

APPG on Social Mobility – Session One – Monday 20th November 2017, Committee room 15

This session is the first in the APPG's inquiry into the regional attainment gap. It sought to give an overview of the gap, discussing where the disparities lie and what underpins them as well as why narrowing this gap is so important for increasing social mobility.

APPG Officers in attendance

- Justin Madders MP (Chair)
- Baroness Claire Tyler (Co-chair)
- Lucy Powell MP
- Stephen Timms MP
- Lucy Allan MP
- Siobhain McDonagh MP

Parliamentarians in attendance

- Karin Smyth MP

Speaker presentations

Welcome and introductions

Justin Madders introduced the regional attainment gap as the topic for inquiry for the APPG in this upcoming Parliamentary session. He said that the inquiry would look at why the regional attainment gap exists but also how we can share best practice across the country. He said that the evidence shows that it is not just a North/South divide but also between coastal areas and inner cities and rural and urban areas. Justin said that there was a need to drill down into why the gap exists in some areas and not others.

He then welcomed the first panellists to kick off the presentations.

Jo Hutchinson, Education Policy Institute (EPI)

- Jo made some comments regarding the measurement of the attainment gap due to the reforms that have taken place in performance tables and accountability measures.
- She argued that there has been some new testing on how to measure the regional attainment gap.
- There has been some progress in narrowing the attainment gap for disadvantaged students but it still remains very large (at age 16 there is a gap of 19 months of development).
- EPI estimates it would take around 50 years to close if it keeps going at its current rate.
- Improvement in the North has been larger because gap in attainment was larger to begin with. It has been slower in the south outside of London, and London continues to lead in narrowing the gap.

- The variation between local authorities is also vast both geographically but also as children move through schooling.
- There is a bank of LAs across the north where attainment is low in both primary and secondary.
- Attainment gaps have been associated with rurality in secondary school.
- Large gaps in coastal areas can be explained by high levels of deprivation and the isolation of those areas.
- The EPI report looked at Regional School Commissioner areas and found that there is some variation across those. Design of those areas was intended to make the level of challenge more similar than old Government office regions but this is difficult. RSCs for the North/Lancashire and West Yorkshire/Humber and East Midlands have large deprivation.
- It also looked at Opportunity Areas where gaps are large and increasing but there are other areas that have similar or worse trends so an argument could be made for more Opportunity Areas.
- Attainment gap for deprived children is not necessarily consistent between the Key Stages (particularly in the NE where children who do well at primary do not necessarily do well at secondary).
- Hard to judge attainment gaps at post 16 given the variation of routes that can be taken and differences in provider types which means that disadvantaged pupils most likely to fall into specific routes.
- In schools that have more disadvantaged pupils, the attainment gap is narrowing but in schools that have low levels of disadvantaged pupils, the gap remains large and the progress gaps are widening in the least disadvantaged schools in the country.
- Level of persistence of disadvantage is worrying. Those who have been eligible for FSM for most of their school careers (9 yrs by KS4) the gap has been widening since 2006 and there is no evidence that it was ever closing.
- In schools where there are a lot of disadvantaged pupils who are close to the old performance thresholds (e.g A* to C), when those measures were in place there was greater improvement in attainment and the more of those pupils who came close to achieving those boundary grades.
- Think the new measures (Progress and Attainment 8) are a positive move towards closing the attainment gap.

Professor Becky Francis – UCL, Institute for Education

- Becky said that the evidence suggests that schooling reflects social inequality rather than closing the gaps despite the best efforts of schools.
- She mentioned the Education Arms Race and how that supports social immobility.
- Becky argued that whilst geography is important, there is disadvantage across the country.
- Social mobility is strongly related to levels of financial inequality and labour market conditions which schools cannot address.
- There are some multi academy trusts and local authority schools that are doing well in raising attainment and many of those are in London.

- Becky argued that education is a key way that ‘the affluent can perpetuate their position’ and this is something which needs to be addressed.
- Our system allows more affluent parents to use their economic, social and cultural capital to access education throughout their lives.
- Disadvantaged children are overrepresented in poorer quality schools and less likely to access good quality education.
- Some Academy Trusts that have done well. This is due to the fact that they have strong expectations for all pupils regardless of background, have a strong model and have strong expertise within Trust models. They have well managed gradual growth and geographic coherence.
- Those schools who are highest performing and highest attaining are exacerbating the gap. For example grammar and private schools. Some have the poorest progress gaps. There is also an issue with some Academy Trusts which have become worse. Regional Schools Commissioner system is driving down on these schools and there is a need greater accountability.
- Becky argued that we need to find ways to support and incentivise the quality of teaching in areas of social disadvantage. Teacher quality has the biggest impact on outcomes, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and this in turn affects higher education participation rates.
- There needs to be more work done in what would incentivise good teachers to teach in these areas.
- There also needs to be a continued focus on early years education and a need to make sure that young children are ready for school.
- There is a need to continue, with increased rigour, the pupil premium fund.
- Becky also called for a policy plan for school improvement and a coherent middle tier and also a need to tackle loss aversion that is experienced by more affluent.
- Cultural and social capital can be seen through a child’s life and can influence what they do next. For example the influence this has on personal statements and the chances they have of going to university.
- In order to improve social mobility there needs to be a redoubled focus on equity.

Luke Sibiet – Institute for Fiscal Studies

- Luke started by talking about London which has higher level of funding and higher outcomes.
- Part of the reason for this is higher London weighting, higher prices and also London has been more deprived than the rest of the country. It has had higher levels of funding for a long time.
- Funding differential between London and rest of the country has been the same since the 1990s but there has been improvement in outcomes. Higher levels of funding and maybe this helped as financial resource can help schools and organisations to respond positively to changes.
- Resources and pupil outcomes can be linked and research shows a strong positive relationship between the two, especially for more deprived students.

- If you look at the evidence in the US, this relationship helped reduce the attainment gap but can also help in later life such as the labour market.
- The national funding formula is good as there will be a clear allocated formula which will be able to respond to the changes in local areas. There will still be higher funding in London and outer London. But it will also provide more money to more deprived areas and main beneficiaries should be those that are more deprived. It does mean that those who are less deprived will lose out.
- Schools need to make better use of the resources that they already have. For example it is good to hire more teaching assistants but they need to be used properly rather than poorly and in an ad hoc way. One example of this might be to have one to one catch up classes which have shown to improve progress from three to four months.
- Schools need to be more creative in ways that might not sit well with parents. E.g There is little evidence that bigger class sizes have an impact on attainment and so perhaps there should be bigger classes, and less teacher time in front of children to give teachers more time to plan lessons and receive feedback.
- And what comes before school is also very important. Research shows that the impact of resources is bigger when preceded by good quality early years education.
- There are concerns around the implementation of the 30 hours of free childcare with the focus now tilted towards childcare rather than high quality years education.

Dr Lee Elliot Major, Sutton Trust

- Lee said that he was pleased that there is going to be some work done around 'place' as an issue for social mobility.
- He argued that there are talented children in every part of the country and that the Sutton Trust Mobility Map found huge variation in mobility rates by area with people having very different prospects.
- He said that it was not just who you are born to but where you are born that also matters.
- He said that the research has moved from international comparisons to look at the huge variation within a country both in the UK and the US.
- He said that it was not just intergenerational persistence of social immobility but also multigenerational persistence and so grandparents can also be a factor and that it can persist for many generations.
- Lee said we need to have a debate about what is happening both within schools as well as what is happening outside of schools as they cannot on their own solve the social mobility gap.
- There is a need to look at social segregation, poverty levels, connectivity (social and physical connectivity) and family stability.
- Lee said that the London effect was a combination of a highly aspirational community of those who came and stayed in London combined with good schools.
- There is a need to think about how this could be replicated but the answer lies both within and outside of schools.
- He said that the Sutton Trust summer schools programme receives applications from every constituency goes through our programmes but this is particular type of social mobility.
- He mentioned that the Trust is moving some of its focus into the workplace to see how opportunities here can be increased for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Need a debate about both education and work place policy as otherwise nothing will have changed down the line.

Question and Answer session

Baroness Tyler asked about the London Challenge and how this could be used across the rest of the country.

She also asked how additional resources are allocated, were they allocated per pupil or by local authority? She was also interested in whether any other countries were working on the attainment gap.

A: Luke suggested that the evidence of what happens in school with resources is very limited. Some research shows that in primary schools the extra funding goes on teaching assistants and in secondary on non staff related costs. TAs in primary schools are used in different ways and there are some good examples of use and other examples of where they are not used well at all. In secondary schools the resources are used to expand on what the school is already doing. It tends to be spent on overall pupil welfare (school nurses/mental health provision etc). Jo suggested that targeting resources at individual pupil level is the most effective way to target resources.

On international studies, the UK has been distinctive in the committed interest in social mobility in education. Becky argued that our schooling system is relatively progressive and that other countries are facing similar challenges to us. For example in China there is currently a debate around the postcode lottery and there is now a 'near school policy' where parents have to apply to the nearest school. Lee said that Australia and Canada have lower inequality levels in their schools but this might be down to the fact that there is less inequality in their societies overall. Lee also mentioned that some areas that were mobile become immobile when more affluent families move in.

Siobhain McDonagh MP asked about the top 3/4 performing academy chains and Local Authorities. She also wanted to talk about the fact that there is a challenge for white working class girls and boys.

ARK and Harris/Outwood Grange were named as academy chains that consistently do well and a list of local authorities can be sent round to officers.

Jo mentioned that subject choice and who ends up in alternative provision is also an issue when it comes to working class boys and girls and there is also a need to look at mental health, EAL, and SEND as these groups can have socio economic problems but raising their attainment will not be solved by just focusing on the socio economic element.

Chair Justin Madders MP then asked about whether transport was an issue and also whether there were any good initiatives when it came to raising aspirations.

Jo suggested that the debate around school choice did not apply for those rural communities where there is only one school of choice and that there is a bigger impact of rurality when it comes to economic output and the labour market.

Lee said that there was little evidence about what works when it comes to parental engagement. He argued that you could look at grandparental engagement and the grey pound. For example where grandparents help their children who are working to look after their grandchildren. Lee said that we know parental engagement is important but there is relatively little evidence and something that there should be more work done.

Lee also talked about young people being able to make an informed choice when it comes to their post 16 education and that not everything should be centred on the academic route.

Karin Smyth MP noted how parental engagement was important and how there was a need to get children out of school to experience the real world. She said that this was difficult if the school was not doing it themselves as it required funding. She also mentioned that she was working in her constituency to engage parents on apprenticeships. She said that it was difficult to help young people make informed choices at the moment as there is an increasingly complex system to navigate.

Lee said that there is a problem with progression in apprenticeships where young people do not automatically progress from a Level 2 to a Level 3. He said that it would be interesting to see the different offers that different regions have outside of the academic route and that there is a need for jobs to be created.

Becky mentioned the fact that as well as good quality careers advice, there needs to be advice more generally about future occupations. She argued that pupils are allocated to subjects rather than choosing them, with some pupils have demarcations for certain subjects. She said young people are not aware of the subject choices they need and then realise later down the line that they cannot then go into a specific career.

Questions from the audience

Q: For organisations that run programmes, what schools should interventions target and where should resources be prioritised?

The argument was made that they should not target those parents who are already really interested from the start as they might not gain as much from it. There was some interesting work done linking parents tax credit records and looking at the relationship across the income distribution to see if deprivation was linear. It found that it was not that linear but there was a weak link between higher income and more advantage. Luke therefore argued that resources should be focused right at the bottom where there are the worst educational outcomes.

EPI will be developing new measures to come up with a global estimate of how vulnerable children are. Also interventions should look to target the schools who are the least interested but they are difficult to reach.

Becky argued that working class parents are really aspirational for their children but they do not know how to use the system and 'play the game'. Children and parents both know this.

Information and signposting is needed for this group. A large proportion of parents are trying to work school choice (middle and working class) but working class parents do not get as far and are impeded in different ways to middle class parents. For example they lack the financial resources to spend on tuition, they cannot afford a house near a good school. There needs to be mobilisation of information for these families.

Lee argued that you could randomise school admissions as a way of getting round this and it was trialled in Brighton. Becky said that MATs are doing it partially through both a catchment and lottery system. Lee said that there should also be randomisation for universities over a certain grade as they are hyper selective and perhaps they should give local preference.

Q: What happens to attainment gaps post 16? Does it expand/shrink? Transition to post 16 creates another challenge for young people and this leads to them dropping out of higher education, does the gap increase further at this level?

Q: Academic attainment is the focus but what can schools do increase social capital?

Q: Are Opportunity areas working and is anything good coming from them?

Q: What can be done to address the post 16 funding drop given that universities are now looking at all of the extra curricular things that sixth forms can no longer provide?

Le said that there are worries about the basic level of funding and it is important how you spend it. He agreed that there was a very academic focus and this has implications for later life and that there should be more money in post 16 education.

On Opportunity areas he said that it was too early to tell. Research from the US on the Promised neighbourhoods programme shows that interventions were needed both in school and outside but the funding was not there. He argued that you cannot scrimp on social mobility but you have to spend resources well and there are worries about the levels of funding.

Becky said that there is a need to resource further education and take it seriously and yet people have been saying this for decades. Trouble with social and cultural capital we are more interested in elite routes and the routes our children might pursue. There are some tangible things to be done like addressing retakes. Retakes are fine in one instance but repeating them gives you diminishing returns and has an impact on the young person. That suggests the need for higher quality foundation qualifications. Education arms race shows what private schools can do for children and the impact this has on personal statements. Becky thinks that personal statements should be gotten rid of.

Jo mentioned the good work of the EEF on Pupil premium and social capital. She argued that the benefits of early years education are not visible in school attainment but are visible in later life (health, employment etc). So far those opportunity areas who have declared plans are choosing early years as a focus but the 3 year time frame to deliver results is worrying given that we are a year in. Perhaps workforce training in the early years would be good for them to look at but not possible to do that on timeframe.

Luke said that 16 to 18 education has not been a priority for successive policy makers and in 30 years there has been no change in resources and we need to ask why it is not a priority. More advantaged get more from their education and they earn more. Apprenticeships have good and

bad opportunities and an overall numerical target is dangerous. Apprenticeships are not currently a young person's option at the moment, with most going to 25s so that it sounds like investing in training and calling it an apprenticeship to meet numerical target.

Justin Madders thanked the panellists for their contributions and closed the meeting.