the role of teacher recruitment and retention in reinforcing educational inequalities, how this is shaped by geography, and how high-quality teaching can be leveraged to tackle attainment gaps.

Breaking the link between social background, geography and educational success will require a combination of big picture thinking and local understanding. We would like to see more collaboration between schools, local authorities and universities, harnessing the successes of the London Challenge, and with a focus on social mobility cold-spots. But equally, we need to see policy change at a national level, such as repurposing the Pupil Premium into a new 'Social Mobility Premium', which can be used for professional development and extra supports for teachers in deprived areas.

If we are to give young people the best chance of success in life, it is also vital we tackle these gaps early. This was a key theme highlighted across our sessions, with issues raised around access to children's centres and ensuring high quality staff in nursery settings.

What happens from nursery through the school years is crucial to success later in life, and if we are to improve social mobility in this country, it is key that we tackle the issues addressed during our inquiry. We hope that the Prime Minister, and her government, will look closely at the findings and recommendations of this report.

*We would like to sincerely thank everyone who participated in the inquiry, from those who spoke at our sessions, to those who submitted evidence and all who attended our events. We offer particular thanks to the Sutton Trust for their support as Secretariat to the APPG and all of their work on the inquiry and this report.*

**Justin Madders MP**  
**Baroness Tyler of Enfield**

## BIOGRAPHIES



### **Rt Hon Justin Madders MP, Ellesmore Port & Neston, Chair**

Justin Madders has been the Labour MP for Ellesmere Port & Neston since May 2015.

Justin grew up in the constituency and became the first person in his family to go to University, when he graduated with a Degree in Law from the University of Sheffield. He qualified as a solicitor in 1998 and at the same time became a Councillor.

Before being elected, Justin worked in employment law, defending the rights of working people to be treated fairly and with dignity at work. Justin is the Shadow Minister for Health.



### **Baroness Tyler of Enfield, Co-Chair**

Claire Tyler is a Liberal Democrat life peer in the House of Lords where she sits as Baroness Tyler of Enfield.

After graduating in law and politics from Southampton University, Claire joined the Greater London Council/Inner London Education Authority in 1978. In 1988 Claire joined the Civil Service where she worked until 2007 including four years as the Head of the Government's Social Exclusion Unit. From 2007 to 2012 Claire was the Chief Executive of the charity, Relate.

Claire was the Chair of CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service), a post that she held from February 2012 to March 2018. She also became President of the National Children's Bureau and Vice President of Relate in 2012.

In 2015 Claire was made Liberal Democrat Mental Health Spokesperson and in addition to her frontbench role, she is Chair of the Lords Select Committee on Financial Exclusion. Claire is also Co- chair of the APPG on Wellbeing Economics. Outside of Parliament Claire is Chair of the Make Every Adult Matter Coalition of Charities

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The APPG on Social Mobility Inquiry into the Regional Attainment Gap ran from November 2017 until June 2018, encompassing three evidence sessions held in Parliament and a call for written submissions. This report summarises the evidence submitted to the report in both written and oral form, and makes a series of practical policy recommendations to tackle the issues highlighted.
- The attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their better-off classmates is substantial, across a range of different measures, and widens through the school years. At GCSE level, there is evidence that the attainment gap is narrowing, but very slowly.
- Attainment varies substantially across the country, with London a particularly strong performer when it comes to both overall attainment, and the gap between those who are disadvantaged and those not. Partly as a consequence of this, London is a hotspot for social mobility in comparison to other parts of England. Inner London has the highest proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (26%, twice the national average). Despite this, schools in Inner London had the highest performance in the country at GCSE in 2018, with the lowest attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils.
- Disadvantaged pupils nationally lag behind the average by around half a grade per subject, but those in London perform about the same as the average student nationally. Disadvantaged pupils in the North East had the lowest scores, but there is not a simple north/south divide, with the South East and South West both performing poorly for their disadvantaged pupils. The South East has an attainment gap twice the size of Inner London.

### *Sense of place and collaboration*

- The London Challenge was very successful because it brought together local players who had a vested interest in improving local outcomes. Some of this success was replicated in Somerset and Manchester, but there was less buy-in from national government and so the schemes were mostly locally supported.
- A sense of place is something coming through in the opportunity areas – this local buy-in is important and allows areas to interpret and shape national policy in a way that works for them.
- Whilst there are pockets of local collaboration across the country, sharing best practice consistently and widely is more challenging. Facilitating the sharing of best practice is key to local improvement.

### *Financial issues*

- The national funding formula was raised as being a challenge for schools. School funding has a larger impact on disadvantaged pupils and can make a significant difference to their achievement at school.
- Austerity related policies have had an impact on social mobility, especially with cuts to support services and the impact this has on teachers. In deprived areas, problems with pupils' home life frequently spill into the classroom, putting pressure on teachers.
- There remain questions around whether schools were using their funding effectively, however. There are particular issues around spending of the pupil premium. Substantial amounts of money are spent on teaching assistants, which evidence indicates may not be an effective use of funds. Pupil premium should be better targeted towards measures which have been shown to have an impact.

### *Teacher recruitment and retention*

- Disadvantaged young people are more likely to be taught by teachers who are less experienced and have lower qualifications. This is particularly true of subjects such as maths and physics: a young person in the most affluent schools is 22 percentage points more likely to be taught physics by someone who has a degree in physics or related subject than a young person in a disadvantaged school.
- Recruitment and retention of teachers is a bigger challenge in the most disadvantaged schools and geographical areas with higher levels of deprivation. There are also issues in cold spot mobility areas around a 'stagnant' teacher population which leads to less circulation of new ideas and sharing of best practice.
- The lack of opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD) is a particular issue when it comes to retaining teachers. Workload and money needed to allow teachers time away from the classroom are seen as barriers to accessing CPD.
- The evidence suggests that pay and financial incentives only go so far when it comes to recruiting and retaining teachers. Support networks, flexible working and progression with good CPD seemed to be bigger issues.

### *The role of early years*

- Education in the early years is fundamental to preparing a child for the rest of their life, but children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are behind their well-off peers by about 11 months when they start school. The inquiry heard how children hold on to the gains that they make in early years education throughout their lives, making them better learners and therefore progressing further.
- Current government policy has shifted the focus from good quality early years education to a focus on providing childcare to enable parents to work. This is affecting the quality of early years settings.
- Children's centres were seen as key to improving outcomes for disadvantaged children, but widespread closures and downgrades have worried many experts. About a third of the 1263 centres that were open in Dec 2009 have now closed, and their remit has expanded so that the focus is no longer on early intervention.
- The quality of early years educators is something which needs to be addressed if we are to close the attainment gap. This is already recognised in some sectors, with almost every opportunity area listing early years as one of its areas of focus.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Collaboration*

- 1) **Local authorities should harness a sense of place through stronger collaboration across the whole system** (including between schools, universities, local services, businesses etc). This should be done by providing additional funding to cold-spot areas so that they can take on the role of local coordinators in driving school improvement and supporting schools to work with one another.
- 2) **In order to be rated as Outstanding, schools must highlight that they are collaborating with other schools in the local area** and Ofsted must recognise and evaluate this in their inspections.
- 3) **All universities should more rigorously evaluate their outreach activities to ensure the funding that they are provided with is being spent on evidence-based interventions**, which should be enforced by the Office for Students. Universities should align themselves, where possible, to coldspot areas so that they can provide insight days and access to facilities in order to raise aspirations locally.

### *Teacher recruitment and retention*

- 1) **The Government should incentivise school collaboration by repurposing the Pupil Premium into a new Social Mobility Premium** which schools and senior leaders can use on initiatives to improve social mobility in deprived schools and coldspot areas. For example, this could be used on teacher recruitment and retention in specific subject shortage areas, CPD for teachers, mentoring and peer to peer support.
- 2) **The Government should build on the new recruitment and retention strategy and deliver on reforms that would reduce teacher stress and workload, particularly for those in more challenging schools.** Additional support for early career teachers and greater flexible working is welcome, but should be accompanied by increased capacity in the system for teachers at all career stages to access wellbeing services, and a more flexible pay scale.
- 3) **The Government should follow through on their ambitious strategy and support schools in social mobility coldspot areas to offer a more generous financial incentive**, combined with a strong offer of additional professional development to teachers to encourage them to take up positions there.

### *Early Years*

- 1) **The Government should complete the long-promised review of the children's centre programme** and publish a reinvigorated National Strategy on children's centres in 2019.
- 2) **The Government should ringfence funding for children's centres** and ensure that they are able to reconnect with their original purpose, focusing on the 0-5 age range.
- 3) **Once a review of children's centres has been completed, the Government should ensure that nursery provision is reinstated within the centres and Ofsted should re-establish its inspections programme.** Ofsted should make sure that the services that are provided are following the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework so that children are school ready. This will be particularly important in areas of deprivation.
- 4) **The government should move towards giving early years teachers Qualified Teacher Status**, with the increase in pay, conditions and status this would entail, and should invest in improving

qualifications for all practitioners in the sector. A dedicated funding pot, similar to the old Graduate Leader Fund, is important to achieving this.

### ***Other recommendations***

- 1) **The Government should fully implement its Careers Strategy** in order to ensure that young people have the resources that they need to make informed choices about their futures.
- 2) **Local Enterprise Partnerships should, in their local industrial strategy, help businesses to identify skills gaps** and support businesses to work with local schools in order to ensure that students have the right skills to help them enter the workforce.
- 3) **Schools should ensure that they are fully evaluating any programmes to raise attainment** and should be guided by the work of the Education Endowment Foundation in ensuring that they are using evidence-based initiatives where possible.

## INTRODUCTION: The attainment gap

In recent years, much of the education debate has focused on closing the attainment gap and how narrowing the gap will increase social mobility. The attainment gap measures the attainment of disadvantaged children against the attainment of non-disadvantaged children (using Free School Meal eligibility as a measure of disadvantage) at key points in their educational journey - usually at Key Stage 2 and then again at Key Stage 4. For many policymakers, there is an imperative to close this gap in order to improve social mobility in England, something that Secretary of State for Education Damian Hinds outlined in his speech of July 2018.<sup>1</sup> He argued that more was to be done to close the attainment gap and while “10% is a good start in terms of reducing the gap...there is more to go”.<sup>2</sup>

Recent reports in the education space have also understandably focused on the attainment gap. According to the Education Policy Institute report on the topic, although the gap has been narrowing, there has been a significant slowdown in the rate of closure.<sup>3</sup> The report suggests that this is in part down to the rise in child poverty and the impact of austerity on many services that disadvantaged people rely on,<sup>4</sup> something that this report will touch on in due course.

It is widely recognised, among both researchers and policymakers, that the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children appears very early on in a child’s life, with literature showing that many children from disadvantaged backgrounds are already considerably behind their better off peers when they start school at the age of five. This was also acknowledged by Secretary of State Hinds in his speech in July. Sutton Trust research has shown that, on average, disadvantaged children are behind their more advantaged counterparts by around 11 months.<sup>5</sup>

And this gap continues to grow as a child progresses through school. Research by the Education Endowment Foundation has shown that the gap continues to widen at every following stage of education, standing at 19.3 months by the end of secondary school.<sup>6</sup>

Closing the attainment gap is therefore extremely important, with education setting up young people for the rest of their lives. A majority of 19-year-olds who have been eligible for free school meals leave school without good enough grades to get on in life, departing without recognised qualifications in either English or Maths, making it difficult to enter the world of work or study.<sup>7</sup> This is a huge challenge which needs addressing and one that has no simple answer.

### *The regional attainment gap*

While the picture above has focused on overall attainment in England, there are variations in different parts of the country, with different regions having vastly diverse patterns and one region being particularly distinctive from the others. London stands out as an area which has been extremely successful in narrowing the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils. Other regions have fared less well, as this report will show.

The latest GCSE attainment data released by the Department for Education in January 2019 is illustrative. Figure 1 shows substantial differences in the proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged in each region. 26% of pupils in Inner London were FSM eligible, twice the national average. The East and the South East (both 9%) had much fewer by comparison.

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<sup>1</sup> Rt Hon Damian Hinds’ speech at the Resolution Foundation (2018). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretary-sets-vision-for-boosting-social-mobility>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Hutchinson, J., Robinson, D., Carr, D., Hunt, E., Crenna-Jennings, W. & Akhal, A (2018). Education in England: Annual Report 2018. Education Policy Institute.

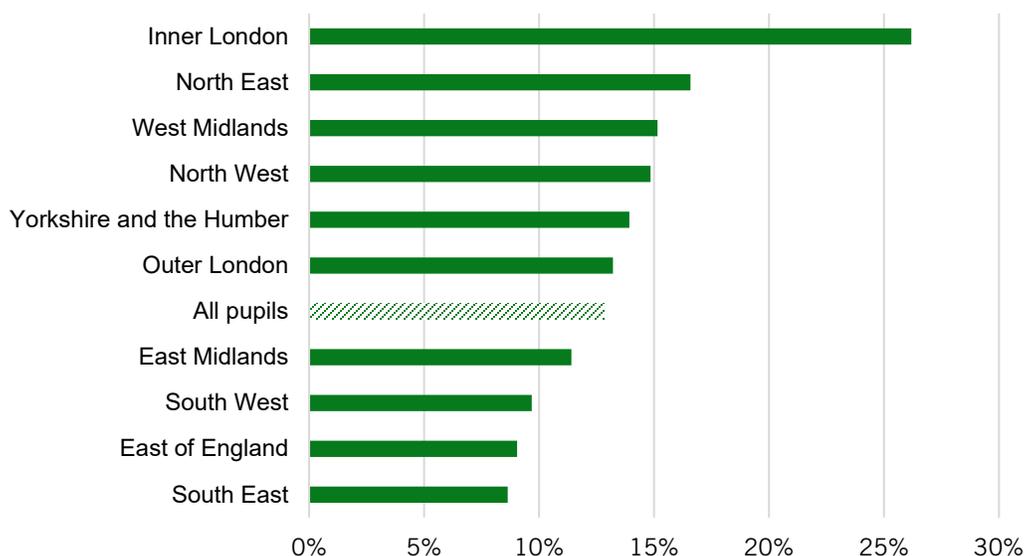
<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Waldfogel, J. and Washbrook, E. (2010) Low income and early cognitive development in the UK. Sutton Trust.

<sup>6</sup> Education Endowment Foundation (2017) The Attainment Gap.

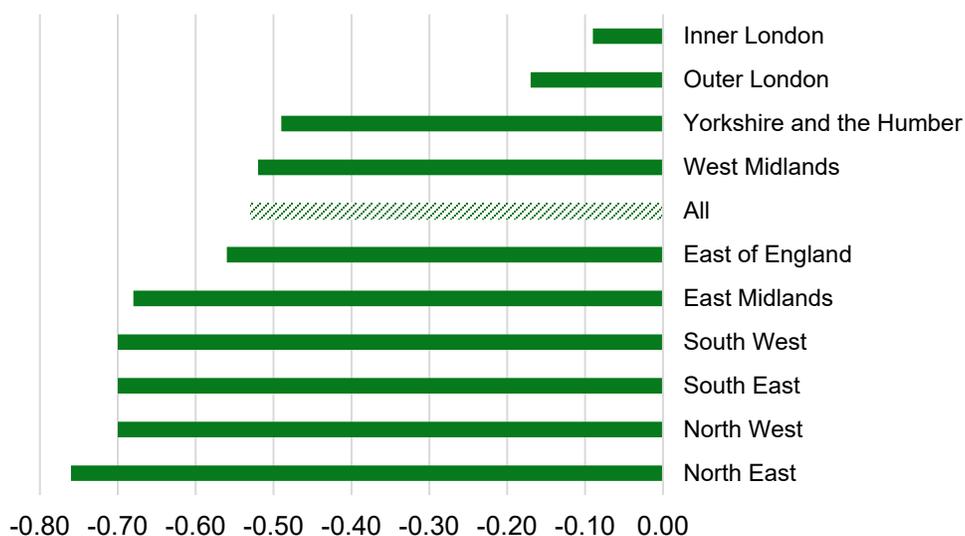
<sup>7</sup> Ibid

**Figure 1. Proportion of GCSE students entitled to Free School Meals by region, 2018**



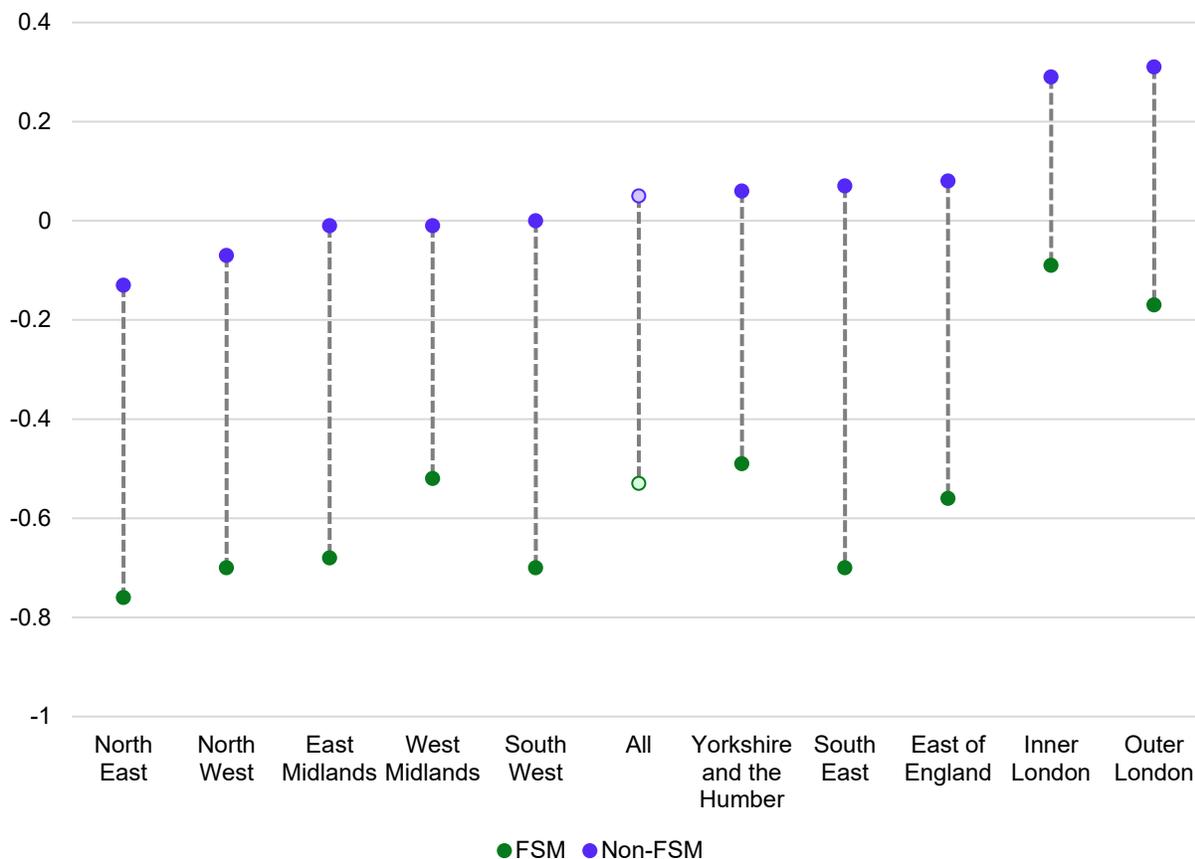
Despite having the highest proportion of FSM eligible pupils, disadvantaged students in Inner London perform the best of any region in England. In fact, while disadvantaged pupils nationally lag significantly behind average in their school performance, disadvantaged pupils in London perform about the same as the average student. 'Progress 8' is the headline measure for performance at GCSE level, and represents the level of progress made by students between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. A figure of zero represents the average, while a positive or negative number indicates whether progress is above or below average. Overall, FSM eligible pupils have a score of -0.5, which means that they lag behind the average by half a grade in each subject. However, this varies regionally, with those in London close to 0 (the national average). Disadvantaged pupils in the North East performed worst, with a score of -0.76, but Figure 2 shows this isn't a simple north/south divide, with the South East and South West (both -0.7) also performing poorly, despite their low levels of disadvantage.

**Figure 2. GCSE Progress 8 scores by region, 2018**



While the performance of non-disadvantaged pupils in inner London is also high, both Inner and Outer London have the smallest attainment gaps between the disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged (Figure 3). The gap in Inner London is just 0.38, half the size of the gap in the nearby South East, with the average gap in England running at 0.58, so over half a grade per subject. Gaps are also high in the South West (0.7) and East Midlands (0.67). In general, areas with higher attainment have lower gaps. The reasons for London's excellent performance on these measures are not straightforward, combining a multiplicity of demographic and public policy factors, explored later in the report. But what London has demonstrated is that attainment gaps can be narrowed without sacrificing overall performance levels.

**Figure 3. GCSE Performance of FSM pupils, non-FSM pupils and attainment gaps by region, 2018**



### Regional attainment gaps and social mobility

This regional variation is an issue that policymakers and the current government are especially keen to address, with the gaps in opportunity summarised by the Social Mobility Commission as a 'widening geographic divide' when it comes to social mobility across the country.<sup>8</sup> This is something that was seen starkly in the results of the 2016 referendum on whether the UK should remain in the European Union. A range of studies have indicated that level of educational qualification was one of the strongest indicators of which way someone voted in the referendum. Those who held a university degree were significantly more likely to vote to Remain, while those with GCSE qualifications or below significantly more likely to have voted to Leave.<sup>9</sup> This also had a geographical component, with areas containing the most university

<sup>8</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2017) State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain.

<sup>9</sup> Chan et al. (2017) Understanding the social and cultural bases of Brexit. UCL Institute of Education Department of Quantitative Social Science.

graduates most likely to have voted Remain,<sup>10</sup> while low educational outcomes and levels of social mobility have also been associated with areas that voted Leave.<sup>11</sup>

Place is the biggest piece of the regional attainment puzzle. According to the Social Mobility Commission's latest State of the Nation report, which looked at social mobility in each local authority in England and defined them as either hotspots for social mobility or coldspots, disadvantaged children are 14 percentage points less likely to be school-ready at age five in coldspots than hotspots. In 94 areas, under half of disadvantaged children reach a good level of development at age five.<sup>12</sup> It concluded that a person's life chances are very closely linked to the place where they grew up.

The report also showed that 51% of London children on free school meals achieve A\* to C in English and maths GCSE, compared with an average of 36% in all other English regions. In Kensington and Chelsea, 50% of disadvantaged young people make it to university, but in Hastings, Barnsley and Eastbourne, the university participation rate for this group falls to just 10%.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the conventional narrative, the geographical social mobility divide is not just between the north of the country and the south, but in fact one characterised by pockets of deprivation across the country as a whole, as demonstrated by the stark figures above. The Commission's report also notes that most cities in England, apart from London, are not doing enough to ensure that there are good levels of social mobility in their areas.<sup>14</sup>

Coastal and rural areas are also seen as parts of the country that are struggling with social mobility. They too have been left behind according to the Social Mobility Commission, with younger people living there facing more barriers to social mobility than young people who live in and around cities.<sup>15</sup> 14% of young people in rural coldspots progress to university in comparison to 27% in hotspots, which the Commission believes is due to a combination of poor education backgrounds coupled with weak labour markets.<sup>16</sup>

The regional attainment gap needs to be addressed if the country is to improve social mobility in England. London is pulling away from the rest of the country, while towns and cities in other parts of the country see their gaps in attainment widening, with economic repercussions. Research by Oxera for the Sutton Trust has shown that even a modest increase in the UK's social mobility (so that it is in line with average levels across Western Europe) could be associated with an increase in annual GDP of approximately 2%, the equivalent to £590 per person or £39bn to the UK economy as a whole.<sup>17</sup>

The challenge of closing the gap must be tackled if disadvantaged young people from all parts of the country are to have the same access to opportunities both within and outside of education as those who live in and in close proximity to the capital.

### ***The scope of this inquiry***

This report will look to outline many of the challenges that the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Mobility heard regarding the regional attainment gap, with particular emphasis on the three main messages which emerged from the sessions. These were the role of place and community, the importance

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YouGov (2016) How Britain Voted. Available at: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2016/06/27/how-britain-voted>

NatCen (2016) Understanding the Leave vote. Available at: <http://natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/understanding-the-leave-vote/>

<sup>10</sup> BBC News (2017) Local voting figures shed new light on EU referendum. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-38762034>

Alabrese et al. (2019) Who voted for Brexit? Individual and regional data combined. *European Journal of Political Economy*.

<sup>11</sup> Devine, F., Sensier, M. (2017) Social Mobility and Brexit: A Closer Look at England's 'Left Behind' Communities. University of Manchester.

<sup>12</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2017) State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Jenkins, H., English, K., Hristova, O., Blankertz, A., Pham, V. & Wilson, C. (2017) Social Mobility and Economic Success. Oxera & Sutton Trust.

of teaching and how to encourage good teachers into areas of deprivation, and the role of collaboration with schools, including how to share best practice.

The final chapter in this report will then briefly consider some of the other issues that were highlighted during the various evidence sessions and submissions, such as the role of early years education, the impact of spending on education, and the current education structures that are in place and their impact on the attainment gap.

It will then look to draw some conclusions and recommendations aimed at policymakers at all levels, as well as practitioners on the ground.

One of the overarching themes that became apparent as the inquiry progressed was the consensus that social mobility cannot be increased by education alone. It is imperative that policymakers think about this if they are to create initiatives that will truly have an impact on closing the regional attainment gap and ensuring that all young people have the ability to reach their full potential.



## CHAPTER ONE: A sense of place

It is difficult to explore regional attainment without fundamentally thinking about ‘place’. In recent political times, the idea of the importance of place and local communities is something which has gained in popularity. Politicians have begun to talk about place more than they did before, with initiatives such as the Opportunity Areas and the Northern Powerhouse taking hold and increasing the focus on different parts of the country. The referendum on whether the United Kingdom should remain within the European Union highlighted the difference of opinion across the country, with a sense that the results reflected the feeling in some parts of the country that they had been left behind and did not have access to the same opportunities as everyone else.<sup>18</sup>

The conventional narrative has always been that England is divided between ‘the North and the South’, but in recent times, this narrative has also been challenged. The Social Mobility Commission, in their most recent report, draw out the fact that there are pockets of deprivation across the whole country and that it is not just cities and towns in the north that are being left behind, but also coastal and rural towns across the country.<sup>19</sup> The Children’s University welcome this recognition and argue that for too long the focus has been on the differences between the North and the South and that focus has not necessarily been on coastal and rural areas, which are areas in need of attention.<sup>20</sup>

This sense of place - the identity of a particular town, city, or region – was a consistent theme that ran through all of the evidence sessions that the APPG held, and was reflected in much of the written evidence that was submitted. This sense of place was seen as crucial, not only to tap into the fabric of that location, but to ensure that any initiatives to narrow the attainment gap were successful.

There was a general consensus among the experts the inquiry heard from that this meant initiatives needed both a top down and a bottom up approach to succeed, but that the balance of this is unique to each area. The driving factors for success included a plan to address the challenges fitting the specific problems faced by that local area.<sup>21</sup> Dame Sue John summarised a successful approach to place-based initiatives through a three-pronged approach – being true to your values, true to your locality and then working with the wider environment so that ideas and initiatives do not get trapped too locally.<sup>22</sup>

The importance of a sense of place was perhaps best reflected by the former Secretary of State Justine Greening in her session on 21<sup>st</sup> June, where she spoke passionately about the role of place and why it was so important.<sup>23</sup> She told the APPG that for her, a national strategy put together by national government needed to have enough nuance to allow for local variation to ensure that it met the needs of the local area. It had to make sense to the different areas in order for it to be successful.<sup>24</sup> This was a sentiment that was echoed by other speakers and organisations and overall the feeling was that until policymakers get this approach right, it will be difficult to close the regional gap.

### *The London Challenge*

However, having a place-based approach does not mean that policymakers cannot learn from best practice. As much evidence of the has shown, London seems to be pulling away from the rest of the country both in terms of narrowing the attainment gap between its advantaged and disadvantaged young people, and in being home to most of the social mobility hotspots as identified by the Social Mobility Commission.<sup>25</sup> The problem is therefore twofold, not only is London continuing to do well across the board in terms of social mobility indicators, but the rest of the country is stagnating.

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<sup>18</sup> Goodwin, M., Heath, O. (2016) Brexit vote explained: poverty, low skills and lack of opportunities. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/brexit-vote-explained-poverty-low-skills-and-lack-opportunities>. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>19</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2017) State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain.

<sup>20</sup> Children’s University (CU Trust) written evidence submitted to the APPG on Social Mobility (2018).

<sup>21</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2017) State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain.



Despite the progress London has recently made, up until the early 2000s it had some of the worst performing schools in the country. Schools in the capital were considered to not provide adequate standards of education. Off the back of this consistent poor performance, the London Challenge was set up in 2003 as a government led initiative to address the problem. The inquiry heard how it was a top down initiative which brought together politicians, civil servants and practitioners in order to address the challenges faced by local London schools. Its aims included raising standards in the poorest schools, narrowing the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils, and creating more good and outstanding schools. The Department for Education initially funded the project, with advisers being challenged to focus on the most vulnerable schools and focus on five key boroughs.<sup>26</sup>

Given its focus, the inquiry heard about the way in which the London Challenge had come together, the outcomes and lessons learned, in order to explore what had worked so well in the capital and see whether there were examples of best practice that could be applied in different areas of the country. Throughout the evidence sessions, the inquiry heard how the London Challenge had inspired similar initiatives in other parts of the country, to varying degrees of success.

In order to explore what had worked so well in the capital and to see whether there were any lessons learned from the initiative that took place from 2003, the inquiry heard from Dame Sue John, who had been one of the main players in the policy from the beginning and was able to give a detailed insight on how the initiative had worked.

Dame Sue outlined why she believed that the London Challenge was so successful, and for her there were four main strands of success. These were - the strength of community cohesion, the strong local leaders who were well supported, the diverse mix of families and young people who were living in London, and the range of opportunities that were and continue to be available outside of the school gates.<sup>27</sup> Again, Dame Sue highlighted the unique make up of London and the way in which the Challenge absorbed and worked with such unique issues in order to be successful. This sentiment of social mobility being more than just what about what happens inside classrooms was one that was echoed by Dr Lee Elliot Major, Chief Executive of the Sutton Trust, when he said that education alone was not enough to improve social mobility.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

This is reiterated further in the evidence submitted by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, who highlight one of the recommendations from the OECD regarding school improvement, which specifies 'prioritising linking schools with parents and communities', understanding the need for broader buy-in from those outside of the school gates.<sup>29</sup> It is also highlighted in the evidence submitted by Dr Carol Fuller, who argues that there is a need for 'opportunities to learn and develop skills outside of the formal classroom' to be recognised by the Government given the importance of these skills in raising attainment.<sup>30</sup> It is further alluded to in the submission from the Prince's Trust which argues that research shows a link between non cognitive skills and educational attainment.<sup>31</sup>

Opportunities outside of the school gates are unique to the locations that the schools are in. Therefore regional gaps will only begin to close as regional initiatives are launched to accompany national policy. London has a wealth of opportunities outside of the school gates and for some, this is what propelled the success of the London Challenge.

Dame Sue John drew on this sense of place, arguing that the London Challenge worked well because it convinced local education leaders to own the problem in their local area and work together to ensure that it was acknowledged and addressed.<sup>32</sup> She also spoke about the role of the wider local community and how local groups came together in order to rise to the challenge. This idea of 'collective responsibility for performance' was something which was also highlighted in some of the evidence that the inquiry received, as well as the fact that 'schools cannot change and improve without good leaders'.<sup>33</sup>

Dame Sue similarly reflected that one of the key factors in ensuring the success of the London Challenge was that it was not just about what was happening inside the school gates that contributed to the improvement seen by local schools, but that there was also a role for the wider local economy and the impact that that had.<sup>34</sup> Local economies differ massively, as work by the Social Mobility Commission and others shows. For Dame Sue John, this was something other areas in the country would need to think about, given that the capital has lots of additional chances to interact with good opportunities (interactions with businesses, culture and the arts for example). This would need to be a factor in any school improvement plan. It is here therefore that London has a huge advantage over the rest of the country, and this imbalance is one that policymakers must address.

### ***The Somerset Challenge***

While the London Challenge was a significant success for the capital, variants of the initiative had differing results in other parts of the country, with some similarities. The sense of community of which Dame Sue John spoke was also raised by Simon Faull, former Director of the Somerset Challenge. He said that a sense of place was very important during the Somerset Challenge and that it was critical to what occurred there.<sup>35</sup> Mr Faull outlined some of the problems that Somerset faced – West Somerset is 324<sup>th</sup> in the country for social mobility, according to the Social Mobility Commission's latest report, making it the worst performing area in the country.<sup>36</sup> He highlighted that the most significant difference between the London and the Somerset Challenges was fundamentally the voluntary basis of the Somerset Challenge and the hurdles this brought with it. Mr Faull also outlined the limited financial resources available for the initiative and explained that all of these factors combined made it difficult for local leaders to maximise levers for local change, including getting buy-in from key stakeholders.

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<sup>29</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2016) Raising the achievement of all learners in inclusive education.

<sup>30</sup> Dr Carol Fuller written evidence submitted to the APPG on Social Mobility (2018).

<sup>31</sup> The Prince's Trust written evidence submitted to the APPG on Social Mobility (2018).

<sup>32</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018

<sup>33</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2016) Raising the achievement of all learners in inclusive education.

<sup>34</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2017) State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain.

Given the voluntary nature of the initiative, Mr Faull spoke about just how important a sense of place was and how a sense of community was vital as a driver, as there were few other incentives. He said that one of the most important things was this sense of place, that it was down to local practitioners coming together and ploughing forward with the initiative.<sup>37</sup> He said that there was a sense that the local schools needed to do something in order to address poor performance and they believed that it was better to do something themselves than to 'have it done to them' through external influences.<sup>38</sup>

It was this which spurred the local schools on, and provided a sense of place that was so important to the initiative making it off the ground. Mr Faull spoke of the 40 middle and secondary schools that started the process, with primary schools joining in later on, and highlighted how the Somerset Challenge was very much a bottom up approach to the issues faced by the area, characterised by a strong local driving force to push forward with it.<sup>39</sup>

### **Opportunity areas**

As the former Secretary of State Justine Greening outlined in her evidence to the inquiry, opportunity areas are one of the flagship policies of the 2017 Conservative government, with the aim for them to be used as a vehicle to drive up education standards and to improve social mobility. There are currently 12 opportunity areas identified as social mobility coldspots and experiencing a whole host of different activities in order to tackle some of the issues that they face.

These opportunity areas are first and foremost based on a sense of place, albeit with a regional focus compared to town or city. For the former Secretary of State, these opportunity areas embody her view that every national initiative announced by Government must have a localised feel to it in order to succeed.<sup>40</sup> She told the inquiry that when the opportunity areas were launched, many civil servants who had grown up in the proposed areas came forward in order to offer their support in setting them up. They were eager to pass on their local knowledge and it is this localised focus which, according to Greening, encouraged and excited civil servants and those on the ground.<sup>41</sup> This pertinent example showcases how important a sense of place can be and why others across all of the evidence sessions have argued that initiatives will only work if they can be embedded into the workings of the local area. What was apparent from almost all of the evidence sessions was just how imperative local buy-in is to any policy.

Dr Tim Coulson, chair of the Norwich Opportunity Area Partnership Board, brought his opportunity area to life by explaining how the problems that the area faced were unique to Norwich, which helped to get the buy-in from across the local community. According to the Norwich Opportunity Area delivery plan, Norwich is ranked 323<sup>rd</sup> out of the 324 districts in the Social Mobility Index and performs poorly across a range of different measures, driven in part by the fact that there is low educational performance amongst disadvantaged children in the area.<sup>42</sup>

With this in mind, Dr Coulson outlined that the four main areas of focus for Norwich were early language, professional development for teachers particularly in literacy and numeracy (in both primary and secondary schools), focus on exclusions and improving alternative provision, and supporting secondary schools and students to engage with the world of work.<sup>43</sup> He said that these were the areas that local leaders in Norwich had agreed were important and it was vital that these issues were tackled in order to improve social mobility.

When examining, as a whole, the opportunity area delivery plans for all 12 areas, it is clear that they all stem from the same initial initiative but that there are distinct differences between them. For example where

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<sup>37</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Department for Education (2017) Norwich Opportunity Area delivery plan 2017-2020. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/696825/Social\\_Mobility\\_Delivery\\_Plan\\_Norwich\\_FINAL\\_WEB.PDF.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696825/Social_Mobility_Delivery_Plan_Norwich_FINAL_WEB.PDF.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

Norwich focuses on early language, Hastings has instead chosen to focus on improving literacy and raising attainment in mathematics.<sup>44</sup> Hastings is also focusing on mental health and resilience as a top priority, perhaps reflecting the needs of the local population, in a way that other opportunity areas have chosen to address other challenges instead.<sup>45</sup>

These differences were also commented on by Dr Coulson himself who reiterated that what was happening in Norwich was different to what was happening in, say, the Bradford opportunity area because both plans were based on the needs of the local population.<sup>46</sup> Dr Coulson explained that, for example, alternative provision was an extremely big challenge for Norwich and that it was important to the local area that they were able to address this as part of the opportunity area plans. He also emphasised the importance of institutionalised knowledge and the role that this plays in improving outcomes at a local level. The example he gave was of a primary school headteacher working in the opportunity area in a school that required improvement. After 18 years of hard work, the school had been recently awarded an 'Outstanding' rating in its Ofsted inspection. Dr Coulson argued that this was partly due to the localised knowledge that that particular headteacher had, and their understanding of the challenges faced by Norwich's young people. This was crucial as part of the school's success and is arguably key to ensuring that local initiatives succeed.<sup>47</sup>

Despite their local variations, one national driving force can be attributed to each of the plans, and national priorities clearly provide the framework for each individual opportunity area plan. Taking a look at each of the plans, it is clear that all of them are attempting to address the need to prepare young people for the world of work. In his speech in December 2018, the Secretary of State for Education Damian Hinds said, "...For too long, we've had too many of our young people leaving school without the necessary skills or direction - and ending up on a dead-end route...getting in to work but not able to get on in work and progress to something better".<sup>48</sup> This speech is typical of other speeches he has made on the issue of ensuring young people have the necessary skills when they leave compulsory education, a priority for this Conservative government. In their general election manifesto in 2017, the Conservatives said that they will "deal with local skills shortages and ensure that colleges deliver the skills required by local businesses" and this policy strand is identifiable in all of the opportunity area plans.<sup>49</sup>

A sense of place is a clear driving force for some local leaders in Norwich. Focusing on challenges that are of real importance to local actors leads to a greater chance of strong buy-in from local organisations across sectors who will combine their expertise together. This is in the hope of addressing some of those challenges and delivering better outcomes for disadvantaged young people.

From the evidence heard by the APPG, some of the work that is happening on the ground in opportunity areas echoes the approaches taken by the London Challenge; a driving force from national government, but an emphasis on the role of local leaders and a localised approach to the challenges faced.<sup>50</sup> However Dr Coulson had a note of caution, with his view being that the challenge that these areas now face was on how much leverage the opportunity area has in the wider local area. Now that the area has been identified and set up he said that it would be for local leaders to decide whether this was an initiative that they could get behind, or whether they would feel that it was another national directive from central government.<sup>51</sup>

It is still too early to tell what impact, if any, the opportunity areas will have on both the area as a whole, and in helping to close the attainment gap. Those who argue that the gap cannot be closed by what happens

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<sup>44</sup> Department for Education (2017) Hastings Opportunity Area delivery plan 2017-2020. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/696829/Social\\_Mobility\\_Delivery\\_Plan\\_Hastings\\_v12\\_FINAL\\_WEB.PDF.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696829/Social_Mobility_Delivery_Plan_Hastings_v12_FINAL_WEB.PDF.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Rt Hon Damian Hinds' speech at Battersea Power Station (2018). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/damian-hinds-technical-education-speech>

<sup>49</sup> Department for Education (2017) Social mobility and opportunity areas. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas>

<sup>50</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

in the classroom alone will be eager to see whether this coalition of local players can come together to successfully address the challenges in Norwich, and whether it is successful in other parts of the country as well.

## **CORNWALL COUNCIL**

Cornwall Council has identified the importance of place in the regional attainment gap, and in this context, the Cornwall & Isles of Scilly should be recognised as a region. The region is performing well in a number of measures, but at Key Stage 1 the attainment gap between those claiming free school meals and those not has increased, and the region is below the national average for Russell Group entry and participation in Education, Employment and Training (EET) rates. Another key aim for the region is achieving progression from levels 2 and 3 (GCSE and A level, respectively) to level 4 across all sectors.

There are many region-specific issues that can have an impact on attainment. There are accessibility issues within and between different places in Cornwall and the IoS, meaning that children often have to travel to access broader learning. Reliable broadband is not available in some areas, and the area has high rates of deprivation and low productivity, while also facing the challenge of gradual withdrawal of EU funding programmes.

There are several initiatives aiming to tackle the challenges faced by Cornwall and the IoS. Cornwall Council's Education and Early Years Service have a website which promotes the work being undertaken to meet the Education Strategy for Cornwall priorities. The site shares knowledge, success stories and best practice in addressing the attainment gap. The Cornwall Careers Offer also provides a framework to address some of the key challenges faced within careers guidance, and showcases local examples of good practice.

Sector-specific approaches have had successes in the region too. Software Cornwall is an organisation that aims to inspire people into careers in the local software and digital technology industry. The organisation runs a number of activities, including summer schools and supporting businesses to deliver work experience opportunities. Software Cornwall has increased the number of apprentices recruited in the organisation and has improved awareness of local career opportunities. The development of a business-led technical Baccalaureate is also in progress, which builds on the activities of the summer schools.

## CHAPTER TWO: Collaboration

What is apparent from the previous section, and from the evidence heard by the inquiry, is that there is a general consensus that a sense of place is a determining factor in how successful a national policy initiative is. Understanding of local challenges, local drivers and key local players seems to provide the most solid foundation for rallying around a central government initiative. From what the inquiry heard, this sense of community is fundamental to achieving local buy-in and ensuring that a new initiative is successful. It is at this point that in order to foster success in other parts of the country, the fundamentals must be shared with other local areas. The inquiry heard that whilst collaboration between local areas and organisations was key, there are still a lot of questions around how best to share this with other parts of the country. While there is some infrastructure in the opportunity areas to consolidate and disseminate best practice, there are still questions around what a collaboration model looks like elsewhere in the country. Some of the literature on this topic suggests that schools should be seen as a part of a wider learning system and emphasises the importance of professional learning communities.<sup>52</sup>

One of the strongest messages to come out of the evidence submitted to the inquiry was that there is currently no mechanism by which best practice can be shared. Evidence seen and heard by the inquiry argued that there is a lack of direction from government regarding scale up and no capacity within the school system to step in. The reality is that this is where more and more often, the third sector is stepping in instead.<sup>53</sup> Some of the evidence submitted to the inquiry suggested that such third sector organisations are bridging the gap between schools and employers, but they are doing so in an ad hoc way. And in turn, this makes it difficult to share best practice.

Despite the regional variation, some of the challenges faced by communities in regions across the country are very similar, which is why collaboration is extremely important. For example, evidence submitted by Bodmin College in Cornwall described how the lack of local transport links are an issue for them, but staff are also aware that other rural and coastal towns may face similar problems.<sup>54</sup> Distance between students and schools, students and the workplace, and students and facilities can be a huge barrier for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and this in turn feeds into the regional inequalities that have been documented.

Given the regional similarities and the challenges facing young people from disadvantaged backgrounds across the country, collaboration is central to closing the regional attainment gap. As the Sutton Trust's Mobility Map has shown, there are neighbouring areas across the country that have vastly different social mobility outcomes despite being extremely close to one another. For example, the constituency of Beverly and Holderness in Yorkshire was identified by the Trust's mobility map as having high social mobility, yet the neighbouring constituency of East Yorkshire was highlighted as having low levels of social mobility.<sup>55</sup> Despite being neighbours, there are vastly different outcomes for young people depending on which constituency they live in. This begs the question as to why their outcomes are so different and whether there are examples of best practice in Beverly and Holderness which can be applied to East Yorkshire in order to help raise attainment there. Collaboration between the two areas could be the key to raising attainment through a sharing of best practice between both areas.

Successful collaboration is particularly important given the move towards more evidence-based teaching. As the inquiry heard from James Turner, then Education Endowment Foundation's Deputy Chief Executive, the government set the EEF up in order to find out what works in evidence-based teaching.

Given the growing movement towards evidence-based teaching it is important that good practice, with clear evidenced approaches to what works in the classroom to improve the regional attainment gap, is shared and built upon. Collaboration is a key part of raising attainment but only as long as the best practice that is being shared can be fully backed up by evidence.

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<sup>52</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2016) Raising the achievement of all learners in inclusive education.

<sup>53</sup> Children's University (CU Trust) written evidence submitted to the APPG on Social Mobility (2018).

<sup>54</sup> Bodmin College written evidence submitted to the APPG on Social Mobility (2018).

<sup>55</sup> Sutton Trust Mobility Map available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/policy/interactive-mobility-map/>

Not only is the theme of collaboration important between schools, something which took place within the London and Somerset Challenges, but there was also a clear sense of a need for schools and others to engage with other local organisations in order to fulfil the ambitions of young people and ensure that good attainment resulted in social mobility.

### *The importance of collaboration between schools*

Officers of the APPG heard during several sessions about the importance of school-level collaboration and the barriers that schools faced when attempting to do this. One of the ways in which the Government has been encouraging schools to share best practice has been through the setting up of research schools.

Research schools were established by the government in order to create a network of schools that would support the use of evidence. They share evidence across to other schools to ensure that they are spending time on embedding interventions which are shown to raise attainment. Through the research schools network, schools take the evidence and put it into practice, showing other schools in their network how to use the evidence in the classroom. Over the last year or so, research schools have also begun to put in place training courses and other resources for local teachers to tap into so that they can take best practice with them to their local schools to raise the attainment of pupils. This allows practitioners to come together and discuss their experiences and their concerns but also to talk about what has worked in their classrooms and take it back to share with their students and their colleagues.

Patsy Kane OBE of the Education and Leadership Trust and Dr Vanessa Ogden of the Mulberry School Trust both talked about the need for collaboration as practitioners. Patsy Kane spoke about the fact that Manchester was a very ambitious city despite being in the top ten cities nationally for disadvantage.<sup>56</sup> She told the inquiry about the work of the Manchester Schools Alliance, which had been set up by headteachers who have come together to provide support for teachers in the local area.<sup>57</sup> For her, there is very little infrastructure or co-ordinated offer to schools in Manchester and this has required local teachers to step up and fill this gap.<sup>58</sup> This sentiment was echoed by Dr Ogden, who explained that for her, when a school became outstanding, it then had a 'system wide responsibility' to work with other schools in the local area.<sup>59</sup> She said that that school then should assume a leadership role among the other local schools and work with them in their capacity as an outstanding school. At the moment, the Mulberry School is working with 10 secondary schools and three primary schools in Tower Hamlets. The work that they are doing is specific to the local area, with this model currently working well.<sup>60</sup>

In Manchester, collaboration has been a big part of the professional development drive. Patsy explained that there had been some strengthening of middle leadership, but that the challenge now was to focus on developing the top tier and developing those leaders. Patsy Kane suggested that in Manchester, headteachers were leaving the profession, which in turn creates a vacuum of experienced leaders at the top able to drive through systematic change. Despite the fact that the Manchester Schools Alliance has relied upon voluntary buy-in from local headteachers, the Alliance has created training opportunities for local teachers and provided a space where practitioners can go for support from colleagues, allowing them to ensure that they are focusing on student outcomes.

There was a similar situation in Tower Hamlets, where Dr Ogden explained that they were developing a leadership academy with a focus on pedagogy. She also said that there was a focus on support staff and their importance in the classroom. For Dr Ogden, it was important that the model that they were adopting was one that was relevant to inner city schools, but she emphasised that this did not mean London alone and that the idea was that the model that they put together could work in any urban city across the country.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

Both Patsy Kane and Dr Ogden talked about the academy trust model as one way in which they had been collaborating with other schools on a small scale. Both explained that their chains had recently taken on struggling schools and that through collaboration they were now working to improve them.<sup>62 63</sup> Patsy Kane particularly spoke about the need to ensure that part of the improvement process included instilling the standards and values that the two good schools had into the one that required improvement.<sup>64</sup>

However, there are many challenges to practitioner collaboration, which the inquiry also heard. In Manchester, Patsy Kane explained that there was still a sense of fear from some teachers about the consequences of what would happen if they were in a failing school. One of the things that colleagues are sceptical of is peer review, which she believed would be invaluable to supporting colleagues. However, she said that there was some pushback from those who did not buy into the idea of peer review.<sup>65</sup> There was also a sense that some schools were difficult to engage with, not wanting to get involved with the partnerships and initiatives that other local schools were involved in. For Patsy Kane, this was one of the challenges that needed to be overcome to allow for more collective approaches to school improvement.<sup>66</sup> Practice transfer must also include teachers' professional development in order to work.<sup>67</sup> This builds on evidence that one of the successes of collaborative work is the fact that it needs to be reciprocal and that both organisations/sets of people need to work and learn from one another if it is to work.<sup>68</sup>

### *Collaboration with the wider community*

Collaboration between practitioners is extremely important if we are to ensure that there is good sharing of best practice in raising attainment, and it is very important that where possible, best practice in some parts of the country is shared with those areas that are struggling. As the inquiry heard, if this best practice and these initiatives have the flexibility to adapt to the local situation, then there is promising evidence that they will help to narrow regional attainment gaps.

Not only did both Patsy Kane and Dr Ogden explicitly talk about collaboration beyond schools with other practitioners, this was a theme which was repeated in many of the evidence sessions as well as in some of the written submissions from individuals and organisations.

In Manchester, one of the big collaborators with schools was the University of Manchester. The university agrees that improving outcomes in the wider community is part of its social responsibility and that includes the work that they are doing with schools in the area.<sup>69</sup>

However, the most common collaboration projects were with local businesses. Dr Coulson said that working with local businesses was one of the priorities for the Norwich opportunity area, and indeed many of the opportunity areas state that they intend to work with local businesses in order to ensure that they have a post-16 skills plan in place.<sup>70</sup> Patsy Kane also spoke about the work that was happening in Manchester with local businesses there, and particularly highlighted the work that schools are doing with the Manchester United Foundation, which uses football in order to help young people with the challenges that they face.<sup>71</sup>

Dr Ogden talked about how in Tower Hamlets, there are a wealth of opportunities to be had with Canary Wharf on their doorstep and that these were opportunities that schools wanted to harness in order to help raise attainment in their classrooms.<sup>72</sup> This was something that Dame Sue John had also touched on when explaining why the London Challenge was so successful. It also feeds into Dr Lee Elliot Major's argument

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<sup>62</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>63</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018.

<sup>64</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

<sup>67</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2016) Raising the achievement of all learners in inclusive education.

<sup>68</sup> People written evidence submitted to the APPG on Social Mobility (2018).

<sup>69</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Department for Education (2017) Social mobility and opportunity areas. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas>

<sup>71</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>72</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018.

that there is also a need to think about what happens outside of the school gates if we are truly to improve social mobility.<sup>73</sup>

For Dr Ogden there was also a wider question about the role that support services had in their interaction with schools. She talked about how community and family support services had a role to play and that their interaction with schools was extremely important.<sup>74</sup> She argued that external factors outside of a school's control can have huge implications for learning in the classroom and so it is important to point out that collaboration should not just be with businesses but also with the wider community as a whole.

The importance of engaging with local businesses, however is one that should not be ignored. In order to close the regional attainment gap there is a need for schools to share best practice on what works in the classroom, but it is also important that the local economy then provides these young people with employment opportunities where they are able to utilise their skills. Over the years there have been many arguments made about the need to raise aspirations of some of these communities with low attainment. Part of this should happen through creating jobs which encourage young people to do well at school and then remain in their local area, or come back to their local area after university. This can help to raise aspirations of the next generation. This was something which came through from the evidence submitted by Bodmin College, where part of the role of the aspirations coordinator is to ensure that young people come back to their school in order to talk about their own journeys and the opportunities now open to them.<sup>75</sup>

As the evidence above has shown, collaboration is a necessary part of ensuring the spread of best practice, and allows schools and practitioners in local areas to come together in order to address the challenges that they face. If some schools in the area are doing well in terms of raising the attainment of their most disadvantaged pupils, it is important that there are avenues through which they are able to share this best practice. However, it is also important to be able to share best practice across the country in order to draw from the wealth of experience across England. There is no real mechanism for this as yet, but the evidence that the inquiry has heard suggests that perhaps this an area to explore further.



<sup>73</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2017

<sup>74</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018

<sup>75</sup> Bodmin College written evidence submitted to the APPG on Social Mobility (2018).

## CHAPTER THREE: Teacher recruitment and retention

So far the inquiry has established that place and collaboration within a place and between places is necessary in order to raise attainment and narrow the regional attainment gap. However, at the heart of the story are the teachers in the classroom putting into practice many of the things that the inquiry heard in the evidence sessions.

There is a body of evidence which suggests that the single most important factor in the classroom in helping a disadvantaged young person to raise their attainment is the quality of the teacher providing the instruction. In the Sutton Trust's report, 'What makes great teaching?', an effective teacher is defined as someone whose teaching has an impact on assessed learning.<sup>76</sup> There are a number of studies which have found a relationship between a teacher's content knowledge of the subject that they are teaching and the attainment of students in that subject.<sup>77</sup>

Teachers are with their pupils for many hours a day and can be instrumental in the direction that a young person's life takes. Students from more advantaged backgrounds are more likely to have access to good quality teachers (especially if they attend an independent or grammar school) and it is disadvantaged young people who tend to miss out on good quality teaching.<sup>78</sup>

The research therefore indicates that it is important to ensure that all pupils have access to good quality teaching, but that this is extremely important for those areas of the country where there is a large attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged young people.

The Sutton Trust's own research has shown that schools that have the highest percentages of pupils who are eligible for free school meals have lower proportions of specialised science teachers.<sup>79</sup> This means that the most disadvantaged students do not have access to good quality subject-specific content knowledge, which can be to the detriment of these pupils. Research also highlights a similar issue in maths, suggesting that the lack of specialised teachers is not specific to just one subject.<sup>80</sup>

Since 2010, it has become clear that schools are under increasing pressure from a range of different angles. According to a recent Education Policy Institute (EPI) report on the teacher labour market, since 2010 the number of teachers has stayed roughly the same, whilst the number of pupils has risen by about 10%.<sup>81</sup> At the same time, school finances are being squeezed, impacting some schools' ability to cover all of their costs.<sup>82</sup>

With the above challenges in mind, there are now serious questions in England around the numbers of people who are choosing to move into the teaching profession, with fears that the profession has become increasingly unattractive as pressure from all sides increases. Application rates for teacher training were down by 5% in 2018.<sup>83</sup> In turn, this poses questions around how to ensure that the most disadvantaged young people have access to well-trained teachers and that they are retained.

Since the completion of the inquiry, the government has launched its new Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy.<sup>84</sup> Its bold approach, addressing many of the concerns raised in the inquiry, is to be

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<sup>76</sup> Coe et al. (2014) What makes great teaching?. Sutton Trust.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018

<sup>79</sup> Cullinane, C., Kirby, P. (2017) Science Shortfall. Sutton Trust.

<sup>80</sup> Allen, R., Sims, S. (2018) How do shortages of maths teachers affect the within-school allocation of maths teachers to pupils? Nuffield Foundation.

<sup>81</sup> Sibieta, L. (2018) The teacher labour market in England. Education Policy Institute.

<sup>82</sup> Sutton Trust (2018) Best in Class 2018 Research.

<sup>83</sup> Sibieta, L. (2018) The teacher labour market in England. Education Policy Institute.

<sup>84</sup> Department for Education (2019) Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy. Available at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/773930/Teacher\\_Retention\\_Strategy\\_Report.PDF.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/773930/Teacher_Retention_Strategy_Report.PDF.pdf)

welcomed. Nonetheless, delivering on this strategy will be key, and in particular, ensuring that incentives and supports for teachers are targeted at geographical areas which need them the most.

### **Good quality teachers**

When Professor Rebecca Allen gave evidence to the inquiry, she began by saying that perhaps there was a theory that suggested that money alone cannot buy the best classroom instruction. In her work on the teacher workforce, she measured 'appropriately qualified' teachers, due to the difficulties in measuring or accurately defining what a 'good' teacher looks like. It was from this basis that she began to look at the makeup of teachers in different types of schools.<sup>85</sup> In their report, EPI use 'relevant degree in a subject that a teacher teaches' as an indicator of quality.<sup>86</sup>

One of the things that her research showed was that in the secondary sector, the most disadvantaged schools are typically teaching with 9% of teachers who are not appropriately qualified versus 5% in the most advantaged schools. She also went on to highlight to the inquiry that there were inequalities in the experience of teachers teaching different kinds of pupils. She said that her research had found that in the most disadvantaged schools, 12% of teachers had less than 10 years' worth of teaching experience, yet this figure was just 7% in the more advantaged schools.<sup>87</sup>

Professor Allen also elaborated on the notion that specialism can make a difference to the quality of teaching that a student receives. In the most affluent schools, a young person is 22 percentage points more likely to be taught physics by someone who has a physics or otherwise related degree (for example, engineering) than a young person who is in the most disadvantaged school.<sup>88</sup>

This analysis of the landscape chimes with what other recent research has shown. EPI estimate that at Key Stage 4, only 37% of maths teachers and 45% of chemistry teachers in deprived schools outside of the capital have a relevant degree in the subject that they are teaching.<sup>89</sup>

The figures which Professor Allen highlighted in her evidence to the inquiry showcase why closing the regional attainment gap will be difficult unless the most disadvantaged young people across the country have access to well trained and experienced teachers. Her research has shown that the patterns mentioned above are also present when analysing the data within constituency as well as across the country as a whole, reiterating that it is a localised as well as a national problem which needs addressing.<sup>90</sup>

### **Teacher workforce mobility**

It is clear that there is a huge challenge with ensuring that the right teachers are in the right places to teach the students who will benefit from them most, and the inquiry received a small insight into teacher mobility in the country. Professor Allen noted in her evidence that it was the most disadvantaged schools that were seeing the highest level of teacher turnover, something which has negative implications for professional development and support for those practitioners.<sup>91</sup>

Professor Allen told the inquiry that shortages of appropriately trained teachers are particularly acute in outer London, the South East and the East of England. For the East of England, she explained that this was because of a shortage of initial teacher training opportunities.<sup>92</sup> In central London, there seems to be a fairly mobile teacher population, according to Dame Sue John. She explained that this has both positive and negative implications in allowing for an agile workforce, but one which does move around a lot, which

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<sup>85</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018.

<sup>86</sup> Sibieta, L. (2018) The teacher labour market in England. Education Policy Institute.

<sup>87</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

<sup>89</sup> Sibieta, L. (2018) The teacher labour market in England. Education Policy Institute.

<sup>90</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid

<sup>92</sup> Ibid

can cause a lack of continuity in places that they have left behind.<sup>93</sup> Dame Sue said that, alongside the London Challenge, there were also worker housing schemes which meant that teachers had somewhere that they could stay while they were working in inner city schools.<sup>94</sup> Much of the current debate around teacher retention in London is based round the high costs of housing associated with the city, forcing young teachers to move out into the suburbs in order to buy property and start families.

Rural and coastal towns face different challenges to cities when it comes to the mobility of teachers. There, the teacher population can be quite stagnant and these towns have difficulties attracting new teacher talent to begin with, given their locations. This can make it difficult to bring in new ideas and to have good knowledge mobilisation, something which Dame Sue John said was a strength of the London Challenge and one of the elements of the Challenge that was particularly successful.<sup>95</sup>

Professor Allen did however point out that having a shortage of teachers was not the same thing as not having good quality teachers, that poorly qualified and inexperienced teachers are not always the same thing as poor quality teachers, and that high quality teachers did not mean that they would be teaching effectively.

There is little robust evidence around what works to recruit teachers into the areas that need them most. There has been some discussion about the need to provide housing for teachers in these areas, but there are also things that could be addressed within schools that can attract well-trained teachers to these areas, which are discussed below.

### **Retaining and training teachers**

In their report 'Teacher workload and professional development in England's secondary schools: insights from TALIS', the Education Policy Institute says that teachers in England are working more hours than teachers in other countries.<sup>96</sup> The report suggests that teachers here in England are working on average 48.2 hours a week compared to an average of 40.6 hours in other countries.<sup>97</sup>

The report argues that these extra hours mean that there is less time for teachers in England to have access to professional development opportunities. Teachers in England spent only an average of 4 days on these CPD opportunities (including courses, observational visits, seminars and in-service training), compared with an average of 10.5 days elsewhere.<sup>98</sup> In Shanghai, by contrast, teachers reported spending an average of 40 days in the year on these forms of CPD – ten times more than teachers in England.<sup>99</sup> Teachers have also reported themselves that the workload affects their ability to focus on professional development, with 60% of teachers saying this.

The report also looks at the difference in workload depending on the performance of the school. It found that teachers in outstanding schools seemed to work around the same number of hours as those who worked in satisfactory and inadequate schools. Interestingly, the report noted that those in outstanding schools were less likely to report feeling that their workload was unmanageable.<sup>100</sup> However, those who did have an unmanageable workload were less likely to be satisfied in their roles, in part because they felt that they were unable to cope with the expectations that they were faced with.

Professional development was another consistent theme which came through not just from the evidence given by Professor Allen but also practitioners Patsy Kane and Dr Vanessa Ogden, as well as Dame Sue John. For Patsy Kane there was a challenge in Manchester that there was no consistent offer to teachers

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<sup>93</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> Feb 2018.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>96</sup> Sellen, P. (2016) Teacher workload and professional development in England's secondary schools: insights from TALIS. Education Policy Institute.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

<sup>98</sup> Ibid

<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> Ibid

in the local area for improvement and Dr Ogden talked about how professional development was one of the main focuses of their leadership academy.<sup>101</sup> <sup>102</sup>Dame Sue John outlined how the London Challenge had created a legacy of networks and support for teachers and in part this was why London schools continued to thrive.<sup>103</sup>

Alongside professional development is a broader question around wider support. This is especially important for those teachers in disadvantaged schools and who may need additional support in order to manage the situations that they may find themselves in. Professor Allen spoke about the fact that these teachers may find themselves in an environment which is more challenging due to the lives of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds inevitably spilling inside the school gates. It is teachers themselves who find themselves having to provide additional support to these pupils. Professor Allen said that this was understandably difficult and such challenging circumstances lead to high staff turnover, which in turn has consequences for the wider support networks teachers rely on in order to do their jobs well.<sup>104</sup>

### ***What works in recruiting and retaining teachers***

For Professor Allen, the current situation as it stands was that disadvantaged schools were experiencing teacher shortages, were therefore recruiting inexperienced staff who were hoping to go into the job to help young people and make a difference, and then leaving when this wasn't the case.

One of the things she was keen to highlight was that financial incentives only go so far and only for particular teachers. None of the practitioners that the inquiry heard from focused on pay being an issue for them, with their focus being very much around professional development and the additional support that teachers require.

Professor Allen suggested that one of the reasons that she was sceptical about financial incentives was because there is already an existing pay gradient for when teachers move to a more disadvantaged school in the same area, equating to around £1,200 extra for a secondary school teacher moving to a more disadvantaged school in the same constituency.<sup>105</sup> She said that although pay may be an initial factor for those who are just starting out in the profession, it seemed that those teachers who were more experienced were less wage sensitive and this meant that financial incentives would most likely only go so far in addressing the problem. Professor Allen suggested that financial incentives should really only be used, and would only be successful, in terms of local reallocation of teachers.<sup>106</sup>

Patsy Kane had earlier referred to the need to think about flexible working and how some of the debate had moved towards mirroring what was happening in other sectors<sup>107</sup>, and Dr Ogden suggested that in London especially, things like housing allocation and free breakfasts could be another way to incentivise teachers.<sup>108</sup>

Ultimately, as well as thinking about how to plug the gaps (knowing that the shortages will hit our most disadvantaged schools) we also have to think about what else we can do in the meantime to improve the quality of teaching and not just the supply of teaching.

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<sup>101</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>102</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018.

<sup>103</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>104</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

<sup>106</sup> Ibid

<sup>107</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>108</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018.

## CHAPTER FOUR – Other issues in the inquiry

### Funding

Funding issues pervade many questions of social policy, and a number of commentators, in the aftermath of the 2017 General Election, have suggested that school funding was a particularly strong issue on the doorstep, and a challenging one for the government.<sup>109</sup>

The issue of funding is one which has come up throughout this inquiry, both in the evidence sessions that the APPG held, as well as in some of the evidence that was submitted. There was a sense from some organisations and individuals that in order to address the regional attainment gap, there was a need to tackle school funding at the root in order to ensure that schools had the adequate financial support that they needed in order to raise attainment.

For example, Patsy Kane, executive headteacher at the Education and Leadership Trust, argued that schools in Manchester needed to have their funding matched with that received by schools in London in order to address some of the attainment challenges.<sup>110</sup> The Children's University also suggested that funding was something which needed addressing.<sup>111</sup> There was a sense that many schools currently lack the financial support in order to carry out even their basic duties, which means that raising attainment is crowded out among their priorities. Indeed, this argument was heard many in times in Parliament as politicians debated the new national funding formula.

As well as hearing from practitioners, the inquiry also heard from Luke Sibieta, Research Fellow at the Institute for Fiscal Studies. He argued that it was not necessarily the case that all schools did not have enough money, and that in some cases it was more important to ensure that the resources that schools do have are being used properly and being directed at the right interventions.<sup>112</sup> Whilst he acknowledged that resources could be linked to better outcomes, especially for those students who were more disadvantaged (for example through the use of the Pupil Premium), he was keen to assert that it was just as important that the resources were being used effectively.

One example of this, he said, was the work of the Education Endowment Foundation on how to use teaching assistants effectively. Despite the increase in recent years in the numbers of teaching assistants being deployed in classrooms, there is a body of evidence to suggest that they are not being utilised in the most effective way. Ensuring that teaching assistants are being used to supplement good quality teaching can be a way of using teaching assistants so that they can help to raise attainment, as well as making sure that schools are targeting their resources effectively.

Despite articulating that more money was not always necessary, Luke Sibieta did acknowledge that London has historically had higher levels of funding, because in the past, London has had higher levels of deprivation in comparison to other parts of the country.<sup>113</sup> This was in part what had spurred on the London Challenge, which Dame Sue John acknowledged in the evidence that she gave.<sup>114</sup> Luke Sibieta also suggested that where schools do have more financial capacity, they are able to respond to any new initiatives which are launched in a way that schools that are more financially stretched may not be able to take full advantage of – one reason as to why schools in London continue to do well in narrowing the attainment gap.

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<sup>109</sup> TES (2017) 750,000 voters switched support as a result of school funding cuts, survey finds. Available at: <https://www.tes.com/news/750000-voters-switched-support-result-school-funding-cuts-survey-finds>

<sup>110</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5th February 2018.

<sup>111</sup> Children's University (CU Trust) written evidence submitted to the APPG on Social Mobility (2018).

<sup>112</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid

<sup>114</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5th February 2018.

### **Wider impact of austerity**

There was little discussion in the inquiry on the wider impact of the current economic climate and the austerity policies that have been pursued by this current government. However, it was raised and it is important that it is mentioned here given that there are those who would argue that social mobility cannot be improved without some serious investment across the board. Dr Lee Elliot Major told the inquiry that there was a wider question about whether inequality at a fundamental level needs to be addressed before social mobility can improve.<sup>115</sup> Whilst there continue to be inequalities within London, as a whole it is the wealthiest part of the country and other places have felt the impact of the economic downturn more severely than the capital.

The Equality Trust, in their submission to the inquiry, argue that regardless of spreading best practice across the country, the most powerful approach to improving educational attainment across the whole country would be to make the UK more equal as a whole.<sup>116</sup> For the Equality Trust, some of the interventions that the APPG heard are merely mitigating the impact of inequality on social mobility and therefore will not be as successful as dealing with the root cause, inequality.<sup>117</sup> They argue that in order for there to be a real improvement in social mobility, there needs to be an overarching change in policy which would look to reduce economic inequality.<sup>118</sup>

### **Role of early years**

The importance of early years was something that was reiterated in every evidence session heard by the APPG. This is no surprise as Sutton Trust research has shown the importance of early years education when it comes to ensuring that disadvantaged young people get the best start in life. The early years are fundamental in preparing children for a good start in life and it plays an important role in making sure that a child continues to progress successfully throughout their educational journey, and the rest of their lives. These gaps are prominent early on, with Sutton Trust research documenting that on average, children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds start school around 11 months behind their more advantaged counterparts.<sup>119</sup>

Many of the experts that the inquiry heard from argued that getting early years education right was one of the keys to narrowing the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children and in turn, narrowing the regional attainment gap. Almost every opportunity area has listed early years education as one of its areas of focus, including the Norwich opportunity area where Dr Coulson said that the focus would be on early language.<sup>120</sup>

Luke Sibieta, in his evidence to the inquiry, said that what comes before formal education is extremely important and good quality early years teaching should form the basis of a child's formal education going forward.<sup>121</sup> Dame Sue John said that although the London Challenge did not initially focus on early years education, it was something that they acknowledged later on given its importance.<sup>122</sup>

One of the central issues in early years education is making the distinction between childcare and early years education that can help to set up a child for the rest of their lives. Policymakers tend to see both issues as part of the same solution, but they are different in focus. Improving the amount of free childcare is seen as a solution to encouraging parents into work, but childcare may not include education where a child is exposed to developing new skills.

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<sup>115</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

<sup>116</sup> The Equality Trust written evidence submitted to the APPG on Social Mobility (2018).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid

<sup>118</sup> Ibid

<sup>119</sup> Stewart, K. & Waldfogel, J. (2017) Closing Gaps Early. Sutton Trust.

<sup>120</sup> Department for Education (2017) Social mobility and opportunity areas. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas>

<sup>121</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

<sup>122</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

The Sutton Trust has called on the government to ensure that early years education is of a good quality, which includes making sure that staff are well-trained and qualified. This is because it is believed that the current policies around free childcare have been focused on providing provision to allow parents back into work rather than focusing on quality.<sup>123</sup> This suggests that the focus is less on making sure that children are learning. The former Secretary of State, Justine Greening, suggested that for the government, the next step was looking at the quality of early years education to ensure that this was a policy that they were getting right.<sup>124</sup>

Professor Kathy Sylva, in her evidence to the inquiry, outlined that her research has shown how the quality of a child's preschool can have an impact on their outcomes later on in life. Crucially for her, through good quality early education not only are children able to hold onto those gains through their educational career, but they are also better learners.<sup>125</sup> Professor Sylva outlined that her research has shown that children who went to a good quality pre-school made more progress between the ages of seven and 11 and were better learners as well.<sup>126</sup>

Quality continued to be the most pressing issue in all of the evidence that the inquiry heard around early years education. Professor Sylva suggested that the 30 hours of free childcare policy that the government had introduced had varying levels of quality depending on the provider. In the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector, the quality was varying, with it tending to be of a lower quality than the maintained sector.

For Professor Sylva, collaboration was important here too. As well as schools sharing best practice, as was discussed as one of the central themes of the inquiry, there is also a need for collaboration in early years settings too. Professor Sylva suggested that more needed to be done in order for the maintained sector, which has traditionally been better financed and supported overall, to work with the PVI sector to help it to overcome some of the challenges that have been created with the rollout of 30 hours of free childcare.<sup>127</sup>

The home learning environment was also something which Professor Sylva focused on. The inquiry had heard already from Professor Allen about how in disadvantaged areas, teachers can often find that they are left to provide additional support as students' lives enter the classroom. Professor Sylva made the point that a child's home environment can be difficult to influence but plays a very important role in a child's development.

Professor Sylva chose to focus on the importance of children's centres to the early years debate and how not only have numbers drastically declined - of the 1263 centres open in December 2009, 622 have closed, suggesting that about a third are no longer open - but that they have moved a long way from their original purpose of supporting families.<sup>128</sup>

This sentiment was also borne out in the evidence that was submitted by Peeple, who argued that they had seen a detrimental effect on children from the closure of children's centres in Oxfordshire. At the same time there had been a move away from emphasis on 0-5 years to targeted provision for older age groups and Peeple believe that this has hindered the attainment gap.<sup>129</sup>

The Sutton Trust's report, Stop Start, looked at what had happened to children's centres in more detail. Many of the closures were put down to financial pressures on local authorities, perhaps highlighting that the fiscal policies of the government since 2010 have had some impact on early years policy, and in turn on progress in closing the regional attainment gap.<sup>130</sup> The report concludes that children's centres have

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<sup>123</sup> Stewart, K. & Waldfogel, J. (2017) Closing Gaps Early. Sutton Trust.

<sup>124</sup> APPG on Social Mobility oral evidence session, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid

<sup>126</sup> Ibid

<sup>127</sup> Ibid

<sup>128</sup> Ibid

<sup>129</sup> Peeple written evidence submitted to the APPG on Social Mobility (2018).

<sup>130</sup> Smith, G., Sylva, K., Smith, T., Sammons, P. & Omonigho, A (2018) Stop Start. Sutton Trust.

been ‘hollowed out’ and that they are no longer spaces that would be considered open access neighbourhood centres.<sup>131</sup> From the case studies that the report provides, it seems the emphasis on these centres is to support the most vulnerable families with somewhat patchy approaches to the issues that are faced.<sup>132</sup> While this inquiry has found that place-based interventions tend to get the most buy-in from local people, it seems in this case there is an absence of a national strategy for children’s centres, which has led to a vacuum in its central purpose, and a decline in energy and coordination at a local level.

While good quality early years education is no doubt important, for many children who are already in the education system, it is important that there are interventions in place to help them to succeed in spite of the quality of early years education they may have received. Going forward, individual areas need to (and are beginning to) address early years as one of their key priorities to ensure that they can begin to close the gap early on.

## **Conclusion**

From the totality of evidence provided to the inquiry, it is clear that the regional attainment gap is a multi-faceted issue, with no simple solutions. Causes run from macro issues such as societal inequality, concentration of economic resources in big cities and long term economic decline of coastal and isolated areas, all the way to more specific problems like support for teachers, communication between schools and the challenges of effective collaboration and sharing of best practice.

In order to speed up the slow pace of closing the attainment gap, it is clear that a combination of holistic national policy and harnessing localised expertise and energy is required. It is in this combination where progress is most likely to be achieved in a sustainable fashion. This report contains many challenges, both for government and for schools, local governments and third sector organisations across the country. We hope that all will take up the baton, and building on the successes of the past, tackle this vital social problem with renewed vigour.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid

<sup>132</sup> Ibid

## Appendix A

List of the three evidence sessions held as part of the inquiry

### **Session One: What works to address the regional attainment gap**

*20<sup>th</sup> November 2017, House of Commons Committee Room 15*

Jo Hutchinson, Director for social mobility and vulnerable learners at the Education Policy Institute  
Professor Becky Francis, Director of the UCL Institute of Education  
Luke Sibieta, Research fellow at the Institute for Fiscal Studies  
Dr Lee Elliot Major, Chief Executive of the Sutton Trust

### **Session Two: Sharing best practice between schools across the country**

*5<sup>th</sup> February 2018, House of Commons Committee Room 15*

Dame Sue John, Executive Director of Challenge Partners  
Dr Tim Coulson, Chair of the Norwich Opportunity Area Partnership Board  
Simon Faull, Director of the Somerset Challenge  
Patsy Kane OBE, Executive Headteacher at the Education and Leadership Trust

### **Session Three: What works to address the regional mobility gap**

*21<sup>st</sup> June 2018, House of Commons IPU Room*

Presentation:

Rt Hon Justine Greening MP, Secretary of State for Education 2016-2018

Panel:

Dr Vanessa Ogden, Headteacher of Mulberry School, Tower Hamlets  
James Turner, Deputy Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation  
Professor Rebecca Allen, Director of the Centre for Education Improvement Science at UCL Institute of Education  
Professor Kathy Sylva, Senior Research Fellow and Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Oxford

## Appendix B

List of those who submitted evidence to the Inquiry:

1. Cornwall Council
2. The Prince's Trust
3. National Foundation for Educational Research
4. Bodmin College
5. Children's University
6. MyBigCareer
7. University of Dundee
8. National Literacy Trust
9. Nottingham Trent University
10. Peeples
11. The Equality Trust
12. Villiers Park Educational Trust
13. Dr Carol Fuller, Institute of Education at University of Reading
14. Education Endowment Foundation
15. Achievement for All