

Post-16 transitions for 'lower GCSE attainers' in Greater Manchester

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About this report

This is a summary of Greater Manchester (GM) specific findings from a research project on the post-16 transitions of young people who do not achieve grade A*-C (now 9-4) in English and maths GCSE by the end of Key Stage 4 (KS4). We called these young people 'lower attainers'. In most years they make up around two fifths of the GCSE cohort.

The research involved quantitative and qualitative analysis linking KS4 and post-16 data. It produced many important new insights into who these young people are, what happens to them in the post-16 phase and what the barriers are to progress and achievement. You can find below links to the full report and a summary¹, as well as a recording of the launch event², a blog with some of the main findings³, and a data dashboard enabling exploration of the data at local education authority, combined authority, regional and national levels.⁴

The research focused on two combined authority areas: Greater Manchester and North of Tyne, and within them on smaller localities to explore how transitions are affected by local structures of provision and practices. In Greater Manchester, these localities were Oldham, Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall, Eccles, and Wythenshawe (see Appendix A for definitions). One of the key contributions of this aspect of the research was to document all the advertised post-16 provision in these localities (by subject and level) and the entry requirements, thus identifying which learners could get into which courses/apprenticeships.

This short report summarises findings for Greater Manchester. For ease of reading we have not included wider findings or conclusions or details of our methodology, which can be found at the links below. There is a brief methodological overview at Appendix B. A key point to note is that the research covers the years 2013 to 2017 (the most recent data available at the time of the research). The main focus is on the cohort completing Key Stage 4 in 2015, since these can be tracked through to age 19. This means that we refer to the old GCSE grading system (A*-U). For the smaller localities we use pooled data from the 2013 to 2016 GCSE cohorts to increase the number of observed learners.

¹ <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/post16transitions>. The main report is entitled: *Moving on from initial GCSE 'failure': Post-16 transitions for 'lower attainers' and why the English education system must do better.*

² <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/events/moving-on-from-gcse-failure>

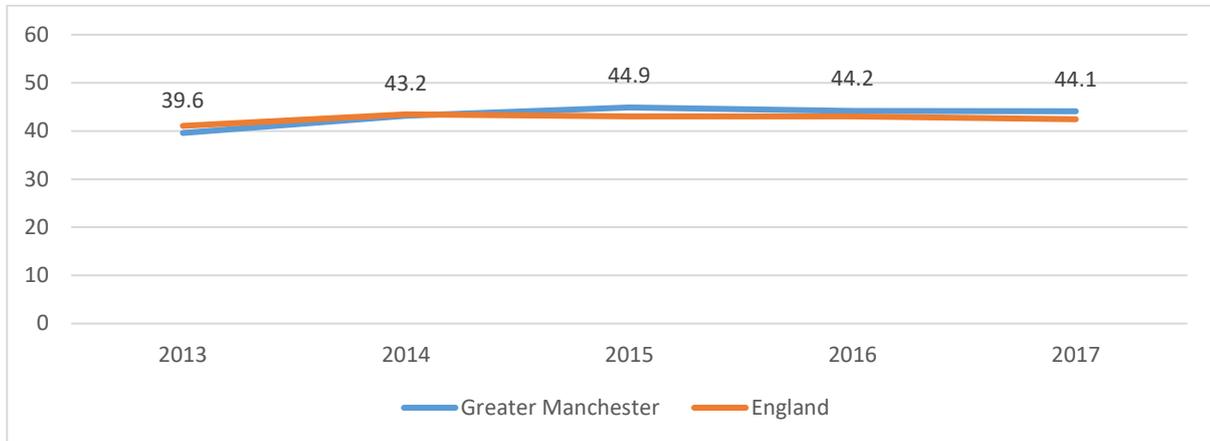
³ <http://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/posts/2021/02/filling-a-youth-shaped-gap-in-the-fe-white-paper-reducing-inequalities-in-post-16-progression/>

⁴ Available to download here: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/students-who-do-not-achieve-a-grade-c-or-above-in-english-and-maths>

'Lower attainers' in Greater Manchester

The proportion of 'lower attainers' in Greater Manchester is very similar to that of England as a whole (Figure 1), although since 2015 it has been little higher than for England overall, previously slightly lower.

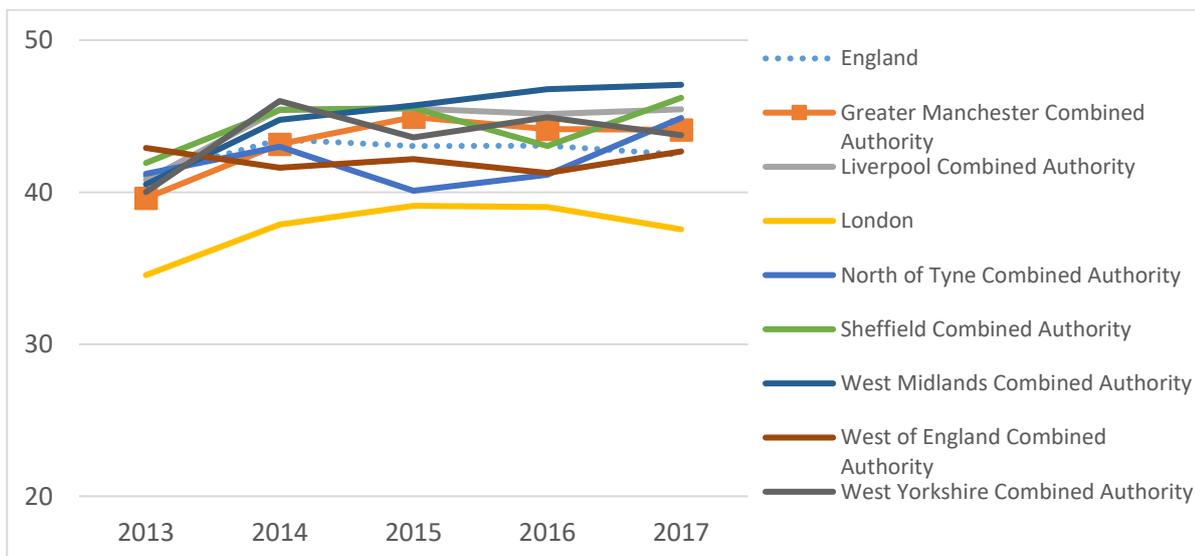
Figure 1: Percentage of learners in Greater Manchester and England who are 'lower attainers' (i.e. did not achieve grade C/4 in English and/or maths, or both), 2013-2017



Source: National Pupil Database. Note. Data labels are for Greater Manchester.

Figure 2 shows the proportion of 'lower attainers' in Greater Manchester compared to other combined authorities and England, for cohorts between 2013 and 2017. Whilst GM was lowest of all combined authorities in England in 2013 (except London), it has had a rate of 'lower attainers' that is middling amongst the other combined authorities in the years since. It will be observed that the biggest difference in most years was between London and other areas, reflecting the familiar pattern of London's higher educational attainment, rather than between the combined authorities outside London.

Figure 2: Percentage of cohort who are 'lower attainers', by combined authority, 2013-2017



Source: National Pupil Database.

Attainment profiles within the 'lower attainer' group

A key aim of our research was to understand the variation within the 'lower attainer' group. While headline figures simply identify proportions achieving key GCSE benchmarks, grouping the others together as those who have not been successful, the reality is that there is a huge range of attainment among 'lower attainers'. Some 'lower attainers' have a strong profile of achievement but have not gained a Grade 4/C in either English or maths, while some have no GCSE or equivalent passes at all.

We grouped 'lower attainers' into nine categories based on attainment in English and maths GCSEs and on their overall GCSE or equivalent achievement. The classification produces nine categories of learners, shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Classification of 'lower attainers' into nine attainment categories

	Number of GCSEs at A*-C/9-4 (or equivalent qualifications)		
	5 or more	1 to 4	none
Grade C/4 in English but not maths	<i>Five A*-C with English</i>	<i>Some A*-C with English</i>	-
Grade C/4 in maths but not English	<i>Five A*-C with maths</i>	<i>Some A*-C with maths</i>	-
Grade C/4 in neither English nor maths	<i>Five A*-C with neither</i>	<i>Some A*-C with neither</i>	No A*-C

Number of GCSEs at D-G/3-1 (or equivalent)		
5 or more	1 to 4	none
<i>Five D-G</i>	<i>Some D-G</i>	No D-G

A key finding from our research overall is that it is wrong to suggest that young people who do not achieve standard passes in both English and maths GCSE "leave school with nothing" (Children's Commissioner, 2019). Many of them have substantial achievements. Yet our qualitative research with young people revealed that these learners often feel like failures. The focus on English and maths meant their other achievements were not valued as much. We argue that there needs to be a major policy shift towards recognising and building on everyone's achievements, not focusing narrowly on English and maths thresholds.

Table 1 shows that in Greater Manchester, 24.1 per cent of 'lower attainers' achieved five or more GCSEs at A*-C (or equivalent non-GCSE qualifications) in 2015. Additionally, over half of 'lower attainers' achieved between one and four GCSEs at A*-C (or equivalents). Of these two groups, substantial proportions also achieved a C or above in one of English or maths.

Table 1: Proportion of 'lower attainers' in each attainment category, 2015 cohort

	<i>as % of 'lower attainers'</i>		<i>as % of total cohort</i>	
	Greater Manchester	England	Greater Manchester	England
Five A*-C with English	10.8	9.9	4.8	4.3
Five A*-C with maths	11.3	9.3	5.1	4.0
Five A*-C with neither	2.0	1.3	0.9	0.5
Total with Five A*-C	24.1	20.5	10.8	8.8
Some A*-C with English	11.9	12.3	5.3	5.3
Some A*-C with maths	9.5	11.6	4.3	5.0
Some A*-C with neither	30.2	27.6	13.6	11.9
Total with Some A*-C	51.6	51.5	23.2	22.2
Five D-G	10.1	10.9	4.6	4.7
Some D-G	8.7	9.0	3.9	3.9
No passes	5.4	8.1	2.4	3.5
<i>'Some D-G' and 'No passes' groups combined</i>	<i>14.1</i>	<i>17.1</i>	<i>6.3</i>	<i>7.4</i>
Total with No A*-C	24.2	28.0	10.9	12.0

Source: National Pupil Database. Excludes learners in independent schools.

Although many young people in the 'lower attainer' group have substantial Key Stage 4 achievements, those in the bottom two categories in Table 1 – the 'No passes' category and the 'Some D-G' category – leave Key Stage 4 in a much more precarious position.

Greater Manchester has relatively few of these learners compared to the national average, but nonetheless 14.1 per cent of 'lower attainers' in Greater Manchester either achieved no passes, or some passes but fewer than five.⁵ This equates to 6.3 per cent of the whole cohort in 2015.

As will be discussed below, this is a group that tends to have worse outcomes than the other categories of 'lower attainers', and for whom more support is therefore likely to be required. We do not have data on the characteristics of these learners in GM, but the national data suggests that more than half of them have special educational needs, and substantial proportions are additionally eligible for Free School Meals. There is also a substantial proportion who have incomplete records in the NPD, suggesting that they may have moved schools during Year 11 or faced other disruption to their education.

⁵ Achievement of five GCSE passes is 'full Level 1' and is often held to be an indicator of a broad basic level of education.

Post-16 destinations

Table 2 shows the destinations of young people living in Greater Manchester after completing Key Stage 4. Destinations are those in which the learner was registered on the 1st of November following the end of Key Stage 4. Data are pooled over four cohorts (2013 to 2016) to increase the number of observed learners.

Table 2 reflects a very different structure of post-16 provision in Greater Manchester compared to England overall. The largest overall post-16 destination for learners in Greater Manchester was General FE colleges, followed by Sixth Form Colleges; both of which take on much greater proportions of learners compared to England. Greater Manchester has the smallest school sixth form offer of all combined authorities in England, which is reflected in the much smaller proportion of learners moving into school sixth forms compared to both the national figure (14.3 per cent compared to 37.9 per cent), and to all other city regions. Apprenticeships as destinations are in line with national levels, around 3.5 to 4 per cent.

There are similar patterns among young people who did not achieve a grade C or above in English and maths. General FE colleges account for three fifths of post-16 destinations for 'lower attainers', and sixth form colleges account for a greater proportion than for England overall (13.3 per cent compared to 6.6 per cent). Other forms of destination are broadly in line with national figures.

Table 2: Post-16 destinations in Greater Manchester compared to England as a whole, 2013-2016 cohorts

	<i>All learners</i>		<i>'Lower attainers'</i>	
	Greater Manchester	England	Greater Manchester	England
General FE College	41.3	36.7	59.7	55.2
Sixth Form College	31.7	12.8	13.3	6.6
School sixth form	14.3	37.9	7.3	17.2
Any other education provider	2.9	2.6	3.7	3.6
Apprenticeship	3.9	3.6	5.0	5.0
Traineeship	0.3	0.2	0.6	0.4
Employment and/or training	0.5	0.5	1.0	1.0
NEET, unknown or not recorded	5.1	5.7	9.4	10.9
Total	100	100	100	100

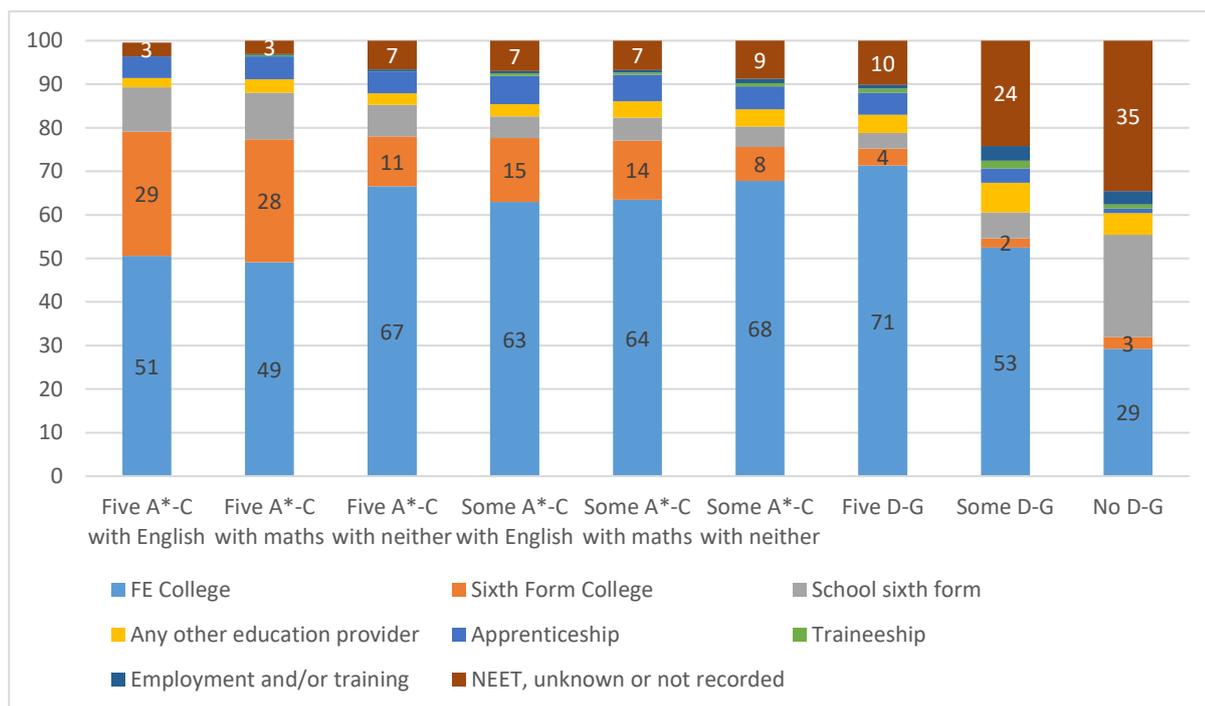
Source: National Pupil Database. Excludes learners in independent schools. Note. Traineeships included with employment and training due to low numbers of observations at city region level.

As we have seen, there is considerable diversity within the overall group of 'lower attainers' in terms of their Key Stage 4 attainment profile. When we examine the post-16 destinations of young people in each attainment category, we can see that these differences in attainment have an impact on the types of transitions made. Between 75 and 80 per cent of 'lower attainers' that have either five A*-C grades, between one and four A*-C grades, or five subjects at grades D-G (i.e. the first seven types) go to either FE College or sixth form college. What is clear is that 'lower attainers' with five A*-C grades that also have either English or maths (first two types) are much more likely to go to a sixth form college, which may be due to the impact of not reaching both of these

standards on the options available to young people. But learners in the remaining attainment categories do tend to have lower levels of overall attainment, which may also play a role.

For learners in the 'Some D-G' and 'No D-G' categories, unsuccessful transitions (i.e. to NEET or unknown status) were very common. Around 1 in 4 of those in the 'Some D-G' category, and over 1 in 3 of those in the 'No D-G' category, made an unsuccessful transition, accounting for around 1,800 young people across the four combined cohorts. These figures are much higher than across England overall, where only 14.6 per cent and 22.6 per cent are NEET, respectively. This suggests that these learners may require additional support leading up to, and during, the post-16 transition.

Figure 4: Transitions to post-16 destinations for young people in Greater Manchester, by attainment category, 2013-2016 cohorts



Source: National Pupil Database. Excludes learners in independent schools.

Levels of learning in Year 12

Just as learners across the attainment categories display differences in terms of their post-16 destinations, so too there are notable differences in terms of the levels of learning entered after Key Stage 4. Focusing first on learners in education, as opposed to apprenticeships or traineeships, Table 3 shows the principal level of learning that young people were engaged in on November 1st following Key Stage 4.⁶

Of young people in the first two attainment categories ('Five A*-C with English' and 'Five A*-C with maths'), a majority made a transition to courses at Level 3. Of these, a substantial proportion were

⁶ Level of learning is defined as the level associated with the largest number of guided learning hours (GLH) across all the learning aims the learner was enrolled in on November 1st following completion of Key Stage 4. For instance, if a young person is enrolled in a Level 2 BTEC in Sports of 360 GLH, a Level 2 Functional Skills Award in maths of 45 GLH, and a Level 1 certificate in employability of 90 GLH, their total GLH at Level 2 are 405, with 90 GLH at Level 1. This person would be categorised as learning at Level 2.

enrolled on at least one AS or A level qualification. For learners in the other attainment categories, most transitions were either to Level 2, or Level 1. It is notable that even among learners who already achieved five or more GCSE passes (i.e. 'full Level 1'), a not insignificant proportion made a transition to Level 1 as their main level of learning post-16. For instance, among those in the 'Some A*-C with neither' category, almost a third were on Level 1 courses, and just under 9 per cent were on Entry Level courses in November of Year 12.

Table 3: Levels of learning in Year 12 for young people in Greater Manchester, by attainment category (learners in education only)

	Entry Level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	of which, at least one A/AS Level*	Unable to determine	Total
Non-lower attainers	0.0	1.2	4.0	93.3	73.4	1.5	100
Five A*-C with English	<0.5	4.4	20.2	71.7	31.7	<5.0	100
Five A*-C with maths	0.4	7.0	20.7	69.6	26.9	2.4	100
Five A*-C with neither	6.8	29.1	39.5	18.6	4.3	6.1	100
Some A*-C with English	0.7	12.5	55.2	25.5	3.9	6.1	100
Some A*-C with maths	1.3	16.8	51.6	24.2	3.5	6.2	100
Some A*-C with neither	8.5	33.2	43.9	7.0	1.1	7.5	100
Five D-G	11.4	48.2	29.0	2.1	<0.5	9.3	100
Some D-G	24.5	36.9	11.7	0.7	<0.5	26.3	100
No D-G	23.6	15.8	<5.0	<0.5	<0.5	57.1	100
Total lower attainers	6.4	22.7	34.9	27.0	9.1	9.0	100
Total	2.6	9.8	16.3	66.8	47.7	4.5	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N = 108,116. Note: Population is limited to learners observed in education providers.

This is a nation-wide phenomenon, not something that occurs only in Greater Manchester, but it raises questions about the process of allocating learners to different levels of learning, and the reasons why some learners are placed on an apparently lower level than the one they already hold. The national data suggests that this tends to be more common in vocational areas related to construction and engineering. The professionals we interviewed suggested that learners often will not have had the chance to study these subjects during Key Stage 4, meaning that most learners are required to start at a lower level to build up the required basic skills. But this phenomenon is observed to some degree across all subject areas and, crucially, there appear to be spatial differences in the tendency for learners to make a transition to the same, or a lower, level of learning than the one they already acquired at KS4.⁷ Further investigation is needed to understand the reasons behind these differences.

Table 4 shows what level of apprenticeship young people in Greater Manchester transitioned to after Key Stage 4, again depending on their attainment category. Due to the low number of learners moving into apprenticeships, some values have had to be suppressed, and others approximated. It

⁷ See footnote 1 for more information in main report.

is nonetheless clear that ‘lower attainers’ are less likely than other learners to move into a Level 3 (Higher) apprenticeship and more likely to start on a Level 2 (Intermediate) apprenticeship. This is true for learners in all the attainment categories, but it does appear that those who attained a C or above in one of English or maths (rather than neither) are somewhat more likely to move into a Level 3 apprenticeship rather than a Level 2 apprenticeship. It is also notable that a greater proportion of learners with a grade C in maths moved into a Level 3 apprenticeship than those achieving a C or above in English.⁸

Table 4: Levels of learning in Year 12 for young people in apprenticeships in Greater Manchester, by attainment category

	Level 2	Level 3	Unable to determine	Total
Non-lower attainers	59.2	35.3	5.5	100
Five A*-C with English	75.9	15.0	9.2	100
Five A*-C with maths	66.5	26.8	6.7	100
Five A*-C with neither	75.5	9.8	14.7	100
Some A*-C with English	78.9	12.2	8.9	100
Some A*-C with maths	71.9	19.2	8.9	100
Some A*-C with neither	81.1	7.1	11.8	100
Five D-G	75.0	6.1	18.9	100
Some D-G	64.7	<2.0	<35.0	100
No D-G	63.0	0.0	37.0	100
Total lower attainers	75.5	12.4	12.1	100
Total	68.3	22.5	9.2	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N = 4,631. Note: Population is limited to learners observed on apprenticeship programmes.

In focus groups with young people in Greater Manchester, several participants told us that while careers advice was provided in their schools, it often failed to meet their needs and expectations. Several young people commented that only cursory information was provided, often by representatives from local colleges who came into school, and that they didn’t have an opportunity to sit down with a careers adviser. Those who did receive one-to-one careers advice often said that this felt like a box-ticking exercise rather than a genuine chance to discuss their interests and ambitions. Some commented that careers advisers did not listen to them or had much interest in what young people had to say. Given these experiences, it is perhaps not surprising that some young people start on courses below their previous levels of achievement in ‘Year 12’ as many young people reported feeling rushed into making their course choices.

⁸ This is something that is found in the national data too.

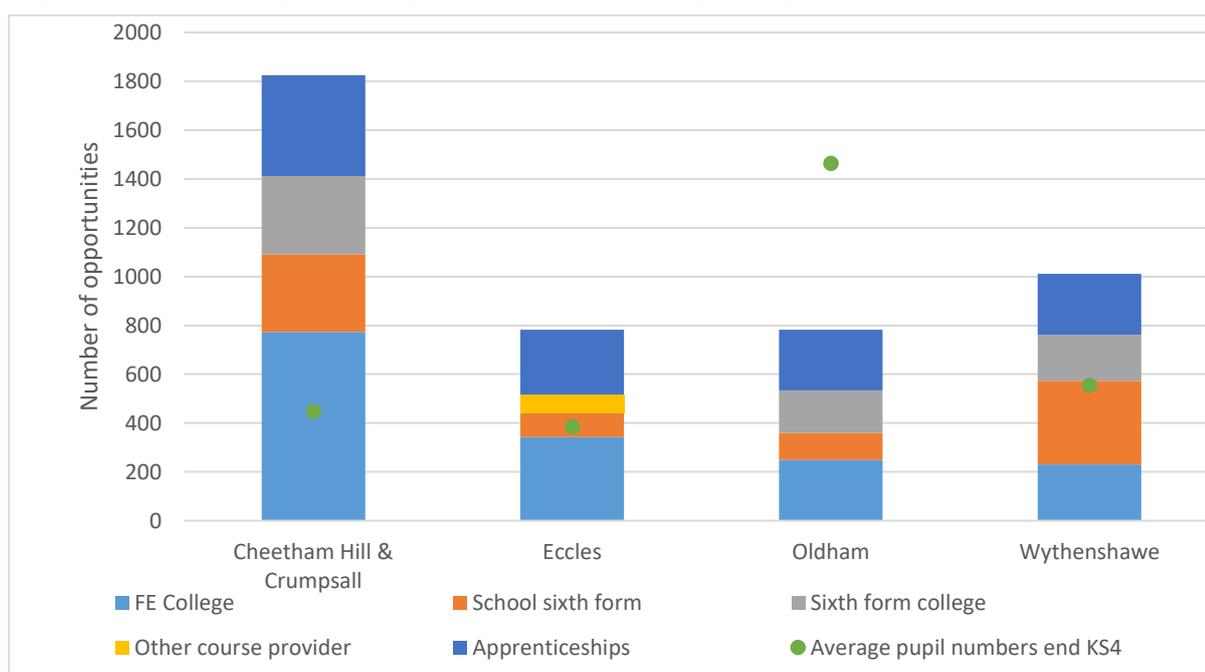
Post-16 opportunities in case study localities

To explore the lived realities of post-16 transitions, we zoomed in on smaller localities. We selected four individual localities within Greater Manchester – Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall, Eccles, Oldham and Wythenshawe – and for each of these areas analysed the post-16 providers that could be reached within 60 minutes travelling via public transport (or on foot) by using the Google Maps API. We then compiled data on all courses offered at these providers, including the level and the subject area, by visiting provider websites. We also gathered data on apprenticeship vacancies using the ‘Find An Apprenticeship’ website on GOV.UK. This gave us a comprehensive overview of all of the post-16 opportunities open to young people in each of the four localities, although this is of necessity a snapshot at a particular point in time.

When we refer to an ‘opportunity’ in this section, we refer to either a course available at a college or other provider (e.g. a Level 1 Diploma in Professional Cookery), or, in the case of apprenticeships, a single apprenticeship vacancy advertised by a provider or employer. It is worth noting that most courses can accommodate relatively large numbers of learners, whereas apprenticeship vacancies are usually for just one place. The number of ‘opportunities’ should therefore be seen as an indication of the *range* of different things that young people have access to, not an indicator of the numbers of post-16 places.

What becomes clear when examining post-16 opportunities in this way is that there are substantial differences in what is available to young people depending on where they live. For instance, as shown in Figure 5, the overall number of opportunities is much higher in Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall, with Eccles and Oldham having less than half the number of opportunities. This suggests that young people in Oldham and Eccles may have a narrower range of different options to choose from. The extensive number of opportunities available to those living in Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall is in part because of the relative proximity to central Manchester, meaning that a larger range of providers can be reached within 60 minutes on public transport.

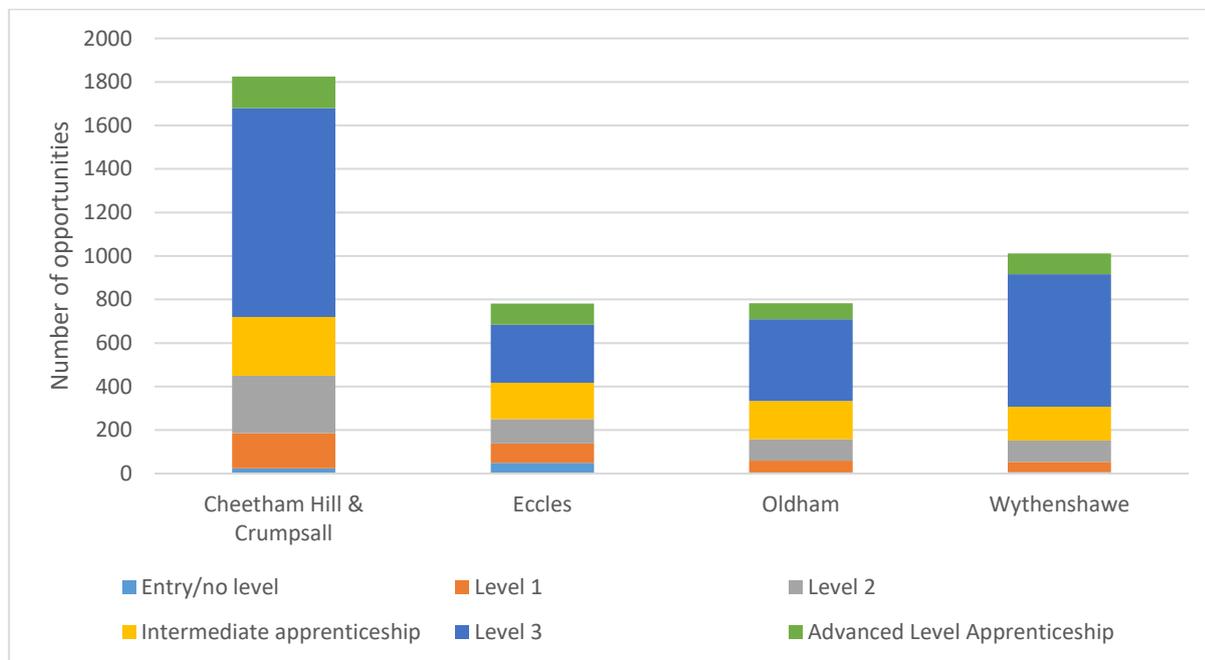
Figure 5: Number of post-16 opportunities by locality and type of provision



Source: Dataset on opportunity sets constructed by the researchers, average pupil numbers from the National Pupil Database.

As shown in Figure 6, the number of opportunities by type (i.e. courses versus apprenticeships) and level of learning also varies. As well as having many more opportunities in general, Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall has a larger share made up of Level 3 courses. Similarly, Wythenshawe also has a relatively large share of opportunities at Level 3.

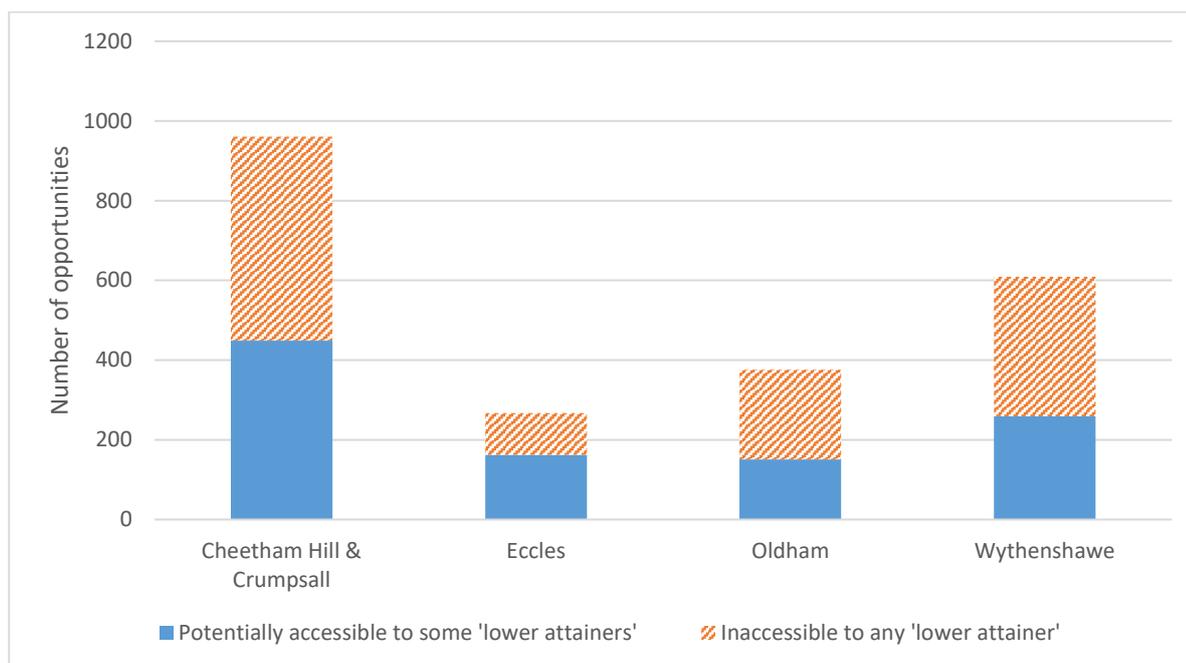
Figure 6: Number of post-16 opportunities by type, level and locality



Source: Dataset on opportunity sets constructed by the researchers.

Having examined the total number of post-16 opportunities that are available to young people in each of the four localities, it is important to bear in mind that not all of these will in fact be accessible to young people without grade A*-C in English and maths. By gathering data on the entry requirements of each of the courses and apprenticeships advertised by providers in the three case study localities, we were able to make an assessment of the number of opportunities that would potentially be accessible to 'lower attainers', and the opportunities that would be closed off due to the stated entry requirements including a grade C or above in both English and maths. As shown in Figure 7, such inaccessible opportunities make up a substantial proportion of all post-16 opportunities in each of the three localities. For all localities except Eccles, over half of post-16 opportunities are inaccessible to 'lower attainers'.

Figure 7: Number of post-16 opportunities that are accessible to 'lower attainers'

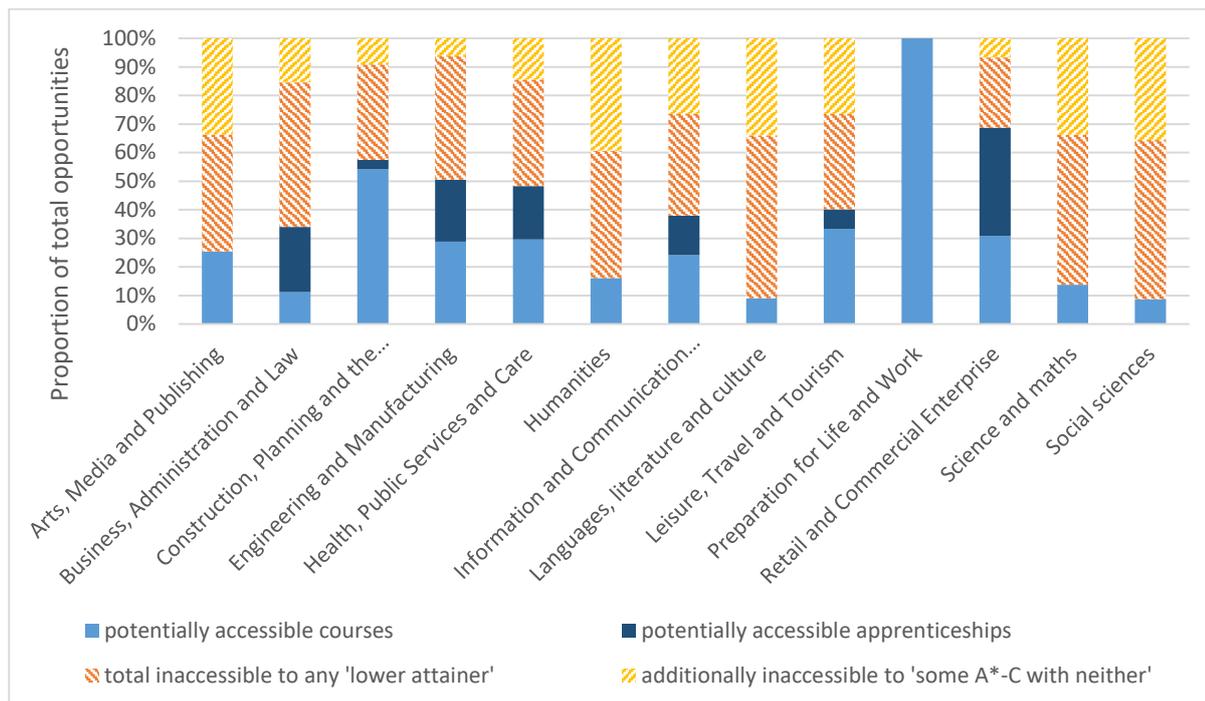


Source: Dataset on opportunity sets constructed by the researchers.

The reason why Figure 7 divides opportunities into those which are inaccessible, and those who are *potentially* accessible to *some* 'lower attainers' (rather than definitely being accessible) is because entry requirements usually include a number of stipulations. Aside from (often, but not always) calling for specific grades in English and maths, they also often include general provisions about, for instance, the required number of GCSEs at grade C/4 or above. Thus, whether a 'lower attainer' is able to access a particular opportunity depends on their specific attainment in not just English and maths but also their other subjects. Other requirements, such as portfolios, auditions and interviews, do not relate specifically to grades.

We can get a better sense of how entry requirements affect different groups of learners by considering the accessibility of opportunities for learners in our different attainment categories. For example, for learners in the 'Some A*-C with neither' category, certain opportunities will be inaccessible due to the requirement to have a grade C in English and maths, but in addition, some opportunities will be blocked because they call for at least five GCSEs at A*-C. The extent to which opportunities are closed off in this way varies between subject areas, depending on the level that particular subjects tend to be offered at, and potentially due to subject-level differences in entry requirements. For instance, taking Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall as an example, we can see in Figure 8 that a relatively large share of opportunities in Humanities, Languages, literature and culture, Science and maths, and in Social sciences, are inaccessible to young people in the 'Some A*-C with neither' category.

Figure 8: Post-16 opportunities in Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall, by subject, type, and accessibility to learners in the 'Some A*-C with neither' category



Source: Dataset on opportunity sets constructed by the researchers.

Actual post-16 destinations in case study localities

Having shown the differences in provision structures and different types of post-16 opportunities in the four case study localities, in this section we compare these to the actual destinations of learners from these areas as observed in the ILR, NPD and NCCIS data.

To provide some context for this, we also show, in Table 5, the composition of 'lower attainers' in each locality. As in the previous analysis, the cohorts from 2013-2016 are combined together to increase the number of observed learners, since the case-study localities contain relatively small numbers of young people.

As indicated in Table 5, there are some differences in the make-up of 'lower attainers' between localities, but these differences are on the whole fairly minor. Eccles has the lowest proportion of 'lower attainers', at 45.3 per cent. This is compared to the other localities which has rates of over 50 per cent. The largest proportion of 'lower attainers' in all localities are in the 'Some A*-C with neither' category. All four localities have a larger proportion that are 'lower attainers' than is the case for England as a whole; Oldham with the largest, at 54.5 per cent of the 2013-2016 cohorts (compared to only 42.6 per cent nationally).

Table 5: Distribution of learners across attainment categories, by case study locality

	Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall	Eccles	Oldham	Wythenshawe	England
Non-lower attainers	48.5	54.7	45.5	46.5	57.4
Five A*-C with English	6.5	6.8	3.9	5.5	4.6
Five A*-C with maths	7.2	4.0	5.8	5.0	4.9
Five A*-C with neither	3.2	4.9	3.8	4.0	2.7
Some A*-C with English	3.4	5.5	5.5	6.8	4.2
Some A*-C with maths	4.6	2.9	5.0	3.8	4.3
Some A*-C with neither	17.2	13.7	19.3	17.6	12.2
Five D-G	3.8	1.8	3.6	3.0	3.2
Some D-G	2.9	3.7	4.4	4.5	3.3
No D-G	2.7	2.1	3.2	3.4	3.2
Total lower attainers	51.5	45.3	54.5	53.5	42.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 11,396.

Examining the destinations of all 'lower attainers' in each of the four localities, Table 6 shows that Wythenshawe diverges from the other three in terms of where learners continue their studies or training. A smaller proportion of learners go to FE College (47.6 per cent compared to over 60 per cent in other localities), and a greater proportion go to school sixth forms. This is reflective of Wythenshawe's landscape of provision, which compared to other case study localities has fewer FE colleges and a greater number of school sixth forms within a 60 minute travel time. In addition, a greater proportion of learners are NEET or unknown, perhaps signalling a need for better guidance for these young people when making this transition.

One in five 'lower attainers' in Oldham go on to studying at a sixth form college, a figure slightly higher than in other localities. More than one in three 'lower attainers' go to FE College in Eccles and Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall, with a slightly higher rate starting in apprenticeships in Eccles and Wythenshawe.

Table 6: Transitions to post-16 destinations for 'lower attainers' in each case study locality (%)

	Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall	Eccles	Oldham	Wythenshawe	Total	England
FE College	69.2	68.1	60.8	47.6	60.3	55.2
Sixth Form College	13.1	0.0	21.6	13.5	16.2	6.6
School sixth form	7.6	13.9	4.2	17.7	8.5	17.2
Any other education provider	1.6	5.9	2.5	3.8	3.0	5.1
Apprenticeship	0.0	4.5	2.0	3.8	2.3	5.0
NEET, unknown or not recorded	8.6	7.6	8.9	13.7	9.7	10.9

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 5,830.

Note: Columns do not sum to 100 per cent as not all destinations have been reported. Grey numbers indicate where values have been approximated by aggregating from analyses with very small numbers of observations where exact values were suppressed.

We additionally consider destinations for 'lower attainers' with different attainment profiles. Due to the relatively small numbers of learners in each locality it is not possible to separate learners into the fine-grained categories reported above, so we group together learners into three larger attainment categories: Five A*-C (shown in Table 7), Some A*-C (shown in Table 8), and No A*-C (shown in Table 9). Some values have had to be rounded due to small cell counts. Here we can see that, even when considering learners with broadly similar Key Stage 4 attainment, there are notable differences between the localities in the types of provision attended.

Overall, General FE colleges are the most common destination type across all three attainment categories, and especially prevalent for learners achieving some A*-C grades but fewer than five. However, in Eccles general FE colleges are also a very common destination for learners in the 'Five A*-C' group, with more than two-thirds of learners in this group moving to a general FE college, a much higher percentage than in the other three localities. This may be explained by the fact that Salford, the local authority in which Eccles is located, does not have any dedicated sixth form colleges, but instead has one large general FE college that includes a sixth form centre. Learners from this area with good overall attainment may be enrolling in this centre rather than entering a distinct sixth form college in another area of Greater Manchester. It is also notable that while all four localities have fewer learners moving into school sixth forms than the England average, in Wythenshawe a much higher proportion of 'lower attainers' enter school sixth form at 16 than in the other three areas, particularly among the 'Some A*-C' and 'No A*-C' groups. The reason for this is likely to do with the fact that, as mentioned, Wythenshawe has a relatively high number of schools with sixth forms compared to other areas of Greater Manchester (at least at the time of analysis). In our interviews with professionals, several of these told us that part of the reason why a number of schools in the area maintain a sixth form is to provide a local post-16 option for young people who do not wish to travel into other areas of the city region, given Wythenshawe's location on the very edge of Greater Manchester. These school sixth forms offer a fairly broad and accessible range of courses, including some Level 2 vocational qualifications, to enable a wider range of young people to stay on than might be the case in a 'typical' school sixth form.

Table 7: Transitions to post-16 destinations for young people belonging to the 'Five A*-C' categories, by case study locality (%)

	Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall	Eccles	Oldham	Wythenshawe	Total	England
FE College	52.5	70.3	46.1	44.7	51.4	47.9
Sixth Form College	28.7	<1.0	42.0	24.1	30.5	11.0
School sixth form	11.6	14.1	4.3	18.4	10.0	29.2
Any other education provider	<2.0	5.4	2.0	3.1	2.4	3.1
Apprenticeship	<2.0	5.8	1.7	4.4	2.5	4.8
NEET, unknown or not recorded	4.6	<5.0	3.1	4.7	3.3	4.0

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 1,625. Note: Columns do not sum to 100 per cent as not all destinations have been reported.

Table 8: Transitions to post-16 destinations for young people belonging to the 'Some A*-C' categories, by case study locality (%)

	Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall	Eccles	Oldham	Wythenshawe	Total	England
FE College	77.1	68.1	68.3	48.5	66.8	61.6
Sixth Form College	6.4	<1.0	19.6	11.2	14.2	6.1
School sixth form	3.3	9.7	0.8	18.1	5.6	13.3
Any other education provider	3.1	7.7	2.2	3.8	3.3	4.8
Apprenticeship	<2.0	4.7	1.6	4.8	2.4	5.8
NEET, unknown or not recorded	6.9	6.5	6.1	12.5	7.6	8.3

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 3,100. Note: Columns do not sum to 100 per cent as not all destinations have been reported.

Table 9: Transitions to post-16 destinations for young people belonging to the 'No A*-C' categories, by case study locality (%)

	Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall	Eccles	Oldham	Wythenshawe	Total	England
FE College	64.3	42.2	52.1	44.8	55.0	50.4
Sixth Form College	<1.0	<2.0	<2.0	4.2	0.9	2.3
School sixth form	10.1	21.6	12.6	14.1	14.4	10.6
Any other education provider	<5.0	<10.0	3.7	4.2	3.1	8.6
Apprenticeship	<2.0	<5.0	3.0	<5.0	1.8	3.3
NEET, unknown or not recorded	18.5	24.1	22.6	27.4	24.8	24.9

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 1,105. Note: Columns do not sum to 100 per cent as not all destinations have been reported.

As well as local differences in the type of provision attended, we see differences in the principal level of learning that young people are on in Year 12. As shown in Table 10, studying at level 3 in post-16 learning is most common across all localities for those achieving five A*-C grades; however this is particularly the case in Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall, where 67 per cent of this broad attainment category study at Level 3. This is not the case for young people from Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall with 'Some A*-C' grades, since among this group fewer are on Level 3 courses or apprenticeships in Year 12 compared to some of the other areas. In addition, both Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall and Oldham seem to have relatively high proportions of learners in the 'Some A*-C' group moving into Entry Level or Level 1 courses. Another interesting finding is that a relatively large proportion of learners in Wythenshawe who have no A*-C grades are learning at Level 3 in the first year of the post-16 phase. Due to the small numbers of learners that this analysis draws on, it is difficult to say much about what may explain this.

Table 10: Levels of learning in Year 12 for young people in the 'Five A*-C' categories, by case study locality (learners in education only)

	Entry Level/ Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	of which, at least one A/AS Level*	Total
Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall	6.1	26.9	67.0	29.7	100
Eccles	12.9	33.0	54.1	7.8	100
Oldham	15.3	30.6	54.0	23.2	100
Wythenshawe	17.2	28.2	54.6	16.4	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N = 1,516.

Table 11: Levels of learning in Year 12 for young people in the 'Some A*-C' categories, by case study locality (learners in education only)

	Entry Level/ Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	of which, at least one A/AS Level*	Total
Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall	35.3	52.8	11.9	<2.0	100
Eccles	26.4	53.5	20.1	<2.0	100
Oldham	36.8	51.2	12.0	2.4	100
Wythenshawe	28.5	53.2	18.3	<2.0	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N = 2,595.

Table 12: Levels of learning in Year 12 for young people in the 'No A*-C' categories, by case study locality (learners in education only)

	Entry Level/ Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	of which, at least one A/AS Level*	Total
Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall	34.4	52.1	13.5	0.0	100
Eccles	43.1	41.2	11.8	<5.0	100
Oldham	23.2	49.5	26.6	<1.0	100
Wythenshawe	21.4	41.1	36.6	<1.0	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N = 576.

There are also differences between the localities in terms of the subject areas studied, as shown in Table 13. Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall has the largest proportion of 'lower attainers' enrolled in multiple equally-sized subjects (which for the most part will be AS/A Levels), compared to the other three localities. This makes sense considering that we saw, in Table 7, that a relatively large proportion of learners in the 'Five A*-C' group move onto Level 3 as their main level of learning in Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall. In contrast, in Wythenshawe, a larger share of learners are engaged in Construction, planning, and the built environment than elsewhere; and Oldham stands out for having a relatively large proportion of learners on courses or apprenticeships in Information and communication technologies. In both Eccles and Wythenshawe, Health, public services and care appears to be a more common subject area than in the other two localities.

Table 13: Subject area of main qualification on November 1st of Year 12, for all lower attainers, by case study locality

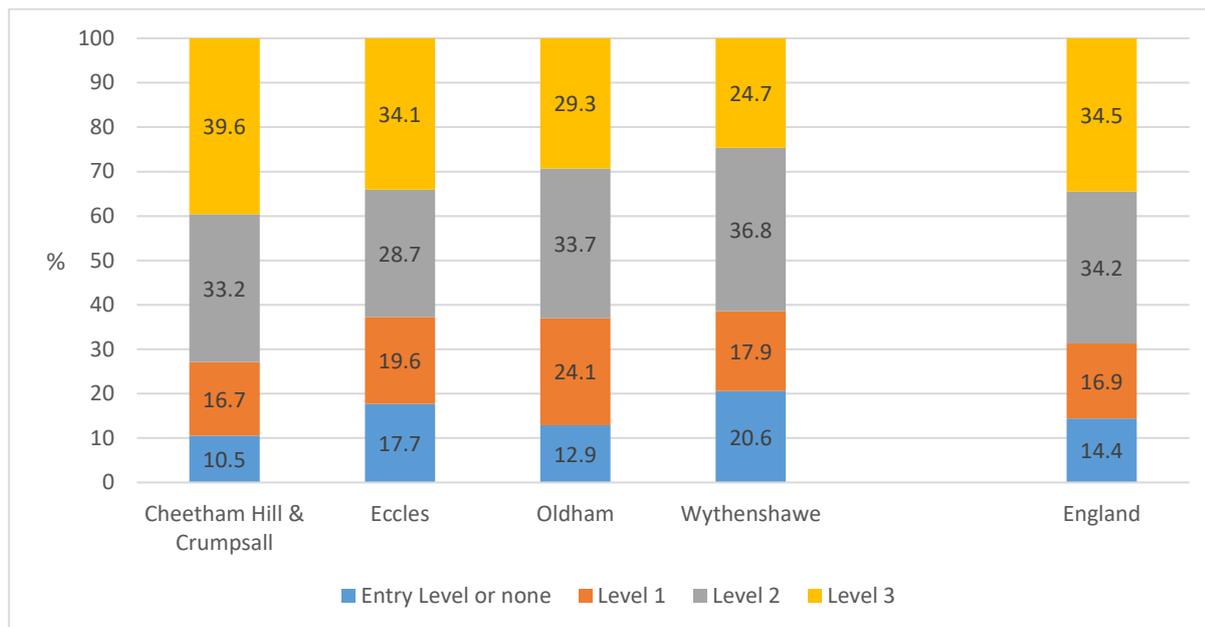
	Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall	Eccles	Oldham	Wythenshawe
Multiple subject areas	21.1	7.0	11.5	9.2
Health, Public Services and Care	16.6	17.8	20.6	17.2
Leisure, Travel and Tourism	6.8	11.5	8.0	12.2
Engineering and Manufacturing	6.2	3.6	7.6	8.3
Arts, Media and Publishing	7.4	13.6	7.4	10.2
Preparation for Life and Work	10.9	9.6	7.8	8.9
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	3.1	10.6	6.3	9.3
Retail and Commercial Enterprise	4.5	7.9	5.0	10.7
Business, Administration and Law	9.8	3.4	8.7	3.6
Information and Communication Technologies	5.7	6.1	3.5	3.6
Learner doing E&M only	<2.0	<1.0	7.9	1.5
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N = 4,659. Notes: Population restricted to learners in education only. Columns do not sum to 100 per cent as some smaller subject categories are omitted from the table.

Lastly, we consider the post-16 attainment outcomes of learners in these three localities, to assess the extent to which the differences in opportunity structures, destinations and levels of learning entered in Year 12 feed through into differences in educational outcomes across the three areas. To do this we look at the highest level of qualification achieved during the two years following completion of Key Stage 4, when most learners will have turned 18 (Figure 9). We focus on all ‘lower attainers’.

We can see that the proportion of ‘lower attainers’ who managed to achieve a Level 3 qualification is highest among learners in Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall (39.6 per cent). This is in line with the differences in level of learning entered in Year 12 that we’ve seen in Table 10 to 12, confirming that the level of learning that young people start on at the beginning of the post-16 phase is strongly linked to the level of attainment achieved by age 18. This is of course not altogether surprising, but it is worth remembering that the Key Stage 4 attainment profile of each area was very similar across the three localities. This means that, starting from similar levels of Key Stage 4 attainment, ‘lower attainers’ in Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall were able to achieve, on the whole, higher levels of post-16 attainment than learners in other localities – particularly Oldham and Wythenshawe – seemingly because more of them transitioned to Level 3 courses after Year 11.

Figure 9: Highest level of qualification achieved between age 16 and 18, all 'lower attainers' by case study locality



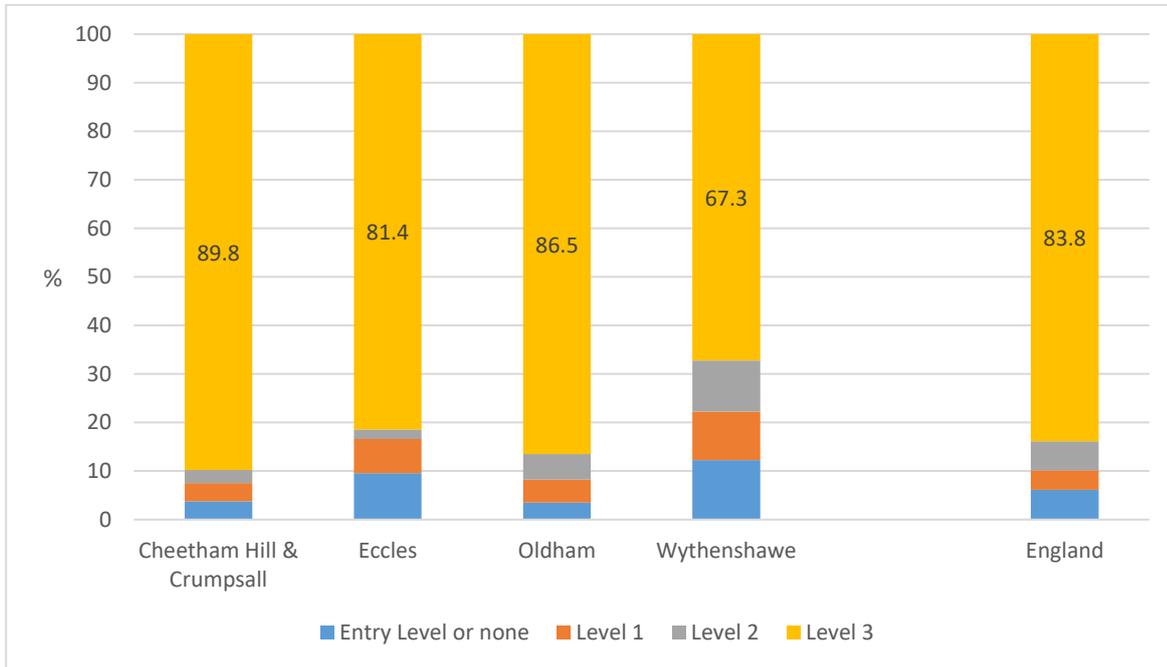
Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 5,543. N (England) = 897,808. 'Highest level of qualification' refers to any qualification achieved during the post-16 phase, regardless of size.

To illustrate further the point that spatial differences in the level of learning on entry to the post-16 phase play a role in explaining differences in outcomes, Figure 10 shows that when considering only those learners who started at Level 3 in Year 12, learners in Oldham in particular are much closer to Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall in terms of rates of attainment of Level 3 qualifications. This does not appear to be the case in Eccles and Wythenshawe, where the proportion of 'lower attainers' starting Level 3 courses in Year 12 who achieve a Level 3 qualification by 18 still trails that of Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall. However, the picture in Oldham suggests that a learner's starting level in post-16 study has consequences for leaving post-16 study with a higher-level qualification.

Of course, just because young people have not achieved a qualification at Level 3 by age 18 doesn't mean they will not go on to achieve one at some later stage. A substantial proportion of learners remain in further education until age 19, or even longer.⁹ Additionally, we have not considered the type or the size of qualifications achieved, and of course attainment of a Level 3 qualification is only one indicator of 'success' in the post-16 phase. What is arguably most important is that young people complete the post-16 phase with skills that will help them be successful in the labour market and in life. Nonetheless the preceding analysis illustrates an important point, namely that the local structure of post-16 provision has an impact on the types of education and training routes pursued by young people, and through this, on the levels and types of qualifications achieved, even if debate can be had about what the 'optimum' mix of outcomes looks like.

⁹ Though when analysing attainment across larger areas in our main report, we found that while extending the analysis to age 19 increases attainment of Level 3 qualifications to some degree, this increase is relatively modest.

Figure 10: Highest level of qualification achieved by 18 for 'lower attainers' on Level 3 programmes in Year 12, by case study locality



Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 1,200. N (England) = 247,714.

Key points from this report

- Greater Manchester has a similar proportion of 'lower attainers' to England and a similar proportion of 'lower attainers' to other combined authority areas except London which is the area of the country with the lowest percentages of 'lower attainers'.
- 'Lower attainers' do not typically leave school 'with nothing' – around 76 per cent of 'lower attainers' in Greater Manchester leave school with some good GCSEs (here, A*-C grades) – a higher percentage than the England average. This is driven by the higher percentages of 'lower attainers' in Greater Manchester who have five or more GCSEs at A*-C – around 24 per cent of 'lower attainers' in Greater Manchester compared with 21 per cent in England.
- Lower attainers in Greater Manchester are overall more likely to be in a sixth form college and less likely to be in a school sixth form than those in England as a whole – reflecting structures of provision. However, the predominant destinations for those in this group are FE colleges. This, of course, will be influenced by prior attainment. Those with the highest KS4 achievements were typically more likely to be in sixth form colleges than those with lower achievement. Apprenticeship as a destination in Greater Manchester is in line with national levels.
- Higher percentages of learners with the lowest KS4 attainment made an unsuccessful transition in Greater Manchester than in England overall.
- Around 27 per cent of 'lower attainers' in Greater Manchester are learning at Level 3 following KS4. This is most common for those who have Five or more GCSEs at A*-C and one of English or maths at that level. Those without this are much less likely to be studying at this level including those with Five A*-C but neither English nor maths.
- Many young people in Greater Manchester start post-16 on levels of learning that are lower than their prior achievements. This is not necessarily a problem but it can affect what they are able to achieve by age 18/19. Strikingly, around 36 per cent of young people in Greater Manchester with Five GCSE grades at A*-C but neither English nor maths at this level started courses at Level 1 or below. Where 'lower attainers' started apprenticeships, these were typically at Level 2.
- There is variety in provision at the local level within Greater Manchester in terms of the range of opportunities and what is accessible. We observed differences in the level and subject areas of opportunities across the four localities we studied – Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall, Eccles, Oldham and Wythenshawe. But it is important to study entry requirements in conjunction with opportunities – doing so showed us that areas with fewer advertised courses and apprenticeships overall could have more that were accessible to those with lower grades.
- Starting from similar levels of Key Stage 4 attainment, 'lower attainers' in Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall were able to achieve, on the whole, higher levels of post-16 attainment than learners in other localities – particularly Oldham and Wythenshawe – seemingly because more of them transitioned to Level 3 courses after Year 11.

Appendix A: Locality profiles

Locality definitions

The localities were defined on the basis of ward boundaries as a starting point, with a few minor deviations reflecting natural boundaries or local knowledge. For instance, the Wythenshawe locality excludes the area around Manchester airport.

Table B1: Locality definitions

Locality	Definition
Oldham	Includes the wards of St James', Waterhead, St Mary's, Alexandra, Coldhurst, Werneth, Hollinwood, and Medlock Vale. Bordered by the M60 to the south, and the river Medlock to the east (although it also includes the Holts estate just east of the river). It also includes Moorside and Sholver to the north.
Eccles	Includes the Eccles, Barton and Winton wards. Bounded by Worsley golf course and Swinton park golf course to the north, the Gilda Brook roundabout to the east, and the Manchester ship canal to the south. Includes Peel Green just to the west of the M60. Also includes the Westwood Park/Alder Forest area of Eccles up to the boundary of Worsley.
Cheetham Hill and Crumpsall	Includes the Cheetham and Crumpsall wards. Bounded by the river Irk to the north and east, the Manchester Inner Ring Road to the south, and the boundaries of Salford local authorities to the west.
Wythenshawe	Includes the northern part of the Woodhouse Park ward (the built-up area north of the airport/the A555), Baguley ward, Sharston ward and the part of the Northenden ward south of the M56 (basically Benchill).

Oldham

Oldham is a large town in the north-east of the Greater Manchester conurbation. Large parts of the town, especially the central area, is in the top two deciles of the IMD, although areas further from the city centre are less disadvantaged. Central Oldham has a majority British Asian population, mostly comprised of people from Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnicity. The outer areas of the town are mostly White British. There is a similar divide between the more central areas of Oldham and the surrounding suburbs in terms of ONS area classifications, with the central areas classified mostly as 'Ethnicity Central' and 'Multicultural Metropolitans', while the outer areas classified as 'Hard-Pressed Living' and 'Constrained City Dwellers'.

Population

108,000

16 year old population

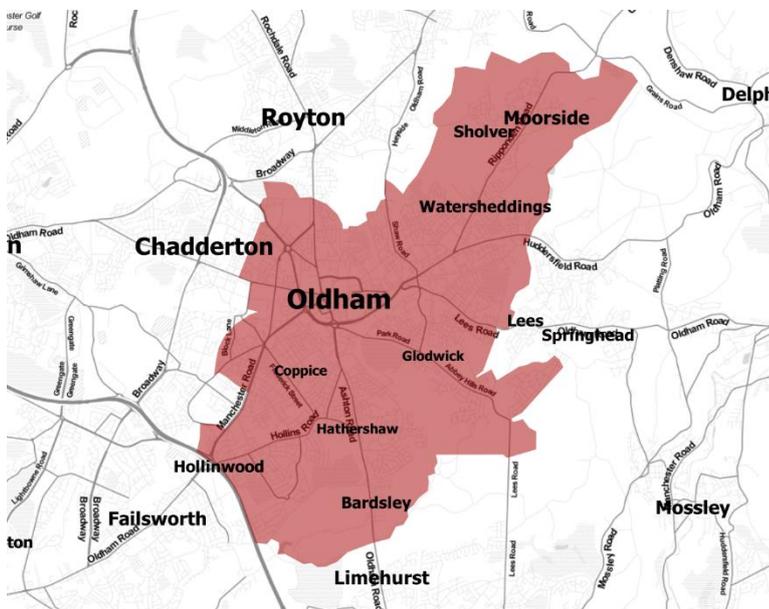
1,660

Percentage of young people who are 'lower attainers'

53

Pre-16 provision

- 4 mainstream secondary schools, 1 with a sixth form
- 2 special schools
- 4 independent schools, 2 of which are single-sex schools with religious ethos



Post-16 providers within...

30 minutes	45 minutes	60 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 FE college • 1 sixth form college • 1 school sixth form • 1 UTC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 FE college • 2 sixth form colleges • 3 school sixth forms • 1 UTC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 FE colleges over 5 sites • 4 sixth form colleges • 9 school sixth forms (of which two are single-sex schools with a religious ethos) • 1 UTC

Post-16 landscape type

Abundant provision, mix of FE college and sixth form college

Eccles

Eccles is a town in Greater Manchester, in the Salford local authority. The town contains several areas of economic disadvantage, but also several middle-income areas and some higher-income areas, especially around Ellesmere Park. All areas of the town are majority White British in terms of ethnic make-up, but a sizable minority of the population is of 'White Other' ethnic background, and there are small minorities of Pakistani and Bangladeshi residents. The dominant ONS classifications in Eccles are 'Constrained City Dwellers' and 'Hard-Pressed Living', although much of Particroft is classified as 'Multicultural Metropolitans'. The Ellesmere Park neighbourhood is classified as a mix of 'Urbanites' and 'Suburbanites'.

Population

38,000

16 year old population

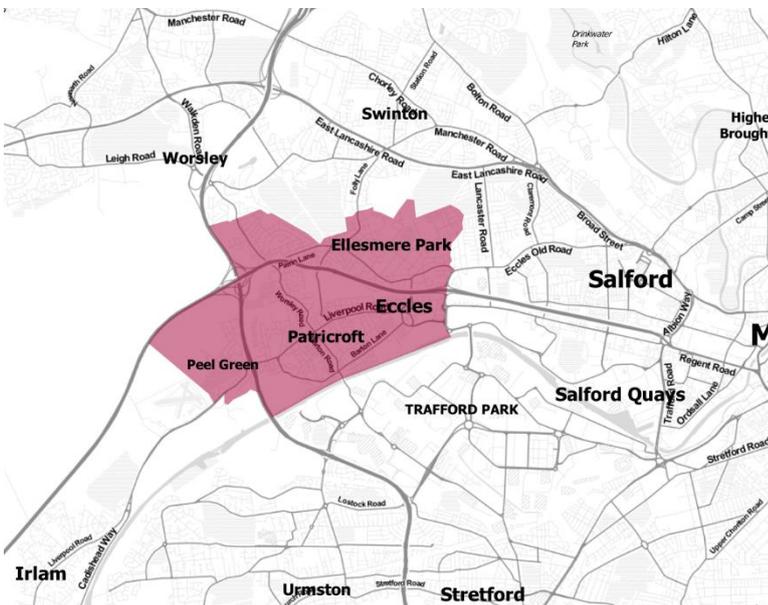
346

Percentage of young people who are 'lower attainers'

55

Pre-16 provision

- 3 mainstream secondary schools, of which one with religious ethos (none with sixth forms)
- 3 special schools (1 with sixth form)



Post-16 providers within...

30 minutes	45 minutes	60 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 FE college site offering limited provision • 1 sixth form college (part of same provider as above) • 1 UTC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 FE college over 3 sites • 2 sixth form colleges (part of same provider as above) • 1 UTC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 FE colleges over 7 sites • 2 sixth form colleges • 7 school sixth forms • 2 grammar school • 1 studio school • 1UTC

Post-16 landscape type

Moderate provision, dominated by large FE provider

Cheetham Hill and Crumpsall

Cheetham Hill and Crumpsall are inner-city neighbourhoods in north Manchester. Levels of economic disadvantage are high across many parts of the two neighbourhoods. In terms of ethnicity the two neighbourhoods are roughly evenly split between White British and (British) Asian residents (mostly Pakistani and Indian). There are also small minorities of White Other, Black and Black British residents, as well as a small proportion of residents of Arab ethnicity. Most of Cheetham Hill and Crumpsall is defined by the ONS as 'Multicultural Metropolitans', with smaller areas classified as 'Ethnicity Central' and, in the very south of Cheetham Hill, some areas classified as 'Constrained City Dwellers' and 'Cosmopolitans'.

Population

38,000

16 year old population

474

Percentage of young people who are 'lower attainers'

36¹⁰

Pre-16 provision

- 5 mainstream secondary school, of which 4 with a religious ethos (3 of which have a sixth form)
- 1 special school with religious ethos



Post-16 providers within...

30 minutes	45 minutes	60 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 FE site offering limited provision • 3 school sixth forms (all with a religious ethos) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 FE colleges over 8 sites • 4 sixth form colleges • 5 school sixth forms (of which 3 have a religious ethos) • 1 grammar school • 1 UTC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 FE colleges over 8 sites • 4 sixth form colleges • 5 school sixth forms (of which 3 have a religious ethos) • 1 grammar school • 1 UTC

Post-16 landscape type

Abundant provision, mix of FE college, sixth form college and religious school sixth forms

Wythenshawe

¹⁰ GCSE attainment varies substantially between schools, ranging from just below the England average at Abraham Moss Community High School and extremely high at the King David High School.

Wythenshawe is a large suburban housing estate located to the south of Manchester, largely built in the post-war period. Much of the area is ranked in the top decile of the IMD, although there are parts that are closer to the middle-income range. In terms of ethnicity, the area is mostly White British (70-90 per cent), but especially in central areas of the district, there are small shares of residents from Indian, Black African, and White Other backgrounds. Most areas of Wythenshawe are classified by the ONS as 'Hard-Pressed Living', 'Multicultural Metropolitans', and 'Constrained City Dwellers', with small pockets of 'Urbanites' and 'Suburbanites' particularly in Baguley and Woodhouse Park.

Population

46,000

16 year old population

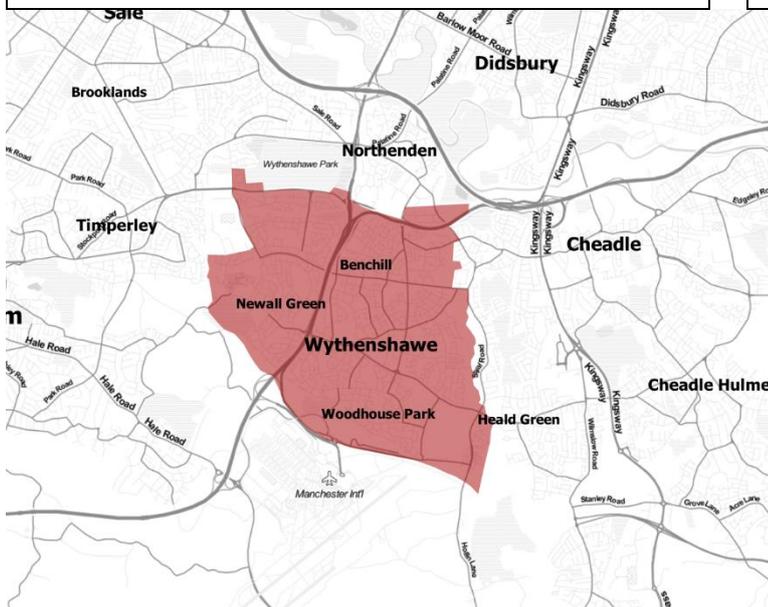
534

Percentage of young people who are 'lower attainers'

61

Pre-16 provision

- 4 mainstream secondary schools, 1 of which has a religious ethos (3 with sixth forms)
- 1 special school



Post-16 providers within...

30 minutes	45 minutes	60 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 FE college sites with a somewhat limited course offer • 3 school sixth forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 FE college sites with a somewhat limited course offer • 8 school sixth form • 4 grammar schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 FE colleges over 7 sites • 4 sixth form colleges • 15 school sixth forms • 5 grammar schools • 1 studio school

Post-16 landscape type

Moderate provision, mix of school sixth form and FE college

Appendix B: Data and Methods

The project consisted of both quantitative analysis of administrative data on learners in England, and qualitative research with both young people and professionals working in Greater Manchester.

For the **quantitative analysis** we used the National Pupil Database (NPD) and the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). These are the main datasets containing information about young people's education and training activities, as well as achievements, during the post-16 phase. Data from the National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS), which is aggregated from Local Authority data on young people's post-16 activities, was used to supplement the NPD and ILR where young people could not be found in either of these datasets. We mainly follow the cohort of young people who completed Key Stage 4 in 2015, since we are able to track these young people through to age 18. But for the local analysis we pool data for several cohorts – those completing Key Stage 4 in 2013 through to 2016 – to increase the number of observed learners.

The **qualitative fieldwork** consisted of focus groups with young people aged 16-20 engaged in further education in Greater Manchester (one focus group in each of Eccles, Oldham and Cheetham Hill & Crumpsall, and two focus groups in Wythenshawe). We also interviewed some of the young people who took part in the focus groups on a one-to-one basis to gain more detailed insights into their experiences. The focus groups, as well as interviews, centred around how young people made decisions about what post-16 path to pursue. More detail about how the focus groups were conducted can be found in the main report. Additionally we interviewed ten professionals working in further education and related areas in Greater Manchester.