



Department  
for Education

# Understanding the changing gaps in higher education participation in different regions of England

Research report

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## Executive summary

This report has been prepared jointly by BMG Research and CFE Research. It presents the findings from a study to develop a fuller understanding of reasons for regional variations in higher education participation.

## Background to the research

Participation in higher education in England has been steadily increasing since the 1990s. Participation amongst disadvantaged groups has grown in line with this overall increase and the gap between the most and least disadvantaged has narrowed. However, there are large differences in the participation rates of young people living in different parts of the country.

Other research shows that prior educational attainment and ethnicity are important predictors of participation in higher education. When these are accounted for, many differences between areas are reduced. However, some areas have much higher or lower levels of participation than would be expected given pupil attainment and the local ethnic profile, suggesting other factors are also at play.

The aim of this study is, therefore, to explore the factors influencing participation in higher education particularly where these relate to or vary by locality, and the relative influence these have on the propensity of the young people living in the area to progress into higher education. This research project:

- summarises existing knowledge on participation rates in higher education and key determinants of participation;
- identifies areas with high and low levels of participation or changes in participation, which cannot be explained by either prior educational attainment or the ethnic composition of an areas' population;
- identifies factors at a local level which appear to drive higher education participation, including environmental or other "uncontrollable" factors; and
- identifies key influential actors and stakeholders and actions they can take to influence participation.

## Method

In order to address these objectives we have adopted a mixed-methods approach which draws on the extensive literature concerned with progression to and participation in higher education, analysis of national data and primary qualitative research with young people, their parents, schools and wider stakeholders. Eight wards provide the geographical focus for the research. This enables an in-depth exploration of the factors that impact on progression within each ward as well as the identification of cross-cutting themes that appear to influence progression irrespective of geographical area. In order to facilitate a

comparison, six wards have been selected to create three matched pairs that are similar in terms of demography but which differ in terms of the level of young participation in higher education. Within each matched pair, one ward has lower than expected levels of participation and one has higher than expected levels of participation given their respective levels of pupil attainment and ethnic profiles. In addition a further two wards located in London, with one exhibiting higher than expected levels of participation and one exhibiting lower than expected levels of participation, are explored.

The case study areas are:

- **Urban pair:** Anfield, Liverpool (higher than expected participation) and Bulwell, Nottingham (lower than expected participation)
- **Rural pair:** Tipps Cross, Essex (higher than expected participation) and a ward in the South West of England (lower than expected participation).<sup>1</sup>
- **Sheffield City Region pair:** Hillsborough, Sheffield (higher than expected participation) and Aston, Orgreave and Ulley, Rotherham (lower than expected participation)
- **London case studies (not paired):** White Hart Lane, Haringey (higher than expected participation) and Mile End and Globe Town, Tower Hamlets (lower than expected participation)

In total 146 young people, 85 parents, 19 school staff and 25 other stakeholders were consulted across the 8 case study wards.

## Key findings

There were clear differences between areas in both the rural and urban case study pairs which help to further explain local variation in young participation in higher education. However, the influential factors uncovered differ between the two pairs. The differences between the two Sheffield city region areas and the London wards were less stark and it was more difficult to discern clear reasons for the different levels of participation. All this illustrates how the challenges of widening participation in higher education are not uniform across the country and that a one size fits all approach is unlikely to be appropriate for tackling them. This research shows how different factors combine in unique ways in different places to affect participation. We also gathered useful insights into influences on and perceptions of participation in higher education that cut across different areas.

## Perceptions of success

Parents and young people across areas have similar perceptions of what success in life means. The emphasis is on happiness above other considerations; an enjoyable and fulfilling career or job is seen as more important than a high salary. However, there are differences between areas and groups of participants in terms of the extent to which higher

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<sup>1</sup> We have not named the specific South West case study ward. As the population in this area is particularly sparse, it would be easier to identify the individual school, colleges and other research participants in the area, some of whom wish to remain anonymous.

education is perceived to be a potential pathway to achieving success. Raising awareness of how higher education can support individual aspirations for happiness and security may help make it a more attractive proposition to those with ability who are not currently progressing to higher education.

## **Perceptions of the local area**

The research findings indicate that feelings about and connections to the local area may influence aspiration and participation in higher education in complex ways. While areas may face similar challenges and disadvantages, we found some stark differences in the extent to which residents felt proud or stigmatised by where they come from. Further research is needed to explore links between civic pride and participation, but we suggest that a sense of pride in an area engenders a positive, optimistic outlook which is linked to aspiration and confidence to pursue ambitions.

Some communities within case study areas (both in areas with higher and lower levels of participation in higher education) are perceived to be close-knit with strong local connections and little traditional mobility. As a result, some residents are reluctant to leave to pursue learning and work opportunities. The degree to which this is a problem varies between areas. Accessible local opportunities for graduate work and higher education can make all the difference, but even where there are local opportunities, this is not always sufficient to overcome entrenched low aspirations and narrow horizons that appear to be linked to negative associations with the area.

The combination of poor transport links and lack of local higher education provision can mean that moving away from home is the only option for young people living in some rural communities. This appears to be a barrier for some. The higher costs and the added risks involved in studying away from home make this option less appealing to some young people and those who are less confident that higher education is right for them. Conversely, a plentiful supply of higher education institutions within easy commuting distance may make participation that much more accessible.

## **Local labour market**

Awareness of local labour market opportunities amongst young people and parents is generally limited to highly visible employers, such as retail, and a limited range of other local opportunities. Labour market information plays little role in the information, advice and guidance provided to young people and their decision-making. Yet having clear career paths and employment opportunities are important considerations in career decision-making.

We found evidence that the extent to which graduate jobs are visible to young people and their parents may impact on aspirations to higher education. Where young people have ready access to positive graduate role models they are more likely to be convinced of the benefits of higher education. A lack of local employment opportunities can be a spur to aspirations to leave, but where young people have close local ties, lack of local opportunities and optimism could also create lower aspirations.

## **Attitudes to higher education and alternatives**

Analysis of secondary survey data to inform this study suggests that there are regional differences in attitudes to higher education, particularly between London and other parts of England. Attitudes and aspirations appear to play a key part in explaining regional differences in participation, even after other factors such as educational attainment are controlled for.

Parents and young people generally perceive the benefits of higher education in terms of providing greater opportunities (opening doors) and enabling better job prospects. There is also concern from parents in particular, that a university education is no longer a guaranteed route to a well-paid or graduate level job given the huge increase in the number of graduates in recent years and lack of opportunities in some sectors or parts of the country.

Parents across all areas expressed concern about the cost of higher education. For many, the benefits of higher education are perceived to be worth the investment. However in some instances, where employment opportunities and in particular graduate employment opportunities are scarce or less visible to young people and parents, the benefits of higher education can appear less secure.

Some participants did highlight the wider, experiential benefits of higher education in terms of developing networks, friendships, independence and a life-shaping experience but these benefits were less frequently articulated. While the wider benefits of university alone may not be sufficient argument for participation, a greater awareness and consideration of these benefits might help to tip the balance in favour of participation.

In some instances we found a lack of understanding about the potential employment opportunities that studying pure, rather than applied or vocational, subjects can lead to. Where parents cannot see a clear link from higher education generally to career or employment opportunities, other routes such as vocational training or apprenticeships appear to offer a more appealing prospect.

## **Influences on decision-making**

Across all areas the main influences on decision making are consistent: friends, family, teachers, personal experience and to a lesser extent the media. These influences all appear to exert a greater influence on decisions about what subjects to study and career goals than formal information, advice and guidance. We therefore suggest that the extent to which young people come into contact with a diverse range of people, including those in graduate jobs, may have an impact on aspirations. This underlines the importance in areas with lower levels of participation and socially homogenous communities of introducing young people and parents to a diverse range of inspirational career opportunities.

Higher education is now seen as much more the norm. The evidence collected suggests that some young people may be following particular pathways (either into higher education or other routes) without necessarily making an informed and active decision – it is just what happens after A levels or what most people do nowadays.

## **Provision of information, advice and guidance**

Aspiration needs to be nurtured but also supported with appropriate information, advice and guidance. Information is available in all case study areas, but awareness of the sources, including the National Careers Service, is typically low. The onus is often on young people to proactively seek information out. Young people do not necessarily have the skills to identify the most appropriate source of information and to use it effectively. Furthermore there is a desire from young people for more than just information; they are seeking individually-tailored advice and guidance. Competing pressures on schools can sometimes mean that opportunities for individually-tailored career guidance are limited.

There are also indications that the quality of advice and guidance varies greatly between areas and schools, although links between this and participation in higher education in case study areas were not always clear. Formal provision of information, advice and guidance is generally perceived by parents and young people as being of limited influence and help.

Given the influence we found of personal contacts on careers aspiration, engagement with employers and the world of work would appear to be an effective way of raising and diversifying aspirations. Interactive engagement with employers appears to have greater impact than more passive forms of providing information. Schools and employer representatives expressed a desire to enhance links with each other. Barriers to doing this include the time and resources needed to set up partnerships and activities, schools and employers having other priorities and employers being asked by a number of different schools to get involved rather than a more joined up approach.

Universities and colleges are working in all the case study areas offering information, talks, university visits, residential trips and other activities. This work is perceived by universities and schools to be important for widening participation. However, despite the raft of interventions to improve participation in higher education there remains a paucity of research evidence to demonstrate impact. The key challenge for higher education institutions identified in this research is engaging schools. Often those who would benefit most from the outreach offered have other priorities such as turning around poor Ofsted ratings and improving results. Obviously enhancing attainment is a key mechanism for raising participation but, as the analysis on which this study is based demonstrates, this alone is not sufficient.

## **Recommendations**

This research helps to illuminate some of the local factors that influence participation in higher education beyond educational attainment. Some factors, particularly those that relate to geographical location, local economy and prevailing cultures of communities are not easily addressed through policy levers. However we set out below suggested actions to reduce perceived risks of participation in higher education, increase the perceptions of benefits and improve the quality of information, advice and guidance available to ensure young people can be confident in making the right decision.

## Reducing perceived risks

- **Improve access to local higher education opportunities in ‘cold spots’** (areas with lower levels of higher education provision). For some students who may be less willing to move away from the local area or who are less confident about studying higher education, more accessible and thus lower risk options may be more attractive. This could be enabled through greater and more diverse provision of higher education at further education colleges in ‘cold spots’ and / or more opportunities to study remotely.
- **Explore options for providing other options for lower risk higher education.** For example, this might involve expanding courses or curricula that provide self-contained stepping stones towards a degree. Courses that involve employers in the design and delivery may also be more appealing for some.

## Increasing perceptions of benefits

- **Give young people access to a wide range of graduate employers and employees.** Schools and their partners should work to offer a broad range of inspirational careers ideas to young people, particularly roles and careers that young people might not otherwise come into contact with in their everyday life and / or local community.
- **Seek out and celebrate local role models of successful higher education participation.** People from communities with lower levels of higher education participation might be more powerful role models to help communicate that people from here can benefit from higher education.
- **Raise awareness of the wider benefits of higher education.** Young people and their parents, particularly if they have no or limited experience of higher education themselves, need information about the impact of higher education on developing networks, confidence, social skills and independence, as well as the employment opportunities and salary benefits.
- **Provide better information about the career and employment opportunities related to different subject disciplines.** Links between pure / non-applied subjects (for example history or physics) and potential career paths need to be better communicated to parents and young people. Better use could be made of information on the type and range of careers that graduates pursue, average salaries and unemployment rates, for example the information provided as part of the Key Information Sets on the Unistats website.<sup>2</sup>
- **Share effective ways to engage parents, particularly from hard to reach groups.** This can be a challenge for schools, but parents are key influencers. Examples of successful approaches and initiatives should be sought and communicated.

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/it/publicinfo/kis/>

## Improving the quality of information, advice and guidance

- **Support young people to make better use of information and other resources.** There is no shortage of careers related information available, but support and mediation is needed to help young people and parents navigate and make the best use of it. The expectations of young people also need to be better managed so they know what careers guidance can and cannot offer.
- **Provide more tailored, individual careers advice and guidance.** Young people are eager to receive this kind of support. Schools need appropriate resources to enable them to do this and to be incentivised to make use of outreach opportunities offered by higher education institutions.
- **Explore ways to make careers education more engaging, memorable and relevant for young people.** Young people's active rather than passive engagement in careers education means it is more likely to have an impact.
- **Make better use of local and national labour market information.** Young people and their parents are particularly interested in the employment opportunities of higher education. Labour market information is under-used and could effectively support career decision-making.
- **Ensure teachers and parents are well-informed.** Informal sources of information, advice and guidance are influential. It is important therefore that parents in particular are engaged in careers education, along with their children. Teachers too need to be aware of where, when and how to refer young people to professional careers information, advice and guidance and to support young people to access and make best use of this.



## Introduction

This report presents the findings from a study commissioned by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) and carried out jointly by BMG Research and CFE Research. The research was undertaken between March and December 2014 and explores the reasons why some areas of England have higher or lower than expected levels of participation in higher education by young people given their levels of educational attainment and ethnicity.

## Project background

The Government has implemented a raft of reforms that are intended to raise standards, narrow gaps in attainment and raise aspirations in order to increase participation amongst groups that have been traditionally been under-represented in higher education. According to the latest figures, a total of £743m<sup>3</sup> is being invested via institutions in activities designed to widen access as well as improve the retention and success of students from disadvantaged groups in higher education. This focus is premised on a vision of higher education as an enabler of social mobility, contributing to economic growth through the building knowledge and skills as well as enriching the lives of individuals.<sup>4</sup> The higher education sector plays a key role in helping to support social mobility by providing a route for individuals to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to enter high value-added occupations and opportunities for inter-generational movement into the professions.<sup>5</sup> However, the latest figures show that some groups are under-represented in higher education and that participation in some areas of the country falls well below the national average. The potential implications of this are that some individuals fail to reach their full potential because they lack the higher level skills they need to take up high value-added occupations and that some areas of the country experience higher level skills shortages.

## Participation rates in higher education in England

The official measure of participation in England is the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR). The measure is an estimate of entry rate in any one year of people aged 17 to 30 who had not previously entered higher education.

The latest provisional estimate of HEIPR for 2012/2013 puts participation at 43 per cent.<sup>6</sup> The young participation rate, as measured by HEFCE, is the proportion of young people who enter higher education at age 18 or 19. This currently stands at 38 per cent<sup>7</sup>.

Participation in higher education overall has been steadily increasing since the 1990s. Participation amongst disadvantaged groups has grown in line with this and the gap

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<sup>3</sup> HEFCE and OFFA (2014) [Outcomes of access agreement, widening participation strategic statement and National Scholarship Programmes monitoring for 2012-13](#)

<sup>4</sup> HEFCE and OFFA (2014) [National strategy for access and student success in higher education](#)

<sup>5</sup> Cabinet Office (2012) [Fair Access to Professional Careers: a Progress Report](#) London: Cabinet Office

<sup>6</sup> BIS (2014) [Participation rates in higher education: academic years 2006/2007 – 2012/2013 \(provisional\) Statistical first release](#)

<sup>7</sup> HEFCE (2013) [Trends in young participation in higher education](#). Bristol: HEFCE



between the most and least disadvantaged has narrowed. However, the likelihood that a young person will participate in higher education continues to vary significantly between these groups. Furthermore, there are large differences in the participation rates of young people living in different parts of the country (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Mean young participation rates by English region**

Region	Participation Rate (%)
North East	29.4
North West	32.5
Yorkshire and the Humber	30
East Midlands	32
West Midlands	32.2
East of England	33.8
London	43.1
South East	36.6
South West	32.1

To investigate further the variation in participation rates by geography, HEFCE devised the Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) classification. The classification groups small areas across the UK according to their level of young higher education participation. Areas are grouped into quintiles from 1 (lowest participation) to 5 (highest). POLAR is now in its third iteration (POLAR3) and a fourth is in development (Gap POLAR). POLAR3 captures a specific form of disadvantage that is related to but distinct from other measures (for example, eligibility for free school meals).<sup>8</sup> Young people from the most disadvantaged areas are significantly less likely to participate than those from less disadvantaged areas. Young people in the lower POLAR3 quintiles are also more likely to study part-time and to attend a university closer to home, which may limit the subject studied and the type of institution attended.<sup>9</sup>

Prior educational attainment is generally considered to be one of the key determinants of participation in higher education.<sup>10</sup> When this is accounted for, many gaps are significantly

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<sup>8</sup> HEFCE (2012) [POLAR3: Young participation rates in higher education](#)

<sup>9</sup> HEFCE (2014) [Further information on POLAR3 An analysis of geography, disadvantage and entrants to higher education](#)

<sup>10</sup> Chowdry, H., Crawford, C., Dearden, L., Goodman, A. & Vignoles, A. (2013). [Widening participation in higher education: analysis using linked administrative data](#). *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 176(2): 431–457. [f](#)

reduced. However, gaps between the regions of England remain, suggesting that factors other than prior educational attainment are at play.

The purpose of this research is to develop a fuller understanding of the wider factors influencing participation in higher education. Complementary research commissioned by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills being undertaken by CFE is exploring the intersection between gender, class and ethnicity and participation in higher education. This study is, therefore, primarily concerned with exploring the factors pertaining to local geographies and the relative influence these factors have on the propensity of young people living in an area to progress into higher education. To achieve these aims, this research project:

- summarises existing knowledge on participation rates in higher education and key determinants of participation;
- identifies areas with high and low levels of participation or changes in participation, which cannot be explained by either prior educational attainment or the ethnic composition of areas' population;
- identifies factors at a local level which appear to drive higher education participation, including environmental or other “uncontrollable” factors.
- identifies key influential actors and stakeholders and actions they can take to influence participation.

In order to achieve the above we adopted a mix-method approach which draws on the extensive existing literature concerned with progression to and participation in higher education as well as analysis of national secondary datasets and primary qualitative research with young people and their parents, schools and wider stakeholders. A total of eight Census Area Statistics wards provide the geographical focus for the research. This enables an in-depth exploration of the factors that impact on progression within each ward as well as the identification of cross-cutting themes that appear to influence progression. Two of the eight wards are located in London, with one exhibiting higher than expected levels of participation and one exhibiting lower than expected levels of participation. In order to facilitate a comparison, the six remaining wards have been selected to create three matched pairs that are similar in terms of demography but which differ in terms of the level of young participation in higher education. Within each matched pair, one ward has lower than expected levels of participation and one has higher than expected levels of participation.

## **This report**

Following this introduction, we set out in detail our methodological approach, including the rationale for the area selection. We move on to consider the wider factors that impact on progression to higher education drawing on the existing literature, analysis of secondary national data and primary survey data. This section provides the context for a detailed consideration of the findings from the primary qualitative research conducted in each of the eight wards. The primary research findings are presented in four sections, one concerning

each matched pair and one concerning the two London wards. The concluding section of the report pulls together the cross cutting themes and considers the implications of the findings for policy.

## Method

In this section we provide a detailed account of the methodological approach developed for the research. The research is designed as a predominantly qualitative study which explores individuals' perceptions and experiences of the place in which they live and the extent and nature of the influence it has over decisions about education and employment. To avoid duplication, and to ensure the study adds to current understanding of the barriers and enablers to progression into HE, the study draws upon an expansive evidence base derived from existing research literature and national datasets, including the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England known as the LSYPE. Previous research suggests that aspects of the decision-making process are unconscious and, as a consequence, choices are often shaped by factors which respondents are not fully aware of or which may not be recollected unprompted in a research situation.<sup>11</sup> We finally, therefore, drew on behavioural economics theory to capture primary quantitative data to further aid our understanding of the socio-cultural factors at play in young people's decisions.

## Gaps in young participation in higher education

This research takes as its starting point analysis of young participation in higher education undertaken by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). To measure young participation rates across England, 15 year old maintained school pupils from each Census Area Statistics ward<sup>12</sup> (CAS wards) are tracked to see if they participate in higher education at age 18 or 19. Recent research demonstrates that wards are a suitable geographical unit to investigate the causes of differential rates of participation by area and by disadvantage. It does this by showing that variation within wards is not significantly different from ward averages.<sup>13</sup> The rates for each ward are calculated by combining data from five cohorts of 18 year olds, 2006-07 to 2010-11. This analysis highlights the differences in young participation across the country.

This approach using individual level data can be extended to try and explain some of the variation in young participation. In addition to GCSE-level attainment, ethnic profile also appears to be a particularly important driver of participation. All minority ethnic groups are now on average more likely to go to university than their white British counterparts, even when accounting for prior attainment and other background characteristics.<sup>14</sup> The HEFCE analysis compares actual rates of young participation in each ward with what would be expected given the profile of young people in an area. The difference is the 'participation gap'.

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<sup>11</sup> Diamond, A; Vorley, T; Roberts, J. and Jones, S (2012) [Behavioural approaches to student choice](#). York: HEA and NUS;

<sup>12</sup> For more information on statistical wards see [Statistical wards, CAS wards and ST wards](#)

<sup>13</sup> HEFCE (2014) [Further information on POLAR3: An analysis of geography, disadvantage and entrants to higher education](#)

<sup>14</sup> Crawford, C. and Greaves, E. (2015) [Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation](#) BIS Research Paper 186 London BIS

The wards were categorised into ten deciles based on the scale of the significance of their participation gaps. Wards in decile 1 are those with the most significant negative participation gaps, that is, where participation rates are a lot lower than expected given the attainment and ethnicity of young people living in the area. Those in decile 10 have the most significant positive gaps and exhibit much higher rates of participation than might be expected. Further information on this analysis, including interactive maps, can be found on the HEFCE website: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/gaps/>

## Case study approach

Using the results of HEFCE's analysis of gaps in higher education participation, a long list of wards to provide the basis of the eight case studies for the research was developed. BMG and CFE selected a short list of eight. Our selection was reviewed, revised and approved by the project steering group.

Six of the selected case study areas are paired. We identified areas with 'extreme' participation gaps where actual levels of participation were much higher or much lower than expected given educational attainment and the ethnic profile of the area. We then identified a ward that was demographically similar, but where the participation gap was at the other extreme. In this way, areas with higher than expected participation were matched with areas with lower than expected participation. Pairs were matched on the basis of the following key demographics:

- total population
- mean age
- proportion of the population not born in the UK
- unemployment rate
- income deprivation affecting children
- proportion of 10-15 year olds with graduate parents
- proportion of children in higher socio-economic households
- rural / urban classification

See appendix one for details of the demographic data used for matching for each pair. This matching method allows us to compare the two areas in order to begin to understand the reasons why ostensibly similar areas should exhibit different levels of participation.

A range of other factors was taken into account when agreeing the final eight case studies. In order to ensure different types of geography were represented in the sample, an urban pair (Bulwell, Nottingham and Anfield, Liverpool) as well as a rural pair<sup>15</sup> (Tipps Cross, Essex and a ward in the South West of England) were selected. While these four areas are geographically dispersed, for our third pair we selected two areas in the same part of the country, the Sheffield City Region. A further two 'wild card' areas were selected: Mile

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<sup>15</sup> We have not named the specific case study ward in the South West. As the population is particularly sparse, it would be easier to identify the individual school, colleges and other research participants, some of whom wish to remain anonymous.

End and Globe Town and White Hart Lane, both in London. London has the highest overall participation rate in the country and the rate at which it has increased far outstrips all other regions. According to existing research<sup>16</sup>, this can largely be explained by higher attainment amongst young people from low income backgrounds living in London. However, the significant variation in participation rates across the city suggests that other factors are contributing to the 'London effect'. It was, therefore, felt to be important for the study to include a least one London ward in order to explore this further. Although both these wards are in London and one has a lower (Mile End and Globe Town) and one has a higher (White Hart Lane) than expected rate of participation, they differ demographically and are not, therefore, paired. Although case studies are focused at ward level, our analysis takes into account the wider contextual information of the local area. Table 2 provides details of the expected and actual levels of participation for each of the named case study wards.

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<sup>16</sup> Access HE (2013) [Social Mobility in London: The Role of Higher Education](#). London: London Higher:

**Table 2: Expected and actual level of young participation in higher education for case study wards**

Pair	Case study ward	Expected young participation rate (%)	Actual young Participation rate (%)	Participation gap (percentage points)	Participation gap decile
Urban 1	Anfield, Liverpool	21.8	25.2	3.4	10
Urban 2	Bulwell, Nottingham	17.4	10.4	-7	1
Rural 1	South West	-	-	-	1
Rural 2	Tipps Cross, Essex	41.2	50	8.8	10
SCR 1	Hillsborough, Sheffield	28.2	31.4	3.2	10
SCR 2	Aston, Orgreave and Ulley, Rotherham	32	30.7	-1.3	4
WC 1	White Hart Lane, Haringey	29.9	33.8	3.9	10
WC 2	Mile End and Globe Town, Tower Hamlets	38.8	29.5	-9.3	1

## Building the case studies

### Desk research

Once the case study wards had been agreed, desk research was conducted in order to produce area-specific factsheets. The primary purpose of the factsheets was to provide some contextual information on the educational and skills landscape in each of the wards and the surrounding area to inform the development of the key lines of inquiry for the primary research. However, the information has also been used in this report to contextualise the primary research findings from each case study. The team drew on a range of publically available sources of information in order to produce the factsheets including the analysis produced by HEFCE on the population participation rate, deprivation and unemployment in the wards, data held by local authorities, neighbourhood statistics, Nomis, data.gov.uk, area classification data, local economic strategies, Ofsted reports, and access agreements and/or widening participation strategies of local higher education providers.

## Primary data collection

In each of the eight case study wards we conducted in-depth research with the aim of better understanding how the local environment can impact the student lifecycle and interact with wider personal, socio-economic and cultural factors to shape young people's aspirations, motivations, goals and behaviours in relation to higher education, training and employment.

## Qualitative research

In each area we consulted with school pupils in years 9 to 13 and their parents/carers along with school staff in both strategic (e.g. Heads, Deputy Heads and Governors) and operational (e.g. Careers Co-ordinators) roles. Although the schools consulted were not always located in the target case study wards, they were selected to participate in the research because a large proportion of the pupils from the target ward attended them. In addition to school staff, we consulted with wider stakeholders operating in the local area including local authorities, further and higher education providers and employer representative bodies (for example, Local Economic Partnership (LEPs)).

In each area we aimed to carry out:

- 4 focus groups with school pupils / young people
- 2 focus groups with parents or carers of secondary school age children
- In-depth interviews with 5 school professionals
- In-depth interviews with 5 other key stakeholders

A range of methods was employed to engage respondents in the research. The team worked extensively with schools to secure the co-operation of staff, pupils and parents. The schools also helped to identify, and in some cases refer, the research team to wider stakeholders with whom they worked or were aware of, who had a professional interest in the education and skills landscape and participation rates in higher education in particular. This was supplemented with contacts from the research team's own networks and the networks of the wider steering group as well as proactive internet searches. Where it was not possible to secure the co-operation of pupils and/or parents through the school, the research team worked with an agency specialising in the recruitment of research participants for focus groups as well as with local voluntary and community organisations. In total we consulted with 146 young people, 85 parents, 19 school staff and 25 other stakeholders.

The interviews and focus groups were semi-structured to ensure the data captured was comparable across areas but to allow sufficient flexibility for any issues that were particularly pertinent to an individual area to be explored. The topic guides were designed to explore perceptions of the area, including the strength of the local economy and the educational and employment opportunities available to young people. Formal and informal sources of support for young people as well as information, advice and guidance on learning and work were also explored along with the other factors that were perceived to impact on choice.



## **Survey research**

In addition, parents and young people taking part in focus groups completed a short questionnaire survey. We drew on behavioural economic theory in order to design the questionnaire so that the data could be used to test hypotheses about the key attributes we know or suspect are likely to affect subconscious level decisions as well as those impacting at a conscious level. The questionnaire asked respondents to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements on a five-point scale and to respond to a series of scenarios. The statements and scenarios explored factors that are likely to be correlated with behavioural effects, including decisions about higher education. The measures included tolerance to risk, time preference, attitudes to debt and optimism and pessimism. Although it is important to note that this approach is usually adopted in the context of large-scale quantitative research programmes with statistically robust randomised samples, the results can provide valuable insights in the context of qualitative research when triangulated with other sources of primary and secondary data.

## **Secondary research**

### **Literature review**

Alongside the primary data collection, we undertook a literature review to ensure that the study builds on existing research from the UK and abroad. The literature review aimed to understand the range of factors that impact on the likelihood that a young person will progress into higher education and contribute to differential participation rates in different geographical areas. The literature review also helped to inform the design of qualitative data collection and analysis by ensuring perceptions of the relative influence of the key factors identified in the literature as having an impact were explored.

### **Secondary data analysis of Longitudinal Study of Young People in England**

Alongside the literature review we undertook analysis of data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England known as LSYPE to explore possible factors that influence participation in higher education and the significance of these factors. Further details of the analysis undertaken and the findings are presented in the following chapter.

## Factors that influence participation in higher education

A wealth of evidence is available that considers the factors that can influence rates of participation. As a result, a wide range of personal, dispositional, institutional and situational factors have been shown to have an impact on the likelihood that an individual will progress into higher level study. Interestingly, in the context of this study, there is very little research which has explored the specific impact of geographical factors on progression to higher education. Furthermore, relatively few studies examine the factors that have been shown to have an impact in combination, either to compare the relative strength of their effects or to investigate how they interact with each other. However, there is little disagreement about which factor is the most significant: prior educational attainment is regarded as the main predictor of participation and accounts for much of the variation in participation.

The analysis by HEFCE that informed the sampling strategy for this study shows that prior educational attainment does not account for all the variation in participation between groups or geographic regions. The purpose of this report is, therefore, to understand why these gaps appear and also to explain why there are differences in the size of these gaps in different areas. We aim to explain these differences primarily in terms of features of the local areas, such as the proximity of universities, quality of careers related information, advice and guidance and local employment opportunities, while acknowledging that these factors intersect with a raft of other personal and socio-economic and cultural factors to shape behaviour. To prepare the ground for that analysis, this chapter provides a summary of the factors that are known to affect participation rates, based on the latest evidence from recent empirical studies, analysis of data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) data and some primary survey data collected during the research.

## Factors that affect rates of participation in higher education

### Prior education and attainment

As it has been noted, prior attainment is a major determinant of participation in higher education largely because attainment of qualifications is the main entry requirement for most higher education courses. Students with better A-levels (or equivalent) have a greater chance of getting into university, and they also have better chance of obtaining a first or upper second class degree once at university<sup>17</sup>. Interestingly, however, there is evidence to suggest that prior attainment at Key Stage 4, not Stage 5, is the most important factor in predicting later academic success and participation in higher education. Interventions directed at raising aspirations and attainment in the pre-16 phase of the student lifecycle are therefore most likely to impact on eventual progression to higher education. Interventions in the post-16 phase are most likely to influence choice of institution and programme of study rather than the decision of whether to apply. This distinction is recognised in many institutional strategies. Current research by CFE to understand the impact of funding for widening participation shows that institutional focus

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<sup>17</sup> HEFCE (2014b). *Differences in degree outcomes: Key findings*. <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/201403/#d.en.86821> p.3

can often shift from outreach to marketing and recruitment at the point of transition from the pre- to post-16 phase.

## Socio-economic status

A number of studies suggest that socio-economic status is the most significant factor affecting rates of participation in higher education. Recent research demonstrates that the participation rate of the lowest socio-economic group (quintile 1) group is 19 per cent, compared with 56 per cent in the highest quintile group.<sup>18</sup> However, there is a strong association between socio-economic status and attainment. Children from more advantaged backgrounds and from higher socio-economic groups tend to do better at school than their less advantaged peers.<sup>19</sup> Other evidence suggests that differences in participation rates at high-tariff institutions between socio-economic groups are reduced once prior attainment is taken into account.<sup>20</sup> The same evidence also suggests that because this holds true for both state and private school pupils, poor achievement in secondary schools is more important than socio-economic group in explaining low participation rates amongst pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds

In the advent of the reforms to student funding, it is plausible that financial considerations, including worries about debt could be a barrier to progression for young people from lower socio-economic groups. Policies have been introduced in an attempt to overcome financial barriers and reduce inequality through financial support for disadvantaged groups. Maintenance grants and income-contingent loans are available to help undergraduate students with tuition fees and living costs. Financial aid schemes were also implemented to complement the range of packages of support offered by individual institutions. However, the link between financial aid and widening access to higher education has not been proven<sup>21</sup> and it is difficult to disentangle the relative effects of different interventions.

A range of other factors affect the decision of whether to attend university by young people from lower social- economic backgrounds. These include educational factors, family background and support, and institutional factors such as the recruitment policies of universities and colleges.<sup>22</sup> Traditional economic studies of the impact of socio-economic status on decisions about higher education suggest that students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds participate less because “they accumulate less human capital

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<sup>18</sup> Crawford, C. (2014a). [Socio-economic differences in higher education participation and outcomes](#). Institute for Financial Studies.

<sup>19</sup> Perry, E. & Francis, B. (2010). [The Social Class Gap for Educational Achievement: a review of the literature](#). London: RSA.

<sup>20</sup> Chowdry, H., Crawford, C., Dearden, L., Goodman, A. & Vignoles, A. (2013). [Widening Participation in Higher Education: analysis using linked administrative data](#). *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 176(2): 431–457.

<sup>21</sup> OFFA (2014). [Trends in Participation by student background and selectivity of institution](#). Office for Fair Access.

<sup>22</sup> Connor, H. & Dewson, S. (2001). [Social Class and Higher Education: Issues Affecting Decisions on Participation by Lower Social Class Groups](#). Institute for Employment Studies. London: DfEE.

[...], and have lower preferences for education”<sup>23</sup> as well as being more sensitive to the perceived costs and benefits of higher level study. However, behavioural economics offers a more nuanced understanding of the influence of socio-economic status, providing accounts of how behaviour is influenced by different attitudes and understanding, as well as by habits and ‘automatic’ reasoning. Behaviourally-informed approaches are useful for understanding the effects on decision-making and information use amongst different groups of students, particularly in a market-led system.<sup>24</sup> We return to this later in the chapter when we consider the empirical research findings generated through this research.

Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital is useful for understanding socio-economic effects on participation.<sup>25</sup> Cultural capital is distinct from economic capital (income and wealth), social capital (networks between people and groups) and symbolic capital (qualifications, authority and charisma). Cultural capital comes in three forms: the embodied form of cultural capital is the consciously learned and subconsciously acquired personal properties (for example, a learned language, including the acquired characteristics of local dialect). Objectified cultural capital refers to the physical objects owned (for example, a collection of music or paintings), which are closely linked to economic capital. Finally, institutionalized cultural capital includes the social recognition conferred by institutions in the form of qualifications, for example, which also has a close relationship with the economic potential of the individual. Some recent studies use this concept to explain how the decision to attend university is influenced by the cultural capital of family and peer networks, which is strongly linked with socio-economic group.<sup>26</sup>

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is one the three pillars of his sociological theory<sup>27</sup>, alongside field and cultural capital. Habitus describes the complex psychological disposition of a social group which reflects the context in which it has been developed. As such, habitus can be associated with socio-economic status, and can help to explain the formation of aspirations and the shaping of opportunities that tend to be shared by groups of people who attend the same (or similar types of) institution. This concept is prevalent in sociological studies of HE participation where it is used to explain observed gender patterns. For example, Cooper<sup>28</sup> used Bourdieu’s concepts in her qualitative study with pairs of mothers who had daughters who were either just about to enter or had been to higher education.

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<sup>23</sup> Declercq, K. & Verboven, F. (2014). [Socio-economic status and participation in higher education: Do costs matter?](#) KU Leuven Discussion Paper Series DPS14.26.

<sup>24</sup> The Higher Education White Paper, *Students at the Heart of the System*, describes the coalition government’s programme of “funding reforms and the introduction of a more market-based approach” to higher education. BIS (2010), p.73.

<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1967). Systems of education and systems of thought. *International Social Science Journal*, XIX(3)14: 338–358.

<sup>26</sup> Callender, C. & Jackson, J. (2008). Does the Fear of Debt Constrain Choice of University and Subject of Study? *Studies in Higher Education*. 33(4): 405–429.

<sup>27</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1967). Systems of education and systems of thought. *International Social Science Journal*, XIX(3)14: 338–358.

<sup>28</sup> Cooper, L. (2013). [Women and higher education: perspectives of middle-class, mother-daughter dyads.](#) *Gender and Education*, 25(5): 624–639.

Cooper found that middle class mothers did use their social and cultural capital to help their daughters get into university.

## Gender

Until the 1990s, the participation rate of men had consistently exceeded that of women by between two to five percentage points.<sup>29</sup> However, this trend has since been reversed. Whereas the earlier imbalance in favour of males was likely a product of institutional and societal gender biases, the current gender gap in favour of females is almost entirely accounted for by the higher achievement of girls in prior education, which approximately coincides with the time when GCSEs were first introduced. However, this headline figure obscures pronounced gender imbalances within higher education; females are under-represented in many science, technology, engineering and mathematics programmes. Conversely, males are under-represented in subjects including teaching and nursing.

## Ethnicity

Participation varies greatly by ethnicity. Ethnic minority groups make up an increasingly large proportion of young people in higher education, but there are significant differences in participation rates between these ethnic groups, and this pattern also varies by institution. Participation levels are highest amongst students with Chinese and Indian heritage. The most under-represented groups of young people in higher education are White, particularly working class males, and those from Black African-Caribbean ethnic backgrounds. However, recent analysis shows that all minority ethnic groups are now, on average, more likely to go to university than their white British counterparts, even when accounting for prior attainment and other background characteristics.<sup>30</sup>

## Motivations and aspirations

There is a lack of clear understanding about how motivation functions as a contributing factor to participation and there is a lack of evidence about the efficacy of interventions based on increasing motivations amongst prospective students. Although attitudes and aspirations are understood to vary by gender, ethnicity, area and socio-economic status,<sup>31</sup> there is evidence that initiatives aimed at raising aspirations, changing attitudes and modifying behaviour are effective and can have a positive effect on participation.<sup>32</sup> As a result, higher education providers are increasingly investing in outreach activities designed

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<sup>29</sup> Broecke, S. & Hamed, J. (2008). [\*Gender gaps in Higher Education Participation: An Analysis of the Relationship between Prior Attainment and Young Participation by Gender, Socio-Economic Class and Ethnicity\*](#). London: DIUS. p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Crawford, C. and Greaves, E. (2015) [\*Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation\*](#) BIS Research Paper 186 London BIS

<sup>31</sup> Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force (2008). [\*Aspiration and attainment amongst young people in deprived communities\*](#);

<sup>32</sup> Gorard, S., See, H. & Davies, P. (2012). [\*The impact of attitudes and aspirations on educational attainment and participation\*](#). Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

to raise aspirations and some are reducing expenditure on other interventions such as financial aid to resource it.

Parents have been shown to be influential over young people's decision-making, by helping to shape their aspirations, beliefs and values in relation to learning and work. For example, analysis of longitudinal data on parents and children found that "families and socio-economic background explain the majority of the aspiration gap between deprived and non-deprived areas".<sup>33</sup> Parental involvement in their child's learning is shown to influence attainment (which may therefore have an indirect effect on participation), but there is no evidence that initiatives to raise parental expectations have an effect on young people's participation.<sup>34</sup>

Parents and family members, other trusted adults such as teachers, and peers are not, on the whole, impartial and often do not have access to up to date information on the range of options available to young people. There remains an important role for independent, professional information, advice and guidance, such as that delivered through the National Careers Service, in supporting young people throughout the student lifecycle, challenging their thinking and equipping them with the skills they need to make informed choices about learning and work, including whether higher education is right for them.

## School effects

Understanding the local landscapes of secondary education is particularly relevant to this study because a range of school characteristics are associated with participation rates in higher education. When pupils with the same background characteristics and Key Stage 2 scores are compared, the differences in participation in higher education reduce by around 40 per cent. The remaining differences can be mostly explained by school effects. In order of decreasing significance, these are: school selectivity, school performance, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, school value added, and whether the school has an attached sixth form. Amongst these factors, school selectivity has the largest effect on participation rates, with pupils attending selective state schools more than 40 percentage points more likely to go to university and more than 30 percentage points more likely to go to a high-status institution than pupils attending non-selective state schools.<sup>35</sup> Subjects studied along with the type of school attended intersect with overall attainment at Key Stage 4 and 5 to influence progression.<sup>36</sup> Good grades in 'highly-regarded subjects' are associated with a higher probability of staying in education beyond the age of 16 and doing well at Key Stage 5.<sup>37</sup> This increases the probability that a young person will progress to higher education and can influence the type of institution and programme applied for.

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<sup>33</sup> Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force (2008) p.23.

<sup>34</sup> Gorard, See & Davies (2012), p.7.

<sup>35</sup> Crawford, C. (2014b). [\*The link between secondary school characteristics and university participation\*](#). London: Department for Education. p.9

<sup>36</sup> Crawford (2014b)

<sup>37</sup> Crawford, (2014b), p.10



## Geography

The geographical accessibility of universities can have some influence on participation. The research evidence suggests that there are at least two geographical factors that affect participation rates – these are proximity to the nearest higher education provider and the extent to which an area is more urban or rural. The distance between home and university presents a barrier to participation for some young people, and this effect tends to vary in strength with socio-economic status and ethnicity. For example, the educational choices of low-income and ethnic minority groups are constrained because they need to stay at home for financial<sup>38</sup> or cultural reasons.<sup>39</sup>

While one study concludes that geographical proximity is a less important driver of higher education participation than early academic achievement,<sup>40</sup> proximity between home and university is strongly linked to institution choice. As a result, university intakes are skewed towards students whose parents live nearby. Furthermore, because the effect of proximity varies by ethnic group, the relationship between geographical and ethnic factors is complex.

The effect of rurality is less significant in England than in some larger countries (for example, Australia, Canada or the US), because the density of universities across the country means that few people live in areas that could be considered isolated enough to present a significant barrier to participation. A study on geography, choice and participation in England reports that “Only in a few peripheral rural areas (ten per cent of England’s land area) are the nearest three institutions on average over 100km away.”<sup>41</sup> Even though proximity to higher education institutions is higher in urban areas than rural, there is no clear relationship between proximity and participation, but there are some interesting details, for example low income groups tends to live nearer to their nearest university but also slightly further away from all institutions on average.<sup>42</sup>

Another study to consider geographical factors on participation is the ‘Four Cities’ report, based on research commissioned by HEFCE.<sup>43</sup> This study looked at four areas of low participation, including Birmingham, Bristol, Nottingham and Sheffield. This research is closely aligned with the present study not only because of the coincidence of geographical areas, but also because of the shared aim of understanding the “local and situated nature of the processes that appear to be producing the low rates of progression to higher education”. The findings emphasise the complexity of understanding the interaction of barriers and facilitators in specific locations, and identify a range of significant factors that are not easy to summarise. One common theme was the provision of information, advice and guidance, specifically the variation in quality and visibility that create differential levels

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<sup>38</sup> Gibbons, S. & Vignoles, A. (2009). Access, Choice and Participation in Higher education. [Regional Science and Urban Economics](#), 42(1–2) 1–38.

<sup>39</sup> Gibbons, S. & Vignoles, A. (2012). Geography, choice and participation in higher education. [Regional Science and Urban Economics](#), 42(1–2): 98–113.

<sup>40</sup> Gibbons & Vignoles (2012) p111.

<sup>41</sup> Gibbons & Vignoles (2012) p.103.

<sup>42</sup> Gibbons & Vignoles (2012) p.103.

<sup>43</sup> Reed, L.R., Gates, P. & Last, K. (2007). [Young Participation in Higher Education in the Parliamentary Constituencies of Birmingham Hodge Hill, Bristol South, Nottingham North and Sheffield Brightside](#).

of problem for young people seeking to get information about further study and employment. The report concludes with recommendations for higher education institutions to further develop support for widening participation and engagement with schools, and to combine these with approaches that are informed by the local jobs market, with input from employers.

## **Analysis of Longitudinal Study of Young People in England**

### **Background to the LSYPE**

The Longitudinal Study of Young People in England follows a cohort of individuals born between September 1989 and October 1990. Young people in England were first interviewed in 2004 (aged 13/14), with subsequent annual surveys taking place until 2010, resulting in a longitudinal dataset consisting of seven 'waves'. Parents of young people were also covered as part of the study; however their responses were only collected between waves 1 and 4.

To date, quantitative literature exploring the factors that determine higher education participation have focused on the impact of demographic characteristics and prior attainment. The Longitudinal Study of Young People in England includes a number of questions that look to understand parental and child views on education, as well future career aspirations. Hence, analysis of this panel dataset enables the role of attitudes and aspirations in determining higher education choices to be examined, which can therefore add to the existing evidence base in this field.

### **Descriptive statistics<sup>44</sup>**

The key variable of interest in this study is participation in higher education at the age of 19 or 20. Mirroring the overall young participation rate, participation levels in higher education amongst young people in the study from London far exceed participation rates found in any other region. 56 per cent of individuals residing in London at wave 2 were at university during wave 7. Participation levels amongst study respondents are particularly low in the North East and Yorkshire and Humberside (34 per cent). In order to understand why such differences exist, we firstly investigated through cross tabulations whether there were any differences in the aspirations and attitudes of individuals by region.

Within wave 1 of the study, individuals are asked about their aspirations to apply to university, as well as their intentions after Y11. Table 3 and Table 4 highlight that pupils in London were far more likely to state that they would apply for higher education and were looking to remain in full-time study after Key Stage 4, when compared to pupils in any other region. Just over four fifths of young people in London said that they were fairly or very likely to apply to university (82 per cent), whereas across the other regions, this figure ranged from 65 per cent to 70 per cent. Additionally, 92 per cent of individuals in London reported that they intended to remain in education after Year 11. Outside of London, the proportion of young people looking to remain in education was highest in the West Midlands, South East and East of England (84 per cent).

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<sup>44</sup> All descriptive statistics are based on weighted data.



**Table 3: Likelihood of young person applying for university by region, as reported at age 13-14  
(wave 1 – 2004)**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Very likely (%)</b>	<b>Fairly likely (%)</b>	<b>Not very likely (%)</b>	<b>Not at all likely (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
North East	30	36	18	16	636
North West	33	32	18	17	1941
Yorkshire & Humberside	30	36	17	16	1296
East Midlands	31	35	19	15	1059
West Midlands	35	35	19	11	1439
East of England	27	38	22	13	1377
London	49	33	11	7	1693
South East	31	37	19	13	2052
South West	30	36	22	12	1171

**Table 4: Young Person's intentions after Year 11 by region, as reported at age 13-14**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Stay in full time education (%)</b>	<b>Leave full time education (%)</b>	<b>Leave full time education but return later (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
North East	80	19	1	647
North West	82	16	2	1929
Yorkshire & Humberside	82	16	2	1275
East Midlands	81	17	1	1046
West Midlands	84	14	2	1447
East of England	84	14	2	1333
London	92	7	1	1692
South East	84	14	2	2012
South West	83	14	3	1129

In wave 4 of the survey, young people are asked further questions about their views on higher education including whether they agree that the best jobs available in the labour market go to those who have been to university. This variable may therefore be a good proxy to the value individuals attach to a university education and/or knowledge of the benefits of going to university. Table 5 demonstrates that 65 per cent of individuals in London agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, which is higher than any other region. Across the other regions, once again there was little disparity in the responses, but individuals from the East of England were the least likely to agree with the statement (47 per cent).

**Table 5: Level of agreement with the statement: The best jobs go to people who have been to university by region, as reported at age 16-17**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
North East	21	34	36	8	562
North West	17	39	36	8	1565
Yorkshire & Humberside	15	36	39	10	1128
East Midlands	15	39	38	8	957
West Midlands	18	36	35	11	1232
East of England	13	34	41	11	1192
London	24	41	29	5	1371
South East	15	37	38	11	1607
South West	16	34	39	12	1016

Parental attitudes towards education also seemed to differ by whether or not they resided in London. When parents were asked what they wished their child to do at the end of Year 11, 91 per cent of parents in London wanted their child to remain in education. In contrast, the figure varied between 82 per cent and 85 per cent in areas outside of London, with parents expressing a greater preference for their child to begin working in a trade or apprenticeship. Furthermore, in wave 1 of the survey, parents were asked whether they believed that leaving school at 16 limits a person's career opportunities. 83 per cent of parents in London agreed strongly or a little with this statement compared with between 67 per cent and 76 per cent in other regions within the country.

**Table 6: What parents would like their child to do when they are 16 by region, as reported when child is age 13-14**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Continue in full time education (%)</b>	<b>Start a trade/ App/ training course (%)</b>	<b>Get a full time paid job (%)</b>	<b>Something else (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
North East	81	16	2	1	674
North West	80	17	2	1	2030
Yorkshire & Humberside	79	18	1	2	1319
East Midlands	79	18	2	2	1066
West Midlands	82	15	2	1	1509
East of England	78	18	2	2	1373
London	91	7	2	0	1736
South East	80	17	1	2	2110
South West	79	17	2	2	1174

**Table 7: Parental agreement with the statement: Leaving school at 16 limits young people’s career opportunities by region, as reported when child is age 13-14**

Region	Agree Strongly (%)	Agree a little (%)	Disagree a little (%)	Disagree Strongly (%)	Total
North East	49	23	20	8	668
North West	50	23	18	9	2031
Yorkshire & Humberside	44	23	24	9	1326
East Midlands	46	24	19	11	1074
West Midlands	52	24	16	8	1504
East of England	48	23	20	8	1390
London	66	17	12	5	1735
South East	50	23	19	8	2103
South West	44	24	22	10	1174

## Econometric analysis

The descriptive statistics we have discussed above suggest that aspirations and attitudes towards education do potentially play a part in explaining differences in higher education participation levels. However, to understand the impact these variables have in greater detail, we need to control for other possible determinants of higher education participation (for example ethnicity, gender and so on). We do this with regression analysis. Appendix 2 presents the results of our regression models. The coefficients reported in appendix 2 show how a change in the independent variable alters the probability of an individual being in higher education. We explain the meaning of the coefficients in more detail within appendix 3. A staged approach was used to create the final model, so that we can clearly ascertain the impact that aspirations and attitudes have on higher education participation. We discuss each of the four models we produced in turn.

Our first model contains only personal and demographic characteristics. These include gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, family type, number of siblings and region. Our variable for socio-economic status has been created by combining data on parental education and occupation. Individuals are classified as being from a disadvantaged background if their main parent has qualifications below GCSE A\* to C (or equivalent) and they work in a semi-routine/routine occupation or have never worked/are long-term unemployed. We find that 20 per cent of young people are classified as disadvantaged according to our definition in wave 1 of the survey. In the first model we created, all variables are statistically significant. In particular we find that, on average, living in London at the age of 14 or 15 increases the probability of participating in higher education at 19 or 20 by 10.8 percentage points.

In our second model, we add relevant variables that represent the attitudes and aspirations of young people and their parents. All these variables appear significant in predicting participation in higher education and in the direction that would be expected (those with more positive attitudes to higher education are more likely to participate). It is useful to note the impact adding these variables has on the extent to which demographic characteristics predict participation, with gaps by gender and socio-economic status beginning to diminish. In particular, we now find that there is no significant difference in higher education participation by region. Hence, once we account for attitudes and aspirations, gaps in participation between London and other regions in England no longer remain.

Once we add Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 attainment in model 3, we find that there are no significant differences in participation by gender, and there is a substantial fall in the difference in higher education participation by socio-economic status. School characteristics were included in the final model however this does not lead to any major change in the overall results and conclusions to be drawn from the analysis. A number of the attitude variables remain significant predictors of participation. Thus, what our models suggest is that attitudes and aspirations play a key part in explaining the differences in higher education participation by region. In the final model, agreeing or strongly agreeing at age 16/17 that the best jobs go to those who have been to university increases the probability of participating in higher education by 15.1 percentage points. Aspirations to attend university, as indicated by stating at age 13/14 they are very or fairly likely to apply to university, increases the probability of participating in higher education by 10.2 percentage points. Similarly some parental attitudes are significant in explaining participation: wanting your child to pursue a trade, apprenticeship or training course after year 11 reduces the probability of participating in higher education by 11 percentage points.

It is useful to note that even after taking into account attainment, aspirations and attitudes towards education, as well as demographic and school characteristics, significant differences by ethnicity remain, which is in line with findings from research by Bowes et al (2015).<sup>45</sup>

## Behavioural factors

The analysis of LSYPE data and previous work by CFE Research suggests that behavioural influences are likely to be important in choices related to participation in higher education.<sup>46 47</sup> Much of the higher education choice literature takes a traditional economics approach assuming that decision-makers operate with complete knowledge and with unlimited capacity to evaluate benefits and costs. This model fails to account for much of

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<sup>45</sup> Bowes L, Evans J, Nathwani T, Birkin G, Boyd A, Holmes C, Thomas L & Jones S (2015). [Understanding progression into higher education for disadvantaged and under-represented groups](#). A report for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, London.

<sup>46</sup> Diamond, A. Roberts, J. Vorley, T. Birkin, G. Evans, J. Sheen, J. and Nathwani, T. (2014) [UK review of the provision of information about higher education: Advisory study and literature review](#) HEFCE

<sup>47</sup> Diamond, A. Vorley, T. Roberts, J. Jones, S. (2012) [Behavioural approaches to understanding student choice](#) The Higher Education Academy

the observed behaviour of people in the real world, which deviates from the expectations of rationality. Behavioural economics, in contrast, recognises that our capacity for rationality is bounded and that our decision-making is also characterised by non-rational behaviour. The ways in which we deviate from purely rational behaviour are not random (as the traditional economic model assumes). Instead, we tend to use heuristics (or 'rules-of-thumb') that offer ways of reducing the burden of complex decision-making, but which give rise to systematic errors or biases. With findings from the behavioural sciences, these heuristics can be understood and their biases can be predicted.

In relation to higher education choices the behavioural responses of both children (the prospective students) and their families are likely to be of relevance. Experiments are the most appropriate way to measure behavioural influences. The influences are largely non-cognitive and thus we are not conscious of the effects on our decision making. Hence the effects are difficult to uncover from traditional survey methods such as asking people why they made a particular decision (ex post) or what is likely to influence them (ex ante). As this current study is essentially a qualitative one with relatively small numbers of participants and limited interview time, it was not possible to carry out any experimental work. However, the questionnaires distributed alongside our focus groups provided an opportunity to collect information on factors that are likely to be correlated with behavioural effects, and then to explore whether these factors can help to explain differences in participation rates.

Given the time constraints of focus groups we prioritised four key behavioural factors: risk preference, time preference, optimism/pessimism and attitudes to debt (both general debt and higher education specific debt). The first two factors are central to the theory of economic decision making (under uncertainty) both in traditional economics and in behavioural economics. Risk preference is the extent to which someone is prepared to take risks or tries to avoid risk. Time preference (or time discounting) refers to the relative valuation placed on a reward at an earlier date compared to its value at a later date. People with a high time preference prefer rewards sooner rather than later. Optimism/pessimism is a key psychological factor that is likely to have an important influence on choices that have long-term consequences. Finally debt attitudes have been shown by previous work to have an important influence on higher education choices.<sup>48</sup> Our rationale for our choice of the specific questions with which to measure each of these factors was to ensure they were simple to understand (for both adults and children/young people) and quick to answer. In addition we used measures that had been used in previous work. The questionnaire items are shown in Appendix four.

It is worth pointing out here that the responses to statements on attitudes to debt are not always consistent, a finding that is reported by Callander (2003)<sup>49</sup>; so people may exhibit higher debt tolerance in relation to some statements but lower for others. In order to deal

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<sup>48</sup> For example: Callander, C. (2003) *Attitudes to debt: School leavers and further education students attitudes to debt and their impact on participation in higher education* Universities UK; Callander C. and Jackson, J. (2005) Does fear of debt deter students from higher education? *Journal of Social Policy* 34(4):509-40; and Callander, C. and Jackson J (2008) Does the fear of debt constrain choice of university and subject of study? *Studies in Higher Education* 33(4):405-29

<sup>49</sup> Callander, (2003)

with this we follow Callender (2003) and carry out a factor analysis<sup>50</sup> to reduce the questions to a set of core factors representing different typologies of attitudes towards debt. This factor analysis was more successful with the children's data than the parents' data, probably due to the smaller number of observations for parents. We use the factors described below using terminology borrowed from Callender (2003). The parent factors are used only in a limited way:

- Factor 1 – Fear of debt, for example, 'I would worry a lot if I got into debt'
- Factor 2 - Moral aversion to debt, for example 'owing money is basically wrong'
- Factor 3 - Liberal attitude towards debt, for example 'It is okay to be in debt if you can pay it off'

We also created a factor relating to attitudes to higher education debt specifically based on four statements on the questionnaire that related to this, for example: 'Borrowing money to pay for a university education is a good investment'.

### **Analysis of questionnaire data**

As shown in Table 8 we obtained 146 questionnaires in total from children; these are more or less evenly distributed across wards, with slightly fewer in Tipps Cross. We also obtained 85 questionnaires from parents, with none in Mile End.

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<sup>50</sup> Factor analysis is a statistical method used to describe variability among observed, correlated variables in terms of a potentially lower number of unobserved factors.



**Table 8: Questionnaire responses by ward**

Case study ward	No. of questionnaire responses	
	Children	Parents
Anfield (Liverpool)	16	8
Bulwell (Nottingham)	20	12
Tipps Cross (Essex)	8	9
South West ward	30	10
Hillsborough (Sheffield)	18	14
Aston, Orgreave and Ulley (Rotherham)	18	18
White Hart Lane (Haringey)	18	14
Mile End and Globe Town (Tower Hamlets)	18	0

We initially carried out bivariate analysis of the data. This analysis explores whether there are systematic differences in the responses to the questionnaire items between groups defined in a variety of different ways. If there are any systematic differences then these may help to explain whether a case study area has a positive or negative higher education participation gap. It is important to stress that this is a simple bivariate comparison between groups and does not control for any other factors. In addition sample sizes in many cases are very small, therefore we do not have large power to detect differences.

Comparing responses between case study areas there are no significant differences between some items (for example, there are no significant differences between pairs for children's responses on risk preference and optimism). Where there are significant differences these are generally counter-intuitive; the differences are not what would be expected given the area participation gaps. For example, young people from Tipps Cross had less tolerance to HE debt as measured by the statement "It is not worth getting into debt just so you can get a degree" than young people from the South West case study ward. This is contrary to expectations given that Tipps Cross has a positive participation gap.

In interpreting these results it is important to remember that the sample of respondents was designed for qualitative research and is therefore small, self-selecting and not necessarily representative of the wider population of an area, indeed parents in one case study area made this point to us. It is arguably more interesting and useful to compare responses between respondents with different characteristics rather than between areas. In this regard the results show that those children with parents and / or siblings with higher education or who are definitely planning to apply to higher education are more likely to display those characteristics we would expect to see. Children who have parents with higher education and those who say they will definitely apply to higher education themselves have higher levels of optimism. In relation to debt attitudes those who have parents with higher education have higher tolerance to general debt on Factor 3 (liberal

attitudes). Those children who say they will definitely apply for higher education have higher tolerance of higher education debt, which is in line with expectations.

In terms of parents, those with higher education place less weight on current benefits at the expense of longer term rewards. Again there are differences in attitudes to general debt. In particular those parents who have children in higher education have higher debt tolerance on several measures. Those parents with children in higher education also have higher tolerance to higher education debt by statement 'students do not worry about their debts while at university because they will get well-paid jobs when they graduate'.

There are also some statistically significant and interesting differences between different age groups, genders and ethnicities. Amongst the child respondents, those whose ethnicity is not white British have higher risk preference than those who are white British. Females have lower levels of optimism than males and have lower debt tolerance on Factor 1 (fear of debt). Those who are aged 17 and older have higher risk preference and have higher levels of optimism than younger respondents. Respondents aged 17 and older also have more tolerance to general debt as measured by Factors 1 and 3 and more tolerance to higher education debt, which may reflect a growing acceptance of debt as they approach the age of entry into higher education.

Amongst parents, those aged over 50 have lower risk preference but place less weight on current benefits and prefer longer term rewards than younger respondents. The over 50s also have higher levels of optimism. Optimism is also higher for those parents who are not white British compared to white British parents. Parents who are not white British also have higher debt tolerance on some measures, being less likely to agree with the statements 'Once you are in debt it is very difficult to get out of debt' and 'I would worry a lot if I got into debt'.

This is a small scale survey however it does help us to identify individual attitudes and characteristics that might affect participation in higher education and chimes with the findings of the analysis of the LSYPE data.

We then undertook multivariate analysis using probit regression models to explore the extent to which different variables predict whether a parent or young person completing the questionnaire comes from an area with a positive or negative participation gap. It is worth stressing that this is not causal analysis, the model is estimating only the associations between the various factors and whether the participation gap is positive or negative. This approach allows us to test associations between characteristics and participation gaps while controlling for other factors, such as area characteristics.

For parents, higher levels of optimism are associated with a positive participation gap but there were no other significant associations of parental attitudes or characteristics.

There are mixed results when we look at young people's attitudes to debt; some measures positively associated with higher participation gap and others negatively associated. A more liberal attitude to debt (greater tolerance in relation to factor 3) is positively associated with the probability of coming from an area with a positive participation gap. However less fear of debt (greater tolerance in relation to factor 1) is negatively associated – that is, respondents with less fear of debt are more likely to come from area with lower

than expected participation. Yet higher tolerance to higher education debt specifically is associated with positive participation gap. This is what we might expect. Clearly attitudes to debt differ between young people, but higher education debt may be perceived differently to other types of debt, such as credit card debt amongst young people with positive views of or aspirations to higher education. The qualitative research explores why the attitudes of young people and their parents to higher education may differ between areas and why certain attitudes might be more prevalent in some areas than others.

The following four chapters explore each case study pair and the London case study areas in turn. For each case study area we provide some contextual information on the area to set the scene followed by key findings from the qualitative research. We found stronger contrasts between the first two case study pairs (urban and rural areas) than in the other areas, and in these chapters focus on possible factors that could help to explain the different participation gaps. While the contrasts between the other case study areas were less stark and possible factors influencing participation gaps were harder to discern, we nevertheless collected useful data that helps illuminate particular barriers and enablers to participation in different localities and for different sections of the community.

## Urban Pair: Anfield (Liverpool) and Bulwell (Nottingham)

In this chapter we explore the findings from the research comparing two urban areas, one with lower than expected levels of participation in higher education (Bulwell in Nottingham) and one with higher than expected levels of participation in higher education (Anfield in Liverpool).

### About the case study areas

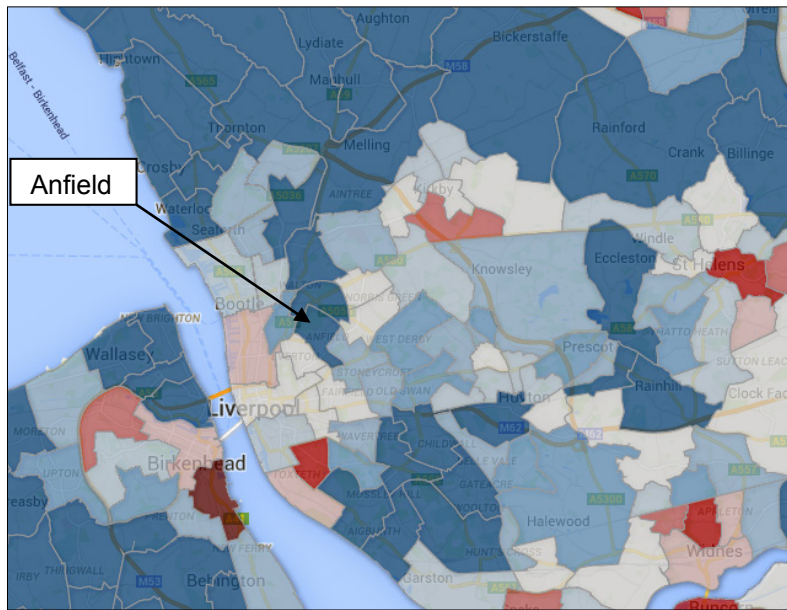
#### Anfield, Liverpool

Anfield is a district of Liverpool, Merseyside, and a Liverpool City Council Ward. It is situated approximately 1 mile to the north of the city centre. It is bordered by the areas of Walton, Clubmoor, Tuebrook and Everton and has a population of approximately 13,400.<sup>51</sup> At 22.0 per cent, Anfield has the 6th highest proportion of lone parent households of all Liverpool wards. Anfield also exhibits high levels of deprivation with almost a third (31.9 per cent) of the ward falling within the most deprived 1 per cent of neighbourhoods nationally, and three-fifths (60.5 per cent) falling in the most deprived 10 per cent. The rate of young people's participation in higher education for the area is 25.2 per cent. Although this is lower than the average participation rate for the North West (32.5 per cent) and national young participation rate (38 per cent), it is 3.4 percentage points above the level expected when the prior educational attainment and ethnicity in the ward are accounted for. Figure 1 below shows that across the Merseyside area there are many wards with higher than expected levels of participation, shown in shades of blue on the map.

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<sup>51</sup> 2011 Census

**Figure 1: Participation gap for Anfield, Liverpool**



Source: HEFCE [Gaps in young participation in higher education](#)

Generally both parents and children are happy with the area they live in. In particular, children are very positive about being from Liverpool. They take great pride from being from the wider Liverpool area and this contributes to a strong sense of identity. Parents, young people and school staff all describe the wider Liverpool area as a vibrant place to live, which has benefited significantly from substantial investment and regeneration in recent years, including as a result of being awarded European Capital of Culture in 2008. The Liverpool European Capital of Culture programme had a total income of £130m over six years and is reported<sup>52</sup> to have generated an economic impact of £753.8m from additional direct visitor spend alone across Liverpool, Merseyside and the wider North West region.

However, there is also a view amongst parents, children, and school staff that at 'street level', pride in the area can differ depending on which part of Anfield an individual resides in. Some areas and streets are associated with gangs and drug-use and, therefore, perceived as 'bad areas'.

Parents are aware of a range of local opportunities for young people living in the area, including, employment in the retail and construction sectors in particular, apprenticeships and higher education. However, some parents perceive that the prevalence of drugs and crime in the area could act as a barrier and deter some young people who might otherwise progress into higher education:

*It's an influence isn't it, from drugs and crime and stuff like that would stop them.*

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<sup>52</sup> Garcia, B., Melville, R. and Cox, T. (2010) [Creating an impact: Liverpool's experience as a European Capital of Culture](#). See:

## Parent, Anfield

Young people are, on the whole, aware of a wide range of opportunities that are available to them and are optimistic about their futures. Respondents identified a comprehensive list of options including: higher education, work experience and employment, entrepreneurship, travelling, summer camp and joining the army. Although many of these opportunities are not available in Anfield itself, the young people from in this area are aware that they are available in Liverpool and can be easily accessed via the city's transport links.

When asked about their perceptions of 'success' parents in both areas mainly believe that overall happiness is the most important factor, as well as having sufficient income to be 'comfortable'.

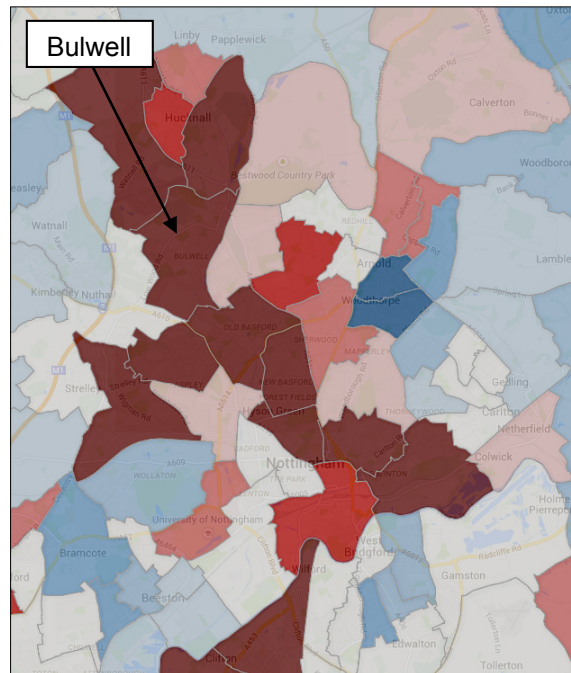
## Bulwell, Nottingham

Bulwell is approximately 4.5 miles northwest of Nottingham city centre, and borders Ashfield and Broxtowe districts. Bulwell has a population of approximately 16,157.<sup>53</sup> Schools in and around Bulwell have historically been among the worst-performing in the United Kingdom, and it was made an "Education Action Zone" in 1999. The north Nottingham region has the lowest level of students progressing to higher education in the country. The rate of young participation in higher education for this area is 10.4 per cent, which is 7 percentage points lower than the expected level of 17.4 per cent and 21.6 percentage points lower than the East Midlands region as a whole. Figure 2 below shows Bulwell and surrounding wards. Wards with lower than expected levels are participation are shown in shades of red.

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<sup>53</sup> 2011 Census

**Figure 2: Participation gap for Bulwell, Nottingham**



Source: HEFCE [Gaps in young participation in higher education](#)

The parents and young people from Bulwell who took part in the research generally report that there is a lack of opportunities in the area which is perceived to be less affluent than other areas of Nottingham. High levels of long-term unemployment, crime and gang culture are all prevalent in the area:

*I don't think there are enough opportunities in this area for young people, I really don't, yes we've got youth clubs and that but you know it has got a lot of crime.*

**Parent, Bulwell**

The negative association between these issues and Bulwell are all perceived to have contributed to the area becoming stigmatised as a 'bad place to live'. As a result, and in stark contrast to Anfield, the young people in Bulwell do not to take pride in being from this area. Several young people spoke about wanting to move away from Bulwell and the wider Nottingham area in order to seek career opportunities elsewhere.

*I'd get away from Bulwell yes...it just seems like there's more opportunities out there than there is in Bulwell or Nottingham.*

**Young person, Bulwell**

*Yes, in the future, like. I still want to live in Bulwell at the minute, so that's the best option to do. When I've got a bit older and know more about the world, then I'm planning on moving out of here.*

**Young person, Bulwell**

## Local education, employment and training opportunities

### Secondary education

In both Anfield and Bulwell parents are aware of a range of secondary educational opportunities available in each area. Parents in Anfield report that there is a good choice of secondary schools available to them. Most had got their first choice for their children but even those who had got their second choice were happy with the decision. As a consequence, the majority of parents report that their children are receiving a good quality education with a range of choices available to them if they want to progress into Further Education and Higher Education opportunities.

The participating school in Anfield was established out of two failing schools and is perceived by parents as doing very well. The school was deemed 'Good' in its most recent Ofsted inspection with 'Outstanding' leadership and management. School stakeholders describe the ethos of the secondary school as inclusive and having good links with the local community. There is also a strong sense that the school is primarily focussed on enhancing students' self-belief in order to raise educational attainment:

*One of the things that the [School] has been able to generate is a belief in that, if you try, you can succeed. You can get a certificate that says that you've succeeded in a qualification that's recognised by those people around you.*

**Stakeholder, Anfield**

Similarly in Bulwell, a new Academy has been established. In contrast to Anfield, the school has been placed in special measures by Ofsted, although Ofsted has deemed the school to be making 'reasonable progress'. Parents have mixed views on how well the schools are performing in the area and the quality of education provided, although it is acknowledged by some that the schools are doing well in 'challenging' circumstances, others feel more could be done. For example, some parents report that that alongside academic subjects, more emphasis should be placed on the development of important life skills and entrepreneurship which they perceive are not being taught currently.

### Further education

Both Anfield and Bulwell offer a wide range of options for young people who wish to continue studying after their GCSEs. This includes A levels delivered at a sixth form, apprenticeships and vocational qualifications such as NVQs and BTECs delivered by local further education colleges. The majority of young people from both Anfield and Bulwell express a desire to pursue further education at either college or sixth form. The colleges and sixth forms in both case study wards are accessible by public transport and so transport is not a barrier for the young people from these areas wishing to study at this level.

### Higher education

There are opportunities for the young people from both case study wards to pursue higher education at a local university or other local higher education provider. The majority of the young people consulted aspire to go to university and the parents agree that university



may be an option for their children. However, the financial cost of university (debts/fees) is a considerable cause for concern in both Bulwell and Anfield:

*I'm not being funny, I'm now 65, and we're working our rear-ends off, and have done for the past three, four years, to get our daughter through university. I just think, you know, I don't regret that, don't at all get me wrong, but I just think there should have been a system in place that would have helped her to have that education, you know?*

**Parent, Bulwell**

## **Apprenticeships**

Parents in Anfield and Bulwell are aware of apprenticeships and some feel that this is a valuable option for their children to pursue as they provide them both with a qualification, skills, experience of employment, and an income. Some parents felt apprenticeships were a good opportunity for those who may not enjoy full-time studying so may not want to progress to higher education. However, perceptions of the availability of apprenticeships for young people varied between the case study areas.

Parents in Anfield report that there is currently a lack of industry-based apprenticeships available in the area. Perhaps at least in part as a result, none of the young people consulted report that an apprenticeship is an option they would wish to take after leaving compulsory education:

*They're [companies] not offering apprentices, any chance of any sort of apprenticeship or anything. They get put in with these training councils, you know, and these don't offer the kids anything.*

**Parent, Anfield**

In contrast, some parents in Bulwell report that they are aware of apprenticeships within a number of sectors in the local area including child care, health care and construction. Some of the young people from Bulwell share this view and indicate that they intend to apply for an apprenticeship after they leave school: and perceive that that they are readily available:

*Actually apprenticeships are kind of popular now, a lot of apprenticeships have been offered.*

**Young person, Bulwell**

## **Employment**

The unemployment rate within both Anfield and Bulwell is more than 10 per cent. Despite this, parents in Anfield appear optimistic about the local employment opportunities for young people. They are aware of a range of industries and a number of large companies based in Liverpool such as Ford and Jaguar and regard these as being the main places that young people could go and work. Parents also identify a career in the NHS as a viable option due to the number of hospitals in the local area and opportunities within the retail sector specifically work in the local supermarkets.

There is widespread agreement amongst the parents in Bulwell that there is a lack of employment opportunities for young people as well as adults in the local area. According

to the 2011 Census, 3.6 per cent of the population in Bulwell (aged 16 to 74) are long-term unemployed and 1.8 per cent are unemployed and have never worked. These figures are higher when compared to the rest of England (long-term unemployed 1.7 per cent and unemployed and never worked 0.7 per cent). There is a perception amongst some of the parents that rising immigration is contributing to rising unemployment and impacting on the number of opportunities available for the local population. Rising unemployment is also perceived to have contributed to the rise in crime in the local area.

According to one of the school stakeholders, young people in Anfield are in an advantageous position in terms of local employment opportunities because of the proximity of the area to two large cities (Liverpool and Manchester). According to this stakeholder, this means that young people do not need to travel far to take up employment.

*There's two big cities very close together, and there's a sense that you wouldn't necessarily need to go much further afield, because there's a lot of employment opportunities here. There's two big cities, both on the economic climb now, a little bit. There are more opportunities and it's very commutable, it's very easy to get around, and so it enables people to stay in this area, but to be able to participate in a lot of stuff.*

**Stakeholder, Anfield**

In contrast, external stakeholders from Bulwell are in agreement with parents that there is a distinct lack of employment opportunities for young people in Bulwell. This is mainly perceived to be due to the absence of large industries in the area:

*Yes, I wouldn't say employment opportunities are great for students because as far as I'm aware there are no large businesses other than supermarkets*

**Stakeholder, Bulwell**

Once again, this stakeholder view is shared by the young people in Bulwell who, when asked what job opportunities were available to them locally, described jobs in either retail, the fast food industry or in supermarkets. Perhaps as a result, a few wanted to leave the area and get jobs in other sectors such as accounting.

Whilst both areas are similar in terms of their unemployment rates, residents of Anfield appear more optimistic about the employment opportunities available to young people than the residents of Bulwell. We might hypothesise that being in close proximity to two major cities positively influence young people's perceptions of the range of local employment opportunities and their subsequent career aspirations. However, Bulwell is also located a relatively short distance from a large city, Nottingham. This suggests that other factors are also at play. As noted previously, Liverpool, including Anfield has benefitted from considerable inward investment over recent years; Bulwell has not benefitted in this way.

## **Attitudes to higher education**

Parents from Anfield believe that university is a viable option for their children and, given the range of provision locally, that they have the opportunity to go if they wish. However, some described the decision to go to university as a 'personal choice', and that going to university is not the right choice for everybody as some may not be as 'academically inclined'. Some of the parents made a clear connection between the importance of a

university education, and gaining a degree in particular, and successfully securing employment in the current economic climate where competition for jobs is increasing:

*It is now. In this day and age, if you don't go to university, I don't think you're going to get a job anywhere.*

**Parent, Anfield**

Parental attitudes towards higher education and the value of a university degree are different in Bulwell when compared with Anfield. Parents are particularly concerned about the costs of higher education and whether it is worth the investment. Interestingly, Bulwell parents are not just concerned about the costs borne and the debt incurred by the student. Some parents also expressed concerns over the financial strain that would be placed on the family if one or more of their children attended university, as a proportion of the family income would be redirected to support the family member who was studying and not able to fully support themselves. As the following quote illustrates, some families are faced with stark choices which are influenced by a strong desire to treat all members of the family fairly and equally:

*I've got a big family, and I want the best for my children, but it's going to be hard for me, having six children, to support all that. Either I've got it or they've got it, do you know what I mean?*

**Parent, Bulwell**

This view perhaps reflects a lack of understanding on the part of parents on low incomes of the financial support that is available to students and the mechanisms that have been put in place to ensure that the upfront costs of higher education are minimised. Nevertheless, these concerns are potentially pervasive and are likely to be impacting on the guidance parents offer and young people's decisions about progression to higher education. This suggests more needs to be done to inform and reassure parents in this situation that financial help is available.

This view is echoed by the external stakeholders consulted in Bulwell. A stakeholder from a local university noted that a lack of parental understanding of higher education was acting as a barrier for some young people. This stakeholder's institution was seeking to break down some of these barriers through outreach work with local parents. The interventions are designed to broaden parents' knowledge and understanding of higher education and to encourage parents to consider higher education as an option for their children:

*We in the outreach team have tried to work more with the parents. That's something that has, kind of, been added to our menu over time to try and influence the influencers in some way. So encouraging them to encourage their sons and daughters to think beyond, kind of, the neighbourhood that they are currently are in.*

**Stakeholder, Bulwell**

A few of the parents in Anfield also discussed the financial pressures associated with university (such as debt and fees); however, while some reported that there is a risk that graduates will not see a return on the investment in the form of a well-paid job, others felt

that the costs are justified as graduates tend to establish successful careers and achieve higher earning than those without a degree in the long run:

*I do feel it's worth it. I knew someone who went to uni and she's got a really good job now. She's head of department*

**Parent, Anfield**

Some of the parents in Bulwell shared the view that there are no guarantees when it comes to employment, even for graduates with a good degree and questioned whether higher education was worth the investment. Some parents in both Anfield and Bulwell also cautioned that as the number of graduates grows and competition for jobs increases there is a danger that students will become overqualified for the employment opportunities that are available in the local area:

*I think that could be a scapegoat for people. 'Sorry, you're too qualified. In other words we don't want you.' You know, it's awful.*

**Parent, Anfield**

The external stakeholders in both Bulwell and Anfield report that the young people in these areas face a number of barriers and challenges when accessing higher education and that the characteristics of the local area and of the local population are likely to be having an influence. Both Bulwell and Anfield are relatively close knit communities and there is a perception that the young people from these areas are not willing to move away from their parents to take up learning or employment opportunities.

*...Because there is such a close knit community and such a sense of family to life in Liverpool, they don't want to move away from their parents, they want to stay. Sometimes, even though it's really lovely and a lot of them do want to go to university, they don't want to move away, so they stay at home.*

**Stakeholder, Anfield**

The young people in Anfield expressed particular reservations about leaving Liverpool because of concerns about how they would be perceived by people from other parts of the country and prevailing stereotypes of Liverpudlians.

The lack of willingness to leave home means that those young people who are considering higher education as an option are more likely to apply to a local higher education provider and remain living at home. As noted previously, there are a number of higher education institutions in Liverpool offering a wide range of provision. Anfield's proximity to the city and good transport links ensure this provision is accessible to residents of Anfield and this may help to explain why participation in Anfield is higher than expected and the participation rates differs so much when compared with Bulwell. Despite the varied views of parents, the majority of the young people in Anfield and Bulwell expressed a desire to go onto higher education as they felt this would provide them with a qualification that would lead to employment in the future. Given the relatively low proportion of young people in Bulwell in particular who act on their intentions and progress into HE, this suggests that a range of other factors are also impacting on young people causing them to modify their aspirations and behaviours.

## Influences on career decision-making

The young people consulted in Anfield and Bulwell both identify a range of influences that impact on decision making. These include schools, individual teachers, parents and other family members, friends, the media, and other organisations young people may engage with including the career service and youth clubs. However, there is no consensus about what the main influencer is, for most it is a combination of factors.

### School

Parents from Anfield and Bulwell perceive that teachers are one of the main influences on their children's decision-making. They perceive that their children are well-supported by their school as well as their teachers, who provide encouragement and guidance about future choices. The parents believe that their children are able to openly approach teachers and discuss the options available to them.

*I'd like to think me, but I think, personally, it's the teachers with my son. He comes home and goes, 'Miss said this, and Miss said that,' and I don't get a look in.*

**Parent, Bulwell**

*Teachers more than the parents, because we could nag them until we're blue in the face, and it's going to go in one ear and out the other.*

**Parent, Anfield**

The young people, on the whole, also report that they are receiving sufficient help and support from their secondary school in order to make decisions about their future:

*Then they helped you make decisions, like, and revise for GCSEs and stuff, and decide what you wanted to do next. So that was helpful to me.*

**Young person, Bulwell**

*I feel like depending on wherever you live, schools a place where they are trying to always do well for you and so they are very personal in helping you take the right path that you want to take.*

**Young person, Anfield**

However, while parents and young people are satisfied with the amount of support they are receiving external stakeholders, in Bulwell in particular, question the quality of that support. One perceives that young people are not being well-informed about what they need to do in order to progress to higher education by their schools and, as noted above, misinformation from other sources, such as parents, can exacerbate the situation:

*While quite a lot of young people said at least some point in their school career that they were interested in university and would like to go there, they didn't actually make the right decisions at the right times to make that a reality. They weren't getting the advice or, you know, didn't have the proper knowledge, the experience of others to call on.*

**Stakeholder, Bulwell**

## Media

Parents in both areas cited a number of other influences on young people's career decision-making, including the media. One parent commented on the recent rise of young 'YouTube' stars who make large amounts of money posting videos online and the influence this has on their children's idea of work and their attitudes to their future career:

*YouTube....It's when they show men making £21 million out of YouTube for showing people how to play FIFA and you're like, 'That's not the real world.' That's what he's made. This fella's made £21 million for just showing kids how to play FIFA on YouTube.*

**Parent, Anfield**

Similarity, many of the parents reflected on celebrity culture and how stars (such as footballers) are portrayed in the media. The way in which their earnings are reported and the way in which their lifestyles are portrayed are appealing to young people and encourages them to regard 'celebrity' as a viable career route.

## Family

The parents agreed that despite pressure from the media and the significant role that teachers and schools fulfil, parents still have an important and influential role and ultimately it is parents who are responsible for helping and supporting young people to make the right decisions.

*I don't think it's feasible just to look at it and say, 'It's all down to schools and colleges.' You've also got to have the family element of encouraging your children to do these things. You know, you can't just sit back as a parent and say, 'Well, that's the school's job.'*

**Parent, Bulwell**

The school and external stakeholders in Anfield shared the view that family, along with the popularity of Liverpool as a city are the main influencers for young people. External stakeholders in particular regard parents as role models who shape young people's view of work and employment. This can have both a positive and a negative influence on young people's decision-making when it comes to work as well as higher education:

*If your role models are two individuals who have never worked, then that's what you see. Whereas, if you've got very proud parents you might still have some poverty, then your expectation in your mind is that you leave school and you go out to work. So, it does start from that point.*

**Stakeholder, Anfield**

External stakeholders in Bulwell agree that young people are most influenced by their family and that a lack of support from parents can have a detrimental effect on decision making. However, they also report that young people are influenced by their peers and by wanting to enter a career in an area which they enjoy. This view is also supported by some of the young people in the area:

*If you hate your job, and you still get money from it, that means nothing because at the end of the day you still hate your job. So you're not that happy, because you hate your job. So I think, doing something that you love, you probably work harder in that, then you get more money in that, that's probably better, I think.*

**Young person, Bulwell**

In addition, stakeholders, school staff and parents in both Anfield and Bulwell discuss the importance of young people having access to positive role models from a range of employment sectors so they can find out more about different types of jobs. It was noted by stakeholders in Bulwell that there is perhaps a lack of appropriate role models in the area because of the lack of distinct industries and/or well-known employers. We return to how schools in Anfield have increased the visibility of local employers and facilitated access to role models in order to positively impact on young people's decision making in the section below.

## **Sources of information, advice and guidance**

Parents in Anfield are well informed about the sources of advice and guidance on learning and work available for their children. For example, many of them are aware of the Connexions service (now the National Careers Service) and local youth services. Some parents are also aware of opportunities in the area such as the Duke of Edinburgh award which help to develop young people's skills and confidence. In contrast, parents in Bulwell did not show much awareness of the sources of information, advice and guidance that are available to young people outside of school that can support them in their decision making. Furthermore, an external stakeholder expressed concern that young people from Bulwell are not receiving enough advice and guidance which is in turn acting as a barrier to progression into higher education.

The participating school in Anfield provides a range of support to young people, including advice and guidance at sixth form level, advice from impartial advisers, and talks from employers. The employer talks are delivered using a '20 questions' approach. This involves an employer coming in to the school and the young people asking them questions about what their job entails and the qualifications and experience they have gained. The young people then try and guess what the employer's job is. The benefit of this approach is that it challenges young people's perceptions of the career paths and opportunities that are available to them in a fun and engaging way. Even when the young people guess the employer's job incorrectly, the process is memorable and has a lasting impact.

These employer talks were specifically cited by the school as an example of good practice and some of the young people interviewed reported that they were particularly enjoyable and engaging. However, the school stakeholders agree that further improvements could be made to the quality of the services delivered by increasing the extent and nature of business links with the school and enhancing the information available about different employment opportunities:

*We do need more business links, although that is tough in this area to do. So, having a careers room, for example, is something we're still in the process of setting up and having ready.*

**Stakeholder, Anfield**

The school in Anfield has also successfully implemented a programme designed to help students with their UCAS application and successfully secure a place at university. It is likely that this programme is contributing, at least in part, to the higher than expected levels of participation in higher education amongst young people in Anfield:

*Well, the focus on UCAS is strong, because the team in Sixth Form are very well trained to support a student with a UCAS application....I would say, is good in that it's supportive, it's one to one, it's constantly nagging, it's going into forms and intervening in forms. Sitting with students, helping them to write personal statements, checking their personal statements, checking them again.*

**Stakeholder, Anfield**

There is evidence elsewhere that support to improve the quality of applications can successfully increase the proportion of young people achieving a positive outcome. For example, CFE recently undertook an evaluation on behalf of the National Apprenticeship Service to examine the impact of the short employability skills programme. This programme was designed to increase the success rate of young people applying for apprenticeships via the Apprenticeships Vacancy Matching service by identifying failed applicants and offering support. The evaluation demonstrated that this type of intervention is effective at improving the success rate of some applicants.

In both Anfield and Bulwell support and guidance is offered through other local sources (including university widening participation programmes and impartial careers services such as Connexions and Futures). In Anfield, this involves talks within schools and brochures on the support on offer through the service. Impartial advice and guidance is delivered to students who are unsure about what they want to do. The young people in this situation who had accessed the service describe it as particularly useful:

*At this stage it's like, 'I don't know what I'm going to do,' and it's nice to have all the people there to say, 'Well you could do this, or this or this.'*

**Young person, Anfield**

In both Anfield and Bulwell, the young people found talks from external visitors about different careers options helpful in shaping their opinions of what they wanted to do and raising their awareness of new careers they perhaps had not considered and the different paths available to them.

*When I was at school and I did health and social care, they got people to come in and talk to us about different careers, so then that helped me decide that I'd like to be a midwife. They told me about the job and they seemed honest about it and not false, so that helped me.*

**Young person, Bulwell**

Some young people in Bulwell also received support through a teacher-mentor programme designed to give students one-on-one help and support in making their decisions which was regarded as very useful by those who had taken part.



## Initiatives to widen access to higher education

Widening access to higher education programmes are available in both Anfield and Bulwell; however, notably the extent to which these are taken up varies. It was observed by stakeholders in Bulwell that their ability to deliver these programmes can be reduced when schools are unwilling or unable to take part in these activities due to competing priorities. This did not seem to be a concern in Anfield where widening participation was seen as a high priority in the school and this was demonstrated through the presence of a representative from a local university on the school's board of governors.

### Anfield

The school stakeholders are engaged in a number of activities designed to widen access to higher education. These include a dedicated sixth form team who provide information, advice and guidance to students and external advisors who develop independent learning plans for individual students. The school also has a close relationship with local universities which is described as positive and useful. This involves regular visits to the school as well as events and day trips to the universities for students which aim to encourage them to consider higher education as an option. Outreach programmes like this also include residential trips for students to expose them to university life and address and issues and concerns they may have about being a student in higher education:

*Although having good contacts with them and having good relationships with them is positive, and knowing that they put on events for our students to attend and things like that. We have regular school trips down to those universities, so that definitely helps, but we also drive it as well.*

**Stakeholder, Anfield**

An external school stakeholder spoke about the work they do focused on reaching out to students from disadvantaged backgrounds so that everybody has equal access to higher education. They explained how their role also included dispelling myths about higher education in order to encourage more young people to attend; for example, they provide talks to dispel finance myths and encourage young people to move away from home to access higher education elsewhere:

*We have a programme set in stone to get them to go onto higher education...to give them that boost and that confidence boost that they need....We enable them by running student finance nights, getting student finance in to talk, we talk to them, we support them with their application to student finance.*

**Stakeholder, Anfield**

The same individual spoke about work with other higher education institutes in the area, and working collaboratively with them in order to expand their outreach efforts. This also included working with more primary schools. This stakeholder felt that they had achieved a good and close relationship with the local schools and colleges which has enabled them to promote university successfully across all levels.

## Bulwell

Two external stakeholders from two local universities reported that they are engaged in a raft of outreach activities designed to engage local schools, raise the aspirations of young people and widen access to higher education amongst under-represented groups. There is evidence that local universities are delivering activities to young people and parents of pupils in primary and secondary schools in the Nottingham area partnership with schools.

The outreach work includes the involvement of undergraduate role models and taking them into schools to demonstrate to young people how similar people to themselves have achieved access to higher education:

*I think we always take student undergraduate role models with us and I think they can have an impact as well, especially if they are somebody who's from that area, or from a similar area, and they've managed to do something.*

**Stakeholder, Bulwell**

Other outreach activities included day visits to the campus, where students were able to spend the day at university with an undergraduate. These activities were perceived to be crucial in raising the aspirations of young people in the area. However, as noted previously, higher education providers have mixed success in terms of the level of engagement with some schools. Schools face a range of competing priorities, particularly when in special measures, and this inhibits the time and resources they can invest in widening participation activities. This may help to explain why, despite the existence of outreach provision, that progression rates remain lower than expected in Bulwell.

## Chapter conclusions

Of the different case study areas visited Anfield and Bulwell present the most notable differences within a pair. Although similar demographically, there are a number of key differences between the wards of Anfield and Bulwell which could help to explain the participation gaps.

Outlook and the perception that there are opportunities available locally were very different in the two areas. It was notable in Anfield that there is generally a more positive outlook in terms of the local area and the opportunities in both education and employment that are available to young people – particularly in the wider Liverpool area but also in nearby Manchester. Although young people and parents in Bulwell feel they could travel to Nottingham, there is less awareness of the types of education or employment opportunities available to them and a perception of a lack of local employment. They also feel that there is a stigma attached to them in Nottingham as a result of being from Bulwell which was not present in Anfield.

The school environment may also be considered a factor in the differences between the areas. Although it should be noted that access to school representatives in Bulwell was not possible for this research due to other school commitments, it can be noted that the main school for residents in Bulwell is currently in special measures. In comparison, whilst historically the schools in Anfield were perceived as 'bad' schools, the success of the new academy in the area has to some extent turned this around.

There was a sense from stakeholders and young people in Anfield that they may be more comfortable attending university in their local area rather than moving away which would overall reduce the financial burdens on them. Young people in Bulwell were slightly more likely to want to move away from the Nottingham area and as such financial barriers to higher education may be more pronounced.

Finally, young people in Anfield appeared to have more access to positive role models through the school information and advice and widening participation programmes which helped them to see the benefits of progressing to higher education. In Bulwell, a lack of positive role models and high unemployment in the area was seen as a barrier to raising young people's aspirations, whilst young people and parents were not always aware of information, advice and guidance available in schools and stakeholders expressed concerns over the quality of provision.

## Rural pair

In this chapter we explore the findings from the research comparing two rural areas, one with higher than expected levels of participation in higher education (Tipps Cross in Essex) and one with lower than expected levels of participation in higher education (a rural ward in the South West of England). It should be noted, however, that both areas have good levels of young participation, either at or above the national average. We have not named the specific South West case study ward. As the population in this area is particularly sparse, it would be easier to identify the individual schools and other research participants, some of whom wish to remain anonymous.

## About the case study areas

### South West ward

This case study ward is located in the South West of England. The rate of young participation in higher education for the ward is good. However, given the educational attainment and ethnic profile of the area, the *expected* participation is substantially higher. With a participation gap of over 10 percentage points, this places the ward in participation gap decile 1.<sup>54</sup> Many of the surrounding wards also have lower than expected levels of participation in higher education.

The parents who took part in our research all say the area affords a good quality of life and is a great place for children to grow up. Several had moved into the area or had moved back to the area specifically because it offered a quieter life and more relaxed pace of living. However this quietness was also recognised as being problematic at times; as one parent pointed out ‘what’s brilliant about [the area] is also its problem’.

Lack of transport infrastructure is a particular problem. There is no nearby motorway link and public transport options (buses in particular) are limited. This is reflected in methods of travel to work. The 2011 Census shows that over two thirds of people from the ward travel to work by car or van (compared to 57 per cent nationally) and far fewer travel by train or bus. A higher proportion than the national average also works from home. Young people often travel long distances to school and lack of transport can limit their ability to take up activities and opportunities, where these are on offer. These sentiments were echoed by young people who say that the area is safe but can be ‘boring’ and it is necessary to travel some distance to access better shops and leisure activities.

Parents also highlighted the relatively high cost of living in the area, particularly in terms of housing costs. Along with London and parts of the South East, the area has high mean property prices and a high affordability ratio (prices as a multiple of earnings). Although parents and stakeholders acknowledge that the area is generally affluent there are pockets

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<sup>54</sup> Those wards in participation gap decile 1 are those with the most significant negative participation gaps, with participation rates a lot lower than expected given attainment and ethnicity of young people in the area. Those in participation gap decile 10 are those with the most significant positive gaps.

of disadvantage and affordable housing can be a particular challenge for younger people trying to get on the property ladder.

## Tipps Cross, Essex

Tipps Cross is a rural ward in Essex, to the north of the town of Brentwood. Given the area's educational attainment and ethnic profile, the expected rate of young participation for Tipps Cross is 41.2 per cent. However, the actual rate of participation for Tipps Cross is much higher at 50 per cent. Tipps Cross is thus in participation decile 10. Unlike the rural ward in the South West described above, the surrounding area is mixed in terms of participation gaps, with areas with higher, lower and expected levels of participation.

Superficially, Tipps Cross and the South West ward appear similar. Tipps Cross is also rural, described by parents and young people we spoke to as quiet, safe, friendly with plenty of green spaces. Like the South West ward, the area is perceived to be generally affluent but with some social housing in the area too. The main problems raised were also related to connectivity – poor mobile telephone reception and infrequent public transport – and lack of activities for young people or at least difficulties accessing them. Like the South West ward, the area also has high property prices. However, while Tipps Cross itself is not well served in terms of public transport, Brentwood Borough is on the edge of the London commuter belt and has good transport links, with the M25 and A12 and buses and trains to London. While a similar proportion of Tipps Cross residents travel to work by car or van or work from home as in the South West ward, far more travel to work by train, bus or underground. It is not uncommon for residents to commute to work in London as well as the nearby towns of Basildon, Brentwood, Romford and Chelmsford. Both parents and young people from Tipps Cross highlighted the draw of London. The opportunities and diversity of such a large and cosmopolitan metropolis are arguably more accessible from Tipps Cross, than from the South West ward.

## Local education, employment and training opportunities

### Secondary education

Parents we spoke to from the Tipps Cross area highlighted the good choice of secondary schools nearby, including a newly opened free school. Young people in the area mainly attend four different schools. Latest ratings by Ofsted show these are either 'good' or 'outstanding'. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more good GCSEs, including maths and English, ranges from 56 to 77 per cent.

*We do have a lot of secondary schools, because we come under what they call the Five Parishes. So we have the pick of the local [schools], and they are all good.*

**Parent, Essex**

The picture is different for young people from the South West ward. Practically all young people from this ward attend the same secondary school. The school is high achieving, with a high proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more good GCSEs including Maths and English, and is generally well regarded by the pupils and parents we spoke to. However, as the only secondary school in the area, it is very large. The largest school in the Tipps Cross area by contrast is substantially smaller. One parent from the South West ward expressed concern with the school's size:

*I would say I think this school is too big. I think it's very easy to get missed and overlooked in this school.*

**Parent, South West**

## **Further education**

Both areas offer a range of options for continuing study after GCSE level. The secondary school attended by young people from the South West ward has a sixth form and, like the school itself, this is large. There are further education colleges in nearby towns as well as further afield. The perception amongst young people is that the school sixth-form is the best option for A levels with a view to progression to higher education, whereas the local further education college is a popular choice for those looking for 'practical, hands-on courses and something job-related'. The school has also just opened a new venture providing more vocational education for 14 to 19 year olds in collaboration with a local college and employers. A key stakeholder described their vision for the project:

*Developing another pathway from fourteen, [in a] smaller environment. Some children find it hard to cope in the environment here of over 2,000 [pupils]. It's just providing another option but hopefully with a really good progression route.*

**Stakeholder, South West**

All the secondary schools in the Tipps Cross area also have sixth forms, and there are a range of other local colleges within reasonable distance that young people can attend to study A levels or more vocation qualifications, such as BTECs.

## **Employment opportunities**

Parents from both areas highlighted concerns about young people undertaking degrees and then being unable to find appropriate graduate level employment – however this was more often highlighted as a concern by parents from the South West. Here there is a keen awareness that there are fewer graduate employment opportunities in the area. Several parents grew up in the local area, left to study and work elsewhere, then returned for the countryside and quality of life. They recognise, however, that as a result their employment opportunities are much reduced.

*People who went to university, have got firsts, who are here working at McDonalds. One friend who has got a very good degree, has taken a job in an abattoir because she can't get anything else.*

**Parent, South West**

In contrast, stakeholders from Essex highlighted the close proximity of the area to London and the fact that many people from the area enter employment in London in a diverse range of jobs.

*A lot of people from Brentwood will go into employment in London, because you're right on the edge of London. I don't think there's any particular specific thing that they will go into, they will go into a wide range of things.*

**Stakeholder, Essex**

The Association of Graduate Recruiters' (AGR) survey 2014 shows that just under two thirds of all vacancies offered by member employers were for positions in London and the South East (59.9 per cent), with London offering just over half of all vacancies (50.1 per cent). The South West by contrast offered just 4.5 per cent of all graduate vacancies.<sup>55</sup>

We might hypothesise therefore that the greater visibility of graduate level jobs for local people might encourage a greater proportion of young people from Tipps Cross to progress to higher education than from the South West ward. Across all case study areas we find that personal experience, often through friends, family and neighbours, is an important influence on career decision making. Greater personal experience of graduate level employment amongst friends and family may influence the expectations and aspirations of young people, as this stakeholder from Essex outlines:

*I think it's the proximity to London because I think that parents who go to London to work very often their degrees are demanded of them and I think that therefore the proximity means [...] that there is that expectation, that's what you need to get on.*

**Stakeholder, Essex**

Stakeholders and parents in the South West ward highlighted that the region in particular has a high number of micro-businesses in agriculture, food and manufacturing. There was a perception that these businesses tend to recruit from within their families and there may be an expectation that young people will continue in the family business rather than leave to attend university.

*I've got a family friend whose son has just left school with very good GCSEs. [...] He's doing an apprenticeship through his dad to take on the family farm. If he wasn't in a farming background, he would've gone to uni.*

**Parent, South West**

A stakeholder also gave an example of a high achieving pupil choosing to work in the family business rather than university because it provided an equally good route to success and achievement without leaving the local area. It is difficult to determine the extent to which young people in the South West ward take a similar route but this was not something that was mentioned by Essex research participants.

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<sup>55</sup> CFE Research (2014) [The AGR Graduate Recruitment Survey 2014](#) Warwick: Association of Graduate Recruiters (Available to purchase from)



## Attitudes to and access to higher education

Parents and young people taking part in the research held a similar mix of attitudes to higher education in both areas. Parents could see the benefits of a university education, in terms of opening up work opportunities, accessing professions in particular and broadening horizons. Parents from both areas felt that higher education has now become 'the norm' but expressed concern about the pressure on young people to attend university and that some may follow this path without it being an active and informed decision or the most appropriate path for the individual.

Many of the parents from the South West ward who took part in the focus groups are university educated themselves and / or have lived or worked outside of the South West. They have similar aspirations for their children. However, some suggested that they are not necessarily representative of all sections of the local population and that some of the long-term local residents who have not lived elsewhere are averse to leaving the county and have narrower horizons and aspirations as a result. This perception was echoed by a stakeholder working to widen participation in higher education in the area:

*I would say in [county], most of the schools that we work with, all have issues from being rural and coastal. They all have issues around aspiration and engagement in higher education. [...] There's no mobility never mind social mobility. They don't see opportunities. There is a lack of aspiration, a lot of 'we don't do that'. We don't go to university and we don't change jobs, we just stay where we are.*

**Stakeholder, South West**

In contrast, this was a perception not mentioned by Essex parents. One stakeholder, also working in widening participation, recognised the challenge highlighted by the South West stakeholder, but did not feel it applied to the area around Brentwood.

*Sometimes you can have areas close to somewhere like London, where those [people] never go into London, that are actually really pocketed and only ever stay in that area. I wouldn't put Brentwood in that category.*

**Stakeholder, Essex**

Beyond the aspirations of different sections of the community in each area, there are also practical challenges in accessing higher education for young people in the South West ward. Recent analysis published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England highlights those areas of England where the young population has little access to higher education.<sup>56</sup> Much of the South West is in the lowest decile for higher education provision accounting for the population. In stark contrast, Tipps Cross is in decile 1, offering plentiful higher education opportunities for the young population. Figure 3 below shows how the higher education provision varies across the country. Although classed as rural, Tipps Cross has access to higher education opportunities similar to those in London and other

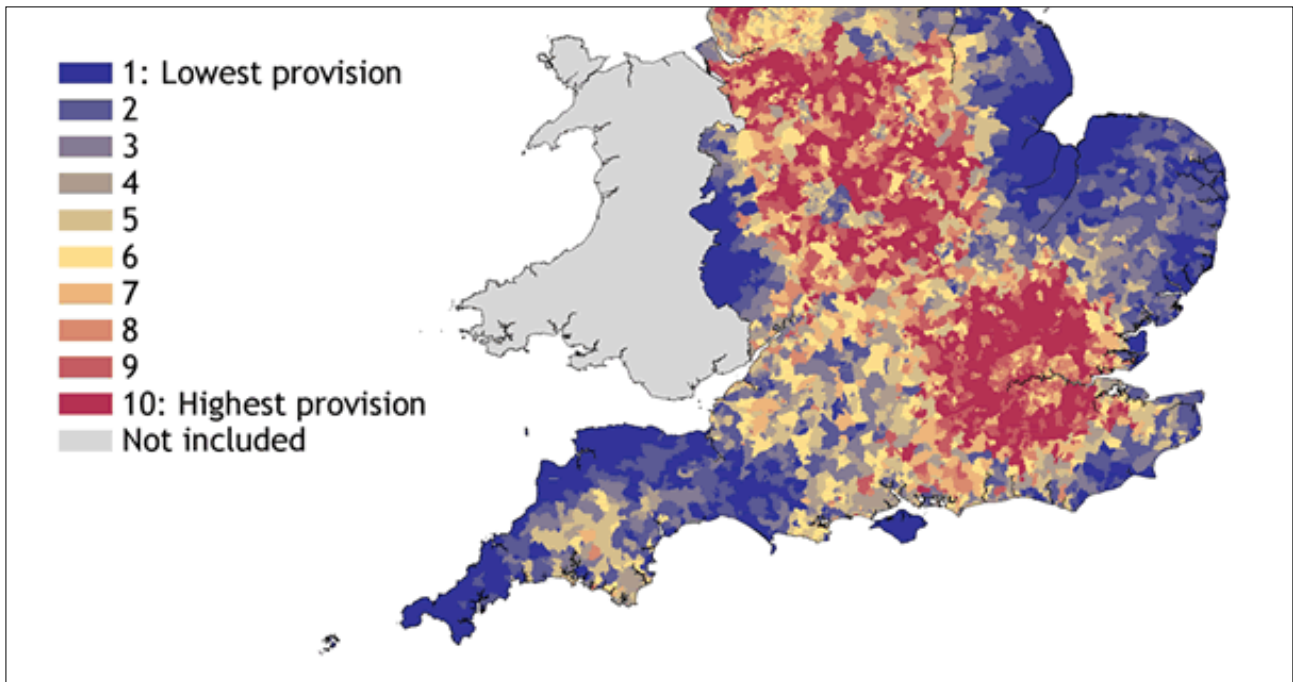
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<sup>56</sup> HEFCE (no date) *Higher education provision in England*  
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/maps/archive/heprovision/>



major cities in England. Clearly this is a major difference between the two areas that may account for the different participation gaps.

**Figure 3: Provision of higher education accounting for population**



Source: HEFCE <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/maps/archive/heprovision/>

The young people we spoke to from the South West ward who were planning to study at university mainly mentioned South West based institutions as ones they were considering, such as Bristol, Bath and Cardiff. Stakeholders agreed that young people aspired to move away from home, but not too far.

*A lot of kids here are very South-West based. If you said, what about going to university in Manchester, they would say, oh no, no, I don't want to – I want to go away but I don't want to go too far. That tends to be a common response.*

#### **Stakeholder, South West**

But the transport infrastructure in the South West means that it can be time consuming and expensive to access even South West based institutions. Parents suggest that young people who are 'high fliers' or who have a clear career goal aspire to attend the 'best' university for their chosen subject, irrespective of where it is. However, there are others who may not have such a clear goal or be less confident that university is for them. The parents suggested that for these young people, the lack of much in the way of higher education that they can access while still living from home may be off-putting. Something more local would provide a lower risk way to try out higher education.

*Because it's less of a risk, you know. Why should I spend all my money, go somewhere else to do something that I don't know if I really want to do it and it won't necessarily give me a job.*

**Parent, South West**

Further education colleges close to the South West ward provide some higher education. A stakeholder confirmed this provides an attractive option for local students, but the higher education provision in local colleges is relatively small and limited mainly to land-based and tourism related subjects.

*We do get a lot of local students, particularly mature students. [...] Younger local students as well, particularly ones who have come through college with us. They know the college, and rather than go off to university somewhere, they are aware of the costs and it is a lot easier to spend two or three years at home [...] because they know it, and they know where it is.*

**Stakeholder, South West**

Stakeholders from one of the local schools that young people from Tipps Cross in Essex attend also observed a growing trend of young people progressing to university, but staying local and living at home. And while one school stakeholder expressed concern that this limits choices and opportunities, there is an acknowledgement from other stakeholders that this is a more realistic option here than in other parts of the country, as demonstrated by Figure 5. Concerns over lack of nearby and accessible higher education were not expressed by parents from Tipps Cross. Stakeholders from the area highlighted the availability of universities in the South East, such as Anglia Ruskin University, the University of Cambridge, the University of Essex and Writtle College as well as the relative ease and speed with which London based institutions could be accessed.

*You're talking about Tipps Cross [...] It's close to Brentwood. You go from Brentwood, you've got a train right into the centre of London, you know, half an hour into the centre of London. The number of universities that are within reasonable difference is dozens.*

**Stakeholder, Essex**

## **Influences on career decision-making**

There were no clear differences between the two case study areas in terms of the factors that were said to influence career decision making.

Not all young people taking part in the research have clear job or career aspirations. Where they do these are often related to interest and enjoyment. Some say they are considering careers related to favourite subjects, others suggest career paths related to hobbies, such as music, sports or computer games. Family, friends and neighbours also have an influence; young people sometimes referred to being interested in a job because a parent, older sibling or relative does it.

Young people's choice of subjects to study at GCSE, A level and university, is often related to what they enjoy, are interested in and feel they were good at. Interest and attainment are often linked by respondents, who say that students are more likely to do

well in subjects they enjoy. Parents in both areas are happy that choosing subjects to study, GCSEs in particular, on the basis of enjoyment and ability is a good strategy as so few young people have clear ideas about what career path they want to follow at that age. Parents in both areas also were clear about the importance of being happy in one's job or career.

In both areas, where young people have clear career goals, these ambitions often influence their choice of subjects after GCSEs. This is particularly the case for those considering professional careers such as teaching, nursing, medicine and veterinary science, where they know a degree is essential and have a good idea of the types of subjects that are needed.

Other factors influencing decisions relating to subject choice mentioned in both areas are: preferences for particular teachers, familiarity with certain subjects or institutions and which subjects friends are selecting. School policy and timetabling also impact on the selection of subjects at GCSE level. After compulsory subjects have been taken into account there are a limited number of options. Timetabling restrictions and strategies to ensure students retain a broad curriculum (for example, some have to study a language and 'tech' subject) further impact on the combination of choices available and this resulted in grumbling by a few students as they were unable to achieve their aim of only studying what they like and / or are good at.

## **Information, advice and guidance**

Similar types and variety of careers education, information, advice and guidance are provided by the schools we spoke to in both case study areas. This includes information about subjects to help inform selection of course options, careers fairs, inspirational speakers, visits to places of work, colleges and universities, one to one sessions with independent careers advisers and the provision of information about other opportunities available outside of school such as open days. The area where the two schools who participated in the research most differed was the way individual guidance was targeted.

Both schools purchase the services of an independent, professional careers adviser. All students at the Essex school get an interview with the careers adviser towards the end of year 10. The session is followed up with a report which summarises what has been discussed and advice on progression routes. Careers interviews were also said to be provided to year 12 students on applying to university and alternatives for those who do not wish to follow this route. The careers advisers are also available for drop-in sessions for students, at parents' evenings and other careers events held. In contrast, the careers adviser at the South West case study school is only available one day a week. As the school is so large, this means that individual interviews are targeted at those who are at risk of not being in education, employment or training. Students can request an interview, but this resource is not widely promoted for fear of not being able to meet demand. There is also the option to contact an online adviser service. This is said to be advertised to students through assemblies and promoted to parents at the time of subject option selection. However awareness appears to be low as none of the young people or parents mentioned this as a potential source of careers information or advice.

Work experience in both areas is no longer universally arranged through schools. Students are encouraged to take up work experience opportunities by the South West ward school but due to the logistical difficulties of finding local opportunities for such a large number of students, work experience is no longer offered to all students. Similarly young people from Tipps Cross in Essex do not appear to be routinely offered work experience via school.

Despite the wide range of activities available to the South West ward students, there is further evidence that these are not available to all who might benefit. Both students and parents have the perception that visits to universities or external careers events are generally open to 'top set' or A / A\* students. When places are limited these are said to be allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis. Feedback from students indicates that visits to universities have an impact; participants were often impressed and inspired by the 'amazing facilities' they saw. Yet while some students are well served in this regard (one student said they had visited a local university seven times!) other students who are not the highest achievers or are less proactive but who could benefit are potentially missing out. Recognising that students from lower income backgrounds or without family experience of higher education might not get the same opportunities to visit universities as others, the Essex school looks to pair students up with others who are attending open days with their parents to improve accessibility.

Young people taking part in the research from both areas were generally underwhelmed by the support they receive with careers decision-making. They describe the information and advice as 'pretty useless' or do not even recall having received any. Students from the South West ward feel there is not enough time allocated to careers decision-making and that the support is not individualised enough. Information from teachers on subject choice is not seen as impartial; instead young people feel they are being 'sold' courses. In both areas young people say they receive information but not advice and guidance; one participant described the interview he received as 'jobs awareness rather than careers advice'.

The parents in Essex we spoke to appear generally satisfied with the careers information advice and guidance available. Some commented that they found careers events they attended useful for them and their children. The parents taking part in the research from the South West ward in contrast are generally highly critical of the both the amount and quality of information advice and guidance provided through the school. Two gave examples of poorly communicated advice or advice that was contrary to what a student had been advised by a university admissions tutor. Tellingly, after a long wait for an appointment with the school careers adviser, one parent said her daughter then contacted a further education college and received an appointment immediately.

Young people may have unrealistic expectations of what careers information, advice and guidance is and is not (anticipating that they are or should be 'told' what career is right for them), but there is still clearly a real desire for more tailored, individual and engaging guidance with decision-making.

## Conclusions

There are a number of key differences between the two rural case study areas that may account for the different participation gaps. While both areas have good young

participation rates compared to the national average, there is potential scope to enhance participation in the South West ward given the high levels of educational attainment.

There appears to be a tendency for some people in the South West ward area to be less likely to move away from the area for the purposes of education or employment. There is very limited availability of higher education in the immediate area which makes university level study while staying 'at home' less of an option. Graduate level jobs appear less visible in the area and this may impact on perceptions of the benefits of higher education. In contrast, Tipps Cross is closer to the capital. This provides not only greater visibility of a diverse range of graduate opportunities but the area has far better access to higher education provision.

There are also important differences in the schools provision between Tipps Cross and the South West ward. While educational quality is good in both areas, Tipps Cross has greater choice of secondary education and the schools are not as large as the school attended by the South West ward students. The extent to which the larger school in the South West case study area is able to provide individual information, advice and guidance and opportunities to engage with higher education providers and employers is relatively limited in comparison. As a result, resources appear to be targeted at those who are particularly high achieving or at risk of leaving education altogether. This potentially leaves a proportion of the school population who may have aspirations or ability to attend higher education with less individual careers support. It should be noted however that there was a desire from young people in both areas for more and better advice and guidance rather than just information.

## Sheffield City Region pair: Hillsborough (Sheffield) and Aston, Orgreave and Ulley (Rotherham)

In this chapter we look at findings for our pair of wards both within the Sheffield City Region. Hillsborough in Sheffield has higher than expected levels of participation in higher education, while Aston, Orgreave and Ulley ward in Rotherham has lower than expected levels of participation. It should be noted that while the two areas are demographically similar (see Appendix 1), unlike the other case study pairs, the difference between the participation gaps in each area is less stark. In many ways it has been harder to identify potential reasons for the participation gaps in these areas. However both areas have expected and actual young participation rates below the national average and the research has helped to identify some of the barriers to raising participation levels in these communities.

### About the case study areas

#### Hillsborough

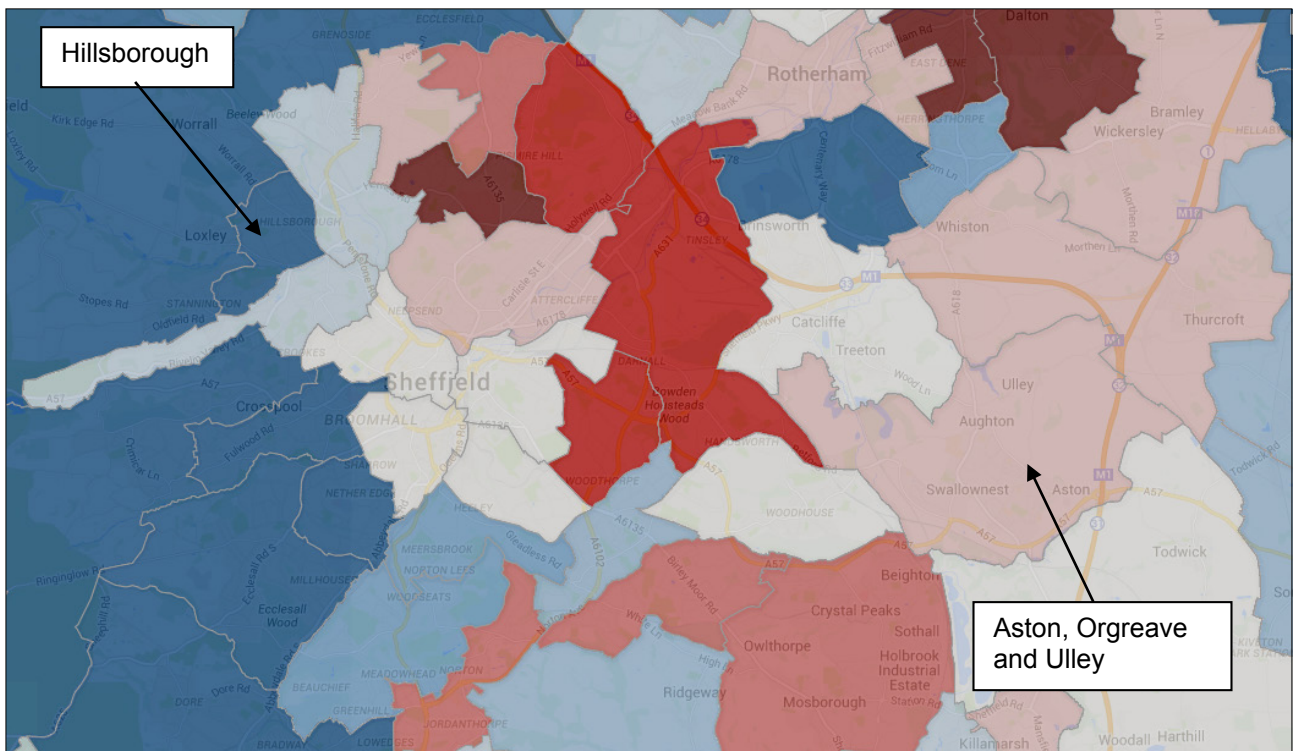
Hillsborough is approximately 2.3 miles north-west of Sheffield city centre. Sheffield railway station is easily accessible with frequent trams, the area is also a local hub for buses and there is good access to motorways. It has a higher than expected rate of young people going into higher education of 31.4 per cent compared with the expected rate of 28.2 per cent. With a positive participation gap of 3.2 percentage points, this places Hillsborough in decile 10. The average participation rate for the Yorkshire and Humber region is 30.0 per cent. Figure 4 shows that Hillsborough is one of a number of wards to the west of Sheffield city centre that has much higher than expected levels of participation in higher education (coloured dark blue on the map).

Young people and their parents have mixed views of the area. Hillsborough is close to the city centre, with good transport links, but also benefits from being close to the countryside with the Peak District easily accessible. This means that locals have access to shops, schools and workplaces, but there is also access to the countryside (the Derbyshire Peak District) close by. There are plenty of pubs and recreational areas, and the locals feel that the area has a good sense of community – ‘everyone knows each other’. The young people pointed to the accessibility of parks and leisure facilities and the fact their friends all lived close by as things that made the area a good place to live.

On the down side, parents flagged concerns about a lack of activities for teenagers and the closure of recreational facilities. Associated with this, in the minds of parents, is the problem of vandalism of community areas and facilities. Young people also said that traffic noise is a problem, and mentioned that some areas had suffered from flooding, with some personally experiencing damage to their homes.



**Figure 4: Participation gaps for wards in the Sheffield City region**



Source: HEFCE [Gaps in young participation in higher education](#)

## Aston, Orgreave and Ulley

Aston, Orgreave and Ulley is located approximately 6 miles south-east of Rotherham. The ward is largely made up of Aston-cum-Aughton, a civil parish comprising the villages of Aston, Aughton and Swallownest. Ongoing development, originally as a result of the coal mining industry (now defunct), and more recently from the addition of new housing estates – has seen the population of these villages grow and merge into the present parochial area. The ward-level participation rate is 28.2 per cent while the expected level, taking account of the effect of ethnicity and prior attainment at GCSE, is slightly higher at 32 per cent. The participation gap of -1.3 percentage points is smaller than for Hillsborough, which puts the Aston in participation gap decile 4. Figure 6 illustrates this and shows that neighbouring wards are also as or slightly below what would be expected.

Parents highlight how the area has changed significantly over the recent generations, with the area expanding as housing has been built over the past ten to fifteen years, transforming from what used to be a mining community. The local jobs market has transformed also as the city's industry changed focus from production and manufacturing to services. Aston is seen as a safe area, with parents not worried about letting their children play outside.

Parents agree that the area is typical in that it has both good and bad aspects. The good parts include the schools, and this was the motivation for some to move into the area.

Transport links to Sheffield and Doncaster are also regarded as positive aspects of the area, with access to the M1 also nearby, plus connections to trains and trams.

## Local education, employment and training opportunities

### Secondary education

Parents in the areas said that they select a school by providing their top three choices of school, in order of preference and getting their first choice of secondary school does not appear to be a problem, although there is greater competition for places at primary schools. Some parents in both areas expressed concern with some aspects of local schools; these were generally related to lack of support for specific learning requirements or behavioural issues.

There is a difference in the views of parents on schools in the two areas, and this difference is also borne out by secondary data. The parents we spoke to in Aston generally agree that the local schools are good. In contrast, parents from Hillsborough disagreed about the quality of their local schools. Views ranged from very poor to good. There was also disagreement on how much the quality of local schools varies – one parent said that ‘None of them are any better than the other’, whilst others highlighted specific (negative) experiences with certain schools. The young people’s point of view is fairly similar – a mixture of experiences and opinions on school quality.

These findings from these focus groups correspond with data on school quality published by Ofsted. For example, the four most popular schools amongst young people from Aston are all graded 2 (good), whereas those attended by young people from Hillsborough vary across all grades from 1 (outstanding) to 4 (inadequate). The school attended by most young people from Hillsborough received the lowest of these Ofsted inspection grades, and also fares badly in terms of GCSE results. Schools in Hillsborough also have a slightly higher proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in Aston. We were unable to secure participation in the research from any of the main schools attended by young people from Hillsborough.

Much of the data on the schools in Aston and Hillsborough suggests that participation should be higher in Aston, when in fact the gap is lower than expected. Overall, Aston schools have better Ofsted grades, more sixth forms, better GCSE results, and lower proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals. Hillsborough schools do have slightly lower proportions of SEN pupils on average. We know that higher proportions of pupils with special educational needs is one of the schools characteristics that is associated with lower rates of participation in higher education<sup>57</sup> but because the difference between the two areas is small and it cannot be the only reason for the difference in participation. This suggests that there are others factors at play in Hillsborough that mean the area has

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<sup>57</sup> Chowdry H Crawford C Dearden L Goodman A and Vignoles A (2013) Widening Participation in Higher Education: analysis using linked administrative data. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 176(2): 431–457.



higher than expected levels of participation in higher education in spite of its relative disadvantage in school educational terms.

## Further education

Young people in both Hillsborough and Aston are well served in terms of the opportunities for study at further education level. There are a number of successful further education colleges in the area which range from larger institutions that offer a broad range of courses and qualifications to smaller and more specialized institutions. Some of these also offer higher education courses. A stakeholder remarked that there had been a significant growth in the number of sixth forms in recent years, particularly amongst schools in Hillsborough, as well as a new post-16 free school opening up. This could have an impact since having a sixth form is associated with higher participation.

## Higher education

The local area is served by two universities located in campuses across the city of Sheffield: The University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University. The University of Sheffield is a member of the Russell Group, and it ranks highly in terms of research quality and won a 2014 Times Higher Education Award for widening participation.<sup>58</sup> Sheffield Hallam is the fourth largest university in England with a student population of around 35,000 higher education students enrolled in 2012/13.<sup>59</sup>

Both universities are accessible in transport terms from the two case study areas and there was good awareness of the institutions amongst parents and young people. There is also a large further education provider which also offers higher education and serves both case study areas. The college is said to have over 50 per cent internal progression from further to higher education. The college has developed strong links with local small to medium-sized employers (SMEs), and curriculum areas for foundation degrees are tied into employability. As part of these courses, students undertake 'live' projects with real clients based on projects set by the employers. In this way, students gain first-hand experience of work and employers get the chance to spot potential employees. This scheme is successful in finding jobs for students.

## Apprenticeships and employment

A stakeholder interviewee highlighted that the number of apprenticeships in Sheffield has grown considerably in the last couple of years, partly due to initiatives such as the City Deal initiative. Partnerships between employers and educational institutions have also been developed as part of the Higher Education Progression Partnership for the Sheffield City region.<sup>60</sup> As we explore below, the importance of securing employment for some parents means that apprenticeships are an attractive option for many. As one stakeholder

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<sup>58</sup> Widening Participation or Outreach Initiative of the Year; Outstanding Support for Early Career Researchers; and Outstanding International Student Strategy. See: <http://www.the-awards.co.uk/the2014/awardswinners/2014-winners>

<sup>59</sup> HESA (2013). [All students by higher education institution, level of study, mode of study and domicile 2012/13](#).

<sup>60</sup> [The Higher Education Progression Partnership for Sheffield city region](#)

noted, this could be a reason for lower than expected levels of participation if young people are following alternative pathways.

*...clearly, there will be some students who are going to be picked up by that vocational apprenticeship who [otherwise] might have considered higher education as an option.*

**Stakeholder, Sheffield**

However, we have uncovered no evidence that apprenticeships are more widely available in Aston than Hillsborough, or that young people in Aston are more likely to take up these opportunities.

## **Attitudes to higher education**

Parents from both areas often indicated that their priority for their children was them finding work that was right for them and they enjoyed. Parents were keen to encourage their children along career paths with clear-sight of a job at the end. While some parents acknowledged that getting a degree gives young people a better chance of finding employment. A few indicated that they see greater value in courses that have a clear vocational link. Some were unaware of the type and range of careers that more traditional academic subjects could lead to.

*I see a lot of people that they're studying for things like sociology. What are you going to do with sociology? There are not a lot of jobs out there. [...] Go and get a degree in engineering or go and get a degree for medical stuff. That's great. That's concentrating on a job you can do.*

**Parent, Hillsborough**

We suggest that parents in the area tend to adopt this view as a result of the mass unemployment suffered in the areas through the decline of the coal industry and the transformation of the steel industry (now more automated and specialized). Because the parents' generation has lived through these transformations and suffered unemployment, they are keen to protect their children from a similar fate.

*[In] this area, and Rotherham and Manchester are the same, [there is] absolute terror of mass unemployment, and not having a job. Anything that offers a job, [parents] will go for that over a potential job, as a graduate. That does worry me, in terms of the ambition of children of high ability.*

**Stakeholder, Sheffield**

And so the type of pathway offered by further education colleges to employment may offer a more attractive option than higher education, for which the employment prospects are much less clear to some parents.

The views of young people in both Hillsborough and Aston mirrored their parents. Young people are well aware of local universities but – like their parents – they expressed the view that a university education does not necessarily lead to a better chance of getting a job or to greater satisfaction with life in general. What mattered most was finding employment. In general, this meant being in a job that they find satisfying and/or which allows them to enjoy time with their families and to support them financially.

## Influences on career decision-making

The greatest influence on young people's decisions appears to be parents, peers, and teachers. Many young people gain awareness of different careers through what work their family and friends do or through personal experience of different professions (for example, one young person aspired to become a counsellor after receiving support following being bullied). The visibility of employment opportunities is shaped considerably by the local labour market. In the Sheffield area, the labour market has a traditional focus on manufacturing and engineering, particularly in the coal and steel industries. Today, the loss of large-scale employers and semi-skilled jobs is being partly replaced by a growth in advanced engineering and skilled jobs. In both case study areas however parents had limited awareness of local employment opportunities, tending to highlight mainly low-skilled but highly visible employers such as retailers.

In both areas, parents are supportive of their children's aspirations. They want the best for their children, and whilst they provide some guidance they are more concerned with supporting whatever decision their children make. However, given their influence on young people's aspirations and decision-making, improved awareness amongst parents of local labour market opportunities and career pathways (including links between higher education and work) may be helpful.

## Widening Participation Activity

An area wide partnership works with schools, colleges, universities and the local authorities in the Sheffield city region with the aim of widening participation in higher education. The partnership is funded by both the major universities but it operates independently from the universities' marketing and recruitment operations. They focus on working with young people in years 9, 10 and 11, the rationale being that once young people enter sixth-form decisions are more about choice of university rather than progression route.

*By Year 12, they should actually be looking at 'which university', not 'whether university'. We're all about 'whether university' and the advantages of going.*

**Stakeholder, Sheffield**

Projects include work to better inform young people and teachers about student finance, promoting the value of university education – including but not limited to improved employment prospects, development of progression routes for apprentices into higher education, work with parents and they have recently begun to engage with primary schools in the area. This is particularly true of some new academies. Very often engagement depends on the 'buy-in' of a particular teacher or head of year. Once engaged, other schools in the area often want to engage too.

A stakeholder reported that there can be difficulties engaging with some schools where the overriding focus is on attainment.

*We are challenged by schools in these areas, and some of them in the very areas you're looking at, who feel so pressured by their exam results, that they won't participate in anything that's going to raise aspiration.*

**Stakeholder, Sheffield**

However, perhaps contrary to expectations given the different participation gaps, the partnership stakeholder reported that they found it easier to engage with schools serving the Aston area.

## Conclusions

It is difficult to distinguish factors that might be responsible for the differences in participation gaps between the two wards. In part, this difficulty arises because this pair of case study areas has a smaller difference in terms of the decile of the participation gaps: Hillsborough is in decile 10 but Aston is in the decile 4. The difference between the gaps is less than for the other case study areas.

Our research has flagged up a number of factors, particularly school-related factors, that would suggest higher participation rates for Aston than Hillsborough. However, there is evidence to suggest reasons why participation in higher education is relatively low across many parts of the Sheffield city region generally. Parents from the area understood that university can offer an advantage for candidates competing for jobs, but they also expressed the views that university education is less important than gaining employment. What is most sought in employment is a job that allows people to support their families financially, provided that this also allows time for the family too. It would appear that the pathways to employment being offered by apprenticeships and colleges with good links to employers are meeting this kind of demand. If it is the case that many young people in the area are transitioning into work following further education, then this would explain the lower-than-expected rate of participation in the area. Furthermore, the young participation data excludes people who do a degree later in life, and we have anecdotal evidence that this occurs in the area. What is less clear is how these factors might differ in terms of prevalence and influence the different gaps between expected and actual participation in the two case study wards.

## London wards: White Hart Lane and Mile End and Globe Town

London has the highest overall participation rate in the country and the rate at which it has increased far outstrips all other regions. While much of this can be attributed to higher attainment, significant variations in participation between areas remain once this has been taken into account. In this chapter we explore findings from White Hart Lane (higher than expected participation) and Mile End and Globe Town (lower than expected participation). Although the areas share some demographic similarities they have not been selected as a matched pair. As such direct comparisons are not made between the two areas in this chapter.

### White Hart Lane

#### About the area

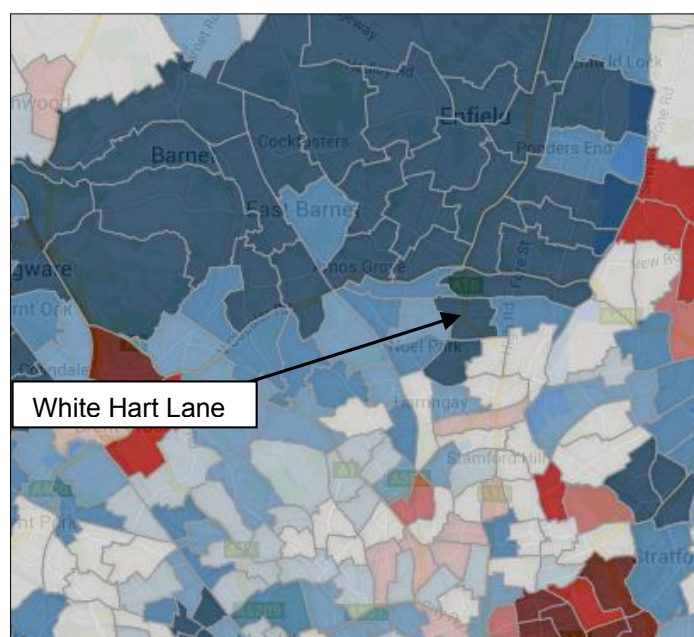
White Hart Lane is a ward in Haringey, North London and has a population of circa 13,500. Almost two thirds of Haringey's population, and over 70 per cent of young people, are from minority ethnic backgrounds. 22 per cent of White Hart Lane residents are white other, 14 percent Black Caribbean and 11.9 per cent are Black African.<sup>61</sup> The ethnic mix of the area is very diverse with over 100 languages spoken in the borough. Haringey ranks as one of the most deprived boroughs in the UK – 13<sup>th</sup> most deprived borough in England and the 4<sup>th</sup> most deprived in London.

White Hart Lane has a young participation rate of 33.8 per cent, 3.9 percentage points above what would be expected given the attainment and ethnic profile its young population. As can be seen in Figure 5 below, White Hart Lane is one of a number of north London wards with much higher than expected levels of participation (shown in blue). It should be noted however that both the expected and actual participation rate for White Hart Lane is below than the national average young participation rate of 38 per cent.

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<sup>61</sup> 2011 Census taken from [http://www.haringey.gov.uk/sites/haringeygovuk/files/census11\\_white\\_hart\\_lane\\_ward\\_profile.pdf](http://www.haringey.gov.uk/sites/haringeygovuk/files/census11_white_hart_lane_ward_profile.pdf)

**Figure 5: White Hart Lane, Haringey**



Source: HEFCE <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/gaps/>

Young people taking part in the focus groups describe White Hart Lane as lively and multi-cultural. They feel the area has good amenities (such as the football stadium, a wide range of local shops and good transport links to the rest of London) and there are a lot of activities and things to do in the local area. In particular it was noted there is a strong sense of community in the area with most people knowing each other. Several young people and parents also observe that there are high levels of crime in the area related to gangs and violence. There is a lot of poverty, and the area is perceived as dirty, and not always well kept.

In contrast to other areas, there was a greater emphasis amongst young people from White Hart Lane on high wages as important to their overall happiness and success. Whereas in other areas, happiness was the main indicator of success and job satisfaction and enjoyment more important than high income, wealth appears to be a greater concern in White Hart Lane. This may be for a number of reasons. The higher cost of living, and in particular high house prices in London generally may mean that residents have greater concerns for income. London boroughs such as Haringey also contain extremes of wealth and poverty in close proximity. Indeed Haringey has been said to be the most unequal of London boroughs with some of both the richest and poorest wards in the city.<sup>62</sup> As a result young people in the area are arguably more exposed to extreme wealth and its accoutrements than elsewhere in the country.

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<sup>62</sup> Trust for London / New Policy Institute (2013) [Income inequalities by wards within London boroughs](#)



## Local education, employment and training opportunities

### Secondary education

There are a range of secondary schools that young people from White Hart Lane can attend. The school attended by most young people from the area is rated as outstanding by Ofsted and is in the top 25 performing schools for improved GCSEs. One stakeholder did note that the school has significantly improved in the last few years which is likely to have improved outcomes for young people.

*If you look within the last three or four years, there have been a lot of changes. It changed its name to make it look better. It had a bad reputation. It's now got a good reputation within the area. The school has been rebuilt and that has made a lot of difference. I think that's certainly added to the young people in that area being much more forward and outgoing.*

#### Stakeholder, White Hart Lane

The last comment from the stakeholder is interesting. As noted in some of the other case studies, a lack of confidence and optimism may be associated with lower aspirations. This example shows how the influence of schools on participation can be about much more than simply raising attainment. As important institutions in the community, the reputation, performance and ethos of a school can influence wider feelings of positivity and confidence.

The other schools attended by significant numbers of young people from the ward are rated by Ofsted as either good or outstanding. Despite this parents taking part in the research are generally unhappy with the choice of schools in the local area. This appears to be mainly related to long-standing poor reputations of schools that have since improved, although parents are not aware of this. In addition many have concerns that schools generally are becoming too 'target-focussed' with not enough focus on the children and learning. Some also expressed concerns about the raising of the participation age, feeling it is inappropriate to keep young people in education if they do not want to be, although this view is not shared by all.

### Further education

There are several further education colleges and sixth forms in the immediate area. Again, young people and their parents are dissatisfied with these choices; instead several prefer to travel to other colleges and sixth forms outside of the local area. The negative perceptions of further education providers appears to be influenced by the areas in which they are located; if an area is perceived as bad so is the college. This demonstrates that young people in the area are both willing and able to travel further afield in order to access what they perceive to be better opportunities.

Young people taking part in the research expressed preferences for further education colleges rather than sixth forms as they believe they offer a better range of subjects and opportunities. In addition, young people found the greater independence of a college environment as more attractive than sixth forms.

## Higher education

London has a high concentration of universities, including world class institutions such as UCL, Imperial and the London School of Economics, as well as more inclusive institutions. Excellent London transport networks make these easy to get to and young people from White Hart Lane clearly do not experience proximity to universities as a barrier to participation. While young people from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to study close to home, encouragingly young people taking part in the research wanted to keep their options open and several were considering applying to universities further away if they provide the courses they are interested in and are of higher quality than those available in London.

A few of the young people had concerns that their background and specifically the postcode of the area they are from could be a barrier to entering some of the top rated universities such as Oxford and Cambridge. They feared that they would be judged and dismissed on the basis of where they came from and preconceived ideas about what people from White Hart Lane are like. Others in the group dismissed this as a rumour. We have explored in other case studies possible links between how residents perceive how others see their area and aspirations. Young people from White Hart Lane do not appear to lack aspirations to higher education but clearly some are concerned about how their background will be perceived by those in particularly prestigious institutions. This shows that rumours and misinformation about admissions policies persist and there is still a need to dispel these, provide clear information and develop notions that high-status institutions are accessible to people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

## Apprenticeships and employment opportunities

Apprenticeships were not viewed as particularly attractive by young people in White Hart Lane. They feel there are not enough interesting or well-paid apprenticeships in the area that they want to undertake. Parents have mixed views on apprenticeships; some acknowledge that they are a good way of developing skills while others believe apprentices are not paid enough so there is little incentive to undertake one.

*The money you get on an apprentice scheme is so demotivating; you might just be on the dole.*

**Parent, White Hart Lane**

Parents and young people from White Hart Lane mentioned retail or leisure most frequently as local employment opportunities, although these are not perceived as long-term career opportunities. Some young people also highlighted starting their own business as an option if they want to work locally. Parents and young people are also aware that many people from the local area travel into the city for work opportunities (including opportunities that require higher level qualifications). There is a possible link here between the aspirations of the young people. As suggested in other case studies, the visibility and accessibility of graduate jobs may help young people and parents to better see the benefits of higher education.



## Attitudes to higher education

Young people consulted in White Hart Lane mainly aspire to go to university as they feel it will give them better opportunities for jobs later in life. This attitude was shared by parents who believe that university is a good opportunity to get better qualifications and employment. Parents and young people both generally articulated the benefits of higher education in terms of economic and employment rather than other, wider experiential benefits.

However, also in common with parents and young people from other areas, a few highlighted the fact that a degree is not necessarily a guarantee of a good career and not all graduates progress into high paying jobs. This is despite the apparent good visibility of local graduate opportunities.

*You're not guaranteed a good job if you go to Oxford, you're not guaranteed nothing in life.*  
**Young person, White Hart Lane**

These views may be the result of media publicity in recent years highlighting difficulties experienced by some recent graduates in finding suitable work during the recession. Alongside these concerns, some parents in particular are concerned about the high levels of student debt. Clearly parents need to feel that taking on debt is worth it in terms of the eventual returns. And yet this does not appear to dampen aspirations and university was still seen as a far more appealing prospect than apprenticeships, say.

## Influences on career decision-making

Key influences on career decision making were the same here as other case study areas. Subject enjoyment and hobbies were important in determining study and career choices. Family and friends appear to be particularly influential, specifically by the career choices of older siblings, parents, relatives and older friends as these provide them with an insight into the types of options and pathways available. Again, the visibility of different occupations is important, and opportunities for young people to gain experience and insights into different jobs can help inspire and develop aspiration. Specific job roles young people aspired to were varied and included medicine, finance and the media. Some young people in the area also aspired to glamorous roles such as becoming professional footballers or actors, which are not always seen as realistic.

The desire to earn money is a key driver for the young people consulted when they are making decisions about the future. This might be a desire to make money immediately and thus enter employment when they finish school or choosing to gain higher level qualifications so they can get better jobs in the future. As illustrated above, a key factor for young people in considering higher education is the access it can give to better and high paying jobs.

In line with high levels of crime and gang activity in the area, young people also flagged criminal activity, such as drug-dealing, as a possible career option. While none of the young people consulted planned to take this pathway, it is a stark reminder of the difficult reality of young people's lives in the most disadvantaged parts of the country.

## Sources of information, advice and guidance

Young people and parents in White Hart Lane were able to name a range of different sources of information, advice and guidance, including specialist careers advisers (a few of the young people had accessed services from Connexions), discussions with teachers and other staff at school and college open days. However, the list is relatively limited and informal sources such as talking to family and friends appear to be key. There was a desire from most young people for more opportunities to receive information, advice, and guidance about employers and different types of jobs.

The local secondary school is working to address this demand by developing employer links. A local company engages employers to come into the school and encourage young people to look at problem solving and entrepreneurship. The school also offer a week-long work experience opportunity, and business mentoring for students within the business studies curriculum through the Haringey Business Education Partnership. We found work experience to be popular with young people and parents from many of the case study areas, but the resources required to organise it often mean it is not available or is limited, as in this instance, to students undertaking particular courses such as business studies.

## Conclusions

Overall, the young people and parents we consulted with in White Hart Lane are aspirational, ambitious and see higher education as an important route to achieving success. There are a number of factors observed in the area which may help to contribute to this. The strong recent performance of the main school in the area may contribute to overall progression rates in White Hart Lane. In particular the success of the school is associated with pupils being more outgoing and confident.

Parents and young people are concerned about the quality of local education. Place and neighbourhood reputation appears to be used as a proxy indicator of quality. While this may lead to perceptions of quality that do not necessarily match the performance of schools, young people are willing to travel to other areas to find courses and educational options that meet their needs. This is indicative of a more outward looking attitude that contrasts to attitudes found in some parts of other case study areas where the focus is on staying close to home.

As in other areas, personal contact with people in different occupations has an important influence on career aspirations. Visibility of diverse graduate and other jobs in the London area, along with partnerships between the school and employers to raise awareness of different job types may be seen to have an impact. Unlike other areas, high income and wealth accumulation are more important to the young people's ideas of success. While this may be related to dreams of glamorous careers or a desire to leave education to start earning as soon as possible, it may also be seen to encourage some to set their sights high and pursue higher education as the means to achieve their goals.

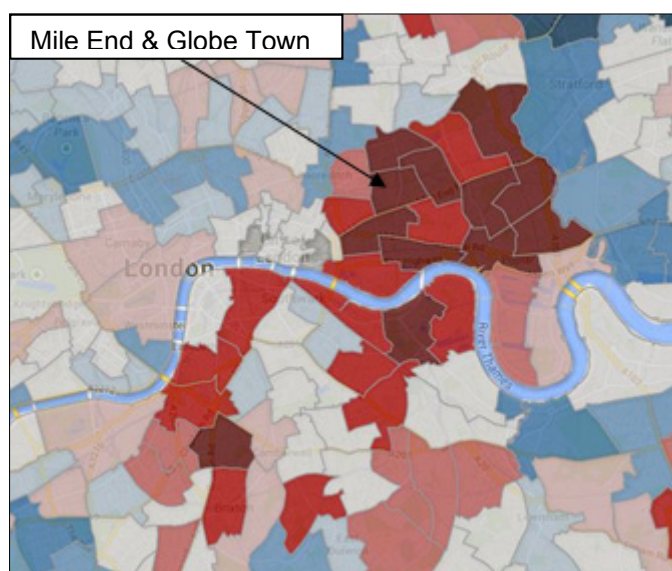
## Mile End and Globe Town

### About the area

Mile End and Globe Town is a district in Tower Hamlets, East London, located 3.6 miles east northeast of Charing Cross. It has a population of circa 15,190 and over two thirds (41 per cent) of the ward's population are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Globe Town has a large Bangladeshi community.

Mile End and Globe Town has a young participation rate of 29.5 per cent, 9.3 percentage points below what would be expected given the ethnic profile and educational attainment of young people in the area. The expected young participation rate is in line with the national average (38 per cent). While London as a whole is seen to be performing better than expected in terms of participation, Figure 6 below shows that Mile End and Globe Town is one of a cluster of wards in east London where the rate is lower than expected.

**Figure 6: Mile End and Globe Town**



Source: HEFCE [Gaps in young participation in higher education](#)

Young people were positive about living in the area and feel it is very diverse with lots of opportunities for young people, for example through youth centres. Young people highlighted a number of factors that make the area an interesting place to live, such as a rich history, easy access to London through good transportation links and a range of shops and markets. The negative aspects mentioned of living in Mile End and Globe Town are a high level of gang activity, the rising cost of living (in particular rising house prices) and pollution.

## Local education, employment and training opportunities

### Secondary education

The main secondary school attended by young people from the Mile End and Globe Town ward is has been designated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. The school offer a range of qualifications to young people (mainly GCSEs but also BTECs) to ensure their approach caters to the needs of all young people.

The school strives to be representative and inclusive of the diverse community they serve. The school engages with different communities by providing interpreters for parents who do not speak English and holds events tailored to engaging the more hard to reach communities.

*I would say that we're an inclusive school in terms of our intake. We're very mixed, in terms of ethnicity, gender, ability. We see that as a strength. We reflect the community that we're situated in.*

**Stakeholder, Mile End and Globe Town**

However there are still challenges in involving some parents.

### Further education

There are several further education colleges in reach of Mile End and Globe Town including Tower Hamlets College and the College of East London as well as other colleges and sixth forms in neighbouring boroughs. However, it is noted by one school stakeholder that in the past gang activity may have put some students off attending colleges and sixth forms which were further afield due to 'postcode wars' and young people feeling at risk if they went to other areas. This would limit the range and type of sixth forms and colleges young people could access and as such their opportunities to access different types of courses and qualifications. This contrasts with what we found in White Hart Lane where young people were more open to travelling to other parts of London for the best opportunities.

It is notable that a sixth form was opened at the main secondary school in 2009 in partnership with other schools in the area. This is the only sixth form of its type in the local area and as awareness has steadily increased so have numbers of pupils. The school estimates that between half and two thirds of their GCSE students now stay on in their sixth form. The school commented that having a sixth form, and therefore more continuity, meant that progression was seen more as the norm now and that this would continue to develop and become more entrenched over time. As such it may be that in recent years progression into higher education has improved.

*We've got to the stage where there's an expectation that you stay on, so that's become almost the norm. I think they do go and look elsewhere, but actually, on the whole, they like the school and decide to stay with us.*

**Stakeholder, Mile End and Globe Town**

## Higher education

As in White Hart Lane there are several universities in close proximity to Mile End and Globe Town, including: the Institute of Education, Queen Mary (which has its main campus in the ward), and London Metropolitan University. Other London universities are also accessible. The school has good relationships with all of the above institutions but also ensures their students are aware of opportunities further afield and have cultivated good relationships with universities outside of London, including Oxford, Cambridge, Leicester, Sussex and Edgehill. The students we consulted are aware of universities both in their local area and further afield and appeared to be largely basing their decisions about where to study on the availability of courses rather than on location.

## Apprenticeships and employment opportunities

Young people in Mile End and Globe Town do seem aware of apprenticeships as an option. However, it was notable that only a small minority are aware of the specific opportunities available and most do not see them as something they want to pursue as they would prefer to go to university to achieve a higher level qualification. They were not aware that higher-level apprenticeships could also be an alternative route to university.

Young people in Mile End and Globe Town are aware of a range of employment opportunities; in particular they are aware of opportunities in finance in relatively close proximity in the City. Other employment opportunities mentioned by young people include retail and bar work, working in IT and becoming self-employed. The jobs young people were aware of tended to be those that were visible in the local area, those they were aware of through the schools links with industry and those of friends and family. This is in line with findings from other areas and emphasises the importance of activities undertaken by schools to provide careers ideas and inspiration. It is also notable that the young people from Mile End talked about generally accessible occupations and not the glamorous, more difficult to achieve dream jobs mentioned by White Hart Lane young people.

## Attitudes to higher education

Young people are very aware of the higher education institutions near them and further afield and are generally very positive and motivated about attending higher education. For some the key consideration was the perceived greater job security provided by higher education and the potential flexibility of a degree as opposed to more narrow vocational qualifications that might limit them in terms of particular roles and / or industries.

*The best route to take is to do a degree, for me, because say that, for instance, I do get a job and say the company goes bust or something, I've still got my degree in the bank. If I'd have done an apprenticeship, I wouldn't have a degree so it would be harder for me to go back and look for a job because they'll be like 'you haven't got the requirements for this job'.*

**Young person, Mile End and Globe Town**

Some also noted the importance of other factors in getting a job, such as personality and wider skills. They recognised that if they had the higher qualification and other positive attributes they would be at an advantage. Emphasising the wider benefits of higher education and how it can contribute to the development of soft skills demanded by

employers as well as academic knowledge may help further enhance the appeal of higher education for these young people.

## **Influences on career decision-making**

In Mile End and Globe Town parents are seen as an important influence. However, a stakeholder noted that this is not always positive and can be detrimental in some cases. Furthermore there is a perceived lack of local role models to inspire progression into higher education.

*The home environment that some people are living in is not conducive to study to high attainment, is not conducive to future planning and sticking with education. There is a lack of role models for some of the people in the borough in terms of positive examples of people who have gone onto higher education and made a success of it.*

**Stakeholder, Mile End and Globe Town**

Further to this, stakeholders highlighted challenges engaging with parents from the Bangladeshi community due to cultural and linguistic barriers (despite the school being sensitive to these). This may mean that parental advice to young people relating to education and careers may not be fully informed and opportunities to raise parental awareness of higher education opportunities are lost. The authors of this report encountered similar problems engaging with the local community and were unable to convene a focus group with parents despite exploring a number of different options such as approaching parents via the school and community groups.

The importance of social capital was raised by stakeholders in the area as an important element of developing young people's aspirations. Not all parents are able to speak to their children based on their own experiences of higher education and employment as many do not have these lived-experiences. As such the school had developed a wide-ranging extra-curricular programme (including music lessons and visits to the theatre), as well as frequent visits to universities (starting from Year 8) to ensure their students are exposed to the same experiences and potential role models as others in more affluent areas.

*We see all the extra-curricular and aspirational work as very important as well, because we need to provide that kind of educational culture to develop social capital that families might want to provide, but aren't necessarily able to.*

**Stakeholder, Mile End and Globe Town**

While these opportunities and other support provided by the school is clearly vital in areas where parents are less able to offer this themselves, clearly areas where parents are better able to provide support have an advantage. As illustrated throughout this report, parents remain a key influence on young people.

*I would've liked more support from my family but I didn't really get that. I had to do it on my own, though I sometimes went and saw one of my teachers I knew quite well and she helped a little bit but in the end I made most of the decisions.*

**Young person, Mile End and Globe Town**



## Sources of information, advice and guidance

The main school in the area employs a member of staff dedicated to providing information, advice and guidance and all the young people we consulted were aware of this resource. In addition, the school offer a range of support activities to help young people make their decisions and progress. For example the school offers homework clubs and one-to one tuition with recent graduates (often those who are school alumni) in English and Maths; the school feel this engagement from previous graduates helps students to feel that going to university is a realistic goal and provides them with good role models.

In addition to employers talks and other career focussed activities the school offers:

- Year7 ‘Drop Down’ morning where Year 7s undertake activities (including researching different types of jobs) to help them understand more about available careers.
- University taster days for Year 8s (a choice of seven different universities to visit is available).
- ‘Meet the employer’ days in Year 9.
- Work experience in Year 10.

The school has also developed a range of links with businesses to enable them to offer internships in large firms and to gain support to fund university visits for young people.

*Lloyds work for us quite closely; they do mentoring sessions with pupils and in some instances may offer internships. They also contribute towards funding for pupils to go and visit universities outside of London, and provide bursaries.*

**Stakeholder, Mile End and Globe Town**

School have developed a range of partnership relationships with city firms such as Deloitte to be able to offer students work experience placements.

## Initiatives to widen access to higher education

There is a large amount of widening participation activity being undertaken in Mile End and Globe Town due to high deprivation rates, and one stakeholder commented that:

*There are a couple of universities of course in the area, Queen Mary and Brunel who do a lot of work on access and widening participation and outreach and working with young people in schools and also once they've left as well and working in colleges and so on. So, those two quite local universities are both very active, plus because London being the way it is there's a whole range of other institutions that geographically and logistically are able to work with that borough and will target that borough as part of their widening participation work because it ticks all of those boxes. You know, the borough contains the, sort of, population that we'd be targeting in widening participation.*

**Stakeholder, Mile End and Globe Town**

In addition to the local universities, the school has also cultivated relationships with universities from different parts of the country so young people are given the opportunity to move further away if they want to.

Within the school consulted as noted previously there is also a great deal of opportunities for young people to engage with graduates through mentoring and to experience university taster days as early as Year 8 in order to gradually get young people used to the idea of entering university when they may not have considered it otherwise due to cultural issues or a lack of social capital.

Young people interviewed were very aware of the opportunities available to them in higher education and some commented that the school was frequently providing them with information about higher education and other opportunities to keep them up to date.

## Conclusions

It is notable that the emerging picture in Mile End and Globe Town indicates the conditions that are in place could be considered as supportive in favour of higher levels of progression to higher education rather than lower. This includes:

- The school has a comprehensive programme of information, advice, and guidance which includes visits to universities from Year 8, engagement with employers, and one-to-one mentoring from graduates.
- There is a high level of progression from GCSE into the school sixth form.
- Young people consulted were very positive about higher education and most consulted intended to go to university.

This seems to be counterintuitive to the findings from the HEFCE analysis that participation rates are lower than expected; and findings to suggest why the area may have lower participation rates did not emerge strongly (and were limited to demographic and deprivation factors which were taken into account when the area modelling and selection took place). Therefore, it is perhaps significant that the wards are calculated by combining data from the five cohorts of 18 year olds from 2006-07 to 2010-11. As such the participation rates were calculated prior to and only one year following the introduction of the new sixth form at the main school in the area and as such do not reflect the changes in levels of young people who are progressing into sixth form at the school and the impact this has had on the area and young people's aspirations. Therefore it can be suggested that if Gap Polar analysis was run over a more recent period then it may not show lower progression rates; but conversely an 'as expected' or higher rate.



## Conclusions

In this final chapter we draw together the main findings from across all the case study areas with the aim of identifying the key factors that appear to drive participation in higher education at a local level. We then set out a number of recommendations for policy makers and practitioners in terms of how participation, particularly in areas with lower than expected levels, can be increased and encouraged.

While previous research has explored the influence of geographical factors, such as proximity to higher education institutions, on participation, relatively little research has been carried out looking at defined areas and how the local circumstances – physical, economic, educational and cultural – impact participation. This research focuses on how all these issues operate and intersect in specific localities. The research explores how different factors combine in unique ways in different places to affect participation. It provides both general evidence on factors affecting participation, and also insights into area specific issues that should be taken into account when designing local initiatives to widen participation.

There were clear differences between areas in both the rural and urban case study pairs which help to further explain local variation in young participation in higher education. However, the influential factors uncovered differ between the two pairs. It should also be noted that the actual participation rates in all the urban areas were much lower than the rural areas, irrespective of the expected level of participation. The differences between the two Sheffield city region areas and the London wards were less stark and it was more difficult to discern clear reasons for the different levels of participation. All this illustrates how the challenges of widening participation in higher education are not uniform across the country and that a one size fits all approach is unlikely to be appropriate for tackling them. However, across all case study areas we gathered useful insights into influences on and perceptions of participation in higher education.

## Cross cutting themes and key findings

### Perceptions of success

Parents and young people across areas have similar perceptions of what success in life means. The emphasis is on happiness above other considerations; an enjoyable and fulfilling career or job is seen as more important than a high salary. A basic level of financial security is seen as important but not necessarily great wealth (there were some exceptions to this observed in London). Given the importance of happiness, it is perhaps not surprising that the reasons young people and their parents give most often for selecting particular subjects for study and / or career paths are enjoyment (because I like it) and aptitude (because I'm good at it). While there are few differences across areas in how success is defined, differences between areas and groups of participants are observed in terms of the extent to which higher education is perceived as a potential pathway to achieving happiness and security as defined above. Raising awareness of how higher education can support individual aspirations for happiness and security may help make it a more attractive proposition to those with ability who are not currently progressing to higher education.

## **Perceptions of the local area**

The research findings indicate that feelings about and connections to the local area may influence aspiration and participation in higher education in complex and different ways. One case study pair in particular displays stark differences between residents' (both young people and parents) perceptions of their local area: the extent to which the area is regarded as a desirable place to live and work, the extent to which residents are proud of the area, and how residents think the area is perceived by outsiders. Although both areas are facing similar challenges and disadvantages, participants from Anfield expressed pride in their local area whereas Bulwell residents feel stigmatised by where they come from. Further research is needed to explore links between civic pride and participation, but we suggest that a sense of pride in an area engenders a positive, optimistic outlook which is linked to aspiration and confidence to pursue ambitions.

Some communities within case study areas are perceived to be close-knit with strong local connections and little traditional mobility. The result is that some residents are reluctant to leave to pursue learning and work opportunities. This is not necessarily a problem where there are diverse higher education and employment opportunities close to the local area, for example such as in Anfield. However it can inhibit participation in higher education in rural communities which have more limited access to higher education and graduate level employment opportunities. Yet even where there are local higher education opportunities, as is the case in Bulwell, this is not always sufficient to overcome entrenched low aspirations and narrow horizons that appear to be linked to negative associations with the area.

Our rural pair of case studies also highlights the impact that the proximity of higher education opportunities can have on participation due to practical constraints. The combination of poor transport links and lack of local higher education provision means that moving away from home is the only option for young people living in some rural communities. The higher costs and the added risks involved make this option less appealing to some young people and those who are less confident that higher education is right for them.

## **Local labour market**

Awareness of local labour market opportunities amongst young people and parents is generally limited to highly visible employers, such as retail, and a limited range of other local opportunities. Labour market information plays little role in the information, advice and guidance provided to young people and their decision-making. However, as noted below, clear career paths and employment opportunities are important considerations in career decision-making, particularly for some parents.

We found evidence that the extent to which graduate jobs are visible to young people and their parents may impact on aspirations to higher education. Where young people have ready access to positive graduate role models they are more likely to be convinced of the benefits of higher education. Conversely, seeing friends and family with graduate qualifications return to the local area to work in non-graduate roles can make higher education seem less attractive, more risky and may deter some from participating.

A lack of local employment opportunities can be a spur to aspirations to leave, but where young people have close local ties, lack of local opportunities and optimism could also create lower aspirations.

### **Attitudes to higher education and alternatives**

Parents across all areas often talked about the extent to which participation in higher education has grown over recent years and is now more accessible and 'less elitist'. Parents and young people generally perceive the benefits of higher education in terms of providing greater opportunities (opening doors) and enabling better job prospects generally. There is an awareness that specific jobs, or in the case of young people, career aspirations, require degree level qualifications. Related benefits, such as enhanced salary and greater competitive edge in the jobs market were also frequently articulated by those taking part in the research. However, some study participants, parents in particular, feel that a university education is no longer a guaranteed route to a well-paid or graduate level job given the huge increase in the number of graduates in recent years and lack of opportunities in some sectors or parts of the country.

Parents across all areas expressed concern about the cost of higher education. For many the benefits of higher education are perceived to be worth the investment. However in some instances, where employment opportunities and in particular graduate employment opportunities are scarce or less visible to young people and parents, the benefits of higher education can appear less secure. There is evidence that in areas of very low participation and amongst low income families the opportunity costs of higher education are just as much a concern as the debt incurred by the individual student. By opportunity costs we mean that supporting a child in higher education can have a detrimental effect on the rest of the family as income is diverted away from other potential uses. There also remains misinformation and misunderstanding about availability of financial support. Parents in particular want to see a return on their investment in higher education, hence their focus on the potential employment benefits.

Some participants did highlight the wider, experiential benefits of higher education in terms of developing networks, friendships, independence and a life-shaping experience but these benefits were less frequently articulated. A few parents with less positive perceptions of higher education highlighted the importance of 'life skills' such as confidence and questioned whether a university education provided these. While the wider benefits of university alone may not be sufficient argument for participation, a greater awareness and consideration of these benefits might help to tip the balance in favour of participation.

In some instances we found a lack of understanding about the potential employment opportunities that studying pure, less applied or vocational subjects can create. As a result parents may be more likely to encourage young people to take more applied subjects and vocational courses. This will narrow opportunities for some. More needs to be done to raise awareness of employment opportunities opened by studying pure, non-applied subjects. In addition, in some areas, where parents cannot see a clear link from higher education generally to career or employment opportunities, other routes such as vocational training or apprenticeships appear to offer a more appealing prospect.

## **Influences on decision-making**

Across all areas the main influences on decision making are consistent; friends, family, teachers, personal experience and to a lesser extent, the media. Family, friends and teachers exert both a direct, conscious influence in terms of a providing advice and guidance but also a sub-conscious influence in terms of acting as role models and transferring influential behaviours, beliefs and values. These influences all appear to exert a greater influence on decisions about what subjects to study and career goals than formal information, advice and guidance.

Given the influence of friends and personal experience, we suggest that the extent to which young people come into contact with a diverse range of people, including those in graduate jobs, may have an impact on aspirations. The more socially-diverse an area, the more young people are exposed to aspirational role models and a greater diversity of career paths. This underlines the importance in areas with lower levels of participation and socially homogenous communities of introducing young people and parents to a diverse range of inspirational career opportunities. This needs to be done in an interactive way to help participants identify with the role models.

Just as influence may be conscious and sub-conscious, so decision-making may be active or passive. Today higher education is seen as much more the norm and young people often talked about university as ‘the next logical step’ or an ‘expectation’. Some young people had clear aspirations to go to university without necessarily having a specific career goal or even subject for study in mind; one group suggested that university is where they were hoping to find out what they wanted to do as a career. Some parents were happy that young people should keep their options open and that university was a useful way to defer entering the labour market, while others questioned the value of higher study without clear purpose. It is not necessary to have clear career goals in mind to benefit from higher education and the opportunity can be beneficial in broadening horizons and opening up ideas and possibilities as well as shaping particular interests. However some of the evidence collected suggests that some young people may be following particular pathways (either into higher education or other routes) without necessarily making an informed and active decision – it is just what happens after A levels or what most people do nowadays.

## **Provision of information, advice and guidance**

Aspiration needs to be nurtured but also supported with appropriate information, advice and guidance. As higher education increasingly becomes seen as the norm for many, young people need up to date, accurate and accessible information on how to make their aspirations a reality and to ensure that alternatives are understood and consider so that decisions are informed and active.

Schools have a statutory duty to ensure all pupils from years eight to 13 are provided with independent and impartial careers guidance.<sup>63</sup> The schools that engaged with this research are providing a range of activities including employer talks, individual advice sessions, mentoring, entrepreneurship activities, careers fairs, and support with applying for jobs, university and / or apprenticeships. Information is available in all case study areas, but awareness of the sources, including the National Careers Service, is typically

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<sup>63</sup> Department for Education (2014) [Career guidance and inspiration in schools](#) DfE

low. The onus is often on young people to proactively seek information out. Young people do not necessarily have the skills to identify the most appropriate source of information and to use it effectively. There is a desire from young people for more than just information; they are seeking individually-tailored advice and guidance. However competing pressures on schools can sometimes mean that opportunities for individually-tailored career guidance are limited.

There are also indications that the quality of advice and guidance varies greatly between areas and schools. Formal provision of information, advice and guidance is generally perceived by parents and young people as being of limited influence and help. Engagement of employers and provision of information about career options is often provided in a passive way to young people and as a result can lack impact. However, we did find some examples of more engaging information, advice and guidance activities where young people responded positively and were more likely to recall the activities.

The statutory guidance for schools states that “schools should help every pupil develop high aspirations and consider a broad and ambitious range of careers”<sup>64</sup> and suggests that providing contact with employers helps to inspire and inform pupils. Given the influence we found of personal contacts on careers aspiration, engagement with employers and the world of work would appear to be an effective way of raising and diversifying aspirations. Interactive engagement with employers appears to have greater impact than more passive forms of providing information.

Schools and employer representatives expressed a desire to enhance links with each other. Barriers to doing this include the time and resources needed to set up partnerships and activities, schools and employers having other priorities and employers being asked by a number of different schools to get involved rather than a more joined up approach. The Local Economic Partnership (LEP) in one case study area is working towards setting up a skills hub, where the vision is for a range of ‘off-the-shelf’ opportunities to be available that businesses can support and schools can engage with in an effort to address some of the problems highlighted above. In December 2014 the government announced that a new employer-led careers company would be created to broker relationships between schools, colleges and employers.<sup>65</sup> Our research suggests this kind of support will be welcome.

Higher education institutions have been in receipt of government funding to widen participation in higher education since 1999. In addition a significant proportion of their fee income is allocated for this. Programmes such as “Aimhigher” and more recently the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NCCO) aim to encourage more young people into higher education, particularly amongst those from lower socio-economic groups and from areas where participation in higher education is low.

Universities and colleges are working in all the case study areas offering information, talks, university visits, residential trips and other activities. This work is perceived by universities and schools to be important for widening participation. However, despite the raft of interventions to improve participation in higher education there remains a paucity of

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<sup>64</sup> Department for Education (2014) p5

<sup>65</sup> Department for Education (2014) [New careers and enterprise company for schools](#) [online]

research evidence to demonstrate impact. The key challenge for higher education institutions identified in this research is engaging schools. Often those who would benefit most from the outreach offered have other priorities such as turning around poor Ofsted ratings and improving results. Obviously enhancing attainment is a key mechanism for raising participation, but the analysis on which this research is based demonstrates that this alone is not sufficient.

## **Conclusions**

There is a raft of factors that intersect and interact in different ways in different geographical contexts that can result in a positive impact on progression and in other instances inhibit progression to higher education. This research indicates there are a number of reasons why particular individuals or communities might view the risks of higher education as outweighing the benefits. Risks are increased because participation involves greater investment (such as incurring higher costs or having to move out of the area); the benefits weighed against the risks are sometimes unclear, not understood or seem less relevant than the local labour market opportunities. To support participation in areas where it is lower than expected it will be necessary to either improve awareness of the benefits, reduce the perceived risk of higher education or both.

Reducing risks might involve removing practical barriers, such as providing more local opportunities or providing stepping stones into higher education. Perceived financial risks could be addressed through tackling misinformation or lack of information, including amongst teachers and parents, about the costs and financial support available. Impartial and professional information, advice and guidance that can challenge existing thinking can enable young people to be more confident in their decision making. Better understanding of links between higher education and employment / economic benefits, particularly for non-applied / pure subjects, may help to develop awareness of the benefits side of the equation. Emphasising the non-financial, wider benefits of higher education may also help to tip the balance in favour of benefits and away from the risks.

There is no single factor that can be seen to make a difference in an area but instead the combination of factors inter-relate in different ways to affect participation. In addition, these factors intersect with individual characteristics that have been shown to influence participation such as gender, ethnicity and dispositional factors. The influence of these has not been explored here but is covered in a related project undertaken on behalf of BIS.

## **Recommendations**

This research helps to illuminate some of the local factors that influence participation in higher education beyond educational attainment. Some factors, particularly those that relate to geographical location, local economy and prevailing cultures of communities are not easily addressed through policy levers. However we set out below suggest actions to reduce perceived risks of participation in higher education, increase the perceptions of benefits and improve the quality of information, advice and guidance available to ensure young people can be confident in making the right decision.



## Reducing perceived risks

- **Improve access to local higher education opportunities in ‘cold spots’** (areas with lower levels of higher education provision). For some students who may be less willing to move away from the local area or who are less confident about studying higher education, more accessible and thus lower risk options may be more attractive. This could be enabled through greater and more diverse provision of higher education at further education colleges in ‘cold spots’ and / or more opportunities to study remotely.
- **Explore options for providing other options for lower risk higher education.** For example, this might involve expanding courses or curricula that provide self-contained stepping stones towards a degree. Courses that involve employers in the design and delivery may also be more appealing for some.

## Increasing perceptions of benefits

- **Give young people access to a wide range of employers and employees.** Schools and their partners should work to offer a broad range of inspirational careers ideas to young people, particularly roles and careers that young people might not otherwise come into contact with in their everyday life and / or local community.
- **Seek out and celebrate local role models of successful higher education participation.** People from communities with lower levels of higher education participation might be more powerful role models to help communicate that people from here can benefit from higher education.
- **Raise awareness of the wider benefits of higher education.** Young people and their parents, particularly if they have no or limited experience of higher education themselves, need information about the impact of higher education on developing networks, confidence, social skills and independence, as well as the employment opportunities and salary benefits.
- **Provide better information about the career and employment opportunities related to different subject disciplines.** Links between pure / non-applied subjects (for example, history, physics) and potential career paths need to be better communicated to parents and young people. Better use could be made of information on the type and range of careers that graduate pursue, average salaries and unemployment rates, for example the information provided as part of the Key Information Sets on the Unistats website.<sup>66</sup>
- **Share effective ways to engage parents, particularly from hard to reach groups.** This can be a challenge for schools, but parents are key influencers. Examples of successful approaches and initiatives should be sought and communicated.

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<sup>66</sup> See [Unistats](#)



## Improving the quality of information, advice and guidance

- **Support young people to make better use of information and other resources.** There is no shortage of careers related information available, but support and mediation is needed to help young people and parents navigate and make the best use of it. The expectations of young people also need to be better managed so they know what careers guidance can and cannot offer.
- **Provide more tailored, individual careers advice and guidance.** Young people are eager to receive this kind of support. Schools need appropriate resources to enable them to do this and to be incentivised to make use of outreach opportunities offered by higher education institutions.
- **Explore ways to make careers education more engaging, memorable and impactful for young people.** Young people's active rather than passive engagement in careers education means it is more likely to have an impact.
- **Make better use of local and national labour market information.** Young people and their parents are particularly interested in the employment opportunities of higher education. Labour market information is under-used and could effectively support career decision-making.
- **Ensure teachers and parents are well-informed.** Informal sources of information, advice and guidance are influential. It is important therefore that parents in particular are engaged in careers education, along with their children. Teachers too need to be aware of where, when and how to refer young people to professional careers information, advice and guidance and to support young people to access and make best use of this.

## Appendix 1: Comparisons of case study ward pairs

The following tables show the key demographic data on which the named case study pairs were matched.

**Table 9: Anfield and Bulwell demographic data**

	<b>Anfield, Liverpool</b>	<b>Bulwell, Nottingham</b>
Total Population ( <i>2011 Census</i> )	13,400	16,157
Gap POLAR young population ( <i>5 cohorts of maintained school pupils</i> )	1,004	1,223
Mean age ( <i>2011 Census</i> )	37.8 years	36.2 years
Income deprivation IDACI quintiles ( <i>IMD 2010</i> )	1	1
Children in NS-SEC 1-3 households quintiles ( <i>2001 Census</i> )	1	1
Unemployment rate ( <i>2011 Census</i> )	13.8%	14.3%
Proportion not born in the UK ( <i>Census 2011</i> )	5.7%	8.2%
Proportion of 10-15yrs with graduate parents ( <i>2001 Census</i> )	7.8%	7.8%
Urban indicator ( <i>ONS classification</i> )	Urban	Urban

**Table 100: Hillsborough and Aston, Orgreave and Ulley demographic data**

	<b>Hillsborough</b>	<b>Aston, Orgreave and Ulley</b>
Total Population ( <i>2011 Census</i> )	18,231	16,045
Gap POLAR young population ( <i>5 cohorts of maintained school pupils</i> )	1,133	1,070
Mean age ( <i>2011 Census</i> )	40.5 years	40.8 years
Income deprivation IDACI quintiles ( <i>IMD 2010</i> )	3	3
Children in NS-SEC 1-3 households quintiles ( <i>2001 Census</i> )	3	3
Unemployment rate ( <i>2011 Census</i> )	5.5%	5.0%
Proportion not born in the UK ( <i>Census 2011</i> )	4.0%	2.6%
Proportion of 10-15yrs with graduate parents ( <i>2001 Census</i> )	25.0%	19.7%
Urban indicator ( <i>ONS classification</i> )	Urban	Urban

**Table 11: Mile End and Globe Town demographic data**

	<b>Mile End and Globe Town</b>
Total Population ( <i>2011 Census</i> )	15,190
Gap POLAR young population ( <i>5 cohorts of maintained school pupils</i> )	624
Mean age ( <i>2011 Census</i> )	30.5 years
Income deprivation IDACI quintiles ( <i>IMD 2010</i> )	1
Children in NS-SEC 1-3 households quintiles ( <i>2001 Census</i> )	1
Unemployment rate ( <i>2011 Census</i> )	13.8%
Proportion not born in the UK ( <i>Census 2011</i> )	40.6%
Proportion of 10-15yrs with graduate parents ( <i>2001 Census</i> )	8.0%
Urban indicator ( <i>ONS classification</i> )	Urban

**Table 112: White Hart Lane demographics data**

	<b>White Hart Lane</b>
Total Population ( <i>2011 Census</i> )	13,431
Gap POLAR young population ( <i>5 cohorts of maintained school pupils</i> )	974
Mean age ( <i>2011 Census</i> )	32.7 years
Income deprivation IDACI quintiles ( <i>IMD 2010</i> )	1
Children in NS-SEC 1-3 households quintiles ( <i>2001 Census</i> )	2
Unemployment rate ( <i>2011 Census</i> )	12.7%
Proportion not born in the UK ( <i>Census 2011</i> )	44.6%
Proportion of 10-15yrs with graduate parents ( <i>2001 Census</i> )	18.5%
Urban indicator ( <i>ONS classification</i> )	Urban

**Demographic data sources:**

Participation of Local Areas based on individualised data (Gap POLAR): derived from the Department for Education's National Pupil Database (NPD)

Populations from the 2011 Census: from the Office for National Statistics

<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/>

Income deprivation affecting children (IDACI) area classification: from the Department for Communities and Local Government as part of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation for England (IMD) 2010 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-indices-of-deprivation-2010>

National Statistics Socio Economic Classification (NS-SEC) quintiles: from 2001 Census Area Statistics Theme Table CT001. NS-SEC outlined at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/classifications/current-standard-classifications/soc2010/soc2010-volume-3-ns-sec-rebased-on-soc2010--user-manual/index.html>

Proportion of 10-15 year olds with graduate parents: from a 2001 Census commissioned table C0821 from the Office for National Statistics

Rural/urban area classifications: from the Office for National Statistics

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/geography/products/area-classifications/rural-urban-definition-and-la/rural-urban-definition--england-and-wales-/index.html>

## **Appendix 2: Marginal Effects from Probit Models**

The coefficients from probit models cannot be interpreted with ease and therefore, we have reported the marginal effect of each determinant, which highlights how a change in the independent variable leads to a change in the probability of participation in higher education. Furthermore, probit models are a type of non-linear regression model and thus the size of the marginal effect calculated for a particular factor depends on the values chosen for all other independent variables. For simplicity, we have reported values for the hypothetical average individual by utilising the mean values for all independent variables. Models created using wave 7 weights and have accounted for the complex survey design.



	Pr(ln HE)		Pr(ln HE)		Pr(ln HE)		Pr(ln HE)	
male	-0.0692	**	-0.0383	*	-0.0168		-0.0219	
disadvantage	-0.278	**	-0.222	**	-0.0804	**	-0.0682	*
white	-0.405	**	-0.267	**	-0.354	**	-0.363	**
pakistani	-0.107	**	-0.119	**	-0.0952	**	-0.0834	**
bangladeshi	0.0157	**	-0.00324	**	-0.0954	**	-0.0743	**
black_caribbean	-0.347	**	-0.267	**	-0.214	**	-0.215	**
black_african	-0.0471	**	-0.0849	**	-0.0635	**	-0.0675	**
lone_parent	-0.182	**	-0.141	**	-0.0452	*	-0.0438	*
number_siblings	-0.0463	**	-0.0363	**	-0.00628		-0.0042	
london	0.108	**	0.0544		0.0244		0.0157	
likely_apply			0.262	**	0.106	**	0.102	**
stay_fte			0.157	**	-0.0145		-0.0137	
bestjobs_a			0.244	**	0.148	**	0.151	**
trade_or_app			-0.254	**	-0.108	**	-0.11	**
leave_16			-0.0688	**	-0.0656	**	-0.065	**
KS2_attain					-0.00332		-0.00487	
KS4_attain					0.00478	**	0.00465	**
foundation							-0.051	*
voluntary							0.0368	*
modern							-0.0474	
selective							0.0114	
KS4EM_04							0.00218	**
%FSM							-0.00052	
<b>n</b>	<b>5200</b>		<b>5200</b>		<b>5200</b>		<b>5200</b>	

\*\* Significant at the 1% level. \* Significant at the 5% level.

## Appendix 3: Interpreting the variable coefficients in the final model

**male** - A dummy variable<sup>67</sup> equal to one if the person is male and zero otherwise. It shows the probability of a male individual participating in higher education is not significantly different to that of a female individual.

**disadvantage** - A dummy variable equal to one if the person is disadvantaged and zero otherwise. It shows the probability of a disadvantaged individual participating in higher education is 6.8 percentage points lower than for an advantaged individual.

**white** – A dummy variable equal to one if the individual is White and zero otherwise. It shows the probability of a White individual participating in higher education is 36.3 percentage points lower than for an Indian individual.

**pakistani** – A dummy variable equal to one if the individual is Pakistani and zero otherwise. It shows the probability of a Pakistani individual participating in higher education is 8.3 percentage points lower than for an Indian individual.

**bangladeshi** – A dummy variable equal to one if the individual is Bangladeshi and zero otherwise. It shows the probability of a Bangladeshi individual participating in higher education is 7.4 percentage points lower than for an Indian individual.

**black\_caribbean** – A dummy variable equal to one if the individual is Black Caribbean and zero otherwise. It shows the probability of a Black Caribbean individual participating in higher education is 21.5 percentage points lower than for an Indian individual.

**black\_african** – A dummy variable equal to one if the individual is Black African and zero otherwise. It shows the probability of a Black African individual participating in higher education is 6.8 percentage points lower than for an Indian individual.

**lone\_parent** - A dummy variable equal to one if the individual is from a lone parent family and zero otherwise. It shows the probability of an individual from a lone parent family participating in higher education is 4.4 percentage points lower than for an individual not from a lone parent family.

**number\_siblings** – A continuous variable which highlights that number of siblings does not significantly impact on the probability of participating in higher education.

**london** - A dummy variable equal to one if the individual is from London and zero otherwise. It shows the probability of an individual from London participating in higher education is not significantly different to that of an individual living outside London.

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<sup>67</sup> A dummy variable takes the value zero or one to indicate the absence or presence of a categorical effect. It enables qualitative data to be used in qualitative analysis.

**likely\_apply** – A dummy variable equal to one if the individual states they are very or fairly likely to apply to university in wave 1 and zero otherwise. Being very likely or fairly likely to apply at wave 1 increases the probability of participating in higher education by 10.2 percentage points.

**stay\_fte** – A dummy variable equal to one if the individual intends to stay in education after year 11 and zero otherwise. This variable does not have a significant impact on the probability of participating in higher education.

**bestjobs\_a** - A dummy variable equal to one if the individual states they agree or strongly agree that the best jobs go to those who have been to university. Agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement increases the probability of participating in higher education by 15.1 percentage points.

**trade\_or\_app** – A dummy variable equal to one if the parent of the individual would like their child to do a trade, apprenticeship or training course after year 11 and zero if they would like them to stay in education. Wanting your child to do a trade, apprenticeship training course reduces the probability of participating in higher education by 11.0 percentage points.

**leave\_16** - A dummy variable equal to one if the parent of the individual disagrees a little or strongly disagrees that leaving school at 16 limits career opportunities and zero otherwise. Disagreeing a little or strongly disagreeing that leaving school at 16 limits career opportunities reduces the probability of participating in higher education by 6.5 percentage points.

**ks2\_attainment** – A continuous variable indicating an individual's average key stage 2 point score. This variable does not have a significant impact on the probability of participating in higher education.

**ks4\_attainment** - A continuous variable indicating an individual's total capped GCSE point score. A unit increase in the individual's point score leads to a 0.5 percentage point increase in the probability of participating in higher education.

**foundation** – A dummy variable equal to one if the individual goes to a foundation school and zero otherwise. It shows the probability of an individual from a foundation school participating in higher education is 5.1 percentage points lower than for an individual from a community school.

**voluntary** – A dummy variable equal to one if the individual goes to a voluntary aided or voluntary controlled school and zero otherwise. It shows the probability of an individual from a voluntary school participating in higher education is 3.7 percentage points higher than for an individual from a community school.

**modern** – A dummy variable equal to one if the individual goes to a secondary modern school and zero otherwise. This does not have a significant effect on the probability of participating in higher education.

***selective*** – A dummy variable equal to one if the individual goes to a selective secondary school and zero otherwise. This does not have a significant effect on the probability of participating in higher education.

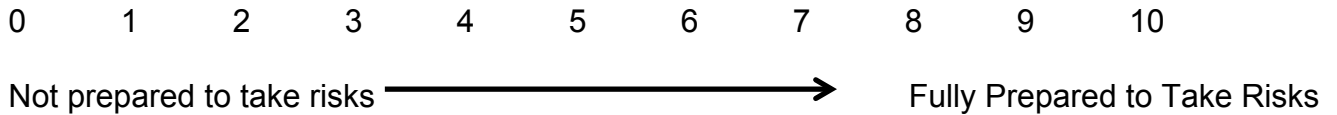
***KS4EM\_04*** – A continuous variable indicating the proportion of pupils in the 2004 cohort in the individual's school who attained 5 A\* to C at GCSE including English and Maths. A unit increase in this proportion increases the probability of an individual participating in higher education by 0.2 percentage points.

***%FSM*** – A continuous variable indicating the proportion of pupils in the 2004 cohort in the individual's school who were eligible for free school meals. This does not have a significant effect on the probability of participating in higher education.

## Appendix 4: Questionnaire items

### Risk Preference – Children and Parents

Are you generally a person who is fully prepared to take risk or do you try to avoid taking risks?



Source: Dohmen, T. Falk, A. Huffman, D. Sunde, U. Schupp, J and Wagner, G. (2005) *Individual Risk Attitudes: New Evidence from a Large, Representative, Experimentally-Validated Survey* IZA DP No. 1730

### Time preference – used with children

If you had to choose between £100 now and £1000 in 5 years which would you choose?

1. Certainly £100 now
2. Probably £100 now
3. Cannot choose
4. Probably £1000 in 5 years.
5. Certainly £1000 in 5 years

### Time preference – multiple list, used with parents

In each row choose A or B:

A	B
£100 in 1 week	£105 in 1 month
£100 in 1 week	£110 in 1 month
£100 in 1 week	£115 in 1 month
£100 in 1 week	£120 in 1 month
£100 in 1 week	£125 in 1 month

Source: Jamison, J. Karlan, D. and J. Zinman (2012) Measuring risk and time preferences and their connections with behaviour *Handbook of Experimental Economics*

## Optimism/pessimism -) Used with children and parents

Please be as honest and accurate as you can throughout. Try not to let your response to one statement influence your responses to other statements. There are no "correct" or "incorrect" answers. Answer according to your own feelings, rather than how you think "most people" would answer.

4 = I agree a lot, 3 = I agree a little, 2 = I neither agree nor disagree, 1 = I Disagree a little, 0 = I Disagree a lot

1. In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.
2. It's easy for me to relax.
3. If something can go wrong for me, it will.
4. I'm always optimistic about my future.
5. I enjoy my friends a lot.
6. It's important for me to keep busy.
7. I hardly ever expect things to go my way.
8. I don't get upset too easily.
9. I rarely count on good things happening to me.
10. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.

Scheier, M. F. Carver, C. S. and Bridges, M. W. (1994). Distinguishing optimism from neuroticism (and trait anxiety, self-mastery, and self-esteem): A re-evaluation of the Life Orientation Test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67, 1063-1078

## Measuring general debt attitudes

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| D1.  | I try to manage with the money I have got                    |
| D2.  | Once you are in debt it is very difficult to get out of debt |
| D3.  | I would worry a lot if I got into debt                       |
| D4.  | It is okay to be in debt if you can pay it off               |
| D5.  | You should always save up first before buying something      |
| D6.  | Debt is a normal part of today's lifestyle                   |
| D7.  | There is no excuse for borrowing money                       |
| D8.  | I would rather be in debt than change my lifestyle           |
| D9.  | It is better to have something now and pay for it later      |
| D10. | Owing money is basically wrong                               |

Agree Strongly/ Agree/ Neither Agree or Disagree/ Disagree / Disagree /Don't know

Sources: Callander, C. (2003) *Attitudes to debt: School leavers and further education students attitudes to debt and their impact on participation in higher education*. Report for Universities UK

Callander, C. and Jackson, J. (2005) Does fear of debt deter students from higher education? *Journal of Social Policy* 34(4):509-40

Callander, C. and Jackson, J. (2008) Does the fear of debt constrain choice of university and subject of study? *Studies in Higher Education* 33(4):405-29

### Measuring debt attitudes – Higher education specific

- HE1. Borrowing money to pay for a university education is a good investment.
- HE2. Student loans are a good thing because it allows students to enjoy university life.
- HE3. Students do not worry about their debts while at university because they will get well-paid jobs when they graduate.
- HE4. It is not worth getting in debt just so you can get a degree.

Responses: Item 4 is reverse coded.

Agree Strongly/ Agree/ Neither Agree or Disagree/ Disagree / Disagree /Don't know

Sources: Callander, C. (2003) *Attitudes to debt: School leavers and further education students attitudes to debt and their impact on participation in higher education*. Report for Universities UK

Callander, C. and Jackson, J. (2005) Does fear of debt deter students from higher education? *Journal of Social Policy* 34(4):509-40

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