

The road most travelled?

The 16-19 journey
through education and training

Impetus – The Private Equity Foundation (Impetus-PEF) transforms the lives of 11-24 year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds by ensuring they get the support to succeed in education, find and keep jobs, and achieve their potential. We do this by finding the most promising charities and social enterprises that work with these children and young people. We help them become highly effective organisations that transform lives; then we help them expand significantly so as to dramatically increase the number of young people they serve.

As a result of working with organisations committed to improving poor outcomes for economically disadvantaged young people, we have developed a strong understanding of the barriers which many of these young people face in transitioning from school to work.

Our previous research, our current work with a range of impact-driven charities as well as our experience of co-funding successful Social Impact Bonds (SIB), has positioned Impetus-PEF as a pioneer of improving educational and employment outcomes for disadvantaged young people.

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Acknowledgements

Our thanks go to Christine Preston of Catch22, Sarah Ford of TwentyTwenty and Matt Archer of City Gateway for providing their time and input towards this report. Special thanks also to Adam Crews of Crews Associates for fact-checking the data used in the 16-19 outcomes section of this paper. We also thank RR Donnelley for providing their printing services free of charge. All links in footnotes were correct at the time of publication.

Executive summary

Too many disadvantaged young people are leaving school without good GCSEs in English and maths. The journey that most of them go on to take, post-16, is paved with poor outcomes.

The low numbers of disadvantaged young people achieving Level 2 qualifications in English and maths by 19, mean that many are not progressing towards a Level 3 qualification, or beyond to university, an apprenticeship, or a job. In short, post-16 education and training is not supporting disadvantaged young people to catch-up and attain these key qualifications and therefore gain the skills they need to progress into sustained education or employment.

Impetus-PEF supports over 20 charities working with 11-24 year olds across the country. However, the particularly poor outcomes experienced by 16-19 year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds combined with recent policy changes affecting the provision they receive, has moved us to focus our attention on this group for our new *'Life after School'* campaign.

In 2013, the government introduced the Study Programme and the Raised Participation Age (RPA). These policies were designed to increase the number of low-attaining students remaining in education or training until at least age 18, and ensure that many more reach Level 2 English and maths and gain some form of vocational training. These changes are welcome, but it is now crucial that they also lead to improvements in long-term outcomes for young people.

Current post-16 outcomes suggest that realising the ambitions of these two particular policies for disadvantaged young people will be challenging:

- The attainment gap at the end of Key Stage 4 is well-known: only 33% of young people who were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieved five good GCSEs (A*-C or equivalent, including English and maths) compared to 61% of their non-FSM peers last year. This poor attainment rate is likely to decline further with the introduction of more robust curricula and substantive grade re-scaling.
- Well over 50% of disadvantaged students who left school at 16 had not attained a Level 2 qualification in English and maths by 19 in 2014. This reflects the steep challenge faced by post-16 providers and the need to improve provision between 16 and 19.
- Poor Level 2 attainment means 41% of young people from an FSM background who manage to enter some form of education post-16 fail to progress to a Level 3 qualification by 19. By comparison, 60% of non-FSM students reach 19 with a Level 3 qualification.
- For the 31% of FSM students who do achieve a Level 3 qualification, and sustain their post-19 destination, where they are going is positive; 44% go on to university and 18% into Further Education (FE). These outcomes actually look comparable to those of their non-FSM peers – however a far lower percentage ever get there in the first place.
- While the renewed focus on apprenticeships is positive, very few disadvantaged young people start an apprenticeship at age 16 or following Level 3 study (4% at each stage). Clear evidence tracking the progression rates of these apprentices does not currently exist. Apprenticeships cannot yet be claimed as a route to improved life chances for disadvantaged young people.

The impact of the RPA on attainment will not be clear until 2017 at the earliest. However, evidence is starting to emerge of the large number of young people enrolling in catch-up qualifications, with one college reporting a 300% increase in entrants for both English and maths since 2013/14. Current performance suggests that there is no guarantee of success for this increased cohort.

Additionally, the new GCSE maths curriculum as well as the GCSE grading changes are predicted to decrease the pass rate in 2017, meaning that even more young people will be enrolled in underperforming catch-up provision.

Charities often find themselves picking up the lowest-attaining students post-16 – the vast majority of whom have Entry Level English and maths ability, as well as other disadvantages. Our charity partners use a range of methods to help these young people to progress academically and to expose them to the world of work, with the intention of supporting them into a sustained career.

Three of our charity partners, Catch22, TwentyTwenty and City Gateway, have distinctive programmes aimed at low-attaining, disadvantaged and often NEET (not in employment, education or training) young people. Each charity is improving their services as a result of their partnership with Impetus-PEF to more effectively serve young people on their programmes.

However, many more charities are acting as 'last chance saloons' for those who are not in mainstream provision between the ages of 16 and 19. The young people they serve, as well as thousands like them in state provision, are starting their post-16 journey with high expectations, which our research shows are unlikely to be met.

This gap between policymakers' ambitions and the reality of outcomes for disadvantaged young people requires urgent attention.

March 2016

Impetus – The Private Equity Foundation

16-19 outcomes

In this section we present the available evidence on educational outcomes for disadvantaged 16-19 year olds in England and Wales. These figures are visually represented on pages 8-9.

Results at 16



A significant number of students are leaving school at age 16 without good qualifications in English and maths. The attainment gap between pupils eligible for FSM and their non-eligible peers is pronounced. In 2014/15, 33% of pupils eligible for FSM achieved five good GCSEs (A*-C or equivalent, including English and maths), compared to 61% of all other pupils.¹

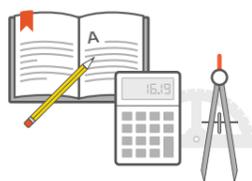
Destinations post-16



85% of FSM students continue into sustained education, employment or training following Key Stage 4, which compares to 93% of all other students in mainstream schools.² Research shows us that disadvantaged students are around twice as likely not to sustain their initial post-16 education or employment destinations, and four times more likely to be recorded as NEET during the course of Key Stage 5. Long-term tracking studies also confirm a strong link with FSM eligibility and being NEET at age 18, with this group being more than twice as likely to be NEET than those who did not claim FSM.³

Academic destinations for students entering some form of education post-16 also differ for the two groups, with FSM students more commonly enrolling at a Further Education college (45%) compared to all other students, who are more likely to go to a Sixth Form college (54%).⁴ Sustained post-Key Stage 4 destinations are relatively high for both groups. However, the introduction of the RPA is increasing the number of young people remaining in education or training for longer.

Course entrance and attainment 16-19



Further education colleges educate the majority of students aged 16-18 who did not achieve grade A*-C in English or maths at 16 but subsequently took some form of catch-up English or maths provision.⁵ The remainder are in school sixth forms or sixth-form colleges, both of which can provide catch-up provision.

At present, very few of those leaving school at age 16 without Level 2 qualifications in English and maths are attaining them by 19. Instead, a significant number are achieving at a lower level by 19 – either Level 1 qualifications or Entry Level qualifications.

Figure 1. Post-16 enrolment and achievement

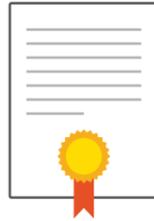
Cohort of students leaving school without A*-C in 2011/12		Students enrolling on lower than a Level 2 course post-16		Students achieving lower than a Level 2 by 19		Students enrolling on a GCSE post-16		Students gaining GCSE A*-C by 19		Students gaining a GCSE or Level 2 equivalent by 19	
English	Maths	English	Maths	English	Maths	English	Maths	English	Maths	English	Maths
201,683	186,160	52,438 (26%)	57,710 (31%)	76,640 (38%)	78,187 (42%)	52,438 (26%)	37,232 (20%)	22,185 (11%)	13,031 (7%)	42,353 (21%)	24,201 (13%)

Figure 1. shows us that of the students leaving school without Level 2 qualifications in English and maths in 2011/12, approximately 60% entered onto an English course and 57% onto a maths course post-16. 26% of this group entered a below Level 2 course in English which compares to 31% in maths. 26% entered for the GCSE in English between 16-18 and 20% in maths.⁶

Looking at GCSE entrants shown in figure 1. 44% (11% of the total cohort) attained at least a C in English by 19, while 36% (7% of the total cohort) did so in maths. Even if you were to include other Level 2 qualifications, 79% of this cohort reached 19 without an A*-C English GCSE or equivalent. For maths, this figure rises to 87% of the cohort. Of those not attaining a Level 2, 38% were gaining an Entry Level to Level 1 in English and 42% the equivalent in maths.⁷

Broken down by disadvantage, 46% of young people in receipt of FSM at age 15 managed to gain a Level 2 in English and maths by age 19, which was a small percentage increase on the 39% of the same cohort who gained these grades at 16.⁸

Current 16-19 catch-up provision is failing to effectively progress the majority of young people who left school without Level 2 English and maths.



Progression from Level 2 to Level 3, attainment and destinations

A significant number of FSM students do not progress from Level 2 to Level 3 courses during their 16-19 education. Of those who entered a sustained education or employment destination post-16 in 2011/12, only 44% entered onto a Level 3 course before they were 19.⁹

Broken down, most students who were eligible for FSM in year 11 and achieved Level 3 by 19 were doing so in non-A Level qualifications and at a lower rate to their non-FSM peers. 36% of FSM students were achieving a Level 3 qualification (16% at A Level vs. 20% in other Level 3 courses)¹⁰ by 19, compared to 60% (38% at A Level vs. 22% in other Level 3 courses) of the rest of the population – an achievement gap of 24 percentage points, which has remained consistent over the last four years.

Crucially, post-19 destination data suggests that FSM students who do attain a Level 3 qualification are moving at a similar rate into sustained education, employment and training pathways as their better off peers – 71% vs. 74%.¹¹ However, this figure masks the significant number of FSM students who fail to progress from a Level 2 to a Level 3 course by the time they are 19.

Of the 44% of FSM students who entered a Level 3 course at college (67% of non-FSM students entered one), 31% moved into sustained further education or employment at 19, compared to 50% of other students. Broken down further, 19% of FSM students left Key Stage 5 to enter higher education, compared to 33% of non-FSM students.¹²

The figures above suggest that FSM students are performing at a similar level to their peers, once they have achieved a Level 3 qualification. But while 60% of the non-FSM cohort were reaching 19 with some form of Level 3 qualification, just 36% of their FSM peers did the same. 54% of previously FSM young people reached 19 without Level 2 qualifications in English and maths.



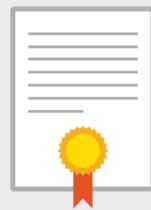
Traineeships and apprenticeships

The focus being placed by government on traineeships and apprenticeships, and the requirement of each that participants must be working towards at least a Level 2 in English and maths, is high.

Traineeships, which were introduced in August 2013, saw 11,600 starts by under 19s in 2014/15. In the same year, 7,400 completed the course with 5,400 progressing into a job, apprenticeship, further full-time education or other training.¹³ With traineeships targeted at supporting young people who lack work experience and in many cases, Level 2 English and maths qualifications,¹⁴ they seem to present a good route for the disproportionate number of disadvantaged students without Level 2 English and maths. However, the relatively poor completion and progression rates mean this should be treated with caution.

The vast majority of apprenticeships are undertaken by over 19s at an intermediate level, which equates to a full Level 2 (five A*-C GCSEs) and typically last 12 months, but can last longer. In 2014/15, there were 499,900 apprenticeship starts, of which 374,000 (75%) were by over 19s and 125,900 (25%) by under 19s. 71,100 under 19s completed an apprenticeship that year.¹⁵

Completion rates for under 19 year olds are, on the surface, reasonably good: 71% in 2013/14. However, last year's rate continues a pattern of gradual decline over the last four years, from a peak of 74% in 2010/11.¹⁶



ATTAINMENT

of 16-19 year olds

* Numbers based on students who turned 19 in 2014 (79,694 FSM & 488,885 non-FSM students).

THE 16-19 JOURNEY THROUGH EDUCATION AND TRAINING



DESTINATIONS

of 16-19 year olds

* Numbers based on students who left Key Stage 4 & 5 in 2013/14 (81,120 FSM & 480,000 non-FSM students).



Level 2 in English & maths



FSM STUDENTS

NON-FSM STUDENTS

Did not attain Level 2 in English & maths **61%**



AT 16

Did not attain Level 2 in English & maths **35%**



Attained Level 2 in English & maths **65%**

Attained Level 2 in English & maths **39%**

Did not attain Level 2 in English & maths **54%**



BY 19

Did not attain Level 2 in English & maths **29%**

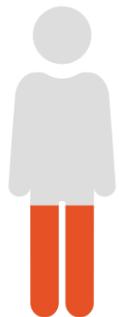


Attained Level 2 in English & maths **71%**

Attained Level 2 in English & maths **46%**

Level 3

Did not attain Level 3 **64%**



BY 19

Did not attain Level 3 **40%**



Attained Level 3 **60%**

Attained Level 3 **36%**

FSM STUDENTS

NON-FSM STUDENTS

Not in education, employment or training. **15%**



AT 16



Not in education, employment or training. **7%**

In education, employment or training. **85%**

In education, employment or training. **93%**

41%



Not entering a level 3

Entering for a Level 3

26%

Not entering a level 3

44%



67%



13%



Not sustaining education, employment & training

AT 19

17%

With Level 3 & gone into education, employment & training

31%



Higher Education **19%**
Further Education **8%**
Other education **2%**
Work or training **2%**



50%

Higher Education **33%**
Further Education **9%**
Other education **2%**
Work or training **5%**

Post-19 destinations



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Our charity partners serving 16-19 year olds

Too often, young people with a range of barriers to learning are poorly served by mainstream provision and as a result, drop out or look for a different educational pathway.

The poor state of national outcomes for disadvantaged young people between 16 and 19 led us to interview three of our charity partners: Catch22, TwentyTwenty and City Gateway – each of whom provide programmes targeted at 16-19 year olds. We sought to understand how they work with young people, the distinctive features of the programmes they offer, what works well and the challenges they face. This section presents how they are each delivering components of post-16 education and training.

Figure 2. Characteristics of young people served by Impetus-PEF charity partners

Young people being served by Impetus-PEF charity partners	Common additional risk factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ At least 16 ➤ Not in education, employment or training (NEET) ➤ Low educational attainment ➤ Economically disadvantaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Special Educational Needs (SEN) ➤ Mental health ➤ Care leavers/in care ➤ Some form of caring responsibility ➤ Offending behaviour ➤ Unstable housing situation ➤ Disengaged/history of exclusion ➤ Inter-generational unemployment

The young people our charity partners serve

Our charity partners serve a wide-range of young people, across the country. Looking specifically at those aged 16 to 19 and on a programme with either Catch22, TwentyTwenty or City Gateway, figure 2. provides a list of common characteristics exhibited by some of the young people they serve.

The Study Programme in Alternative Provision

In 2011, the government commissioned the *Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report*, as a result of perceived weaknesses in the quality of vocational education nationally. It questioned post-16 English and maths provision, the quality of vocational courses being offered and their capacity to develop the skills required for learners to move into sustained careers.¹⁷

A key recommendation of this review was the introduction of the Study Programme (2013) which coincided with the first cohort affected by the Raised Participation Age (RPA).

The review suggested that students leaving school without good GCSEs should be enrolled on a Study Programme. This requires them to work toward gaining Level 2 English and maths qualifications and to enhance their employability skills through work experience.¹⁸

For Catch22, the introduction of the Study Programme within their own centres was a move away from sub-contracted arrangements with local education providers. This allowed Catch22 to have greater control over the intensity of programme young learners were being enrolled on. Previously, the colleges they worked with were placing students on part-time programmes with minimal contact time – a reflection perhaps of the serious challenge they were facing in progressing these particular individuals. Catch22 offered an individualised approach, support networks – which included social workers, youth offending team officers and mental health professionals – and vocational training which reflected Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) priorities.

A small percentage of 16-19 population are served by Alternative Provision (AP), but those who are suffer from high levels of disengagement. One of Catch22's biggest challenges is the significant number of low-attaining, mainly Entry Level 3, individuals entering their programme at 16. Progressing these young people to Level 2 within two years, is difficult. This is a national challenge. Just 1% of students who were in some form of AP pre-16 gained five good GCSE or equivalent qualifications in 2014/15.¹⁹

Having already spent two years as a Study Programme provider, Catch22, alongside Impetus-PEF, took a step back and analysed the strengths and weaknesses of their 16-19 provision. Attainment, retention, emotional well-being and progression were identified as problem areas. A blueprint has now been co-designed and commits the 16-19 provision to: drive attendance by increasing 1:1 support, raise English and maths attainment by increasing the hours of learning offered and recruiting qualified teachers, and following-up with individuals who progress from their programme to ensure they sustain their pathway after completion. For those who do not complete a programme with Catch22 first time around, the charity have committed to working with them until they do.

CATCH22

Target population – 350 16-18 year olds across 12 Alternative Provision (AP) centres in areas of high NEET population.

Programme – Study Programme delivery: functional Level English and maths and Level 1 vocational courses/ work experience which reflect Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) priorities.

Additional support – High levels of personalised provision and tailored support which reflects additional barriers to learning. 1:10 staff to student ratio.

Outcomes – 68% of those who completed the programme progressed into a positive destination on the date of exit. Positive destinations are mainstream education, FE college or apprenticeship at Level 2, or in work for at least six months post-exit. A significant proportion of those progressing into a positive destination did so with below Level 2 English and maths qualifications. 35% of the original cohort dropped out at some point during their course, demonstrating the challenging population they serve and providing useful lessons to be learned for their programme going forward.

Adding to the Study Programme

Prior to working with Impetus-PEF, TwentyTwenty were sub-contracted by a local college to deliver Study Programme provision to 16-19 year olds. They have since taken the decision to move away from this arrangement and instead concentrate on recruiting students requiring high levels of support themselves.

The charity previously offered two Level 1 digital photography awards, alongside English and maths, as a mandatory aspect of the programme. This vocational course, designed to increase learner engagement and develop some transferable skills, returned a 100% achievement rate for the 72% of students who completed the course.

However, through joint analysis with Impetus-PEF, of the overall outcomes of their learners, TwentyTwenty is taking steps to change its programme.

They found that those progressing into jobs were primarily individuals with higher participation rates, which prompted concerns around attendance. To strengthen the appeal and efficacy of the content of their programme, TwentyTwenty's new approach concentrates on more intense delivery of English, maths and ICT, and work experience supported by 1:1 coaching. TwentyTwenty are also now committed to providing support to young people until they transition into a FE course at a minimum of Level 2 or work.

To ensure sustainment, the programme is now complemented by a mentor, who acts as both a guide and confidante to young people over the course of their programme and during and after work placements; monitoring their development and also offering advice. The importance of this cannot be understated. Many under-attaining students entering the programme also suffer from anxiety and low self-confidence. This has a substantial impact during the course of the programme, with tutors noting dips in motivation and in some cases attendance, in the build-up to exams. The emphasis placed on confidence-building is therefore a reaction to the impact which past failure has had on individuals.

TWENTYTWENTY

Target population – 46 16-19 year olds across three centres in areas of high deprivation and NEET rates in the East Midlands.

Programme – Two entry paths: Engage and Prepare. Both are aimed at progression in English, maths and ICT, with Engage as a stepping stone to Prepare. The Prepare element provides tutelage towards a Level 2 qualification. In addition there are vocational training and work-based projects which guide individuals towards a job on exiting the programme.

Additional support – High levels of personalised provision and tailored support, including a business mentor who monitors development and provides advice during the course of an individual's work placement.

Outcomes – 53% of the group progressed into sustained education, employment or training. Many enter the programme with Entry Level abilities in English and maths and exit with Functional Level 1 in both subjects.

Delivering quality apprenticeships

Impetus-PEF welcomes the government's commitment to increasing the number of apprenticeship starts to three million in this Parliament, but the policy does not provide an obvious solution to the problem of poor outcomes for 16-19 year olds. The majority of apprenticeship starts in the last five years have been by people aged over 19, indeed mainly over 25.²⁰

Many of these were existing employees on internal training programmes. If this trend were to continue, very few actual opportunities would become available for young people new to the labour market.

Very few 16 year olds are starting apprenticeships post-school. Based on the most recent post-Key Stage 4 destinations data, 4% of FSM students and 5% of non-FSM students began an apprenticeship.²¹

Our charity partner City Gateway seeks to match up the poor employment prospects of disadvantaged and disengaged young people in Tower Hamlets and inner city East London, with the opportunities that are on their doorstep.

Their joined up four-stage programme is intended to train young people to cope with the challenge of applying for, and getting jobs while also exposing them to the expectations and routines of work. The six-week traineeship work experience placement in particular acts as a litmus test for staff to assess the readiness of the learner to move into an apprenticeship, or the need for additional support to get them to this stage.

As a result of their work with Impetus-PEF and their own analysis, City Gateway redesigned its core provision in order to better serve young people with the greatest need for support – learners who are not work-ready and find it very difficult to engage again in learning of any form.

The research showed a lower proportion of early stage learners were progressing into apprenticeships and employment than their counterparts who joined with a higher level of prior attainment. As part of its new blueprint, City Gateway has redesigned its delivery model to provide more intensive support, and a longer route into employment for learners starting on the initial stages of their programme, in order for their specialised provision to benefit more learners who have struggled elsewhere. This revised model commits City Gateway to helping learners progress positively into work or training and track their sustainment.

CITY GATEWAY

Target population – 125 16-24 year old apprentices. They operate in a single centre in Tower Hamlets – one of the most deprived authorities in England.

Programme – Four stage programme: Engage, Equip, Excel and Employ – a joined up programme of functional, vocational and employability provision, with specialist traineeships and apprenticeship brokerage with high-profile organisations in the banking and financial services sector. They have been rated outstanding by Ofsted for its 14-19 provision.

Additional support – Wraparound coaching and safeguarding support is coupled with expert job brokerage – staff engaging with local employers to offer traineeships, apprenticeships and other work-related training.

Outcomes – 94% positive progression; 56% converted their apprenticeship into a permanent role with their apprenticeship providers, 32% found employment elsewhere, 6% went to university and the rest either finding other employment or going back into education. All gained the English and maths level required as part of the apprenticeship condition.

Impetus-PEF's work with our charity partners draws on strengths, highlights weaknesses and supports the development of plans which commit the organisation to addressing and improving both.

Many of the young people entering programmes with our partners do so facing a number of barriers to progression, including a history of low-attainment and disengagement. These issues do not disappear overnight. Each charity faces common challenges in: retention – keeping learners on course and motivated; progression – helping them gain the qualifications needed to move into work or further study; and sustainment – ensuring individuals stay in post-programme destinations.

It is also challenging for charities to identify the young people most at risk of poor outcomes and ensuring they make up the majority of who they serve. Committing to this often means committing to longer, more intensive programmes, reduced caseloads, and improved management of staff. It also requires organisations to develop more testing measures of their impact, and robustly monitor their performance against these. The three charities we have highlighted here are committed to this, and with our help, are implementing the changes that can help them better serve young people facing the greatest challenges.

Challenges faced by our charity partners

While each organisation faces a number of different and often localised challenges on top of the barriers their learners face, two distinct problem areas emerged as a result of our research – the delivery of catch-up English and maths, and the availability of good quality apprenticeships and training.

Driving progression through English and maths catch-up

Our charity partners are finding that at the point of entry assessment, a significant majority of the students who have failed their GCSEs are at Entry Level 2 or 3 ability – this is equivalent to the skills expected of a 7-11 year old.

This is a damning reflection of secondary provision these individuals have received, and leaves post-16 providers with a mountain to climb.

The focus on Level 2 qualifications is guided by the government's desire to significantly improve the English and maths skills of our future workforce. This is wholly understandable. But this will not translate into better outcomes without addressing the current performance of provision. Equally, the challenge of progressing such low-attaining learners, particularly in the context of the fiscal constraints faced by further education colleges, sixth-form colleges, and charities like our partners, which often serve the most disadvantaged young people, needs to be better understood.

These young people in particular often face non-academic barriers to progression; our partners find that they are struggling with problems at home and in the community, mental health difficulties and unstable housing. All of these young people have experienced failure at school and have little faith in themselves, or in education to provide them with a promising future.

Using functional skills qualifications as 'stepping stone' pathways, for our partner charities, offers a good route to progression, and a way for young people to experience success which builds their confidence. However, it is still difficult for providers to progress learners through the functional skills levels to a Level 2 within two years. The future of these qualifications is currently unclear, as the Education and Training Foundation continues its review on behalf of the government. The foundation is due to publish its findings in August 2016.

The numbers enrolling in catch-up English and maths are increasing dramatically as a result of the RPA. As mentioned, evidence is starting to emerge of some colleges seeing increases of 300% in GCSE English and maths entry since its introduction.²² This figure does not account for the huge number of students who will be entering a non-GCSE course.

Increased entry into both subjects is likely to be further swelled by two new changes introduced by the Department for Education which will have an impact from 2017. The government has brought in a maths curriculum which will be harder and will require more teaching time.²³ In the short term this is highly likely to increase the number of young people failing to secure a C grade.

GCSE grade restructuring from A-G to 9-1, is predicted to have a similar effect. Under the new scale, according to research by the Education Datalab, around 35% of pupils would have achieved Grade 5 (which represents the equivalent of a C) or above in both English and maths in 2015 if GCSEs had been graded on the scale. This is significantly below the current national achievement rate of 58% A*-C in English and maths that year.²⁴

The cumulative effect of these changes will place a greater strain on providers and a system seeking to support low-attaining young people to achieve good Level 2 qualifications having not been able to do so at 16. Increased numbers in mainstream provision raises the likelihood of charities, like our partners, needing to support more young people, placing a greater strain on their resource. Both mainstream and non-mainstream provision will co-exist in a funding environment which shows no sign of changing.

Supporting quality apprenticeships

Employers engaging with colleges and providers to offer more young people apprenticeships, traineeships, and work placements is a good thing.

However, what we have learned from our charity partners is that the challenge of balancing government requirements with employers' priorities is difficult and varies depending on the size of the business.

For employers, the responsibility on them to offer a placement or apprenticeship which includes classroom time may contrast with their business needs and put a strain on their own resource. This particular challenge differs for our charity partners; the businesses which Catch22 and TwentyTwenty are engaging with locally are often small. They are therefore less likely to have resource to support learners and more likely to want well-attaining and work-ready employees, or apprentices.

By contrast, City Gateway enjoys long-term relationships with firms in the City of London – large and well-resourced employers who are able to deal with the responsibilities which come with taking on an apprentice or providing placements as part of the Study Programme.

The introduction of the apprenticeship levy next year will mean businesses will scrutinise potential apprentice recruitment decisions much more carefully. The government will make ‘apprenticeship vouchers’ available, initially, to employers who have put money into the system and other organisations only after two years, once these vouchers expire.

Given that the levy will mainly apply to large businesses, it would be unsurprising if they began paying greater attention to how the vouchers should be used. This may mean employers start to seek greater value for money by recruiting better qualified young people. For the same reasons, they may want to only offer higher level apprenticeships. This has the potential to negatively impact City Gateway’s ability to place their learners in apprenticeships.

These are currently only predictions, and would be unintended consequences of the apprenticeship levy policy, but it suggests a need to safeguard lower-level apprenticeships as a viable route for low-academically attaining students seeking to learn and earn.

More broadly, questions continue to be asked about the quality of apprenticeships and the number of participants progressing into sustained destinations once they have completed them.

The Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy recently launched an inquiry looking specifically at apprenticeships. It will look at the government’s three million apprenticeship starts target, how apprenticeships will affect the UK ‘skills gap’ and routes to achieving higher level apprenticeship qualifications. Specific concerns raised by the Sub-Committee members have included raising awareness of the opportunities available, increasing the take-up rate by 16-19 year olds and ensuring entries into apprenticeships translate into completions and sustained exits into education, employment or training.²⁵

We recommend that the Sub-Committee considers the ability of low-attaining, and disadvantaged students in particular, to use apprenticeships as a vehicle to gain key qualifications in English and maths and develop work-based skills simultaneously. Presently, there is no data which tracks the journey of these disadvantaged young people achieving in apprenticeships and where they end up.

For many young people, apprenticeships are a potentially transformative alternative pathway to a great career.

If these valuable routes are not viable for low-attaining students though, their ability to access roles which offer genuine social mobility will be minimal.

Conclusion

The journey from Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5 for too many represents a journey of failure – a personal defeat, as well as a national waste of potential

The RPA, new grade changes and more challenging English and maths curricula are all likely to combine to suppress attainment further and provide a triple challenge to post-16 providers once all these policies take effect in 2017.

“We want to help all working people be more productive and secure better wages – to do this, we need to help them improve their skills. High-quality technical and professional education for 16 to 19 year olds is the key. We want to help young people gain relevant skills by offering them technical and professional courses that are focused on a specific career.”²⁶

Skills Minister, Nick Boles

Level 2 English and maths and high-quality apprenticeships are a long way from the reality faced by low-attaining 16 year olds

The government’s focus on more young people taking meaningful technical and professional courses is being undermined by poor Level 2 English and maths attainment in schools and colleges. Additionally the government’s expectation that all low-attaining 16 year olds can reach a Level 2 in these subjects by 19, fails to appreciate the individual barriers to progression that many disadvantaged young people face.

National average figures on progression post-Key Stage 5 are masking the number of disadvantaged young people either not progressing from Level 2 to Level 3, leaving college without qualifications expected to be gained at 16, or dropping out of education and training during Key Stage 5.

The attachment of study towards at least Level 2 English and maths as an outcome requirement of apprenticeships further emphasises the importance of these qualifications. However the progression into and out of apprenticeships continues to go unmonitored, and their quality largely unchecked, meaning the viability of these pathways for low-attaining and disadvantaged young people will diminish if this trend continues.

Our charity partners are concentrating on supporting progression

The methods (outside of tuition) used by our charity partners are intended to combat non-academic issues being faced by individual young people. Addressing these issues accelerates their academic progress, and means they are able to make the most of work placements.

Our work with our charity partners has concentrated on them looking at and analysing the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. Each of them have taken steps to address imbalances in attainment, progression and outcomes to ensure they are better serving young people at the highest risk of failure.

The government’s focus on young people spending more time in education and training and on more valuable qualifications is welcome – but there is no reason to be confident this will translate into better life chances for disadvantaged young people without greater commitment to long-term and positive outcomes.

What's next?

This position paper has identified a number of policy challenges which our charity partners and mainstream providers face. Over the coming year, Impetus-PEF will carry out further research into these challenges, and attempt to develop solutions as part of our 'Life after school' campaign.

We intend to do this jointly with our charity partners and other peer organisations. We will also seek to partner with more charities and institutions which, like us, are committed to improving outcomes for disadvantaged 16-19 year olds, and closing the gap between them and their peers.

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Glossary

Levels and qualifications:

Entry Level 1

Entry Level 1 relates to the ability to understand numbers and symbols presented in simple graphic, numerical and written forms. An adult with below Entry Level 1 may not be able to select floor numbers in lifts, for example.

Entry Level 2

Entry Level 2 relates to the ability to understand, in addition to the above, simple diagrams and charts in various forms. An adult below Entry Level 2 may not be able to use a cash machine, for example.

Entry Level 3

Entry Level 3 relates to the ability to understand all of the above but with the addition of doing so for different purposes and in different ways. For example, dividing two digits by one digit and understanding remainders. An adult with below Entry Level 3 may not be able to understand price labels or pay household bills, for example.

Level 1

Level 1 qualifications relate to GCSE grades D-G, Functional Level 1 and a range of vocational awards, whereby an individual possesses skills, with an emphasis on problem-solving, which they are then able to apply affectively to everyday situations.

Level 2

Level 2 qualifications relate to GCSE grades A*-C, functional Level 2 and a range of vocational awards, which recognise good understanding of a subject area of or study and are able to apply them to specific work-related competencies.

Level 3

Level 3 qualifications relate to AS/A-Level awards, BTEC certificates and a range of vocational awards. Competency at this level reflects detailed knowledge and skill within the chosen subject or work area and is appropriate for individuals wanting to go to university.

Apprenticeship levels:

Intermediate

Equivalent to five good GCSEs (Level 2), apprentices will be working towards work-based learning qualification, reflected by NVQs, Key Skills and knowledge-based qualifications such as a BTEC. The skills acquired provide routes into employment and entry to an advanced apprenticeship. Participants without English and maths qualifications need to have completed some form of Level 1 in each prior to completion and be working towards a Level 2.

Advanced

Equivalent to two A Level passes, apprentices work towards work-based learning qualifications, such as NVQs, Key Skills (both at Level 3) and a knowledge-based certificate such as a BTEC. For entrance into this programme, the applicant must either have gained five good GCSEs or completed an intermediate apprenticeship. Participants without a Level 2 in English and maths need to have achieved as such prior to the end-point assessment of such an apprenticeship.

Higher

Higher apprentices work towards work-based qualifications such as an NVQ (Level 4) and can be working towards a knowledge-based qualification such as a Foundation Degree. Higher apprentices can also progress to higher education which include the potential for university degrees. Participants without a Level 2 in English and maths need to have achieved as such prior to the end-point assessment of such an apprenticeship.

Key Stages:

Key Stage 4

Key Stage 4 relates to the two years of school education, normally known as Year 10 and Year 11, which incorporate GCSEs and other exams.

Key Stage 5

Key Stage 5 relates to the two years of education for students aged 16-18.

Alternative Provision:

Alternative Provision (AP) relates to education, arranged by local authorities, for pupils who because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour.

Apprenticeships:

Apprenticeships are designed to combine on-the-job training with study, often delivered by a college or other provider one day a week. Apprentices earn a wage and are expected to work alongside experience staff to gain job-specific skills. Apprenticeships can take 1 to 4 years to complete, depending on their level.

Apprenticeship levy:

The apprenticeship levy was announced in November 2015. It will come into effect in April 2017 with less than 2% of UK employers having to pay it. It has been set at a rate of 0.5% of an employers pay bill but a £15,000 allowance for employers will mean that the levy will only be paid on pay bills over £3 million.

Free School Meals:

Free School Meals (FSM) relates to the statutory benefit available to school-aged children from families who receive other qualifying benefits, such as: income support, income-based jobseekers allowance and income-related employment and support allowance among others. It also acts as a deprivation indicator used by the Department for Education.

Raised Participation Age (RPA):

Introduced in 2013, the Raised Participation Age requires all young people in England to remain in education or training until at least their 18th birthday. This requirement does not insist a young person stay in school. They will be able to choose from:

- Full-time education (e.g. at a school or college)
- An apprenticeship or traineeship
- Part-time education or training combined with one of the following:
 - Employment or self-employment for 20 hours or more a week
 - Volunteering for 20 hours or more a week

Pupils who left Year 11 in summer 2014 will be the first to continue in some form of education or training until at least their 18th birthday.

Study Programme:

A programme aimed at 16-19 year olds, with three key elements:

- A substantial qualification at Level 2 or 3 e.g. BTEC First (Level 2) or A Level (Level 3)
- Courses towards a Level 2 in English and maths (if the student is not at this level). This can include the use of functional level skills as stepping stones towards a Level 2
- Some form of work experience/work preparation programme

All students have had access to the Study Programme since September 2013. Participation can be full-time or part-time (which is banded at four different levels), with funding allocated to providers based on the Planned Learning Hours (PLH) which encompasses planned, organised and evidenced activity depending on the track the learner has taken.

Traineeships:

Traineeships can last up to six months and are a course designed to include a significant work-experience element targeted at 16-24 year olds, qualified below Level 3, to become work ready or as pre-course for an apprenticeship. They target young people who are either unemployed or have little work experience and provide support in English and maths if the individual requires it. Unlike apprenticeships, they are unpaid, but can offer expenses to cover the cost of travel and meals.

If you would like to know more about how you could help more young people to succeed in school, find and keep a job and achieve their potential, please get in touch.

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