

International migration and the education sector – what does the current evidence show?

Introduction and background

The impact of international migration on the education system is a topic of intense interest. It links to the number of children requiring school places, the attainment of pupils and the number of teaching and support staff in schools.

In May 2018, The Office for National Statistics (ONS) made a commitment to provide more evidence on the impacts of international migration on different sectors. This article is the first part of its research on the education sector. It will be followed later in the year with a further article exploring wider data sources. The ONS recognises that measuring the impact of international migration presents a considerable challenge. There is limited data available to measure it and there are at present no consistent way to measure international migration. This article draws on the best indicators which are available and presents insights which can be gained from these sources. It covers only children in state-funded primary and secondary schools. It contains a number of links to local level data.

Key points

School place demand

- There are a number of factors which influence the demand for school places. International migration is just one of these factors.
- Births, rather than migration, are the main driver of demand. However, international migration increases the number of births, and births to non-UK mothers have increased over the last 20 years. In some areas, such as parts of London, there is a higher proportion of non-UK pupils and a higher number of births to non-UK mothers. There are links in the full article which enable exploration of data at a local level.
- Comparing the numbers moving to the UK with those leaving over the period 2002 to 2017, it is estimated that the population of 5- to 15-year-olds in England in 2017 was 300,000 higher than it would have been had there been no international migration of children since 2002. To put this in context, there an overall total of just over 7 million births between 2002 and 2012 (the birth years of the current 5- to 15-year-olds).
- The direct impact of migration of children on the demand for school places is therefore small compared with the number of children born each year.
- In January 2018, country of birth information was provided for 84 per cent of pupils in state-funded schools, with more data for primary schools (90%) than secondary schools (75%). The data is a useful indicator of the impact of people moving to the UK on pupil numbers, but they do not give the full picture about international migration as there is no information on children who have left the UK. They also include small numbers of UK residents born abroad, such as children born to armed forces personnel posted overseas.
- The above data showed that in January 2018, around 7 per cent of children in state-funded primary schools and 10 per cent in state-funded secondary schools were born outside the UK. Of these, just over half were from EU countries.
- The proportion of pupils who were born outside the UK varies greatly across England, highest in London (15%) and lowest in the North East (4%).
- In 2017, there were around 189,000 births to non-UK born mothers in England, 20% more than in 2007. The main change has been in the number of births to women from EU countries. Between 2007 and 2017, the total fertility rate (TFR) for non UK born women fell, from 2.48 in 2007 to 1.95 in 2017. However, this was outweighed by the fact that the number of non-UK born women of childbearing age in England increased by 53 per cent, so the overall number of births to non-UK born mothers increased. In comparison, births to UK-born mothers decreased by 8 per cent over the same period, from 498,000 in 2007 to 458,000 in 2017.
- Births to non-UK born mothers made up 29 per cent of births in England in 2017, up from 24 per cent in 2007. This proportion varies greatly across the country. In London, 58 per cent of births were to mothers born outside the UK, whereas the figure was just 11 per cent in the North East. Looking at changes over time, there are some significant differences between local authorities. In Havering, the proportion of births to non-UK born mothers increased from 17 per cent in 2007 to 32 per cent in 2017. Over the same time period, other local authorities with large increases were Peterborough, Thurrock, Barking and Dagenham, and Swindon.
- It must be remembered that looking at the mother's country of birth cannot give a full picture of the impact of international migration on demand for school places. There will be UK-born women who have emigrated and whose children are therefore educated overseas.

English as an additional language and attainment

- When considering the impact of international migration on the education sector, there are 2 key questions. Do international migrants achieve different results? Does international migration have an effect on the overall learning of all pupils in the school?
- The closest indicator available in the attainment data is English as an additional language (EAL). EAL means that the pupil has been exposed to a language other than English during early development and continues to be exposed to this language in the home or community. However, it is not an exact proxy for international migration, as some of these children were born in the UK.
- In 2018, of all pupils in state-funded schools, 19 per cent had English as an additional language, up from 14 per cent in 2010. The proportion is higher for primary schools than secondary schools, with 21 per cent of pupils in state-funded primary schools having EAL in 2018, compared with 17 per cent in state-funded secondary schools.
- Data published by the DfE allows us to look at attainment for EAL pupils and compare it with those whose first language is English. In the key stage 1 teacher assessments – completed when pupils are aged 6 or 7 years – EAL pupils had slightly lower levels of attainment than first language English pupils.
- At GCSE level, attainment of EAL pupils in 2018 was broadly similar to those with English as a first language. The data by region show that EAL pupils performed slightly better in 2018 in all regions except Yorkshire and The Humber.
- The DfE publish a measure called Progress 8 that shows the progress of pupils between age 11 and age 16. This showed that EAL pupils taking their GCSEs in 2018 had made much greater progress over this period than pupils with EAL.
- The analysis did not find any evidence of a link between the number of pupils with EAL in a particular area and the overall attainment of pupils in that area. Similarly, at local authority level, no evidence was found of a link between pupils with EAL and overall GCSE attainment.

Staff

- International migration contributes to the workforce in schools, with around 12 per cent of school staff in England born outside the UK in 2015 to 2017. Statistics vary considerably across the country, from 4 per cent in the North East to 31 per cent in London.

The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/internationalmigrationandtheeducationsectorwhatdoesthecurrentevidenceshow/2019-05-03>