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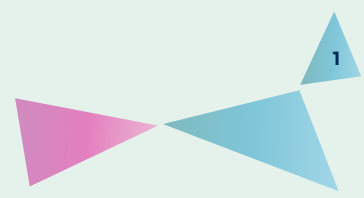
Centre for
Social Mobility

SOUTH-WEST SOCIAL MOBILITY COMMISSION

Introductory Report

July 2023

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University of Exeter



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- **Cornwall Council**
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- **Great South West**
- **Somerset Council**
- **University of Exeter**

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We would like to thank LiveWest, Bella Dash and Petroc for providing the examples of young people's experiences included in this report.





Foreword

There's a romance about the South-West of England – the moorland landscapes, the dramatic seascapes and the gorgeous beaches. It's a place which many people experience happily as a holiday destination and indeed tourism is a major driver of the regional economy. Undoubtedly, the South-West is strikingly beautiful.

But the social reality, hidden behind this romance, is quite stark. At age 11, the children of the South-West are the furthest behind of any English region. At school leaving age, the young people of the South-West are the least likely to move into higher-level apprenticeships or higher education. While employment levels are high among young adults, the proportion of unskilled employment is very high compared to other parts of the country – 44 percent in Bridgwater and West Somerset, for example. As a result, average incomes tend to be lower than elsewhere and often young people with aspiration seek opportunities elsewhere in the country reinforcing the challenges.

The South-West Social Mobility Commission has been established to radically change these facts on the ground. The Commission brings together outstanding leaders from business, education, the voluntary sector and local government. It is ambitious for change. It has set out to combine the efforts of everyone across the region to enhance social mobility, increase opportunity and make the South-West not only a wonderful place to visit but a wonderful place to live, work and bring up a family. A place of prospects, progress and prosperity for all.

There are important positive trends to build on – a growing hi-tech sector, with so many fantastic companies spread across the region that, if they were

in a big city, we'd be talking about a cluster; major developments in the green economy represented best, perhaps, by the Eden Project; an impressive and growing creative economy; and education institutions, schools, colleges and universities that are collaborating effectively to build a better future for the region.

To give just one example, the collaboration between the University of Exeter and the Meteorological Office is quite literally world leading in environmental science and a major contributor to the region and far beyond.

There is also an ever-growing determination among leaders in government across the region to tackle the fundamental problems we face.

In the past, many times across the UK, we've seen insufficient collaboration across sectors to enable solutions to be found for the kind of deep-seated social problems we face in the South-West. Our Commission will ensure that this time the necessary collaboration is strong, focused and sustained. We are determined to ensure a future for the South-West that is socially and economically as well as environmentally sustainable.

This time it's going to be different.

Sir Michael Barber

Chair, South-West Social Mobility Commission



Executive Summary

This report provides an update to the data presented in the 2022 report *Social Mobility in the South-West*. It focuses in particular on education and early career outcomes in the South-West peninsula. The report finds the picture of social mobility in the peninsula to be largely unchanged since the earlier findings, with several stark challenges remaining.

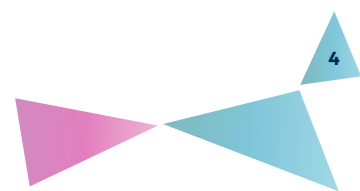
Average educational outcomes in the South-West are often in line with the rest of the country, but this can hide the very poor outcomes being attained by children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds at every level, particularly in certain areas of the peninsula:

- At the end of primary school, fewer children from disadvantaged backgrounds in the South-West reached expected standards in reading, writing and maths than in any other region in 2021/22 – just 37%, compared with 43% across England and 53% in London, the best-performing region.
- Since 2018/19, all regions have seen a significant decline, in particular for pupils from less well-off backgrounds – and the South-West has fallen further behind London and the England average.
- In GCSE English and maths attainment, the South-West is in line with the England average for all pupils (69% achieving a basic pass), but below average for disadvantaged pupils (45% in the South-West compared with 49% across England).
- In terms of advanced (level 3) qualifications, including A-levels, the South-West performed close to the England average for all students but significantly worse for disadvantaged students in 2020/21. Attainment was particularly poor in Torridge, where only 41% of all students and 17% of disadvantaged students achieved a level 3 qualification – compared with 60% of all students and 42% of disadvantaged students across England.

- The South-West continues to have the fewest young people from any background going on to level 4 or above education or training (which includes higher education and higher-level apprenticeships). Progression rates in the South-West are 60% for all young people and 50% for those from poorer backgrounds, compared with 77% and 76% respectively in London.

While the wider South-West region's employment profile broadly matches that of the country as a whole, the picture is very different in the peninsula where a much higher proportion of work is unskilled:

- Every parliamentary constituency in the peninsula has a higher proportion of young adults in unskilled work than the England average. For example, 44% of individuals aged 25 to 34 in Bridgwater and West Somerset and 42% in North Cornwall were in unskilled employment in 2021, compared with 28% nationally.
- Pay for low-paid workers is the second worst in the country, only just higher than in the North East – despite the relatively high cost of living across much of the region.
- Across the country, young adults from less well-off backgrounds are much more likely not to be on a decent wage by the time they are 25. Between 2012 and 2019 around three-quarters of 25-year-olds in the South-West who were eligible for free school meals aged 14 were not earning above the Living Wage.



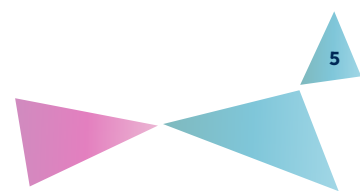
Against this backdrop, this report sets out the vision and plans for the new South-West Social Mobility Commission. The Commission has been formed as a cross-sectoral response to the South-West peninsula's poor social mobility, with a long-term vision to transform education and early career outcomes for all children and young people and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Commission's four long-term goals are:

Goal 1:	Goal 2:	Goal 3:	Goal 4:
<p>Early Years (0-5)</p> <p>Every infant* develops healthily and meets Early Years foundation goals so that they are ready for school.</p>	<p>School (5-16)</p> <p>Every child* finishes school with foundational English and maths, a broad education and a plan for 16-18 study or training.</p>	<p>FE/training (16-18)</p> <p>Every young person* is equipped with the skills employers need now and in the future, the qualifications required to progress and a plan for the next three years.</p>	<p>Early Career (18-25)</p> <p>Every adult* is working towards a further or higher level qualification or in a job with training that lead to skilled employment with decent pay.</p>

* Individual differences may mean this is not possible for every person. However a realistic goal might be 95-100%.

The report introduces the Commission's inaugural Commissioners – a group of passionate and dedicated civic leaders representing a broad range of sectors from across the peninsula who are giving their time voluntarily to support this vital work. The Commissioners are:

- **Sir Michael Barber**, Chair of the Commission
- **Lisa Roberts**, Vice Chancellor of Exeter University
- **Kate Kennally**, Chief Executive of Cornwall Council
- **Paul von der Heyde**, Chair of Somerset Integrated Care Board
- **Lisa Mannall**, Chief Executive of Cornwall Education Learning Trust and former South-West Regional Schools Commissioner
- **Sean Mackney**, Principal and CEO of PETROC College
- **Brendan Staniforth**, Strategy Delivery Director at Devonport Royal Dockyard (Babcock International)
- **Paul Crawford**, Chief Executive of LiveWest
- **Karl Tucker**, Chair of Yeo Valley Ltd, Chair of Heart of the South West LEP and Chair of Great South West
- **Tony Rowe**, Chair and Chief Executive of Exeter Rugby Club
- **Alice Thomson**, Associate Editor, Columnist and Interviewer at The Times
- **Andrew Moreman**, Chief Executive of Young Devon



The way in which the Commission intends to achieve its goals is set out in its draft Framework for Action. Broadly speaking, the Commission will:

- Drive and monitor a co-ordinated set of actions and programmes to be delivered by partners in a limited number of focus areas over the next three to five years, sharing learnings and scaling successful programmes elsewhere – its strategic plan.
- Advocate for the peninsula both nationally and regionally with the aim of highlighting the region's social mobility challenges, embedding a social mobility perspective into organisational decision-making and holding civic leaders to account.
- Create and share best practice and other guidance to support organisations in the region with knowing how best to target their efforts and spend including how to work cross-sectorally on improving social mobility.

The report additionally examines a range of place-based efforts aimed at tackling social mobility. It looks at examples of approaches occurring at different levels of 'place' including:

- **School:** Reach Foundation's cradle to career model
- **Community organisation:** West London Zone

- **Regional partnership:** Blackpool Pride of Place Partnership
- **Local government:** Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- **National government:** Opportunity Areas programme

It is clear that no place-based programme aimed at improving social mobility has been attempted at the scale of the South-West Social Mobility Commission's remit or in an area with a large number of rural and coastal communities. However, there are lessons that the Commission can learn from other approaches to-date. This includes the importance of recognising the complexity of social mobility issues; the need for effective collaboration and partnership; the need to take a long-term perspective but also make rapid progress; and the importance of being data and evidence-informed.

The Commission's next steps will be developing and driving a core strategy across three or four focus areas. We will engage key groups including young people and employers. The plan is to have a full strategy in place by the end of the year, with delivery of programmes starting next year.



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Introduction

The South-West Social Mobility Commission is a unique opportunity to drive long-term transformational change in education and employment outcomes for disadvantaged young people in the South-West peninsula. The Commission will tackle social mobility from a cross-sectoral perspective, working with local and regional partners to develop and deliver programmes and best practice guidance to address the barriers faced by children, families and young people in the region.

This introductory report sets out the vision and long-term goals of the Commission and provides a flavour of its plans for the next three to five years. The Commission was officially announced in December 2022 and Commissioners met for the first time in March 2023. As such, this report comes relatively soon into the Commission's creation and the approach set out should be read as a work in progress rather than definitive.

We plan to publish an annual report each year, which in future years will provide an update on progress towards our goals and insight into the projects and programmes we'll be helping to deliver and hoping to scale-up with partners. We also aim to share more real-time information on our thinking, approach and projects through a Substack¹ or similar forum.

We aim to be as transparent and communicative about our work as possible. Our hope is that this will contribute to national discussions about how to undertake this type of place-based collaborative work on social mobility, and provide rapid learnings on what projects and programmes do and don't work.

Why a South-West Social Mobility Commission?

The Commission has been established in response to the 2022 report *Social Mobility in the South West*². This revealed that the South-West had the lowest educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils of any English region. For example in 2019 only 40 per cent of disadvantaged pupils in the region attained a pass grade in GCSE English and maths, and only 17 per cent went on to university – the lowest rate of all regions. Social mobility is poor in many places and low-paid workers struggle with the lowest weekly pay in the UK.

The launch of the report highlighted an urgent collective desire for action from leaders across the region and support for establishing a cross-sector body for driving change. In December 2022, the Commission was launched with Sir Michael Barber as Chair. He has been joined by a dedicated and passionate group of civic leaders representing a range of sectors from across the South-West peninsula as inaugural Commissioners. The first Commission meeting took place on 3 March 2023.

¹ Substack is a platform enabling subscribers to receive content via email newsletters and an online blog.

² Sim, A. and Elliot Major, L. (2022).



Bella Dash, President of Petroc student union

“I hate the idea of being disadvantageded. I understand that it exists but I don’t like to accept it. I think most disadvantageded people feel this way. It’s hard to accept this because it just becomes normal to have to work twice as hard for anything.

I’ve been homeless three times, my parents split up when I was young because my dad was emotionally abusive and controlling, I couldn’t read until I was 9 but I still didn’t realise I was disadvantageded.

The first time I fully realised I was disadvantageded was when I needed to buy a computer for college and I couldn’t afford one, there wasn’t any support from the college so I had to ask my mother, who didn’t have much either. The cheapest computer was £250 so I bought that one. It regularly breaks meaning I miss notes from lessons but there’s no other choice. The college provides Chromebooks but they are all much more broken than mine. And so I had to work harder.

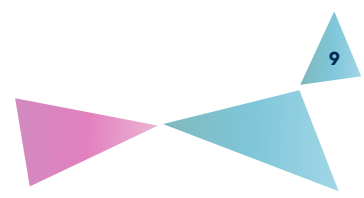
By the end of my first year, I wanted to apply to study geography at Oxford. I had seen the university once on a school trip in year 8 where they told us it was a shame we wouldn’t be able to attend the University of Oxford because it was “so pretty”.

I realised quickly after that I had no idea how to apply, how to write a personal statement, or how to prepare for the TSA³ and the interview. I felt a bit lost and at times felt that it was pointless as there would be much better students applying so that I wouldn’t have a chance. But then I discovered Zero Gravity and was assigned to a mentor who was doing the exact course I wanted to do, and she helped me with every aspect of the application. Without her I might have given up.

On the 10th of January, I got my offer. At first I thought they might have sent it to the wrong person but they hadn’t and I am now incredibly proud to say that I am an Oxford offer holder.

Being disadvantageded isn’t just one or two challenges we must overcome, it’s hundreds all on different scales, which made this incredibly hard to write as it isn’t black and white and sadly many cannot overcome all the challenges. But most importantly, being disadvantageded comes in many forms – I never lived on a council estate but that doesn’t mean I’m any less disadvantageded.”

³ The Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA) Oxford is a two-hour pre-interview test for applicants to undergraduate courses at the University of Oxford. It is designed to help tutors assess whether candidates have the skills and aptitudes needed to study certain courses.



Social mobility in the South-West

2022 report

The 2022 report *Social Mobility in the South West* set out the picture of social mobility in the peninsula. Social mobility in the region has been low for a long time – as revealed by a recent set of studies examining historical social mobility at the regional level.

But further, current educational data speaks to the urgent and ongoing nature of the problem. Educational outcomes by poorer children are a key interim measure of social mobility. The report showed that the current generation of disadvantaged school students in the South-West⁴ are the furthest behind of students anywhere in the country – almost a year behind by the end of primary school and over one-and-a-half years behind at the end of secondary.

Gains made over the past decade or so by disadvantaged children in other parts of the country haven't been as pronounced in the South-West. And while overall educational results in the region fall in line with other parts of the country, these results mask the very poor results being achieved by children from poorer backgrounds.

The report delved into the region's barriers to good outcomes, summarised in terms of its geographic disconnectedness, low wage economy and a lack of impetus for change.

Geographically, the peninsula epitomises the beauty but associated challenges of a coastal and rural landscape. The region has the longest coastline of all English regions and is the most rural and least densely populated. The rurality and remoteness of many places can make the provision of education and other public services difficult. Teacher recruitment and retention is a problem for isolated schools, as is low churn. The consequences are a lower proportion of good and outstanding schools compared with other regions, and particularly so in deprived areas. Meanwhile, many young people across the region travel hours each day to access further education and drop-out rates are

high. Accessing apprenticeships and work can also be challenging.

Low-paid work proliferates across the region, driven by an over-representation of low-paying sectors like hospitality, retail and agriculture; fewer large employers; and fewer professional and managerial jobs. The region's strong further and higher education institutions are an asset but low skills and skills mismatches are an issue across the region. Many young people choose to leave the peninsula to access employment or education elsewhere.

There has also been a lack of impetus for change in some quarters, whether because disadvantage can often be hidden in rural contexts, or because of an acceptance of the status quo, or because of a degree of parochialism and political fragmentation.

The report concluded by making four recommendations, broadly educational in scope, many of which have been taken forward. But it also noted that improving social mobility requires collaborative action that goes beyond the education sector – as is clear from the barriers it highlighted. This is the motivation for starting the South-West Social Mobility Commission.

Where are we now?

One year later and things are much as they were before. What is clear from the data is that whilst average educational outcomes in the South-West are often in line with the rest of the country, this hides the very poor outcomes being attained by children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds at every level, particularly in certain areas of the peninsula. While the wider South-West region's⁵ employment profile broadly matches that of the wider country, the picture is very different in the peninsula where a much higher proportion of work is unskilled.

The following section aims to provide a brief update on key outcomes data; we will look at the underlying challenges at a later stage when we have investigated further.

⁴ In this section we distinguish clearly between the South-West and the South-West peninsula. Where we refer to the South-West, we mean the ONS defined region (one of nine English regions), which covers an area that reaches to Gloucestershire in the north and Wiltshire in the east, and includes Bristol. In intra-regional analysis, we examine the South-West peninsula, which we define as Cornwall, Devon and Somerset. In this analysis, we also include Dorset due to a request by one of our funders. Elsewhere in the report, we use the term South-West more loosely.

⁵ As noted above, the wider South-West region refers to the larger ONS-defined area.



Early Years

In the early years, we looked at children reaching the expected standard across all Early Years Foundation Stage learning goals. Last year, the South-West performed better than the England average for all children (76% compared with 74%), but second worst of all regions for disadvantaged children (59% compared with 61%) (Figure 1).

Many parts of the peninsula – and in particular Devon – perform poorly for disadvantaged children: Mid Devon, Torridge and Exeter all see fewer than 55% of disadvantaged children reaching expected standards

(Figure 2). In South Hams, 81% of all children reach expected standards but only 58% of disadvantaged children do.

By contrast, Mendip performs particularly well for disadvantaged children with 70% reaching expected standards. We will aim to find out what is behind promising figures like this. On average, Somerset and Torbay do reasonably well for disadvantaged children – but early years is the only life stage at which Somerset outperforms the England average.

Figure 1⁶ Percentage reaching expected standard, 2021/22 – all and disadvantaged children, by region

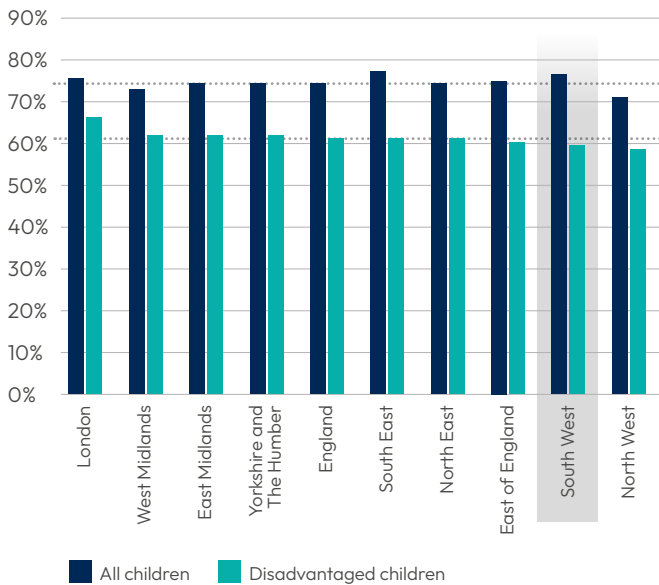
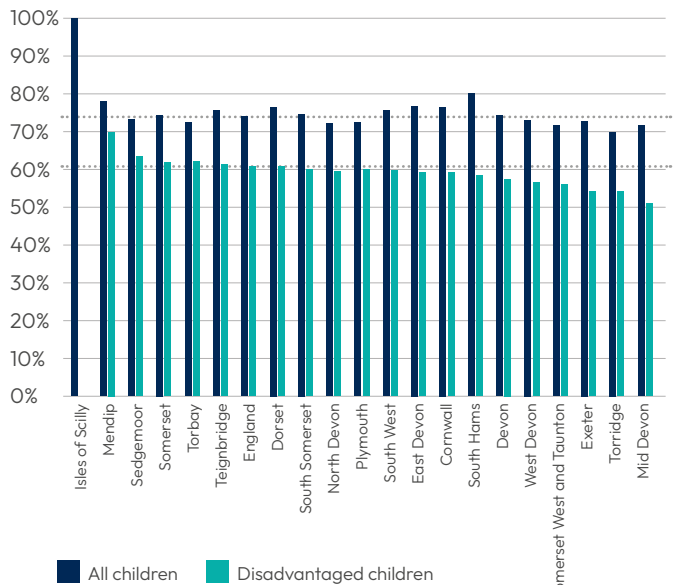
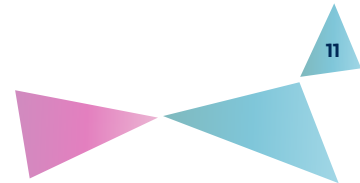


Figure 2⁷ Percentage reaching expected standard, 2021/22 – all and disadvantaged children, by peninsula local authority



6 Department for Education data – accessed 13/04/2023

7 Ibid.



School

At the end of primary school (Key Stage 2), fewer children from disadvantaged backgrounds in the South-West reached expected standards in reading, writing and maths than in any other region in 2021/22 – just 37%, compared with 43% across England and 53% in London, the best-performing region (Figure 3). For all pupils, the South-West performs slightly below the England average (57% compared with 59% respectively).

Since 2018/19, all regions have seen a significant decline, in particular for poorer pupils – and the South-West has fallen further behind London and the England average (Figure 4). For South-West

pupils, there was a decline of 9 percentage points for disadvantaged pupils (from 46% to 37%) and a decline of 7 percentage points for all pupils (from 64% to 57%) between 2018/19 and 2021/22. This means the gap between poorer pupils in the South-West and London was 16 percentage points in 2021/22.

It is likely that we may see a further decline as the effects of the COVID pandemic and ongoing issues in pupil attendance continue to feed through.

Within the peninsula, Torbay and Plymouth perform much better than other areas for disadvantaged and all pupils – roughly in line with the England average.

Figure 3⁸ Percentage reaching expected standard in KS2 rwm, 2021/22 – all pupils and disadvantaged pupils, by region

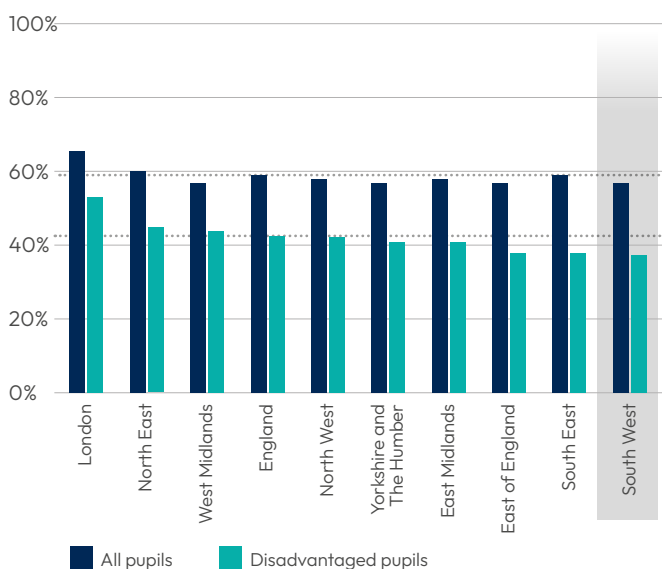
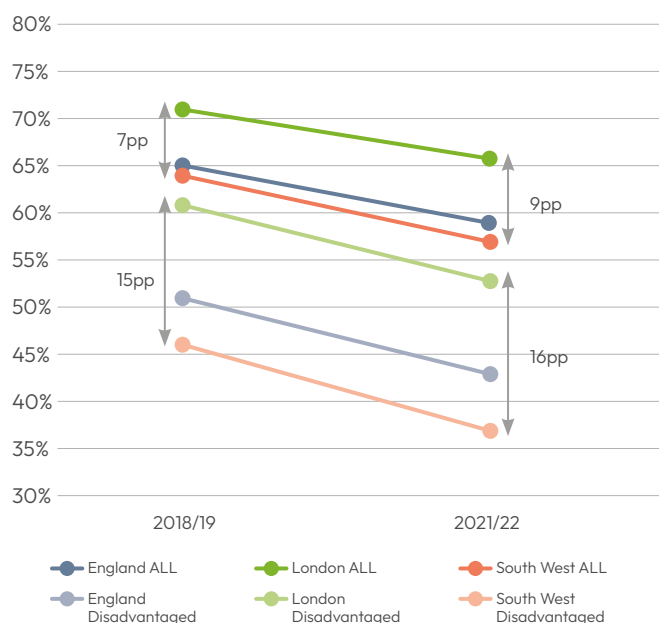


Figure 4⁹ Percentage reaching expected standard in KS2 rwm, 2018/19 and 2021/22 – all pupils and disadvantaged pupils, by selected region



At the end of secondary school, we looked at the percentage of pupils achieving a basic pass (grade 4 and above) in GCSE English and maths, as well as average Attainment 8 scores¹⁰. **In GCSE English and maths attainment, the South-West is in line with the England average for all pupils (69% achieving a basic pass) but below average for disadvantaged pupils (45% in the South-West compared with 49% across England)** (Figure 5).

Whilst this represents an improvement relative to other regions since 2019, when the South-West ranked bottom of all regions, comparisons with other years are difficult because of changes made to grade boundaries and methods of assessment for 2021/22 that may not reflect changes in pupil performance alone. In Attainment 8, South-West schools similarly perform in line with the England average for all pupils but below average for disadvantaged pupils.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Attainment 8 is a measure of academic performance in secondary schools, calculated by adding together pupils' highest scores across eight government-approved subjects. The eight subjects include English and maths which are double weighted, and three must come from qualifications that count towards the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) such as sciences, languages, history and geography.



Within the region, disadvantaged pupils in the urban areas of Exeter and Plymouth do better than average, although those in Torbay don't (Figure 6). Disadvantaged pupils in Somerset do especially poorly, in particular in sparsely populated West Somerset. West Somerset is a priority education investment area¹¹ and we will monitor outcomes with interest over the coming years. Disadvantaged pupils in the more remote north and west of Devon have significantly worse attainment than those in the better-connected south and east.

The picture is very similar for Attainment 8 (Figure 7).

School Census data from Autumn Term 2022/23 worryingly shows that the South-West (alongside the North East) had the joint highest absence rate in the country for the second year in a row – at 7.9% compared with 7.5% across England. This was mainly driven by higher-than-average rates of authorised absence at secondary level¹². We will look into this in further detail as our work progresses.

Figure 5¹³ Percentage achieving grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths, 2021/22 – all pupils and disadvantaged pupils by region

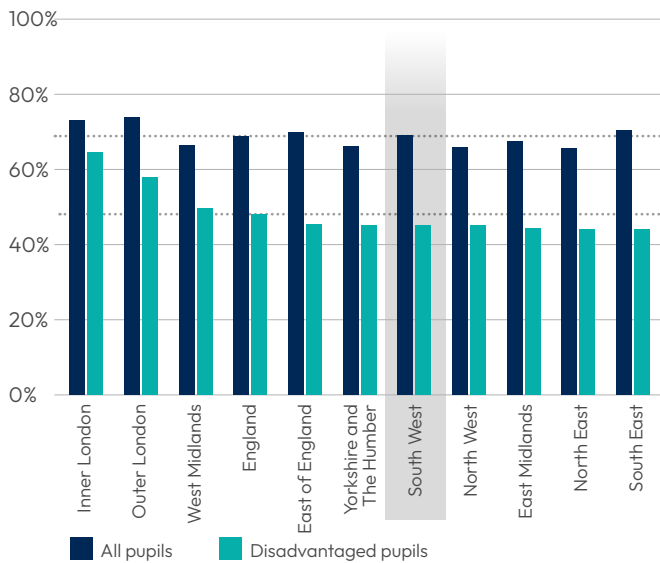


Figure 6¹⁴ Percentage achieving grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths, 2021/22 – all pupils and disadvantaged pupils by peninsula local authority

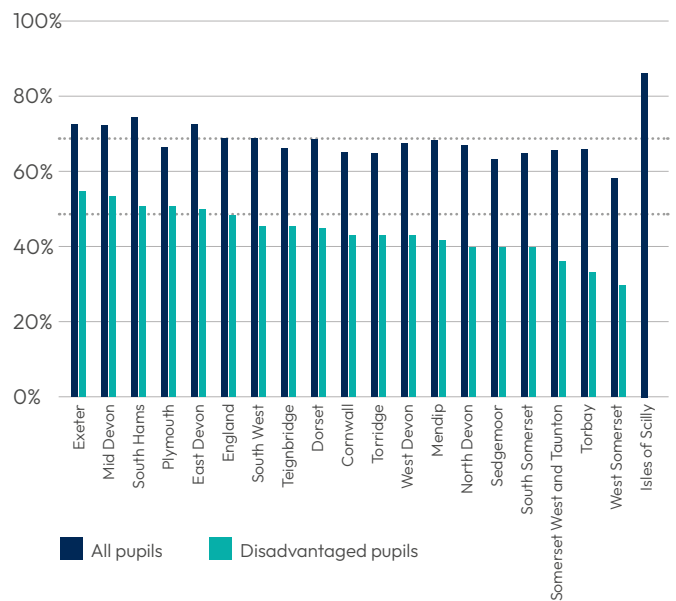
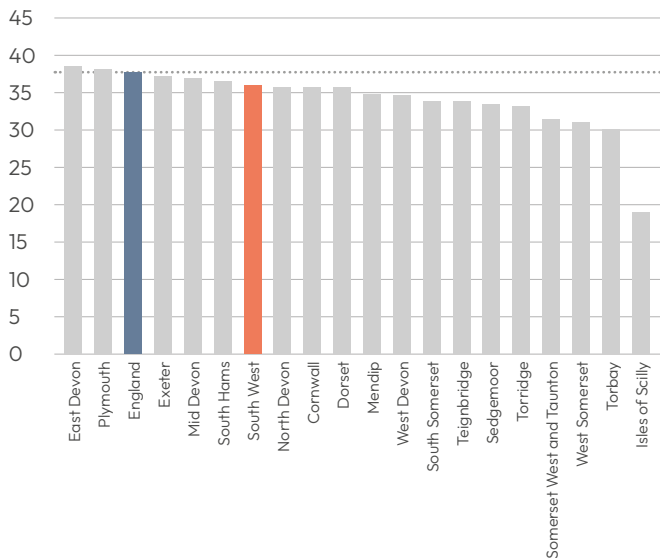


Figure 7¹⁵ Average Attainment 8 point score, 2021/22 – disadvantaged pupils, by peninsula local authority



11 In 2017, West Somerset was selected as one of twelve national Opportunity Areas. Whilst this programme has now ended, in March 2022 the schools white paper identified West Somerset as one of 24 priority education investment areas (PEIAs), qualifying it for various packages of national support.

12 Department for Education data – accessed 13/04/2023.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.



Key stage 4 destinations: education and apprenticeships

Beyond GCSE, we look at key stage 4 destinations at age 16. Continuing in education or training up to age 18 is now mandatory and – we believe – the best pathway to more secure, better-paid work. However a significant proportion of young people still drop out of education or training, many to find employment.

The South-West fares reasonably well for young people staying in education or training post-16 (92% compared with 94% in London, the best-performing region), but slightly worse for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (85% compared with 92% in London, the best-performing region) (Figures 8 and 9). A breakdown

by education and apprenticeships show that across all regions apprenticeships form only a small proportion of post-16 destinations. However, apprenticeships are more important to the South-West than to other regions (3.7% of all destinations – the highest proportion for any region) (Figure 8). We will look further at why this is the case.

Within the South-West, figures are fairly even across local authorities. Apprenticeships are particularly important in Plymouth (7.3% of all destinations) (Figure 10). Torbay and Plymouth perform better than other peninsula local authorities for disadvantaged pupils whilst Cornwall performs slightly worse, particularly on apprenticeships (Figure 11).

Figure 8¹⁶ Percentage going on to a sustained education or apprenticeship destination, 2020/21 – all young people, by region

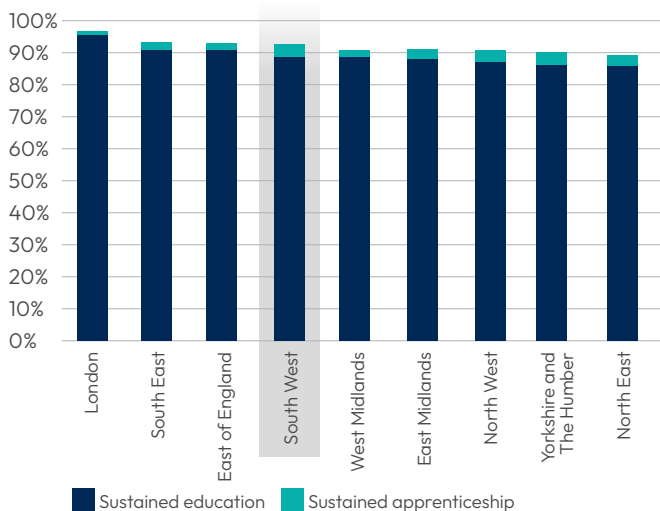


Figure 9¹⁷ Percentage going on to a sustained education or apprenticeship destination, 2020/21 – disadvantaged young people, by region

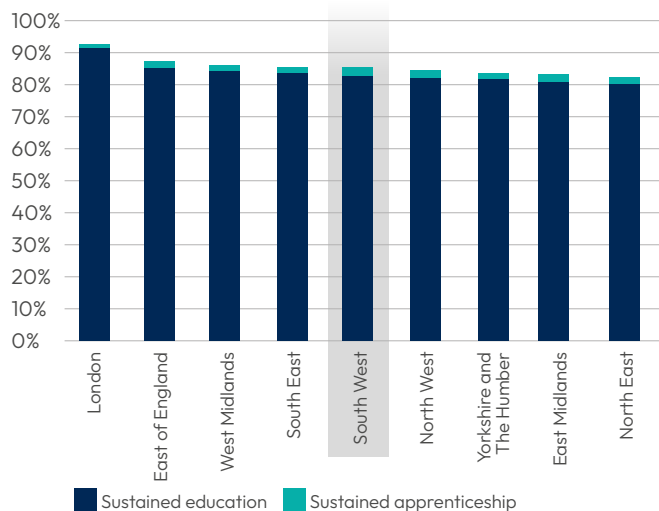


Figure 10¹⁸ Percentage going on to a sustained education or apprenticeship destination, 2020/21 – all young people, by peninsula local authority

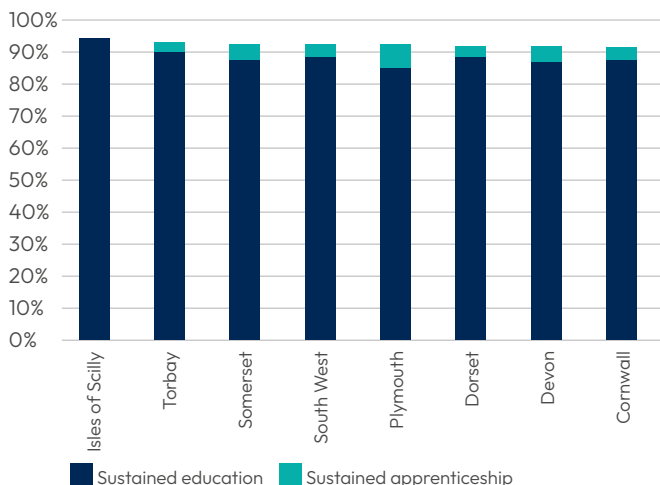
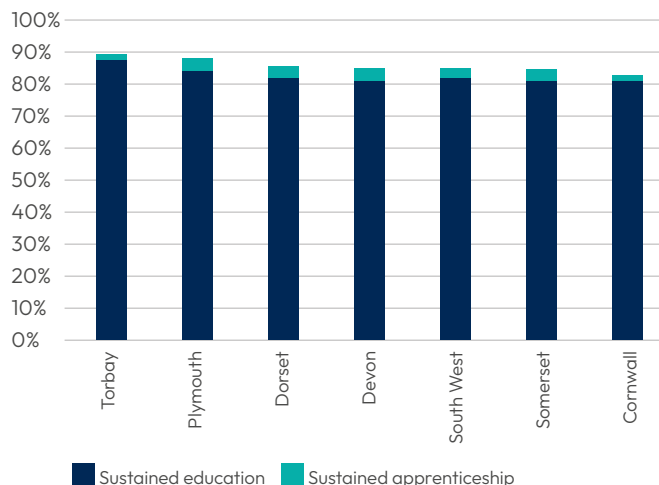
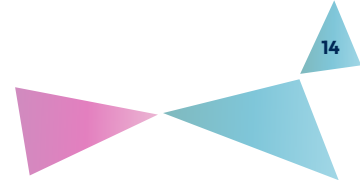


Figure 11¹⁹ Percentage going on to a sustained education or apprenticeship destination, 2020/21 – disadvantaged young people, by peninsula local authority



16 Ibid.
 17 Ibid.
 18 Ibid.
 19 Ibid.

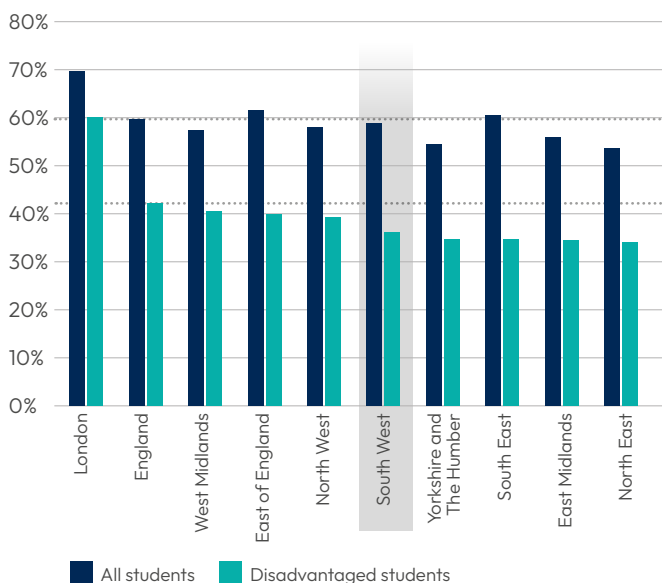


16 – 18 education and training

For age 16 – 18 education and training, we looked at the percentage of young people achieving advanced level (level 3) qualifications²⁰ at age 19 as well as the percentage achieving foundation level (level 2) English and maths at the same age (which includes those who previously gained GCSE qualifications aged 16)²¹.

In terms of level 3 qualifications, the South-West performed close to the England average for all students but significantly worse for disadvantaged students in 2020/21 (Figure 12). Across the peninsula, most local authorities underperformed relative to the England average, and in particular for disadvantaged students (Figure 13).

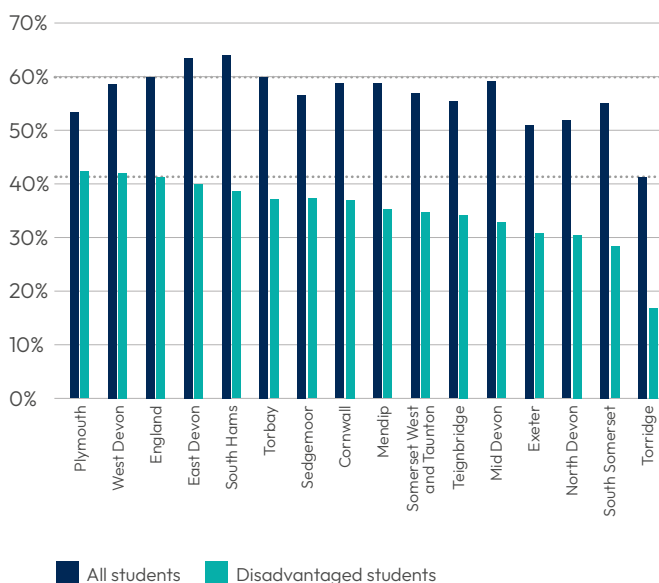
Figure 12²² Percentage achieving a level 3 qualification by age 19, 2020/21– all students and disadvantaged students, by region



In level 2 English and maths, the South-West is the third best-performing region for all students although the gap to the best-performing region (London) has widened since 2018/19 (Figure 14). However, for disadvantaged students, the South-West is sixth of nine regions, with 52% of students gaining qualifications compared with 55% across England in 2020/21 (Figure 15). London is far ahead of other regions for disadvantaged students with 66% attaining qualifications in 2020/21.

Only Plymouth and West Devon did better than the England average for disadvantaged students. Attainment was particularly poor in Torridge, where only 41% of all students and 17% of disadvantaged students achieved a level 3 qualification – compared with 60% of all students and 42% of disadvantaged students across England as a whole. Attainment by disadvantaged students in Exeter (31%) and Mid Devon (33%) was surprisingly low given relatively good prior attainment at GCSE level.

Figure 13²³ Percentage achieving a level 3 qualification by age 19, 2020/21– all students and disadvantaged students, by peninsula local authority



Across many peninsula local authorities, there has been a decline in performance over the past five years – in contrast to the wider regional picture (Figures 16 and 17). For disadvantaged students, there is a high amount of year-on-year flux, but Plymouth appears to have recorded a sharp improvement in 2020/21 whilst Devon and Cornwall have seen significant declines since 2016/17 (Figure 17).

20 Level 3 qualifications are A/AS levels, T levels, advanced apprenticeships, applied generals, level 3 NVQs and level 3 awards, certificates and diplomas, level 3 ESOLs, access to higher education diplomas, international Baccalaureate diplomas and music grades 6, 7 and 8.

21 Level 2 qualifications include GCSEs at grade 4 and above (or A* to C) as well as alternative qualifications at the same level such as level 2 functional skills.

22 Department for Education data – accessed 13/04/2023.

23 Ibid.



Figure 14²⁴ Percentage achieving a level 2 in English and maths by age 19, 2016/17 to 2020/21 – all students, by region

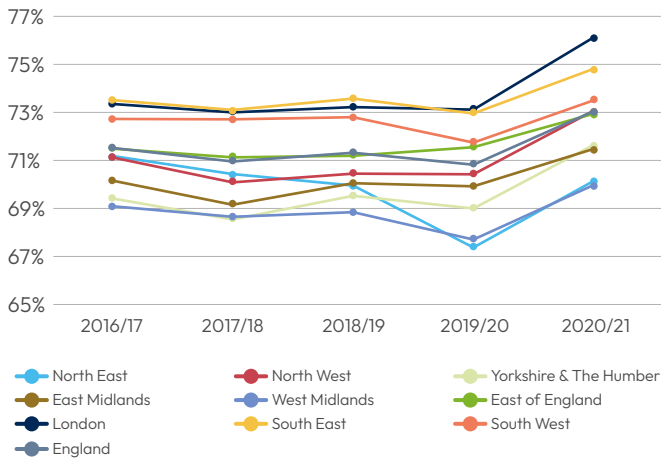


Figure 15²⁵ Percentage achieving a level 2 in English and maths by age 19, 2016/17 to 2020/21 – disadvantaged students, by region

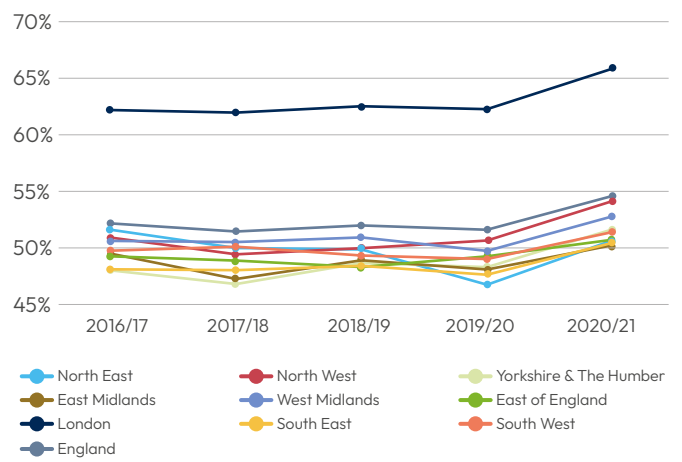


Figure 16²⁶ Percentage achieving a level 2 in English and maths by age 19, 2016/17 to 2020/21 – all students, by peninsula local authority

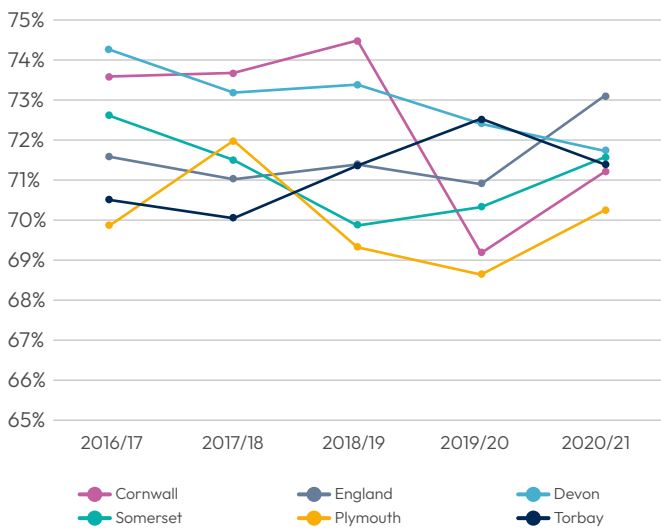
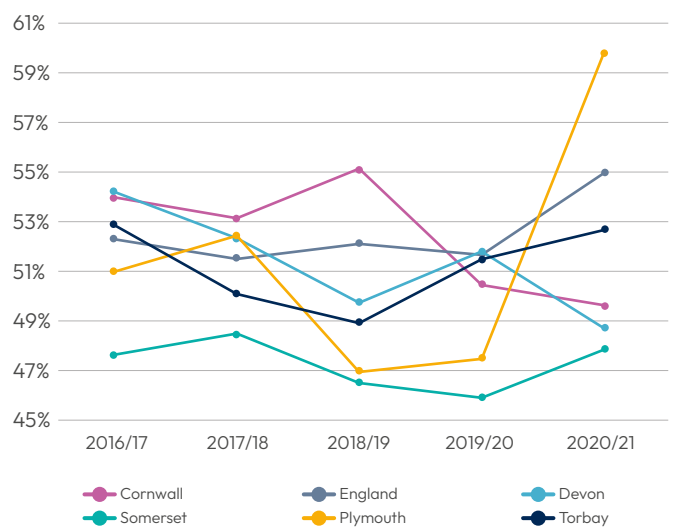


Figure 17²⁷ Percentage achieving a level 2 in English and maths by age 19, 2016/17 to 2020/21 – disadvantaged students, by peninsula local authority



24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.



Progression to higher education or training (level 4 and above)

At the end of 16-18 study, we look at progression to higher education or training, which includes students going on to university or college to get a degree, as well as other forms of study or training like the pursuit of level 4 and 5 qualifications and higher-level apprenticeships. Across the country, degree level study is by far the largest component of progression to level 4 and above; higher and degree level apprenticeships make up relatively small numbers.

Overall, the South-West continues to have the fewest students from any background going on to level 4 and above education or training (Figure 18). The South-West has the lowest proportion of students of all regions progressing to higher education (Figure 19). Whilst proportionately low compared with the numbers

studying for a degree, level 4 and 5 study is a larger component of higher level education or training in the South-West, North East and Yorkshire and the Humber compared with other regions.

The region has not always had such a poor record on HE participation. Whilst across the country participation has gone up over past decades, the South-West has seen the smallest increase of any region (Figure 20). In 2020/21, 25-year-olds who had attended state schools in the South-West aged 15 were the least likely to have participated in HE – just 43% compared with 47% across England and 59% of those from London. Yet just a decade prior, the South-West ranked fourth of nine regions on this measure with a gap to London (the best-performing region) of less than 10%.

Figure 18²⁸ Percentage going on to level 4 and above education or training after 16-18 study, 2018/19 – all young people and disadvantaged young people, by region

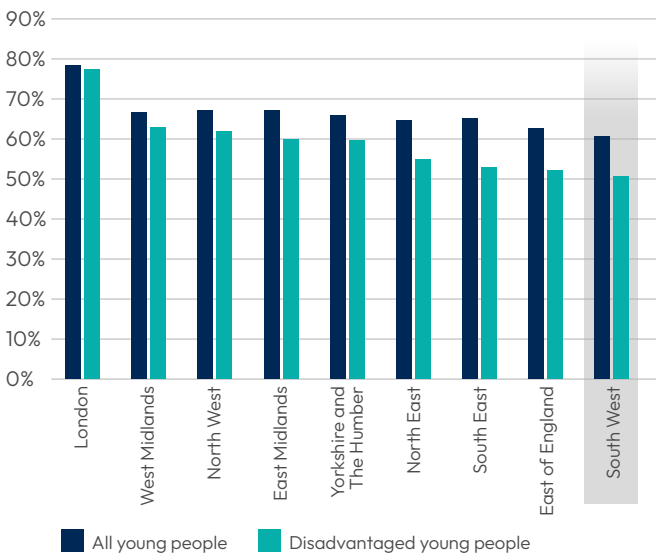


Figure 19²⁹ Percentage going on to level 4 and above education or training after 16-18 study, 2018/19 – disadvantaged young people, by region

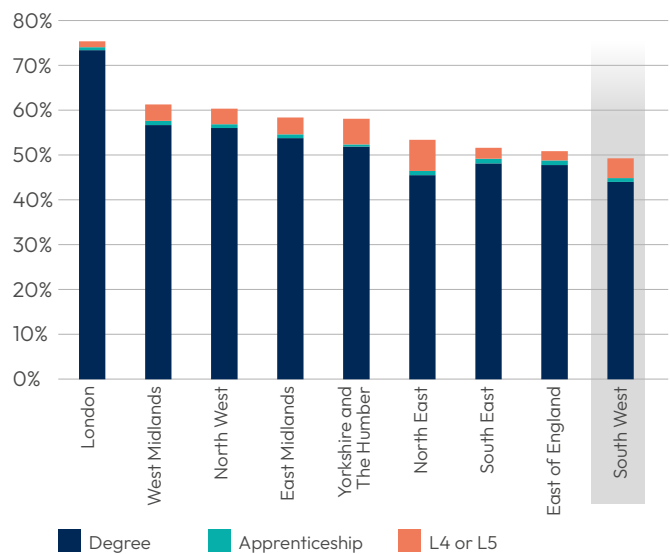
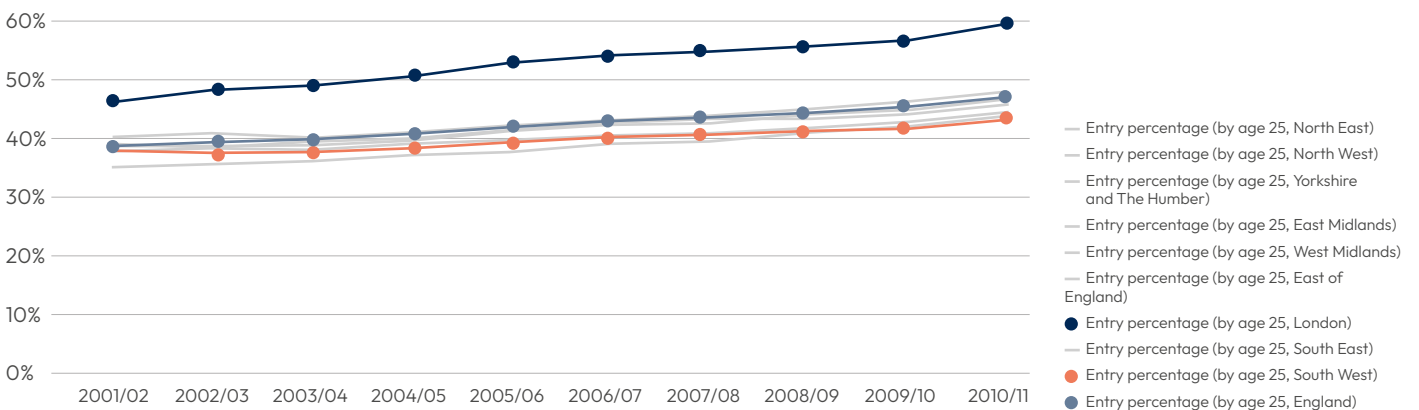


Figure 20³⁰ HE participation by age 25 by region for English cohorts who were aged 15 between 2001/02 and 2010/11



28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Department for Education – accessed 26/05/2023. Chart features matched data from the DfE National Pupil Database, HESA Student Record and ESFA Individualised Learner Record.



Early career employment

As highlighted in our 2022 report, whilst employment levels across the South-West peninsula are high, the proportion of skilled employment³¹ is low. This is largely driven by low proportions of managerial/professional work and higher levels of unskilled (routine and semi-routine) work.

In this analysis, we use 2021 Census data to be able to look at the occupations of 25 to 34 year olds across the peninsula. Examining this age group rather than all adults of working age gives us a better idea of the types of jobs that those who will soon be moving into the labour market might expect to find.

Proportion of young adults in skilled employment or full-time study

In line with our goals, we looked at the proportion of young adults (aged 25 to 34) in skilled employment or full-time study.

The wider South-West region has a broadly similar socio-economic profile to the England average, with roughly 40% of jobs being managerial/professional in nature and just under 20% of jobs classified as 'intermediate'. However, the picture in the peninsula is quite different.

In many parts of the peninsula, the proportion of professional or managerial jobs (NS-SEC L1 – L6) amongst 25 to 34 year olds is significantly below the national and South-West average (Figure 21). This is particularly the case across all of Cornwall as well as the more remote parts of Devon and Somerset, but is also the case in Torbay and Plymouth. For example, in North Cornwall only 27% of 25 to 34 year olds are in professional or managerial occupations. This figure is 28% in Bridgwater and West Somerset and Torridge and West Devon, and 29% in Camborne and Redruth and St Austell and Newquay.

Broadening out the category to include all skilled employment (professional/managerial and intermediate occupations) and full-time study, we see a similar picture across the peninsula although areas with a university presence such as Exeter, Plymouth and Truro and Falmouth have a significantly higher proportion of full-time students (Figure 22). Proportions of intermediate occupations do not vary much by area, falling between 11 and 13% in most areas (although the maximum range is from 9% in North Cornwall to 15% in South-West Devon). The England average is 12%.

As such, it is the proportion of professional/managerial work that accounts for most of the variation in the proportion of skilled employment across areas.

The flipside to skilled employment is unskilled employment or unemployment. Here, we can see that the main component of this in the peninsula is unskilled employment – rates of unemployment are low across most areas.

Across most parts of the peninsula, the proportion of 25 to 34 year olds who have never worked or are long-term unemployed is significantly lower than the England average (Figure 24). In some parts of Devon the figure is less than 4% as compared with 7% across England. Only Plymouth and Torbay have higher-than-average figures at between 7 and 8%.

Unskilled employment meanwhile makes up a significant proportion of work across the peninsula (Figure 23).

Every parliamentary constituency in the peninsula has a higher proportion of unskilled work than the England average (28%). In 18 out of 31 parliamentary constituencies unskilled employment makes up 35% or more of total work (where total work includes full-time study and unemployment).

Parts of the peninsula with a significantly higher-than-average proportion of these types of jobs include sparsely populated rural areas, seaside towns and former mining areas – for example, Bridgwater and West Somerset (44%), North Cornwall (42%), South Dorset (40%), St Austell and Newquay (40%), Torbay (39%) and Camborne and Redruth (39%).

³¹ We classified professional/managerial and intermediate occupations as skilled employment. We classified lower supervisory, lower technical, semi-routine and routine occupations as unskilled employment, on a similar basis to the three-class version of NS-SEC. We didn't include small employers and own account workers (NS-SEC L8 and L9) within either skilled or unskilled employment due to the varied and distinctive nature of this category. See The National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC) for further details on classifications: ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/otherclassifications/thenationalstatisticsocioeconomicclassificationnssecbasedonsoc2010#analytic-classes-and-operational-categories.



Figure 21³² Proportion of individuals aged 25-34 in professional/managerial jobs (NS-SEC L1-L6) in 2021, by parliamentary constituency

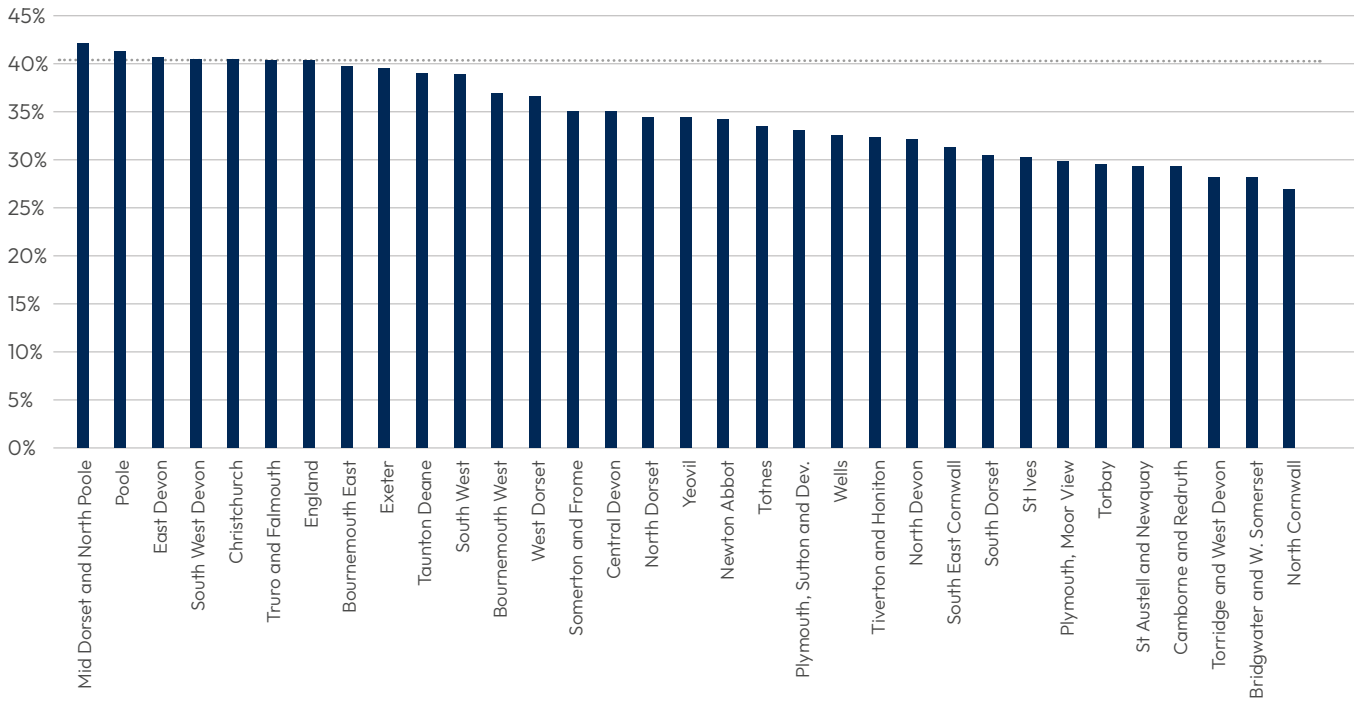
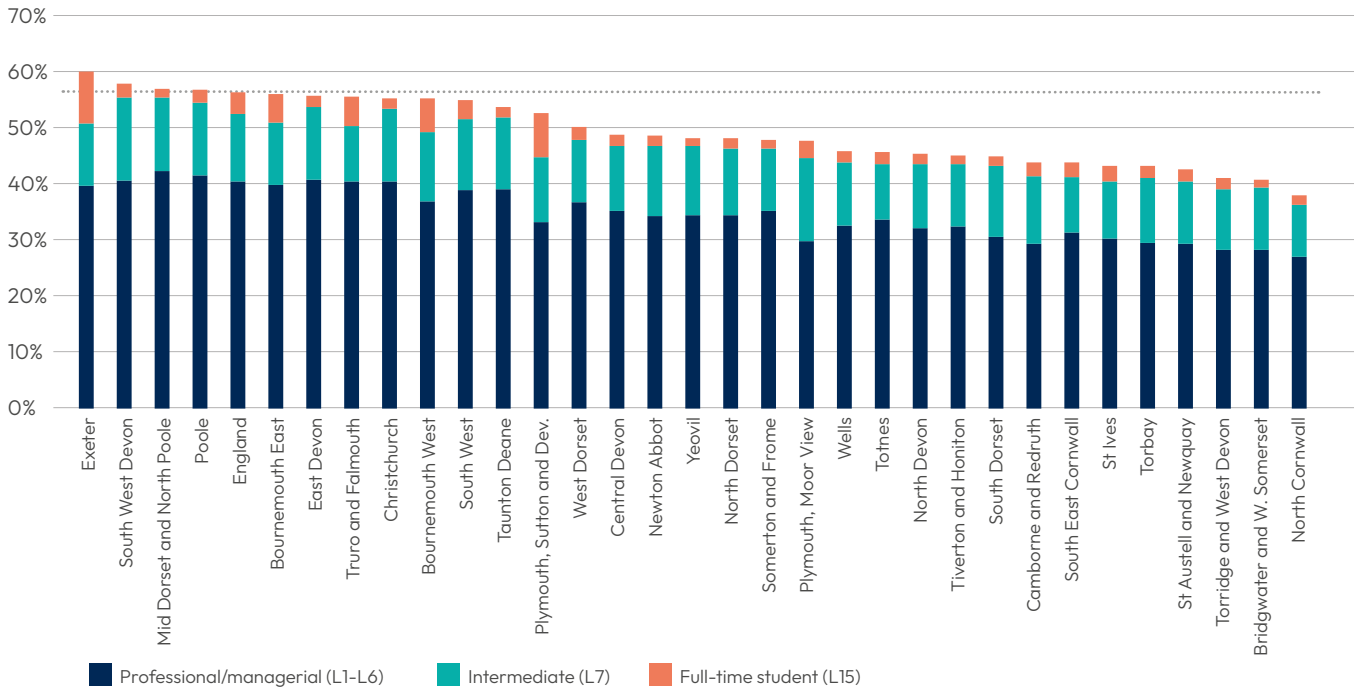


Figure 22³³ Proportion of individuals aged 25-34 in skilled employment or full-time study (NS-SEC L1-L7 and L15) in 2021, by parliamentary constituency



32 NOMIS data, accessed 23/05/2023 - from ONS Census 2021.

33 Ibid.



Figure 23³⁴ Proportion of individuals aged 25-34 in unskilled employment (NS-SEC L10-L13) in 2021, by parliamentary constituency

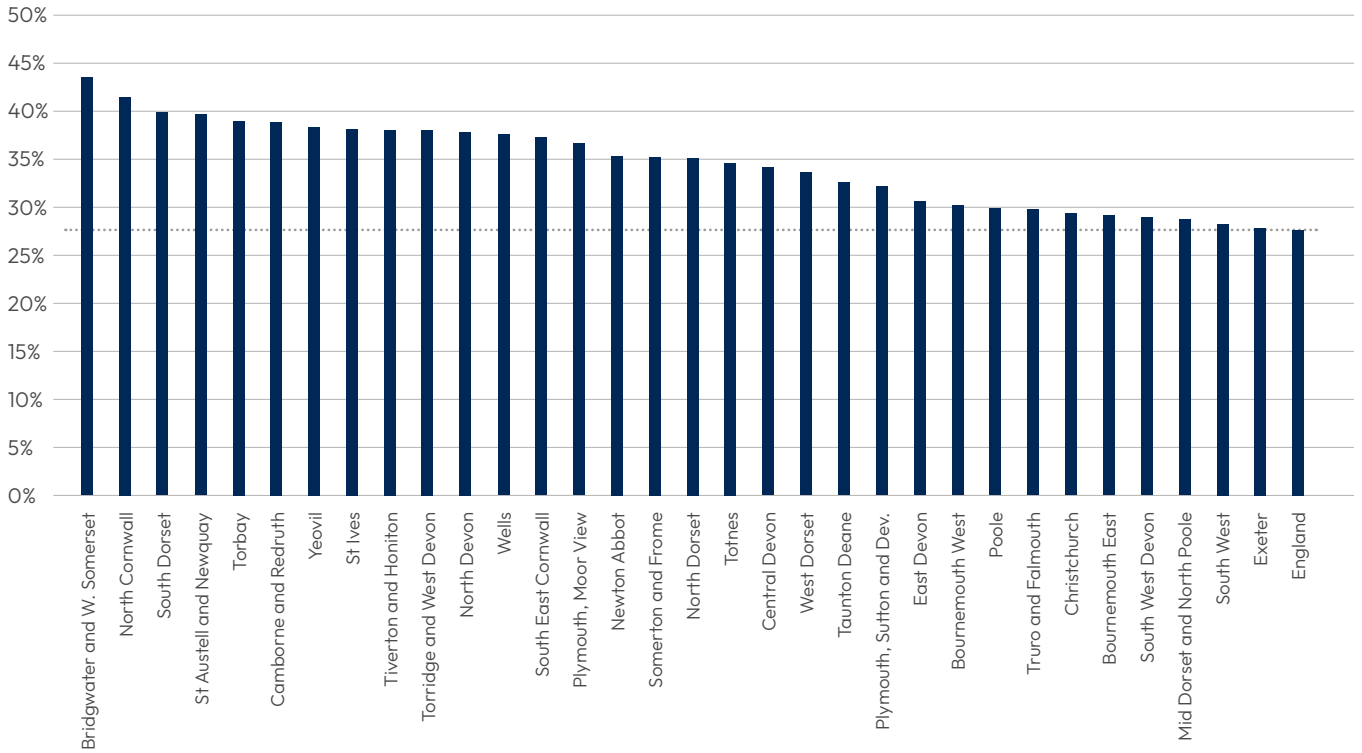
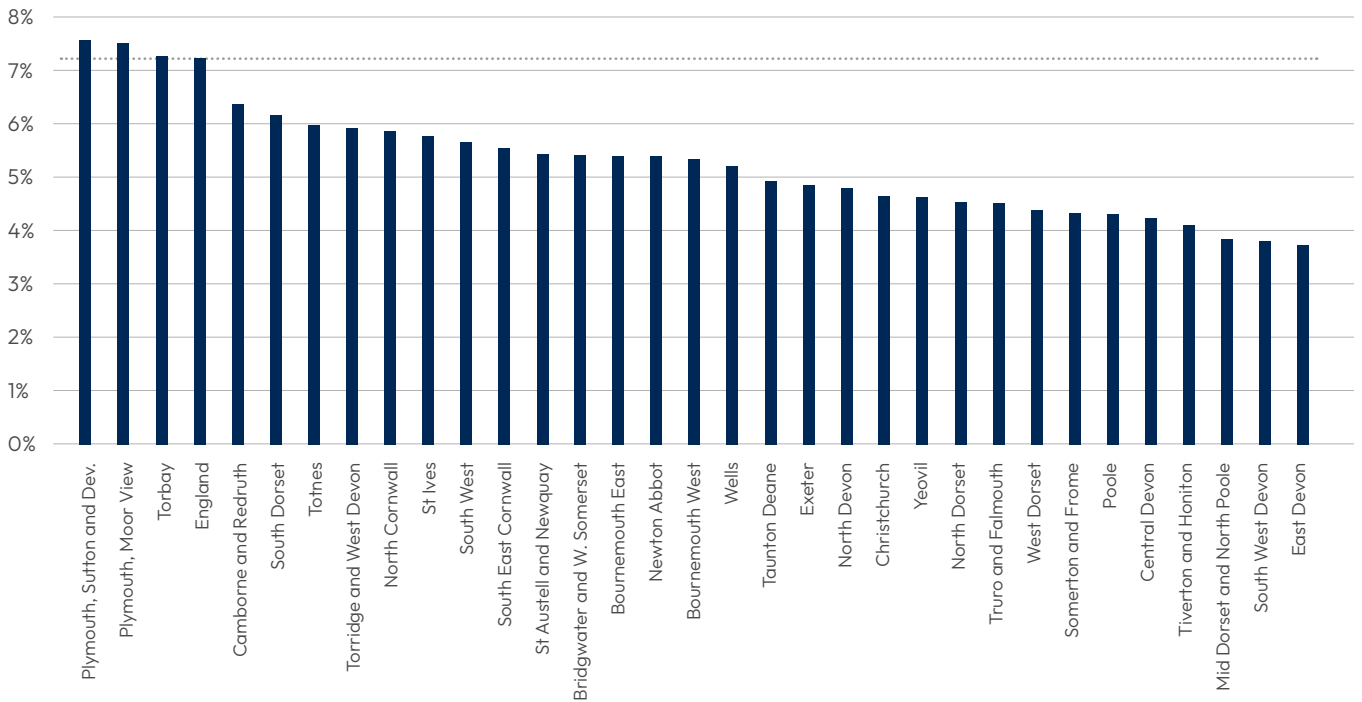


Figure 24³⁵ Proportion of individuals aged 25-34 who have never worked or are long-term unemployed (NS-SEC L14.1 and L14.2) in 2021, by parliamentary constituency



34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.



Earnings

What can young adults in the region expect to earn? We look at median weekly pay and weekly pay for low-paid workers (those in the 25th percentile) by region and by parliamentary constituency.

As a whole, the wider South-West region ranks roughly in the middle of a regional comparison of median earnings, but second worst for low-paid workers ahead of only the North East.

Across the peninsula both median earnings and earnings for low-paid workers are significantly lower than the England average of £536.60 and £360.50 respectively (Figures 25 and 26). In Torridge and West

Devon weekly earnings are over £100 a week lower, at £421.70 and £250.20 respectively.

An important factor in the low pay seen across the peninsula is the high proportion of part-time work – in particular amongst women (Figure 27). This impacts on earnings in terms of the fewer hours that workers do but also because of the lower hourly wages paid by part-time work. In Torridge and West Devon just 56% of work is full time, compared with 73% across England as a whole. 62% of women in Torridge and West Devon work part time, compared with 45% across England.

Figure 25³⁶ Median gross weekly pay in 2022 by peninsula parliamentary constituency

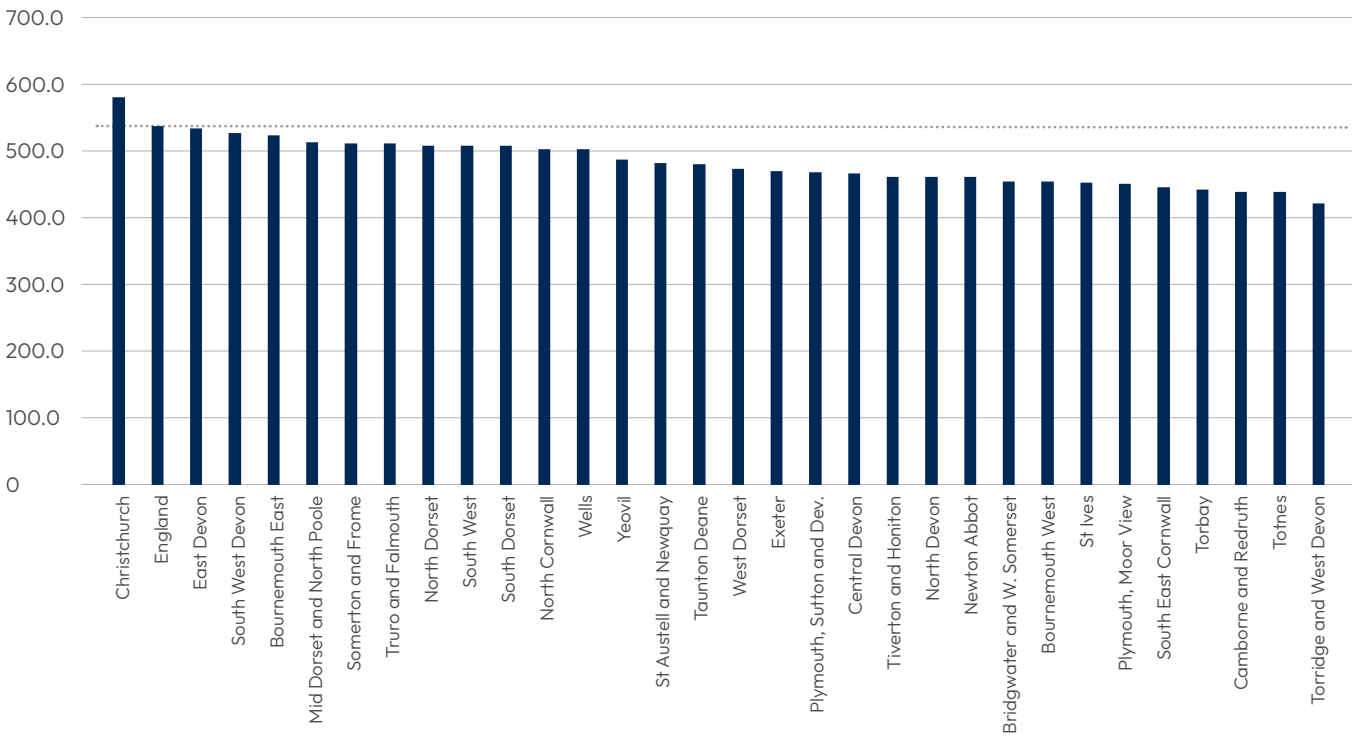




Figure 26³⁷ Gross weekly pay for low-paid workers in 2022 by peninsula parliamentary constituency

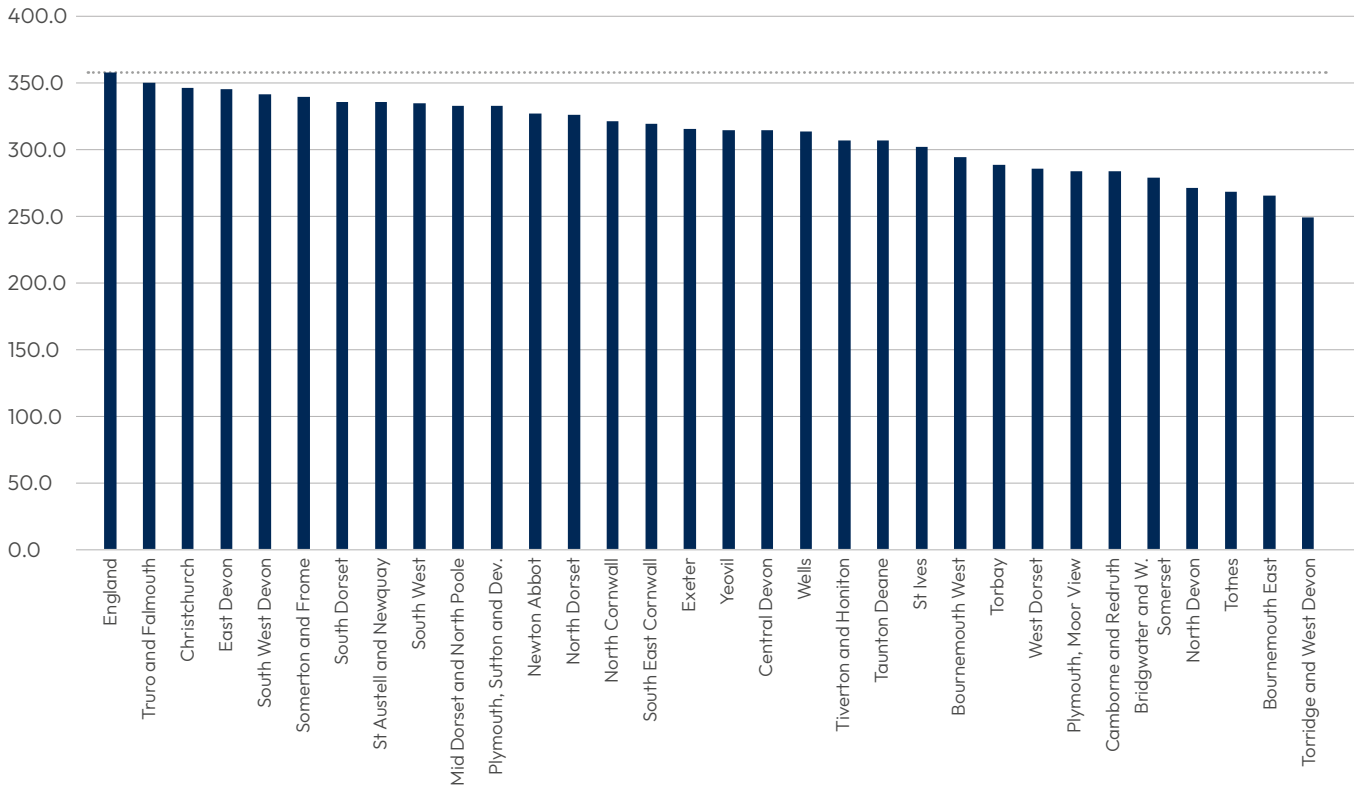
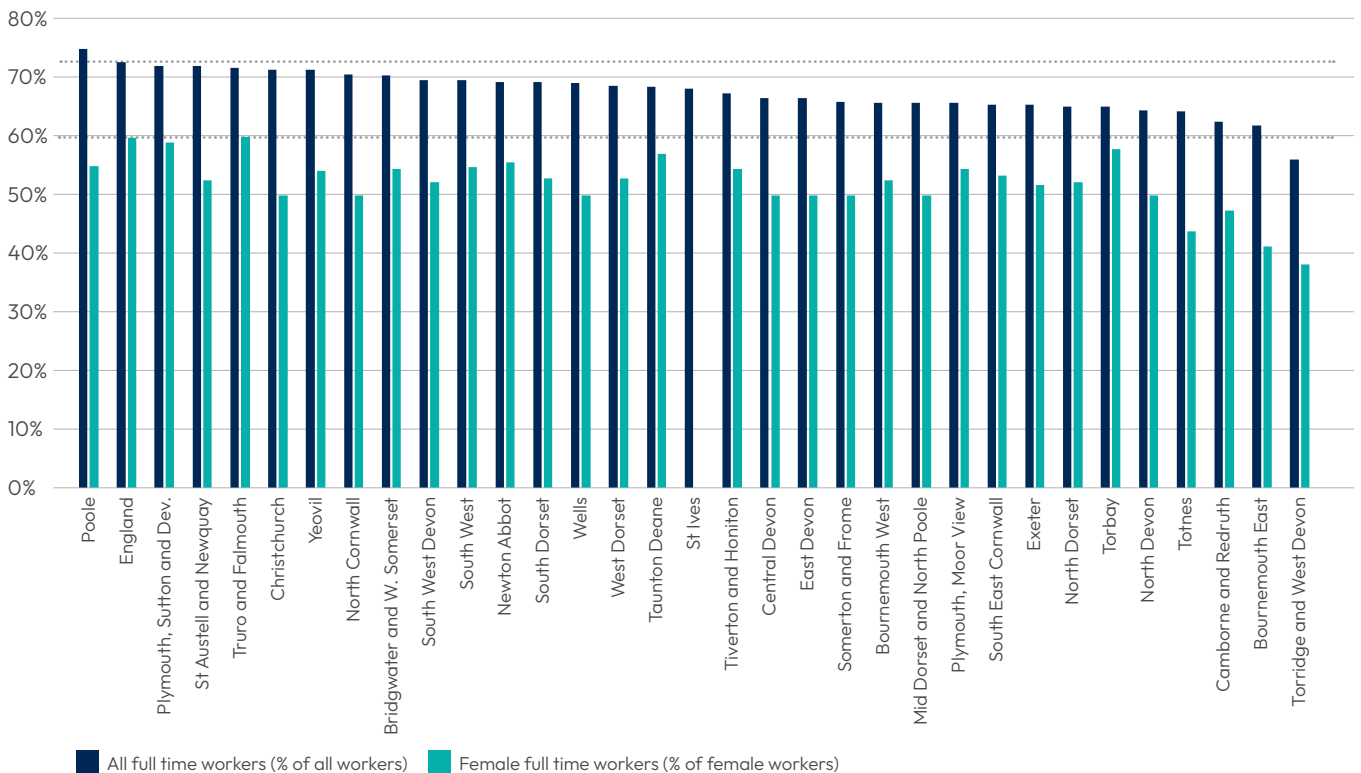
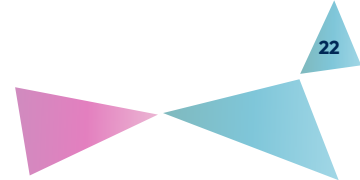


Figure 27³⁸ Proportion of full-time workers (all workers and female workers) in 2022 by peninsula parliamentary constituency



37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.



Data from the Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset allows us to make earnings comparisons for those from disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged backgrounds. It compares earnings across different regions at age 25 for individuals who were and weren't eligible for Free School Meals aged 14. The analysis below looks at the proportion of 25-year-olds earning above the Living Wage between 2012 and 2019.

The data shows that across the country the majority of young adults and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds were not earning a decent wage (Figure 28). For FSM recipients, regional differences ranged from 20% (North East) to 30% (East of England) – in other words, even in the best-performing region over two-thirds of young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds were earning less than the Living Wage, and in the worst-performing region this was 80% of young adults. Amongst non-FSM recipients, regional differences ranged from 39% (Other UK) to 51% (South East) – in other words, in the best-performing region just over half of young adults were earning above the Living Wage; the rest were not.

The gap between the proportion of FSM recipients and the proportion of non-FSM recipients earning above the Living Wage was similar across all regions at around 20 percentage points.

The South-West was roughly in the middle compared with other regions, with 44% of non-FSM recipients and 26% of FSM recipients earning above the Living Wage – although this analysis doesn't take into account the potential higher cost of living in the South-West.

There is a significant gender disparity in earnings, with females earning less than males across all regions, except for non-FSM recipients in London (Figures 29 and 30).

Figure 28³⁹ Earnings status (percentage earning above the Living Wage) at age 25 by free school meal status and region, tax year ending 2012 to tax year ending 2019

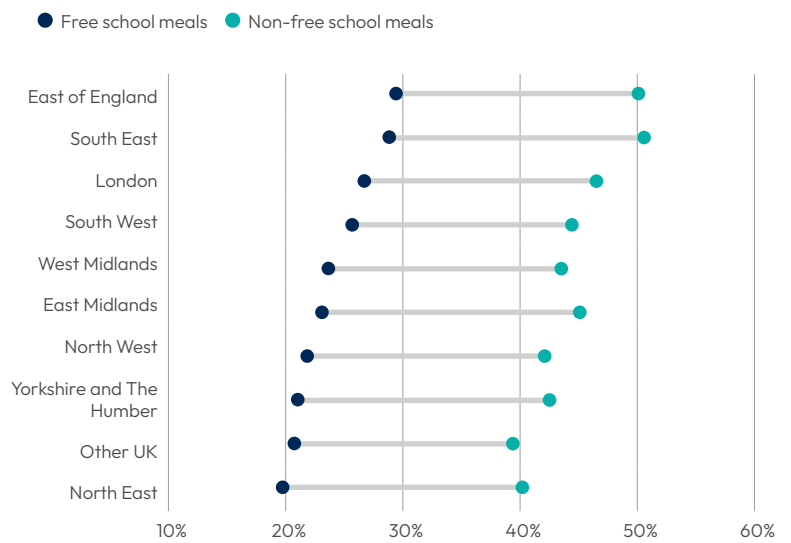


Figure 29⁴⁰ Males

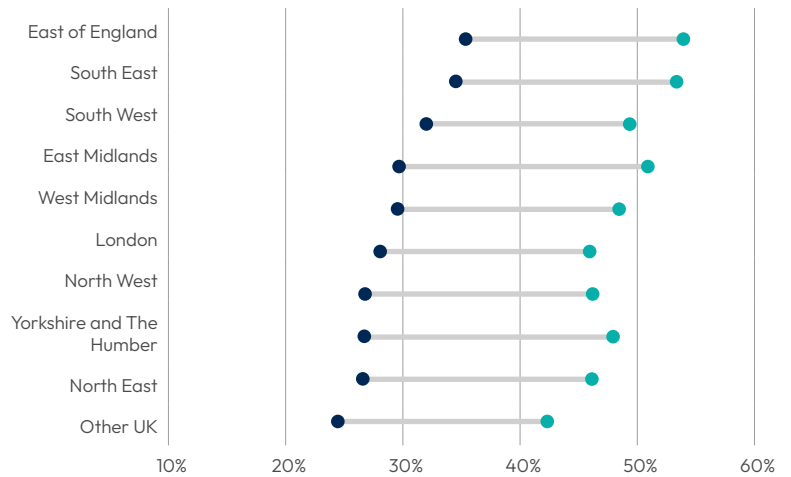
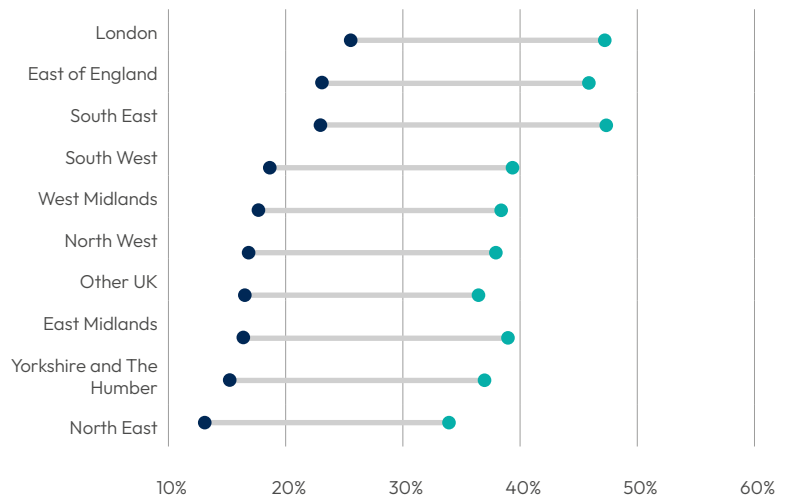


Figure 30⁴¹ Females



39 Tolland et al. (2022).

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.



In this report we feature the experiences of five young people living in LiveWest Foyers – supported housing for those going through difficult transitions including homelessness. These stories highlight some of the barriers facing young people across the region.

Amy⁴²

Amy is 21. She moved to the Foyer in March 2019 after clashes with her mum that resulted in Amy being asked to leave the family home. She was referred from the council's Intensive Family Support Service.

Amy was attending college at the time, studying for a level 1 in Health & Social Care. She completed this successfully and progressed to studying for a level 2 in Child Care. However she wasn't able to complete this due to poor health. She had frequent seizures and poor mental health. She is currently awaiting a concrete diagnosis but it is suspected she may have a functional Neurological Disorder.

Amy worked briefly with a care agency but her seizures meant she couldn't continue. Further, as she didn't have set hours each week, her rent contribution and levels of housing benefit changed regularly. This made it difficult to keep up with payments and was stressful as Amy didn't want to be in debt.

Amy decided to give up her job and move to a cheaper shared house. She is currently paying off her rent and personal charge arrears. Amy feels her poor physical and mental health have been major reasons for not being able to progress.

Ben⁴³

Ben is a bright and articulate 17 year old. He moved into the Foyer in September 2022 after being referred by the Young Homeless prevention team following a family breakdown. Ben had struggled with suicidal thoughts, self-harm and self-neglect and had been under Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

When Ben moved to the Foyer he was enrolled on a level 3 Social Sciences Diploma, applied psychology, sociology and criminology. He wasn't sure if he wanted to go to university or what career he was interested in.

In March 2023, Ben dropped out of college as he had poor attendance and had got behind with his studies. The college were supportive but his mental health was poor and he didn't feel he could cope with the course. He considered a career in the Army and was looking at the Army Preparation Course but his poor mental health prevented him from furthering this.

Ben cites his mental health, poor confidence, lack of belief in himself and lack of money (he is dependent on Universal Credit and Housing Benefit) as barriers to him moving forward with his life. University seems far too expensive so Ben feels this is not an option for him. He has talked about working but is concerned about how he would cope with paying his rent and bills.

42 Not her real name.

43 Not his real name.



The Commission's vision and long-term goals

Our vision

The South-West Social Mobility Commission aims to lead and co-ordinate efforts to improve education and employment outcomes and transform social mobility for disadvantaged young people across the South-West peninsula between now and 2050.

Social mobility is about enabling everyone to access the same opportunities in life regardless of their socioeconomic background. For us, it's about all young people getting the qualifications they need to get a skilled job with decent pay – within the peninsula should they wish to stay, or elsewhere.

Currently, this isn't the case. Too few young people from less well-off backgrounds achieve basic English and maths qualifications, and even fewer attain the advanced skills that lead to less precarious and better-paid jobs.

Social mobility isn't something that can be transformed overnight or even within political cycles. It requires a long-term vision and concerted, joined-up, concrete action over many years. The Commission is about building on the passion and dedication of civic leaders in the region to start driving this long-term change.

This is an opportunity to create change for a generation of children. A child born in 2025 will be 25 in 2050.

Our vision is that the work of the Commission over the next 25 years will transform the experience of this generation of children so that growing up poor in the peninsula no longer determines your life chances.

But we are also acting for all young people now. The Commission's work will address every life stage from 0 to 25. In the coming years an 18-year old from a disadvantaged background should be able to access opportunities that will make a tangible difference to their life prospects.

Social mobility is vital for social justice, economic productivity and democracy. It means breaking the cycles of disadvantage that keep people trapped in poverty benefitting both individual families and public service budgets. It means increasing the skills base of the workforce and broadening the talent pool from which employers can recruit. And it leads to better decision making in all arenas as people with different experiences in life are brought together.

Our 2050 goals

We have set four ambitious goals for 2050, spanning four key life stages from age 0 to 25. We want these

goals to be a reality for all children and young people in the South-West peninsula by 2050.

Goal 1:

Early Years (0-5)

Every infant* develops healthily and meets Early Years foundation goals so that they are ready for school.

Goal 2:

School (5-16)

Every child* finishes school with foundational English and maths, a broad education⁴⁴ and a plan for 16-18 study or training.

Goal 3:

FE/training (16-18)

Every young person* is equipped with the skills employers need now and in the future, the qualifications required to progress and a plan for the next three years.

Goal 4:

Early Career (18-25)

Every adult* is working towards a further or higher level qualification or in a job with training that lead to skilled employment with decent pay.

* Individual differences may mean this is not possible for every person. However a realistic goal might be 95-100%.

⁴⁴ Reference to a broad education addresses our belief that although we have a focus on foundational English and maths in this goal, we don't think this outcome should be pursued at the expense of other subjects (for example, by narrowing the curriculum), and that different skills and qualifications including vocational ones should be valued.



Our overall goals are narrow, insofar as they are restricted to education and early career employment outcomes – to do well in the early years and at school, gain qualifications and skills and have access to good jobs. Having narrow overall goals and key performance indicators will help us maintain a targeted focus and avoid mission creep and confusion with other organisational bodies with complementary aims.

However, this narrow focus in our overall goals does not preclude wider factors such as transport, housing, poverty or adolescent mental health from being important levers to reaching our goals – in fact, it is almost certain that these factors will be important levers. But the point is that solving housing issues for the peninsula (for example) is not our overall goal.

The goals are tied to what we think are realistic Commission levers for change. We see these as being largely internal to the region rather than for example changing national education policy, increasing overall investment to the region or changing the structural profile of the economy.

Our geographic scope is the South-West peninsula (Cornwall, Devon, Somerset⁴⁵). We think there are challenges that are common across the peninsula and we think this geography is the right level for being able to mobilise key actors.

Broadly, we expect these goals to be fixed for the long term but this does not preclude reviewing them in light of policy changes, economic shocks and so on.

Key indicators

We will track progress towards these goals using a set of key indicators. These indicators come from national datasets compiled by the Department for Education and Office for National Statistics. They are imperfect measures of what we are looking to achieve, but are the best available to us based on the data currently being collected. If better indicators become available, we may change our selection of key indicators accordingly.

Our dual target is to achieve 95 – 100% across the indicators in goals 1 and 2 for all children by 2050, with the peninsula being the best-performing region for children from disadvantaged backgrounds⁴⁶. The second element of the target is particularly important in the South-West because as our previous research showed the very poor outcomes being attained by children from disadvantaged backgrounds can be hidden in the headline figures.

For goals 3 and 4, our targets will be more nuanced as we know that individuals will take different journeys to successful outcomes (i.e. we won't be aiming for 95 to 100% of individuals to be in skilled employment or have a level 4 and above qualification). Nevertheless, we believe that higher-level qualifications and skilled employment are more likely to give individuals better choices and a better likelihood of living decent lives, and so our targets will reflect this.

Goal 1:	Goal 2:	Goal 3:	Goal 4:
<p>Early Years (0-5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children meeting expected levels of development at 2 to 2 and a half years • 5 year olds meeting expected standards in early learning goals 	<p>School (5-16)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 year olds meeting expected standards in KS1 phonics screening • 11 year olds meeting expected standards in KS2 reading, writing and maths • 16 year olds achieving a basic pass (grade 4 and above) in English and maths GCSE • 16 year olds' Attainment 8 point scores • KS4 destinations: in education or on an apprenticeship 	<p>FE/training (16-18)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 2 (GCSE or equivalent) English and maths qualification by age 19 • Level 3 qualification (e.g. 2 A-levels, level 3 award or diploma, T-level, advanced apprenticeship) by age 19 • Progression to higher education or training after 16 – 18 study 	<p>Early Career (18-25)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employed people in skilled employment • Not in employment, education or training • Median gross weekly pay and gross weekly pay for low-paid workers • Adults with a level 4 and above qualification and those with no qualifications

⁴⁵ In our analysis of social mobility we have included data on Dorset however the focus of the Commission will be Cornwall, Devon and Somerset (including Plymouth and Torbay).

⁴⁶ Except for Attainment 8 scores, which is a point score. We will target being the best-performing region for all pupils and disadvantaged pupils on this measure.



Data limitations

Improving social mobility is about supporting everyone to do well in life regardless of background. Our targets focus in particular on individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds because we know that outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people are typically much worse than for their better-off peers, and especially so in the South-West.

Unfortunately, data on individuals' socio-economic background is limited. For school-age children, we use measures involving eligibility for free school meals (FSM), which broadly correlates with lower income and lower occupational class. These measures capture roughly the poorest 20 to 30% of children in England depending on the measure used⁴⁷.

However, FSM is a binary categorisation that misses within-group variation. Additionally, FSM rates across the South-West peninsula are mostly below the national average but this likely undercounts the number of families struggling with low wages, underemployment, seasonal working and a higher than average cost of living. As the 2022 report described, where possible disadvantage needs to be understood in broader terms than eligibility for FSM⁴⁸.

For some of the adult measures, it isn't possible to get background data at all so we aren't able to see how adults from disadvantaged backgrounds fare. This is a crucial omission since average outcomes can obscure the poor outcomes being achieved by those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Geographically, the availability of sufficiently granular, up-to-date data can be an issue. With very large datasets like the Census, data can be obtained at a detailed geographic level such as Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA), comprising between 400 and 1200 households. However, this data is only available every ten years. With annual survey data, sampling sizes can mean that only regional level splits can reasonably be obtained.

In sum, our goals and the key indicators we've set are there to help us achieve our vision – but keeping sight of the overall vision is critical. Whilst our key indicators will be a vital means of tracking the progress made by the Commission, we will also monitor the broader evidence to ensure we have a holistic understanding of social mobility in the region and how it is changing.

When will we start seeing an impact?

Whilst our vision is for the long term, we will need interim goals to set the focus. We will set goals for each five-year period between now and 2050. It will be essential to demonstrate significant progress over the next decade.

It's important to set expectations for this work. Over the next few years, we don't expect things to get better. In fact, they are likely to get worse as the effects of various challenges start showing up in outcomes. For example, the COVID pandemic has had an enormous and ongoing negative effect on school attendance with clear consequences for educational outcomes. Meanwhile, the current cost of living crisis is causing many more families to struggle with everyday life with significant negative effects on children's outcomes likely.

As such, whilst we have big ambitions, in the short term we need to temper expectations. The Commission's practical work will start small, in specific places we identify as test-bed areas. If things work, we will look to scale across the peninsula. What starting small means is that we won't necessarily see peninsula-wide change over the next few years – but we should expect to see this change start to happen after we start scaling up programmes.

How will we achieve our vision?

We will do the following to achieve our vision:

- Drive and monitor a co-ordinated set of actions and programmes to be delivered by partners in a limited number of focus areas over the next three to five years, sharing learnings and scaling successful programmes elsewhere – our strategic plan
- Advocate for the peninsula both nationally and regionally with the aim of highlighting the region's social mobility challenges, embedding a social mobility perspective into organisational decision-making and holding civic leaders to account
- Create and share best practice and other guidance to support organisations in the region with knowing how best to target their efforts and spend including how to work cross-sectorally on improving social mobility.

⁴⁷ Datasets typically use an 'FSM' classification, which refers to pupils eligible for free school meals in that year, or a 'Disadvantaged' classification, which refers to pupils eligible for free school meals at any point within the past six years and students looked after by the local authority. According to the Department for Education schools census, 22.5% of pupils were considered eligible for free school meals in 2021/22. 30% of pupils at the end of key stage 2 were considered disadvantaged in 2022.

⁴⁸ Sim, A. and Elliot Major, L. (2022)



In this report we feature the experiences of five young people living in LiveWest Foyers – supported housing for those going through difficult transitions including homelessness. These stories highlight some of the barriers facing young people across the region.

Chloe⁴⁹

Chloe is 18 years old, capable and with a strong work ethic. She moved into the Foyer in May 2022, having been referred via Children's Services. Prior to this she had been sleeping on her cousin's sofa, having had section 20 status turned down. Chloe's mother passed away in 2018 and she stayed with her stepfather until she was 15.

Chloe was unemployed when she moved into the Foyer but had worked in hospitality in the past. She was interested in education and work opportunities.

Chloe was successful in gaining a position in housekeeping at a local hotel but this ended after a few weeks due to a family bereavement. Chloe is very close to her family and spends much of her time supporting various family members. This takes up a lot of her time. The sense of responsibility she feels to support her family has made moving forward difficult.

Dan⁵⁰

Dan is 21. He moved into the Foyer in March 2022 after becoming homeless following a family breakdown. Dan has mild learning difficulties and had an Educational Healthcare Plan. He has dyslexia and struggles at times with processing and retaining information.

Dan was referred to and completed the Prince's Trust hospitality programme. One of the partner hotels was so impressed he was offered a contract with them as a kitchen porter. Dan appeared to be doing well and progressed to LiveWest's move-on house. However, his difficulties processing and retaining information meant he was finding it difficult to follow instructions at work. He also wasn't coping in the lower support accommodation. He struggled financially to manage his rent and utility bills and got into debt. He lost his job and has since moved back to the Foyer.

Dan has a strong work ethic and desire to work. He is still applying for work and is getting support from Seetec Pluss. If he had support on the job and clear instruction this could make a big difference to him.

Ed⁵⁰

Ed is 20 years old. From his early teenage years, Ed didn't have a permanent stable family home and was sofa-surfing between relatives with his mother and two younger siblings. Ed's education was continually interrupted and he left school with no qualifications.

Ed secured employment via the Department for Work and Pension's Kickstart scheme, and was offered permanent employment at the end of his six-month placement. Ed increased his working hours from 20 to 30 hours per week. His hourly pay is above the national minimum wage but below the Living Wage. Ed pays more than half of his earnings on rent.

A lack of affordable housing locally makes finding move-on accommodation almost impossible. Social housing is out of reach and private landlords are not willing to take on under-25s on a low wage without a guarantor. Ed doesn't know anyone with sufficient income who could act as a guarantor. As a result, despite wanting to work, Ed is considering reducing his hours or giving up work so that Housing Benefit will cover the full cost of his rent.

49 Not her real name

50 Not his real name



Introduction to the Commissioners

Commissioners are a group of civic leaders representing different sectors from across the region. They are passionate about improving social mobility and life prospects for the region's young people and have given their time voluntarily for the next three to five years to drive forward this work.

Commissioners bring knowledge, experience and know-how from their different sectors, which include education, business, local authorities, charities, health, housing, sport and the media. Geographically, they span coastal, rural and urban contexts from Cornwall to Somerset.



Sir Michael Barber – Chair of the Commission

Sir Michael Barber is one of the leading Education and Government experts of the last 20 years. He was once described by Time magazine as 'the single most influential educator on the face of the earth'. In April 2021 his latest book *Accomplishment: How Ambitious and Challenging Things Get Done* was published by Penguin. It identifies the pattern of accomplishment across many fields including sport, business and science as well as government. It has been described by Matthew Syed as "an excellent analysis". His previous book *How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers Don't go Crazy*, also published by Penguin, has been influential among politicians and officials worldwide.

From 2017 to 2021 he was Chair of the Office for Students which regulates the higher education system in England. He served as Chief Adviser to the Secretary of State for Education on School Standards from 1997 to 2001 during which time school performance improved significantly.

In 2001 he set up the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit in No 10 Downing Street to ensure the successful implementation of the Prime Minister's priorities in domestic policy including education and health.

Having worked as Head of McKinsey's Global Education Practice and as Pearson's Chief Education Adviser, Michael now leads his own company, Delivery Associates. He is also Chancellor of the University of Exeter and an Honorary Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford. He currently advises the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the skills agenda. He is also Chair of Somerset County Cricket Club.



Kate Kennally, CEO, Cornwall Council

Kate is passionate about improving Cornish residents' lives through inclusive good growth and empowering communities to get involved in the delivery of public services. She is determined that the South-West should be a leading region for sustainable living, harnessing the natural resources which we have within the region to support growth. One of her key priorities is to address social inequalities, working with local partners, businesses and central government to reduce rural and coastal disparities and tackle complex issues such as childhood obesity and healthy ageing as well as creating the right conditions for social mobility.

Alongside a background in People Services, Kate is the Association of County Council Chief Executives policy lead for Net Zero and is the local government representative on the Ministerial Green Jobs Delivery Group, working to ensure that we have the right skilled workforce for the future. Our education system needs to ensure that all young people regardless of their economic background are able to thrive and succeed in this fast changing world. There is much to do to make this a reality, which is why Kate is keen to play her part through being part of the South-West Social Mobility Commission to take advantage of the region's commitment and talent and work towards long term change with both local and national politicians.



Lisa Roberts, Vice-Chancellor, Exeter University

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Professor Lisa Roberts took up her post on 1 September 2020. Prior to this, she was Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation at the University of Leeds where she led on the development of the University's research and innovation strategy. During this time she led significant increases in the income, quality and impact of research at Leeds. She also led a major step change in how the University worked with business, from start-ups to large corporates; launching a new innovation hub and leading a city-wide team of senior city stakeholders through the MIT Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Programme (REAP). Before joining Leeds, Lisa was Executive Dean of the Faculty

of Health and Medical Sciences at the University of Surrey, leading the Schools of Bioscience and Medicine, Psychology and Health Sciences. During this time she also developed and launched only the 8th School of Veterinary Medicine in the UK and developed a successful One Health Strategy with external partnerships being key to its success.

She is a Board Member of the Russell Group, Jisc and Universities UK. Regionally, she is a Board Member of the Heart of the South West LEP, the Great South West Partnership and the Liveable Exeter Place Board.

One of the key themes of the University of Exeter's Strategy 2030 is to lead the progress towards creating a fair, socially just and inclusive society, and this includes activity both across the world and in our region.

Lisa joined the South-West Social Mobility Commission to address the crucial issue of educational and skills attainment in the region, and because she believes passionately that a person's background should not be a barrier to fulfilling potential. She hopes that, through the work of the South-West Social Mobility Commission, we can begin to transform the life prospects of some of the most disadvantaged young people in the country, and she offers the University of Exeter's full support in meeting this ambition.



Paul Crawford, CEO, LiveWest Ltd

Paul has worked in the housing association sector for the past 33 years and is currently CEO of LiveWest, which is the largest provider of affordable housing across the South-West, owning nearly 40,000 homes. LiveWest is also one of the largest developing housing associations in England and over the next 5 years will be developing over 7,000 new homes of all tenures, investing over £1.6B in the South-West economy.

In his role as CEO of LiveWest, Paul has first-hand experience of many of the barriers that are impacting on educational attainment, developing the skills, creating job opportunities, and improving the social mobility of young people across our region.

Given the ongoing cost of living crisis, it is clear that establishing this Commission has a critical role to play more than ever in addressing these barriers and in delivering meaningful change to the educational and employment prospects for young people across the region.



Paul von der Heyde, Chair, NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board

Paul was appointed Chairman of the Somerset NHS system in 2022. He is a Chartered Accountant and business adviser by background. He left practice after almost 30 years to run a substantial business for many years. Subsequently he became a non-executive director and then Chairman of Yeovil District Hospital NHS Foundation Trust for a decade – he was active in the bringing together of the NHS organisations in the county through innovative ideas and believing that change can be for the good. This breadth of experience has given him an insight into how different individuals have succeeded and to recognise the help and encouragement people need. He has admired the extraordinary achievements of people with widely diverse backgrounds which inspires

him to hope for more.

He is convinced that the close collaboration between Somerset Council, a new unitary authority, and the coterminous NHS integrated Care System is an exciting opportunity to support innovative collaboration across our communities and neighbourhoods. This will confirm that the South-West is a great place for young people to make their future and have fulfilling jobs.

Paul has joined the Commission because he believes that everyone has the potential to succeed and be fulfilled but that circumstances can inhibit people from achieving that. He hopes that through the Commission's work all those who influence people's life chances can become more aware and open-minded about how to help talent flourish and be fulfilled; that the environments we create throughout society and the supporting services, public and private, educational and social, can liberate those who live in the South-West to achieve their aspirations whatever they may be.



Lisa Mannall, CEO, Cornwall Education Trust (CELT)

As Trust Leader for Cornwall Education Trust (CELT), Lisa is responsible for nearly 10,000 students and over 1000 staff. CELT educates students from age 2 to 18, across some of Cornwall's poorest areas.

Lisa became a teacher at 30. At that time she was a single parent and the first in her family to experience the privilege of a university education.

Teaching has given her the opportunity to help young people achieve, whilst in both the classroom and leadership roles. Working with young people is a role that she has always relished and finds a privilege, and she is excited to come to work every day.

However, it was not until her period as Regional Schools Commissioner for the South-West that she fully appreciated the desperate need for everyone to understand and acknowledge what it is to be a disadvantaged young person in the South-West. How from the earliest point, you will be falling behind your non-disadvantaged peers in your life chances and the opportunities available to you. We don't talk enough about the fact that it is still persistently the case that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in the South-West are outperformed academically by peers in urban areas facing a similar level of deprivation.

The South-West is a great place to live – for some, but not all. Only when everyone has the same opportunities to succeed will it be a truly great place to live, work and contribute to society.



Alice Thomson, Associate Editor, The Times

Alice Thomson is a British political journalist. She is an associate editor, weekly columnist, and political interviewer for The Times. Starting as a trainee on The Times in 1990, she became a foreign correspondent, feature writer and political reporter for the newspaper. Winner of interviewer of the year in 2022, she has also written for Vogue, the Financial Times and The Spectator among other publications and appeared on Question Time, Any Questions and Newsnight. Alice presents the interview series Past Imperfect with fellow Times columnist Rachel Sylvester on Times Radio, which began in July 2020, also available as a podcast, and now in its sixth series. In 2022, with Rachel Sylvester, Alice wrote What I Wish I'd Known When I

Was Young, looking at why it is that often the most successful people have overcome tragedy and adversity in childhood. Alice is married with three sons and one daughter and lives in London and mid-Devon.

Alice joined the Commission because she has been writing about the South-West, the countryside, farming, health, education, and transport issues for the last 30 years for both The Times and Telegraph newspapers. She thinks the area has been neglected by the press and government in recent years while the emphasis has been on levelling up the cities and the north, most recently the so-called red wall constituencies. The South-West faces its own issues which she'd like to address such as social mobility, educational attainment, rural poverty and transport. Focussing a spotlight on the area will help us to ensure future generations will achieve their potential.



Brendan Staniforth, Strategy Delivery Director, Devonport Royal Dockyard (Babcock International)

Brendan is Director of Business Planning at Babcock's Devonport Royal Dockyard, the largest Dockyard in Western Europe, employing approximately 10,400 people regionally with an economic impact of over £1bn across the South-West. He has over 20 years of experience in delivering enterprise change and strategy across Defence, Nuclear and Pharmaceutical sectors. He is responsible for overseeing delivery of Babcock's Sustainability strategy across Babcock's Nuclear Sector, including Devonport; delivering the long term strategy for Devonport.

Brendan grew up in Cornwall and is now bringing up his three daughters here, so he is incredibly personally committed to making sure children growing up in the South-West have the best possible opportunities to succeed in life.

No matter which business you talk to employment and skills are always at the top of the agenda, combined with the additional challenges business and society faces. Social mobility is critical in ensuring we maintain a capable and agile workforce going forwards. Brendan believes employers can do more, by working together, to improve social mobility and in turn their own sustainability, and meaningfully impact communities while doing it. Babcock has many long-term projects in the South-West, so it's essential it has enough skilled workers now and in the future. Businesses in the region have a major role in improving social mobility.



Karl Tucker, Chair of Yeo Valley Ltd, Chair of Heart of the South West LEP and Chair of Great South West

Karl is the Non-Executive Chair of Yeo Valley Ltd and Yeo Valley Farms Ltd. Karl has been with the Yeo Valley Family of Businesses since 1996 having joined from the Quarrying Industry and before that having served in the British Army.

Karl has been a key member of the leadership team that has seen Yeo Valley grow to be the UK's largest organic food brand and one of the largest, independent, family-owned dairy businesses in the UK.

Prior to his current role Karl has been the Managing Director of Yeo Valley Properties Ltd and Executive Chairman and Managing Director of Yeo Valley Production Ltd.

As well as his role at Yeo Valley, Karl is the Chair of the Heart of the South West LEP and Chair for the Great South West PRP. He is a Non-Executive Director of a start-up business, Remit Zero Ltd, developing alternative solutions for the replacement of fossil fuel boilers.

Karl is also Chair of 'South Bristol Youth', a body working to raise the aspiration, motivation and attainment levels of the more disadvantaged young people of Bristol and Somerset and he is a Governor of the Merchants Academy school in Withywood, Bristol. Karl joined the South-West Social Mobility Commission as he is passionate about ensuring that the young people who grow up in the region have the opportunity and skills required to be active and participate in our regional economy at the highest level possible. We have amazing opportunities in the region that will create significant numbers of high value jobs in the future and Karl wants as many of those jobs as possible being filled by the young people who grow up and live here.



Tony Rowe CBE, Hon LLD, Chairman and Chief Executive, Exeter Rugby Club

Tony is Chairman and Chief Executive of Exeter Rugby Club and has been for over 25 years. Initially introduced to the club to provide sponsorship, it's been an association ever since that has seen him not only continue the sponsorship with his former company, SW Comms, but also help guide the Devon club from the National Leagues to that of Anglo Welsh, English Premiership and European Heineken champions.

Tony left school at the age of 15 and joined the Royal Marines Band as a drummer and bugler. In 1972 he started a company selling and repairing powerboat engines. He went on to race powerboats, successfully becoming British champion – winning the Rouen 24hr powerboat race and setting a new British water speed record.

In 1983, the Government announced that they were going to privatise the telephone market. Tony immediately recognised the potential business opportunity and set up selling South-West Telecoms, selling computers and business telephony systems. The company grew to become a multi-million-pound complete communications business, now known as SW Comms. Since February 2021, Tony has been concentrating on his other business ventures, including the creation of the Sandy Park Hotel, the Matford Business Centre, Hy-tec enamelling, and West Exe Business Park.

He was awarded the CBE for services to business, sport in the 2023 King's New Year's Honours list. He had previously been awarded an OBE in 2012 and received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws from the University of Exeter, as well as being given the Freedom of the City of Exeter.

Tony is proud to represent the Exeter Chiefs and the Chiefs Foundation Charity, bringing his experience of sport and running businesses to the Commission. The Exeter Chiefs Academy has 600 boys and 150 girls aged 13 to 24 learning rugby but also developing their life skills and education. This role is very personal to Tony. He was disadvantaged at school. He is dyslexic and there wasn't much help for him then. He felt inadequate until he developed his English and maths skills himself later in life.



Sean Mackney, Principal and CEO, Petroc

Sean has spent his career working in higher and further education to achieve social and economic change. He has held leadership roles in universities, Government bodies and institutional partnerships in various parts of the country, before joining Petroc – an FE college and university centre with bases in North and Mid Devon.

Recognising that some of the most intractable issues we face in society require multi-dimensional approaches, he has always sought to take advantage of the opportunities that come through working in partnership. He currently chairs the board of Northern Devon Futures – the partnership of systems leaders committed to creating a positive future for that part of the South-West peninsula.

With a research interest in policymaking and a passion for innovation and making things happen, he sees a fantastic opportunity for the Commission to help produce lasting change and improve the life chances of young people through evidence-informed action and advocacy, an agenda central to colleges across the peninsula. He is proud to be a member of the Commission and to be able to help it achieve its ambitious goals for a region that really needs to tackle the disadvantage and inequality hidden amongst its beautiful coast and countryside.



Andrew Moreman, CEO, Young Devon

Andrew has been a youth worker for over 30 years and has been lucky to work alongside young people in several cities and counties across the UK and overseas. Prior to moving to Devon, he worked for Kent, Sussex and Hackney local authorities managing youth clubs and youth services and supporting voluntary sector organisations. He has also led voluntary organisations in Cambridgeshire, Sussex and Lambeth as well as spending time in Melbourne, Victoria developing training and employment pathways for young people.

Andrew is passionate about doing everything we can locally to give young people opportunities to have a say in the decisions that affect them, and to be given the chance to grow and thrive regardless of what's happened before. He truly believes that building relationships is one of the most important things we do professionally and personally – and the best thing about youth work is getting to do that.

Throughout his working life he has focused on youth and community work and the ability it has to develop truly local responses and solutions to the challenges young people face. Whether that's literacy programmes, arts and theatre, open access youth clubs or outdoor learning he has been fortunate enough to work in places and with colleagues who were pre-occupied with ensuring young people had the best chance to grow and thrive.

He now works at Young Devon, a charity providing accommodation, homelessness support, help with mental health, employment support, skills development, help for victims of crime and much more.

He is excited about the opportunity to support the South-West Social Mobility Commission and the possibility it brings to ensure we close the gaps in experiences that young people have growing up in the South-West – it's a challenge none of us can ignore.

Executive function: Exeter University

As one of the key institutions in the region with a commitment to social justice and civic engagement, Exeter University will drive forward this work. Professor Lee Elliot Major and Dr Anne-Marie Sim from the University's Centre for Social Mobility will lead the Commission's Executive function, following the publication of their 2022 report on social mobility in the region.

For all enquiries about the Commission, please contact A.Sim@Exeter.ac.uk



How we plan to work: our framework for action

In this section we set out how we envisage the Commission working to achieve its goals. We expect that our approach will evolve over time as we learn what does and doesn't work. So this section should be taken as a work in progress rather than definitive.

Below we set out our starting premise. This includes the assumptions underlying our thinking, what we think lies within and outside the scope of the Commission, and the key principles informing how we will work.

Our starting premise

1 **What social mobility means** depends on how people define it. Our focus will be on ensuring young people in the region – and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds – grow up able to live decent lives within the region or elsewhere if they prefer. We believe the central means to achieving this is through young people gaining the skills and qualifications employers need. Skills and qualifications give individuals better options in life. Improving skills levels across the region should also drive a virtuous cycle that in time will attract more businesses and jobs to the peninsula.

Of course, not all young people have the same talents. Our goals reflect the fact that beyond foundational maths and English (which we think are the basic qualifications all young people need) we think there is a strong opportunity for the region to support pathways beyond traditional academic ones, in particular technical and vocational skills and work-based placements. Employers will be crucial to making this happen.

2 We think a **particular focus on disadvantage** is necessary because the peninsula does especially badly for poorer children in terms of educational attainment and progression. As our 2022 report highlighted, disadvantage in the region often stays hidden and a lack of focus on disadvantage has led to some of the poorest outcomes in the country.

Eliminating attainment gaps between disadvantaged children and their better-off peers may never be possible because inequality is so pervasive in society. But massively reducing gaps is: the much-narrowed gaps achieved over the past few decades in London attest to this. Being the best-performing region for disadvantaged young people by 2050 is therefore our goal. Key to this will be a relentless focus on doing what works best for disadvantaged children.

3 The Commission's **geographic scope** will be the South-West peninsula (Cornwall, Devon, Somerset⁵¹). We think there are challenges that are common across the peninsula and we think this geography is the right level for being able to mobilise key actors. The Commission's work will provide important lessons for how programmes can be implemented in particular in rural, coastal and sparsely populated contexts.

Within the peninsula we will focus our strategic work on a limited number of 'focus areas' in the first instance – as test-bed places for mobilising a coordinated set of actions and programmes. These focus areas will enable us to work at a human scale – understanding the barriers being faced by children, young people and families within a specific place. We will work with community actors to develop a cross-sectoral plan of action to address the barriers within that context. If successful, we will use the lessons learnt to scale actions in other parts of the peninsula.

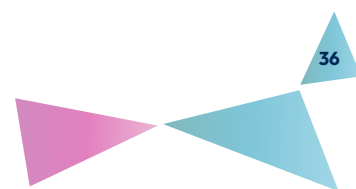
4 Whilst our goals centre on education and early career outcomes we think the central opportunity for the Commission is in taking a **cross-sectoral approach**. In other words, we will assume that teachers and school leaders know best in the classroom; our work as a Commission will instead be in identifying the levers outside of the school gates that impact on attainment within and coordinating action between the different actors who can affect these levers.

Having a narrow focus in our overall goals and KPIs will help us maintain a targeted focus and avoid mission creep and confusion with other organisational bodies with complementary aims. Wider factors such as transport, housing, poverty and adolescent mental health are likely to be important levers to us reaching our goals. We will need to think about the join-up between these levers and what we are trying to achieve, whilst recognising that solving for example all of the peninsula's transport issues is not the Commission's central goal.

5 We have an **ambitious vision** but will take a **pragmatic approach** to achieving that vision. Our 2050 goals for the region are ambitious: reaching 95 to 100% achievement in basic qualifications and being the best-performing region on disadvantage is no small task. Still, our goals are tied to what we think are realistic levers for change. For example, although we will advocate for the region nationally, we see the Commission's key levers as being largely internal to the region. We therefore take things like national education policy, investment to the region and the structural profile of the economy as given.

To reach our 2050 goals we will have interim goals for every five-year period in between – to understand what we need to do in the medium and short term to reach our vision and to track progress effectively. Our strategy will involve trialling actions and programmes in a small number of test-bed areas and scaling where appropriate, rather than trying to launch massive peninsula-wide programmes.

51 In our analysis of social mobility we have included data on Dorset however the focus of the Commission will be Cornwall, Devon and Somerset (including Plymouth and Torbay).



6 The Commission itself won't deliver programmes but it will aim to **spur others to action** and will work with delivery partners to **drive and monitor delivery**. Given our very limited capacity, we think the most effective role the Commission can play is in holding to account other regional and local actors and driving, coordinating and supporting them to deliver our strategy.

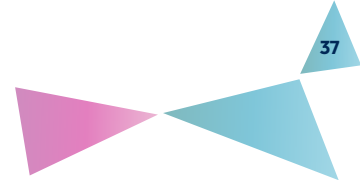
As part of our strategy, we will ensure delivery and monitoring plans are in place so that all actors are clear on their roles and responsibilities, the timeframes in which they will need to act, and the evaluation data they will need to collect so that impact can be assessed. In terms of support, we will look to develop and share best practice guidance for organisations to help them in their decision-making and delivery.

7 Our work will be **evidence informed**. We will use available data to inform our focus areas and strategy, and bring in national expertise and best practice to inform our overall approach and individual programmes. There is a strong opportunity to trial national policies and best practice from elsewhere and to share learnings for how to implement these in coastal and rural contexts.

We will also closely monitor the progress of the Commission's strategy using sets of metrics to track delivery of all of the programmes we develop with partners. We will contribute to the use and spread of best practice by documenting and widely sharing our approach and the lessons we learn from what we do.

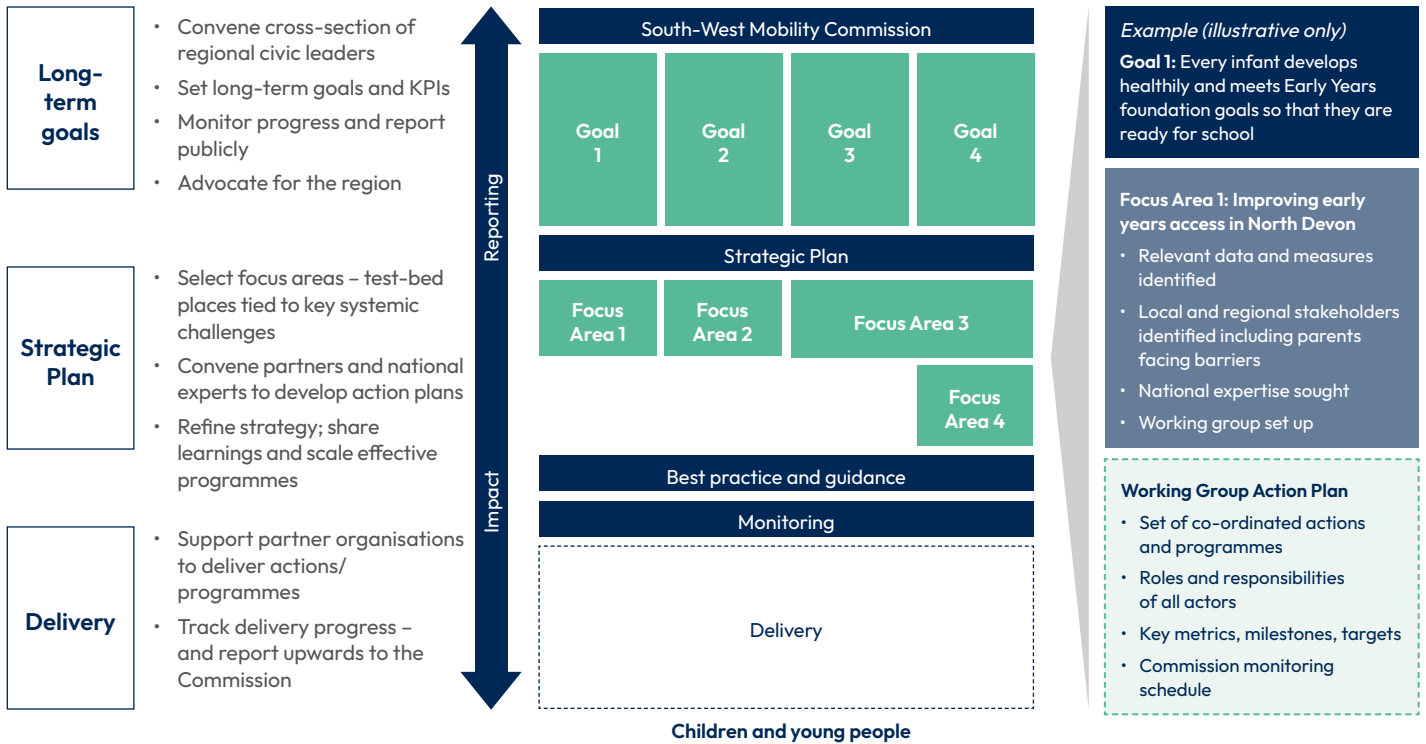
8 We aim to be as **transparent** as possible in terms of sharing our approach, methods and learnings (including mistakes and failures). Sharing candid lessons learnt can be hugely valuable to others who may be attempting or looking to attempt similar things. We also believe this can inform national-level discussions about how to do this kind of regional, cross-sectoral social mobility work. It will be vital to collect evidence on both 'what works' and how to implement programmes effectively to inform social mobility practice elsewhere.

We will look to keep interested individuals and organisations informed about our work in as timely a way as possible to encourage feedback on our thinking. We have set up a Substack for those looking to follow our work and hope this will lead to fruitful conversations on approaches and methods.



Our operating model

Figure 31 Operating model (illustrative only): The Commission owns the strategic plan but partners deliver actions and programmes



Strategic plan

We aim to tackle the key stubborn challenges preventing good outcomes from being achieved at each of the life stages covered by our goals. We will identify the challenges at a regional level and look to understand them in detail within a small number of community contexts – our focus ‘test-bed’ areas.

We will operate on two scales: our action plans will be focused and place-specific, but we will also zoom out to take a peninsula-wide view on how we can be most effective at driving regional change.

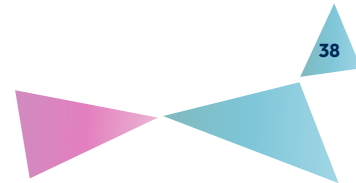
Within each of our focus areas, we’ll look to understand the specific barriers children and families are facing in their everyday lives and how these might be overcome. We’ll work with organisational partners to co-ordinate a set of actions and programmes to address the identified barriers. And we’ll test these with the local community to make sure they’re fit for purpose. We’ll also work with partners to develop delivery plans

and metrics and monitor these to ensure actions and programmes stay on track. Starting small, in specific places, will help us to understand the issues involved at a human scale and enable us to be dynamic in the way we operate – learning from mistakes and refining our approach as we go.

More widely, we’ll also look to hold relevant organisations and groups in the region to account on social mobility – presenting them with the evidence on social mobility and what they can do about it, and calling for them to commit to action (see Advocacy, below). The work from our focus areas will enable us to produce best practice guidance to support the scaling of successful actions and programmes elsewhere. Best practice exemplars will provide organisational leaders with the thinking and evidence they need to put a desire to help into practice (see Learning, below).

Figure 32 Strategic plan: Our three-to-five year strategies will involve delivery in test-bed areas





Advocacy

An important lever for change will be advocacy.

At a regional level, the Commission aims to embed a focus on social mobility throughout all organisational decision making. We want social mobility to be front of mind for leaders across all types of organisations, influencing strategic decision-making including big spending decisions.

In tracking and widely publicising progress towards our goals, we aim to embed social mobility in the public consciousness and hold leaders in the region accountable for their record on this. Meanwhile we will work on sharing best practice guidance to help organisations understand what they can do to help improve social mobility in their organisations and beyond, and how best to focus their efforts and their spend.

As influential leaders within their sectors, our Commissioners will be vital in driving the embedding of a social mobility perspective across different sectors in the region.

At a national level, the Commission aims to draw attention to the peninsula. As our 2022 report noted, despite its geographic isolation the evocation of a North-South divide can mean the South-West peninsula becomes thought about as part of an affluent, well-connected southern England or else forgotten altogether.

We will draw attention to the region's social mobility challenges including those relating to its coastal, rural and remote geography, and implications for funding. We will work with colleagues in the media and organisations like the Great South West partnership to do this.

We will also advocate for the region spearheading trials of national programmes. We will demonstrate through the Commission and other active regional and local bodies that the region has civic leaders who are working together to push for change.

Learning

An additional important contribution the Commission will make is towards collective learning – in particular with regards to cross-sectoral approaches to social mobility and programme delivery in coastal and rural geographies.

We will ensure that we publish as much open access material as possible about our approach, methods, programmes, best practice and lessons learnt. There are many efforts aimed at improving educational outcomes and social mobility across the country, although we don't know of any regional, cross-sectoral approaches exactly like the Commission. We will contribute to the body of knowledge on such approaches by documenting and sharing learnings.

We think there is particular value in publishing real-time or close to real-time information that includes our thinking, methods and lessons on mistakes and failures to inform other similar approaches or programmes that might be occurring simultaneously. Even if the programmes and actions we support aren't successful or don't have impact, we think there is significant value in sharing these lessons.



What to expect and how to get involved

Our plan for this year

We have brought together a committed group of civic leaders to drive change for current and future generations of children in the region. We've set our long-term goals and we know our starting point.

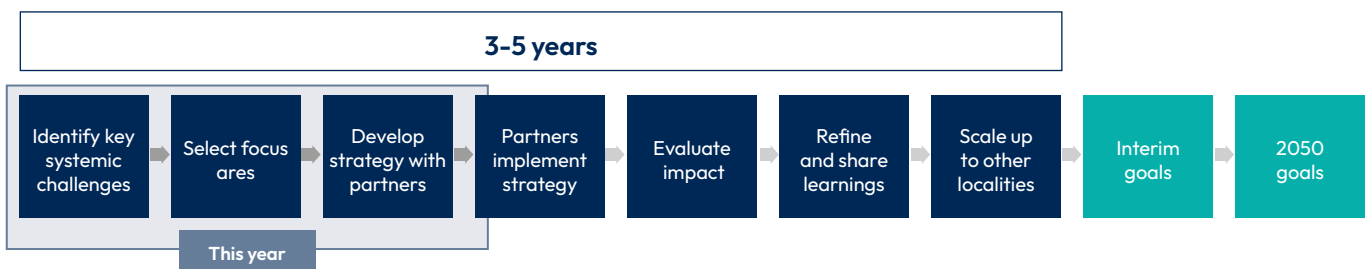
Our next step will be developing and driving a core strategy across three or four focus areas. We are currently deciding on our focus areas. Our method for selecting our focus areas will be a combination of seeking high-level expertise on the challenges, examining available data on possible geographies and being pragmatic about potential opportunities.

Once we've selected our focus areas, the much bigger task that we envisage taking several months to complete will be working with stakeholders within those focus areas to really understand the issues involved.

We will look to learn from and consult with children, young people and families living in our focus areas. We will also identify relevant community stakeholders as well as national experts in the topic area, and set up working groups to help us understand what new and existing programmes and co-ordinated actions might have (or are already having) the most impact, and who might undertake these programmes and actions.

The plan is to have a full strategy in place by the end of the year, with delivery of programmes starting next year (although some may start early). This strategy will include all of the programmes and actions we plan to support, fully specified delivery plans and metrics and schedules for monitoring progress.

Figure 33 Our aim is to have a full strategic plan in place by the end of the year



Be part of the conversation

We intend to keep interested parties informed through a Substack. If you'd like to get involved, please search for the South-West Social Mobility Commission on Substack. We don't want this to be

one-way communication though. Our hope is to publish information in as close to real-time as possible to get timely feedback and start conversations about our plans.



Support with funding

We are always looking for additional funding – for the core work of the Commission, research and best practice guidance work that we'd like to undertake, and programmes that will be run by delivery partners.

In terms of the Commission itself, we have a very small team based at the University of Exeter that is currently being funded by a combination of University, local authority, partnership and philanthropic funding. We are hoping to broaden our funding base to ensure the future sustainability of the Commission. We are especially keen that businesses in the region join our current funders.

Further funding will enable us to do more – in particular, further research and the creation of best practice guidance that will help organisations in the region in their thinking and action on improving social mobility.

In addition to monetary funding, we are also open to support with capacity – including but not limited to funded secondments to our team or pro bono support with specific pieces of research.

Support with delivery

As described above, programme delivery will likely take place in specific places once we've decided on our focus areas, which we'll publicise in due course. Nevertheless, we're always keen to hear from organisations who'd like to offer support with delivery, irrespective of location. Search for the South-West Social Mobility Commission on Substack.



What does good social mobility practice look like?

Introduction

The history of social mobility in the UK in the post-War era is a story of immense political, economic and social transformation, which fundamentally reshaped British society and its class structures. Successive governments, schools and social impact organisations across the UK have been striving to improve social mobility in defined places for decades. This section will provide an overview of some of these initiatives and reforms, and identify some lessons for the South-West Social Mobility Commission.

Trends in social mobility across the UK

The post-war period saw a period of sustained economic growth, with major investment in the national infrastructure as part of the reconstruction effort accompanying a population boom and rapid technological advances. This growth led to the creation of new and better paid jobs, which in turn led to a larger and more prosperous middle class.

This period of growth was accompanied by the formation of the welfare state, including the creation of the NHS and the establishment of universal access to education for all children aged 5 and 15 following the introduction of the 1944 Education Act. These reforms led to increased productivity as healthier and better-educated workers contributed to the economy. Importantly, the post-war era also saw changing attitudes towards social class and mobility, with the idea that social class was fixed and determined by birth being challenged, and an increasing acceptance of the idea that people could move up or down the social ladder based on their own efforts and abilities.

The considerable expansion of professional and managerial positions since 1945 led to a dramatic increase in the number of women pursuing professional careers, and more families now have both parents in professional or managerial roles. However, the story of social mobility in post-war Britain is not without

its challenges. Despite the significant progress made in expanding opportunities, the persistence of class divisions and regional disparities in income and employment have continued to influence social mobility. The decline of traditional industries, the rise of the service sector, and the impact of globalisation have all contributed to the changing dynamics of social mobility in the UK.

Moreover, the growth in available professional and managerial positions has slowed down since 1991. This illustrates the complex nature of social mobility in the UK, as both progress and challenges coexist.

At present, social mobility in the UK remains stagnant. Research by the Government's Social Mobility Commission has shown that occupational mobility – an absolute measure that gives the percentage of people in a different occupational class from their parents – has remained stable for decades.⁵² Meanwhile, there has likely been a decline in both absolute and relative income mobility – the money people earn – for people born in the late 1970s and beyond, and the UK performs poorly compared to the rest of Europe.^{53,54} As Eyles, Elliot Major and Machin (2022) summarise:

“For generations growing up in the early 21st century the dream of just doing better in life, let alone climbing the income ladder, is disappearing.”⁵⁵

It is clear therefore that the UK has a long way to go to become a country where background doesn't determine destiny. This means continuing to make improvements in the core drivers of social mobility, such as conditions of childhood, access to high-quality education and employment opportunities, and levels of social capital. While these drivers were largely showing positive trends nationally prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the pandemic has widened inequality and is predicted to have a significant impact on social mobility.

52 Social Mobility Commission (2022).

53 Ibid.

54 goldmansachs.com/insights/pages/from-briefings-07-april-2022.html

55 Eyles, A., Elliot Major, L. and Machin, S. (2022).



The South-West region of the UK has the worst educational outcomes for disadvantaged young people in the country, and low social mobility compared with other areas. When young people enter the workforce, they are entering a low wage economy – with limited opportunities for advancement in absolute incomes, and the lack of connectivity across the peninsula creates significant barriers to accessing education.⁵⁶ It is vital, therefore, that the South-West Social Mobility Commission makes progress in tackling the barriers to social mobility. In doing so, it must learn from initiatives that have had a demonstrable impact.

Place-based efforts to improve social mobility

Place-based reform is an approach to policy-making and implementation that focuses on addressing the unique needs and challenges of specific geographic areas or communities. This approach acknowledges that issues such as poverty, unemployment, education, and health disparities are often rooted in local contexts and cannot be effectively addressed in full through one-size-fits-all policies.

Place-based reform aims to develop tailored interventions and strategies that take into account the specific social, economic and environmental factors of a particular area. This involves collaboration between various stakeholders, such as local governments, businesses, community organisations, and residents, to identify and address the underlying causes of local problems. By targeting resources and efforts to specific locations, place-based reform seeks to create long-lasting, positive change and promote sustainable development in these communities.

This section will now provide some vignettes of recent and current place-based initiatives by government, schools and community organisations across the UK.

Schools: Reach Foundation's cradle-to-career model

The Reach Foundation is a registered charity whose cradle-to-career model aims to support children and young people from early childhood through to young adulthood. The cradle-to-career model involves a collaboration between Reach Academy Feltham (a highly successful free school founded in 2012) and Reach Children's Hub (a charitable project started in 2017) to provide an innovative form of support for local children, young people and families in Feltham, aimed at tackling educational disadvantage.

Reach Academy Feltham is all-through and small, enabling staff to build deep, trusting relationships with students and families. The school also provides extensive family support and in-house counselling. The Reach leadership team believes that the depth of relationships developed contributes to the students' achievements. However, extensive community consultations highlighted a range of challenges faced by the community that meant the impact of the school was being constrained, including limited essential services, complex family dynamics, high numbers of risk factors (e.g. low-paid work, food poverty), and a lack of support for young people to access high-quality further education or employment. That is why the Reach Foundation created the Reach Children's Hub to create a community hub organisation that supports children, young people, and families beyond what a school can provide.

Reach's cradle-to-career model is designed to provide a seamless pipeline of support for children from pre-school to post-school destinations, and is inspired by models such as Harlem Children's Zone in New York and Strive Together in the United States. The Reach model aims to ensure all children and young people are safe, well-supported, healthy, achieve academically, and have strong relationships and social networks. Whilst still in its infancy, the impact of the cradle-to-career model is encouraging. In 2023, 38% of Reach Academy's children were eligible for free school meals. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, their 2022 Progress 8 score was 0.83, and their Ebacc entry was 87%.^{57,58}

The Reach Foundation have set up a Cradle-to-Career Partnership to help all-through schools and school trusts to develop local cradle-to-career models of support centred around strong performing schools.

Reach are currently partnering with over a dozen schools and trusts across the South-West and North of England, including Education South-West and the Ted Wragg Trust.

The University of Exeter is involved in this through a project to follow partner schools and trusts through the first two years of their involvement in the partnership – from participation in a comprehensive Reach training programme and peer network to the work involved in setting up their own cradle-to-career models. The project will document the enablers and barriers to effective cradle-to-career models.

⁵⁶ Sim, A. and Elliot Major, L. (2022).

⁵⁷ find-school-performance-data.service.gov.uk/school/138266/reach-academy-feltham/secondary

⁵⁸ The local authority average Progress 8 score for state-funded schools was 0.47 in 2022.



Community organisation: West London Zone

The West London Zone (WLZ) is a collective impact organisation that works to improve the life chances and outcomes of children and young people in West London. The WLZ works by bringing together local organisations, schools and community groups to create a coordinated system of specialist support to deliver a 2-year support plan for each child – with a focus on their academic attainment and social and emotional wellbeing.

The WLZ establishes trusted relationships with children and young people by assigning dedicated individuals called Link Workers. These Link Workers are based in the child's school and interact with them on a daily basis, serving as guides, supporters and champions for each child – and working closely with their families and teachers to design and deliver the 2-year support plan. Link Workers also connect children to existing opportunities within the community that they might not be aware of, ensuring accessibility and continuation of support even after their involvement with WLZ ends.

One of the key strengths of the WLZ is its focus on building relationships with young people and their families. The organisation recognises that building trust and rapport is essential for creating lasting change and works to ensure that young people feel supported and empowered throughout their journey. Alongside this, the WLZ has built a directory of all the community organisations working within the area, which enables them to signpost and place children into specific programmes that their Link Worker knows will best support their needs. This includes organisations such as Get Further, a charity which provides small group tuition for students re-taking their maths and English GCSEs, and Creative Futures a charity that specialises in bespoke creative projects for early years and primary aged children. By joining forces with the community, the WLZ ensures that everyone is working towards the common goal of helping the children succeed.

The WLZ utilises data to identify the children who would benefit the most from their support. They gather detailed information about each child's needs and progress over the two-year period, combining school data with the insights gained through the trusted relationships established by the Link Workers. This data-driven approach allows for the continuous adjustment and customisation of each child's support plan based on their evolving needs and circumstances, with input from teachers and parents. This data-

driven approach has taught the WLZ that children that need extra support are often 'hidden' behind average statistics, so they combine data with each teacher's judgement. This allows them to adapt their approach as needed and ensure that young people are receiving the support they need to succeed.

In 2021, the WLZ worked with 1,000 young people across 29 schools in four local authorities. Their latest data shows that outcomes have improved across all focus areas:

- 86% of young people at risk have improved their emotional wellbeing.
- 81% of young people at risk have improved their peer relationships.
- 69% of young people at risk have improved their confidence levels.
- 71% of young people at risk have improved their English and reading skills.
- 65% of young people at risk have improved their maths skills.

Regional partnership: Blackpool Pride of Place Partnership

The Blackpool Pride of Place partnership, launched in 2017, is a group of people from the business, voluntary and public sectors who have come together to promote economic development and tackle deprivation through new housing and employment. It builds on the ideas of the Royal Society of Arts Inclusive Growth Commission including sectoral coalitions, civic enterprises that convene and connect, and investment in human capital.

The Partnership's Board includes leaders of local and national businesses, the council, the Local Enterprise Partnership and the voluntary sector. Blackpool Pride of Place was developed and is managed by Business in the Community, the UK's biggest organisation dedicated to responsible business, with partners including the National Lottery Community Fund, Merlin Entertainments and Blackpool Council.

Blackpool Pride of Place's initial report 'Making a Brighter Future for Blackpool' outlined the challenges facing communities, and the opportunity of working together to regenerate the Blackpool and Fylde Coast. Not only did this report lay out the challenges of the area, but it also provided the platform for aligning a number of public sector plans/strategies and for the development of a purposeful partnership by engaging with the business sector in particular.



The four cornerstones of creating a more prosperous Blackpool were identified as: housing and communities; education and skills; employment and enterprise; and health and wellbeing. Attention to each of these elements was perceived to be the key to building a partnership that could create safer, stronger, more prosperous and resilient communities across the area. It was this early vision, which sought to galvanise leaders across public, business and voluntary sectors and align them to a common purpose.

Blackpool Pride of Place Partnership has created a cross sector long-term agenda for change that can be evidenced by impacts including:

- **The production of a Town Prospectus** – with an invitation to Government to partner with the partnership to address long-term embedded challenges and take advantage of opportunities.
- **Development of a Civil Service Hub** in the Town Centre to catalyse its re-generation in partnership with the Council.
- **A coalition of Housing providers** to focus on improving the quality and management of housing stock across the inner area.
- **An Inward Investment Steering Group** that supports Business Investment onto the Fylde Coast.

Blackpool was also a recipient of a £40m Town Deal to deliver seven projects which will provide a huge boost to the town's regeneration and post-COVID economic recovery, including a new Blackpool 'Multiversity', in partnership with Blackpool and the Fylde College and Lancaster University, to bring a world-class learning facility into the heart of the town centre, and the Blackpool Youth Hub to support young people to access jobs and training and to make the jump from school or unemployment into work.

The range of these accomplishments showcases the diverse sectors involved in the partnership and their ability to make lasting impacts in the future. The presence of collective leadership and widespread support gives Blackpool a prominent platform to voice its views and develop a comprehensive strategy for overall enhancement. An evaluation of the Blackpool Pride of Place Partnership by Lancaster University made several recommendations that the South-West Social Mobility Commission should consider as it

embarks on its own project across the peninsula – many of which are already built into its operating model:

- **Implement evaluation from the start** by establishing clear indicators of success and collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the impact of the partnership.
- **Regularly revisit and reaffirm the partnership's focus, vision, and goals.** Set annual metrics and milestones for progress and ensure effective communication and agreement on these targets.
- **Strengthen the partnership approach by nurturing relationships** based on trust, transparency and a commitment to being a positive force. Continuously assess the skills required to drive the partnership forward, including potential leadership roles and the possibility of expanding the partnership to involve a wider range of businesses. Consider evolving the board membership accordingly.
- **Enhance community engagement at all levels** by developing a long-term community engagement plan. Empower communities and groups by providing leadership opportunities, actively involving them in decision-making processes and reaching out to seldom heard groups.
- **Foster collaboration with central government** to ensure the integration of the partnership's transformative efforts at a national level.
- **Conduct local needs assessments** to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and experiences of different communities. Consider the partnership's role in providing training and preparation for active participation in partnership activities.
- **Review and improve the communication approach** to effectively convey information about the partnership, its activities, achievements, and impacts. Tailor messages and communication channels to engage a wide range of stakeholders.
- **Establish connections and alliances with similar initiatives** in other parts of the country to facilitate the exchange of experiences, practices, and learning.

As of yet, there hasn't been an evaluation of the activities of the Blackpool Pride of Place Partnership on education and employment outcomes.



Local government: Greater Manchester Combined Authority

In October 2020, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority launched an Independent Inequalities Commission, which had a six-month mission to examine inequalities across the city-region, consider how they should be tackled and outline ambitious recommendations. Through rigorous research and analysis, the Commission identified key areas of inequality, such as income disparities, educational gaps, healthcare access, housing affordability, and employment opportunities. Building upon this research, the Commission formulated policy recommendations that spanned various sectors, including education, employment, housing, health and social services.

The recommendations of the Independent Inequalities Commission influenced Greater Manchester's strategy for 2021-2031. At the heart of this new strategy is the creation of the Greater Manchester Model, which outlines how public service delivery works in Greater Manchester. The Greater Manchester Model is underpinned by six 'key features', which are the elements of the public service system that evaluation and self-assessment of past work had shown was needed to progress:

1. **Geographic Alignment** – all services share the same service delivery footprints, and resources and staff are aligned.
2. **Leadership and accountability** – integrated leadership and governance structures across the system, carrying out joint decision making on behalf of local people/places rather than individual organisations.
3. **One workforce** – a common culture across organisation and giving staff permission to change the system through policy changes and supporting structures.
4. **Shared financial resource** – sharing resources across the system and commissioning to align front-line resources.
5. **Programmes, policy and delivery** – having a single transformation programme across all disciplines and bringing multiple delivery models together into a single function.
6. **Tackling barriers and delivering on devolution** – local mechanisms to remove national policy barriers, and Greater Manchester having a single conversation with central government.

The Greater Manchester Model represents a shift towards a more collaborative, devolved, and integrated approach to governance. By empowering local leaders, promoting collaboration, and focusing on long-term planning, the model seeks to drive positive change and improve outcomes for the residents of Greater Manchester. Whilst there are limited learnings for the South-West Social Mobility Commission on impact at this stage, the person-centred approach of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority is an important innovation that it will need to observe and learn from over time.

National government: Opportunity Areas programme

The Opportunity Areas (OA) programme formed a fundamental part of the UK Government's approach to increasing social mobility between 2017 and 2022. The Department for Education (DfE) created OAs across 12 local authority district (LADs) – including West Somerset – identified based on the social, economic and cultural challenges they faced in improving young people's life chances.⁵⁹

The OAs programme then sought to provide intensive and coordinated support to overcome these entrenched challenges. The focus on place in the 12 OAs was an acknowledgement that whilst national school reforms were fundamental to raising standards, their impact was unevenly felt, due in part to their demand-led nature.

In each OA, a partnership board was appointed to work with the DfE to plan, commission and oversee change within the area. While partnership boards were not accountable bodies, they had strategic oversight of the programme within their area alongside the DfE delivery teams. Each partnership board was led by an independent chair/s, and comprised representatives from different education phases, employers, the voluntary sector, and other civic leaders. West Somerset OA, for instance, was initially chaired by Dr Fiona McMillan OBE – a former principal of Bridgwater College and chair of Somerset County Council's Employment and Skills Steering Group – and made up of a panel of leaders from across local government, schools, colleges and public bodies. Their meetings were also attended by the Regional Schools Commissioner and by the DfE's Head of Delivery for the West Somerset OA.⁶⁰

59 The first six OAs (Blackpool, Derby, North Yorkshire Coast, Norwich, Oldham and West Somerset) were announced in October 2016 and the second six (Bradford, Doncaster, Fenland and East Cambridgeshire, Hastings, Ipswich and Stoke-on-Trent) were announced in January 2017

60 Department for Education (2017)



Most partnership boards were supported by a number of subgroups made up of wider groups of local stakeholders. Subgroups were often aligned to specific delivery plan priorities and led the operational work of the partnership board and OA. Where subgroups became established quickly and were working well, the evidence suggests that this was as a result of building on pre-existing local networks and structures (e.g. headteacher groups). Each delivery plan set out the local challenges, and up to four priorities for intervention driven by the OA's needs. Across the 12 OAs, a total of 45 priorities were identified, variously addressing early years, primary and secondary education, post-16 and employment outcomes. Delivery plans indicated how OAs planned to take advantage of other nationally funded programmes and initiatives to provide additional support to OAs.

An independent evaluation of the programme funded by the DfE highlighted several important findings from the OAs' approach which are relevant for the work of the South-West Social Mobility Commission.⁶¹

Firstly, the subgroups of each partnership board that were aligned to early years and schools priorities made more progress than those aligned to skills, employment and cultural priorities as they could leverage pre-existing local networks and structures.

Secondly, while working well on the whole, the partnership boards sometimes felt too led by DfE and not driven enough by a representative selection of stakeholders. Moreover, individuals involved highlighted some logistical challenges associated with the programme such as the time commitment involved and the practical implications of implementing a programme while it was still being defined and developed.

Thirdly, each OA was successful in producing a delivery plan that was informed by data and local intelligence, and stakeholders greatly valued having access to data and intelligence from a cross-section of local stakeholders to inform priority and delivery plan development.

Fourthly, the OA programme would have been better if a more strategic and coherent approach to accessing the resources and services of national programmes had been developed. This could have involved scoping and evaluating programmes that aligned with each OA's priorities and agreeing a coordinated approach across each OA.

Finally, most partnership boards developed an effective system for monitoring outputs (e.g. a dashboard), and across OAs evaluation was being built into many tenders for commissioning projects.

The OA's programme has similarities with the approach of the South-West Social Mobility Commission – albeit without the input and support of the DfE – and has shown some benefits of improved cross-sector collaboration based around a shared understanding and purpose.

Reflections and conclusion

This collection of examples demonstrates that different actors and organisations can take different approaches to improving social mobility, ranging from individual projects to more ambitious whole-scale systems change programmes. Whilst the publicly available methods and evidence of impact were limited in places, the examples demonstrate several important themes that should guide the work of the South-West Social Mobility Commission.

Firstly, social mobility is a complex issue that cannot be improved by a single policy or intervention alone. Low social mobility is a result of systemic barriers such as poverty, family breakdown and unequal access to high-quality education and job opportunities, and action is needed across this range of issues.

Secondly, effective collaboration and partnership between relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, charities, schools, colleges and employers – as well as children and their families – is essential to achieving meaningful and sustainable progress in social mobility. By working together, these actors can pool resources, share expertise and coordinate efforts to address the various challenges facing those who are economically and socially disadvantaged.

Thirdly, it is crucial to adopt a long-term perspective when addressing social mobility. Real change takes time, and progress in this area requires a sustained commitment to addressing the root causes of inequality and promoting equal opportunity for all. By prioritising social mobility and committing to long-term, collaborative efforts, the Commission can make a meaningful difference to the lives of children and young people across the region.

61 Easton, C., McCrone, T., Smith, R., Harland, J. and Sims, D. (2018)



Fourthly, while a long-term perspective is crucial, so too is making rapid progress. No one expects the work of the Commission to fix social mobility overnight, but it needs to rapidly identify initial focus areas, and set out a plan of action.

Finally, data and evidence-led approaches are vital to ensuring that time and resource devoted to improving social mobility are used effectively. The Commission will need to build evaluation and iterative improvement into its projects and programmes, whilst being candid and open about its choices, success and failures to support the wider understanding of how to improve social mobility in a region.

To conclude, it is clear that no place-based programme aimed at improving social mobility has been attempted at the scale of the South-West Social Mobility Commission's remit or in an area with a large number of rural and coastal communities. This provides real challenges for the Commission as there is no template to follow or model to learn from. However, there is a great opportunity to pioneer a new approach to cross-sector reform.

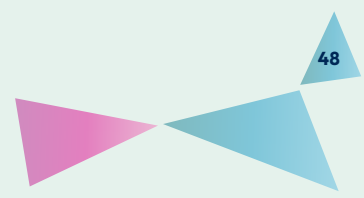
Conclusion

The South-West Social Mobility Commission is an attempt at driving long-term transformational change in social mobility at a regional level. We think the region is the right level at which to be able to mobilise key actors and embed systemic change, and we're excited by the support the Commission has already gathered. Whilst we will look to focus on specific topics in a small number of test-bed areas, the lessons we learn from these areas will be ones we can take to areas and systems in other parts of the region.

For the Commission to be effective, it needs everyone in the region to play an active role in pushing for change – ensuring social mobility is on the agenda at every

discussion, in every spending plan and every boardroom decision. It also needs everyone to work together to think holistically about outcomes for children and young people – and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds – to overcome a focus on short-term or sector-specific goals.

The Commission represents an opportunity to create change for a whole generation of young people across the South-West peninsula as well as be a trailblazer for a new regional approach to improving social mobility. We look forward to working together with others in the region over the coming years to make this happen.



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