

# Post-16 transitions for 'lower GCSE attainers' in the North of Tyne

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## About this report

This is a summary of North of Tyne (NoT) specific findings from a research project on the post-16 transitions of young people who do not achieve grade A\*-C (now 9-4) in English and maths GCSE by the end of Key Stage 4 (KS4). We called these young people 'lower attainers'. In most years they make up around two fifths of the GCSE cohort.

The research involved quantitative and qualitative analysis linking KS4 and post-16 data. It produced many important new insights into who these young people are, what happens to them in the post-16 phase and what the barriers are to progress and achievement. You can find below links to the full report and a summary<sup>1</sup>, as well as a recording of the launch event<sup>2</sup>, a blog with some of the main findings<sup>3</sup>, and a data dashboard enabling exploration of the data at local education authority, combined authority, regional and national levels.<sup>4</sup>

The research focused in particular on two combined authority areas: North of Tyne and Greater Manchester, and within them on smaller localities, to explore how transitions are affected by local structures of provision and practices. In the North of Tyne, these localities were Alnwick, Wallsend and Longbenton & Killingworth (see Appendix A for definitions). One of the key contributions of this aspect of the research was to document all the advertised post-16 provision in these localities (by subject and level) and the entry requirements, thus identifying which learners could get into which courses/apprenticeships.

This short report summarises findings for the North of Tyne. For ease of reading we have not included wider findings or conclusions or details of our methodology, which can be found at the links below. There is a brief methodological overview at Appendix B. A key point to note is that the research covers the years 2013 to 2017 (the most recent data that was available at the time of the research). The main focus is on the cohort completing Key Stage 4 in 2015, since these can be tracked through to age 19. This means that we refer to the old GCSE grading system (A\*-U). For

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/post16transitions>. The main report is entitled: *Moving on from initial GCSE 'failure': Post-16 transitions for 'lower attainers' and why the English education system must do better.*

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/events/moving-on-from-gcse-failure>

<sup>3</sup> <http://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/posts/2021/02/filling-a-youth-shaped-gap-in-the-fe-white-paper-reducing-inequalities-in-post-16-progression/>

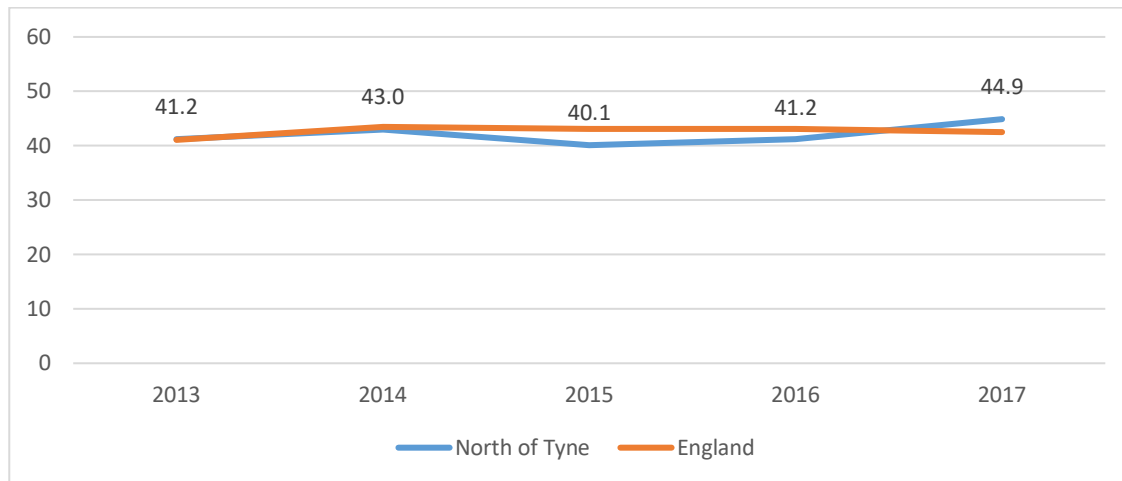
<sup>4</sup> Available to download here: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/students-who-do-not-achieve-a-grade-c-or-above-in-english-and-maths>

the smaller localities we use pooled data from the 2013 to 2016 GCSE cohorts to increase the number of observed learners.

### 'Lower attainers' in North of Tyne

The proportion of 'lower attainers' in North of Tyne is similar to that of England as a whole (Figure 1), although with some fluctuation over time. While in 2015 and 2016 North of Tyne had a relatively low proportion of 'lower attainers' compared to England, in 2017 it saw an increase to 44.9 per cent, above the percentage for England as a whole.

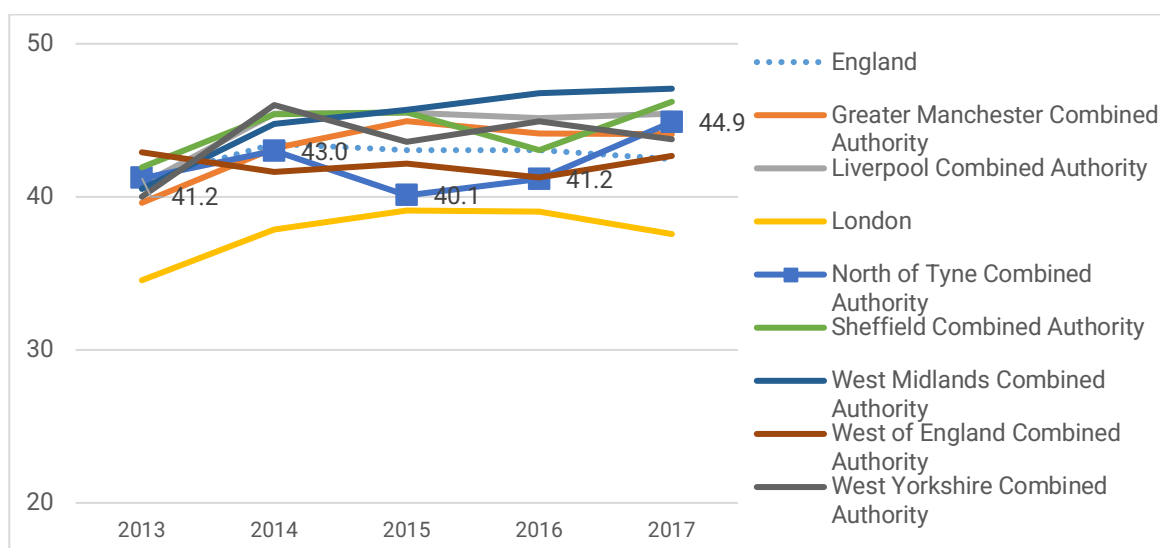
**Figure 1: Percentage of learners in North of Tyne and England who were 'lower attainers' (i.e. did not achieve grade C/4 in English and/or maths, or both), 2013-2017**



Source: National Pupil Database. Note. Data labels are for North of Tyne.

Figure 2 shows the proportion of 'lower attainers' in North of Tyne compared to other combined authorities and England. While this proportion was typically fairly low compared to other combined authority areas except London, the biggest difference in most years was between London and other areas, reflecting the familiar pattern of London's higher educational attainment, rather than between the combined authorities outside London.

**Figure 2: Percentage of cohort who were 'lower attainers', by combined authority, 2013-17**



### Attainment profiles within the 'lower attainer' group

A key aim of our research was to understand the variation within the 'lower attainer' group. While headline figures simply identify proportions achieving key GCSE benchmarks, grouping the others together as those who have not been successful, the reality is that there is a huge range of attainment among 'lower attainers'. Some 'lower attainers' have a strong profile of achievement but have not gained a Grade 4/C in either English or maths, while some have no GCSE or equivalent passes at all.

We grouped 'lower attainers' into nine categories based on attainment in English and maths GCSEs and on their overall GCSE or equivalent achievement. The classification produces nine categories of learners, shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Classification of 'lower attainers' into nine attainment categories**

	Number of GCSEs at A*-C/9-4 (or equivalent qualifications)		
	5 or more	1 to 4	none
Grade C/4 in <b>English</b> but not maths	<i>Five A*-C with English</i>	<i>Some A*-C with English</i>	-
Grade C/4 in <b>maths</b> but not English	<i>Five A*-C with maths</i>	<i>Some A*-C with maths</i>	-
Grade C/4 in neither <b>English nor maths</b>	<i>Five A*-C with neither</i>	<i>Some A*-C with neither</i>	No A*-C

Number of GCSEs at D-G/3-1 (or equivalent)		
5 or more	1 to 4	none
<i>Five D-G</i>	<i>Some D-G</i>	<i>No D-G</i>

A key finding from our research overall is that it is wrong to suggest that young people who do not achieve standard passes in both English and maths GCSE “leave school with nothing” (Children’s Commissioner, 2019). Many of them have substantial achievements. Yet our qualitative research with young people revealed that these learners often feel like failures. The focus on English and maths meant their other achievements were not valued as much. We argue that there needs to be a major policy shift towards recognising and building on everyone’s achievements, not focusing narrowly on English and maths thresholds.

Table 1 shows that in North of Tyne, 20.7 per cent of 'lower attainers' achieved five or more GCSEs at A\*-C (or equivalent non-GCSE qualifications) in 2015. Additionally, almost three-in-five 'lower attainers' achieved between one and four GCSEs at A\*-C (or equivalents). Of these two groups, substantial proportions also achieved a grade C or above in one of English or maths.

**Table 1: Proportion of 'lower attainers' in each attainment category, 2015 cohort**

	<i>as % of 'lower attainers'</i>		<i>as % of total cohort</i>	
	North of Tyne	England	North of Tyne	England
Five A*-C with English	8.1	9.9	3.2	4.3
Five A*-C with maths	11.7	9.3	4.7	4.0
Five A*-C with neither	0.9	1.3	0.4	0.5
<b>Total with Five A*-C</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>8.8</b>
Some A*-C with English	11.9	12.3	4.8	5.3
Some A*-C with maths	15.8	11.6	6.3	5.0
Some A*-C with neither	29.6	27.6	11.9	11.9
<b>Total with Some A*-C</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>51.5</b>	<b>23.0</b>	<b>22.2</b>
Five D-G	8.4	10.9	3.4	4.7
Some D-G	6.3	9.0	2.5	3.9
No passes	7.5	8.1	3.0	3.5
<i>'Some D-G' and 'No passes' groups combined</i>	<i>13.8</i>	<i>17.1</i>	<i>5.5</i>	<i>7.4</i>
<b>Total with No A*-C</b>	<b>22.1</b>	<b>28.0</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>12.0</b>

Source: National Pupil Database. Excludes learners in independent schools.

Although many young people in the 'lower attainer' group have substantial Key Stage 4 achievements, those in the bottom two categories in Table 1 – the 'No passes' category and the 'Some D-G' category – leave Key Stage 4 in a much more precarious position.

North of Tyne has relatively few of these learners compared to the national average, but nonetheless 13.8 per cent of 'lower attainers' in North of Tyne either achieved no passes, or some passes but fewer than five.<sup>5</sup> This equates to 5.5 per cent of the whole cohort in 2015.

As will be discussed below, this is a group that tends to have worse outcomes than the other categories of 'lower attainers', and for whom more support is therefore likely to be required. We do not have data on the characteristics of these learners in the North of Tyne region, but the national data suggests that more than half of them have special educational needs, and substantial proportions are additionally eligible for Free School Meals. There is also a substantial proportion who have incomplete records in the NPD, suggesting that they may have moved schools during Year 11 or faced other disruption to their education.

<sup>5</sup> Achievement of five GCSE passes is 'full Level 1' and is often held to be an indicator of a broad basic level of education.

## Post-16 destinations

Table 2 shows the destinations of young people living in North of Tyne after completing Key Stage 4. Destinations are those in which the learner was registered on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November following the end of Key Stage 4. Data are pooled over four cohorts (2013 to 2016) to increase the number of observed learners.

The largest overall post-16 destination for learners in North of Tyne was school sixth forms, followed by general FE colleges. Because the two main sixth form colleges in North of Tyne are part of larger FE consortia, it is not possible to separate out transitions to these sixth form colleges in the administrative data (instead learners in these institutions are recorded under the 'General FE college' row). As a result, the data shows almost no learners in North of Tyne making a transition to a sixth form college. North of Tyne had a slightly higher rate of young people entering apprenticeships after Year 11 compared to England as a whole (4.7 per cent versus 3.6 per cent).

Among young people who did not achieve a grade C or above in English and maths, General FE colleges were the most common destination. Correspondingly, far fewer of these learners entered school sixth forms (28.2 per cent compared to 52.5 per cent of learners overall). Nonetheless, in North of Tyne a substantially larger proportion of 'lower attainers' made a transition to a school sixth form than in England as a whole. 'Lower attainers' were more likely than other learners to enter into an apprenticeship after Key Stage 4, with an average of 6.4 per cent of North of Tyne-based learners without a grade C in English and maths moving into apprenticeship in the cohorts observed – slightly higher than the England figure.

**Table 2: Post-16 destinations in North of Tyne compared to England as a whole, 2013-2016 cohorts**

	<i>All learners</i>		<i>'Lower attainers'</i>	
	North of Tyne	England	North of Tyne	England
General FE College	34.4	36.7	49.5	55.2
Sixth Form College	0.1	12.8	<0.5	6.6
School sixth form	52.5	37.9	28.2	17.2
Any other education provider	2.6	2.6	4.8	3.6
Apprenticeship	4.7	3.6	6.4	5.0
Traineeship	0.4	0.2	<1.0	0.4
Employment and/or training	0.9	0.5	1.9	1.0
NEET, unknown or not recorded	4.5	5.7	8.4	10.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

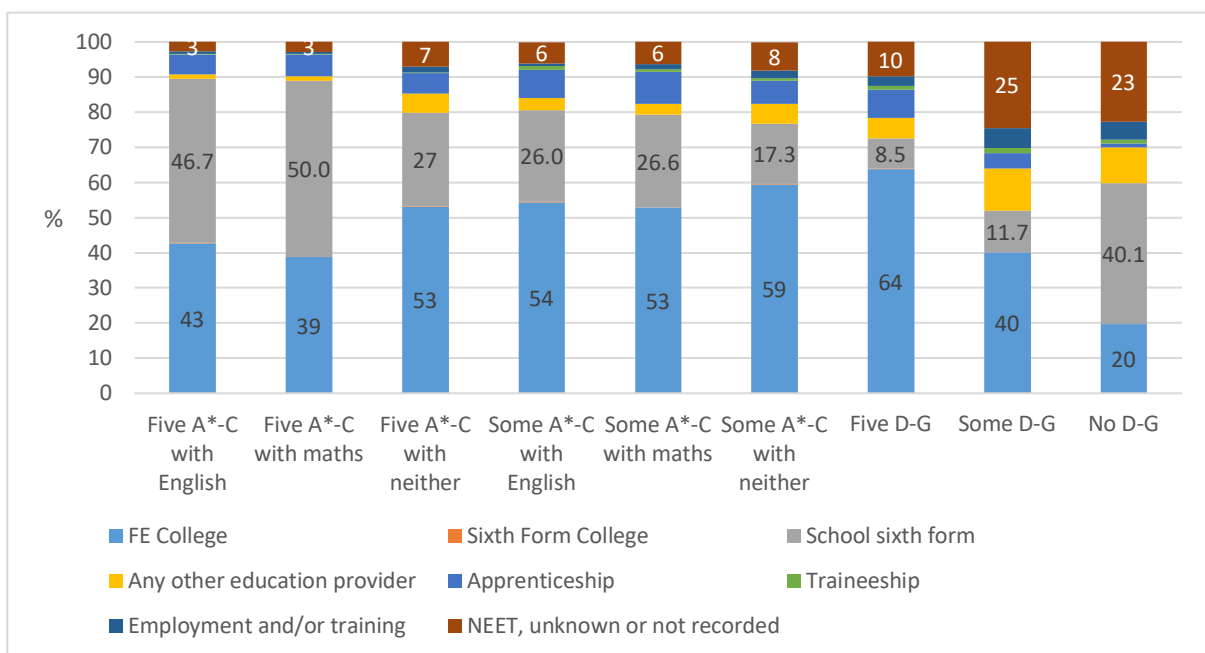
Source: National Pupil Database. Excludes learners in independent schools. Note. Traineeships included with employment and training due to low numbers of observations at city region level.

As we have seen, there is considerable diversity within the overall group of 'lower attainers' in terms of their Key Stage 4 attainment profile. When we examine the post-16 destinations of young people in each attainment category, it is clear that these differences in attainment have an impact on the types of transitions made. Among 'lower attainers' with five or more GCSEs at A\*-C (or equivalent) including one of English or maths (i.e. the first two categories), transitions to school sixth forms were relatively common, with almost half of these learners moving into a school sixth form. For learners belonging to the other attainment categories, however, school sixth forms were

a much less frequent destination – particularly for learners without grade A\*-C in either English or maths and with few, or no, A\*-C grades overall.

For learners in the ‘Some A\*-C with neither’, the ‘Five D-G’ and particularly the ‘Some D-G’ and ‘No D-G’ categories, unsuccessful transitions (i.e. to NEET or unknown status) were relatively common. Of those in the last two categories, close to a quarter made an unsuccessful transition – which is similar to national figures for the ‘No D-G’ (23 per cent compared to 22.6 per cent for England), but greater than national figures for the ‘Some D-G’ group (25 per cent compared to 14.6 per cent for England). This suggests that these learners may require additional support leading up to, and during, the post-16 transition. In focus groups with young people in North of Tyne, several participants told us that while careers advice was provided in their schools, often it failed to meet their needs and expectations. Some felt that there wasn’t enough time to consider options, and instead of offering meaningful opportunities to discuss their plans and interests, careers advice felt more like being pressurised into “just picking something”. Others said that appointments with careers advisers were offered to some students but not others, leaving them feeling overlooked and unsure what to do.

**Figure 4: Transitions to post-16 destinations for young people in North of Tyne, by attainment category, 2013-2016 cohorts**



Source: National Pupil Database. Excludes learners in independent schools.

## Levels of learning in Year 12

Just as learners across the attainment categories display differences in terms of their post-16 destinations, so too are there notable differences in terms of the levels of learning entered after Key Stage 4. Focusing first on learners in education courses, as opposed to apprenticeships or traineeships, Table 3 shows the principal level of learning that young people in North of Tyne were engaged in on November 1<sup>st</sup> following Key Stage 4.<sup>6</sup>

Of young people in the first two attainment categories ('Five A\*-C with English' and 'Five A\*-C with maths'), a majority made a transition to courses at Level 3. Of these, a substantial proportion were enrolled on at least one AS or A level qualification. For learners in the other attainment categories, most transitions were either to Level 2, or Level 1. It is notable that even among learners who already achieved five or more GCSE of equivalent passes (i.e. 'full Level 1'), a not insignificant proportion made a transition to Level 1 as their main level of learning post-16. For instance, among those in the 'Some A\*-C with neither' category, more than a quarter were on Level 1 courses, and almost 9 per cent were on Entry Level courses, in November of Year 12.

**Table 3: Levels of learning in Year 12 for young people in North of Tyne, by attainment category (learners in education only)**

	Entry Level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	of which, at least one A/AS Level*	Unable to determine	Total
Non-lower attainers	<0.5	1.0	2.7	93.9	78.2	<5.0	100
Five A*-C with English	<1.0	4.0	13.0	77.9	46.5	<5.0	100
Five A*-C with maths	0.7	5.9	16.7	73.8	44.9	2.9	100
Five A*-C with neither	4.9	24.7	37.0	25.4	7.1	8.0	100
Some A*-C with English	2.1	12.0	36.8	41.7	16.6	7.4	100
Some A*-C with maths	1.1	15.0	37.7	39.4	13.7	6.8	100
Some A*-C with neither	8.5	25.9	42.3	14.5	4.2	8.8	100
Five D-G	12.0	33.3	39.8	5.1	<1.0	9.7	100
Some D-G	<2.0	35.8	15.1	<2.0	<0.5	31.5	100
No D-G	13.2	15.8	3.1	1.8	<0.5	66.1	100
Total lower attainers	5.4	18.1	30.3	34.7	16.6	11.5	100
Total	2.1	7.5	13.3	71.3	54.7	5.8	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N = 28,657. Note: Population is limited to learners observed in education providers.

<sup>6</sup> Level of learning is defined as the level associated with the largest number of guided learning hours (GLH) across all the learning aims the learner was enrolled in on November 1<sup>st</sup> following completion of Key Stage 4. For instance, if a young person is enrolled in a Level 2 BTEC in Sports of 360 GLH, a Level 2 Functional Skills Award in maths of 45 GLH, and a Level 1 certificate in employability of 90 GLH, their total GLH at Level 2 are 405, with 90 GLH at Level 1. This person would be categorised as learning at Level 2.

This is a nation-wide phenomenon, not something that occurs only in North of Tyne, but it raises questions about the process of allocating learners to different levels of learning, and the reasons why some learners are placed on an apparently lower level than the one they already hold. The national data suggests that this tends to be more common in vocational areas related to construction and engineering. The professionals we interviewed suggested that learners often will not have had the chance to study these subjects during Key Stage 4, meaning that most learners are required to start at a lower level to build up the required basic skills. But this phenomenon is observed, to some degree, across all subject areas, and, crucially, there appear to be spatial differences in the tendency for learners to make a transition to the same, or a lower, level of learning than the one they already acquired at Key Stage 4. Understanding the reasons behind these differences is an area for further investigation.

Table 4 shows what level of apprenticeship young people in North of Tyne transitioned to after Key Stage 4, again depending on their attainment category. Due to the low number of learners moving into apprenticeships, some values have had to be suppressed, and others approximated. It is nonetheless clear that ‘lower attainers’ are less likely than other learners to move into a Level 3 (Higher) apprenticeship and more likely to start on a Level 2 (Intermediate) apprenticeship. This is true for learners in all the attainment categories, but it does appear that those who attained a grade C or above in one of English or maths (rather than neither) are somewhat more likely to move into a Level 3 apprenticeship rather than a Level 2 apprenticeship.

**Table 4: Levels of learning in Year 12 for young people in apprenticeships in North of Tyne, by attainment category**

	Level 2	Level 3	Unable to determine	Total
Non-lower attainers	58.3	33.6	8.2	100
Five A*-C with English	78.6	<15.0	<10.0	100
Five A*-C with maths	76.6	<20.0	<5.0	100
Five A*-C with neither	84.2	<10.0	<10.0	100
Some A*-C with English	74.0	<10.0	<20.0	100
Some A*-C with maths	73.1	16.6	10.3	100
Some A*-C with neither	82.5	6.5	11.0	100
Five D-G	79.3	<5.0	<20.0	100
Some D-G	53.3	<5.0	<50.0	100
No D-G	-	-	-	100
Total lower attainers	77.1	10.4	12.6	100
Total	68.8	20.5	10.7	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N = 1,511. Note: Population is limited to learners observed on apprenticeship programmes.



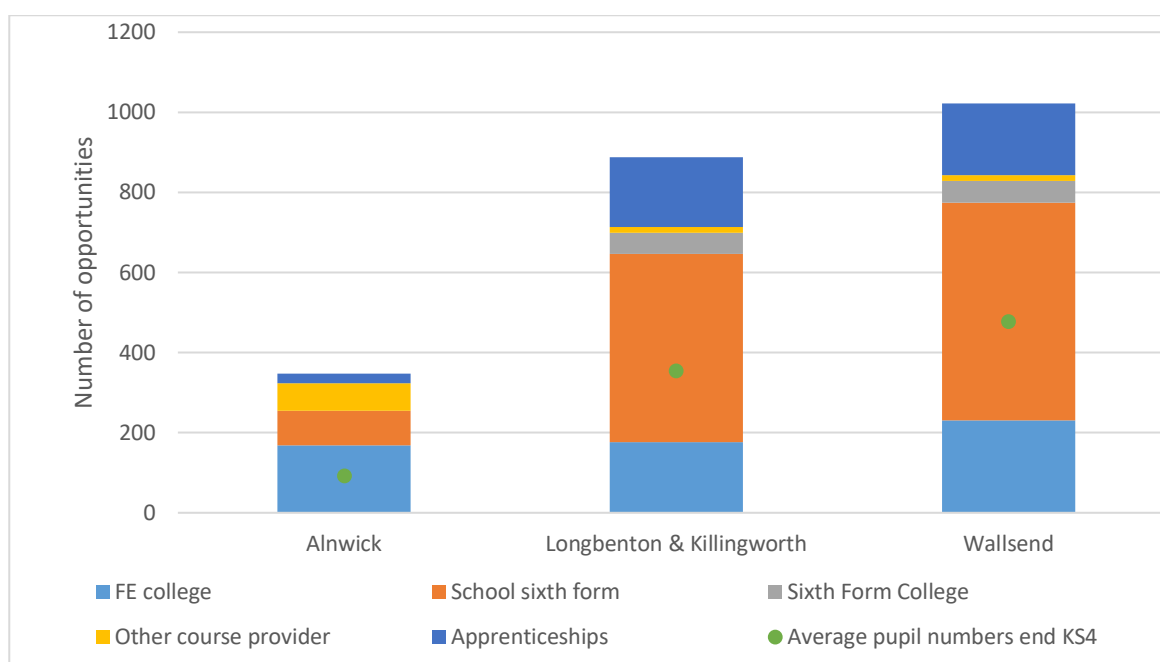
## Post-16 opportunities in case study localities

To explore the lived realities of post-16 transitions, we zoomed in on smaller localities. We selected three individual localities within North of Tyne – Alnwick, Wallsend, and Longbenton & Killingworth – and analysed for each of these areas the post-16 providers that could be reached within 60 minutes travelling via public transport (or on foot) by using the Google Maps API. For Alnwick, a threshold of 90 minutes was used instead to reflect its rural location. We then compiled data on all courses offered at these providers, including the level and the subject area, by visiting provider websites. We also gathered data on apprenticeship vacancies using the ‘Find An Apprenticeship’ website on GOV.UK. This gave us a comprehensive overview of all of the post-16 opportunities open to young people in each of the three localities, although this is of necessity a snapshot at a particular point in time.

When we refer to an ‘opportunity’ in this section, we refer to either a course available at a college or other provider (e.g. a Level 1 Diploma in Professional Cookery), or, in the case of apprenticeships, a single apprenticeship vacancy advertised by a provider or employer. It is worth noting that most courses can accommodate relatively large numbers of learners, whereas apprenticeship vacancies are usually for just one place. The number of ‘opportunities’ should therefore be seen as an indication of the *range* of different things that young people have access to, not an indicator of numbers of post-16 places.

What becomes clear when examining post-16 opportunities in this way is that there are substantial differences in what is available to young people depending on where they live. For instance, as shown in Figure 5, the overall number of opportunities is much lower in Alnwick than in both Longbenton & Killingworth, and Wallsend. Furthermore, in Alnwick a relatively greater number of opportunities are provided by ‘other course providers’ (this category includes independent providers, charities, and local authority provision).

**Figure 5: Number of post-16 opportunities by locality and type of provision**

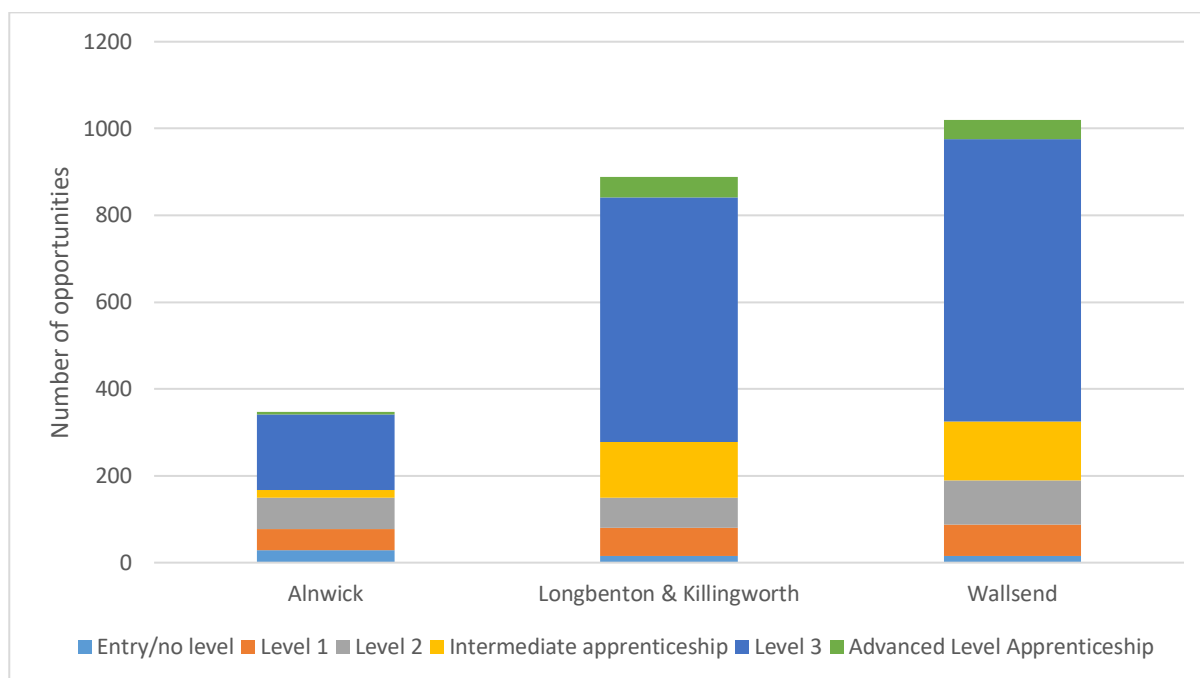


Source: Dataset on opportunity sets constructed by the researchers, average pupil numbers from the National Pupil Database.

As shown in Figure 6, the number of opportunities by type (i.e. courses versus apprenticeships) and level of learning also varies. In Wallsend, and Longbenton & Killingworth, a larger share of opportunities is made up of Level 3 courses. This is likely because there are a relatively large number of school sixth forms in and around these areas, which will all offer a range of AS and A level courses as well as other Level 3 courses.<sup>7</sup>

Learners in Alnwick also have access to fewer apprenticeships, both Intermediate and Higher, than the other two localities, which is perhaps not surprising given Alnwick’s relatively small size and rural location. But it does illustrate the challenge faced by young people in Alnwick who are interested in doing an apprenticeship. With relatively few local apprenticeship opportunities, young people here may find it even harder to find an apprenticeship in their area of interest than young people living in better-connected urban areas. This was confirmed in the focus groups we held in Alnwick, in which several of the young people expressed an interest in apprenticeships but spoke of these being difficult to get in the local area.

**Figure 6: Number of post-16 opportunities by type, level and locality**



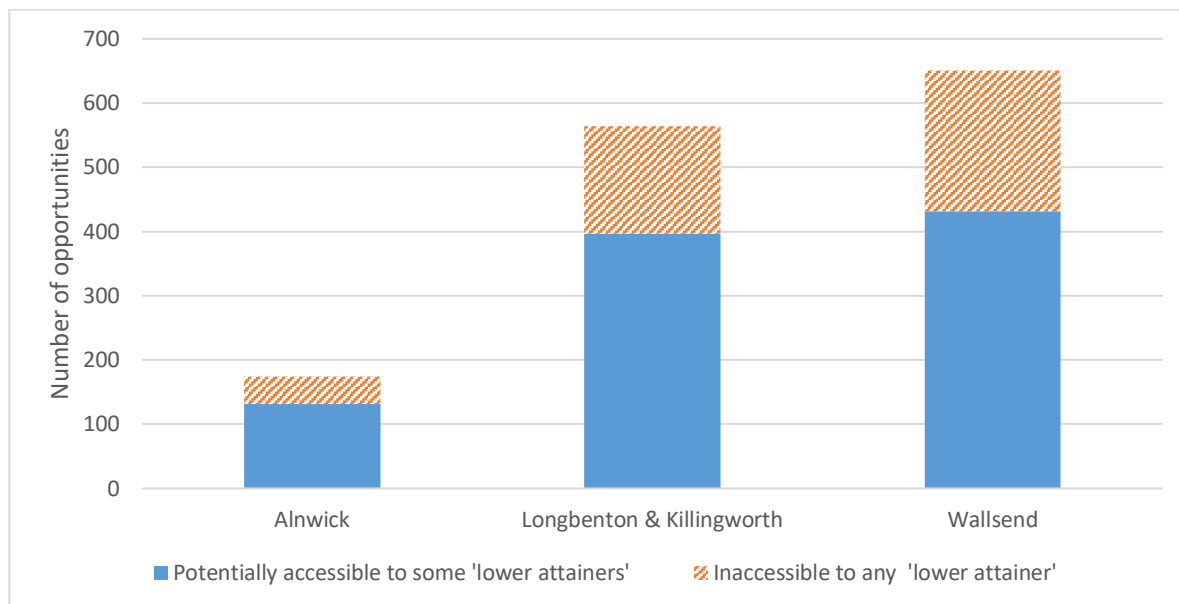
Source: Dataset on opportunity sets constructed by the researchers.

Having examined the total number of post-16 opportunities that are available to young people in each of the three localities, it is important to bear in mind that not all of these will in fact be accessible to young people without grade A\*-C in English and maths. By gathering data on the entry requirements of each of the courses and apprenticeships advertised by providers in the three case study localities, we were able to make an assessment of the number of opportunities that would potentially be accessible to ‘lower attainers’, and the opportunities that would be closed off due to the stated entry requirements including a grade C or above in both English and maths. As shown in Figure 7, such inaccessible opportunities make up a substantial proportion of all post-16

<sup>7</sup> Each A level course offered at each individual school is counted as a separate opportunity. E.g. if an area has five school sixth forms which each offer an A level in History, this is counted as five separate opportunities.

opportunities in each of the three localities. This is particularly the case in Wallsend and in Longbenton & Killingworth.

**Figure 7: Number of post-16 opportunities that are accessible to 'lower attainers'**

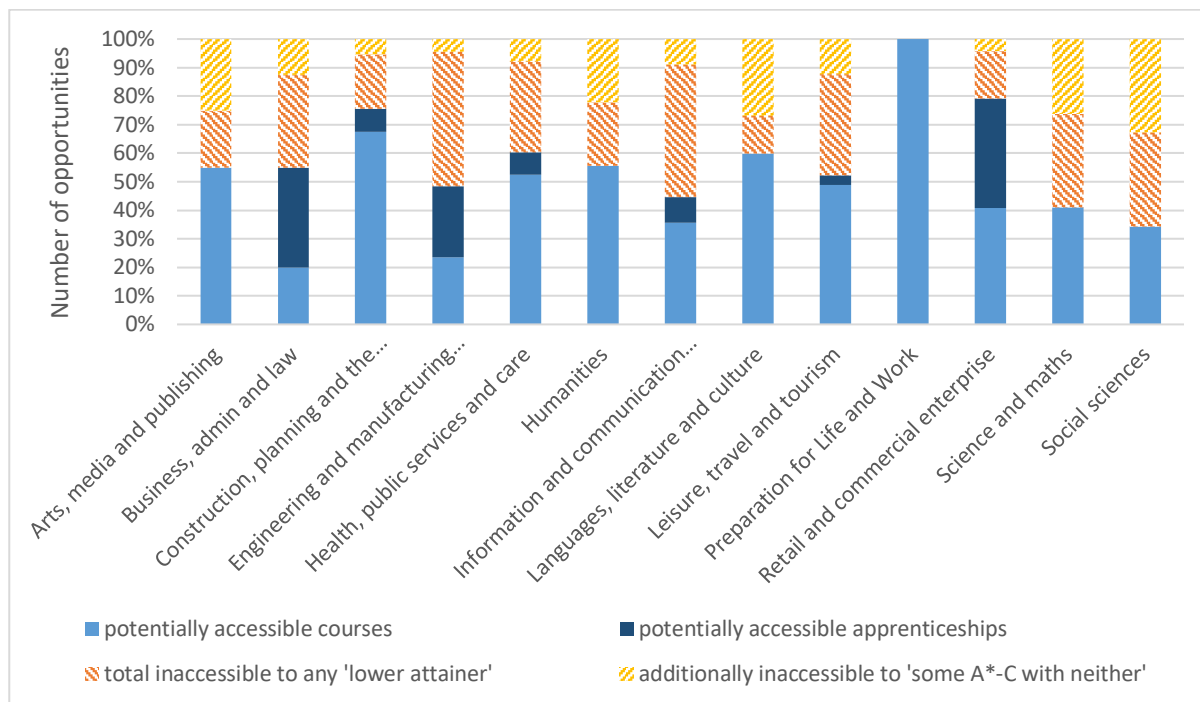


Source: Dataset on opportunity sets constructed by the researchers.

The reason why Figure 7 divides opportunities into those which are inaccessible, and those who are *potentially* accessible to *some* 'lower attainers' (rather than definitely being accessible) is because entry requirements usually include a number of stipulations. Aside from (often, but not always) calling for specific grades in English and maths, they also often include general provisions about, for instance, the required number of GCSEs at grade C/4 or above. Thus, whether a 'lower attainer' is able to access a particular opportunity depends on their specific attainment in not just English and maths but also their other subjects. Other requirements, such as portfolios, auditions and interviews, do not relate specifically to grades.

We can get a better sense of how entry requirements affect different groups of learners by considering the accessibility of opportunities for learners in our different attainment categories. For example, for learners in the 'Some A\*-C with neither' category (the largest sub-group of 'lower attainers'), certain opportunities will be inaccessible due to the requirement to have a grade C in English and maths, but in addition, some opportunities will be blocked because they call for at least five GCSEs at A\*-C. The extent to which opportunities are closed off in this way varies between subject areas, depending on the level that particular subjects tend to be offered at, and potentially due to subject-level differences in entry requirements. For instance, taking Wallsend as an example, we can see in Figure 8 that a relatively large share of opportunities in Engineering and manufacturing, Information and communication, Science and maths, and in Social sciences, are inaccessible to young people in the 'Some A\*-C with neither' category.

**Figure 8: Post-16 opportunities in Wallsend, by subject, type, and accessibility to learners in the 'Some A\*-C with neither' category**



Source: Dataset on opportunity sets constructed by the researchers.

### Actual post-16 destinations in case study localities

Having shown the differences in provision structures and different types of post-16 opportunities in the three case study localities, in this section we compare these to the actual destinations of learners from these areas as observed in the ILR, NPD and NCCIS data.

To provide some context for this, we also show the composition of 'lower attainers' in each locality in Table 5. As in the previous analysis, the cohorts from 2013-2016 are combined together to increase the number of observed learners, since the case-study localities contain relatively small numbers of young people.

As indicated in Table 5, there are some differences in the make-up of 'lower attainers' between localities, but these differences are on the whole fairly minor. Alnwick has relatively more learners in the bottom three attainment categories than the other two localities, which contributes to the overall higher proportion of 'lower attainers' in Alnwick. The overall proportion of 'lower attainers', as well as their distribution across the different attainment categories, is fairly similar across Longbenton & Killingworth and Wallsend, but with a slightly higher number of learners in the 'Some A\*-C with English' category in Longbenton & Killingworth, and a slightly greater proportion of young people in the 'Five A\*-C with neither' category in Wallsend. Compared to national figures, Alnwick had a slightly greater proportion of its 2013-2016 cohorts as 'lower attainers' (46.3 per cent compared to 42.6), and this figure is slightly lower in Longbenton & Killingworth and Wallsend (40.8 per cent in each).

**Table 5: Distribution of learners across attainment categories, by case study locality**

	Alnwick	Longbenton & Killingworth	Wallsend	England
Non-lower attainers	53.7	59.2	59.2	57.4
Five A*-C with English	5.4	5.3	5.1	4.6
Five A*-C with maths	4.3	5.4	5.6	4.9
Five A*-C with neither	5.2	2.3	4.9	2.7
Some A*-C with English	5.4	4.7	2.8	4.2
Some A*-C with maths	3.8	5.0	4.3	4.3
Some A*-C with neither	10.8	12.1	12.3	12.2
Five D-G	4.6	2.1	1.8	3.2
Some D-G	3.5	1.5	1.6	3.3
No D-G	3.3	2.5	2.5	3.2
Total lower attainers	46.3	40.8	40.8	42.6
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 3,700.

Examining the destinations of all 'lower attainers' in each of the three localities, Table 6 shows that Alnwick has by far the largest rate of transition to school sixth forms. As we have seen in Figure 5, courses at general FE colleges make up a greater share of the total number of spatially-accessible opportunities for young people in Alnwick than qualifications provided by school sixth forms. But of course, this is only one factor shaping the actual destinations of learners. The nearest FE college for learners in Alnwick, Northumberland College, is located much further than the local school sixth form, so the latter will be a more convenient option for most learners. Alnwick also sees a decent proportion of 'lower attainers' going into apprenticeships, which is encouraging, although our qualitative fieldwork suggested that there still is a level of unmet demand for apprenticeships in the area.

In Wallsend, a greater proportion of 'lower attainers' move into FE college than in nearby Longbenton & Killingworth, where slightly more learners go to school sixth forms. This is despite the distribution of opportunities being very similar in both areas. Again, one explanation for this is likely to be the distance to different providers. Young people in Wallsend have an FE college within an average journey time of around 15 minutes, whereas those in Longbenton & Killingworth would be travelling, on average, around 40 minutes to reach the same provider. Schools with sixth forms are the predominant local option in Longbenton & Killingworth, with three of these within a 30 minute travel time.

**Table 6: Transitions to post-16 destinations for 'lower attainers' in each case study locality (%), 2013-16 cohorts**

	Alnwick	Longbenton & Killingworth	Wallsend	Total	England
FE College	35.1	54.4	67.2	58.7	55.2
Sixth Form College	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.6
School sixth form	41.1	27.7	16.7	23.6	17.2
Any other education provider	5.4	5.8	5.1	5.4	5.1
Apprenticeship	9.5	6.3	5.3	6.2	5.0
NEET, unknown or not recorded	8.9	5.8	5.6	6.1	10.9

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 1,470.

Note: Columns do not sum to 100 per cent as not all destinations have been reported. Grey numbers indicate where values have been approximated by aggregating from analyses with very small numbers of observations where exact values were suppressed.

We additionally consider destinations for 'lower attainers' with different attainment profiles. Due to the relatively small numbers of learners in each locality it is not possible to separate learners into the fine-grained categories reported above, so we group together learners into three larger attainment categories: Five A\*-C (shown in Table 7), Some A\*-C (shown in Table 8), and No A\*-C (shown in Table 9). Some values have had to be rounded due to small cell counts. Here we can see that, even when considering learners with broadly similar Key Stage 4 attainment, there are notable differences between the localities in the types of provision attended. Across each of the three attainment categories, Alnwick has the greatest proportion going into school sixth forms – much higher than the rate for England overall – followed by Longbenton & Killingworth. In Wallsend only a relatively small proportion of learners move into school sixth forms and the vast majority make a transition to FE college.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Again it is worth pointing out that some of the learners observed in the 'FE college' category may in fact be attending the sixth form college provision within one of the major FE colleges in NoT, but it is not possible to calculate how many from the data.

**Table 7: Transitions to post-16 destinations for young people belonging to the 'Five A\*-C' categories, by case study locality (%), 2013-16 cohorts**

	Alnwick	Longbenton & Killingworth	Wallsend	Total	England
FE College	25.5	50.3	61.4	55.4	47.9
Sixth Form College	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.0
School sixth form	58.2	37.8	26.9	34.8	29.2
Any other education provider	<2.0	<5.0	4.0	2.3	3.1
Apprenticeship	<10.0	6.5	4.4	4.8	4.8
NEET, unknown or not recorded	<10.0	<5.0	<2.0	2.7	4.0

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 523. Note: Columns do not sum to 100 per cent as not all destinations have been reported.

**Table 8: Transitions to post-16 destinations for young people belonging to the 'Some A\*-C' categories, by case study locality (%), 2013-16 cohorts**

	Alnwick	Longbenton & Killingworth	Wallsend	Total	England
FE College	43.2	56.5	70.4	64.7	61.6
Sixth Form College	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.1
School sixth form	32.4	18.5	7.6	15.1	13.3
Any other education provider	<5.0	7.1	4.3	5.3	4.8
Apprenticeship	14.9	7.5	7.3	8.4	5.8
NEET, unknown or not recorded	<10.0	7.5	5.1	6.5	8.3

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 722. Note: Columns do not sum to 100 per cent as not all destinations have been reported.

**Table 9: Transitions to post-16 destinations for young people belonging to the 'No A\*-C' categories, by case study locality (%), 2013-16 cohorts**

	Alnwick	Longbenton & Killingworth	Wallsend	Total	England
FE College	31.0	40.0	53.2	50.5	50.4
Sixth Form College	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.3
School sixth form	31.0	30.6	15.3	26.7	10.6
Any other education provider	<15.0	11.8	9.0	9.5	8.6
Apprenticeship	<10.0	0.0	<5.0	0.0	3.3
NEET, unknown or not recorded	<10.0	<15.0	14.4	13.3	24.9

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 210. Note: Columns do not sum to 100 per cent as not all destinations have been reported.

These differences in the type of provision attended translate into differences in the principal level of learning that young people are on in Year 12. As shown in Table 10, Table 11, and Table 12, within each broad attainment category, a lower proportion of learners from Wallsend are found on Level 3 courses compared to learners in Longbenton & Killingworth and Alnwick. Wallsend also has a markedly higher proportion of learners on Entry Level or Level 1 courses than the other two localities.

**Table 10: Levels of learning in Year 12 for young people in the 'Five A\*-C' categories, by case study locality (learners in education only), 2013-16 cohorts**

	Entry Level/ Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	of which, at least one A/AS Level*	Total
Alnwick	<5.0	<25.0	77.3	43.8	100
Longbenton & Killingworth	7.8	19.0	73.2	35.4	100
Wallsend	17.6	27.0	55.5	24.3	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N = 479.



**Table 11: Levels of learning in Year 12 for young people in the 'Some A\*-C' categories, by case study locality (learners in education only), 2013-16 cohorts**

	Entry Level/ Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	of which, at least one A/AS Level*	Total
Alnwick	17.2	46.6	36.2	<15.0	100
Longbenton & Killingworth	28.5	47.7	23.8	7.7	100
Wallsend	39.6	42.6	17.7	<2.0	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N = 565.

**Table 12: Levels of learning in Year 12 for young people in the 'No A\*-C' categories, by case study locality (learners in education only), 2013-16 cohorts**

	Entry Level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Total
Alnwick	<20.0	<45.0	<45.0	0.0	100
Longbenton & Killingworth	<20.0	42.9	33.3	<10.0	100
Wallsend	37.7	45.9	<15.0	<2.0	100

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N = 121.

Similarly, there are differences between the localities in terms of the subject areas studied, as shown in Table 13. In Alnwick a relatively larger proportion of 'lower attainers' are enrolled in multiple equally-sized subjects (which for the most part will be AS/A Levels), compared to the other two localities. In Longbenton & Killingworth and in Wallsend, in contrast, a larger share of learners are engaged in courses in Engineering and Manufacturing and in Construction, Planning and the Built Environment as their substantive focus.

**Table 13: Subject area of main qualification on November 1st of Year 12, for all lower attainers, by case study locality, 2013-16 cohorts**

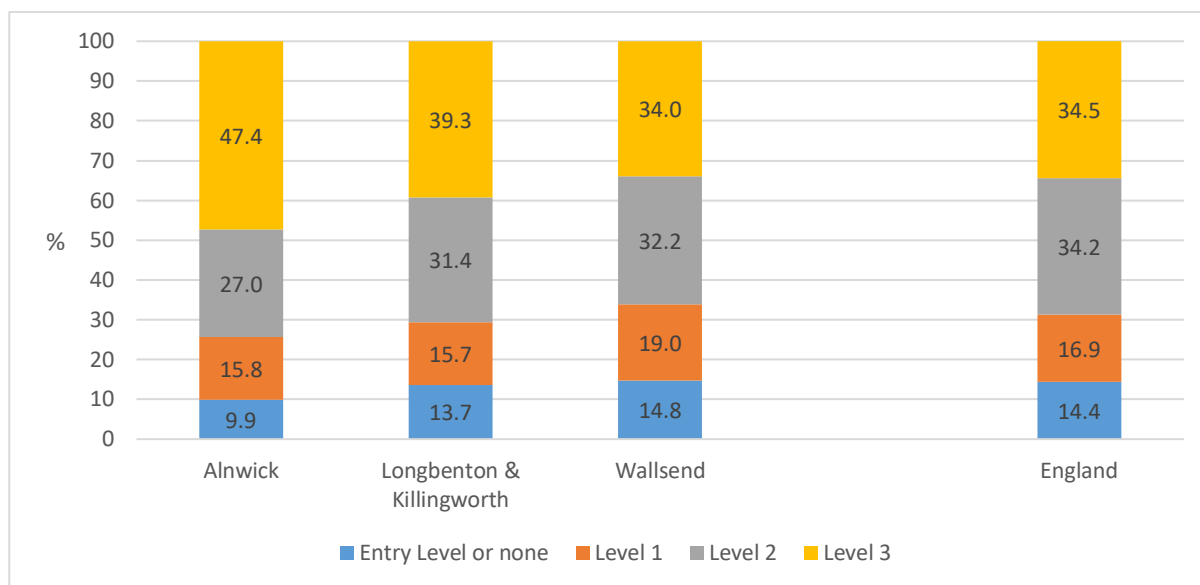
	Alnwick	Longbenton & Killingworth	Wallsend
Multiple subject areas	22.3	16.7	11.8
Health, Public Services and Care	20.7	21.6	22.0
Leisure, Travel and Tourism	<5.0	8.4	8.2
Engineering and Manufacturing	<10.0	15.1	15.4
Arts, Media and Publishing	<10.0	7.9	6.3
Preparation for Life and Work	<5.0	4.2	8.2
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	8.3	11.4	8.2
Retail and Commercial Enterprise	<10.0	5.3	6.0
Business, Administration and Law	0.0	<2.0	2.1
Information and Communication Technologies	<5.0	2.8	5.6
Learner doing E&M only	<10.0	3.0	2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record, and National Client Caseload Information System (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N = 1,138. Note: Population restricted to learners in education only. Columns do not sum to 100 per cent as some smaller subject categories are omitted from the table.

Lastly, we consider the post-16 attainment outcomes of learners in these three localities, to assess the extent to which the differences in opportunity structures, destinations and levels of learning entered in Year 12 feed through into differences in educational outcomes across the three areas. To do this, we look at the highest level of qualification achieved during the two years following completion of Key Stage 4, when most learners will have turned 18 (Figure 9). We focus on all ‘lower attainers’.

We can see that the proportion of ‘lower attainers’ who managed to achieve a Level 3 qualification is highest among learners in Alnwick, followed by those living in Longbenton & Killingworth. This is in line with the differences in level of learning entered in Year 12 that we’ve seen in Tables 10 to 12, confirming that the level of learning that young people start on at the beginning of the post-16 phase is strongly linked to the level of attainment achieved by age 18. This is of course not altogether surprising, but it is worth remembering that the Key Stage 4 attainment profile of each area was very similar across the three localities. This means that, starting from similar levels of Key Stage 4 attainment, ‘lower attainers’ in Longbenton & Killingworth and (particularly) in Alnwick, were able to achieve, on the whole, higher levels of post-16 attainment than learners in Wallsend, seemingly because more of them transitioned to Level 3 courses after Year 11.

**Figure 9: Highest level of qualification achieved between age 16 and 18, all 'lower attainers' by case study locality**



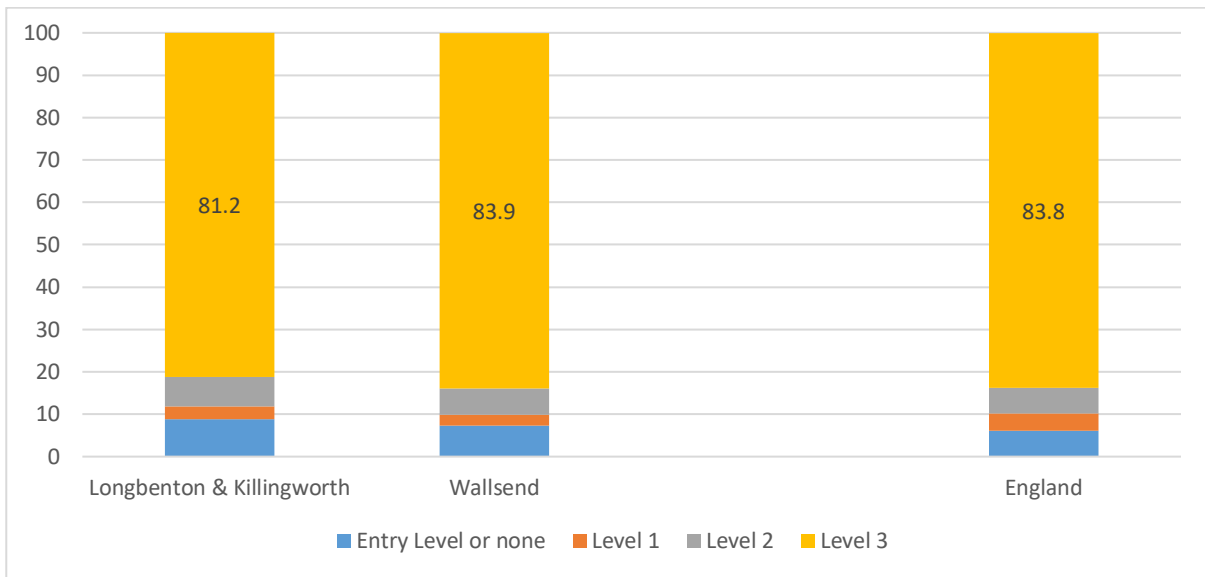
Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 1,430. N (England) = 897,808. 'Highest level of qualification' refers to any qualification achieved during the post-16 phase, regardless of size.

To illustrate further the point that spatial differences in the level of learning on entry to the post-16 phase play a big role in explaining differences in outcomes, Figure 10 shows that when considering only those learners who started at Level 3 in Year 12, learners in Wallsend and Longbenton & Killingworth have very similar rates of attainment of Level 3 qualifications. In fact, the proportion of learners achieving at least one Level 3 qualification is slightly higher in Wallsend. This suggests that the differences observed in Figure 9 are driven to a large extent by the fact that fewer learners start on Level 3 programmes in Wallsend.

Of course, just because young people have not achieved a qualification at Level 3 by age 18 doesn't mean they will not go on to achieve one at some later stage. A substantial proportion of learners remain in further education until age 19, or even longer.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, we have not considered the type or the size of qualifications achieved, and of course attainment of a Level 3 qualification is only one indicator of 'success' in the post-16 phase. What is arguably most important is that young people complete the post-16 phase with skills that will help them be successful in the labour market and in life. Nonetheless the preceding analysis illustrates an important point, namely that the local structure of post-16 provision has an impact on the types of education and training routes pursued by young people, and through this, on the levels and types of qualifications achieved, even if debate can be had about what the 'optimum' mix of outcomes looks like.

<sup>9</sup> Though when analysing attainment across larger areas in our main report, we found that while extending the analysis to age 19 increases attainment of Level 3 qualifications to some degree, this increase is relatively modest.

**Figure 10: Highest level of qualification achieved by 18 for 'lower attainers' on Level 3 programmes in Year 12, by case study locality**



Source: National Pupil Database, Individualised Learner Record (combined data for 2013 to 2016 cohorts). N (case study localities) = 363. N (England) = 247,714. Alnwick not included due to too few observations to allow meaningful and non-disclosive analysis.

## Key points from this report

- North of Tyne has a similar proportion of 'lower attainers' to England though there are signs that this proportion is creeping above the England average. North of Tyne has a similar proportion of 'lower attainers' to other combined authority areas except London which is the area with the lowest percentages of 'lower attainers'.
- Lower attainers do not typically leave school 'with nothing' – 78 per cent of lower attainers in North of Tyne leave school with some good GCSEs (here, A\*-C grades) – a higher percentage than the England average. Around 21 per cent of 'lower attainers' have five or more GCSEs at A\*-C in line with the England average.
- 'Lower attainers' in North of Tyne are overall more likely to be in a school sixth form than those in England as a whole. However, the predominant destinations for those in this group are FE colleges. This, of course, will be influenced by prior attainment. Those with the highest KS4 achievements were typically more likely to be in school sixth forms than those with lower achievement but, interestingly, a large proportion (around 40 per cent) of those with the lowest achievements (No D-G grades at GCSE) also stayed in school sixth forms post-16.
- Around 35 per cent of 'lower attainers' in North of Tyne are learning at Level 3 following KS4. This is most common for those with Five or more GCSEs at A\*-C and one of English or maths at that level. Those without this are much less likely to be studying at this level.
- Many young people in North of Tyne start post-16 on levels of learning that are lower than their prior achievements. This is not necessarily a problem but it can affect what they are able to achieve by age 18/19. Strikingly, nearly 30 per cent of young people in North of Tyne with Five GCSE grades at A\*-C but neither English nor maths at this level started courses at Level 1 or below. Where 'lower attainers' started apprenticeships, these were typically at Level 2.
- There is variety in provision at the local level within North of Tyne in terms of the range of opportunities and what is accessible. We observed differences in the level and subject areas of opportunities in the three localities we studied – Alnwick, Longbenton & Killingworth, and Wallsend. But it is important to study entry requirements in conjunction with opportunities – doing so showed us that areas with fewer advertised courses and apprenticeships overall can have more provision accessible to those with lower grades.
- Though we looked at opportunities within 60/90 minutes travelling time, there is evidence that young people in North of Tyne are perhaps choosing the providers that are closest to home. This has implications for what they will typically access post-16 and what level they can start on.
- The level of learning that young people start on post-16 can make a real difference to their later outcomes. Learners who are able to access Level 3 opportunities at the start of their post-16 transition are much more likely to achieve Level 3 outcomes by 18 and 19. In the small areas we looked at, learners in Wallsend were less likely to start on Level 3 courses (even when they had Five A\*-C grades at GCSE) but those who did achieved at similar rates to those starting Level 3 nationally. We raise the question here how much of this local variation is necessary and desirable and whether there is the possibility that local structures of provision are a limiting factor in what learners can achieve.

## Appendix A: Locality profiles

### Locality definitions

The localities were defined on the basis of ward boundaries as a starting point, with a few minor deviations reflecting natural boundaries or local knowledge. For instance, the Alnwick locality includes only the built-up area of Alnwick not surrounding villages included in the ward boundary.

**Table B1: Locality definitions**

Locality	Definition
Alnwick	The built-up part of the Alnwick ward. Bounded by the A1 to the east, the River Aln to the north, and Alnwick Moor on the west.
Longbenton and Killngworth	Encompasses the wards of Longbenton, Benton, Killingworth, and the southern tip of the Camperdown ward (the area south of the Killingworth Way).
Wallsend	Encompasses the wards of Wallsend, Northumberland, Battle Hill, and Howdon, as well as the western part of the Riverside ward (the bit west of the A19).

## Alnwick

Alnwick is a small market town in rural Northumberland, about five miles from the North Sea coast. It is, for the most part, fairly affluent, although the north-western part of the town is somewhat less economically advantaged. The vast majority of residents are White British (around 95 per cent), with very small percentages of British Asian and White Other residents. A relatively large proportion of residents are aged 65 and over. In terms of ONS area classifications<sup>10</sup>, Alnwick is a mix of areas categorised as Urbanites, Suburbanites, Constrained City Dwellers, and Hard-Pressed Living, with some Rural Residents on the fringes of the town.

### Population<sup>11</sup>

8,000

### 16 year old population<sup>12</sup>

75

### Percentage of young people who are 'lower attainers'<sup>13</sup>

34

### Pre-16 provision<sup>14</sup>

- 1 mainstream secondary school with sixth form



### *Post-16 providers within...*

30 minutes	45 minutes	60 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 school sixth form</li> <li>• Local authority provision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 school sixth forms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 school sixth forms</li> </ul>

### *Post-16 landscape type*

Very limited provision

<sup>10</sup>See

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/geographicalproducts/areaclassifications/2011areaclassifications>

<sup>11</sup> Based on ONS Table SAPE20DT1: Mid-2017 Population Estimates for Lower Layer Super Output Areas in England and Wales by Single Year of Age and Sex.

<sup>12</sup> As above.

<sup>13</sup> Proportion of all young people who completed KS4 in schools in the case study area who did not achieve A\*-C/9-4 in English and maths, average for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Based on the Get Information About Schools (GIAS) database for academic year 2017/18.

## Longbenton & Killingworth

Longbenton & Killingworth are suburban areas situated in the far north-west corner of North Tyneside. Both areas constitute a mix of several lower-income areas, some middle-income areas, and some relatively affluent areas. Residents of Longbenton & Killingworth are mostly of White British ethnicity (90-95 per cent), although there are small minorities of residents from White Other and Asian backgrounds, mostly Indian and Chinese. Large areas of Longbenton & Killingworth are classified by the ONS as 'Hard-Pressed Living', but there are some areas classified as 'Urbanites', 'Suburbanites', and 'Constrained City Dwellers'.

### Population

35,000

### 16 year old population

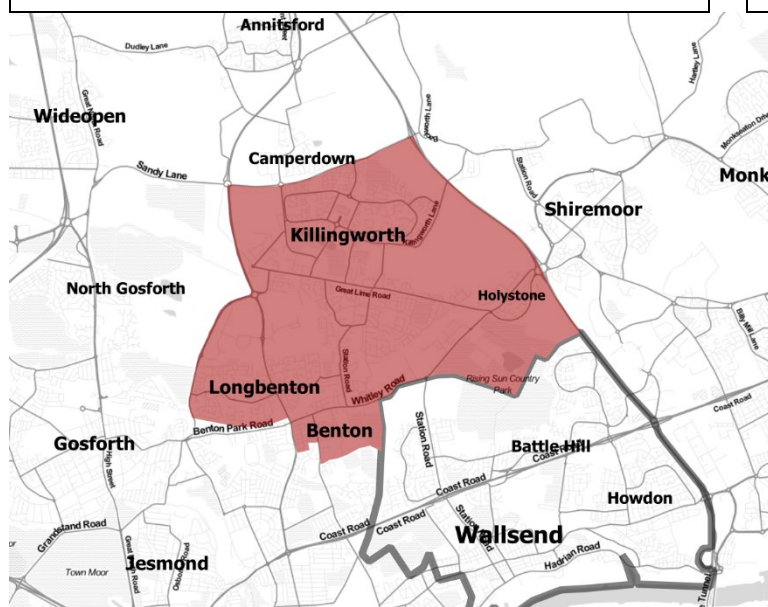
311

### Percentage of young people who are 'lower attainers'

40

### Pre-16 provision

- 3 mainstream secondary schools, 1 of which has a religious ethos (all with sixth forms)
- 1 special school



### Post-16 providers within...

30 minutes	45 minutes	60 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 school sixth forms</li> <li>• 1 independent school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 FE colleges over 3 sites</li> <li>• 1 sixth form college</li> <li>• 14 school sixth forms (2 of which with a religious ethos)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 FE colleges over 9 sites</li> <li>• 2 sixth form colleges</li> <li>• 23 school sixth forms (4 of which with a religious ethos)</li> <li>• 1 CTC</li> </ul>

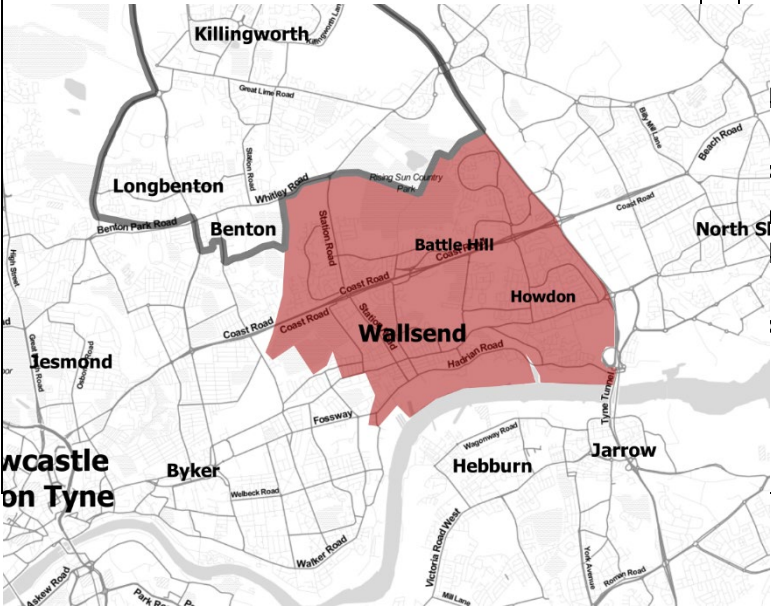
### Post-16 landscape type

Abundant provision, mix of school sixth form, FE college and sixth form college



# Wallsend

Wallsend is a town in the conurbation of North Tyneside, just north of the River Tyne and bordering



**Population**  
43,000

**6 year old population**  
175

**Percentage of young people who are 'lower attainers'**  
18

**Pre-16 provision**

- 2 mainstream secondary schools, both with sixth forms
- 2 special schools

## Post-16 providers within...

30 minutes	45 minutes	60 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 FE college and 1 FE college site offering limited provision</li> <li>• 1 sixth form college</li> <li>• 8 school sixth forms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 FE colleges over 4 sites</li> <li>• 2 sixth form colleges</li> <li>• 14 school sixth forms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 FE colleges over 10 sites</li> <li>• 2 sixth form colleges</li> <li>• 27 school sixth forms</li> <li>• 1 CTC</li> <li>• 1 studio school</li> </ul>

## Post-16 landscape type

Abundant provision, mix of school sixth form, FE college and sixth form college

## Appendix B: Data and Methods

The project consisted of both quantitative analysis of administrative data on learners in England, and qualitative research with both young people and professionals working in the North of Tyne.

For the **quantitative analysis** we used the National Pupil Database (NPD) and the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). These are the main datasets containing information about young people's education and training activities, as well as achievements, during the post-16 phase. Data from the National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS), which is aggregated from Local Authority data on young people's post-16 activities, was used to supplement the NPD and ILR where young people could not be found in either of these datasets. We mainly follow the cohort of young people who completed Key Stage 4 in 2015, since we are able to track these young people through to age 18. But for the local analysis we pool data for several cohorts – those completing Key Stage 4 in 2013 through to 2016 – to increase the number of observed learners.

The **qualitative fieldwork** consisted of focus groups with young people aged 16-20 engaged in further education in the North of Tyne (one focus group in Alnwick, and two focus groups in North Tyneside). We also interviewed some of the young people who took part in the focus groups on a one-to-one basis to gain more detailed insights into their experiences. The focus groups, as well as interviews, centred around how young people made decisions about what post-16 path to pursue. More detail about how the focus groups were conducted can be found in the main report. Additionally, we interviewed eight professionals working in further education and related areas in the North of Tyne.