

# State of the Nation 2018-19: Social mobility in Great Britain

## Introduction and background

**Social mobility means ensuring that a person's occupation and income are not tied to where they started in life. It is also about ensuring that people of all backgrounds get equal opportunities at all stages. This is the sixth State of the Nation report. Using new data on parental occupation from the Office for National Statistics it examines the changing rates of social mobility since 2014. This is the first report to analyse how class interacts with gender, ethnicity and disability and to look at the link between background and region.**

## Key points

### Early years

- The gap between children from different backgrounds begins at birth, with children from less advantaged families having lower birthweights.
- There is a large skills gap in the early years workforce; 45 per cent of childcare workers claim benefits or tax credits.
- The government's 30 hours free child care, although well-intentioned, can impede rather than help social mobility, as poorer families are either ineligible for, or unaware of it.
- In 2018, 43 percent of children entitled to free school meals (FSM) did not reach a good level of development at age 5, compared to 26 per cent of their more advantaged peers.
- The closure or scaling back of children's centres will make it more difficult to ensure that the hardest to reach families benefit from the investment which has been made in the home learning environment.

### Early years: recommendations

- The government should lower the lower income limit for the 30 hours free childcare offer, making it available to those working the equivalent of 8 hours a week. There should then be a revised marketing campaign, targeted at low income families, to promote the 30 hours offer.
- The Department for Education (DfE) should complete its review of children's centres as soon as possible; following the review, the Government should make sure that investment in the home learning environment reaches disadvantaged and vulnerable families.

### Schools

- There are still large gaps in attainment throughout the primary phase. At age 6, there is a 14 per cent attainment gap in the phonics screening check between those eligible for FSM and their peers. At the end of key stage 1 there are gaps in reading (18%), in writing (20%) and in maths (18%). At the end of key stage 2, 46 per cent of pupils eligible for FSM meet the expected standard in reading,

writing and maths, compared to 68 per cent of all other pupils.

- At the end of key stage 5, 16 per cent of FSM eligible pupils attain 2 A levels, compared to 39 per cent of all other pupils.
- Ofsted inspections still tend to reflect the socio-economic make-up of the school's cohort; schools with better Ofsted ratings do not have a lower attainment gap.
- Between 2010 and 2018 schools have faced a real-terms 8 per cent funding cut which has had an impact on their ability to deliver important services.
- Recent reforms to the curriculum were implemented too quickly; disadvantaged pupils were disproportionately affected by this, particularly at key stage 2.

### Schools: recommendations

- Ofsted should use its new inspection framework to improve the accountability regime. It should: seek to move beyond historical use of its 4-tier inspection judgements towards a more descriptive approach; specifically report on the impact of the new framework and approach on schools in more disadvantaged areas; and identify educational excellence in schools operating within the constraints of poverty.
- Working in collaboration with others, the DfE and Ofsted should explore ways of publicly acknowledging schools which effectively tackle long-term educational inequality.
- The Government should commission a review into whether pupil premium funding is effectively targeted towards disadvantaged children and whether differential funding could be used to support those with long-term disadvantage.

### Further education and apprenticeships

- There are twice as many disadvantaged students in further education (FE) colleges as in sixth forms; the gap has risen by 1.2 per cent since 2013.

- When they resit Level 2 exams, disadvantaged students do not perform as well as their peers and this gap is growing. There has been a 12 per cent fall in per student funding for 16-19 year-olds since 2011-12 and it is now 8 per cent lower than for secondary schools. This has led to cuts to the curriculum and student support services.
- Recruiting and retaining teachers in FE is still problematic because of a £2,500 difference in pay. Ninety per cent of colleges report difficulties with recruitment; the average college had 16 vacancies at the start of the 2017-18 academic year.
- Although apprenticeships should aid social mobility, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to be clustered in lower level apprenticeships and they are therefore not benefitting as much as their more advantaged peers.
- Apprenticeship starts at level 2 and 3 have decreased by 16 and 38 per cent respectively since 2016-17. If this trend continues, it could further reduce options for disadvantaged students.

#### Further education and apprenticeships: recommendations

- Within the upcoming spending review, there should be an increase in 16-19 per pupil spending.
- The Government should ensure that data is shared automatically across schools and 16-19 institutions so that disadvantaged pupils can be easily identified.
- The Government should update the methodology underpinning the Discretionary Bursary Fund to ensure that resources are allocated to institutions based on current data.
- The Government should introduce a Student Premium for disadvantaged students aged 16-19 that models the Pupil Premium in schools, with a goal of targeting funding and focussing on raising attainment for disadvantaged students. At the same time the Government should commit to significant 'what works' style research in technical education to help providers make evidence-based decisions with their funding for disadvantaged students.
- The Commission welcomes the review of Post-16 qualifications. It recommends the addition of 3 additional items, namely: looking at ways of improving progression of disadvantaged students beyond level 2; the creation of seamless and clear transitions between technical and academic routes; and assessing the availability of options up to level 3 across the broad range of provisions including apprenticeships.

#### Higher education

- More students from low-income families are now entering university by age 19, although they are still much less likely to do so than others (26% vs 43% of better-off peers).
- Only 5 per cent of disadvantaged young people enter the most selective HE institutions compared to the national average of 12 per cent. Once there, disadvantaged students are more likely to drop out than better-off peers (8.8% versus 6.3% overall).
- Graduates who received FSM earn 11.5 per cent less than others five years after graduating.
- The HE application and admissions system remains too complex, and fierce competition between institutions is resulting in too many universities making increasing numbers of unconditional offers. These are often not in the best interests of students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### Higher education: recommendations

- UCAS, working closely with the Office for Students, universities and others, should develop a system which displays all financial support available to undergraduates alongside their eligibility criteria which can be accessed in a simple and accessible format.
- Universities should only make pre-qualification unconditional offers where it is clearly in the interests of the individual students. In terms of widening access, universities should make more use of 'contextualised offers.'

#### Working lives

- Getting into professional occupations is largely dependent on parental occupation, with people from professional backgrounds 80 per cent more likely to get into a professional job than their less privileged peers.
- Fifty-two per cent of disadvantaged young people leave school without basic qualifications and many therefore get stuck in low-paid work.
- The adult education system could help to redress the balance, but it has been in decline since 2010. There has been a 45 per cent decline in level 2 courses in English and maths.
- One of the routes to a better paid job is moving region – young people who moved region over a 4-year period were 12 per cent more likely to experience wage progression than those who stayed. However, moving is itself dependent on background; those from professional backgrounds are more likely to move.
- The gaps could widen with the increase in automation. Workers in low-paid jobs are more likely to see their jobs become automated. They are also the group which is least likely to access training to reskill.

#### Working lives: recommendations

- Government departments should become accredited voluntary Living Wage employers, thereby modelling good practice. The Government should embed the Living Wage Foundation's recommendations for public procurement systems, including assessing the voluntary living wage as part of the new social value framework for procurement.
- Employers should only require the academic and technical qualifications which are actually and demonstrably necessary to perform the advertised job.
- The Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy should work with the DfE on the Opportunity Areas programme to provide concentrated investment in the skills, jobs and infrastructure in these areas of low social mobility and low pay. They should also expand the reach to more social mobility cold spots.
- Employers and the Government should follow the action plan the Commission has set out in its recent report on adult skills. Adult education funding should be equalised with EU statistical averages and the underspend of the adult education budget should be reduced through more flexible funding structures.

The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-in-great-britain-state-of-the-nation-2018-to-2019>