

# London's Post-16 Trajectories

*July 2020*

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# Executive summary

## Context

London's secondary schools have seen a transformation over the past 15 years and key stage 4 results in London are now the best in the country. However, this progress is not sustained in post-16 education and London ranks fifth amongst the English regions for academic average points score at Level 3.

To establish a clearer understanding of what is driving post-16 education choices and performance in the capital, the Greater London Authority and London Councils commissioned Mime and the UCL Institute of Education to conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis to better understand the pathways of young people in London from GCSE through further study. This research tracks the trajectories of 355,000 London residents from age 15 to 18.

London government will consider the implications of these findings, including for provision funded through the adult education budget, of which the Mayor now has control, and plans for further devolution.

## Key findings

- London's age 16 provision differs to the rest of the country, with higher proportions of young people in school sixth forms and on academic programmes, partly due to the higher proportion of schools with sixth forms in the capital
- Although overall about 75% of London students remain in the same institution between ages 16 and 17, only about half of those on programmes at level 2 or below at age 16 are in the same institution at age 17, which suggests that planning for transition for these students may be less developed in London than it is elsewhere
- Over half of year 12 students that achieved Level 1 at key stage 4 go directly onto a Level 3 course at age 16, skipping or not fully finishing Level 2, which makes the successful achievement of their post-16 studies more challenging
- London's lower than expected performance on headline post-16 measures can be largely explained by the extra degree of stretch given to London's lower attainers, with students with lower prior attainment (from a low E to low C) in London studying more Level 3 courses than their peers elsewhere
- There is limited evidence of a structured approach to delivering the three-year programmes needed by many young Londoners, particularly those with a low level of prior attainment, new arrivals to the country or those switching programmes or institutions
- Vocational provision, and college provision generally, is often seen as a second-class option by schools and universities, and therefore in turn by parents and young people themselves.

## Recommendations

A range of recommendations are proposed as a result of the quantitative and qualitative findings:

1. Government to monitor schools and further education leaders and governors to ensure they deliver their statutory responsibility to provide high quality Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG)
2. Central and London government, schools and further education colleges to demonstrate the value of both A level and technical and vocational programmes – including the new T levels - to parents, carers, students and employers
3. Government to include an accountability measure to show the proportion of a school's key stage 4 cohort who went on to achieve Level 2 or Level 3 by aged 19, to incentivise good longer-term outcomes for all pupils
4. London government to identify and share good practice between institutions with similar levels of prior attainment including successful transitions to college
5. Regarding three-year study programmes:
  - i. Government to ensure all post-16 providers receive full funding for delivering structured three-year post-16 programmes of study
  - ii. Government, schools and further education colleges to promote structured programmes of three-year study.

The background of the slide is a grayscale image of a petri dish containing a bacterial culture. The surface is covered with numerous small, dark, circular colonies. A large, dark gray circular overlay is positioned on the left side of the image, partially obscuring the petri dish. The text 'A. Introduction' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font within this dark area.

# **A. Introduction**

# A. Introduction

## 1. Purpose of the report

This report summarises research carried out in 2018 and 2019 to explore the education trajectories of young people in London after they completed GCSEs.

The overarching objectives of the research were to:

- Conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis to better understand the pathways of young people in London from GCSE through to further study and employment
- Produce practical recommendations for how the 16-18 education and skills landscape could be reformed in London to deliver improved learning and employment outcomes for all young Londoners.

The research was also designed to:

- Provide evidence on outcome and progression patterns for London students at and below Level 3, particularly those undertaking three years of post-16 study
- Inform the GLA's policy position on the delivery of the Government's proposed 'transition period' and how this could improve outcomes and progression pathways for young people leaving school without achieving Level 2.

The main purpose of this work was to fill an important evidence gap on the pathways young people from different backgrounds in London pursue following school, including which subjects they study and institutions they attend, their progress and outcomes, and ultimately, their education or employment destinations. This includes building an understanding of the patterns by socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity and among young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

## 2. Context & background to the project

London's secondary schools have seen a transformation over the past 15 years and GCSE results in London are now the best in the country. The previous 'London Challenge' initiative which helped schools raise GCSE performance in students from low-income backgrounds has been cited as a key reason for this<sup>1</sup>. The capital therefore has a relatively stronger base in lower secondary education, which leads to a relatively high level of post-16 participation in education.

However, the capital fails to sustain this high performance in post-16 education. In 2018, London ranked fifth among the English

	London Rank in 2018 (out of 9 regions)
Foundation Stage	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Year 1 Phonics	1 <sup>st</sup>
Key Stage 1	1 <sup>st</sup>
Key Stage 2	1 <sup>st</sup>
Key Stage 4	1 <sup>st</sup>
Key Stage 5	Academic: 5 <sup>th</sup> Applied General: 4 <sup>th</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Burgess, S. (2014) Understanding the success of London's schools, Centre for Market and Public Organisation University of Bristol <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/compo/migrated/documents/wp333.pdf>

regions for academic average points score at Level 3 at key stage 5<sup>2</sup>. This report goes on to explore what some of the indicators and underlying factors behind this may be.

While the capital includes some of the highest performing local authorities for A level and applied general qualifications in the country, it also includes some of the poorest performing local authorities for these qualifications.

The Mayor of London is committed to creating a new agenda for education and skills in the capital that improves outcomes for all young Londoners and prepares them for life and work in a global city. To help achieve this, the Greater London Authority (GLA) and London Councils, on behalf of London's education stakeholders and policy makers, through the Young People's Education and Skills Board and Skills for Londoners Board, needed a clearer understanding of what is driving patterns and trends that underpin post-16 education choices and performance in London.

### 3. Project approach

The project comprised both quantitative and qualitative analysis workstreams.

For the quantitative analysis we used publicly available data sources where possible to draw out messages for London. However, much of the research required deeper analysis of pupil level data. Accordingly, we used National Pupil Database (NPD) data including linked data joining school data to college/training provider data held in Individualised Learning Records (ILR). Key to the choice of using NPD data was the ability to track a student over time so their movement between key stage 4 (i.e. year 11), through year 12, 13 and 14 could be analysed.

We explored the trajectories of five different cohorts of year 11 pupils; the first cohort completed key stage 4 in 2010/11 and the fifth completed it in 2014/15. We looked at the type of provision they were undertaking (e.g. academic or vocational), the institution where they were studying in each year of post-16 study, and the subject mix they studied (grouped into areas of learning). Their demographic characteristics (taken from the school census in year 11) were also used to break down the analysis by factors such as ethnicity, gender, deprivation and special educational need status. The student level data was also enriched with their key stage 4 prior attainment which provides important context for their post-16 pathway.

The qualitative research included interviewing young people from a range of post-16 institutions which offered provision to 18-year old students (effectively in year 14). The institutions were selected to ensure a cross-section of providers in London. Young people from eight institutions – six further education colleges, one school and one sixth form college – participated in the focus groups and interviews. In total 67 young people participated in this research. The research techniques included focus groups and semi-structured one-to-one interviews.

A steering group including representatives from the Greater London Authority and London Councils ensured the project delivered the intended outcomes.

The qualitative fieldwork was carried out during 2018. The NPD data analysis was carried out in early 2019 following changes to the NPD service which led to delays in the provision of NPD data.

For more information on the project approach and definitions used, please refer to the Appendix.

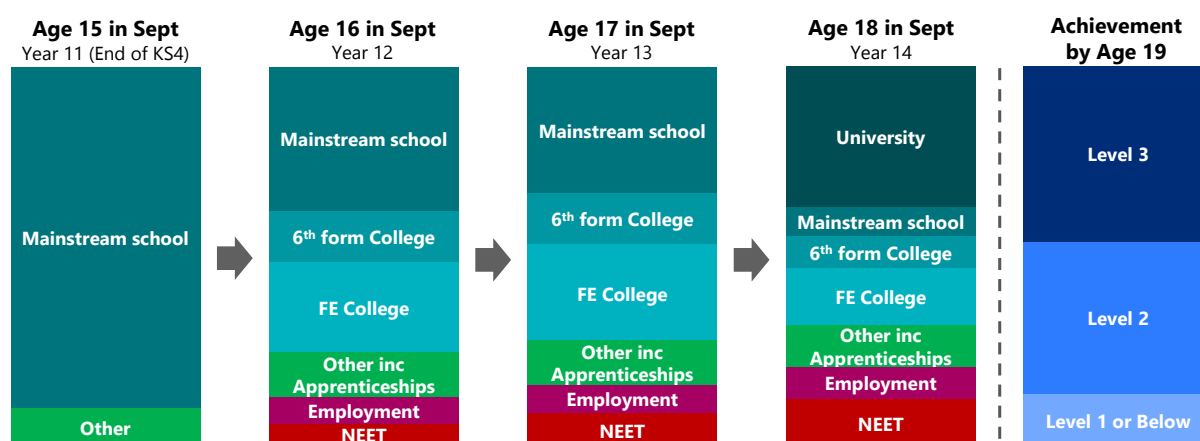
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<sup>2</sup> DfE statistics on achievement of the expected level at each key stage. Key stage 5 based on average point scores

## 4. Key concepts in the report

The report uses some key concepts which it is important to understand before interpreting the analysis:

- **Level of study** – Young people are categorised into a level of post-16 study in each year. This is usually Level 3 (A level or vocational equivalent), Level 2 (GCSEs at A\*-C or 9-4 or vocational equivalent) or Level 1 (GCSEs at D-G or 3-1 or vocational equivalents) or below. Since a student will often be studying more than one course, a student's level is based on the largest volume of courses largely based on their guided learning hours (GLH); for example, if a student was studying a Level 3 course with 100 GLH, and two Level 2 courses worth 100 GLH each, they will be classified as being on a Level 2 programme of study
- **Key stage 4 prior attainment** – Much of the analysis in this report is contextualised by the level of prior attainment a student achieved at the end of key stage 4. This is because prior attainment is often the most significant determinant of progression and outcomes at key stage 5. The analysis is usually broken down by either the level achieved at key stage 4 (e.g. Level 1 or Level 2), or the average grade achieved. See Appendix 2 for more information on key stage 4 prior attainment scores. The relative prior attainment of different groups should therefore always be considered when looking at progression and outcomes by student characteristic, pathway or institution type
- **Academic and vocational** – Based on a similar approach to level of study, a learner is categorised as being on either an academic or vocational programme of study based on the majority of their courses. Academic courses are normally A levels and International Baccalaureate, but also include some functional and key skills courses in English and maths. The most common vocational courses are BTECs. It is worth noting that, on average, up to 2017 (the timeframe covered by the cohorts in this report) Level 3 points scores achieved were higher for vocational courses than academic<sup>3</sup>
- **Age group progression** – A key stage 4 pupil can then progress through up to three years of post-16 study. In this report we look at each step in this post-16 journey, including the qualification level achieved by age 19 (i.e. after completing up to three years of post-16 study). This age progression and the types of destination available at each stage are shown in diagram below. The sizes of the blocks provide a broad, but not exact, representation of the volumes at each age.



"Other" includes independent provision, special schools, pupil referral units

<sup>3</sup> Although this changed in 2018 after the impact of reformed BTECs had an impact on points scores achieved

## 5. Timeline of key policy changes in 14-19 education in England

There has been significant change to the education system in England in the past decade. As the data used for this report sit within this period of change, key policy changes from 2010 are shown below:



## B. London's post-16 cohort

This section examines the demographic breakdown of London's post-16 students and where young people go after they complete key stage 4. This provides the context for the sections that follow which drill down into the post-16 pathways and outcomes for this cohort. We also explore the links between student attainment at key stage 4 and the level of study at age 16.

The analysis shows:

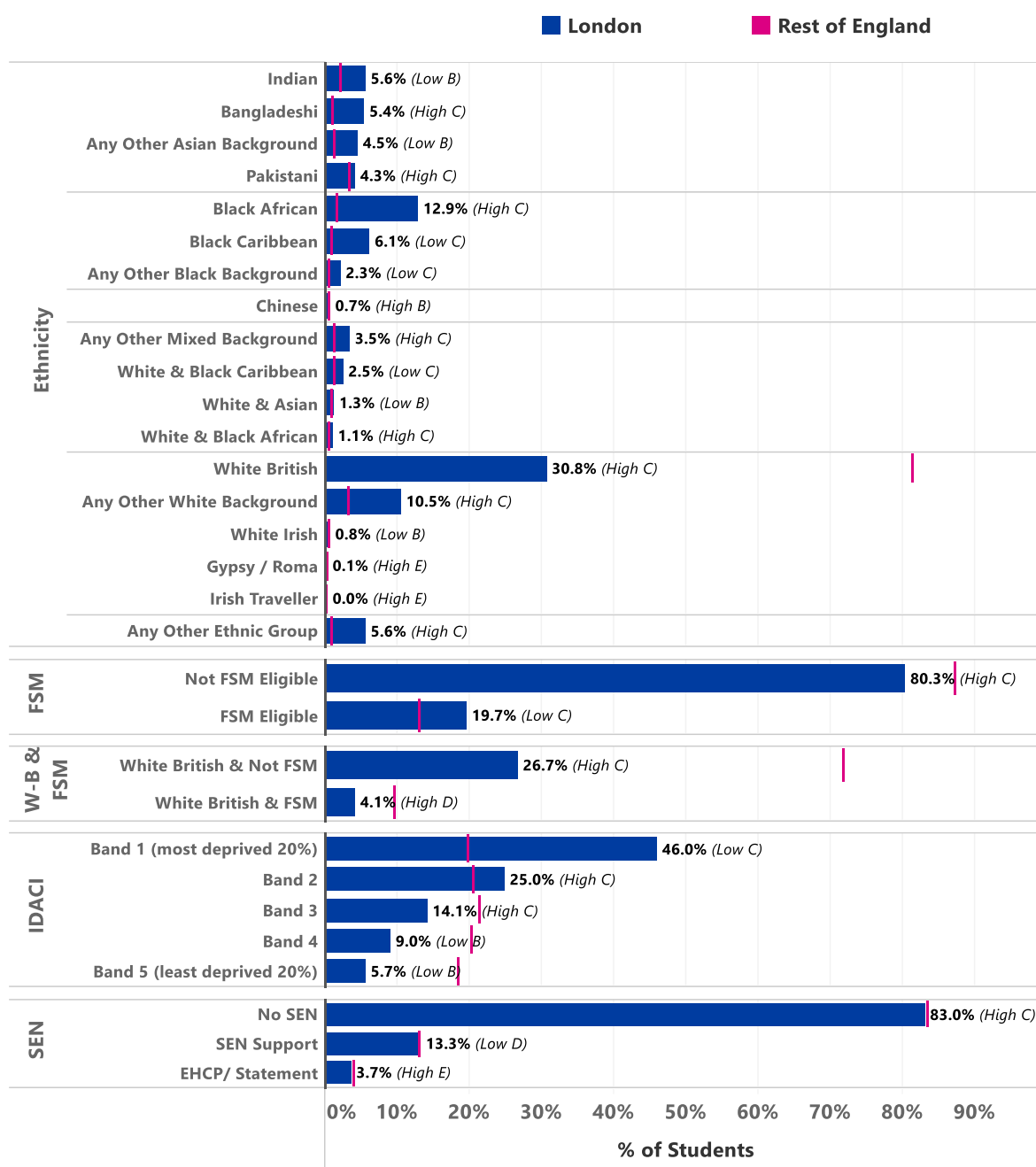
- There are key demographic differences between London and the rest of the country including higher levels of deprivation and a higher proportion of ethnic minority students
- A higher proportion of schools have sixth forms in London which affects the destinations of students after key stage 4 and the nature of qualifications undertaken
- A significant proportion of students achieving Level 1 by the end of key stage 4 went on to a Level 3 course directly afterwards.

# B. London's post-16 cohort

## 1. What are the characteristics of post-16 learners in London?

The government do not publish statistics of the characteristics of the whole cohort of 16 to 18-year-old students in London. However, through the use of longitudinal data in the NPD we can use a young person's characteristics at age 15 to proxy the characteristics of the post-16 cohort. The chart below shows how two of the cohorts of 16-year olds explored for this project break down by characteristic in London, compared to elsewhere in the country. The text in brackets shows the average prior attainment grade at key stage 4 in London for each group.

Fig 1. Characteristics of London's 16-year olds vs rest of England



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

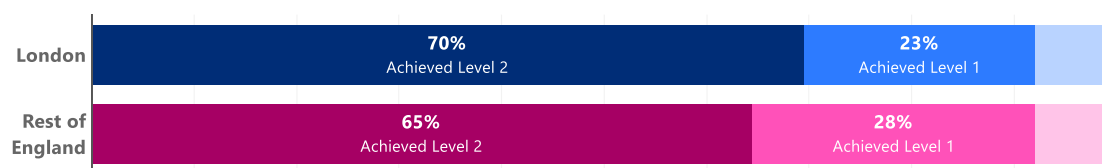
This chart shows that the characteristics of London’s 16-year olds are markedly different to the rest of England in a number of key ways. Firstly, the capital is much more ethnically diverse; while the largest group is white British, the proportion is just under 31% in London, compared with over 81% across the rest of England. Groups such as black African (12.9%), other white (10.5%) and Asian groups (19.8% Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi/other Asian) make up a substantial proportion of the cohort in London.

Secondly, the proportion of London students eligible for free school meals (FSM) is considerably higher; 19.7% compared with 12.8% elsewhere. This is further reflected in the IDACI<sup>4</sup> measure of deprivation where nearly half of the London cohort falls into the most deprived 20% of areas nationally.

## 2. What is the prior attainment of 16-year olds in London?

We know from the good performance of Londoners at key stage 4 that there is a higher level of prior attainment for 16-year olds than there is elsewhere in the country, and this has implications for the appropriate provision required at key stage 5. The chart below shows the level of study young people achieved at key stage 4. In broad terms, a learner will often, though not always, be ready for a course at the next level up in post-16 study. So, for example, learners achieving Level 2 at key stage 4 will often start a Level 3 course at key stage 5. The chart below shows the levels of 16-year olds in London for the two latest cohorts studied in detail for this report.

**Fig 2. Levels of prior attainment of 16-year olds in London vs elsewhere**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

In London, 70% of 16-year olds had achieved Level 2 at key stage 4 (compared to 65% elsewhere), and therefore will often start a Level 3 programme at 16. Eleven percent of these pupils will not have achieved Level 2 in English and maths and so will therefore be required to do this alongside their Level 3 studies at key stage 5.

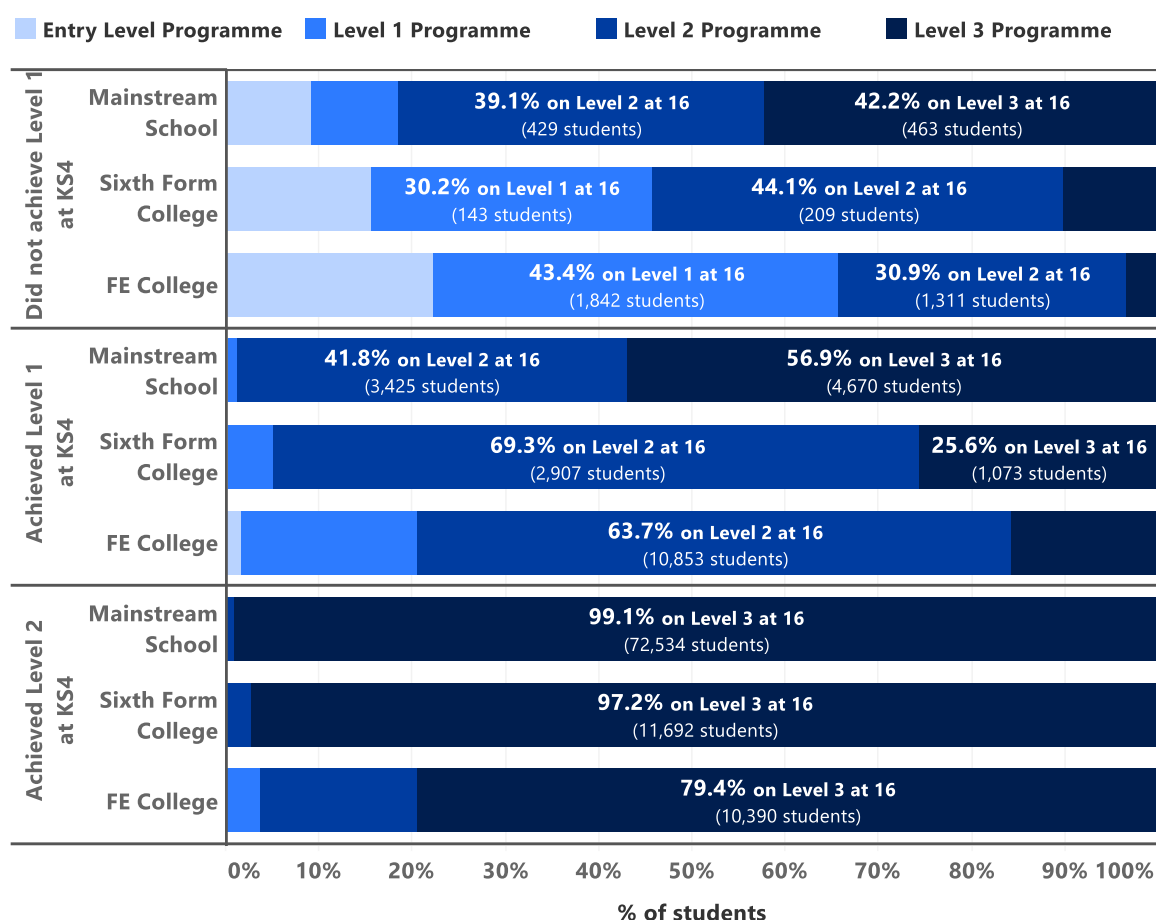
A further 23% in London (28% elsewhere) achieved a Level 1 at key stage 4, of which only 13% achieved Level 2 in English and maths. These are most likely to be starting a Level 2 programme at age 16, but many do another Level 1 course and some even move directly on to a Level 3 programme. The remainder (7% in both London and elsewhere) either had not achieved a Level 1 (and will often have SEND) or had no prior attainment, for example because they had recently arrived from overseas.

## 3. What level of study do 16-year olds in London start?

The chart below looks at the actual levels of study taken at the start of key stage 5 based on the level of key stage 4 prior attainment and the institution type at age 16.

<sup>4</sup> Income deprivation affecting children index (see the Glossary for more information)

**Fig 3. Levels of study at age 16 of pupils in London, by prior attainment and age 16 institution type**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15 in London. The chart does not include young people not in education or in apprenticeships

**Students that had achieved Level 2 at key stage 4:** We can see from the bottom three bars in the chart that achievement of Level 2 at key stage 4 is a good determinant of likelihood of moving to a Level 3 course post-16, although a small proportion pursue further study at Level 2. Those continuing with a Level 2 programme are nearly always in a college; less than 1% of those who achieved Level 2 and are in a school at age 16 are on a post-16 Level 2 programme.

**Students that had not achieved Level 2 at key stage 4:** A surprisingly large number of students who achieved Level 1 at key stage 4 appear to have moved on to a Level 3 programme of study post-16 (shown by the dark blue segment of the middle three bars), especially in mainstream schools. Overall in London, of those that achieved Level 1 at key stage 4 and were in education, 28.7% were on a Level 3 course at age 16. The figure was 24.1% elsewhere in the country.<sup>5</sup> Of those *in schools* at age 16 who had achieved Level 1 at key stage 4, 56.9% were on a Level 3 course.

Note that the 463 students that were in a mainstream school on a Level 3 programme having not achieved Level 1 at key stage 4 (the top right dark blue bar) are something of an anomaly; the

<sup>5</sup> The outcomes for these students on Level 3 courses by age 19 were far lower than for those who had already achieved a Level 2 at key stage 4; 60% of the cohort on a Level 3 course that had a Level 1 at key stage 4 achieved Level 3 by age 19, compared to 82% of those who had achieved Level 2 at key stage 4.

achievement of a full Level 1 requires at least five qualifications to be sat, and a large number of these students achieved high grades, but in less than five qualifications.

*Key  
Fact*

**Over half** of 16-year olds in schools that had **achieved Level 1** at key stage 4 were **on a Level 3 programme**

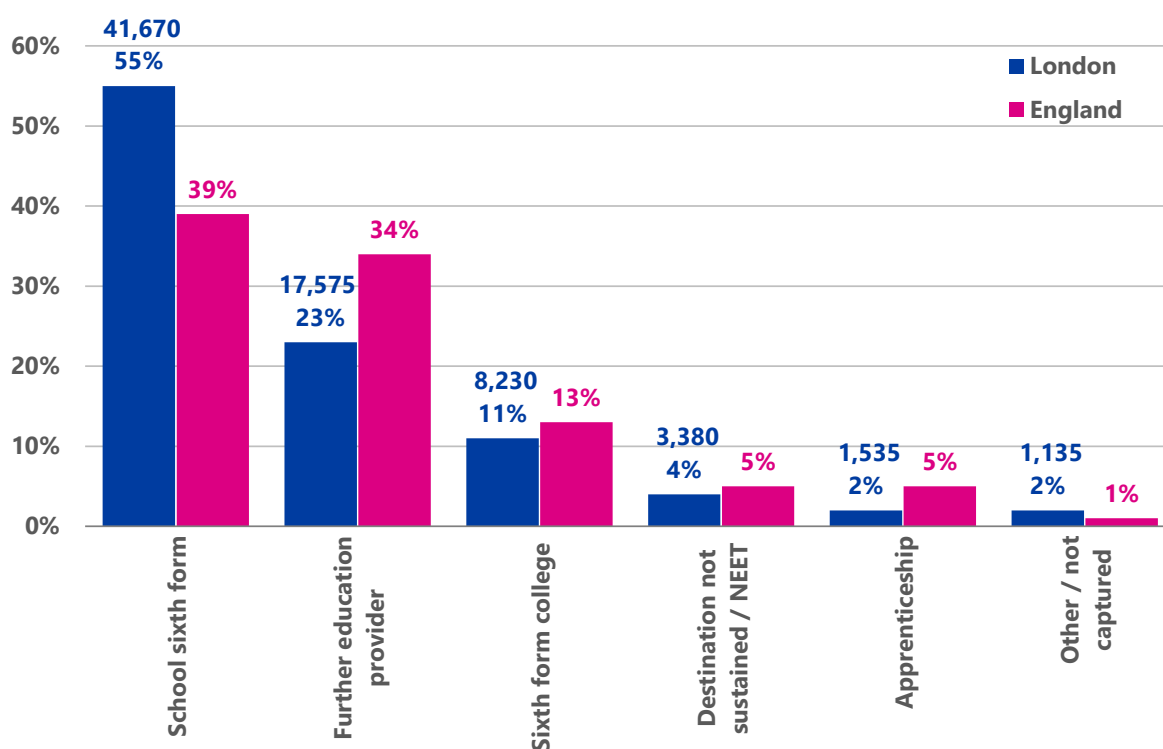
#### 4. Where are London’s 16 to 18-year olds studying?

The government’s published key stage 4 destination measures tell us where young people go when they turn 16. The latest data available (for the cohort aged 16 in 2016/17) shows that, in London, young people are far more likely to go to a school sixth form than in other areas of the country. Consequently, they are less likely to go to a sixth form college, a further education (FE) college or to start an apprenticeship. Furthermore, the proportion going to a sixth form college, FE college or apprenticeship had dropped in London since 2015.

The destinations data also reveals that 16-year olds in London are less likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) than elsewhere in the country. This is supported by the latest (2018) participation data that shows in London 5% of 16 and 17-year olds were NEET or with an unknown destination, compared with 6% nationally.

The chart below shows the proportion of young people in different destinations after key stage 4 in London, compared with England overall. The numbers on the London bars show the number of young people in each destination.

**Fig 4. Destinations after key stage 4**



Source: [DfE destinations data](#) for state-funded mainstream schools. 2016/17 destinations for the 2015/16-year 11 cohort

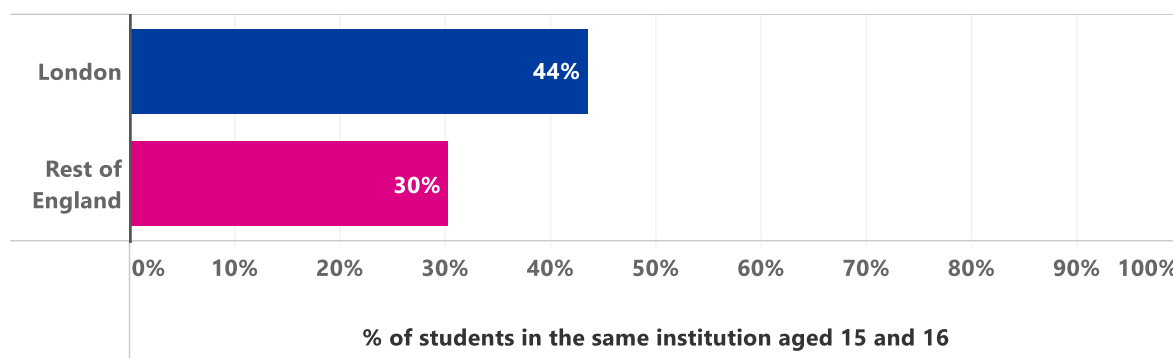
Secondary schools in London are far more likely than those elsewhere to have a sixth form. In 2018, 84% of London’s mainstream secondary schools (i.e. those that offered key stage 4) had a sixth form, compared to 64% of secondary schools elsewhere in the country<sup>6</sup>. The number of schools with sixth forms has grown dramatically; in 2018 it was 360 compared to 314 in 2012, while there has been relatively little change elsewhere in the country. This is, in part, because many secondary schools in London that applied to convert to academy status in this period also applied to extend their school age range to 19 at the same time.

**Key Fact** There were **46 extra school sixth forms in London between 2012 and 2018**, while there was relatively little change elsewhere in the country

This finding is significant since schools generally have more academic provision (predominantly A level) than other types of post-16 establishment. Based on our analysis, approximately 82% of students in a London school sixth form are following a mainly academic curriculum, compared to 66% in a sixth form college and 25% in a further education college.

The following chart examines the extent to which students change school after key stage 4.

**Fig 5. Proportion of young people staying in same school between age 16 and 17**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

London is very different to the rest of England in terms of the proportion of students who stay on in their key stage 4 school to continue their studies post-16; far more students stay in the same school in London. This may be because, relatively speaking, so many more schools in London have a sixth form compared to other regions. One consequence of this which emerged during the qualitative research was that this should mean students feel more settled in their environment and more ready to start their learning.

It is worth noting that London does not have an unusually large number of sixth forms that are small in size. In fact, the London region has the biggest average school sixth form size. In London the average is 202 students, compared with the national average of 175. 24% of sixth forms in London have less than 100 students, compared with 30% nationally<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Analysis based on the DfE Schools, Pupils and Characteristics underlying data, counting schools with at least 10 students in year 12 to 14 as a proportion of all state-funded mainstream secondary schools

<sup>7</sup> Based on the DfE’s Schools, Pupils and Characteristics 2018 underlying dataset. This includes any state-funded secondary school classified as having post-16 studies by the DfE

## C. Progression through post-16

This section explores the progression of London's students through post-16 education, with a particular focus on what happens between age 16 and 17 (typically between year 12 and 13). The analysis looks at high attainers (those who already achieved Level 2 at key stage 4), middle attainers (those starting a Level 2 course at age 16) and lower attainers (those on a Level 1 course at age 16).

The analysis shows that:

- Progression rates to higher levels are generally better in London than elsewhere
- The main exception is low rates of achievement of a full Level 3 following an apprenticeship programme
- In spite of the relatively good progression rates in London, 84% of students on a Level 2 course at 16 did not achieve a full Level 3 by age 19.

## C. Progression through post-16

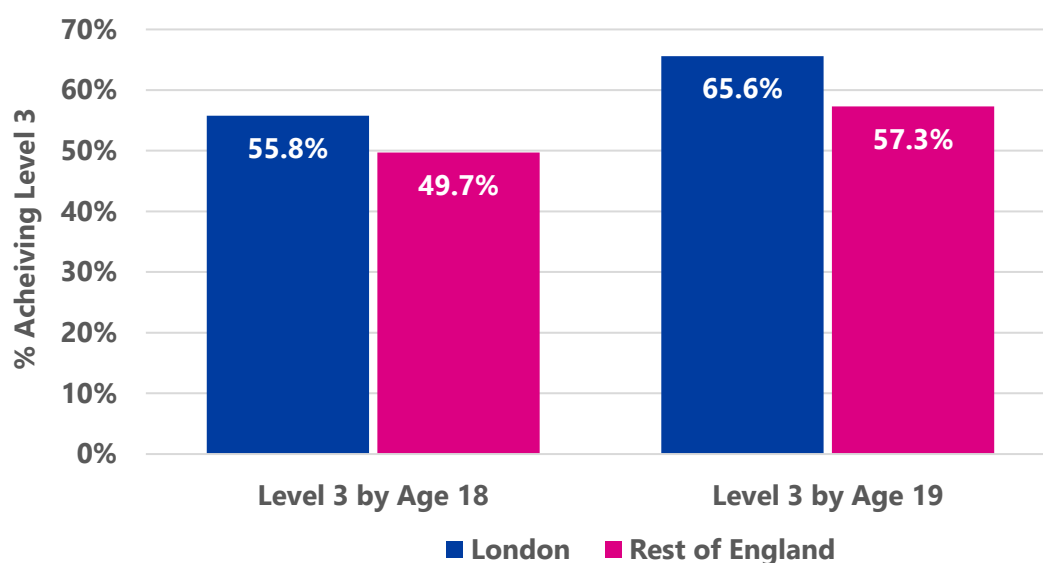
### 1. Higher attainer progression - Do learners progress from Level 2 at key stage 4 to Level 3 by age 19?

The government's expectation is that young people progress to Level 2 (equivalent to five or more GCSEs at A\*-C or 9-4) by the end of key stage 4, and then to Level 3 (equivalent to two or more A level passes at E grade or better) by the end of key stage 5 (or age 19). Level 3 qualifications are generally needed to enter higher education and will often be required to access higher level jobs.

Many young people who achieve Level 2 at the end of key stage 4 will move on to a Level 3 programme of study and complete it by the end of year 13. Other young people take three years to achieve Level 3, effectively achieving it at the end of year 14. However, some other young people do not go on to achieve a Level 3 qualification, dropping out of education, failing their qualifications or simply not progressing onto a Level 3 course.

The DfE previously published regional data on the proportion of young people that achieved Level 3 by the age in which they achieved it. The latest available data is shown in the chart below.

**Fig 6. Achievement of Level 3 by age 18 and age 19**

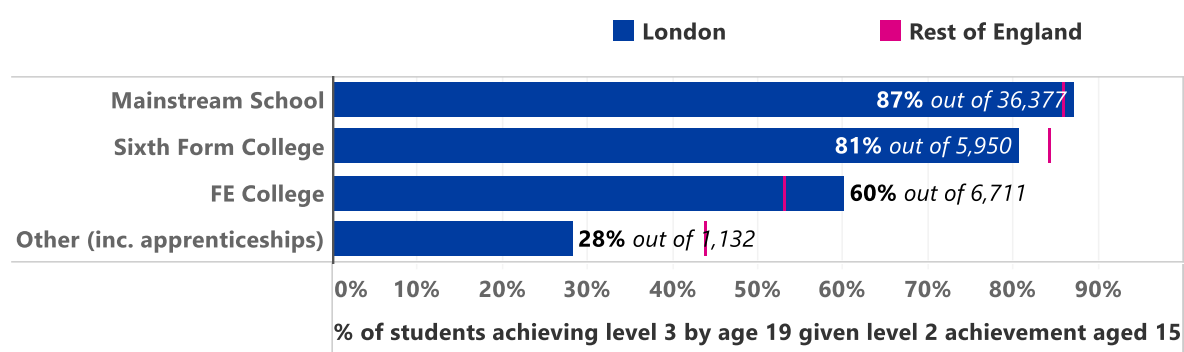


Source: DfE Level 2 and 3 published statistics for 2015/16 (the latest available regional level data)

We can see that, overall in London, the achievement of Level 3 is higher at age 18 and at age 19 than it is elsewhere in the country. We can also see that the jump between age 18 and age 19 is higher in London than it is elsewhere; an additional 9.8% of young people achieve Level 3 between age 18 and 19 in London, compared with 7.6% elsewhere. This is likely to be linked to the fact that a higher proportion of lower attaining young people do a three-year study programme in London than they do elsewhere (see Section G).

The next chart explores the extent to which learners achieve Level 3 when they commenced key stage 5 already having achieved Level 2 at key stage 4.

**Fig 7. Achievement of Level 3 by age 19 by those with a Level 2 at key stage 4, split by institution type at age 16**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14. Excludes special schools

Overall in London, 81% of those with a Level 2 at key stage 4 achieved a Level 3 by the end of key stage 5, compared to 75% elsewhere in the country. When broken down by the student’s institution type at age 16, those at schools were more likely to convert their Level 2 to a Level 3 compared to those in sixth form colleges, who in turn were more likely than those in FE colleges or other institutions such as training providers to reach Level 3. To some extent, this reflects how comfortable the achievement of a Level 2 was at key stage 4; those in schools and sixth form colleges averaged a low B at key stage 4, while those in FE colleges and other institutions averaged a high C.

The rate of progress from Level 2 to achieving a full Level 3 in “other” institutions was far lower than elsewhere in the country. This may reflect relatively poor progression through apprenticeship programmes in London since apprenticeship training providers make up the majority of students in this “other” group<sup>8</sup>.

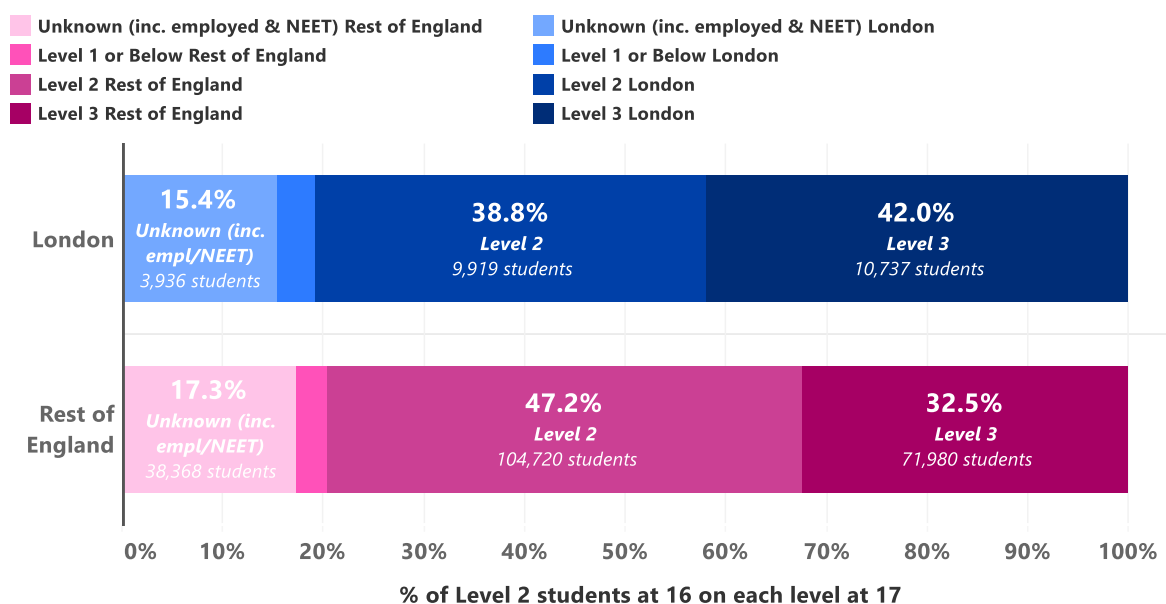
## 2. Mid-attainer progression – Do learners progress from a Level 2 programme at age 16?

As shown in Section B, approximately one quarter of learners will have achieved Level 1 by the end of key stage 4. In some cases, these learners are able to move all the way to achieving a full Level 3 by age 19. Depending on the exact level of prior attainment, the goal for these learners will often be to be able to start a Level 2 course in year 12, move on to a Level 3 programme in year 13 and complete the Level 3 programme in year 14.

The following analysis explores what happens to the learners on a Level 2 course at age 16. The blue bar shows the breakdown of destinations of London students on a Level 2 course at 16; pink bars show the data for the rest of England for comparison.

<sup>8</sup> “Other” also includes a small number of students in alternative provision, pupil referral units and institutions that could not be classified

**Fig 8. Progression from Level 2 courses at age 16 – by level of course at age 17**

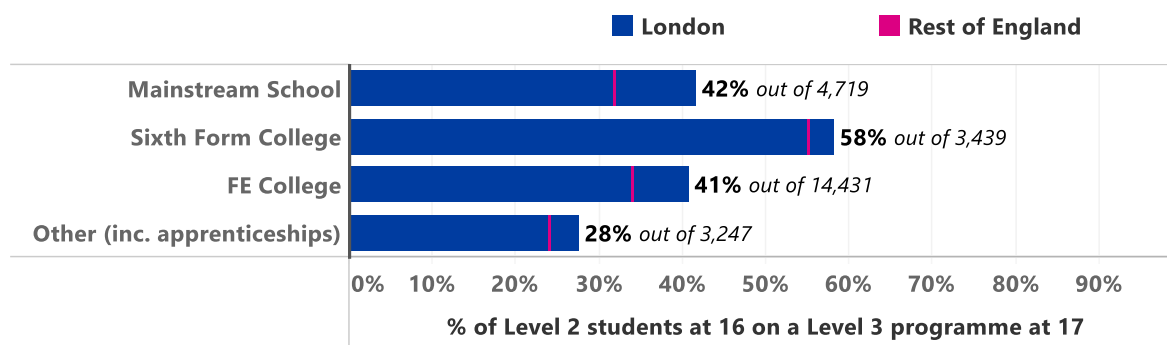


Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Excludes special schools

In London, of the students on a Level 2 programme in year 12, 38.8% remained on a Level 2 programme in year 13, while 42.0% (a far higher figure than in the rest of England) moved on to a Level 3 programme. 15.4% of these Level 2 students had either become NEET or moved into employment by age 17, slightly less than the proportion in the rest of England.

The chart below shows the proportion of young people on a Level 2 course at age 16 that moved on to a Level 3 at age 17, split by institution type at age 16. Comparators for the rest of England are shown with pink bars.

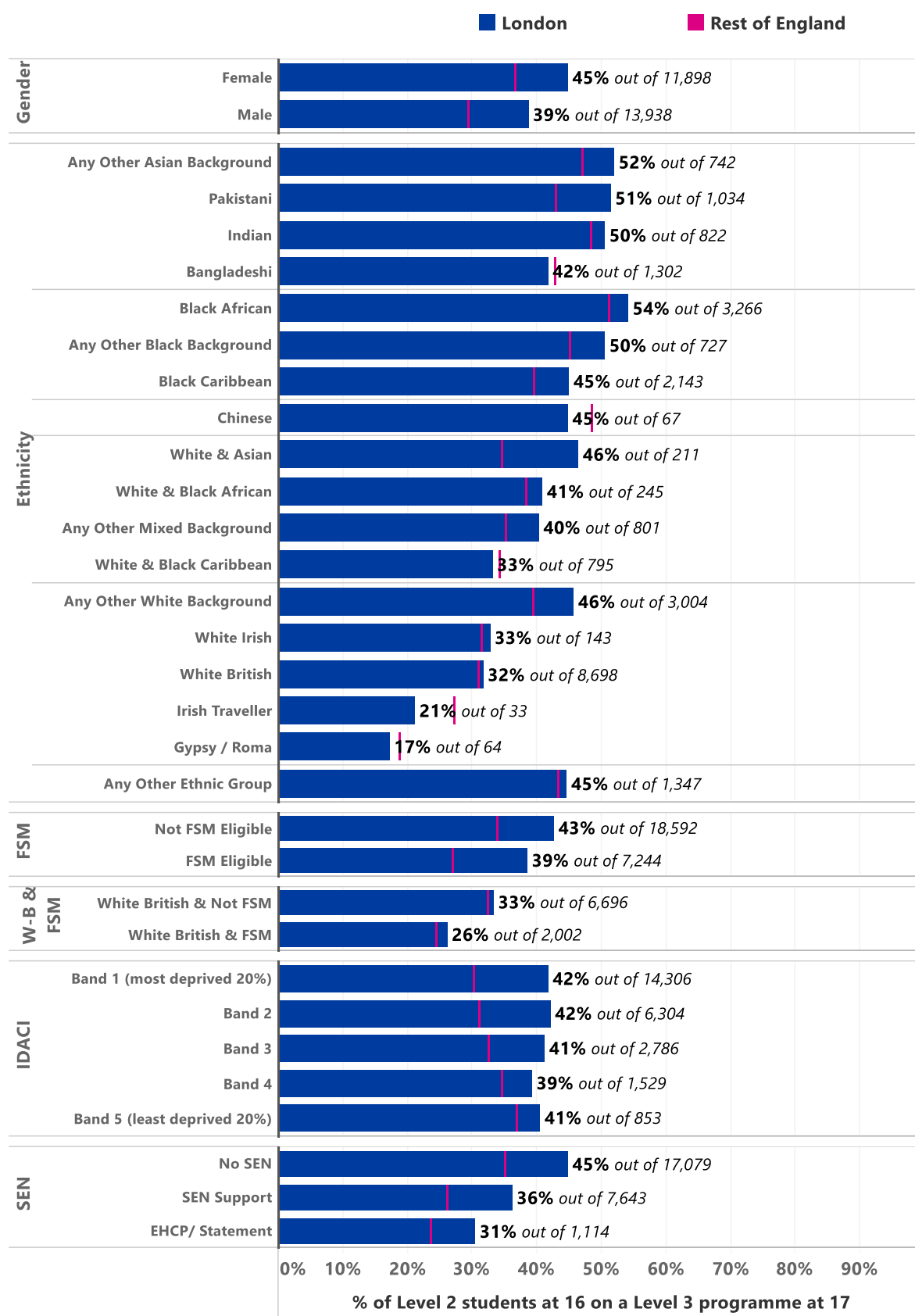
**Fig 9. Progression from Level 2 courses at age 16 to Level 3 at age 17 - By institution type at age 16**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Excludes special schools

When exploring this progression data by institution type, we can see that students in sixth form colleges were more likely to progress from a Level 2 to a Level 3 course than students in the other institution types. However, it should be noted that there were fewer Level 2 students in sixth form colleges than there were in schools or in FE colleges; by volume more students made this progression from FE colleges than from the other institution types. We next look at progression from Level 2 courses broken down by student characteristic.

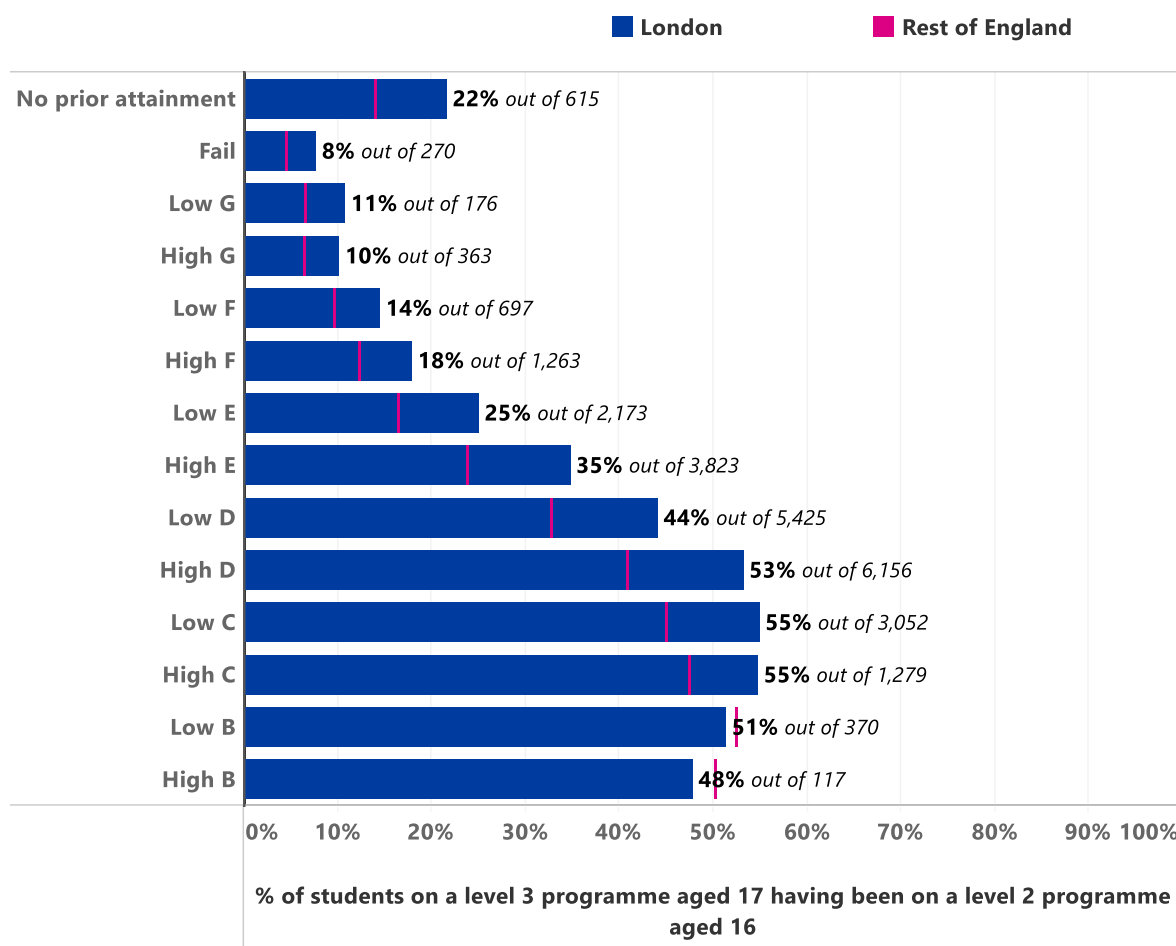
**Fig 10. Progression from Level 2 courses at age 16 to Level 3 at age 17 - By student characteristics**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Excludes special schools

Progression from Level 2 to Level 3 was better in London than it was elsewhere for the vast majority of student groups. The strongest performing ethnic group was black African; an interesting finding as it is a group which performs less well on Level 3 attainment measures (see Section E). The large group that causes the most concern is that of white British, both at a London and a national level. Only 32% of London's white British students on a Level 2 course at age 16 progressed to Level 3. When combining with free school meals the picture is even worse – only 26% of London's white British pupils on free school meals progressed to Level 3.

**Fig 11. Progression from Level 2 courses at age 16 to Level 3 at age 17 - By prior attainment at key stage 4**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Excludes special schools

The chart above shows that, as would be expected, progression from Level 2 to Level 3 courses is fairly closely linked to a student's prior attainment at key stage 4. Higher key stage 4 prior attainment is correlated with likelihood of progressing from Level 2 to Level 3 up to a C grade. For example, 53% of pupils in London with a high D key stage 4 grade average on Level 2 programmes progressed to Level 3, compared to 35% with a high E grade average.

The pattern changes at higher attainment levels; learners with a low B or better are actually less likely to progress to Level 3 than those with a high C. However, the cohort sizes in these groups with higher prior attainment are small.

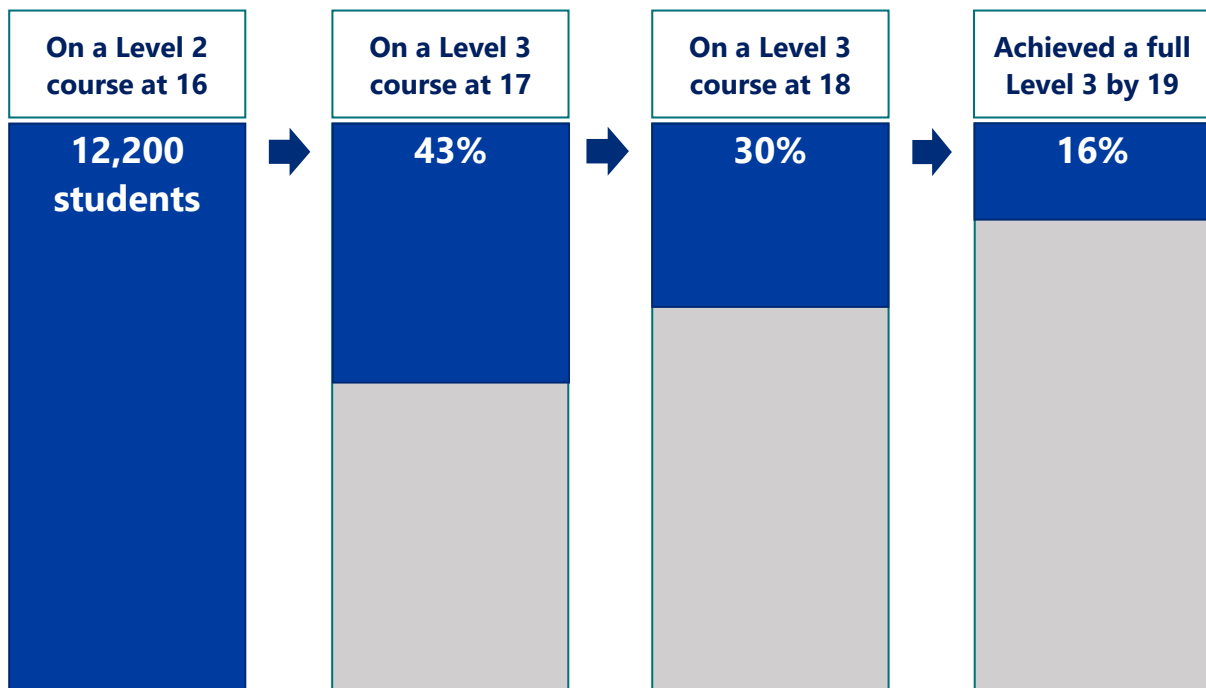
London's progression rate for all prior attainment groups is better than the rest of England comparator, with the exception of the small B grade groups.

**Key Fact**

**Progression from Level 2 aged 16 to Level 3 aged 17 is better in London for nearly all levels of prior attainment than elsewhere**

Even for students that do successfully progress from Level 2 at age 16 to a Level 3 course at age 17, there is no guarantee that this will translate into the achievement of a full Level 3 by age 19. To explore this, the diagram below tracks the progress of the cohort who finished key stage 4 in 2013/14 and were on a Level 2 course at age 16.

**Fig 12. Progression from Level 2 courses at age 16 through to achievement of Level 3 by age 19**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14. Excludes special schools

Of the 12,200 students who were on a Level 2 course at age 16 (usually year 12), 43% were on a Level 3 course at 17, 30% were still on a Level 3 course at 18, and only 16% had achieved a full Level 3 by age 19<sup>9</sup>. This leaves 84% of students that started a Level 2 course at age 16 either not progressing to Level 3, not passing their Level 3 qualifications or dropping out of education entirely. This is disappointing and suggests that a more structured three-year Level 2 to Level 3 programme would have been beneficial for many of these young people.

**Key Fact**

**84% of students on a Level 2 programme at age 16 did not achieve a full Level 3 by age 19**

<sup>9</sup> Note that a small additional proportion (3%) of students on Level 2 courses at 16 do achieve a full Level 3 by 19 even though they were not on a Level 3 course at 17

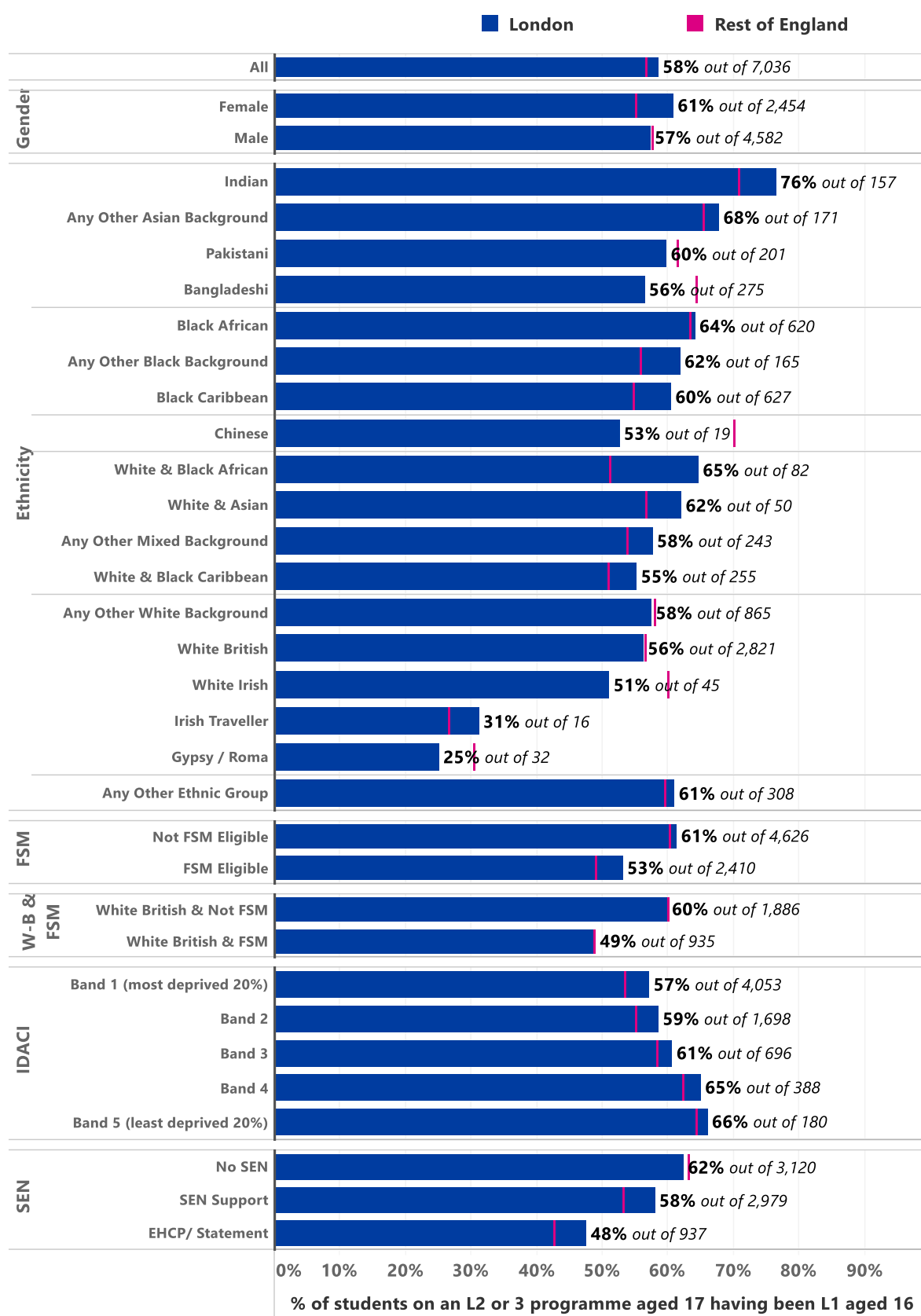
### 3. Lower-attainer progression – Do learners on Level 1 or lower courses at age 16 successfully progress?

Approximately 7% of students are likely to require provision at entry level or Level 1 after key stage 4, based on the proportion of learners who have not achieved Level 1 at the end of the key stage 4. The data shows that of these students who are in education, 62% will attend a further education college<sup>10</sup>. The analysis which follows explores what happens to learners who start a course at Level 1 or lower at age 16, split by student characteristics.

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<sup>10</sup> Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

**Fig 13. Progression from Level 1 or lower courses at age 16 to a higher level at age 17 - By student characteristics**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Excludes special schools

Overall in London, 58% of students on a Level 1 programme at age 16 progress to a Level 2 or higher programme at age 17. While there were far more boys than girls on a Level 1 programme, the progression rate was slightly higher for girls (61% compared to 57% for boys). As with the Level 2 progression statistics, the black African cohort was a high performing ethnic group (65% progressed), though Indian students (76%) and those from any other Asian backgrounds (68%) were most likely to progress. Progression for white British FSM students was poor, with only 49% progressing to a Level 2 or higher at 17.

Refer to the case study and quotes in Pathway 1 (in Section G) to learn about the experiences of some young people who start a course below Level 3 at age 16. In particular, case study 5 discusses Nick's experiences of his Level 1 catering course.

## D. Student drop-out by 17

This section explores the extent to which students continue in the same institution between age 16 and 17, updating the work carried out by Spours and Hodgson in 2014. Continuation rates are broken down by factors including age 16 institution type, prior attainment, student characteristics and whether or not the student had previously changed school at the end of key stage 4. The analysis shows that:

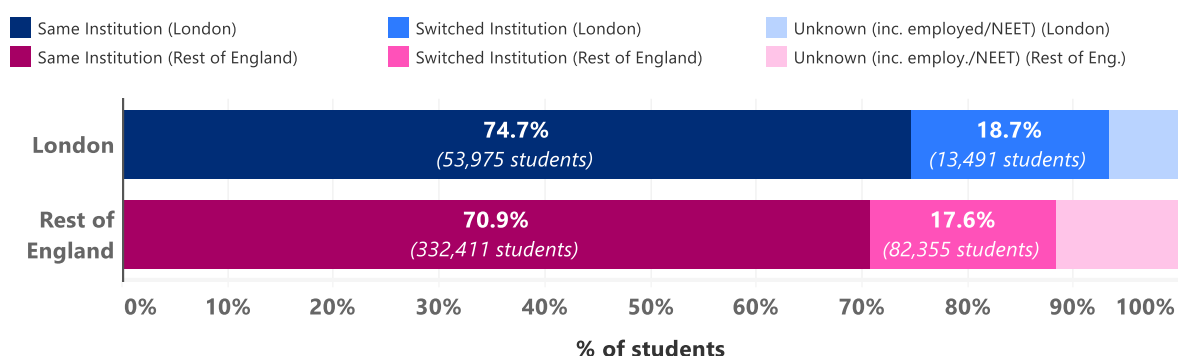
- While one quarter of students in London do not continue in the same institution between 16 and 17 (broadly similar to the picture from four years' earlier), fewer of these young people drop out of education entirely than is the case elsewhere
- Prior attainment plays a significant role in the likelihood of staying in an institution between 16 and 17, but there is a huge variation between institutions with similar prior attainment
- Higher attainers who stayed in the same school after key stage 4 were more likely to stay on to year 13 than those who moved institution after key stage 4. The same was not true for lower attainers however.

## D. Student drop-out by 17

A significant number of students are not in the same institution at age 17 as they were at age 16, or have dropped out of education all together by age 17. As shown in the chart below, of 16-year olds in London in 2015/16, 74.7% were in the same institution at age 17. 18.7% moved institution, leaving 6.6% that appear to have dropped out of education all together<sup>11</sup>.

This figure of 6.6% is the lowest amongst England's regions – the average for the rest of England was 11.5%. Nonetheless, this is still a significant number of young Londoners who have not completed a full two or three-year programme of post-16 study, and therefore this warrants further exploration.

**Fig 14. Students continuing between age 16 and 17 – London vs rest of England**



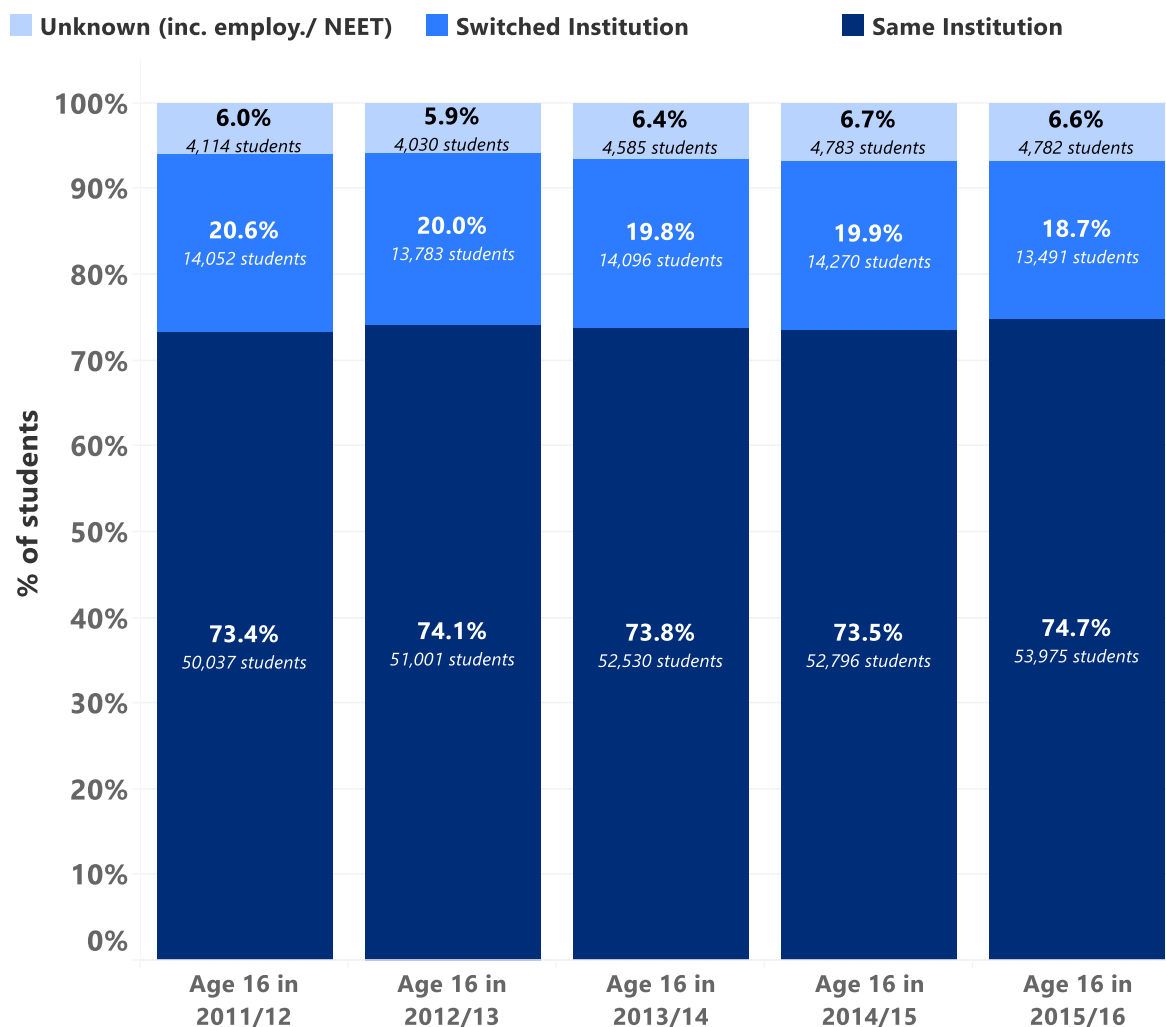
Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2014/15

*Key  
Fact*

**6.6% of London age 16 students dropped out of education by age 17 compared to 11.5% elsewhere**

<sup>11</sup> Of the young people not continuing in the same institution between 16 and 17, only 28% achieved a full Level 3 by age 19.

**Fig 15. Students continuing between age 16 and 17 – Over time**



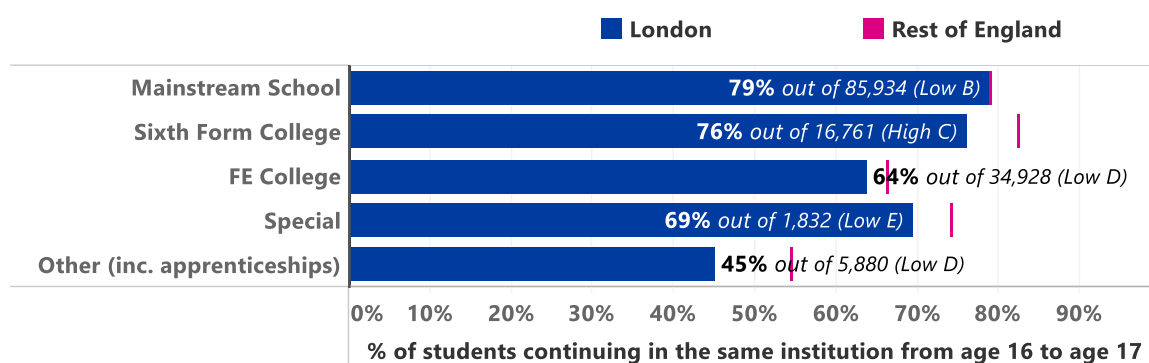
Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 between in 2010/11 and 2014/15

In London, the proportion of young people continuing in the same institution at 17 increased slightly from 2011/12, and the proportion moving to a new institution moved in the opposite direction accordingly. Overall the proportion leaving education all together increased slightly from 6.0% to 6.6% throughout the period studied.

**Key Fact** **74.7% of London’s age 16 students continued in the same institution at age 17, up from 73.4% four years earlier and higher than the national average**

The next chart shows the age 16 to 17 continuation rate broken down by the institution type of the student at age 16. For context the average grade achieved at key stage 4 for the cohort is shown in brackets for each institution type.

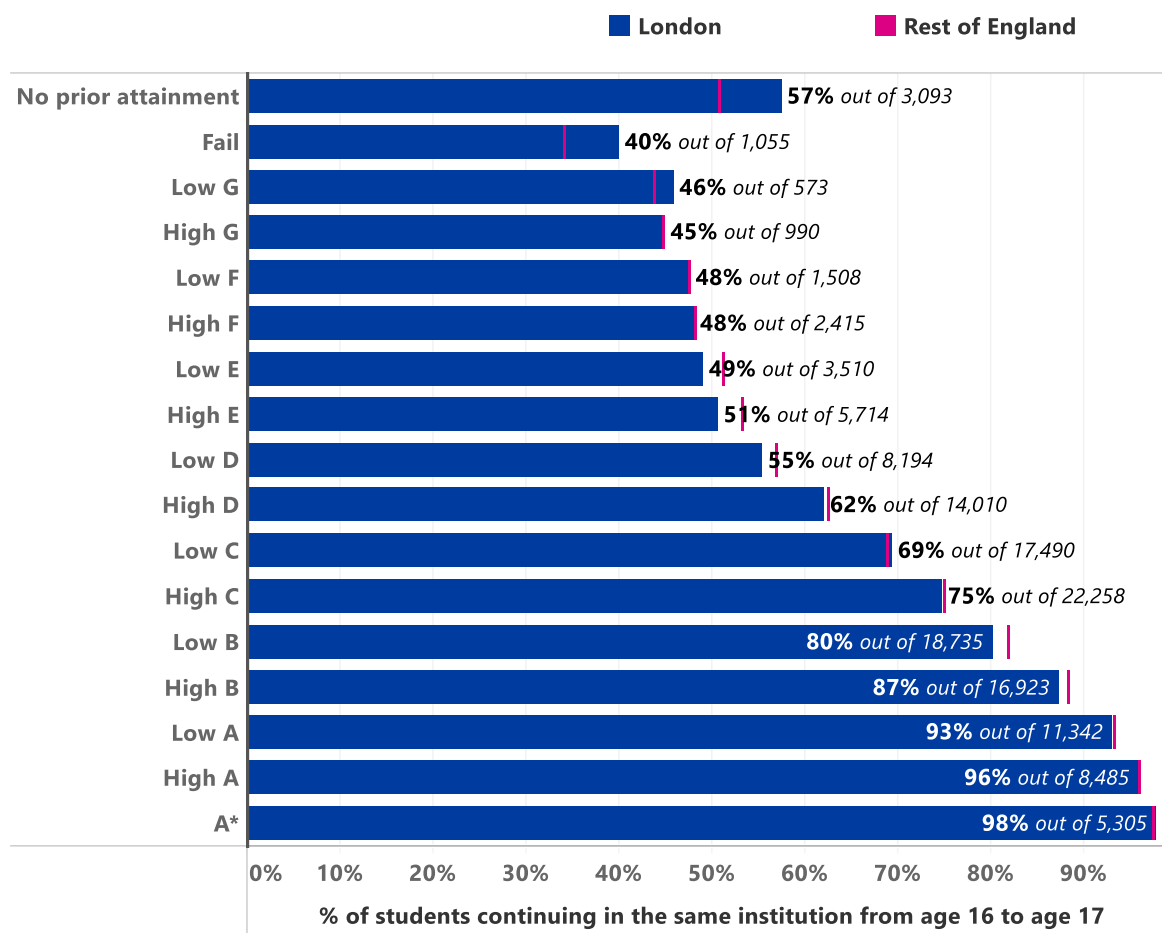
**Fig 16. Students continuing in the same institution between age 16 and 17 – By institution type at age 16**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

We can see from the chart above that students were most likely to continue in the same institution between age 16 and 17 when in a mainstream school, followed by a sixth form college. However, it should be noted that the intakes for schools (a low B average) and sixth form colleges (high C averages) have a higher level of key stage 4 prior attainment on average, and this is strongly positively correlated with the rate of students continuing. The relationship between prior attainment and continuation rates is shown in the following chart.

**Fig 17. Students continuing in the same institution between age 16 and 17 – By prior attainment**



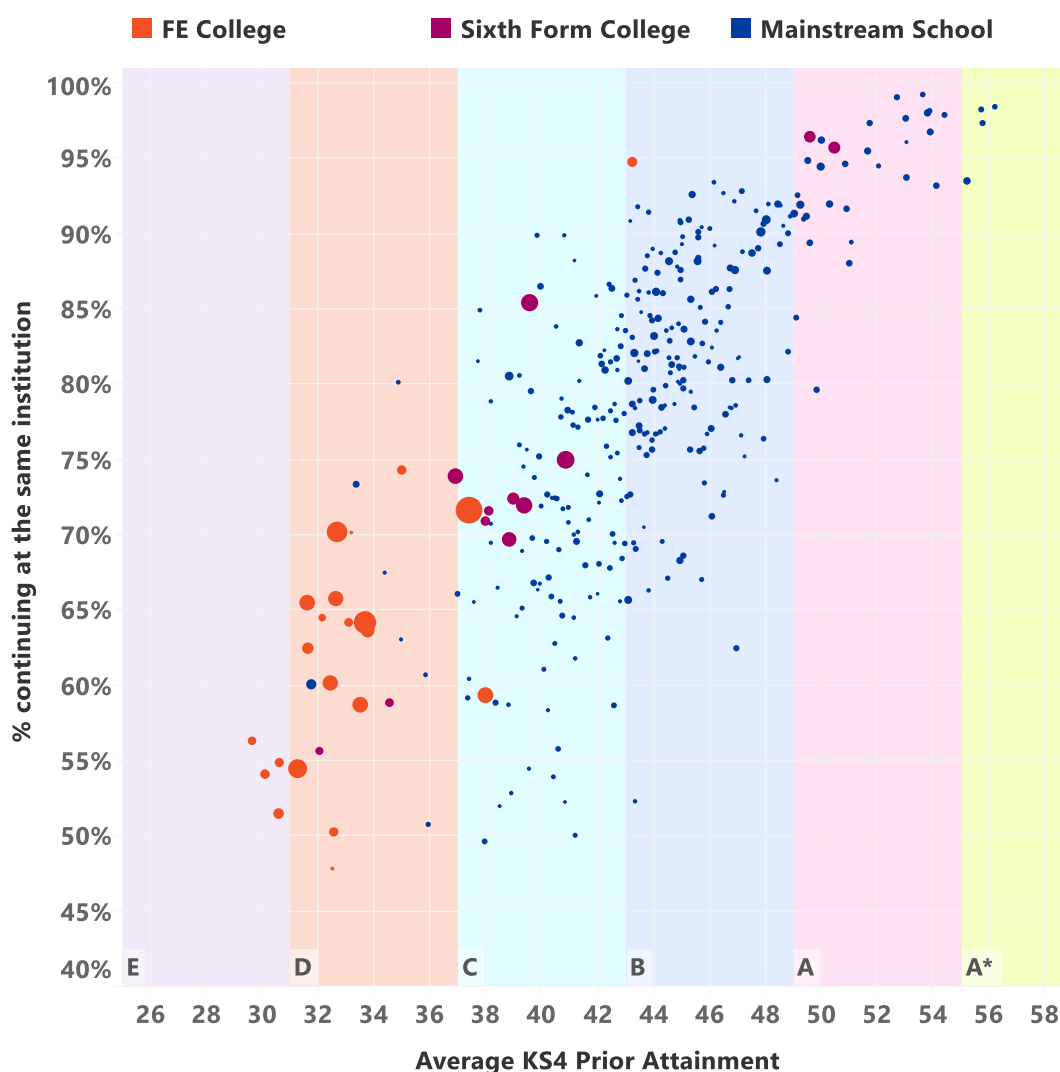
Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

The proportion of students continuing in the same institution between 16 and 17 increases as key stage 4 prior attainment improves. The London averages for each prior attainment band are very similar to the national averages for each band. It is therefore imperative to consider relative differences in prior attainment when looking at progression split by group or pathway in this report.

**Key Fact** As prior attainment increases, students are more likely to stay in the same institution from age 16 to 17

The chart below shows the continuation rates in individual schools and colleges in London and how these relate to the key stage 4 prior attainment of their cohort. Each dot represents an individual FE college (orange dot), sixth form college (purple dot) or school (blue dot). The size of the dot reflects the number of pupils in each institution. Institutions to the right of the chart have cohorts with higher levels of prior attainment from key stage 4.

**Fig 18. Students continuing in the same institution between age 16 and 17 – By institution and prior attainment**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 or 2014/15. Schools and colleges only

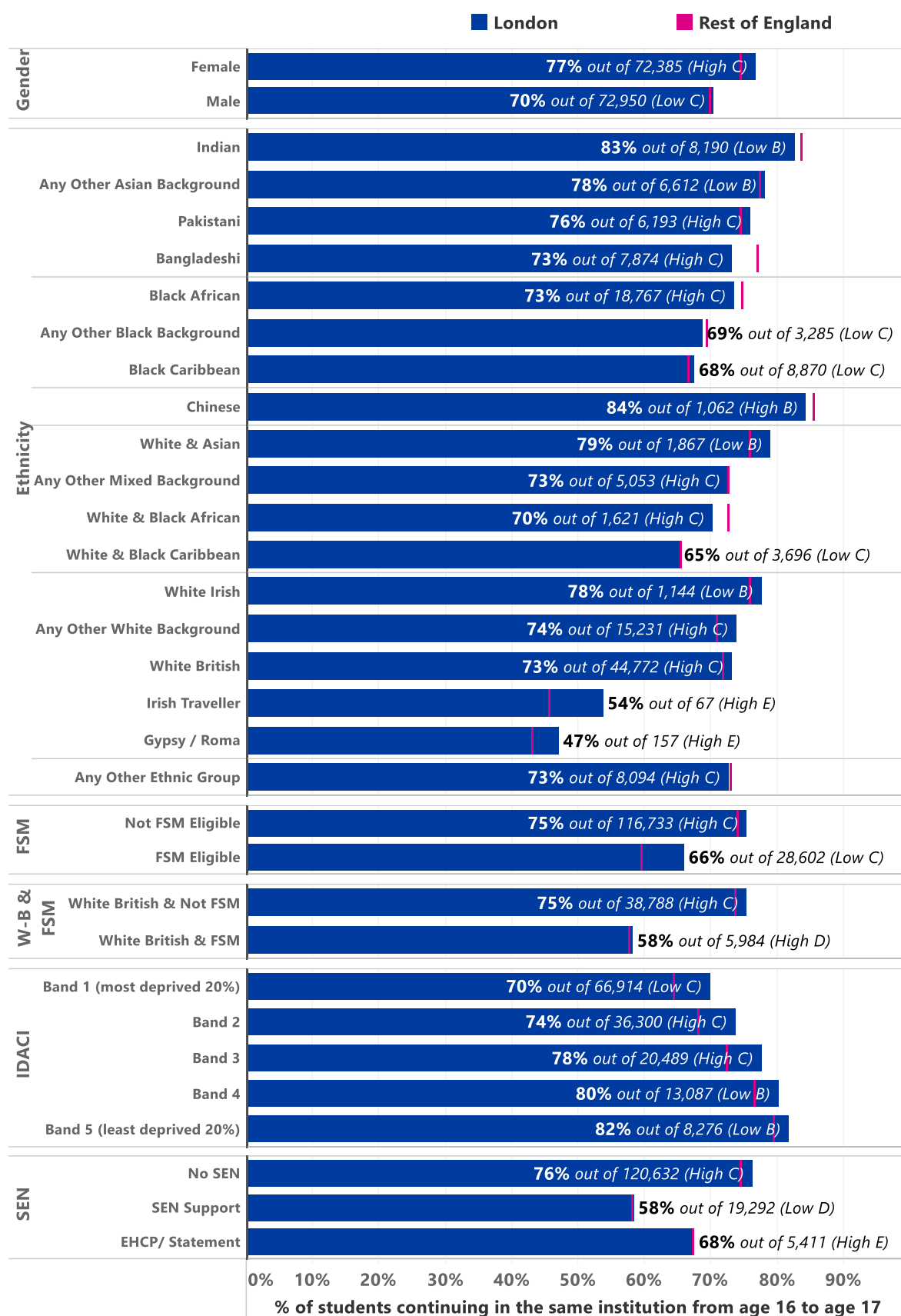
In general, we can see a positive relationship between higher prior attainment and continuation rates since the trend in the dots is from the bottom left of the chart to the top right; in other words, as the average prior attainment of an institution's cohort increases, the likelihood of a student continuing in the same institution between age 16 and 17 increases. However, within each prior attainment band (shown by the vertical coloured bands) we can see a significant variation in continuation rates. For example, schools with cohorts with an average key stage 4 grade of a C have continuation rates ranging from 50% to 90%. This suggests very different approaches between institutions to advice and guidance and student retention into year 13.

*Key  
Fact*

**Age 16 to 17 continuation rates vary dramatically across London** between schools with a similar intake – one school with an average C grade intake had nearly double the continuation rate as another with a C grade intake

We next look at how age 16 to 17 continuation rates vary when broken down by student characteristic. Comparisons to elsewhere in England are shown with a pink line for context.

**Fig 19. Students continuing in the same institution between age 16 and 17 – By student characteristics**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

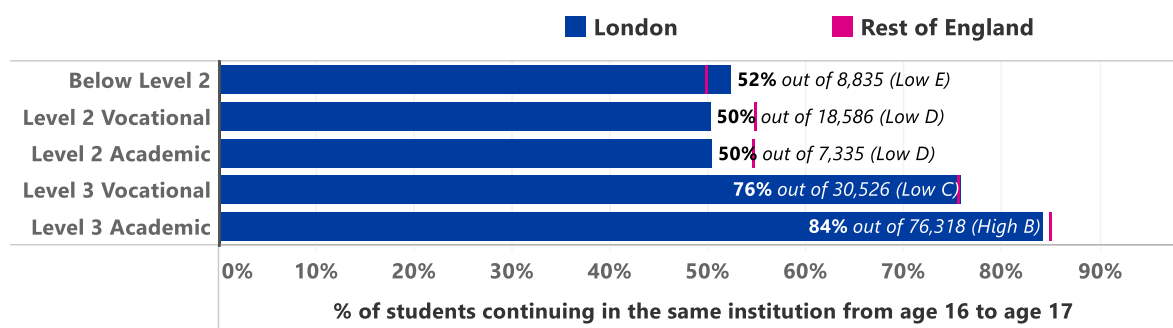
Girls have higher continuation rates in the same institution than boys (77% compared to 70%). The same is true even when controlling for the higher prior attainment of girls.

Ethnic groups with high continuation rates include Indian, any other Asian, Chinese and white and Asian. Groups with lower levels of continuation in the same institution include black Caribbean, white and black Caribbean, and white British free school meal students. Irish traveller and Gypsy / Roma have the lowest continuation rates, but they are very small cohorts. Students on SEN Support have low continuation rates, although this could be explained by their lower prior attainment.

Generally, the performance of different groups in London mirrors the national picture, although London generally has slightly higher continuation rates for each group.

The next chart shows how continuation rates are affected by the pathway undertaken at age 16.

**Fig 20. Post-16 students continuing in same institution between age 16 and 17 – By pathway at age 16**



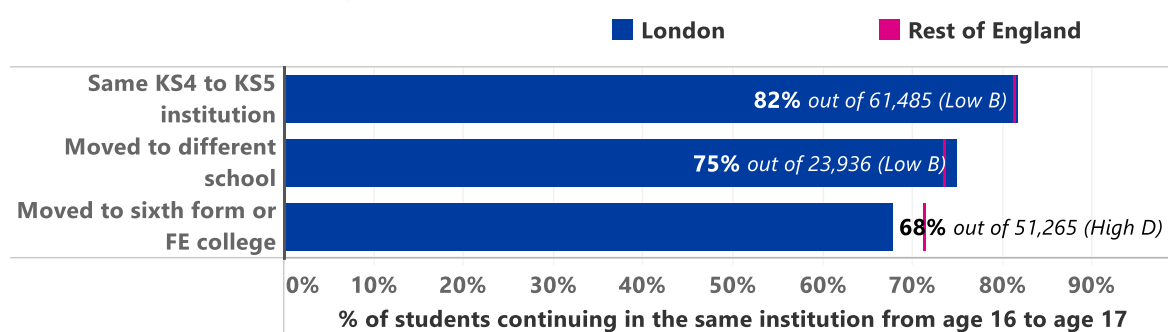
Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

Only around half of London students on programmes at Level 2 continued in the same institution, and this was slightly lower than the national averages. Of those on Level 3 programmes, the continuation rates were higher for those on academic programmes than on vocational. Again, this reflects the levels of prior attainment of these different cohorts.

Refer to case study 2 about Danielle’s experiences of starting an academic programme in a school then dropping out to take up a vocational programme in a college.

The next chart shows whether the change of institution at the end of key stage 4 affects likelihood of continuing in the same institution between age 16 and 17.

**Fig 21. Post-16 students continuing in same institution between age 16 and 17 – by change of institution after key stage 4**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

Students who studied at the same institution in year 12 as they did at key stage 4 are more likely to continue in the same institution between year 12 and 13 than those who moved at the end of key stage 4. This can be explained partly by the lower prior attainment of those who leave and go to a college, since continuation rates are lower for lower attainers. However, when looking at students who move into a different *school* at the end of key stage 4, the continuation rate is still lower (75% compared to 82% of students who remained in the same school after key stage 4). The students who move school at the end of key stage 4 have a similar level of prior attainment as those who stayed in the same school at the end of key stage 4, so, unlike with a college move, prior attainment alone cannot explain the difference in continuation rates.

*Key  
Fact*

Overall, students who studied at the **same institution** in year 11 and year 12 were **more likely** to stay in the **same institution in year 13 than those who moved after year 11**

However, when digging deeper and controlling for prior attainment, students with an average of D to G grade at key stage 4 were actually *more* likely to stay in the same institution between age 16 and 17 if they had changed institution after key stage 4. This could be because they are more likely to be on an unsuitable course if staying at their school, as schools typically offer a more academic range of Level 3 courses.

*Key  
Fact*

**Low attainers** were **more likely** to **continue in the same institution** between age 16 to 17 if they had **changed institution at age 16**

## E. Post-16 outcomes

This section explores the outcomes of London's cohort by the end of key stage 5 compared to the rest of the country. We focus on the achievement of three key measures; the average points scores achieved on Level 3 qualifications, achievement of a full Level 3 by age 19 and the achievement of a full Level 2 by age 19. The analysis shows that:

- Overall, London's Level 3 average points score is not as high as would be expected given its high key stage 4 performance
- However, by drilling down through the data we can see that this is largely to do with the cohort of young people who are included in this measure; in London lower attainers are more likely to do Level 3 courses and more likely to do an academic programme than is the case elsewhere
- A student's ethnicity affects their likelihood of choosing an academic programme with Indian and Pakistani students far more likely than black Caribbean and white British students with similar prior attainment to choose A levels.

## E. Post-16 outcomes

The accountability framework for key stage 5 education used by the government is complex. At key stage 4, the government focusses largely on measures which reflect achievement of Level 2 (i.e. the 'expected level') including EBacc, Attainment 8 and Progress 8. However, there are a bewildering number of different types of outcomes measured in post-16 education, in part a reflection of the different levels of qualifications which students can study. Furthermore, there have been a number of significant changes to the accountability measures in recent years. The current indicators include, but are not limited to:

- Average points scores (awarded to Level 3 qualifications only) split into academic, technical and applied general qualifications
- Achievement of AAB grades at A level, including "facilitating" subjects<sup>12</sup>
- Percentage of Level 3 students completing their main study programme
- Level 3 value-added scores for individual subjects and qualification types
- Achievement of Level 2 in English and maths for students that had not achieved this at key stage 4
- Achievement of a full Level 2 or Level 3 qualification by age 19.

Given this diverse range of indicators, discussing post-16 outcomes can be fraught with complications, and good performance with one indicator in a local authority or region can, at times, have a negative impact on other indicators. In this section we pull together information on some of the key accountability measures to draw conclusions about London's performance in relation to the rest of the country.

### 1. What are the outcomes of Londoners at Level 3?

We first focus on the outcomes of students in London schools and colleges at Level 3 (i.e. A level and equivalent qualifications). This includes analysis of the average points score (APS) per entry<sup>13</sup>, and the achievement of a full Level 3 (two Es or above in A levels or equivalent qualifications). When considering APS it is important to note that this measure is only based on students who took Level 3 qualifications (unlike at key stage 4 where the measures include all pupils). Hence, Level 3 APS scores are very much affected by the composition of the group of students that make up the cohort counted in this measure, and how this composition differs between regions.

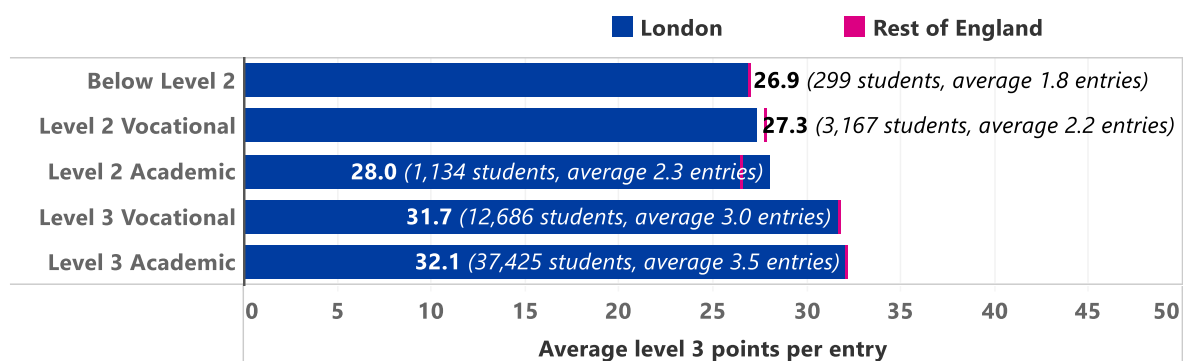
Overall, London was the third highest performing region for Level 3 APS in 2018 and fourth highest in 2017. London was fifth highest for academic APS in 2018. However, given that London was the top performing region at key stage 4 for the equivalent cohorts we would expect performance to be higher than this. Hence, the analysis that follows aims to understand what is driving this, starting by exploring the performance by the different pathway taken at age 16. Each of the students counted in the average points score calculations will have taken at least one Level 3 qualification by age 19, even where they were on a Level 2 or below course in year 12.

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<sup>12</sup> Note that the Russell Group withdrew the list of facilitating subjects in May 2019, but the DfE has currently retained the AAB including 2 facilitating subjects measure for Summer 2019

<sup>13</sup> Note that this analysis is not directly comparable to the London-level analysis published by the DfE due to the cohort being tracked. We largely focus on the outcomes by age 18 of students who were studying in London at age 16

**Fig 22. Level 3 APS – by pathway of study at age 16**

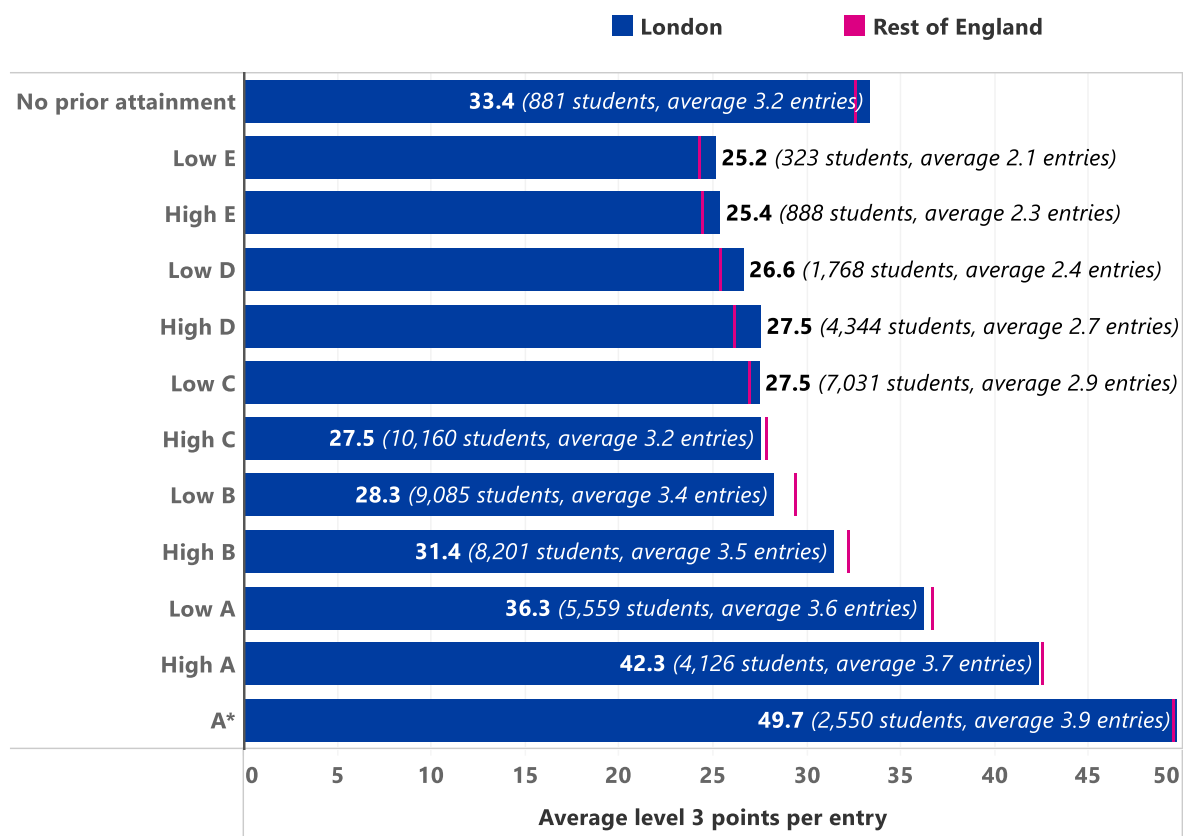


Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 with at least 1 A level entry

Average points scores for those who started on a Level 2 vocational or below Level 2 course at the start of post-16 studies were slightly lower in London than for the equivalent pupils nationally. However, since the average number of Level 3 qualifications taken by students with Level 2 or below is very small, this will have a limited effect on the overall Level 3 performance. When looking at the more significant Level 3 vocational and academic cohorts, London's performance is virtually identical to national in both cases. Based on this, London's performance could be said to be below expectation for both academic and vocational cohorts given London's high performance at key stage 4.

The chart below explores the Level 3 APS split by the average key stage 4 grade.

**Fig 23. Level 3 APS - by key stage 4 prior attainment**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 with at least 1 A level entry

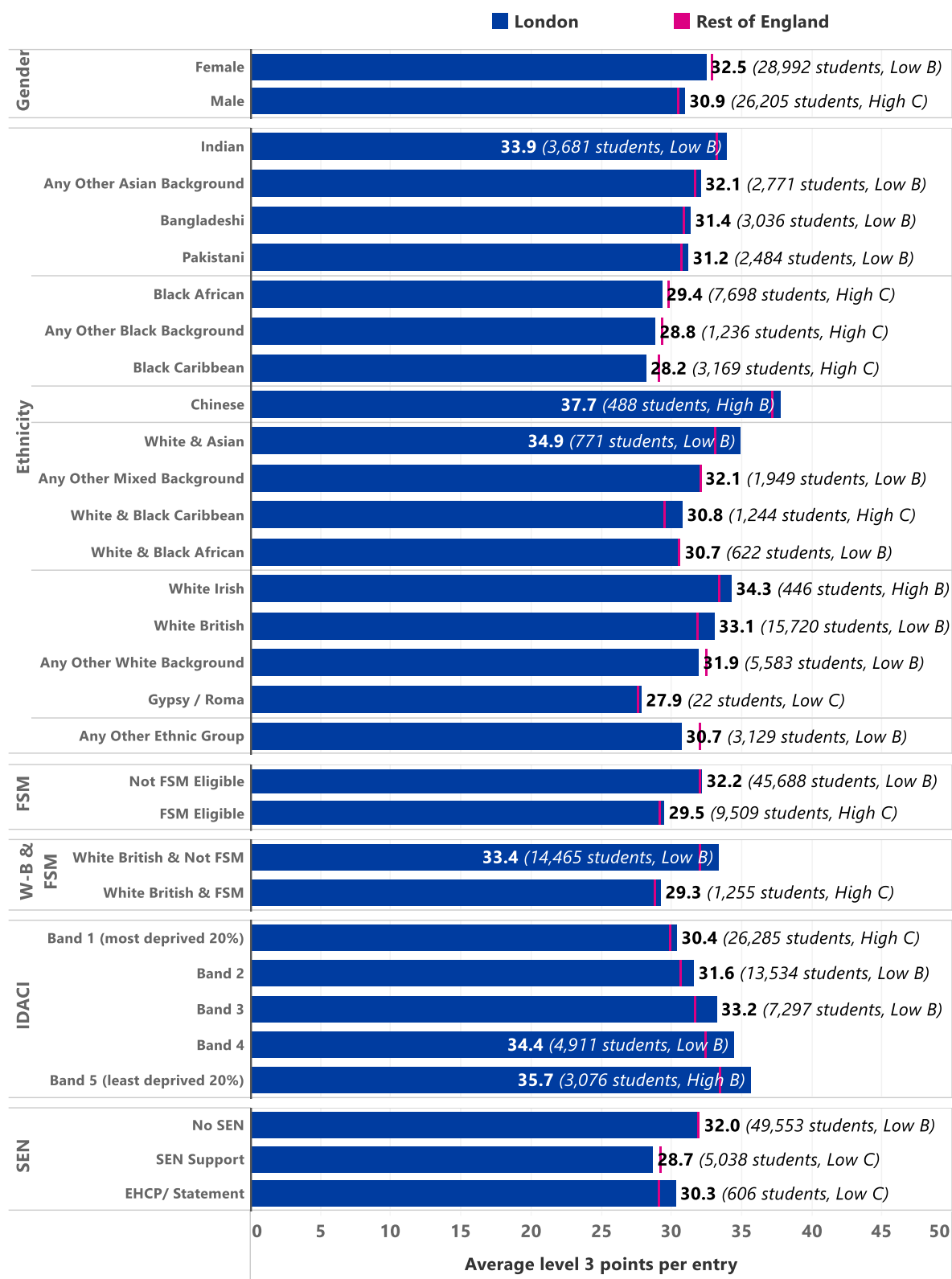
We can see, as expected, that Level 3 APS increases as prior attainment improves. In London, students on a Level 3 course who had lower prior attainment (from a low E to low C) do slightly better than the equivalent group in the rest of England. However, students with a high C or better performed slightly worse than those elsewhere.

*Key  
Fact*

**Lower prior attainers in London perform better in Level 3 APS than their peers in the rest of England, but higher prior attainers perform worse**

The next chart looks at Level 3 APS outcomes split by student characteristic.

**Fig 24. Level 3 APS by pupil characteristics<sup>14</sup>**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 with at least 1 A level entry

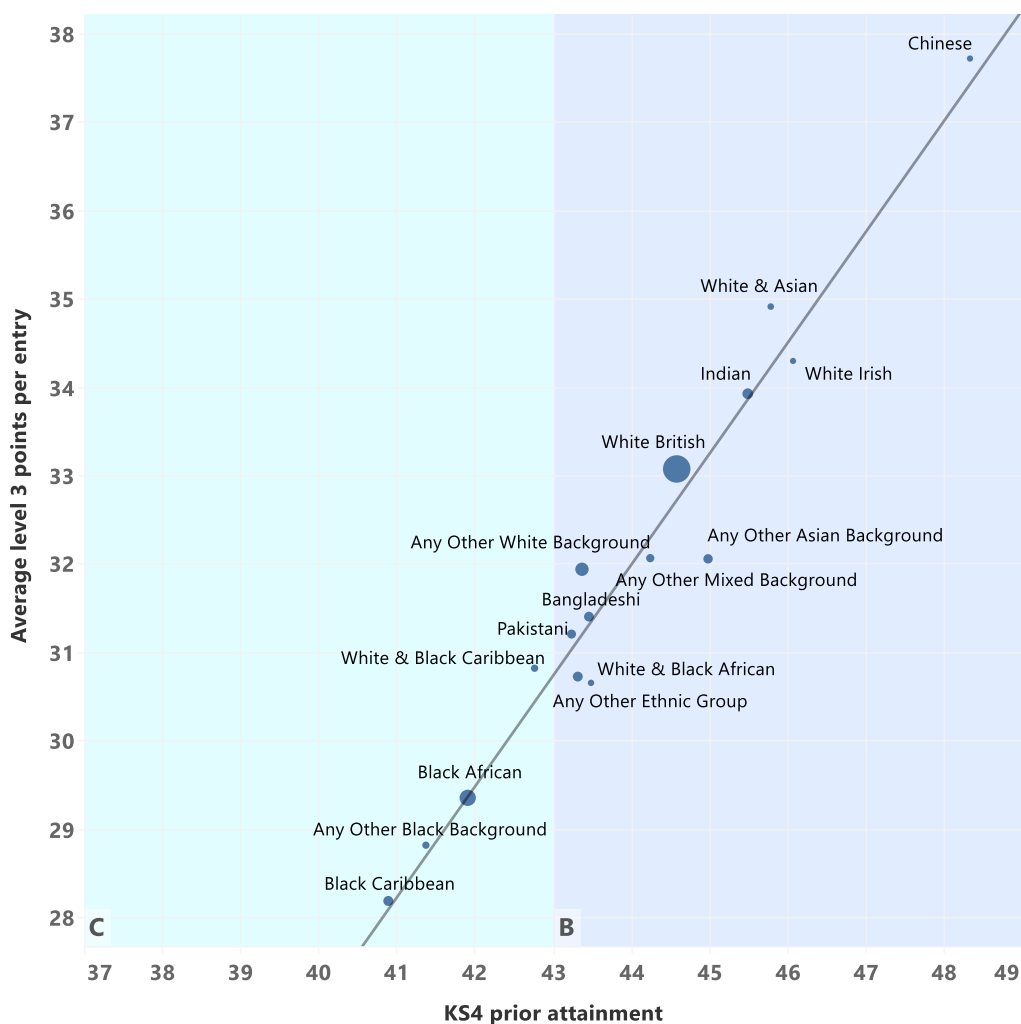
<sup>14</sup> The DfE does not carry out analysis of key stage 5 outcomes by pupil characteristic. Our analysis uses the characteristics of pupils in year 11 as a proxy for their characteristics at the end of key stage 5. In many instances (such as gender and ethnicity) this should not have changed, although characteristics such as SEN status and free school meals may have changed, albeit not at a level that should materially affect the London level findings.

We can see from the chart above that virtually all of the characteristic groups performed broadly in line, or slightly better than the equivalent cohort in the rest of England. London ranked between third and sixth out of the nine regions for most of these groups, so London’s relative underperformance does not appear to be down to a specific underperforming group compared with what is happening elsewhere in England. The big exception to these middle rankings was white British. London was the top performing region for white British students, performing particularly well for white British pupils *not* eligible for free school meals.

The larger ethnic groups which performed slightly below the equivalent groups in the rest of the country include black African, black Caribbean and any other black (these are also the lowest performing significant<sup>15</sup> groups nationally), as well as “any other ethnic group”.

However, it is important to consider the prior attainment of each of these cohorts when evaluating their outcomes since certain groups are over-represented by students with lower prior attainment. This is depicted on the chart below. Each ethnic group is plotted according to the prior attainment of the cohort at key stage 4 (left to right), and their average point score per entry at key stage 5 (bottom to top). The dot size reflects the size of the cohort in London.

**Fig 25. Level 3 APS of different ethnic groups – by prior attainment**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 in London with at least 1 A level entry

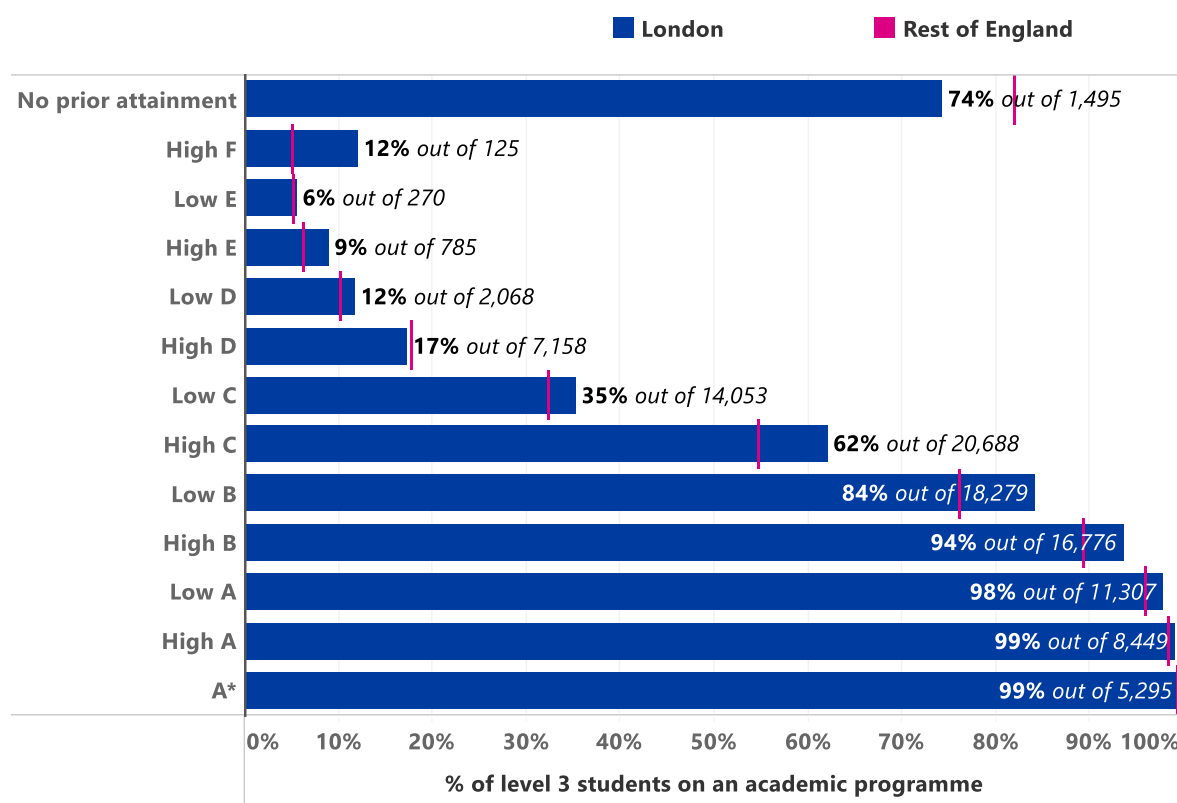
<sup>15</sup> Gypsy / Roma and Irish Traveller students average APS are lower but both are very small cohorts

As would be expected, as key stage 4 prior attainment improves, so does Level 3 APS, and this is reflected by the dotted line. Groups that are below the line have a lower key stage 5 APS than would be expected given their key stage 4 performance. In London we can see that the three black groups highlighted earlier are very close to the line, meaning their performance is broadly in line with what would be expected given their prior attainment. However, each of these black cohorts in London has both a higher key stage 4 prior attainment and a lower key stage 5 APS than their respective group nationally.

It's important to understand how the composition of London's cohort affects its overall performance. London's black groups perform only slightly below black pupils nationally and only slightly below expectation given their prior attainment. However, because London is considerably more ethnically diverse than other regions<sup>16</sup>, lower performing ethnic groups result in a reduction of London's overall performance. We describe this as the "composition effect". London's performance for non-black groups is, in fact, the highest nationally.

We next explore the relative take up of academic and vocational programmes of study of Level 3 students in London, a key factor that can affect APS. We can see how this differs in London to the rest of England to understand whether this can explain London's relative underperformance at key stage 5.

**Fig 26. Proportion of Level 3 students on academic courses – by prior attainment**



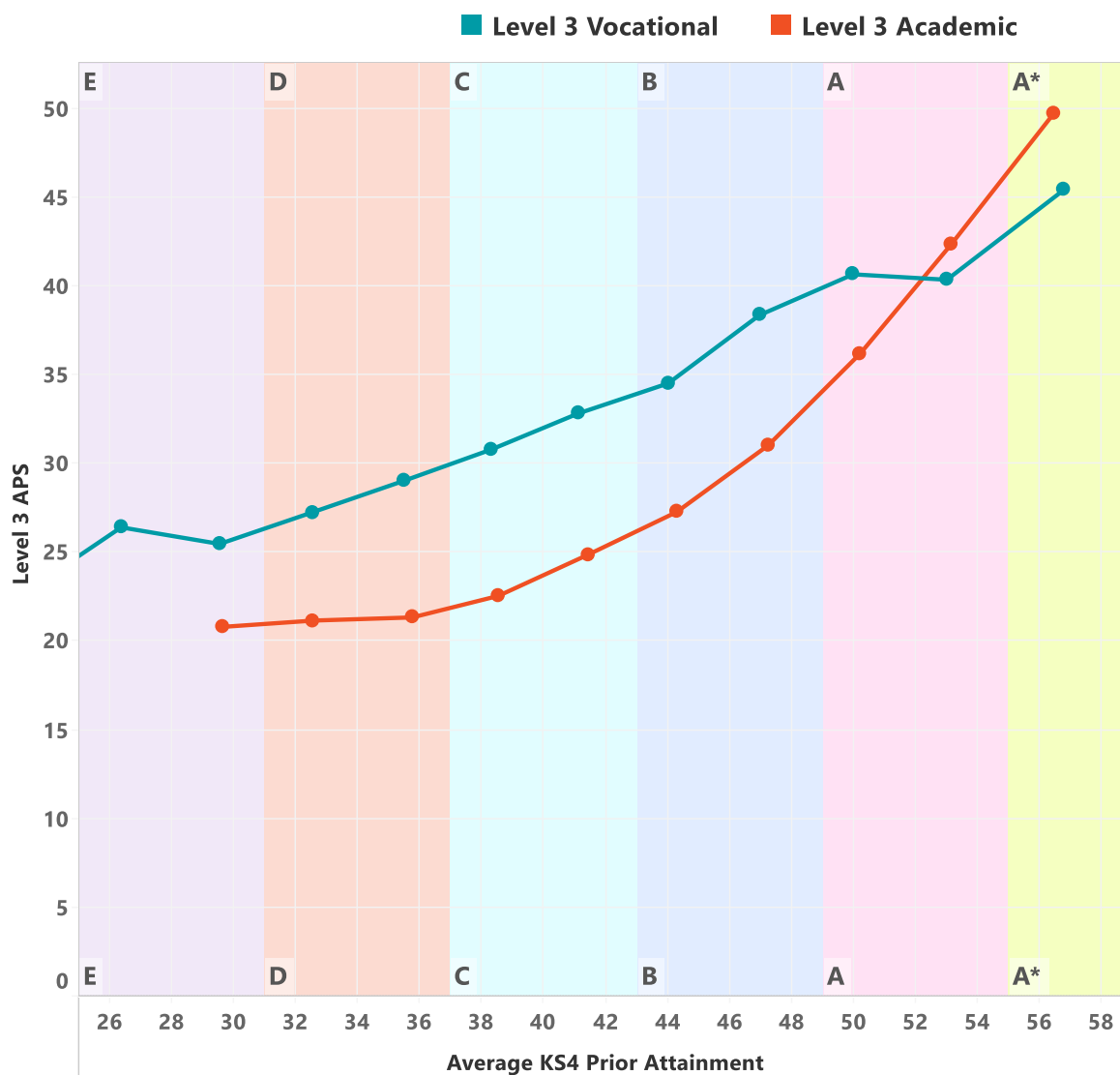
Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

Overall, as prior attainment increases, the proportion of the cohort on an academic programme increases. The chart above shows that, in London, when controlling for prior attainment, students are more likely to enrol in an academic programme than they are elsewhere in the country. For

<sup>16</sup> The black population in England and Wales was 3.3% compared to 13.3% in London (Census 2011)

example, in London, 84% of Level 3 students with a low B average at key stage 4 were on an academic programme compared with 76% elsewhere. This finding is significant since, when controlling for prior attainment, prior to 2018 average point scores were higher for vocational programmes than academic<sup>17</sup>. This is shown in the chart below; for pupils who achieved up to a grade A average at key stage 4, Level 3 average points scores were higher for vocational programmes than they were for academic programmes.

**Fig 27. Level 3 average points score by prior attainment for academic and vocational programmes in London**

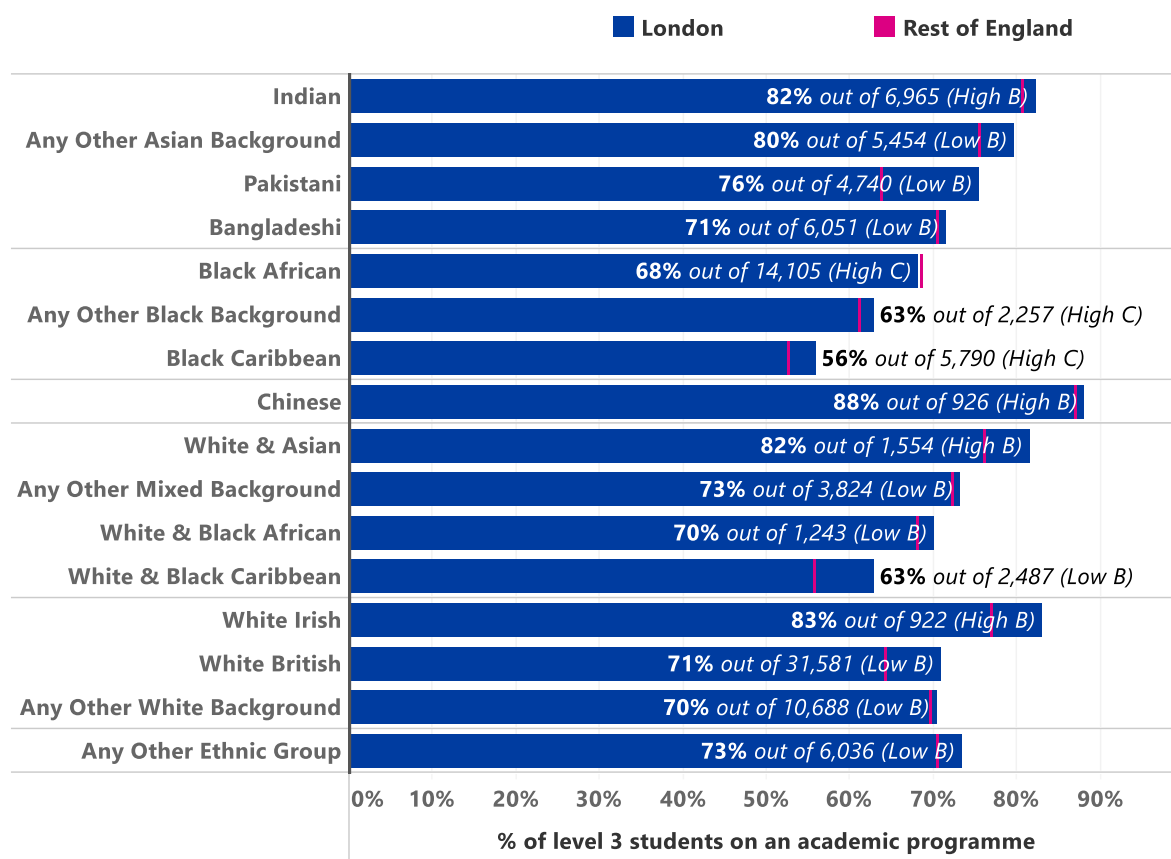


Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 with at least 1 A level entry

The next chart examines whether there may be a cultural dimension to the choice of academic or vocational programme by looking at the proportion of academic programme take up, split by ethnicity. The text in brackets shows the average key stage 4 prior attainment grade for each group.

<sup>17</sup> Although this may change with 2018 results (which were not included in the NPD data for this project) since Level 3 BTEC results dropped quite significantly in 2018 following changes in the way they were assessed

**Fig 28. Proportion of Level 3 students on academic courses – by ethnicity**

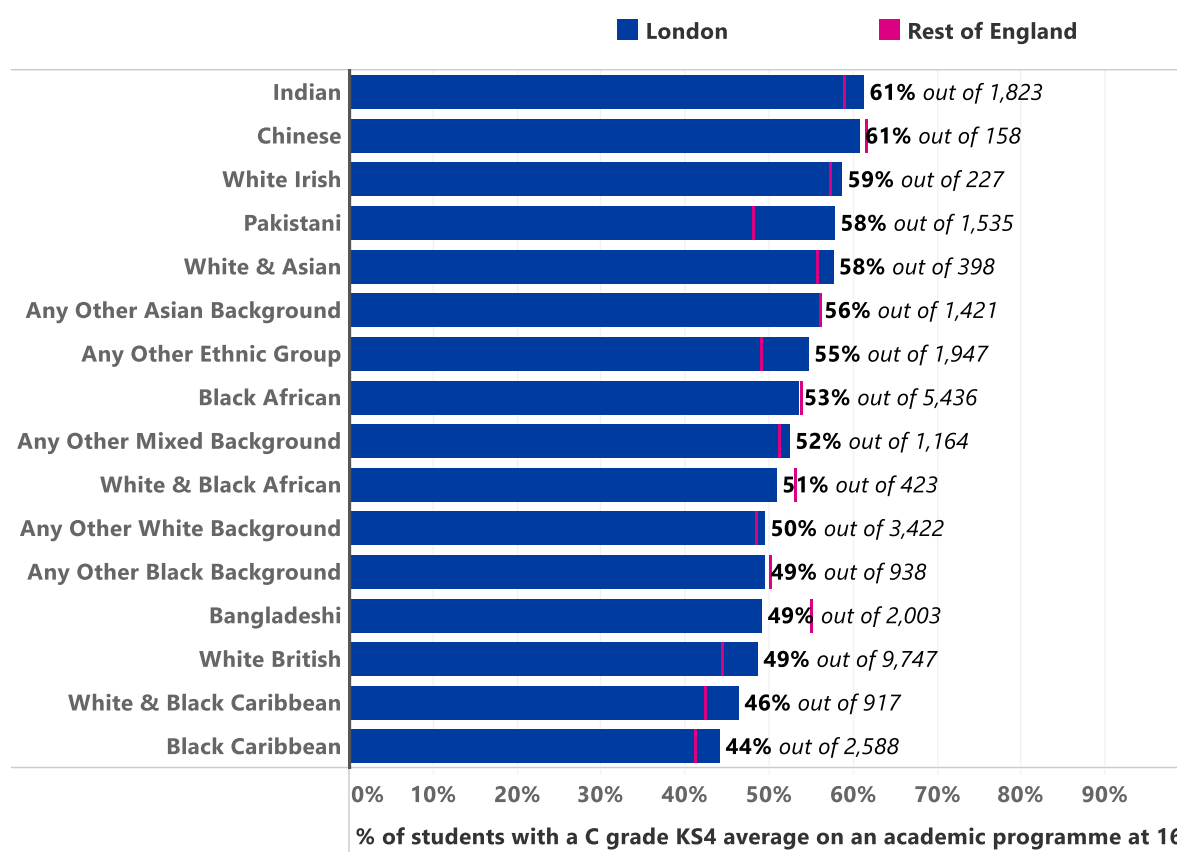


Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

The groups with the highest take up of academic programmes in London are Chinese, white Irish, Indian, other Asian, white & Asian. These are the groups with the highest take up nationally too. However, virtually all ethnic groups are more likely to be on an academic programme in London than they are elsewhere. The exception is black African. Groups with a far higher academic enrolment rate than their comparators elsewhere in the country include Pakistani, white and black Caribbean and white British.

It is important to understand prior attainment of different groups in this analysis since this is a key determinant of enrolment on to academic courses. However, the chart below shows that even when controlling for prior attainment (in this case by only looking at students with a C grade average at key stage 4) certain ethnic groups are still far more likely to be on an academic programme at age 16.

**Fig 29. Proportion of students with an average C grade at key stage 4 on academic courses at age 16 – by ethnicity**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

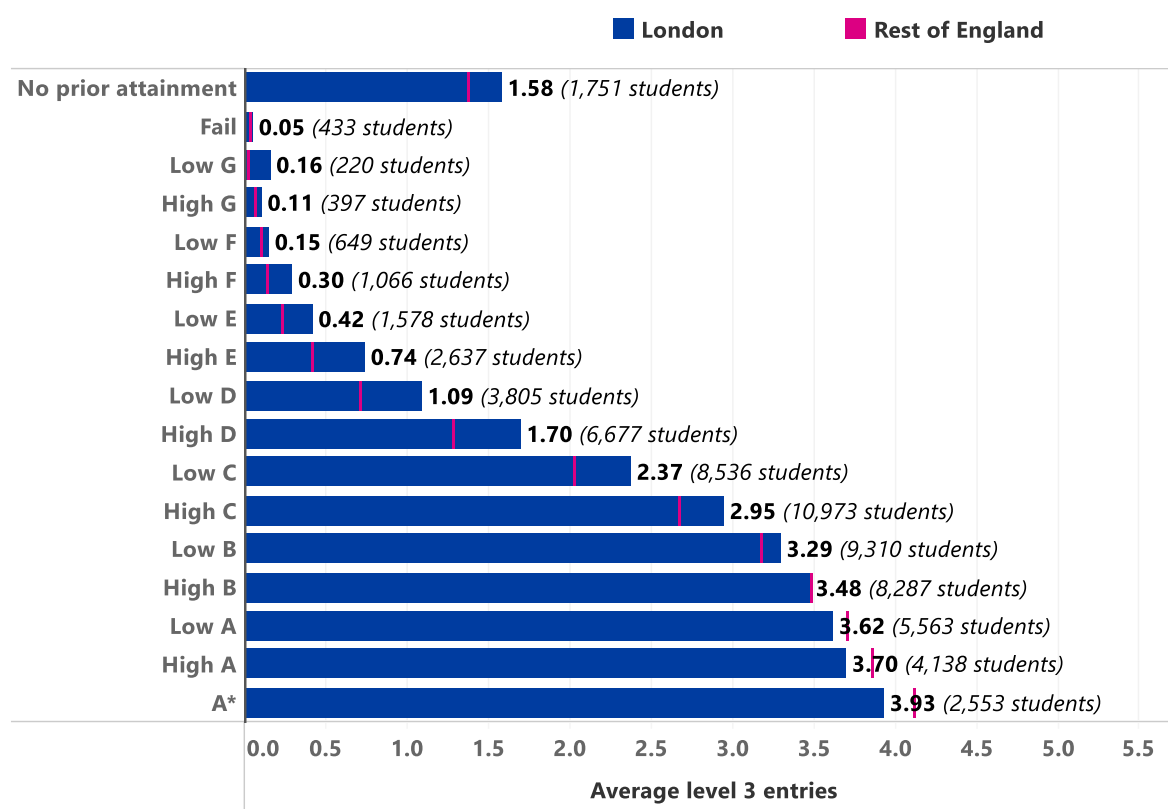
The chart shows that, when controlling for prior attainment, Asian groups are more likely to choose an academic programme than other ethnicities. For example, of Indian students who achieved an average C grade at key stage 4, 61% were on academic programmes at age 16. This is very different to black Caribbean students who achieved a C grade at key stage 4 - only 44% of these students were on an academic programme at 16.

**Key Fact** Of students who achieved grade C at key stage 4, **Indian and Chinese students were far more likely (61%)** to be on an academic programme at 16 compared to **black Caribbean students (44%)**

Students with a C grade at key stage 4 are frequently those who are choosing between academic and vocational courses post-16. Given the variation in the above chart, it is possible that as well as the policies of the post-16 institution, the final choice is influenced by parental and student perceptions. This could suggest that there is a cultural perception of academic courses being more desirable for Asian groups in London, or that there is less awareness of options outside of traditional A levels within these groups.

We next look at the number of Level 3 courses studied in London compared with elsewhere. Overall in London, on average post-16 students study a higher number of Level 3 courses (2.61) than students elsewhere (2.30). However, as before, we need to control for prior attainment to understand what is driving this. This is shown in the following chart.

**Fig 30. Number of courses studied – by prior attainment**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14

London’s very high prior attainers (A grade or better at key stage 4) take fewer courses in their programme of study than the very high prior attainers in the rest of England. However, students with a Low B or lower starting point study more courses in London than elsewhere. What this means for Level 3 APS is significant; London has a higher proportion of students with lower prior attainment included in the Level 3 APS calculation than is the case elsewhere<sup>18</sup>. Because these students have a lower Level 3 APS than those with higher prior attainment, this has the effect of pulling down London’s Level 3 APS score. In other words, it is the composition effect of London’s Level 3 cohort which affects London’s relatively low ranking; these students are actually doing relatively well given their starting points.

This also has an implication for the achievement of Level 3 by 19 measure. Since this measure requires the achievement of at least two Es or equivalent, it is beneficial for London’s ranking that students with lower prior attainment are more likely to study at least two qualifications than they are elsewhere in country.

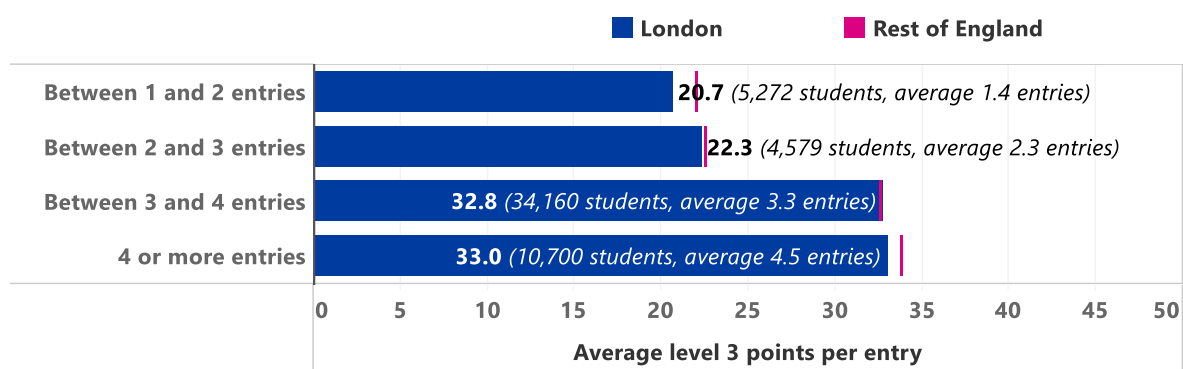
**Key Fact** London students are more likely to study at least two Level 3 qualifications than students elsewhere; this bolsters London’s attainment of Level 3 by 19 which requires the achievement of at least two Es

The chart below shows that, in London, those with between one and three entries have a lower APS than they do elsewhere in England which may reflect an extra level of stretch for these lower

<sup>18</sup> Students must have completed at least one Level 3 qualification to be included in the APS calculations

attaining students. This negatively affects the APS achieved, but without negatively affecting the achievement of Level 3 by 19.

**Fig 31. APS – by number of courses studied**



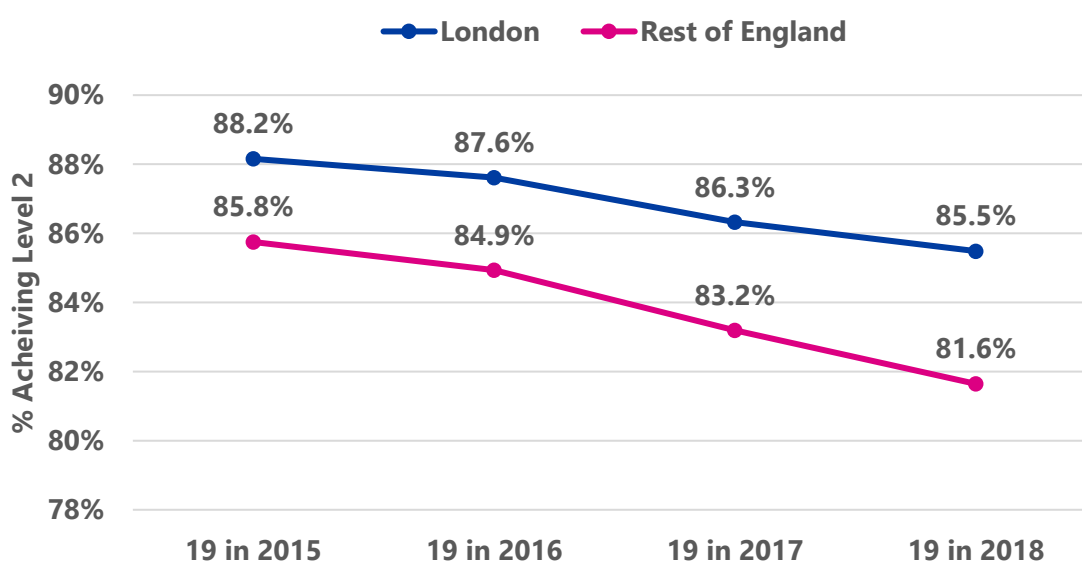
Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 with at least 1 A level entry

Overall, therefore, the quantitative analysis suggests that London’s relative underperformance at key stage 5 (given their excellent key stage 4 performance) largely reflects the extra stretch given to London students with lower levels of prior attainment who are more likely to do academic courses and do more Level 3 courses on average than their peers in the rest of England.

## 2. What are the outcomes of Londoners at Level 2?

The government monitors the achievement of a full Level 2 by age 19 through their accountability statistics. They publish both the overall achievement of Level 2, plus the achievement of Level 2 including English and maths, as shown in the following two charts. The recommendation from the Wolf Review for learners to study English and maths post-16 if they hadn’t already achieved Level 2 pre-16 was adopted by the government to become a condition of funding<sup>19</sup>.

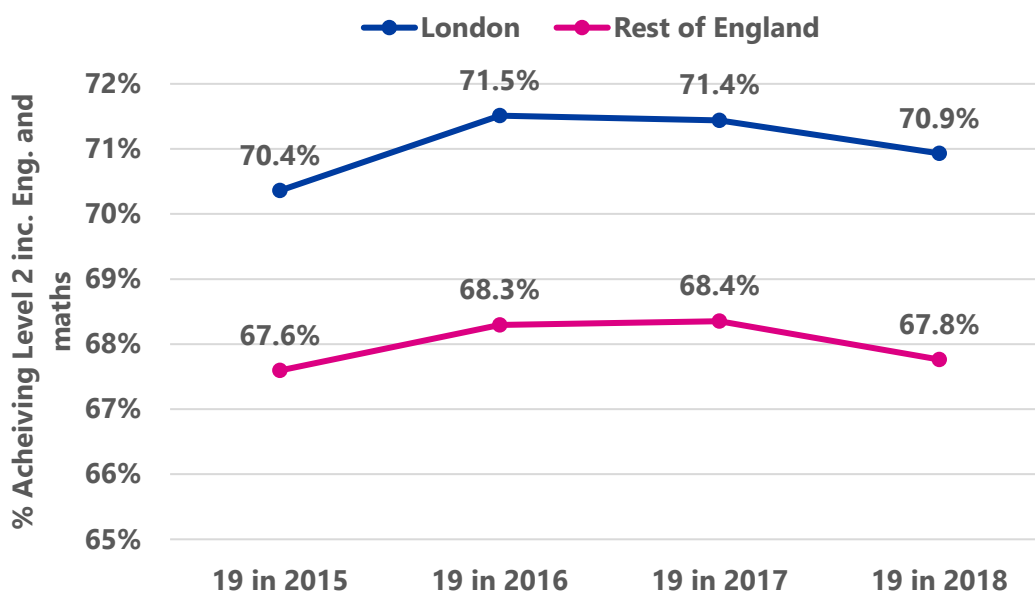
**Fig 32. Overall achievement of Level 2 by age 19**



<sup>19</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-maths-and-english-condition-of-funding>

Source: [DfE data](#) on Level 2 and 3 attainment by young people aged 19

**Fig 33. Overall achievement of Level 2 by age 19 including English and maths**



Source: [DfE data](#) on Level 2 and 3 attainment by young people aged 19

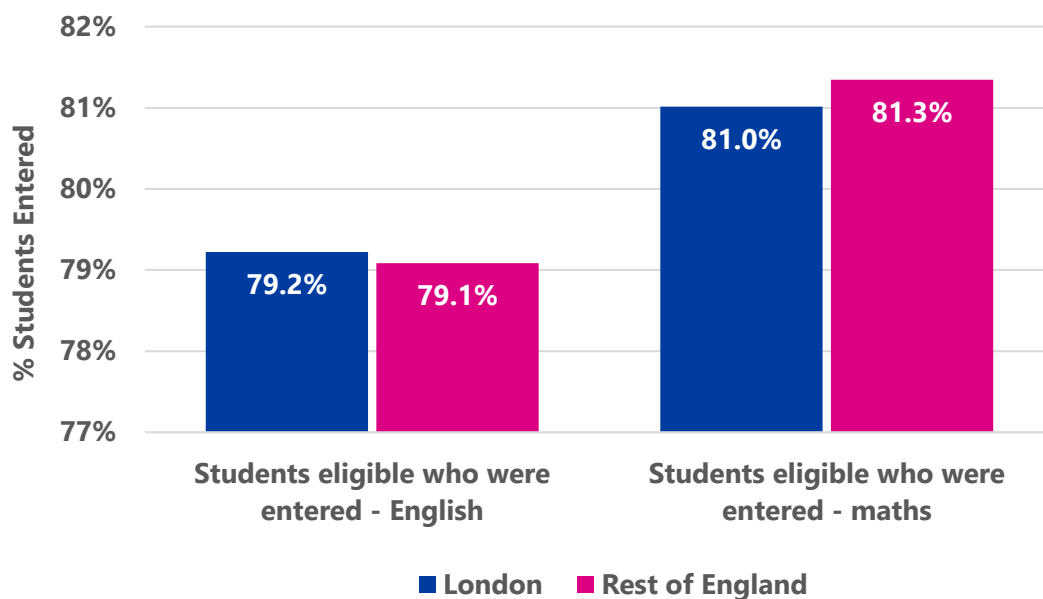
London consistently performs better than the rest of England with regard to both of these measures. For the cohort who were age 19 in 2018, 85.5% of London students achieved Level 2 compared with just 81.6% elsewhere. When including English and maths, the figures were lower with 70.9% of London students achieving compared with 67.8% in the rest of England. London's better performance is in line with its strong performance at key stage 4. Both charts also reflect recent policy changes which have affected the overall number of students achieving Level 2. However, London has fallen by a slightly smaller amount than the rest of England in both statistics, and published data for the 2016 cohort shows around 15% of learners in London are achieving their Level 2 between the ages of 16 and 19, comparable to the national average.

In the context of planning for further adult education beyond age 19, it's important to note that this still leaves around 30% of the cohort who do not have a full Level 2 including English and maths.

**Key Fact**

**Around 30% of London students do not achieve a full Level 2 including English and maths by age 19**

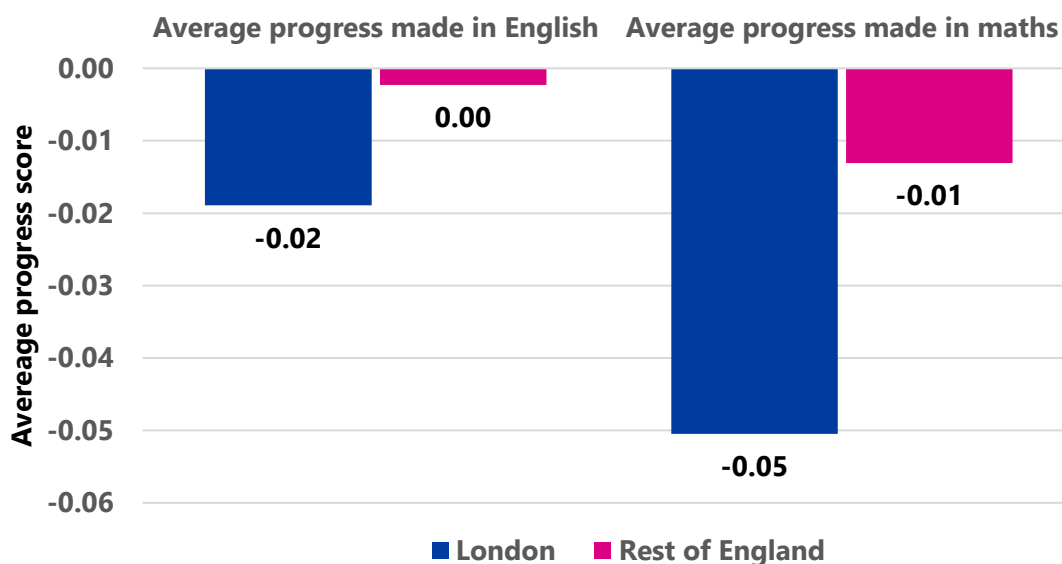
**Fig 34. Proportion of eligible students taking Level 2 English and maths post-16**



Source: Derived from DfE performance table data in 2018

The government measures the proportion of students who should be studying English or maths post-16 that actually did. London students are entered for these qualifications post-16 at broadly the same rates as their peers elsewhere in the country. Again, it is important to note that a proportion of learners who are eligible for this measure are currently not being entered for these qualifications (this will include students who are exempt).

**Fig 35. Progress made in Level 2 English and maths post-16**



Source: Derived from DfE performance table data in 2018

For the population of students eligible to be included in the English and maths progress measures post-16, the government tracks what their outcome on these courses was. This is broken down by those learners who 'improved' their point scores (grade), those who stayed the same and those who lowered their scores. Learners who did not sit a qualification are given a

progress score of -1. The figures can then be evaluated as the change in the proportion of a grade which students exhibit between the end of key stage 4 and the end of key stage 5.

London students show slightly worse progress in English than students in the rest of England. However, the variation among other regions of England is considerable and so these figures are actually better than four of the other regions. The picture looks worse in maths although again, other regions of England do perform worse here than the capital.

## F. Subject-level analysis

This section explores how the choice of subject area affects the progression and achievement measures explored in the previous sections.

The analysis shows that:

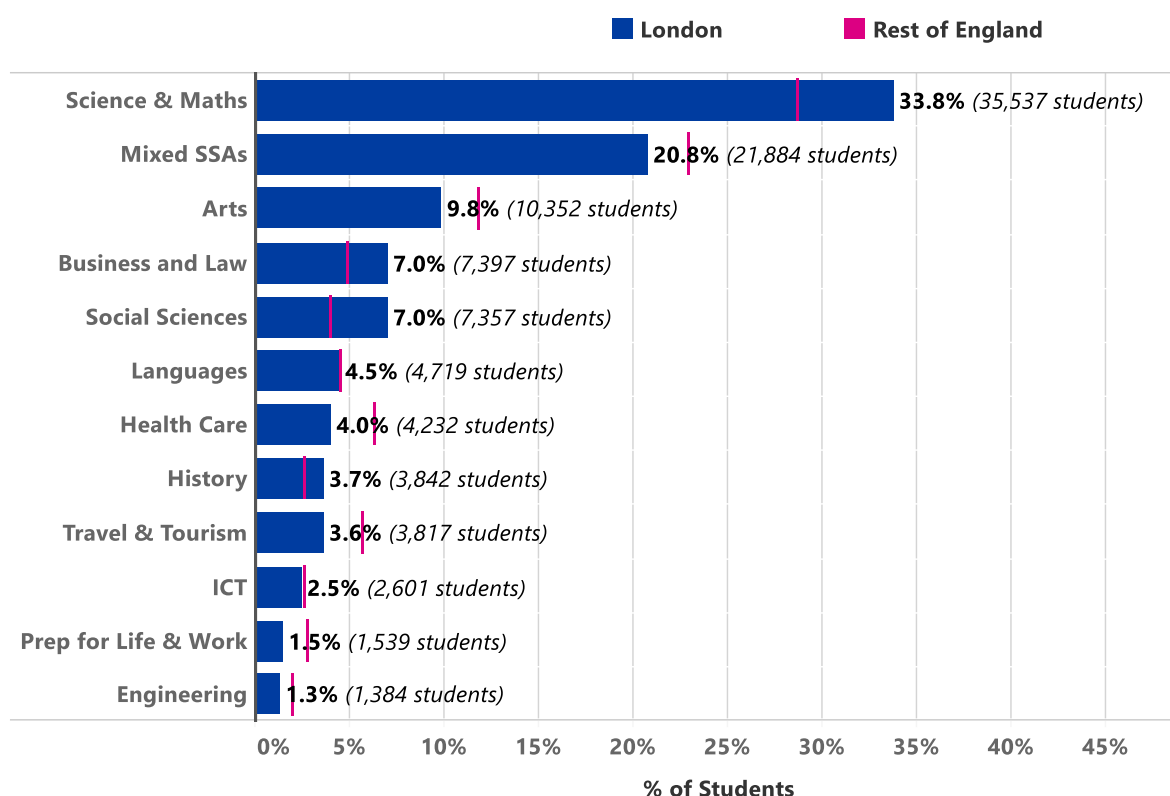
- Students in London are more likely than those elsewhere to study academic subjects including science and maths, social sciences and business and law, but less likely to study vocational subjects such as health care and travel and tourism
- Progression and outcome figures in London are broadly in line with the national picture when split by subject; the main exceptions are higher levels of progression in London from Level 2 courses in science and maths, languages and business and law
- Academic subjects with higher key stage 5 average points scores are those with cohorts with higher prior attainment at key stage 4. This pattern is not true for vocational subjects however.

# F. Subject-level analysis

The following analysis is based on the volume of qualifications in each sector subject area (SSA); where a student takes an even number of qualifications from different subject areas they will be classed in "mixed SSAs". In much of the following analysis, the mixed SSA data is not shown, since it is hard to draw firm conclusions from these students.

## 1. What subjects are being studied in London at Level 3?

Fig 36. Subject area of main Level 3 study programme in London at age 16



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Covers mainstream schools and colleges only.

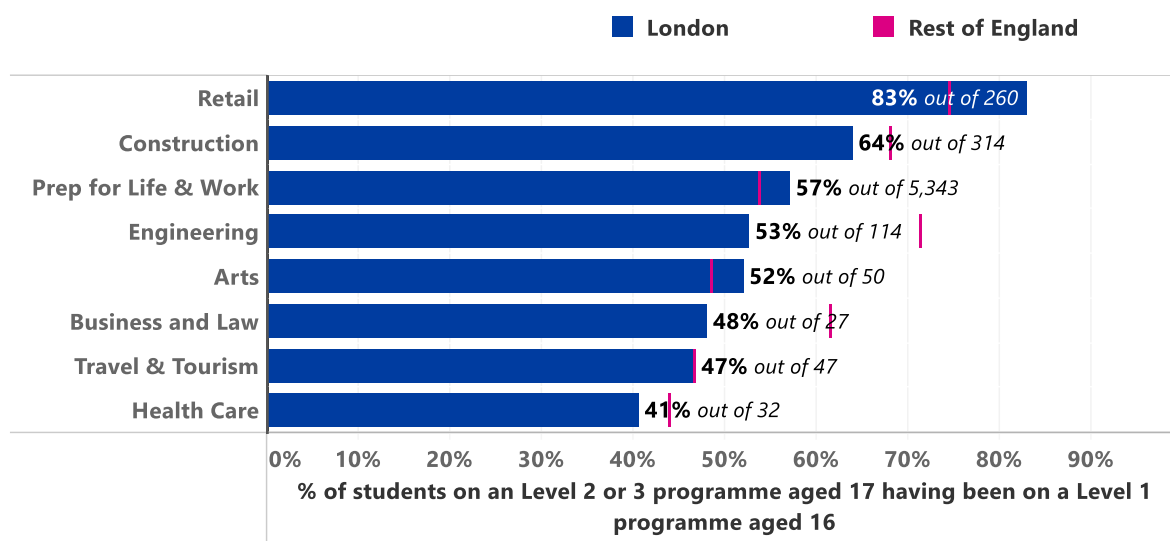
We can see from the chart above that the main areas of study for students in London differ from the rest of England in a number of key ways. Firstly, a higher proportion of London students are studying science and maths (33.8% compared to 28.6%), as well as social sciences (7.0% compared to 3.9%), business and law (7.0% compared to 4.9%) and, to a lesser extent, history. These subjects tend to be academic qualifications so may be partly a result of more London students taking these kinds of qualifications.

Conversely, there are other subjects which London students appear to be studying in smaller proportions when compared to the rest of England. These subjects include vocational subjects such as health care (which incorporates childcare), travel and tourism, and engineering.

## 2. How does the subject studied affect progression rates?

The following charts look at the progression from Level 1 and Level 2 courses to a higher level, split by SSA.

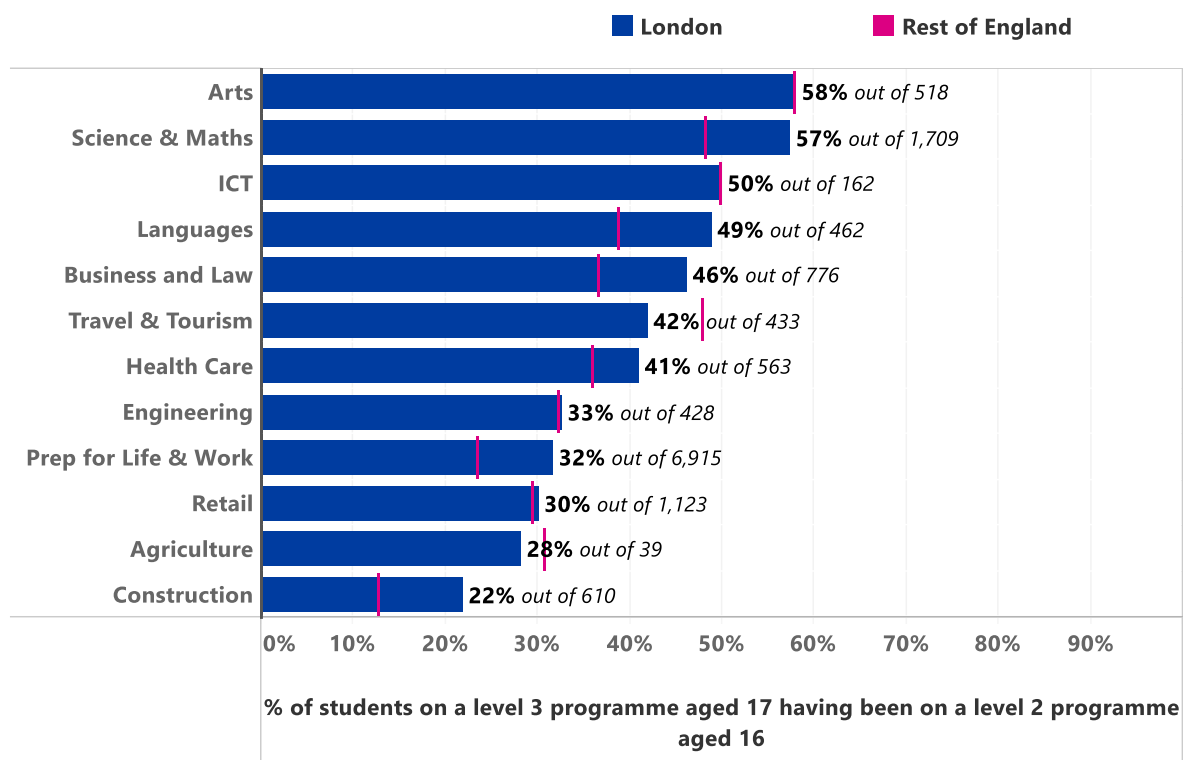
**Fig 37. Progression from Level 1 or lower courses at age 16 - By subject area**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

By SSA, the highest *volume* of Level 1 learners who progressed on to additional studies at age 17 were from preparation for life and work. Preparation for life and work is largely made up of literacy and numeracy qualifications. The highest *proportion* of learners progressing from Level 1 was in retail, with 83% of students in London progressing to a higher level of study at age 17.

**Fig 38. Progression from Level 2 courses at age 16 - By subject area**

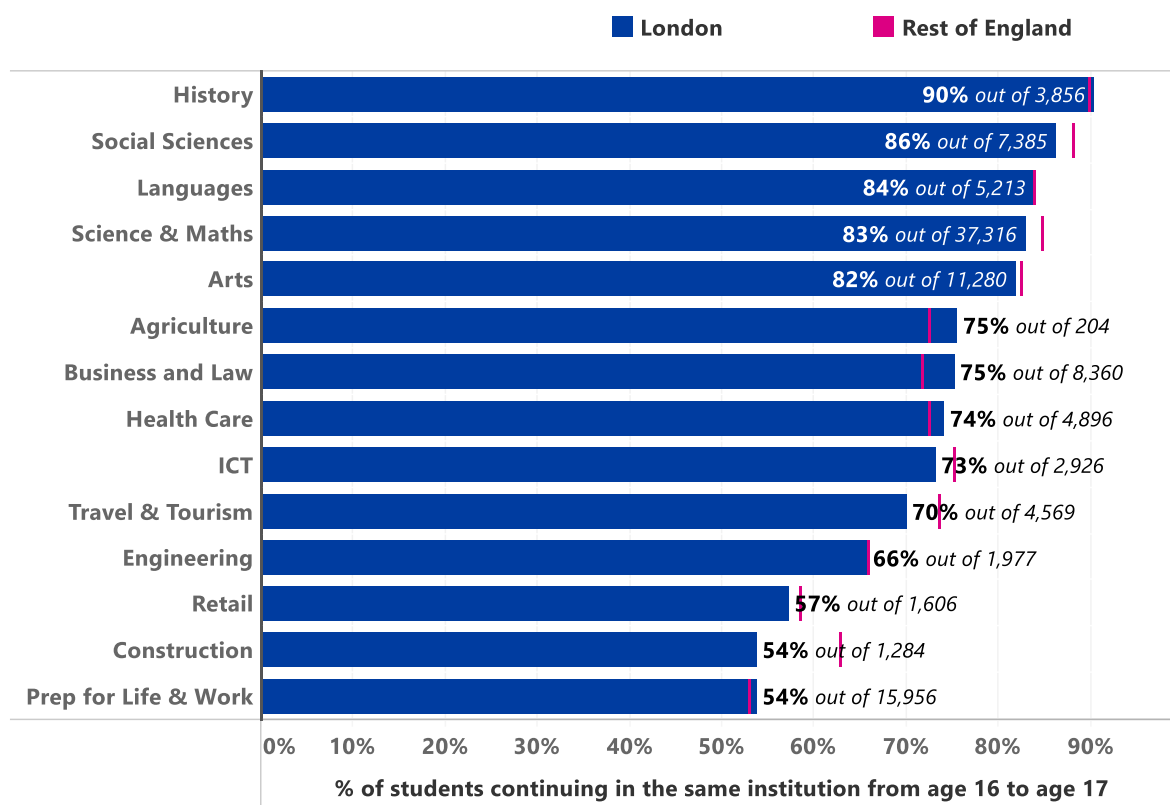


Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

In London, greater numbers of students in total progress from Level 2 at age 16 to Level 3 at age 17, and London students generally outperform the rest of England in terms of the proportions progressing when this is viewed by subject area. Progression is considerably higher in London for science and maths (57% compared to 48% elsewhere), languages (49% compared to 39%) and business and law (46% compared to 36%). Only students from courses in travel and tourism, and a small number in agriculture, in the capital appear to progress at a lower rate than their peers elsewhere in England.

We next look at how continuation rates in the same institution between age 16 and 17 are affected by subject choice.

**Fig 39. Post-16 students continuing in same institution between age 16 and 17 – By subject area**



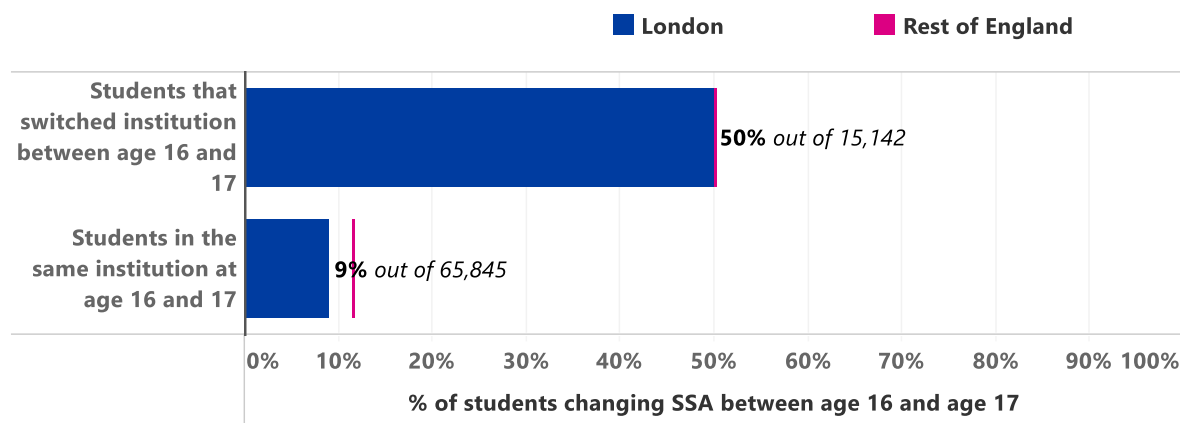
Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

In terms of students continuing at the same institutions between age 16 and age 17, we can see that the higher percentages in the above chart are for academic subjects. This ties to the previous finding that continuation rates are higher for students in school sixth forms and sixth form college (who tend to offer more academic provision than FE colleges). London sees slightly smaller proportions of students staying on in the same institution for ICT (73% compared with 75% elsewhere), travel and tourism (70% compared with 74% elsewhere), retail (57% compared with 58% elsewhere) and construction (54% compared with 63% elsewhere) courses. However, this could be affected by students who change their mind on the subject they want to study, or it could be students who are encouraged to move as they progress to take advantage of better provision at other institutions.

### 3. What type of learners change subject?

We can look at the balance of subjects a student is studying at age 16 and compare this with what they study at age 17 to understand the extent to which they change their mind. The chart below shows how a change of subject choice is linked to a change in institution.

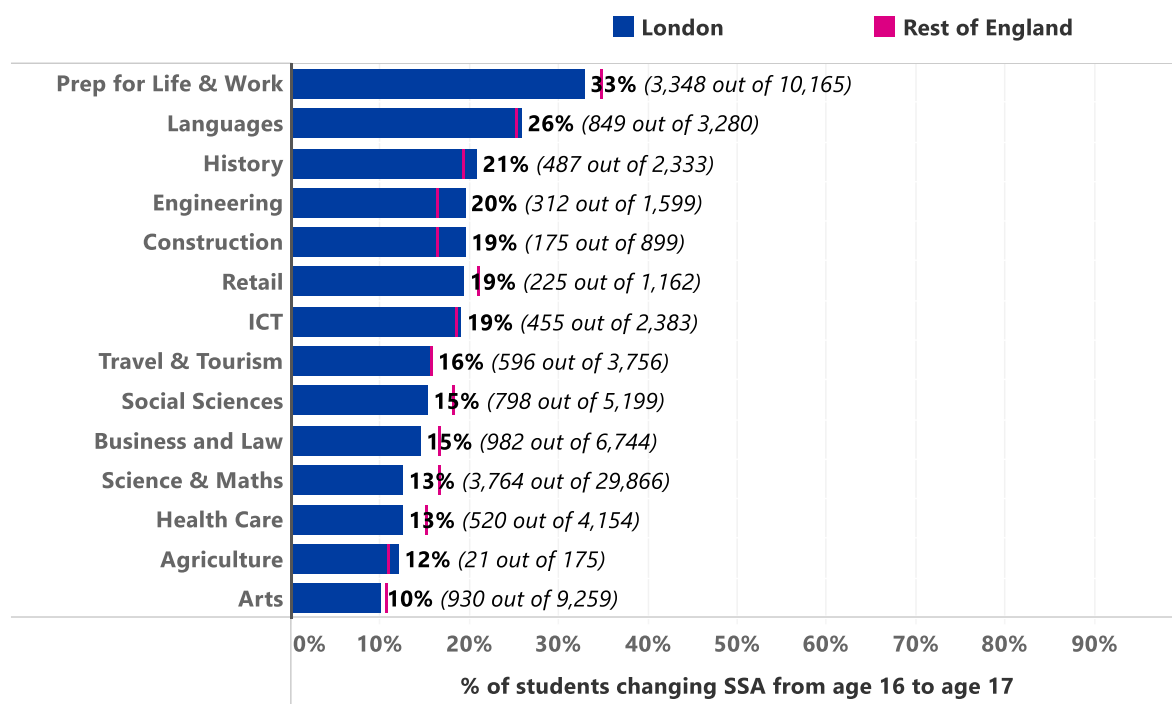
**Fig 40. Proportion of students changing subject between 16 and 17 – by change of institution**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

The chart above shows that the proportion of students who changed subjects is considerably greater among those who have also switched institution; 50% of students who switched institution age 17 also switched subjects, compared to just 9% of those who remained in the same institution. There may be a number of reasons for this; for example, students may switch subject because the subject they were studying at the first institution was part of the reason for them leaving, or because the institution they moved to does not offer the subject they were studying previously.

**Fig 41. Students changing subject - by subject type**



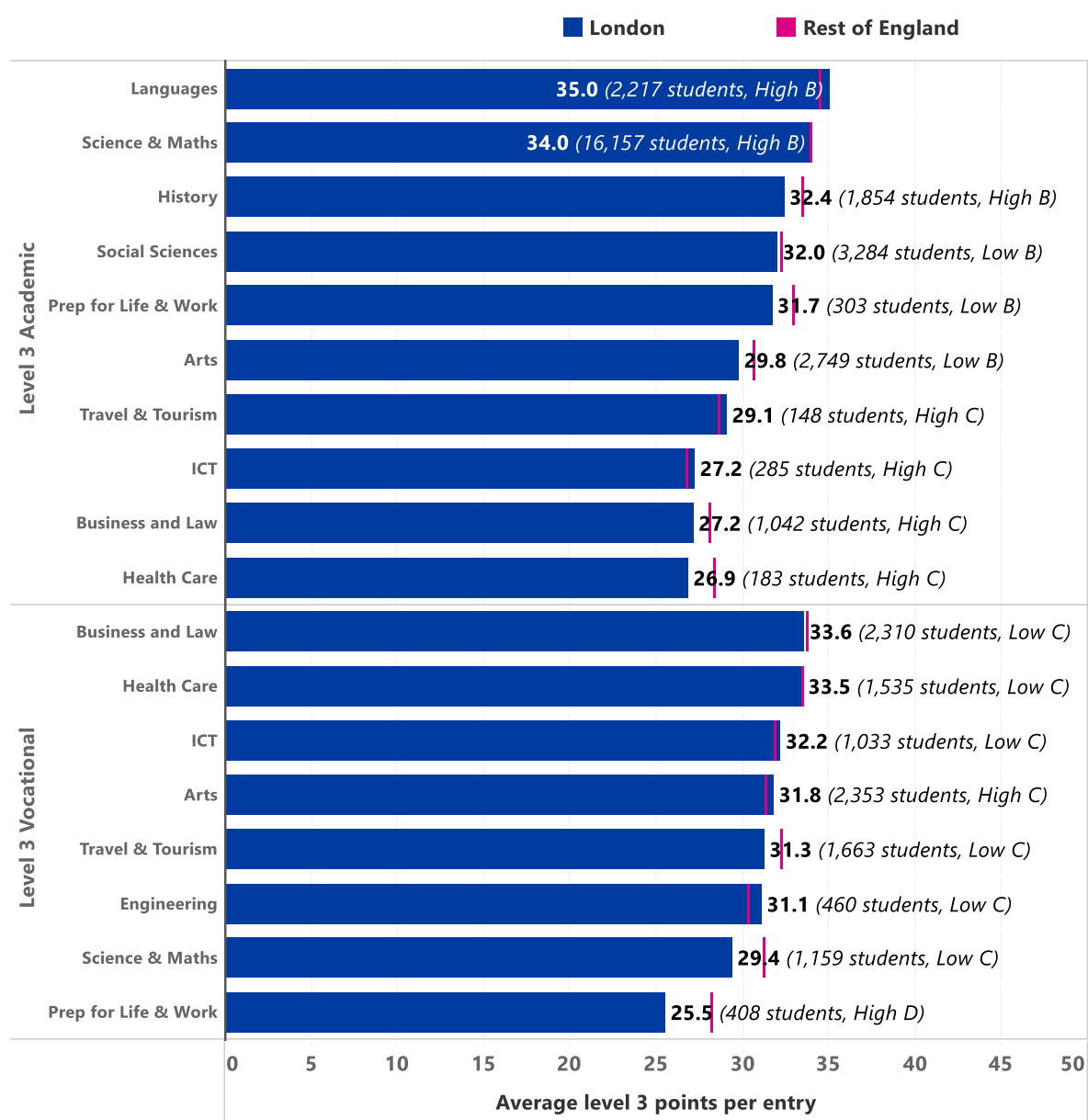
Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15

Among those who changed subject area between 16 and 17, after preparation for life and work the highest proportion of students were those who switched from languages (26%) and history (21%) although this may also reflect learners dropping AS levels in particular subjects which moves them into a mixed SSA categorisation. At the other end of the scale, relatively smaller proportions of learners switched from subjects such as health care (13%) and arts (10%).

#### 4. How are overall outcomes affected by subject choice?

The following chart looks at the Level 3 average points score split by prior attainment. The grade in brackets reflects the average key stage 4 prior attainment for the students in each subject group.

Fig 42. Level 3 APS by subject area



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 with at least one entry. Note that the International Baccalaureate is an academic course which is classified to the subject area preparation for life & work, since it covers a range of different subjects.

This analysis shows the APS achieved on Level 3 programmes by those completing courses by the end of key stage 5 (i.e. by age 19). The pattern of outcomes varies considerably between academic and vocational courses so the chart above considers these types of qualification separately.

For academic courses, the highest points scores at key stage 5 were in languages (35.0) and science & maths (34.0). However, the cohorts studying these subjects had the highest prior attainment. In fact, for academic courses, the relationship between subjects with high KS5 outcomes and the KS4 prior attainment of their cohort is very strong.

Vocational subject areas with the highest point scores at KS5 are business & law and health care. However, there is a much less clear relationship between KS4 prior attainment and KS5 outcomes for vocational subjects.

*Key  
Fact*

**Academic subject areas with higher key stage 5 average points scores are those with cohorts with higher key stage 4 prior attainment. The same is not true for vocational courses, however**

## G. Three-year post-16 pathways

This section focusses on the experiences of students who take three years of post-16 study, which is just over one third of post-16 students. The qualitative research that informs this included focus groups and interviews with students on three-year programmes and we draw out their experiences here. The research identified that:

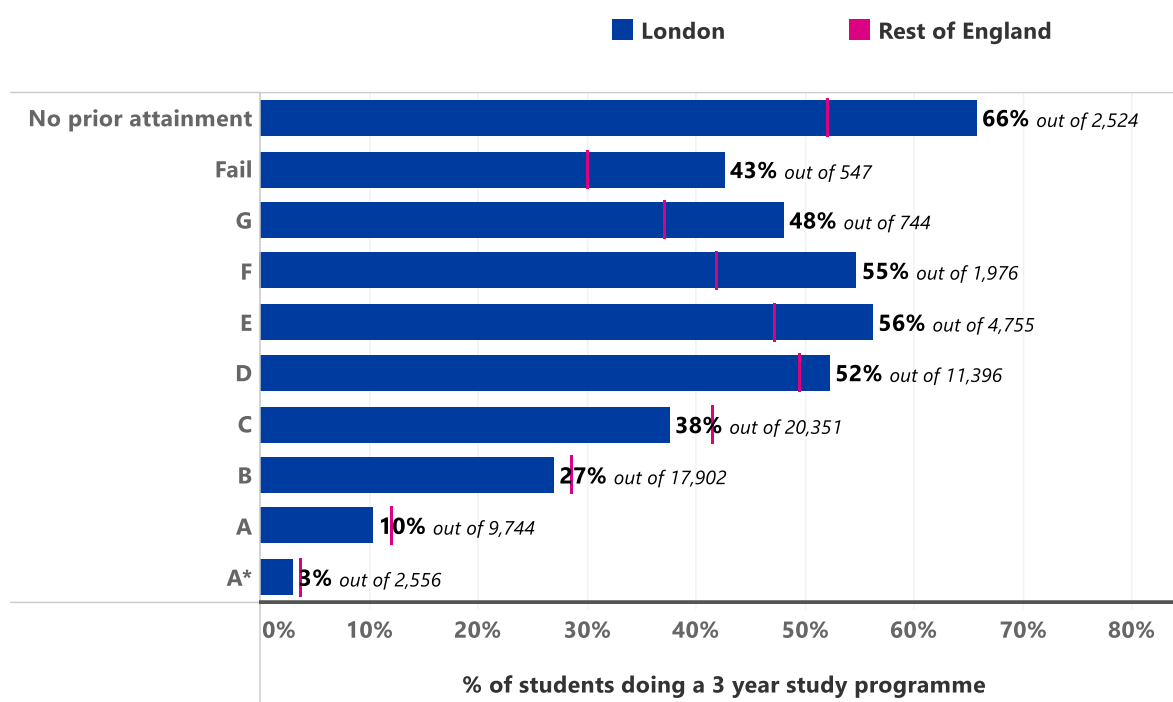
- London's lower-attainers are more likely to do a three-year programme than they are elsewhere
- There were four distinct reasons for three-year pathways, including progressing from a Level 2 course, switching from academic to vocational, newly arriving in the country and switching between vocational courses
- There were a number of issues encountered by the students who went on to do three-year programmes, including narrow advice and guidance, and undervalued vocational provision.

# G. Three-year post-16 pathways

## 1. Who does three years of post-16 study?

Students on a three-year post-16 programme of study are a key focus of this report, especially in terms of the qualitative research. In London 35.1% of the cohort studied were in education at ages 16, 17 and 18, which was slightly lower than the figure for pupils elsewhere of 36.4%<sup>20</sup>. A key determinant of whether students do a three-year programme or not is their prior attainment. The chart below shows the proportion of students carrying out three years of post-16 study split by their average grade at key stage 4.

**Fig 43. Percentage of students doing three years of post-16 study, by prior attainment**



Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14. Numbers under the percentages show the number of students who did a three-year programme out of how many had each key stage 4 average grade.

Clearly, as prior attainment drops, the requirement for a three-year programme increases. Interestingly, a proportion of very high attainers at key stage 4 still take three years of post-16 study.

For example, 56% of students with an average E grade at key stage 4 did a three-year study programme, compared with only 3% of students with an A\* average at key stage 4. In part this reflects that fact that those with higher prior attainment are more likely to achieve a Level 3 after two years of study and are less likely to switch institution.

The pink lines show the equivalent data for the rest of England. Young people in London are far more likely to do a three-year study programme than they are elsewhere in the country when

<sup>20</sup> Source: Analysis of NPD data for pupils finishing key stage 4 in 2013/14 and 2014/15.

they have an average grade of up to a D at key stage 4, but the pattern switches for higher attainers.

**Key  
Fact**

**London's lower attainers are more likely to do a three-year study programme than they are elsewhere in the country, while higher attainers are less likely to**

## **2. What are the reasons behind three-year study programmes?**

There is a widely held assumption that 16-year olds who want to stay in full time education after having completed their GCSEs will take a two-year Level 3 post-16 study programme. However, this is not the universal experience for young people in England. Progression to a two-year Level 3 programme requires a level of attainment in GCSE that approximately 30% of Londoners do not achieve. For this reason, many young people will need to take at least three years of study. Schools and colleges set their own entry requirements for Level 3 programmes and these often differ for A levels and their vocational equivalents (e.g. BTECs). Moreover, while further education and sixth form colleges tend to offer a wide range of Level 3 programmes, most school sixth forms only offer A levels or a relatively narrow range of vocational options. For this reason, there can be considerable 'churn' (i.e. movement between courses and institutions) at both age 16 and age 17 (see Hodgson and Spours, 2014<sup>21</sup>).

**Key  
Fact**

**Progression to a two-year Level 3 programme requires a level of GCSE attainment that approximately 30% of Londoners do not achieve**

The preceding analysis shows that around one in six students undertake a three-year programme of study, and there are a number of reasons behind this. Four distinct educational pathways for the three-year programme cohort emerged from the analysis of our qualitative research. These comprised young people who:

- 1. Started Level 2 at age 16 progressing on to a Level 3 course** – a large group (approximately 7,000 Londoners each year)
- 2. Switched from A levels in one institution to a vocational programme of study in another** – a medium-sized group (5,000 Londoners each year)
- 3. Were new arrivals to the country** – a medium-sized group (though not easy to accurately quantify from the data)
- 4. Switched between vocational courses** – a smaller group (1,600 Londoners each year).

The experiences uncovered from our interviews of students in each of these groups are outlined below:

### **Pathway 1 – Young people who started Level 2 at age 16 progressing on to a Level 3 course**

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<sup>21</sup> Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2014) 17+ participation, attainment and progression in London: key findings and recommendations. Available at: [www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/our-key-themes/children-and-young-people/14-19-young-people-education-and-skills/publications/what](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/our-key-themes/children-and-young-people/14-19-young-people-education-and-skills/publications/what)

In this pathway, the three-year period for the Level 3 study programme occurred when young people had not done very well at their GCSEs, especially in English and maths, and were not accepted back into their school for further study:

*"Well for me sixth form was my first option but I didn't get my maths GCSE so I couldn't stay."*

*"I didn't pass English at school, so I had to do Level 2 media and now I'm on Level 3."*

One student, when commenting on the importance of English and maths said, 'it's basically what stopped all of us'. The poor grades necessitated the young people having to find a place in an FE college in a short space of time in order to continue their education in the September following their GCSE results. For many students this was a traumatic experience. The lower grades also meant that colleges often placed these young people on a Level 2 course before allowing them to progress to Level 3. As part of the Level 2 year, these students needed to attend lessons to re-sit English and/or maths GCSE. Many were taking subjects that they had not previously studied, or had the opportunity to study, at school.

Many students involved in the qualitative research found themselves on this educational pathway. Although disappointed by their GCSE results, it seemed that once young people had settled into college and started to feel a sense of achievement, this three-year route to Level 3 became normalised. As one student commented about her experience of arriving at college 'there were lots of people in the same boat, so it felt fine'. Very few students spoke of regret about taking this additional year. They felt that they were on the right course, that they were valued by college staff and had high aspirations for their future – see case study 1 as an example.

#### **Case study 1. Moving from school to college for a three-year programme**

One student failed her maths GCSE and so wasn't accepted into the sixth form to study business and was required to leave. As she said, "I came here last year and did Level 2 business. I'm doing Level 3 now. I'm glad that I came to college because I knew that I wanted to focus on business and at school you have to do other subjects."

One student, as an exception, expressed regret at having to do an 'extra' year.

*"Right like now, it feels as if it is dragging, because all my friends are in uni and I'm still in college, but it's ok."*

She did though go on to say that "College is like a new beginning. Say you didn't do so well at school then you've got another chance to make yourself be better".

Overwhelmingly students on this pathway were grateful to colleges for giving them the opportunity to progress and develop. All students had positive aspirations, and many wished to go on to study at university. Of the students in the final year of Level 3, a number had been offered places at university.

#### **Pathway 2 – Young people switching from A levels to a vocational programme of study**

Students following this trajectory had mostly switched from doing A levels in a school or a sixth form college to taking BTECs (or equivalent) in an FE college. This was for a combination of reasons: some found A levels too difficult and this led them to leave school sixth form and move to college, some had felt pressured to take certain subjects because of their GCSE results and did not enjoy them, and others simply wanted a change of direction.

*"In my previous school I did health and social care and RS (religious studies). I didn't really like RS it was really difficult. I kind of got put into it because I got a really good level for my*

*RS GCSE and they (the staff) were encouraging me, pushing me to do it and I said I would try it."*

One student who had started art and film studies A levels at school decided that she no longer wished to follow art as a career and had switched to a vocational qualification in social care in college. Another student had started A levels in acting, law and media in one college and switched to a BTEC in drama at another college. As he said, *'I only did law because I couldn't do the other courses'*.

### **Case study 2. Changing direction**

Danielle had started her Level 3 studies doing A levels in Spanish, English literature and sociology at a sixth form college. She had liked the subjects but wanted to be a psychologist and didn't get the grades the sixth form required to study psychology. As she said, "I didn't see any progression, so I dropped out". She dropped out a couple of months before the end of her first year in the sixth form and didn't finish the academic year elsewhere. She started at college the next academic year. At college she was studying a BTEC in health and social care because she felt that this had more to do with psychology.

### **Pathway 3 – New arrivals to the country**

Several young people in the study had arrived in London from other countries. They often found it problematic to integrate into school and found the educational system difficult to navigate and understand.

*"For me it was hard to integrate with my language. I got bullied because of my background and because of my accent."*

Many were placed in year 10, although their age was that of year 11, and on a GCSE course although they had little or no English language proficiency; success at GCSE in year 11 was almost impossible.

*"I came to London in year 10 and I didn't speak any English. I went to high school – year 10 and then year 11. I couldn't choose the subjects I wanted to do, like psychology. They put me to do art and textiles and Spanish. I failed all the other mocks [except Spanish, the language of her country]."*

Another student talked about being put on a Fresh Start course on arrival in this country.

*"I did one year there – it was nothing. I brought the certificate here [his new college] and they were like, 'what is this?' So I had to start Level 1 here. I do regret that year, I wasted it."*

Similarly, to students in Pathway 1, GCSE results day was often traumatic. However, this was made harder because of their lack of understanding about the English educational system. For example, several students did not understand that they would be unable to remain in school to re-sit their exams (see case study 3).

### Case study 3. Understanding the English educational system

Jose arrived in London in 2011 and started year 10 in a local secondary school. *"I had like one year to learn English which was impossible for me, so in year 11 I failed all my GCSEs except ... (the language of his country)".* He had thought that he would be able to stay on at school and re-do English and maths, *"but they said no, just go"*. He hadn't been given any advice in years 10 or 11 about what to do if he failed, *"they didn't say like if you fail GCSEs you have a second option which is college"*. In his home country he would have had the option to stay on and retake. Fortunately, one of Jose's teachers knew one of the teachers at the local college, so she suggested he approached the college. Jose went for interview and obtained a place on the pre-GCSE science course. He then transferred to Level 2 and then a Level 3 BTEC in applied science. Jose has been offered a place on computer science at university.

Noteworthy was that some of these young people had taken four years to reach Level 3 in college.

### Pathway 4 – Young people switching vocational courses

A relatively small group of the young people involved in the focus groups and interviews were taking three years to undertake their study programme due to changing their vocational area of study. Of these young people, many stayed in the same FE college and changed their programme of study with the support of the college staff.

One female student, with a physical disability, had begun a Level 2 course in performing arts in college and had switched to a Level 1 course in motor mechanics at the same college. She had enjoyed a Level 1 qualification in performing arts in school but found that Level 2 was different to what she had anticipated. As she explained *"I like the technical side of things and on performing arts they got me doing dance and stuff"*. Her plan now was to complete Level 1, then Level 2 and 3 motor mechanics and gain an apprenticeship in paintwork. She was quite pragmatic about her change of direction as she felt it would be easier to get a job in mechanics as opposed to performing arts.

One young man had started IT at a sixth form college but had simply found it boring and transferred to the FE college to study a BTEC in professional services. Other young people seemed to have chosen their initial subject almost by chance and then regretted this – see case study 4.

### Case study 4. Unclear about what to study

*"After I left school I was lost. I didn't know what to do, I didn't know what college was like or anything. One of my school teachers helped me out and I ended up doing construction – I didn't like it at all. I did a whole year of this, but then switched courses to public services. I have no idea why I chose construction – I just wasted a year like that. But I'm quite happy with public services."*

## 3. Experiences of vulnerable learners

A significant proportion of young people in London have vulnerabilities which may impact their progression and outcomes, including those with special educational needs, those excluded from school, or those known to social care. A number of the young people interviewed through the qualitative research for this project exhibited some of these vulnerabilities. Three separate case studies are presented below to illustrate the challenging and complex circumstances that some young people face and the resilience and chance opportunities that they draw on to be able to succeed.

## Moving from alternative education to college

A minority of students participating in this research had received fixed-term exclusions or had been permanently excluded from school. While many of these students had found routes back into education, for some these educational pathways were secured through chance. One young man attending an outreach centre commented that he didn't get any help in progressing to college, 'there wasn't any information' and that he 'used to email teachers individually to try to find out about things'.

### Case study 5. From exclusion to college

Nick was 'kicked out' of school in year 9 and had been out of education for over a year until a place was found for him at an outreach centre for 20 students from years 7 to 11. The centre lacked the resources to support him taking his GCSEs. He gained one GCSE in IT. Pivotal for Nick was the school-home counsellor who had kept in touch since he left school and who put in a college application for him to study catering. Nick himself didn't apply to college. Nick attended the college interview and was accepted.

*"Well where I came from, the centre, they didn't expect much of you at all. They didn't really expect much of you and they don't really care what you do. And the jump from going back to college where they try and help you and they want you to succeed I found that quite good. Like I couldn't get that from my secondary school because I wasn't mature enough to know of the chances I was getting, so this shined at me as a second chance. And I came here [the college] and found out about catering, because I'm doing catering Level 1 and have slightly fallen in love with a certain kitchen so I'm here."*

Nick was being fast-tracked from Level 1 to Level 2 and intends to do Level 3. He had obtained Level 1 English and was retaking maths. Nick was fully engaged with college and making the most of this second chance. To this end Nick was looking for weekend catering work and was voluntarily working in the college canteen every day without payment. As he said, "I didn't know I was going to be in this position last year, no way."

Other young people acknowledged that their behaviour in school had not always been good and that this had contributed to their fragmentary educational experience. They also spoke about how they had matured and how the college environment had given them the space to grow and mature.

### High level emotional needs

Some students spoke about serious issues with anxiety and others about having to take time out from education for personal reasons. The examination focus of GCSEs and the pressure put on gaining good results by teachers was especially problematic for these students.

Case study 6 provides an illustration of how the supportive and flexible approach taken by the college enabled a student in foster care and with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety to change courses and remain in education.

### Case study 6. Support to succeed

Zoe suffered from PTSD and anxiety and had had some involvement with CAMHS. She had attended multiple secondary schools and was in foster care. Her GCSE outcomes were poor. As she said, *"I didn't really do very well in my GCSEs, I suffer from PTSD and anxiety, so I find it really hard to do exams"*. Zoe had started at the college while living with her aunt and uncle for the simple reason that the college was near to where they lived. At the time of the interview she was in foster care and living back in the place she was from. This necessitated a two and a half hour commute each day since she wished to remain at the same college.

*"So when I came here I did travel and tourism and in the beginning I really enjoyed it and about half way through it I lost that motivation to do it. I missed out four or five months of classes [due to an incident] and was just embarrassed to go back into classes. In a meeting I had with the Head and my foster mother, she [the Head] told me about this dance course they offered. So I went for an audition and they said it was really good and so they put me onto Level 2 performing arts. You do technical theatre, dance and drama so I'm hoping next year to do Level 3 technical theatre which is the backstage stuff. It feels really good. Compared to what I was doing last year I feel a lot more present, sort of thing. It's helped a lot with my anxiety and with my concentration."*

### Physical disability

One student, Amanda, interviewed for this research had been in a special school sixth form for children with SEND prior to changing to a mainstream sixth form college. In the case study that follows, the driver for a change of institution and the opportunity to pursue higher level qualifications was the student herself.

### Case study 7. Individual agency in changing to a new environment

Amanda's pre-16 school became an academy trust and as part of this all the pupils aged over 16 with SEN, including Amanda, had to change to the sixth form school on another site. Amanda had thought she would be studying Level 2 media, but this wasn't possible. As Amanda explained, *"They had to cater for everyone. When I was at my previous school they allowed students with disabilities to do GCSE. But at the new school they just offer entry level [apart from GCSE science] because they have more people with SEN."* Amanda stayed there until she was 17 and then applied to her current mainstream sixth form college. As she said, *"The other school wasn't allowing me to excel myself. I knew that I needed a change, they weren't pushing me enough, so I made the change. At this college I can work to the best of my abilities... When I decided to leave there was a meeting with my mum and a teacher and I said I wanted to leave. I'd already missed one year."*

Since arriving at the college, she has attained a merit in Level 2 digital and is now studying for Level 3. She has also passed her English.

## 4. Issues emerging from qualitative research

This section draws together a number of issues that arose from the qualitative research. These are arranged under the following three themes:

1. Narrow careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG)
2. Lower attaining pupils' experiences of schools

### 3. Undervaluing of vocational provision.

Note that the issues are drawn from the experiences of young people who were on a three-year post-16 programme of study. Some of these students had not achieved the required English and maths grades at key stage 4, while others had changed from an A level to a vocational programme.

#### **Issue 1 – Narrow CEIAG**

The young people interviewed raised a number of concerns about the information, advice and guidance they received prior to making their post-16 choices.

##### **Lack of understanding of different pathways**

Many young people had either thought they would continue into the sixth form or had applied to sixth form colleges but were unsuccessful in gaining a place due to their GCSE grades, particularly in relation to failed maths and/or English. These young people often had no knowledge of the range of qualifications that FE colleges might offer.

*“They [the school] give you a lot of advice about options in year 9 but they don’t do anything after that. They could do a lot more during your GCSE.”*

Where young people were in schools that finished at age 16, generally, they applied to three or four sixth form colleges only.

*“In school they just give you a bunch of [sixth form] colleges and everyone applies to the same ones, either because it’s near or your friends are going.”*

*“They [teaching staff] pushed [us] to go to sixth form colleges because they say it is similar to school.”*

##### **Lack of guidance on alternative qualifications from schools**

Students spoke of being unaware of alternative qualifications to A levels and said that this hadn’t been discussed in school.

*“In high school it was all A levels, no-one ever mentioned a BTEC to me. We weren’t told about colleges or BTECs. It’s all ‘What A levels are you going to do?’. They don’t give you anything else, there’s no college, no BTEC.”*

As one young woman said who had failed to get into sixth form college:

*“I think high schools could do a lot better explaining. When I came to college there were lots of different options of how I could follow things that I was interested in.”*

In some cases, this focus on A levels and sixth form colleges meant that young people perceived FE and BTEC qualifications in a rather negative light.

*“Until I experienced college, I would have said that colleges are really bad and that the teachers are really bad. And yet coming here, the teachers are really good. I’ve learned such a lot.”*

For several young people, it was apparent that their parents/carers didn’t understand the different programmes of study in college although they understood A levels.

*“Like in my secondary school, I wanted to do a BTEC. And my parents and my whole family made me feel dumb for thinking this: ‘You should be doing GCSEs, why would you do a BTEC?’ Now, I’m at college and I’m doing a BTEC.”*

A young man talked about how his older siblings were at university having studied A levels. However, he wanted to do a BTEC in acting, and was aware that this wasn't what his parents had wanted. There was also a sense of pressure from certain cultures about being a doctor or a lawyer and how this influences young people.

### **GCSE results day**

Many students involved in the research were informed on GCSE results day that they could not continue at school: this was a shock. Often this was because they didn't gain the required grades in English and/or maths. In the case of new arrivals who had started school in year 10 their lack of understanding of the English school system meant they had no awareness that they would not be permitted to stay in school.

*"Well for me sixth form was my first option but I didn't get my maths GCSE so I couldn't stay... Realistically I thought I would be at high school but it got to GCSE results day and I couldn't."*

*"I finished my GCSEs in high school and my first plan was to stay in sixth form. And results day really shocked me because I didn't get the grades. I didn't get English."*

For several this was a traumatic experience. One young woman recounted that on results day:

*"We lined up to get ourselves enrolled and she [a teacher] shouted at me in front of everyone. I wanted to do A level English because I got a B, and she shouted: 'You're not meant to be here, go to another college'. Then I started panicking because I hadn't applied to any colleges."*

Many young people spoke of receiving no guidance about what to do next, or how to find a course to progress their education.

*"I just found it [the college] on the internet. The school didn't help me."*

The other issue arising from the impact of results day is that these young people were under immense pressure to find an FE college and secure a place in the limited time available between results day and the start of enrolment and the academic year.

*"I thought I was going to that sixth form and when I got my results they said they couldn't take me. So, I had to come to college on the same day to make sure that I had a safe place for September."*

By contrast, in the school with its own sixth form, although final decisions about places were made on results day, the students had been provided with opportunities to learn about different subjects and opportunities for study after GCSEs.

*"The school did taster lessons for all the subjects. These took place during reading/tutor time for 20 mins just after GCSEs so that young people could prepare their decisions. All the subjects did them. They [the staff] made decisions on results day."*

### **Happenstance in selecting a course or a college**

Some students made decisions about their future courses in a matter of minutes. In one case a new arrival had been refused education in this country for two years prior to starting at college. The reasons were unclear at the interview. When this was resolved, and the student was eligible for an education, he found a place in FE.

*"I found out about the college online and found out about the course and within five minutes of being here. It was a two-minute decision. It was a good decision because right*

*now I can do what I want in the future. It was literally a list of five courses, some required GCSEs which I hadn't got, so I chose business."*

One student spoke of having got on the wrong bus and arriving at a different college to the one she had intended to visit. The number of the bus was correct, but it was going in the opposite direction. She was unhappy with her A level choices at sixth form college and felt that she had been pushed into subjects she didn't wish to do. She also spoke of being very anxious about doing exams.

*"When I got here, I said I wanted to be part of the college. They sat me down with a book to look for a course. I found public services and the teacher was telling me what it was about, the trips, visits, going to the court. It sounded amazing."*

Several students spoke of knowing nothing about the course that they were following regardless of whether this was an A level or BTEC.

One student, currently studying IT at college, had wanted to study IT in school but wasn't permitted to do this since the class was full. Her poor GCSE results meant that she wasn't allowed to stay at school and so she gained a place at college. As she said, *"before I started the course I had no idea about IT"*. Her hope now was to go to university and become a software engineer.

### **Outreach activities**

The notion of outreach was raised by interviewees to enable young people to understand more about the opportunities in college.

*"A lot of kids don't know about the different programmes and things that they can do, as if someone just expects them to know. Schools should advertise more. There should be things in the community. Like people might not live near a college, they might not know where the college is, so they don't even know when the open day is."*

In many cases the young people interviewed were simply not aware of alternative options such as colleges, and therefore were unable to investigate more about these options as they did not know that they existed or if they were entitled to apply to them (for example, if they had never seen the local college).

Positive examples of support referenced by interviewees included colleges coming into school on results day to support transition.

*"On results day we have this external group come in and talk about other options like if your results didn't plan out like you had hoped. I was shocked by my results on the day, but it was good that there was someone there who could tell me about college and help me find a course."*

At another college one student reported that on GCSE results day there was a college desk in the main hall, so that *"if the school wouldn't accept you for the sixth form you were directed to the college"*.

Although some young people had received information about A level subjects, what was lacking was how different A levels or other qualifications related to different career pathways. They felt that they had received subject guidance, but not career guidance.

*"For schools they should do a careers day once a week where they present a different career. They should show it to the students in a way that lets them understand what they need to do and what types of qualifications."*

### **Supporting transition**

One young person suggested having a pre-college/school day to enable them to become used to a new space:

*“Like a couple of weeks before you start it would be good to have a day with the people you will be working with so you can have a taster session: your first assignment is this, there will be these activities. Like they just throw you into the deep and say swim.”*

## **Issue 2 – Lower attaining pupils’ experiences of school**

Many of the young people interviewed for this report had not achieved the English and maths grades needed to move on to a traditional A level programme within their school. The evidence from these pupils is that their experience of school was not always positive and lacked appropriate support for those for whom an academic pathway was unlikely to be suitable.

### **Perspectives on school**

Most of the young people on three-year post-16 programmes in colleges interviewed disliked school. Young people spoke of not being valued or listened to. They also talked about the rigid environment of school and of the marginalisation of some young people and how this was associated with poor support for transition post-16 in contrast to the support that they found at college.

*“There is favouritism in schools – they always like the ones who do their work, they don’t support you in other ways to see how you are doing. Our teachers on this course, they want us to succeed, we can see that in the way that they act towards us they are very professional.”*

*“In high school you are obviously restricted because of age and things. At college you have to make your own decisions. It encourages you to grow up.”*

### **Positioning of GCSE results by schools**

Undoubtedly many young people felt pressurised by schools because of the importance that staff placed on good GCSE results, and this may reflect a reaction to government policy and accountability measures used by Ofsted.

*“The teachers also made it seem like a life and death situation. Like if you didn’t get your English and your maths then life was over.”*

Some students, having found their way to a Level 2 then Level 3 programme of study questioned comments made by teachers about the pivotal role that GCSEs play.

*“At school, they were kind of saying that you’ve got one choice, you’ve got one shot to do your whole life basically. That isn’t true because you can retake.”*

There was a perception too that this overwhelming sense of pressure was detrimental to young people’s well-being.

*“In secondary school they make it seem like it is the most important thing in your life, they put so much pressure on us, like it causes so many mental factors. If they were to spend less time just pushing and pushing you and more time talking to you then secondary school transition here would have been much easier.”*

## **Issue 3 – Undervalued vocational provision**

There is evidence that vocational qualifications, although they are often the most appropriate study option for many learners, are often undervalued by parents, schools and universities, and this has a significant impact on the perceptions of young people about their suitability for them.

## Perceptions of A levels and BTEC qualifications

Students studying for BTECs were very clear about the differences in the way that A levels and BTECs are perceived and the need to check whether universities would accept BTECs.

*"People are like, 'Oh you do BTEC, like you're not good enough to do A levels'."*

Many of the students in the final year of the Level 3 extended diploma had attended open days at universities. A concern was whether the university would accept them onto the programme. The case study below sets out the experience of one young person.

### Case study 8. University entrance and BTECs

*"I went on a taster day and the lecturer asked, 'What are you doing at the moment?' And I said BTEC. He replied, 'That's assignment-based isn't it?' and then continued by saying, 'So are you going to become academic when you come to university because you don't do exams.'"*

*In the interview the student expressed her frustration with the comment made by the lecturer, "They need to understand that you have to revise to do BTECs, to do your assignments. You have to revise first before you can do your assignments. You also have to do a lot of independent work – that's what you do at university."*

Another student had been told at an open day that it was fine to have a BTEC but that he had to have an A level as well, but: *"that's impossible with our course"*.

Many young people talked about the need for parity between A levels and Level 3 BTECs:

*"Actually, I did know about them but I thought they were like for 'stupid people'. Like to put everything on the same level would be the first step. Like now there is A level, BTEC and apprenticeships. People use the term BTEC like it is second best e.g. that's a BTEC computer."*

Overwhelmingly students studying BTECs were very proud of their course and of the skills that it enabled them to develop in contrast to their experiences of exam-based GCSEs.

*"Doing BTEC helps you to become more independent. You do your own research and most of this stuff you don't get taught in lessons. You have to think for yourself a lot and make sense of what you have read."*

*"It's like a preparation for adult life. Doing everything on your own, thinking and deciding what to do, when to do it. It is very different from high school."*

Allied to this was that many young people reported finding examinations stressful.

*"I just think that education seriously needs to move away from exams. It has got ridiculous. In exams, I remember like in GCSE you spend half the time learning about exams rather than learning the subject. People take exams like far too much as a way of measuring the skills, like when I meet people who can't even fry bacon, but they can do exams."*

Students on BTEC programmes of study also valued that they were focusing on one specialist area:

*"I came here last year and did Level 2 business. I didn't do this at secondary. I'm doing Level 3 now. I'm glad that I came to college because I knew that I wanted to focus on business and at school you have to do other subjects. [Her failed maths GCSE meant that she had to leave school]."*

## Discussion of issues leading to three-year programmes

This qualitative analysis offers an insight into the experiences and needs of young people who undertake a three-year study programme, specifically those who have changed course or had to start their course again.

CEIAG is not supporting all young people in their educational trajectories at age 16. While the statutory careers guidance for schools<sup>22</sup> makes the promotion of different pathways a mandatory requirement, the evidence from the interviews was that this is not happening consistently. The experiences of the young people interviewed suggests that schools largely focussed on A level subject choices rather than the full breadth of options. The young people also lacked understanding of how subject choices affect future career choices.

Some young people were not aware of what would happen if they did not gain the required grades to stay in their school or progress to a sixth form college. The practice some schools adopted of telling students on GCSE results day that they were not able to stay in their school was traumatic for many young people who were left in a panic trying to find a last-minute place at college. In addition, the narrow framing of CEIAG, as reported by the young people, meant that they had been encouraged to apply to sixth form colleges to study A levels. Their lack of success in passing English and maths meant that they didn't meet the entrance requirements. These students, too, had to find a last-minute place in an FE college. Schools must prepare students well in advance of results day and encourage applications to other appropriate institutions if there is a likelihood of them not being able to stay in school or gain a place in a sixth form college.

Most of the young people on three-year post-16 programmes in colleges disliked school and spoke of being marginalised by school staff. In turn they felt that this contributed to a lack of appropriate support for their educational progression. Allied to this was that the young people perceived vocational qualifications to be undervalued by parents, schools and universities. And yet, the young people themselves valued these qualifications and the skills that they were developing.

This reflects a situation in which a set of institutional and provision factors have emerged that impact on particular groups of post-16 learners socially and educationally. Prior research has identified three key London-specific factors:

- **Institutional competition and the production of small providers** – London has a higher proportion of school sixth forms compared with the rest of England. Problems of post-16 progression can be located, in particular, in small school sixth forms that may not be able to provide a broad and motivating offer, may not have a critical mass of learners and may lack staff expertise in some specialist areas<sup>23</sup>. Secondary schools struggling in the education market to recruit post-16, and who also support the concept of student inclusion, may be tempted to allow some students to progress into the sixth form without 'good grades' in GCSE English and maths in the hope that they might make up this ground later
- **A weak vocational education and training (VET) system** - The evolution of London's economic structure over the past 40 years has led to a weakened VET system. Its leading sectors (fintech; digital and cultural) tend to recruit graduates, often imported from the

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-schools>

<sup>23</sup> Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2013) Middle attainers and 14-19 progression in England: half served by New Labour and now overlooked by the Coalition?, *British Educational Research Journal*, 41 (3) 467-482

rest of the country or from abroad, rather than cultivating local talent from below<sup>24</sup>. London's level of apprenticeship take-up for young people remains about half that of the rest of the country

- **A static FE sector** – The FE sector plays a relatively minor role in participation at 16 compared with schools, but an increasingly important one at 17 and 18 as it picks up those leaving school sixth forms. However, the overall effect of institutional competition and fragmentation is that participation of young people in the London FE sector has remained relatively static.

## 5. Implications for a transition period

In thinking about young people's educational trajectories and the benefits of a third year of study for some learners, it is especially important that all young people are given the opportunity to develop and fulfil their potential. The accepted wisdom that London does well in terms of educational attainment pre-16 only to fail to continue that advantage post-16, may be glossing over pre-16 dynamics affecting particular groups of students. It is clear from the research data that previous attainment in English and maths plays an important role in post-16 progression and that some London learners have ended up taking notable risks in their transitions.

Hodgson and Spours<sup>25</sup> have identified the following four transitions in an extended 14-19 phase. The qualitative research in this report focuses on Transition 3.

- **Transition 1:** How the preparatory phase of upper secondary education (14-16) supports young people for transition at 16+
- **Transition 2:** How young people choose or are selected for their post-16 route
- **Transition 3:** How young people perform in their first year of post-16 study and whether they are able successfully to complete upper secondary education within the expected norm of two years
- **Transition 4:** How young people move into the labour market and higher education.

Their research on the previous Coalition Government's qualifications policy, pointed to its influence on institutional behaviours that affects, in particular, middle and lower attainers<sup>26</sup>. The schools which do allow students to progress into the sixth form without those 'good grades' in GCSE English and maths generates further problems. This 'risky' institutional behaviour has been made even more so by the effects of government policy that has made GCSEs more 'difficult', thus demotivating learners in this key area of attainment and even reducing the level of examination attainment<sup>27</sup>. In further education, these learners who progress, but without the necessary foundation have been referred to as 'shaky Level 2s'<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Hodgson, A., Smith, D., Spours, K. and Jeanes, J. (2018) Building the conditions for effective and sustainable technical and vocational education in East London The East London Vocational Education and Training: Innovation Through Partnership Programme (ELVET) Final Report London: UCL Institute of Education

<sup>25</sup> Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2019 forthcoming) Young people and transitions in upper secondary education in England: the influence of policy on the 'local opportunity landscape' Helsinki: Helsinki University Press

<sup>26</sup> Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2013) 'Middle attainers and 14-19 progression in England: half served by New Labour and now overlooked by the Coalition?' *British Educational Research Journal*, 41 (3) 467-482.

<sup>27</sup> Rogers, L. and Spours, K. (2018) The Great Stagnation: Why government policy may be depressing education attainment, restricting choice and undermining 14-19 progression London: Edge Foundation Future Learning.

<sup>28</sup> Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2014) 17+ participation, attainment and progression in London: key findings and recommendations. Available at: <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/our-key-themes/children-and-young-people/14-19-young-people-education-and-skills/publications/what>

The introduction of new technical Level 3 study programmes (T levels) from September 2020, has heralded the introduction of the Transition Programme for T levels. The Transition Programme is aimed at young people who are not ready to commence a Level 3 T level at age 16 but are likely to achieve this by age 19 (Sainsbury Review, 2016<sup>29</sup>). In the first instance the Transition Programme will focus on supporting students to progress to the first three T levels (education and childcare, construction and digital). Although there is little detail available about the Transition Programme, it is known that it will focus on developing maths, English and technical skills and behaviours linked to the requirements of the specific T level to enable progression.

Whether the Transition Programme will support students moving from Level 2 and then Level 3 in college (Pathway 1) is questionable especially in the short term before all T levels are rolled out. Most started on new vocational pathways in college which were unavailable in school and were successful in gaining a Level 3 qualification. More important is proper funding for this three-year pathway. Similar to students in Pathway 1, it seems unlikely that the proposed transition period would be helpful to young people who changed from A levels in one institution to BTEC in another (Pathway 2). Improved CEIAG and a greater understanding of vocational education might enable young people to make more informed choices. Many of the new arrivals (Pathway 3) had taken four years to reach Level 3 so it is unclear how the Transition Programme will support these students if the duration is of one year. Finally, what is less certain is how the Transition Programme will enable students who switch vocational courses (Pathway 4) to progress.

Viewing 14-19 transitions in their wider chronological, institutional, policy and learner cohort contexts has implications for both strategy and future research. Interventions to assist learners in relation to Transition 3 (16-19) may have to be considered in relation to earlier Transitions 1 and 2. These interventions may need to be targeted in relation to middle and lower attainers in particular who may be concentrated in certain areas and certain institutions. Wider institutional and policy landscapes are important factors that have to be addressed longer-term, with an accent on progression rather than selection, and collaboration rather than competition.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/download/file/fid/19059>

## **H. Recommendations**

This section provides a number of recommendations to address the issues that emerged from the quantitative and qualitative analysis in this report. Each recommendation is prefaced with a recap of the issues identified in the report that have led to the recommendation being proposed.

# H. Recommendations

## 1. Careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG)

While the statutory careers guidance for schools<sup>30</sup> makes the promotion of different pathways a mandatory requirement, the evidence from the qualitative research in Section G shows that this is not happening consistently. The experiences of the young people interviewed suggests that some schools did not provide information on all qualifications and pathways available, including the opportunities that colleges and apprenticeships can provide. When guidance was received the students felt it was more often about subject guidance, rather than how their choices related to different careers.

### Recommendation 1

**Government to monitor schools and further education leaders and governors to ensure they deliver their statutory responsibility to provide high quality CEIAG**

To meet this recommendation:

- A. Government must establish more robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure schools and colleges are meeting their statutory obligations, including through Ofsted.** This should include enforcement of the Baker Clause<sup>31</sup> which stipulates that schools must provide colleges and training providers access to students to discuss non-academic routes
- B. Government must provide schools and colleges with sufficient funding and resources to meet their statutory obligations**
- C. School leaders and governors should ensure that information about all post-16 options is made available to students well before the end of key stage 4 and not on GCSE results day.** This should include highlighting academic, vocational and apprenticeship options, including signposting to other establishments (for example, if their own post-16 academic provision does not offer the best subjects to achieve the student's career goals). This awareness raising can be done through a variety of means including taster sessions of courses, assemblies, open days, use of different websites and talks from former students. Information should be shared with parents as well as young people. Guidance should demonstrate how subject choices affect future career options. There should be a particular focus on those who are less likely to achieve Level 2<sup>32</sup> with English and maths by the end of key stage 4, and especially vulnerable young people, for example looked after children
- D. Schools and colleges should engage with local and voluntary outreach services as well as national initiatives such as the National Careers Service and The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC), where relevant.** Schools and colleges should take advantage of outreach activities that are provided through local youth facilities such as youth clubs, sports clubs, internet cafés and libraries, to tap into their knowledge of local labour markets
- E. Schools and colleges should ensure that CEIAG is tailored to meet individual needs.** This includes ensuring that those providing the guidance have access to the tools and

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-schools>

<sup>31</sup> In the Technical and Further Education Act 2017

<sup>32</sup> A qualification equivalent to a GCSE at grade A\* to C, or 9 to 4

information that allow them to tailor guidance, including a deep understanding of a young person's abilities and interests.

These are not new or unique suggestions, but the findings from this research highlight that CEIAG is still not uniformly available, or of high enough quality, to support young people's decision making.

## 2. Perception and take-up of vocational options

Section B showed that young people in London are less likely to go into an FE college than other young people elsewhere in the country. And, as shown in Section C, when controlling for prior attainment, young people in London are more likely to go into academic programmes than elsewhere in the country. This appears to be the case with Asian groups in particular; evidence from the data and our interviews suggests that culturally there is a perception from some parents that academic programmes remain the gold standard and required for the careers their children should be aiming for. The experiences of the young people interviewed suggests that schools largely focussed on A level subject choices rather than the full breadth of qualifications. Additionally, some parents did not understand vocational study options, although they did understand A levels.

The perception of vocational options is also influenced by the nature of school sixth forms in London. We know from the data in Section B that London schools have a higher proportion of sixth forms than schools elsewhere in the country, and schools have predominantly academic provision. The evidence suggests that schools do often try to keep as many students as possible, potentially due to the implications for the viability and funding of their sixth form, and this is supported by existing research highlighted in Section G. Consequently, this is likely to lead to narrow CEIAG around largely academic programmes of study. And, as revealed in the research in Section G, in some cases this means that young people perceived FE and vocational qualifications negatively.

### Recommendation 2

**Central and London government, schools and further education colleges to demonstrate the value of both A level and technical and vocational programmes – including the new T levels - to parents, carers, students and employers**

Evidence of the benefits of studying vocational qualifications should be shared with schools and careers advisors, particularly for those on lower levels of prior attainment. This can include case studies<sup>33</sup> and analysis of outcomes achieved by those on vocational qualifications, plus their destinations and links with particular careers. Promotion should include talks or talking head videos from former students who are currently studying or have moved into a career following a vocational programme. The government's move towards T levels should assist with raising awareness.

## 3. Drop out at age 17

The data in Section D show that one quarter of London students at age 16 do not continue in their same institution at age 17. Of these, only 28% achieved a full Level 3<sup>34</sup> by age 19. In many

<sup>33</sup> For example, see: [www.tes.com/news/max-whitlock-my-btec-was-key-becoming-olympian](http://www.tes.com/news/max-whitlock-my-btec-was-key-becoming-olympian)

<sup>34</sup> The achievement of at least two E grades at A level or other equivalent qualifications

cases these young people transfer to another institution, but a significant minority drop-out of education entirely.

The behaviour of institutions is influenced, in part, by the DfE's accountability measures which do not currently encourage a longer-term view of the success of a school's *whole* cohort. In particular:

- The key stage 4 destination measures currently focus on where a young person is up to two terms after starting year 12. However, many young people will drop-out at the end of year 12 having started an inappropriate course or made an alternate decision, and this is effectively ignored altogether in accountability measures unless the student sits an exam at the end of year 12
- The key stage 5 destination measure only includes young people who have completed a Level 3 programme, therefore offering no accountability for the destinations of a significant number of 16 to 18 year olds
- Although Level 2 qualifications are now included in the performance tables, the headline average point score measures that local authorities and schools are held to account on only include pupils *completing* a Level 3 programme. As shown in Section E, this can lead to a misleading picture of the performance of the overall cohort, particularly where lower attaining students take some Level 3 courses

The data in Section B suggests that young people in London are more likely to be pushed on to a higher level of course than they may be ready for compared with elsewhere in the country. This extra push may be due to funding pressures and the competitive nature of London's school sixth forms discussed in Section G, as well as the lack of accountability for the longer-term success of students with lower prior attainment. However, the analysis in Section D shows that students with a grade D average or lower are more likely to stay in the same institution between 16 and 17 if they are in college at age 16.

### Recommendation 3

**Government to include an accountability measure to show the proportion of a school's key stage 4 cohort who went on to achieve Level 2 or Level 3 by aged 19, to incentivise good longer-term outcomes for all pupils**

A school must be incentivised to ensure a good longer-term outcome for pupils who are not likely to stay on post-16. The DfE should explore a way of addressing this by taking a longer-term view of success after completing key stage 4, regardless of where the student studies.

One option would be to introduce a measure to show the proportion of a school's key stage 4 cohort that went on to achieve Level 3 by age 19, regardless of whether this was in the same school post-16 or elsewhere, and regardless of whether they undertook an academic or vocational pathway. To account for schools with a cohort with lower prior attainment, the measure could focus just on students that had achieved a full Level 2 at key stage 4. This should encourage schools to provide appropriate CEIAG and not keep pupils who may be better served by going elsewhere post-16.

This measure should be given as much importance in the performance tables as other key stage 4 and 5 measures such as EBacc achievement.

#### 4. Wide variation in continuation rates between providers

Figure 18 in Section D shows that there is a wide variation in continuation rates between institutions with a similar intake at the start of key stage 5. This may be to do with CEIAG practices at key stage 4, appropriateness of provision and policies around year 12 to 13 transition.

#### Recommendation 4

**London government to identify and share good practice between institutions with similar levels of prior attainment including successful transitions to college**

Research should be carried out in institutions whose students have low levels of dropping-out of the education system by age 17, particularly where their ultimate Level 3 outcomes are also good, to identify good practice. Specific exemplars of where students have a well-planned transition to a college and then successfully progressed to achieving a good Level 3 outcome should also be identified. Case studies derived from this research highlighting successful approaches can then be shared throughout the sector.

The analysis carried out for this report has identified a number of schools that could be used as a starting point for this research.

#### 5. Three-year study programmes

The qualitative research in Section G showed that many young people are on three-year programmes that were not a result of a planned approach. For the young people interviewed, of whom many had not achieved a Level 2 in English and maths and had not had the opportunity to experience Level 2 vocational options at key stage 4, a three-year post-16 study programme is helping them achieve a positive Level 3 outcome in a vocational programme. The lack of exposure to vocational options at key stage 4 has been compounded by the government's policy changes which have increased schools' focus on EBacc subjects, for example due to the importance of Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores. However, in some cases the three-year programme happened as a result of a poor choice or inappropriate guidance, which necessitated a change of direction and extra year of study.

Some young people that only just achieved a Level 2 at key stage 4 would benefit from continuing Level 2 studies at age 16 in order to fully embed these skills before moving on to Level 3 study over the course of two further years. In many cases these students, as well as some achieving Level 1<sup>35</sup> at key stage 4 may have moved straight on to a Level 3 programme as a result of an anticipation that they will complete their study within the traditional two years, rather than allowing for an additional year. Of the pupils that did not achieve Level 2 at key stage 4 that go directly on to a Level 3 course at age 16, only 60% achieved a full Level 3 by age 19, compared to 82% of those that did achieve Level 2 at key stage 4 and went on to a Level 3 course.

At present, the third year of full-time study in a college or a school is funded at a lower rate as these students will start their third year of study aged 18. This makes it challenging for colleges and schools to successfully design and deliver structured three-year programmes.

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<sup>35</sup> A qualification equivalent to a GCSE at grade D to G, or 3 to 1

## Recommendation 5i

### Government to ensure all post-16 providers receive full funding for delivering structured three-year post-16 programmes of study

The government should ensure full funding for full-time three-year study programmes is available for learners who are at a lower starting point based on their key stage 4 results (e.g. Level 1 or below, or borderline Level 2 learners).

The government has recently proposed that institutions may be able to draw down a one-off payment of **£750** (per subject) for students who do not hold a GCSE grade 4 (or above) or a Level 2 Functional Skills qualification in maths and or English by the start of a T level programme. Incidentally, the current funding for a full-time 18-year-old student is **£700** lower than for 16 and 17 year olds.

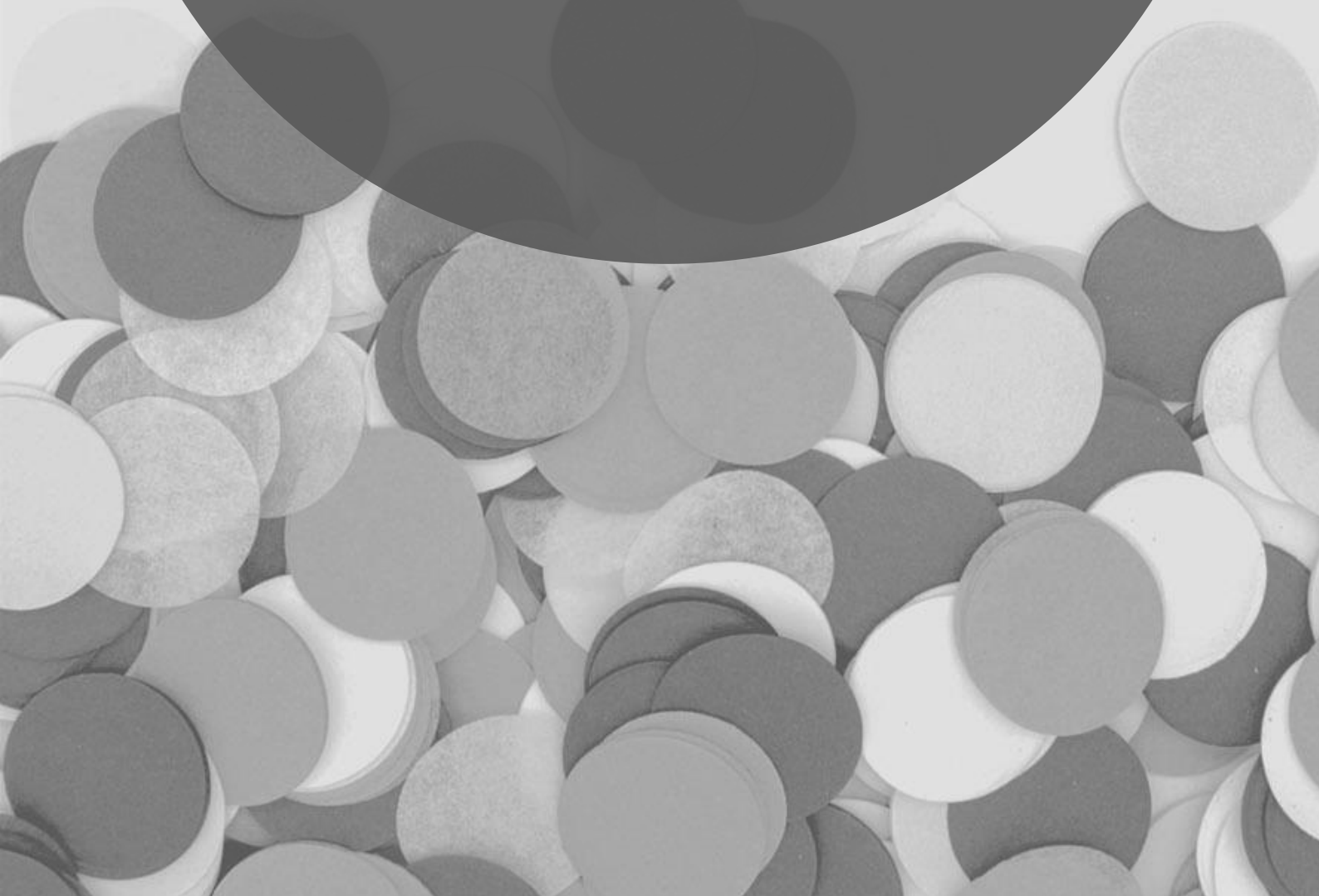
## Recommendation 5ii

### Government, schools and further education colleges to promote structured programmes of three-year study

Where a learner is likely to require additional time to achieve a full Level 3 by age 19, this should be planned as part of a structured three-year programme. Hence, a year 12 transition period should not feel like a standalone year. Instead, it should allow for a full Level 2 programme of study with targeted vocational options that lead into the Level 3 equivalent vocational qualification in year 13, and not just be focussed on English and maths at Level 2. This option would be particularly helpful for new arrivals from overseas who require a period of time to overcome the language barrier, before successfully engaging with their study programme. This structured three-year programme should also be suitable for those who have achieved Level 1 at key stage 4, and those who only just achieved a Level 2 at key stage 4.

A transition period, as part of a structured three-year programme, should allow for young people who are unsure about what they want to do to have taster experiences in the first few months of college. This would mean a student can experience different options and ensure they choose the course they are most likely to stick with. This could work in a similar way to the way that graduate schemes work which enable young people to experience different vocational options before choosing the one they enjoy and can gain the most from.

# Appendices



# Appendix 1 - Glossary

Term	Description
<b>Academic</b>	Includes AS and A levels, plus a range of other less common qualifications including the Extended Project (Diploma), Pre U qualifications, the International Baccalaureate, Free Standing Maths, Advanced Extension Award and Core Maths
<b>Alternative provision</b>	External educational arranged by a school or local authority for pupils not attending mainstream schools
<b>A level</b>	Advanced level qualifications (at Level 3). Can include applied A levels and double awards. The cohorts analysed in this report also took AS levels, equivalent to half an A level
<b>Applied General</b>	Applied General qualifications are Level 3 qualifications that provide broad study of a vocational area. They are recognised by at least three Higher Education Institutions as fulfilling entry requirements to a range of HE courses
<b>Apprenticeship</b>	<p>Apprenticeships combine practical training in the workplace with study and last between one and four years. They can be at different educational levels across a range of subjects.</p> <p>There are three main types of apprenticeship:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intermediate - Level 2 (GCSE equivalent)</li> <li>• Advanced – Level 3 (A level equivalent)</li> <li>• Higher – Level 4 or 5 (foundation degree equivalent)</li> </ul> <p>In September 2015, the government introduced new degree apprenticeships</p>
<b>Attainment 8</b>	<p>A key stage 4 performance measure for secondary schools implemented from 2016 measuring the achievement of a pupil across eight subjects including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mathematics (double weighted)</li> <li>• English (double weighted)</li> <li>• three further qualifications that count in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) measure</li> <li>• three further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or any other non-GCSE qualifications on the <a href="#">DfE approved list</a></li> </ul>
<b>Average points score (APS)</b>	Students receive points based on the grades achieved in Level 3 qualifications. The total points scored by a student are divided by their total number of entries (where some qualifications are more or less than one entry) to calculate an APS per entry
<b>CEIAG</b>	Careers education, information, advice and guidance

<b>Term</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Composition effect</b>	The effect that a group's composition has on overall performance. For example, one region may perform better for both deprived and non-deprived students than another region, but may perform worse overall because they are comprised of a far greater proportion of deprived students than the other region
<b>Destination measures</b>	Statistics published by the DfE showing the destination of students after key stage 4 and key stage 5. Includes students continuing their education by institution type e.g. specialist provider, independent schools, those in apprenticeships, and those not in education
<b>DfE</b>	The DfE (Department for Education) is a government department. The DfE is responsible for education and children's services in England
<b>EBacc</b>	The EBacc is a school performance measure for key stage 4 introduced in 2010. It measures the number of pupils who get five A*-C grades in the below subjects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English</li> <li>• mathematics</li> <li>• history or geography</li> <li>• the sciences</li> <li>• a language</li> </ul>
<b>EAL</b>	EAL (English as an additional language) means children who do not have English as their first language. The DfE defines first language as "the language to which a child was initially exposed during early development and continues to be exposed to this language in the home or in the community"
<b>EHCP</b>	Education, Health and Care Plan. Note that, in this report, we use the term EHCP to refer to EHCP or a statement of special educational needs
<b>Facilitating subject</b>	Facilitating subjects are a list of subjects previously issued by the Russell Group as being accepted by a wide range of courses at university, thereby helping students to keep their options open. These subjects are Biology; Chemistry; Physics; Mathematics; Further Mathematics; Geography; History; English Literature and Classical/Modern Languages Note the Russell Group withdrew this list in May 2019
<b>FSM</b>	Free school meals

Term	Description
<b>FSM eligibility</b>	Children will be eligible to receive free school meals (FSM) if their parent or guardian (or the child in their own right) gets any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income Support</li> <li>• Income-based Jobseekers Allowance</li> <li>• Income-related Employment and Support Allowance</li> <li>• Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999</li> <li>• The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit</li> <li>• Child Tax Credit</li> <li>• Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for four weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit</li> <li>• Universal Credit</li> </ul>
<b>FSM Ever 6</b>	FSM Ever 6 is a classification for pupils who have been FSM eligible at any point in the last six years
<b>Further education (FE)</b>	Post-secondary school level education that is below undergraduate degree level
<b>Higher Education (HE)</b>	Post-secondary school level education generally offered at universities and other academic institutions
<b>IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index)</b>	A national dataset that allows linking of a pupil's home address to a relative deprivation score. It is based on the proportion of households in an area that are in receipt of income-based benefits
<b>ILR (Individualised Learner Record)</b>	A person-level dataset based on statutory returns made by colleges and other post-16 providers about the characteristics of their students and the courses studied
<b>Key stage 2</b>	Covers the four years of schooling from years 3 to 6 (pupils are normally aged between 7 and 11 years). In this report we use the term to refer to the assessments made at the end of the key stage
<b>Key stage 4</b>	Covers the two years of schooling which includes GCSEs, usually years 10 and 11 (pupils are normally aged between 14 and 16). In this report we normally use the term to refer to the assessments made at the end of the key stage
<b>Key stage 5</b>	Covers the two or three years of schooling which includes A levels or equivalent (pupils are normally aged between 16 and 18)
<b>Level of study</b>	In this report learners are categorised into a level of study based on the volume of their qualifications at different levels
<b>Level 1</b>	A qualification equivalent to a GCSE at grade D to G, or 3 to 1. A <b>full Level 1</b> means the achievement of at least 5 A* to G (or 9 to 1) at GCSE or equivalent qualifications, but not achieved Level 2

Term	Description
<b>Level 2</b>	A qualification equivalent to a GCSE at grade A* to C, or 9 to 4. A <b>full Level 2</b> means the achievement of at least 5 A* to C (or 9 to 4) at GCSE or equivalent qualifications
<b>Level 3</b>	A qualification equivalent to an A level pass. A <b>full Level 3</b> means the achievement of at least two E grades at A level or other equivalent qualifications
<b>Level 2 or 3 by 19</b>	The government produces statistics on the achievement of full Level 2 or Level 3 by age 19 at the England, regional and local authority level
<b>Maintained (school)</b>	Schools that are maintained by the local authority. They must follow the national curriculum and national teacher pay and conditions
<b>Mainstream</b>	For the purposes of this report, mainstream is defined as any provision which does not specifically cater solely for SEND pupils. However, note that the supply analysis in this report splits out further education supply from other mainstream provision
<b>National</b>	For the purposes of this report, national refers to England data
<b>NEET</b>	A young person Not in Education, Employment or Training
<b>NPD (National Pupil Database)</b>	A database controlled by the Department for Education, based on data collections from 2 to 21-year olds in state-funded education in the UK. It includes characteristics of pupils from the school census along with their attainment in statutory assessments
<b>Off-rolling</b>	The practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or by encouraging a parent to remove their child from the school roll, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the school rather than in the best interests of the pupil
<b>Progress 8</b>	Progress 8 is a performance measure for secondary schools implemented from 2016 measuring the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school. Performance is measured across Attainment 8 subjects
<b>Provider</b>	In this report, “provider” is used as a general term to cover schools, colleges or any other educational establishment
<b>Pupil premium</b>	The pupil premium grant (PPG) is payable to schools and local authorities with pupils who are disadvantaged or have parents in the armed forces. The purpose of the disadvantaged part of PPG is to close the gap between disadvantaged and other pupils by raising disadvantaged pupils’ attainment.
<b>Region</b>	For the purposes of this report, this refers to the nine regions of England: London, South East, South West, East Midlands, West Midlands, East of England, North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber
<b>RPA (Raising the Participation Age)</b>	RPA refers to the government requirement for all young people in England to continue in education or training until at least their 18 <sup>th</sup> birthday. This could be through full-time study, full-time work or volunteering combined with part-time education or training or an apprenticeship or traineeship

<b>Term</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>School Action</b>	A SEN code used prior to the SEN reforms in 2014. Used when there was evidence that a child is not making progress at school and there was a need for action to help with their special educational needs
<b>School Action Plus</b>	A SEN code used prior to the SEN reforms in 2014. Used when School Action had not been sufficient
<b>School census</b>	A statutory census that takes place each term. It collects data on the individual pupils and the school itself
<b>SEN Support</b>	A SEN code used since the SEN reforms in 2014. Intensive and personalised intervention which is required to enable the child/ young person to be engaged in learning
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SEND</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
<b>Statement (of SEN)</b>	This is a document that sets out a child's SEN and any additional help that the child should receive. A Statement was normally made when the educational provision required to meet a child's needs could not be met by the resources within a child's school at School Action or School Action Plus. Statements should all have been converted to EHCPs by April 2018
<b>STEM</b>	STEM refers to science, technology, engineering and mathematics
<b>Students continuing</b>	In this report, we use the term "students continuing" to show the proportion of students that remain in the same institution between academic years
<b>Success rate</b>	Success rates for apprenticeships and further education qualifications show how many learners who started a qualification completed it successfully
<b>Technical</b>	Technical qualifications are Level 3 qualifications for students wishing to specialise in a technical occupation or occupational group. They lead to recognised occupations, for example in engineering, IT or accounting, and are recognised by trade or professional bodies
<b>T level</b>	T levels are courses, which will be on a par with A levels and will provide young people with a choice between technical and academic education post 16. Courses in construction, digital and education & childcare will be first taught from September 2020. A further 22 courses will be rolled out from 2021, covering sectors such as finance & accounting, engineering & manufacturing, and creative & design
<b>Traineeship</b>	Traineeships were introduced in August 2013 and are designed to help young people develop the skills needed for an apprenticeship and/or employment. Traineeships last between six weeks and six months and include a work experience placement with an employer; work preparation training; and English and mathematics provision where required
<b>Transition Programme</b>	The Transition Programme is aimed at young people who are not ready to commence a Level 3 T level at age 16 but are likely to achieve this by age 19

Term	Description
<b>Value Added (KS4 to KS5)</b>	The key stage 4 to key stage 5 value added (VA) measure calculates how much progress students make between KS4 and KS5. Individual students' scores can also be averaged to find a VA score for each qualification offered at a school or college
<b>VET</b>	Vocational education and training
<b>Vocational</b>	Either applied general or technical qualifications

# Appendix 2 - Points scores

## Key stage 5 point scores

Points scores for some common Key Stage 5 qualifications used in APS (average points score) per entry calculations are shown below. The size of the qualification is used in calculating APS per entry; for example, an AS qualification is 0.5 entries, so an A at AS counts as 50 for APS per entry calculations (i.e. 25/0.5).

### GCE/Applied A level

(Size: 1 entry)

Grade	Points
A*	60
A	50
B	40
C	30
D	20
E	10
Fail	0

### GCE/Applied AS

(Size: 0.5 entries)

Grade	Points
A	25
B	20
C	15
D	10
E	5
Fail	0

### GCE/Applied Double Award

(Size: 2 entries)

Grade	Points
A*A*	120
A*A	110
AA	100
AB	90
BB	80
BC	70
CC	60
CD	50
DD	40
DE	30
EE	20
Fail	0

### BTEC Subsidiary Diploma

(Size: 1 entry)

Grade	Points
D*	50
D	35
M	25
P	15
Fail	0

### BTEC Diploma

(Size: 2 entries)

Grade	Points
D*D*	100
D*D	85
DD	70
DM	60
MM	50
MP	40
PP	30
Fail	0

### BTEC Extended Diploma

(Size: 3 entries)

Grade	Points
D*D*D*	150
D*D*D	135
D*DD	120
DDD	105
DDM	95
DMM	85
MMM	75
MMP	65
MPP	55
PPP	45
Fail	0

Further information on all points available in the DfE published data can be found at:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-qualifications-discount-codes-and-point-scores](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-qualifications-discount-codes-and-point-scores)

## Key stage 4 point scores

Although key stage 4 qualifications have been reformed recently with students now achieving numbered grades instead of the old letters, the students tracked as part of this research completed their key stage 4 studies before this change occurred. Therefore, their prior attainment is expressed via the old point scores which are equivalent to letter grades.

Where we have expressed the average points a student achieved at key stage 4 as an approximate letter grade, we used the lower and upper boundaries shown in the table below:

Grade	Points	Range used in average prior attainment bands	
		Lower Boundary	Upper Boundary
A*	58	55	58
A	52	49	55
B	46	43	49
C	40	37	43
D	34	31	37
E	28	25	31
F	22	19	25
G	16	13	19
Fail	0	0	13

# Appendix 3 - Methodology

## 1. Quantitative research

Much of the quantitative research carried out for this project relied on the data requests made by the project team to access the National Pupil Database (NPD). The DfE provides access to this data for approved research purposes via an application process. This assesses the suitability of the request using the ONS's "Five Safes" framework covering safe people, projects, settings, data and outputs.

The NPD allows research organisations to track anonymous individual students longitudinally. This research project made two requests to the DfE for access to NPD held data. The first was for core NPD information covering school census details, exam results and outcomes. The second was for access to the "Linked ILR" dataset which contains information from the Individualised Learner Record which is completed by FE Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges and apprenticeship training providers. The NPD add "meaningless identifiers" to this data which enables these students to be tracked through the data back to schools they may have been in, which was important when characterising and understanding movement between schools and colleges. Furthermore, this data allows a pupils' key stage 4 prior attainment to be more accurately measured and compared to their peers in schools.

NPD data used in the project includes:

- January school census information (2011 – 2017)
- Post-16 school learning aims information (2010/11 – 2016/17)
- Key stage 5 outcomes and exam results data (2010/11 – 2016/17)
- Key stage 4 prior attainment for the cohorts included
- ILR learner and learning aim information (2010/11 – 2016/17).

The data made available to the project by the DfE was processed and joined together using SQL scripts via a relational database. The anonymous matching reference supplied by the NPD (the Pupil Matching Reference) was used to join learners over time, as well as to their planned learning and outcomes data. Students were added to 'cohorts' based on their age and tracked through their time in post-16 education at age 16, 17 and 18 (at the start of the academic year). A small number of students fall out of their age-based year group (for example, students put 'up' a year) and these are excluded from certain analysis.

Students continuing in the same establishment were determined by a combination of the institution identifier, along with its postcodes. Using postcode helps track schools which have converted to academies during in this time. Furthermore, institutions from the college data (ILR) were matched on postcodes to account for additional campuses (for example). This is also a factor in a small number of cases where 'schools' became 'colleges' during the sample period.

As discussed in the report, the public accountability measures for schools and colleges at both key stage 4 and key stage 5 have changed considerably in the last 10 years. At key stage 4, major changes to the way BTEC and other vocational qualifications have been counted affect the comparability of cohorts' prior attainment. As such, only the most recent cohorts with attainment measured by the DfE following the implementation of the Wolf Reforms are used when considering analysis split by, or controlled for, prior attainment.

As key stage 5, the switch from QCA points to 16-18 points from 2015/16 has a similar effect on comparability of outcomes. For this analysis, data from earlier years was 'rebased' to the new 16-18 points by recalculating points from the individual exam result data. This is helpful for analysis

purposes as the previous QCA points scale had a substantial drop-off for most qualifications between the lowest grade achievable and 'fail', which therefore skews calculations of average points.

Details on a student's contextual characteristics (gender, FSM, ethnicity, etc) was taken from the school census information, which will be from age 15 in cases where they have moved into College.

Students were classified to level and pathway combinations (e.g. Level 3 academic) according to the relative size of their learning aim entries. A similar process was used to classify the subject area pathways, and students with equally weighted mixed pathways were labelled accordingly.

The team undertook a variety of quality assurance steps to confirm the overall accuracy of the datasets created. Further checking of edge cases was also conducted and this included checking schools with very low retention rates. In some cases, these were where a sixth form had closed down, sometimes temporarily.

## 2. Qualitative research

The qualitative aspect of this research sought to understand the experiences and needs of the 16-19 year olds who have undertaken or are on a three-year study programme, particularly those that have changed course or institution or had to start again. Data was gathered through focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

In the focus groups the young people were encouraged to share ideas about:

- Their educational experiences
- The post-16 choices made and the reasons behind these
- What factors shaped their choices (for example Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG), location, prior experience, employment opportunities)
- What factors contributed to changing courses or starting again
- What support mechanisms facilitated these choices
- Whether they had additional support needs
- What advice they would give to young people in a similar position.

The semi-structured interviews with young people enabled a more in-depth exploration of their lived experiences of their post-16 education choices and trajectories.

Young people from eight institutions – six further education colleges, one school and one sixth form college – participated in the focus groups and interviews. In total 67 young people participated in this research. The students had varying levels of attainment at GCSE although most had not met anticipated benchmarks, often failing English and/or maths; were from a range of ethnic groups; some had special educational needs or a disability, including anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and physical disabilities. A few students had previously been in a Pupil Referral Unit or alternative provision and others had been excluded and been in several secondary schools. Several were new entrants into the country with English as a Second Language (ESOL).

The process of analysis of responses was guided by the phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006)<sup>36</sup>. This iterative process of categorisation seeks to continually refine and

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<sup>36</sup> Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

test the description as it unfolds. All interview and focus group transcripts were fully transcribed. Through the generation of codes themes, rich and detailed, as well as complex accounts, emerged. In identifying the quotations and illustrations for the report, care has been taken to anonymise individual young people and the participating institutions. In the case study illustrations young people have been given fictional names.

Our thanks to the schools, colleges and young people who gave up their time to support us with this research.

Cover photo by [Gaelle Marcel](#)

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