

# 17+ participation, attainment and progression in London

## Summary Report: Key findings and recommendations

A report by commissioned by London Councils Young People's Education & Skills

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# **17+ participation, attainment and progression in London: Key findings and recommendations**

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## Background, rationale and research approach

1. The 'quality' of 17+ participation in the English education and training system is becoming a key indicator of its ability to promote sustained educational participation up to age of 18/19 in an era of *Raising the Participation Age* (RPA). Just staying-on post-16 for a short period is not enough. As more young people continue in education and training at 16, so the duration and quality of their participation between the ages of 16-19 and the degree to which they can add value to their pre-16 attainment levels becomes increasingly important for them personally as well as a key measure of system success. It is vital that young Londoners are supported to stay on in a meaningful course of study not just for one year post-16, but for two or even three in order to equip them to progress to either higher study or employment.
2. While London has made great strides in terms of attainment at Key Stage 4 (KS4) compared nationally, this advantage is not being replicated in post-16 study with concerns about 17+ participation, attainment and progression. Moreover, because national and regional destinations data are only made available for 16 and 18 year olds, it is not clear what happens to 17 year olds at the end of their first year in post-16 education. From anecdotal evidence prior to this research, it appeared that this was a time of 'churn' for young people, when a significant number began to change course, move to another institution, reduce their volume of study or drop out of education and training altogether.
3. It was for these reasons that London Councils commissioned the Institute of Education, University of London, to undertake research on 17+ participation, attainment and progression in London during the period 2013-2014. More specifically, there was a desire to examine in greater detail what happens to young people at the end of their first year of post-16 study, because successful or unsuccessful transition at this point appeared to make the difference to effective and sustained participation and attainment for 16 to 19 year olds.
4. The study involved a mix of background desk research; secondary data analysis including specialist data analysis from MIME Consulting; visits to 10 11 to 18 schools, two general further education colleges (GFEs) and two sixth form colleges (SFCs); and discussions with local authority 14 to 19 leads. The research was interested not only in London-wide patterns of participation, attainment and progression, but also the positive role that institutional policies and strategies could play in supporting 17+ transitions.

## Key findings

### 17+ participation, retention and attainment in London

5. Levels of participation in education and training for 16 and 17 year olds in London (92.3%) were higher than the national average (90.3%) in 2014 and have improved by 1.3 per cent over the last 12 months. The vast majority of young Londoners are in full-time education and training (88.7%) and again this figure was above the national average (83.2%) in 2014.
6. However, the proportion of young people in apprenticeships and jobs with training in London stood at half the England average in 2014 and has fallen over the last 12 months.
7. Participation rates varied considerably between London boroughs depending on their level of economic and social deprivation.
8. The proportion of 16-18 year olds studying in school sixth forms and sixth form colleges has increased over the past year, while the percentage studying in general further education colleges has declined.
9. Retention in A Level programmes in London schools is significantly greater than in their level 3 (L3) vocational programmes.
10. Just under a quarter of Year 12 L3 starters 'dropped out' of their sixth form before the age of 18. This was notably the case at the end of Year 12, particularly for vocational courses.
11. Only a third of school students embarking on a L2 course at 16 progressed to L3 study.
12. Retention in colleges is recorded differently to schools (through the Individualised Student Record (ILR)) so we have not attempted to make comparisons between the two. However, from the analysis provided by MIME Consulting it appeared that there were significant variations between GFEs, who do less well, and SFCs, who do better in terms of retention rates. This might be explained by differences in retention rates between general and vocational courses with the former having higher retention rates and being more prevalent in SFCs.
13. Prior attainment in GCSEs or their vocational equivalents plays a major part in both post-16 retention and attainment. GCSE English and mathematics at grades A\*-C are highly

important with 8+ A\*-C grades in GCSEs or equivalent qualifications being a more secure benchmark than 5+ A\*-C grades in GCSEs only.

14. About 30 per cent of L3 learners in London schools in 2011/12 did not have A\*-C grades in GCSE English and mathematics and scored on average 540 points at the end of their course. On the other hand, London learners in 2011/12 who had at least 5 GCSE A\*-C grades including English and mathematics scored on average 753 points at L3 (above the national figure) and those with 8+ GCSE A\*-C grades including English and mathematics scored on average 795 points.

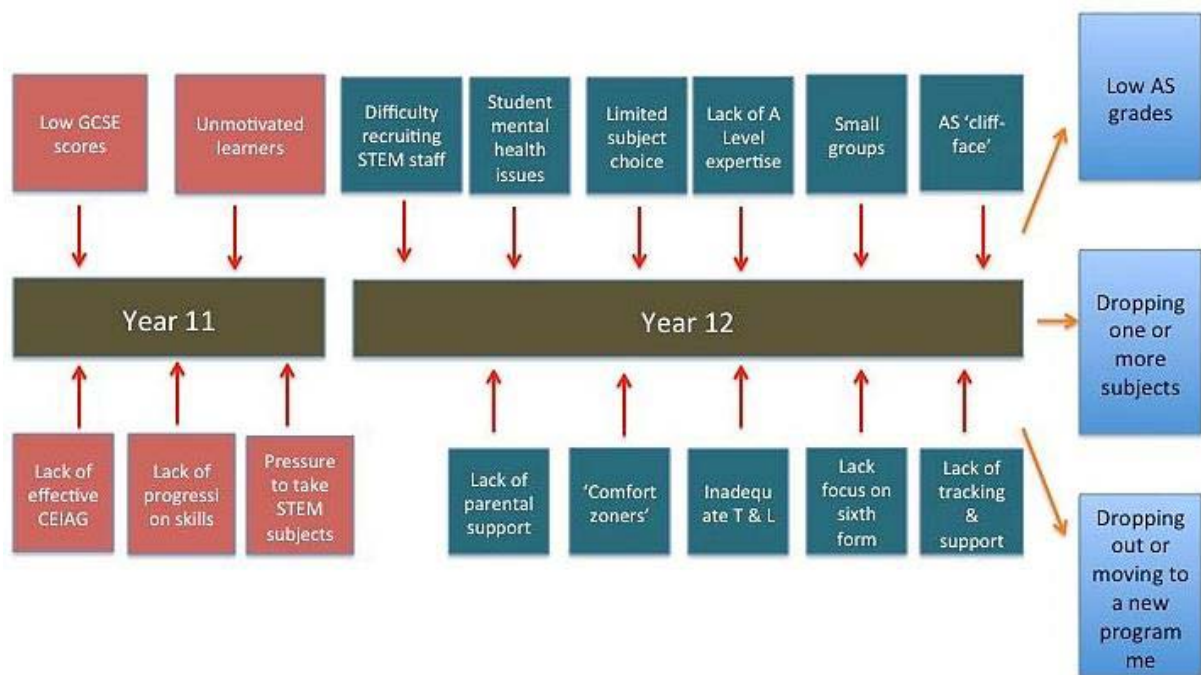
15. Post 16 attainment at L3 in London is below the national average on all measures except the percentage of students achieving at least two substantial L3 qualifications. While this latter measure is important in terms of inclusion, there is no doubt that the capital's relatively poor performance at L3 is cause for concern. Of particular note is London's performance in terms of L3 points per student, which was 682.7 in 2013, compared with 706 nationally, and this figure has declined since 2011. It should be noted, however, that there is considerable borough variation on all indicators, with some London boroughs and institutions performing well above the national average and others well below.

### **Strategies for tackling risk factors at 17+**

16. Visits to a number of schools and colleges revealed a growing awareness of the 'risk factors' that can lead to failure in AS or vocational courses at 17+; repeating study, taking fewer than three advanced level subjects, attaining lower grades and changing course/institution or dropping out altogether.

17. These risk factors are captured in Figure 1 for schools and in Figure 2 for colleges.

**Figure 1. 17+ 'risk factors' in schools**



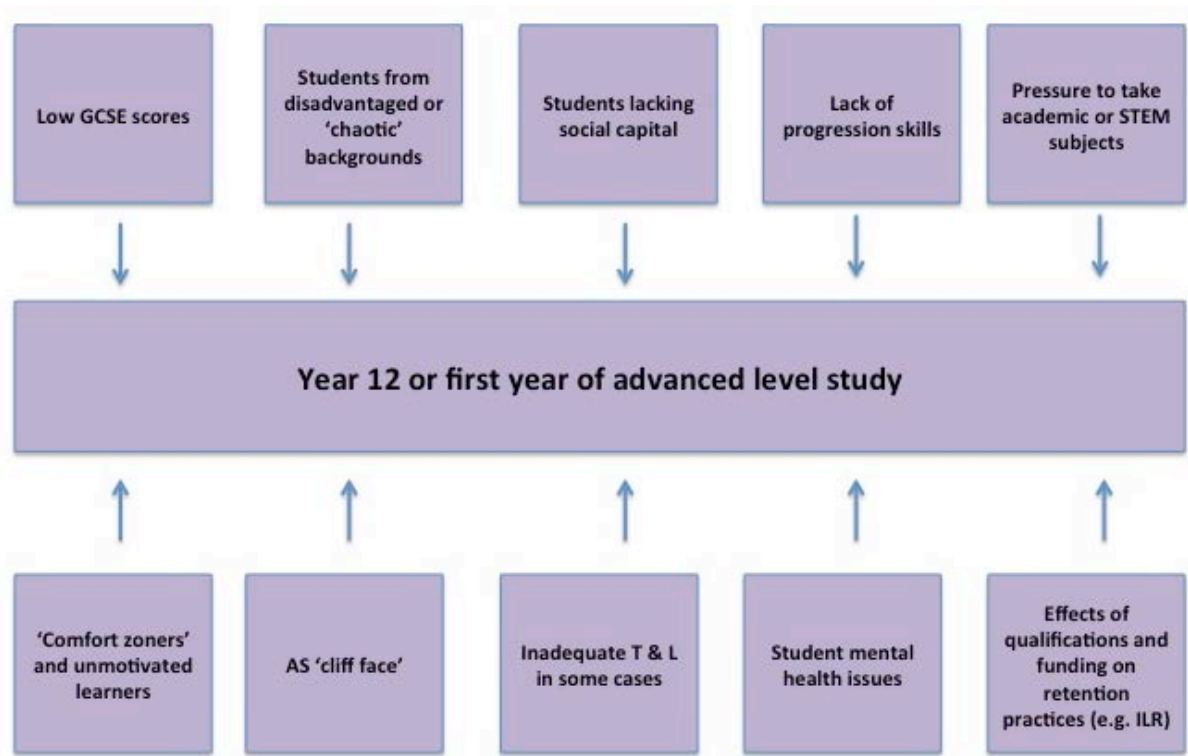
18. The visits to schools revealed a range of strategies that institutions were using to support transitions from both Year 11 to Year 12 and from Year 12 to Year 13.

*a. Strategies to support transition between Years 11 and 12 included:* sixth form taster days; shared subject activities between KS4 and post 16; pitching GCSE teaching at the next level up; summer booster sessions in maths and sciences; early enrolment for Year 12 for diagnosis and study skills; a staged guidance process for post-16 choices; discussion of HE in KS4; building in study skills from Year 7; careful guidance in choice of KS4 subjects; the Year 11 tutor team moving up with students into Year 12.

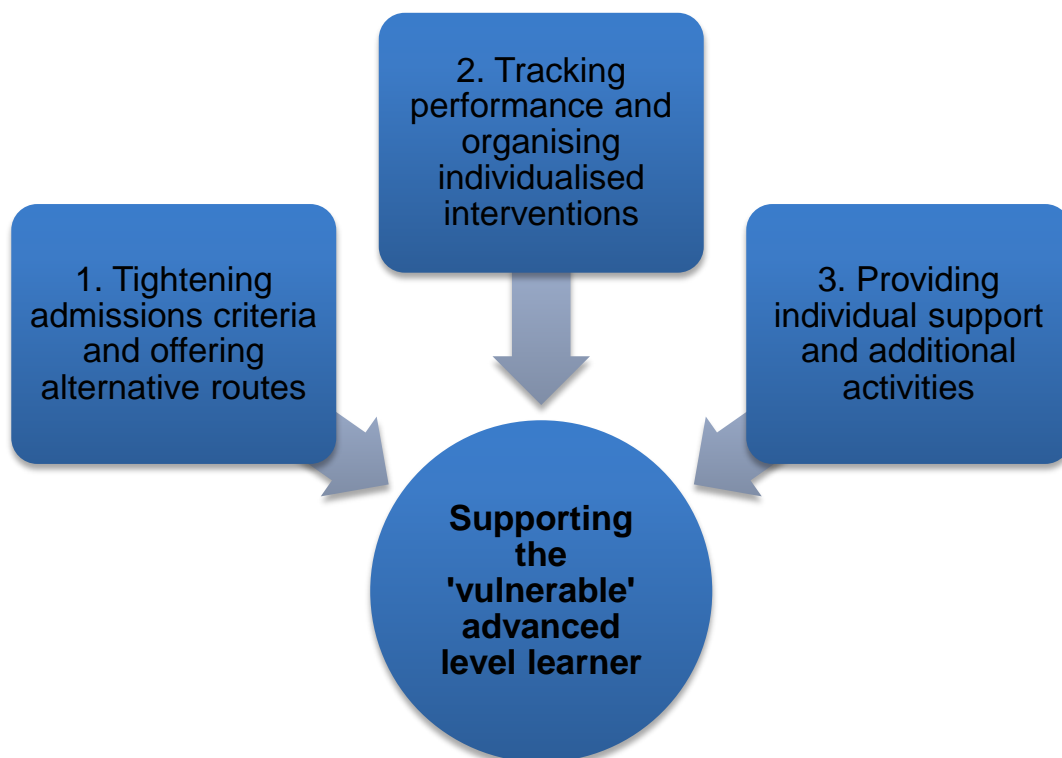
*b. Strategies to support transition between Years 12 and 13 included:* subject specific support for staff and students; enrichment activities (e.g. Extended Project Qualification); regular tracking and reporting of performance; mentoring/coaching; progression to HE programmes; preparation for employment (e.g. work experience); financial support.

19. Colleges in London face many of the same risk factors as schools, although these could be considered as more intensive because colleges tend to recruit a greater proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds; more black and minority ethnic students; those with lower prior GCSE attainment and those who have left a school sixth form at 17+.

**Figure 2. 17+ 'risk factors' in GFEs and SFCs**



20. Strategies employed by colleges to address these risk factors can be grouped into three main types:



## Conclusions and recommendations

21. In the era of Raising the Participation Age (RPA) it is vital that young Londoners participate, attain and progress between the ages of 14 to 19 and, in particular, that they add significantly to their knowledge and skills after the age of 16 because this will give them a greater opportunity to enter the highly competitive London labour market or progress to higher education.

22. London has made marked progress in recent years in pre-16 performance, measured by the attainment of five or more GCSE A\*-C grades including English and mathematics. However, this research suggests that this level of performance at KS4 does not necessarily ensure successful post-16 retention and L3 attainment at 18 because students sometimes lack wider progression skills to make an effective transition.

23. Successful transition at age 17 appears to be a key factor in determining successful outcomes at 18 or 19 for young Londoners, particularly at L3. In this regard, London lags behind the England average and there is considerable variation in performance between boroughs, depending on their socio-economic status. This research has begun to examine how national, local and institutional factors combine to either support or inhibit 17 year olds from progressing to the next stage of their upper secondary education.

24. The research took place at a time when a number of national reforms related to 16-19 education and training were taking place and there was a considerable amount of turbulence in the system. These included changes to: financial support for 16-19 year olds, funding for providers of 16-19 education, all types of 14-19 qualifications, performance indicators, the organisation of the academies programme, Careers Education Information, Advice and Guidance arrangements and the introduction of 16-19 Study Programmes. These changes undoubtedly shaped the strategies that schools and colleges used in supporting transition from KS4 to post-16 study and at 17+.

25. The following overarching recommendations flow from the research contained in [three previous research reports](#).

- a. **The need for a pan-London focus on 17+ participation, attainment and progression**
  - this research has concluded that 17+ should be regarded as the prime indicator of sustained participation in the extended upper secondary phase that has been heralded by RPA.



- b. **A Post-16 London Challenge** - the 17+ issue could form the focus of a new pan-London 'challenge' in which schools and colleges come together with employers and work-based learning providers to support a greater number of young Londoners to achieve not only L3 outcomes at 19, but also to have a greater opportunity to access further/higher education and employment. This could involve:
- i. **Addressing institutional and borough-based variation** - which suggests the need for greater targeting on particular boroughs, schools and colleges within the overall Post-16 London Challenge.
  - ii. **A step change in the sharing of good practice on the 17+ issue** - the strategies that are being put in place by schools and colleges to support students to attain and progress appear to be highly focused on: raising the threshold for access to L3 study; regular monitoring of student progress; trying to extend students' potential through a range of teaching, learning and assessment strategies; and, crucially, by looking outwards to other partners to help them achieve this. Given the richness but unevenness of practice across both colleges and schools, there is an overwhelming case for a major effort to share good practice, particularly in relation to teaching and learning. The need for this type of activity, ideally as part of a Post-16 London Challenge, will only increase as the reforms of curriculum, qualifications and performance measures are implemented.
  - iii. **Raising performance through increased partnership working** - the development of improved partnership working will help address the variability of pan-London performance and encourage a wider choice of programmes of study; increased teacher expertise through communities of practice for professional development; improved access to specialist facilities and the sharing of vital 17+ participation, attainment and progression data.
- c. **Effective Careers Education, Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG)** - a greater effort should be made to build in CEIAG and academic guidance for all young people to avoid the problems associated with inappropriate choice of course and institution leading to wasteful turbulence at 17+. In particular, there should be a focus on preparing young people for adult and working life alongside building on the expertise already existing in terms of support for progression to higher education.
- d. **A greater focus on building in progression skills at KS4** - given the impact of pre-16 attainment on post-16 performance, there should be greater scrutiny of the pre-conditions for post-16 success. This could include an emphasis on a wider range of attainment (e.g.

a version of Progress 8) and the possible introduction of a L2 Extended Project Qualification to support the development of independent learning and skills for progression to higher level study.

- e. **Increasing the supply of high quality vocational (or mixed academic/vocational) L3 provision and apprenticeships** - an increase in L3 attainment will require the further development of high quality apprenticeships, vocational and mixed provision in London. While GFEs, SFCs and work-based learning providers need to take a lead in this area, this type of provision will also be facilitated through strong partnership working between schools, colleges and work-based learning providers to achieve economies of scale and viable centres of excellence.
- f. **Developing planned 'three-year sixth' programmes** - many 'vulnerable' post-16 learners will take three years rather than two to reach the goal of a L3 outcome. A collaborative project is recommended to help schools and colleges to actively plan three-year study programmes that will involve a mixing of general and vocational study post-16 and the introduction of level 2.5 programmes (a mix of L2 and L3 qualifications). This will also require financial support from government by restoring the full funding for 18 year olds and building on the current 16-19 Study Programmes policy.