



Revisiting the raising the participation age to 18 in England

Improving meaningful participation in post-16 education & training: UK insights
March 2025

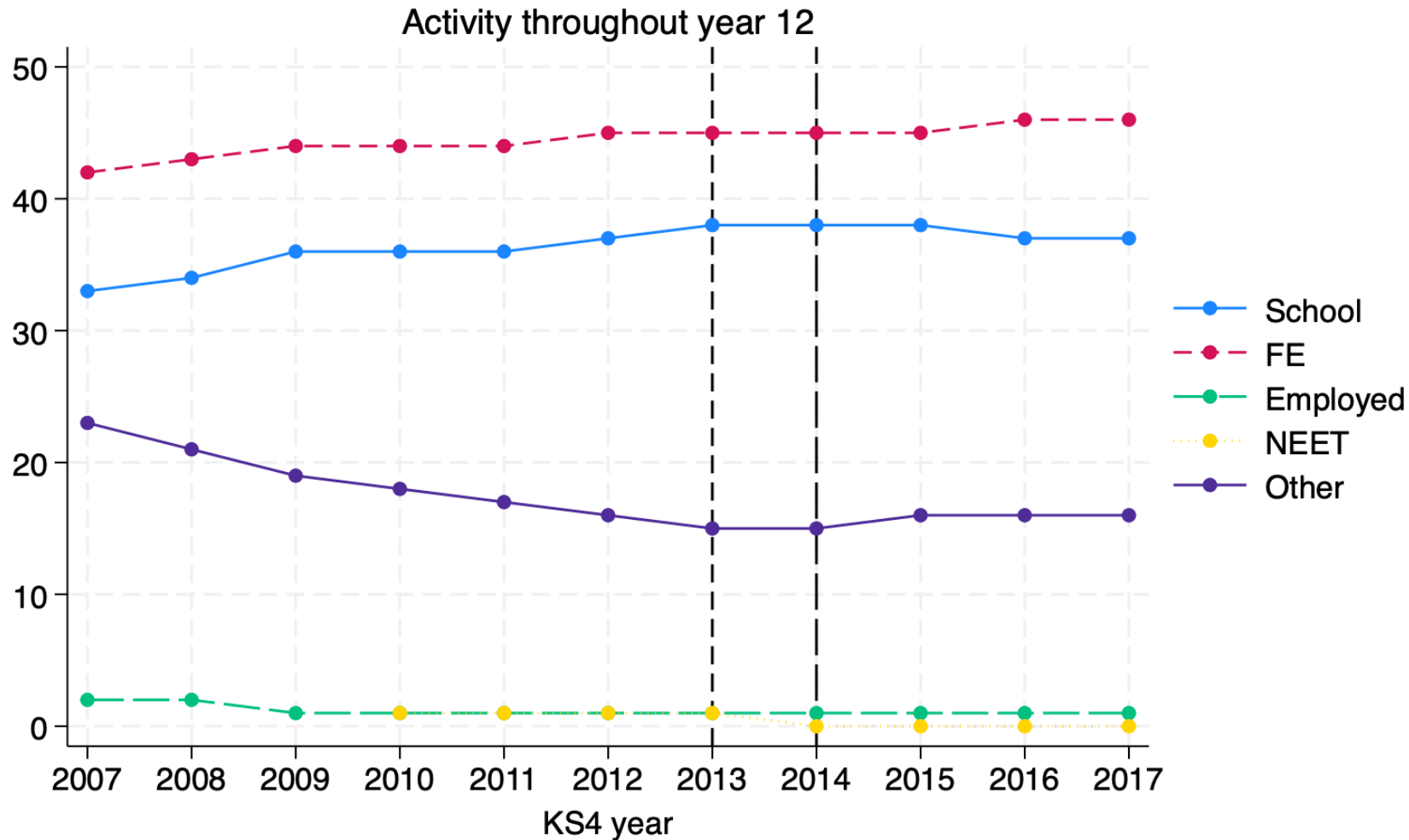
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The 'Raising of the Participation Age' (RPA) policy context versus implementation

- 2008 Education and Training Act – duty on young people to stay in learning in England to 'academic age' **17 from 2013** and until their **18th birthday from 2015**.
- To improve **international economic competitiveness** and to reduce **economic and social inequalities**.
- Different to 'Raising of the School Leaving Age' (RoSLA).
- RPA 'fell out of a series of **building blocks**' developed over a ten-year period e.g., Connexions, EMA, 14-19 Diplomas, Tomlinson Review.
- Post-2010, **RPA was stripped of its original design and supporting systems**, including: policy 'building blocks'; duties on employers to comply; ineffective enforcement and the impact of austerity measures, particularly on local authorities.

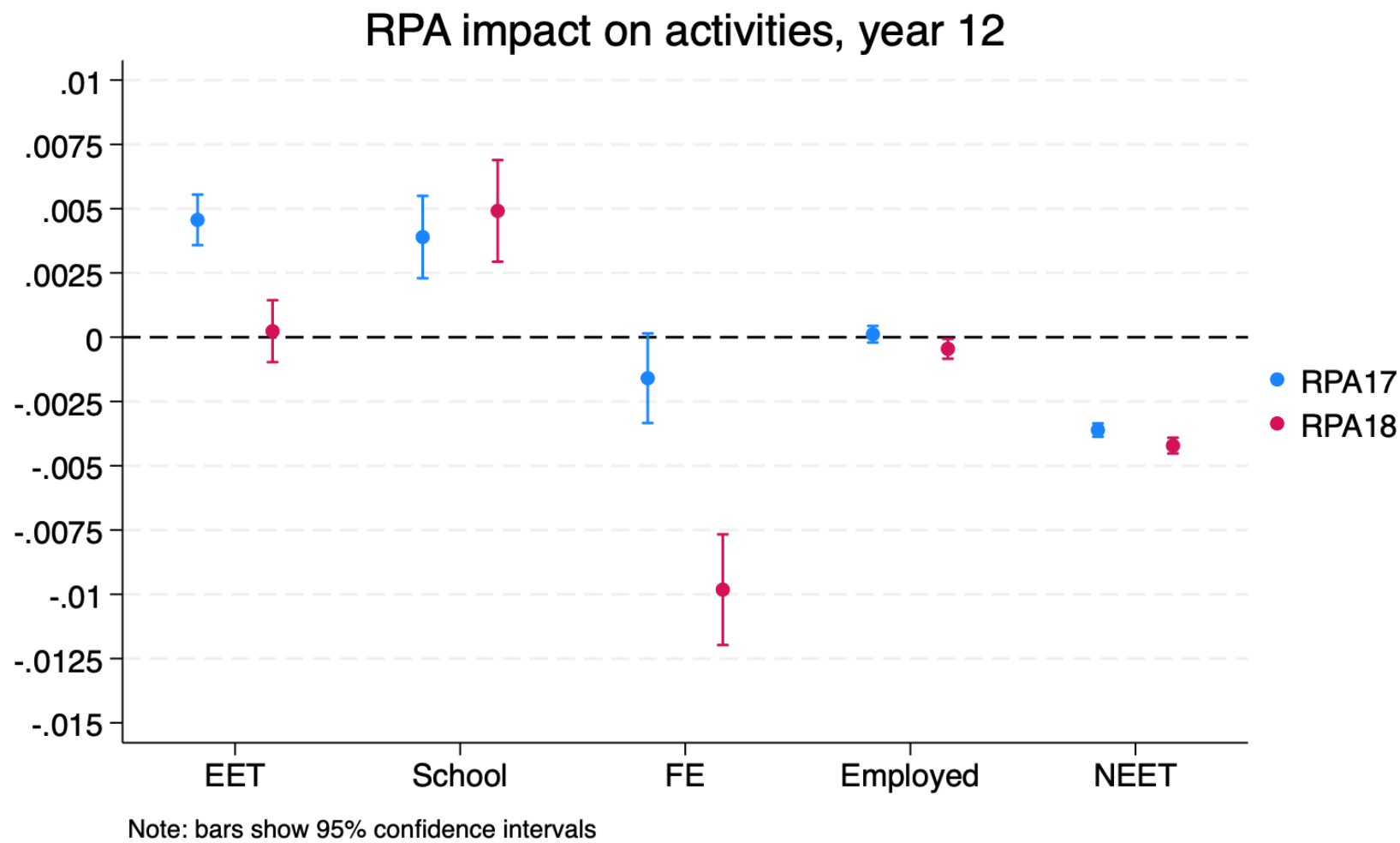
Impact on participation – year 12



This work was produced using statistical data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates. These outputs must not be used without this disclaimer and warning note.

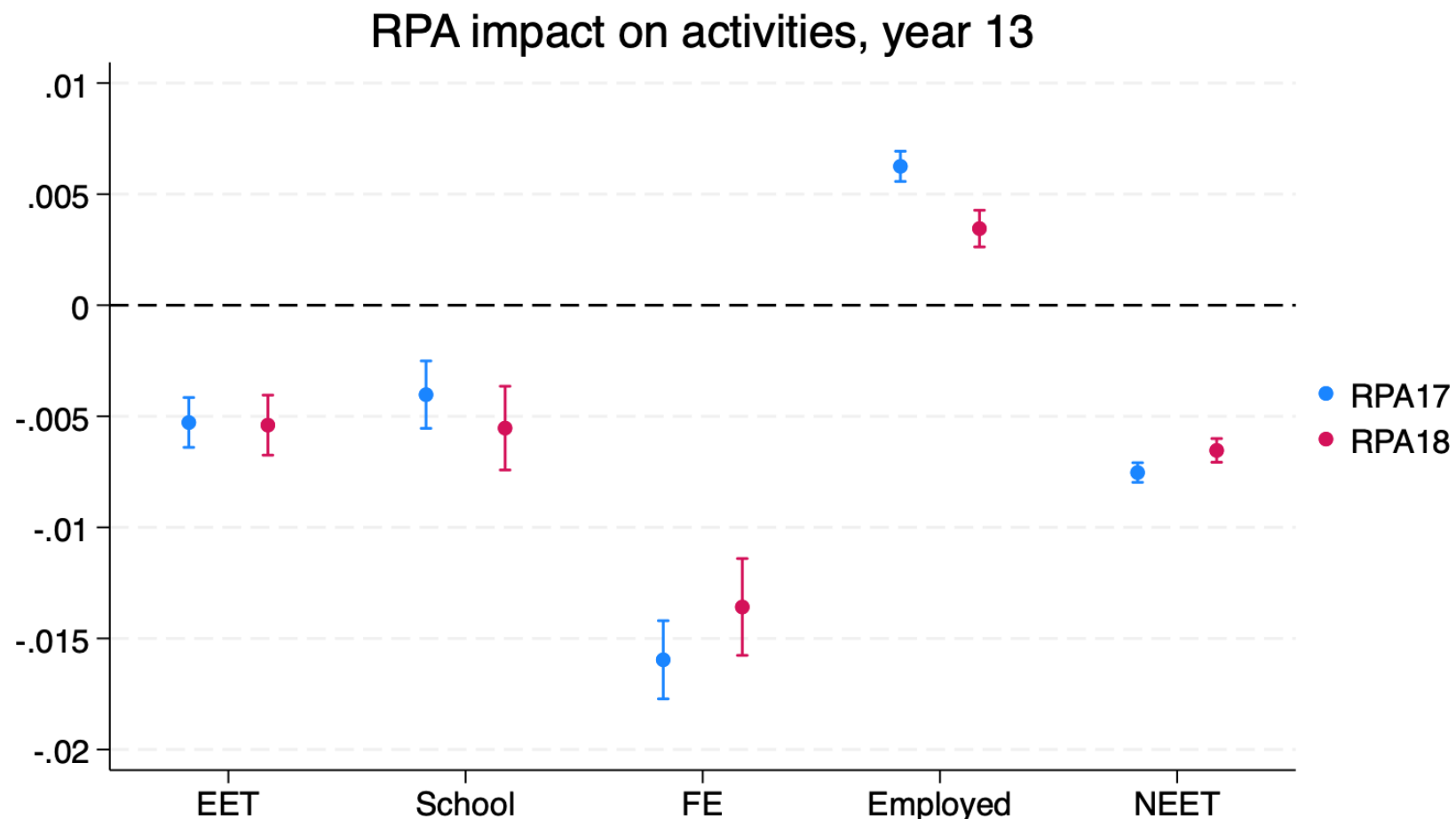
N = 2,457,820 (School)
N = 3,012,530 (FE)
N = 97,580 (Employed)
N = 35,710 (NEET)
N = 1,181,460 (Other/non-sustained)

Full model estimates – participation year 12



N = 5,615,860

Full model estimates – participation year 13

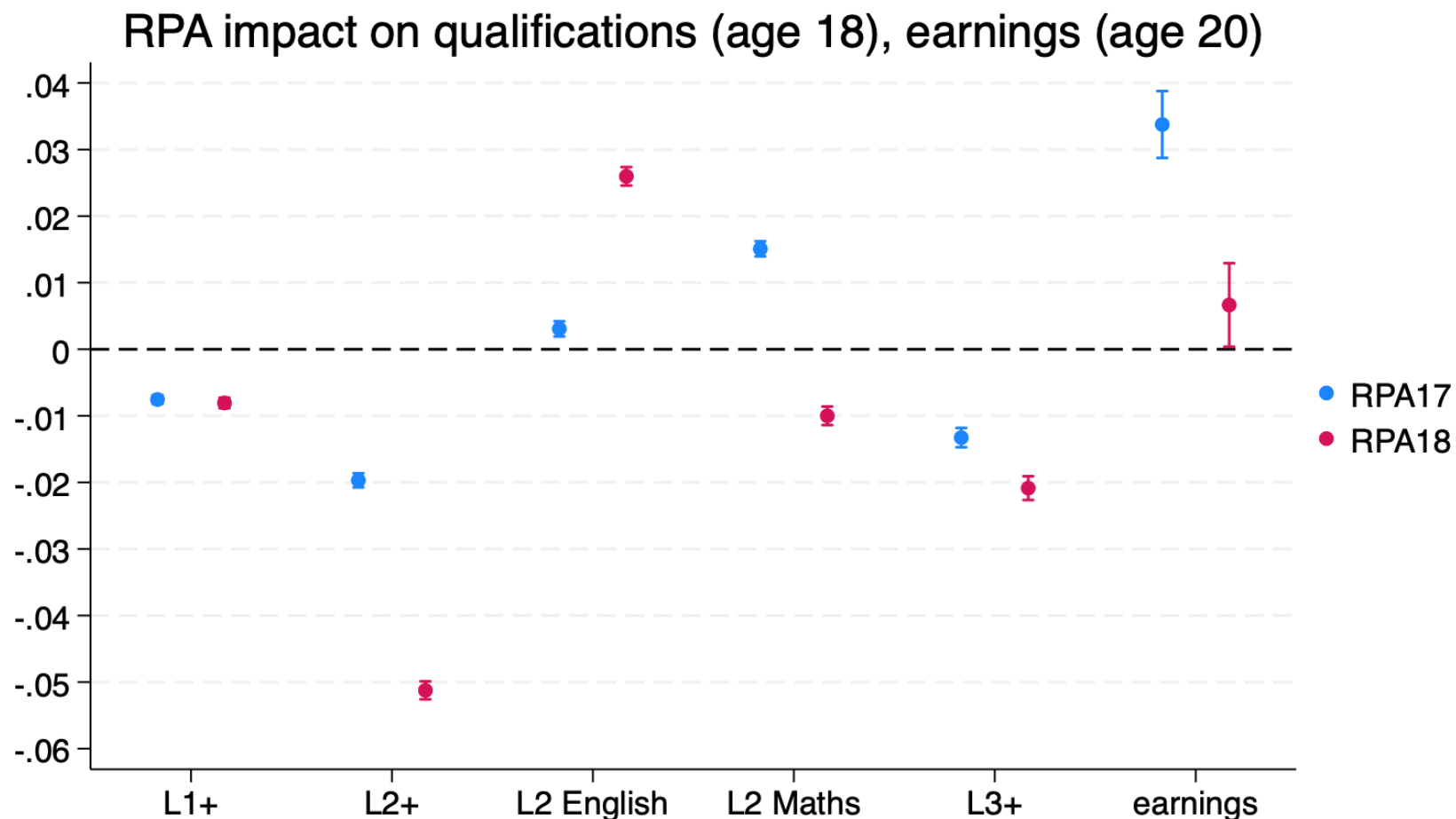


N = 5,613,060

Model controls for:
KS4 year, ethnicity, EAL, %FSM
secondary, ever looked after 15+,
ever SEN, ever SEN secondary,
absence rate year 10, absence
rate year 11, ever permanently
excluded, suspension record year
10, suspension record year 11,
KS1, KS2, KS4 standardized
scores.

Note: bars show 95% confidence intervals

Full model estimates – qualifications and earnings



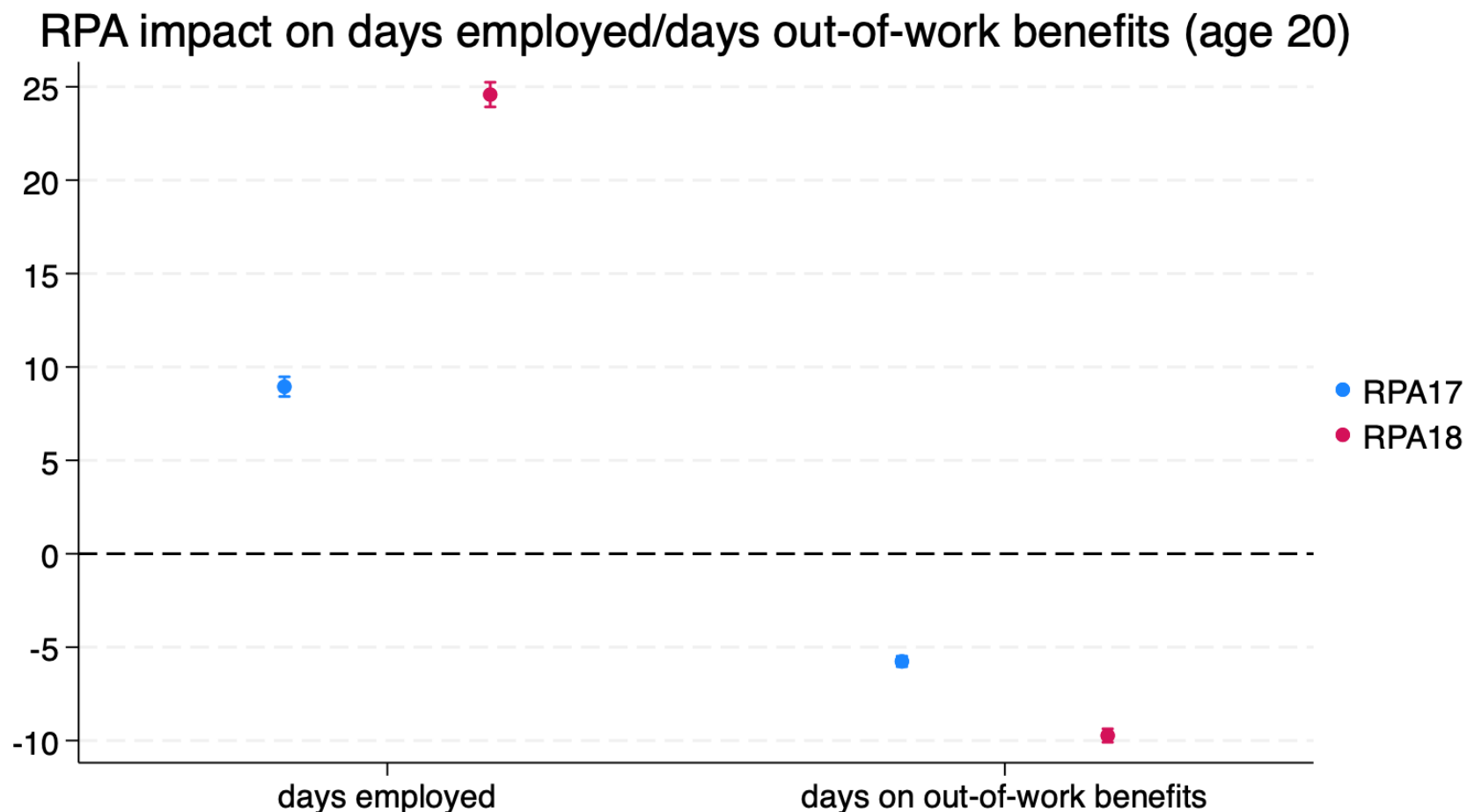
N = 5,613,060 (qualifications)

N = 4,134,080 (earnings)

Model controls for:
KS4 year, ethnicity, EAL, %FSM
secondary, ever looked after 15+,
ever SEN, ever SEN secondary,
absence rate year 10, absence
rate year 11, ever permanently
excluded, suspension record year
10, suspension record year 11,
KS1, KS2, KS4 standardized
scores.

Note: bars show 95% confidence intervals

Full model estimates – labour market



N = 5,422,920

Model controls for:
KS4 year, ethnicity, EAL, %FSM
secondary, ever looked after 15+,
ever SEN, ever SEN secondary,
absence rate year 10, absence
rate year 11, ever permanently
excluded, suspension record year
10, suspension record year 11,
KS1, KS2, KS4 standardized
scores.

Note: bars show 95% confidence intervals

Summary of RPA impact

- RPA17 initially raised year 12 participation, driven by increased school retention, but RPA18 has seen no overall increase, shift from FE to school – plus decrease in persistent NEETs.
- Year 13 lowered persistent NEET but also lower persistent participation – more dropout and churn.
- Positive, sustained impact on GCSE English though not GCSE maths.
- Increase in earnings and days employed at age 20 and reduction in days on out-of-work benefits at age 20.

Case Study Evidence – is greater infrastructure support needed?

- **Awareness of RPA** – focus on post-16 opportunity structures.
- Reliance on **collaborative working** between providers.
- **CIAG provision is variable** – sixth form/FE default post-16 destination.
- Inconsistent and **short-term funding models** affect the scale and diversity of programmes beyond traditional post-16 routes.
- **English and maths** resits are a ‘drag’.
- **LA RPA duties** – tracking/support hampered by staffing cuts, inconsistent data supply and lack of provision at entry level and L1 to support NEET group.

Case Study Evidence – are too many young people left behind?

- Most young people make a post-16 transition BUT **large numbers drop out and fail to re-engage** in learning/work or connect with local support services until they hit the benefit system at 18.
- **Lack of support and availability of options** for young people who wish to access post-16 work/apprenticeships.
- **Youth poverty** driving post-16 decision-making in some localities – Child Benefit/'poor work'.
- **Barriers young people face** include: mental health issues, SEND needs; transport issues; lack of flexibility in enrolment and limited local options.

Where do we go from here?

- Improve **attendance monitoring, mapping, and tracking** of post-16 learners, and develop our understanding of reasons for non-participation and retention issues
- Address '**competition versus collaboration**' between post-16 providers
- Expand support to **early labour market entrants and their employers**
- Develop **tailored interventions for targeted groups** – NEET/post-16 drop-outs
- Much greater focus on **NEET prevention** within post-16 population
- Develop greater **cohesion between post-16 and post-18 routes**, especially for young people who leave full-time education at 18

Ultimately, achieving a greater degree of equality of opportunity in post-16 learning between local areas across England.



Thank you

19 March 2025