



Community
Foundation

Northumberland's Vital Issues 2017

Learning

1 Learning

1.1 Overview

Northumberland is doing reasonably well in relation to this theme, although there are several areas for concern. As always we need to point to the considerable variance in educational attainment that exists between the poorest and better off communities within the county. The IMD Education Score reflects the level of attainment of both adults and children. The county as a whole does well. Within the region it is behind only North Tyneside, and levels of deprivation are lower than in England as a whole. However, at neighbourhood (LSOA) level there are wide variances. There are 23 neighbourhoods in the 10% most deprived in England - concentrated in South East Northumberland but with a few in the West and North – and 19 in the 10% least deprived. Closing this gap is a key challenge.

1.2 Pre-school provision

The percentage of the pre-school population attending funded early years provision is very high compared to both the NE region and UK.

Table 13: Percentage of 2, 3 and 4-year-olds benefitting from funded early education places, 2017

Age	Northumberland	North East	UK
2 yr olds	104	81	71
3 year olds	107	98	93
4 year olds	106	99	96

Note: percentages over 100% indicate that some non-eligible children are provided for

The quality of provision, as indicated by Ofsted ratings, is somewhat lower than for the region, being closer to the national average. Nonetheless 86% of provision is Outstanding or Good, with only 1% rated Inadequate.

Table 14 - Ofsted ratings of provision for 3-4 year olds, 2016ⁱⁱ

	Ofsted inspection rating							
	Outstanding		Good		Satisfactory / Requires Improvement		Inadequate	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Northumberland	1239	19%	4374	67%	908	14%	54	1%
North East	14,270	24%	39,370	67%	4,650	8%	440	1%
England	276,520	23%	772,892	63%	145,867	12%	25,679	2%

1.3 Key stage 2 (ages 7-11)

Attainment at Key Stage 2 in reading, writing and maths is just higher than the national average. However, when the performance of children from poorer backgrounds is compared to that of their better-off peers the picture is considerably worse. Taking free school meal eligibility as an indicator, it can be seen that children from poor backgrounds are considerably less likely to reach the required standard in Northumberland than in the region or country as a whole.

Table 15 - Attainment of pupils at key stage 2 by free school meal eligibility, 2016ⁱⁱⁱ

	Northumberland	North East	England
Pupils with free school meals			
% eligible for free school meals	13%	20%	16%
Number of pupils	442	5,590	90,680
% at the expected standard	32%	39%	36%
All other pupils			
Number of pupils	2875	22,280	490,378
% at the expected standard	59%	62%	57%
Gap in attainment	27%	23%	21%
All pupils			
Number of pupils	3322	27,870	581,058
% at the expected standard	56%	57%	54%

1.4 GCSE performance (key stage 4)

At age 16, levels of attainment are better than the UK average, but worse than for the region as a whole. Given what we know about Key Stage 2, it is interesting to speculate as to how much better the county might do if it could close the gap between young people from poorer backgrounds and their peers.

Table 16 - % of KS4 pupils achieving 5+ A*-C grades inc English and Maths GCSE, 2010-16^{iv}

	2009/10	2015/16
Northumberland	54%	55%
North East	53%	56%
England	54%	54%

1.5 Absence from school

At both primary and secondary school the level of absence is generally either in line with, or better than, the regional and national picture.

Table 17 - Pupil absence from schools, 2014-15^v

	Northumberland	North East	England
Primary			
Absence	4.0%	4.2%	4.0%
Authorised absence	3.2%	3.2%	3.1%
Unauthorised absence	.8%	1.0%	0.9%
% pupils persistent absentees	1.7%	2.2%	2.1%
Secondary			
Absence	5.2%	5.6%	5.3%
Authorised absence	4.2%	4.1%	4.0%
Unauthorised absence	1.1%	1.5%	1.3%
% pupils persistent absentees	4.9%	5.9%	5.4%

The reasons for absence from school include illness (58% of absence) and family holidays (11%)^{vi}, as well as truancy which may result from bullying, inability to cope with schoolwork, or undiagnosed emotional or behavioural disorders^{vii}. In 2011, the government reported that much of the work children miss when they are off school is never made up, leaving them at a considerable disadvantage to their peers.

- Of pupils who miss more than 50% of school, only 3% manage to achieve five A* to Cs, including English and maths.

- Of pupils who miss between 10% and 20% of school, only 35% manage to achieve five A* to C GCSEs, including English and maths.
- Of pupils who miss less than 5% of school, 73% achieve 5 A* to Cs, including English and maths.

There is also a growing body of evidence that absenteeism from school is linked to poor educational achievement and an increased chance of ending up NEET (not in education, employment or training – see section 6 – Work)^{viii}.

Again there are likely to be disparities between pupils from different backgrounds, hidden by this generally positive picture. The rate of overall absence for those pupils eligible for free school meals (8.4%) remains significantly higher than that for all pupils (5.8%).^{ix}

1.6 Post-18 destinations

Table 18 suggests that the progression prospects for 18 year olds in Northumberland are not markedly different from those for their peers in the NE region or England.

Table 18 - Destinations at 18^x

	Northumberland	North East	England
Further education college or other provider	13%	12%	10%
Sixth form	2%	4%	3%
Apprenticeships	7%	7%	5%
UK higher education institution	58%	60%	58%
Top third of HEIs	19%	20%	26%
<i>Russell Group (incl. Ox. and Cam.)</i>	16%	17%	17%
Education / employment / training combination destination	1%	1%	1%
Destination not sustained	12%	8%	7%
Destination not sustained / recorded NEET	1%	2%	2%
Activity not captured in data	10%	7%	13%

However, it is notable that that a lower proportion of post-18 students from Northumberland go into higher education than for the region as a whole. In addition there is a difference in which institutions they go on to attend. Considerably less than the national average of young people progress to the top third of Higher Education Institutions and Russell Group universities. This is particularly true of those students from poorer backgrounds, of whom only 3% of whom go to the best universities^{xi}.

Raising attainment for all the county's bright young people is one way to improve this situation. However, it is not the only factor: low aspirations, limited knowledge and advice and negative perceptions of elite / highly selective universities cause many well-qualified students from all backgrounds to rule-out applying to the best universities^{xii}. Could more be done to encourage them to do so?

1.7 Adults' skills

Across the North East as a whole, rates of adult literacy and numeracy are low compared to elsewhere in the UK. There is a lack of statistics on the Northumberland situation, but low skill levels are likely to be an issue that holds back the county's most deprived areas.

Below is data on levels of qualification in the county as at December 2016. This shows that the number of people without qualifications at NVQ level 2 (e.g. GCSE) and above is higher than for both the region and the country, whilst the proportion of people with no qualifications is also relatively high.

Table 19 – Qualification levels of 16-64 year olds^{xiii}

	Northumberland	North East	Great Britain
NVQ4 And Above	32.7%	31.4%	38.2%
NVQ3 And Above	51.2%	52.3%	56.9%
NVQ2 And Above	72.5%	73.7%	74.3%
NVQ1 And Above	86.1%	85.3%	85.3%
Other Qualifications	4.9%	5.4%	6.6%
No Qualifications	9.1%	9.4%	8%

The nature and implications of this adult skills deficit are summarised in the Local Authority's *Northumberland Economic Strategy, 2015-2020* as follows:

"...a significant minority of people do not have the skills and qualifications they need to take advantage of opportunities locally or externally... Some people and some places are in danger of being left behind... in the south-east and remote rural communities, low levels of attainment and skills constrain business formation and deter investment and are reflected in areas of above-average unemployment, low pay and hidden poverty."^{xiv}

Potential roles for philanthropy

- Closing the educational attainment gap between people from poor and better off communities emerges as a key priority. The voluntary sector has an important role to play in adding value to statutory provision and supporting both young people and adults with philanthropic support.
- Encouraging and supporting young people to have aspirations, overcome challenges and achieve their full potential as learners is an area where philanthropic funding could have an enormous positive impact on individual lives.
- Community and voluntary agencies can provide a "route back" for adults who have been failed by mainstream education. Free of the pressure to constantly demonstrate attainment, charitably funded services provide a great first step towards re-engaging with learning and becoming better qualified for employment.

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- ⁱ **Dept for Education (2016)**, *Education Provision: children under 5 years of age, January 2016*, Office of National Statistics, downloaded from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2017>
- ⁱⁱ **Dept for Education (2016)**, *Education Provision: children under 5 years of age, January 2016*, Office of National Statistics, downloaded from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-provision-children-under-5-years-of-age-january-2016> 20/6/17 07:42
- ⁱⁱⁱ **Dept for Education (2016)**, *National Curriculum Assessments: key stage 2, 2016 (revised)*, Office for National Statistics, downloaded from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-key-stage-2-2016-revised>
- ^{iv} **Dept for Education (2017)** *Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2015 to 2016*, Office for National Statistics, downloaded from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2015-to-2016> 3/6/17 10:32
- ^v **Dept for Education (2016)** *Pupil absence in schools in England: 2014 to 2015, Local Authority Tables*, ONS, downloaded from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2014-to-2015> 28/6/17, 11:52
- ^{vi} **Kershaw, A (2012)** *Truant pupils miss 3.7m school days*, Independent, downloaded from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/truant-pupils-miss-37m-school-days-7851065.html>, 30/6/17 13:16
- ^{vii} **Morrisey, B (2015)** *What to do if your child is playing truant*, downloaded from: <http://www.safekids.co.uk/what-do-if-your-child-playing-truant.html> 30/6/17 13:21
- ^{viii} **Dept for Education (2012)** *Improving attendance at school*, accessed from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-attendance-at-school>, 6/7/17 15:33
- ^{ix} **Dept for Education (2011)** *New data highlights true picture of school absence*, downloaded from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-data-highlights-true-picture-of-school-absence>, 30/6/17 13:12
- ^x **Dept for Education (2015)** *Destinations of key stage 4 and key stage 5 pupils: 2014, Key Stage 5 local authority tables*, ONS, downloaded from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/destinations-of-ks4-and-ks5-pupils-2013-to-2014> 28/6/17 12:42
- ^{xi} **Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (2015)** *Free school meals by local authority: progression to higher education*, downloaded from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/free-school-meals-pupil-progression-to-higher-education>
- ^{xii} **Department of Education (2014)** *School and College-level Strategies to Raise Aspirations of High-achieving Disadvantaged Pupils to Pursue Higher Education Investigation* at <https://www.gov.uk>
- ^{xiii} **NOMIS** *Local Authority Profile, Northumberland* at <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk>
- ^{xiv} **Northumberland County Council Northumberland** *Local Economic strategy 2015-2020* at <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Business/Economic-Strategy-full-2015-2020.pdf>