

Policy@Manchester

Measuring the efficacy of raising KS2 attainment on Levelling Up in England

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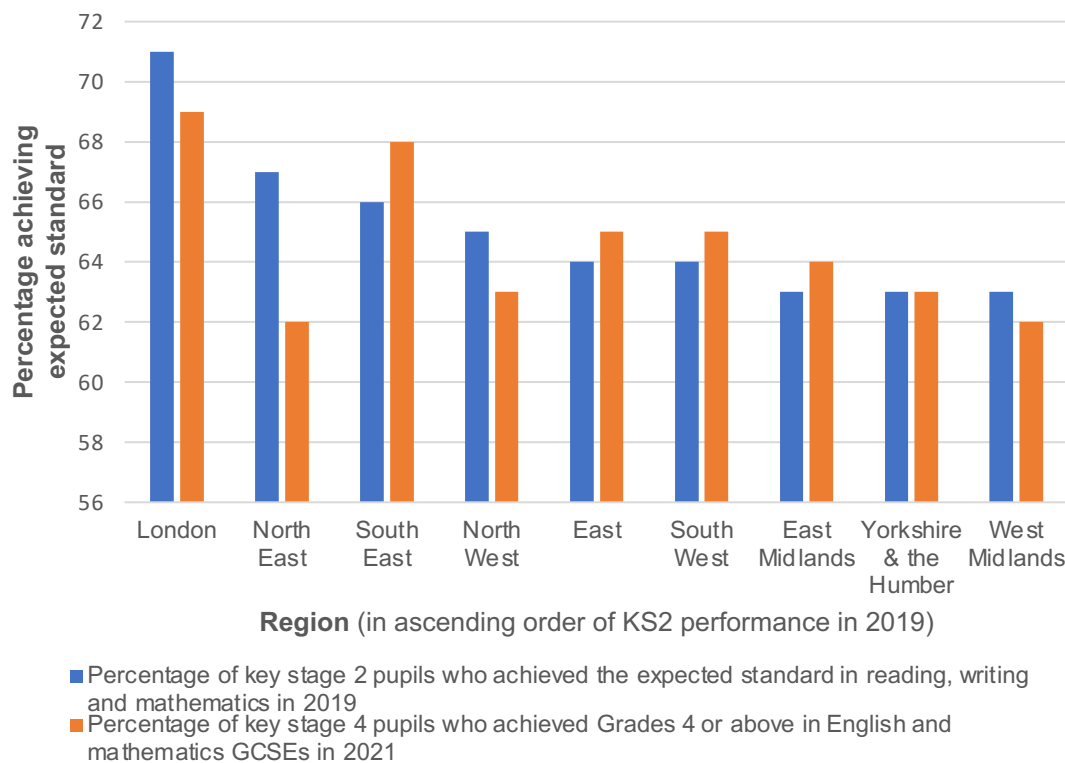


Figure 1. **The attainment gap:** Proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in KS2 and KS4 for the most recently published year (KS2, 2019; KS4, 2021) by English sub-region.

- Statistically significant, positive relationships between LEAs' proportion of pupils achieving expected standard at KS2 in 2016 and proportion of pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs at KS4 in 2021 did not exist for *all* 9 regions in England.

Potential policy recommendations

- View raising GCSE performance in underperforming regions as a mechanism with which to engender the core economic and social aims of Levelling Up;
- Pledge to raise GCSE attainment well beyond its current unambitious targets;
- Designate the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber as 'Educational Action Regions' that receive especial focus, funding and support because the relationship between proportion reaching expected standard in KS2 and KS4 are not positively related; and
- Commission causal research into why the relationship between local authorities' proportion reaching expected standard at KS2 and KS4 attainment is weak in the North East and Yorkshire & the Humber.

Overview of the Data Fellowship

I spent my 8-week data fellowship with Policy@Manchester, which is the University of Manchester's sector-leading policy engagement institute. I conducted a quantitative research report which explored the government's Levelling Up Education policy and its impact on skills in the labour market.

After a detailed review of the literature, I tested the hypothesis that LEAs' proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard at 2016 was positively associated with the proportion of pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs including English and maths in *all* 9 sub-regions. This is because the core Levelling Up Education policy was to raise local educational authorities' (LEAs) proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard at KS2, yet the research focused on the social and economic benefits that transpire from 'good' GCSE performance at KS4.

Data Analysis

To test the hypothesis, I conducted bivariate linear regression models for LEAs' proportion of pupils achieving expected standard at KS2 and the proportion of pupils 5+ GCSEs inc English and maths in all 9 sub-regions. LEAs were weighted by their size (with respect to number of pupils) in the models.

Findings

- There exist persistent and wide gaps in attainment at both KS2 and KS4 between the sub-regions in England.
- Students' GCSE performance is positively related to many social and economic benefits later on in life.

Key Skills Learnt

- I gained an insight into how policymakers and researchers collaborate with one another to inform policies that are informed by robust evidence.
- I was afforded the time and space to conduct a quantitative, social research report independently, which has prepared me for the independence and skills required for my dissertation.
- I learned how to structure both an analytics report, in which I described the methodology and statistics (ie. whether the assumptions to use the models held), *and* a policy briefing, which is a more accessible document and outlines the policy recommendations made in light of the findings.

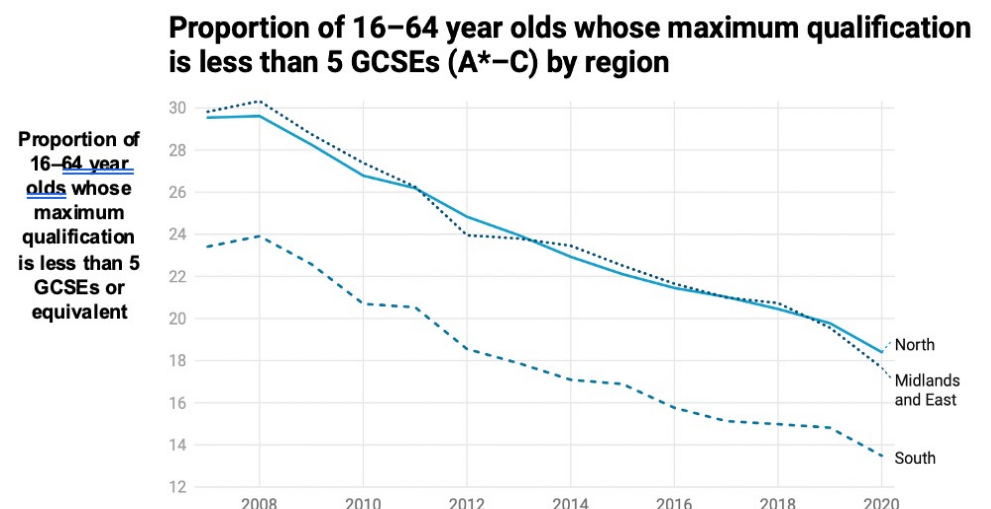


Figure 2. **The skills gap:** Proportion of 16–64 year olds who have low formal educational qualification in the North, Midlands & East, and South (2006–20).