



Leading education
and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

What is happening with 17+ participation, attainment and progression in London?

Paper 1. Schools in London

Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours

Institute of Education, University of London

October 2013

**The Institute of Education has been commissioned as the Academic
Partner to London Councils: Young People's Education and Skills, who
have funded this research.**

Copyright London Councils 2013

A. Introduction

The 17+ issue in London

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 the *Raising of 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 post-16 participation 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. In this regard, London appears to face some challenges. London schools perform relatively well pre-16 in terms of GCSE attainment, including with young people from different economic and social backgrounds¹. However, post-16 the picture appears more mixed. There are high levels of post-16 participation in full-time study but Level 3 attainment (A Levels and vocational equivalents), notably cumulative points scores, remains significantly behind the national average. The advantage that London enjoys in terms of pre-16 general education attainment is being lost in some aspects of post-16 Level 3 study. At the same time, London institutions lift their performance with young people by the age of 19, largely as a result of the success of those who complete A Levels and, possibly more significantly, through the role of Level 3 vocational awards².

3. In the light of this complex picture, London Councils commissioned the Centre for Post-14 Research and Innovation at the Institute of Education, University of London (IOE) to work with London Boroughs and MIME Consulting³ (an organisation that specialises in data analysis) to explore the dynamics of '17+ participation, attainment and progression' and to suggest a range of strategies that could be pursued by the 32 London boroughs to increase the 'quality' of 17+ participation for young people in the Capital.

¹ Wyness, G. (2012)

² Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2012)

³ For more information on Mime Consulting see - <http://www.mimeconsulting.co.uk/>

Research questions and methodology

4. The key questions for this project are:
 - a. What are the main patterns of 17+ participation, attainment, retention and progression of London learners?
 - b. What are the main strengths and weaknesses of London's patterns of 14-19 year old participation, attainment and progression compared with the rest of the country?
 - c. How far and in what ways does '17+ performance' vary across London boroughs and institutions?
 - d. What are the main factors and dynamics behind the current patterns of 17+ participation and progression of London learners?
 - e. Given these factors and dynamics, what strategies might be developed to improve 17+ participation and progression outcomes for London learners?
5. Researching 17+ participation and progression has its challenges, not least because of the fragmented nature of our education and training system and the focus on other transition points. While the importance of the 17+ participation issue is becoming increasingly acknowledged, this age has not been a focus of national data gathering. Moreover, data across schools and colleges are collected by different national departments (DfE and BIS) and are not co-ordinated. At the local level across London, local authorities have variable capacity for data collection and collation and there is no common approach. Furthermore, schools (particularly those which have become academies) are now autonomous organisations and may not collaborate with local authorities on certain data gathering issues. This is the context in which data analysis for this project has taken place. It has required the compilation and triangulation of different types of national and London-related data, assisted by MIME Consulting, over a longer period than anticipated and through two stages⁴.

⁴ Figures that refer to 'Mime Consulting 2013' relate to a dataset produced by them specifically for this project.

Stage 1 (March-August 2013)

- a. The drafting of an initial discussion paper based on national and available London data (e.g. London Skills Observatory; MIME Consulting and LPUK⁵). MIME Consulting collated data from the National Pupil Database (matched data) and ILR college data (The Data Service).
- b. An initial analysis of the available data was discussed by London 14-19 leads at a seminar organised by London Councils in Spring 2013, which helped to refine the scope of the research.
- c. The identification of an additional six strands of pan London data was compiled by MIME and delivered to the researchers in May 2013.
- d. Presentations to both 14-19 local authority leads in London and the Young People's Education and Skills Board of the main analysis and findings to date (July 2013).
- e. The drafting of this report on schools and 17+ in London following these presentations and further discussions with officers from London Councils.

Stage 2 (September 2013-July 2014)

- a. Engagement with a small number of London boroughs that represent differing social and economic contexts, that have significant local data and can arrange interviews with relevant school and college staff. This more local and qualitative data, along with information about institutional policy and practices that impact on 17+ participation and progression, will supplement national and Pan-London data.
- b. Collection and analysis of 17+ data relating to sixth form colleges and general further education colleges in London.

⁵ For more information on LPUK see - <http://www.learningplusuk.org/who-we-are>

- c. Discussions with 14-19 local authority leads around action research strategies for improving participation, attainment and progression at 17+ in London.
- d. Presentations to the YPES Board, 14-19 Leads and college principals through London Association of Colleges (AoC).

The structure of the paper and its terminology

6. The paper is structured around the processes of progression that a learner undertakes through the 14-19 phase so that the sequence and dynamics of factors at each stage can be better understood - pre-16 course choices and attainment; initial participation in post-16 provision, retention and progression at 17+.

7. The paper uses the following terms:

- 'Attainment' refers to summative examination and assessment outcomes.
- 'Participation' refers to starting and studying on a particular course.
- 'Retention' refers to remaining on a particular course through several census points until its completion.
- 'Progression' refers to moving from one course to another either vertically or horizontally in terms of National Qualification Framework levels.
- 'Careers education, information, advice and guidance' (CEIAG) to denote the process of learning about education, career and employment opportunities.

B. 17+ participation, attainment and progression in London

Overall 14-19 performance in London and the 17+ issue

1. In terms of 17+ education participation, London does relatively well in national terms. In 2011/12, 86 per cent of young people stayed on in some form of education and training at 17 compared to 84 per cent nationally. In terms of full-time 17+ participation the figures were 77 per cent and 73 per cent respectively⁶. At the same time, however, there is a widespread recognition (including in London Council reports⁷) that post-16 performance in London has not so far matched pre-16 attainment. Therefore, a question can be asked about the 'quality of participation', that is the ability of young Londoners to complete 16-19 education to a standard that might be legitimately expected of them given attainment pre-16 and their ability to progress to further study or employment.
2. In terms of post-16 Level 3 attainment (2012/13 the London picture is mixed, with lower than national average cumulative Level 3 scores, but higher than the national average attainment of higher A Level or equivalent grades (see para 28 for more detail).
3. A clearer positive story, however, emerges at 19+. By aged 19, London has moved above the national average in terms of Level 3 attainment. In 2011/12 a total of 61 per cent of 19 year olds attained Level 3 compared with 55 per cent nationally⁸. Moreover, London significantly outperformed other regions in terms of the percentage of 19 year olds eligible for free school meals gaining a Level 3 award (49% compared with 34% nationally). The overall Level 3 measure includes not only A Levels, but also broad vocational qualifications such as BTEC Nationals. These data suggest that after a mixed picture at 17+, London performance begins to pick up again, with broad vocational qualifications and further education colleges playing an increasingly important role as they take learners through Level 2 and 3 courses.
4. What might be termed the '17+ issue', may be partly explained by AS/A Level failure rates. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) reported in 2009⁹ that there were higher A Level failure rates in London (5% compared with 3% nationally) and

⁶ DfE 2013a

⁷ See for example, London Councils (2013)

⁸ DfE, 2013c

⁹ Learning and Skills Council (LSC) (2009) *London Strategic Analysis for Young People 2009-10* London: LSC. These data are the latest available on AS failure rates in London.

particularly at AS Level (18% compared with 13% nationally). The LSC speculated that this could have been due in part to low prior attainment on entry to A Levels. Failure rates for AS and A levels for students who attained fewer than GCSE 40 points were 30 per cent and nine per cent respectively, suggesting that many London 16 year olds were not yet ready for Level 3 learning¹⁰.

5. At the same time, however, some London schools enjoyed success at the upper end. In 2010/11, the most popular subject at advanced level in London was mathematics¹¹, suggesting a small but significant proportion of confident learners and sufficient schools with a focus on this very important subject.

6. The basic post-16 London participation and attainment picture is therefore complex:

- slightly higher post-16 education participation rates than nationally;
- significantly lower than national average cumulative Level 3 scores;
- an apparent recovery of Level 3 performance at 19 due to the role of broad vocational provision with a relatively strong performance, in terms of attainment, by students eligible for free school meals.

GCSE performance in London – analysing 5+ and 8+ A*-C grade attainment

7. The level of preparedness for post-16 study is becoming a critical factor as staying-on in education post-16 has become the norm and is now enshrined in legislation. In this regard, London appears to start at a relative advantage compared nationally due to recent improvements in GCSE performance across the Capital (see Figure 1). The overall picture suggests that London is three percentage points ahead of the national average and this gain has been achieved since 2005.

¹⁰ LSC, 2009

¹¹ LPUK, 2012

Figure 1. London GCSE performance compared nationally

	London	England
5 GCSE A*-C grades or equivalent	84.1%	81.8%
Improvement 2005/6 – 2011/12	25.8 points	22.8 points
5 GCSE A*-C grades or equivalent incl' maths and English	62.3%	59.4%
Improvement 2005/6 – 2011/12	16.5 points	13.8 points

Source: LPUK, 2012

8. Within London, however, there is significant borough-based variation in terms of the attainment of 5 GCSE A*-C grades or equivalent including maths and English. This ranges from 79.9 per cent in Kensington & Chelsea to 53.6 per cent in Islington.

9. A less impressive post-16 performance should lead to questions regarding the solidity of the London GCSE baseline for progression as well as issues related to Level 3 study. Here we suggest that there is an inter-related set of factors at work, both national and regional, that complicate the picture.

- There is a large gap between Level 2 and Level 3 in the English qualifications system. Level 3 qualifications (in the main A Levels) were historically designed to prepare a minority for university study, rather than acting as a progression route for the majority.
- More recently, however, increasing GCSE or equivalent attainment has raised aspirations to study A Levels at a time when these qualifications have become somewhat more difficult to attain (as a result of the 2008 reforms¹²).
- At the same time, there has been a growth in the number of school sixth forms (particularly in London) with increased competition for A Level learners and possible relaxations of entry requirements to A Level study.
- The institutional accountability threshold at Key Stage 4 is normally seen as 5 GCSE A*-C grades. However, statistical analysis from the Youth Cohort

¹² The planned further reform of A Levels, with a reduction in modularity, a reduction in the possibility of resits, a greater focus on synoptic assessment and external examination, is likely to continue this trend.

Studies suggests that this baseline is not sufficient to guarantee successful completion in Level 3 post-16 study¹³.

- Moreover, pressures on schools to meet GCSE performance criteria have resulted in institutions focusing on those students on the 'C/D borderline' in an attempt to boost the numbers gaining the main Key Stage 4 performance measure. In this context, some learners just manage to creep over the 5 A*-C grade threshold and particularly in English and maths. These learners have been referred to in further education colleges as 'shaky Level 2s' who are likely find Level 3 study particularly challenging.
- In addition, there has been the liberal use of vocational courses at Key Stage 4 in some schools because of the 'equivalence' points they afforded to boost GCSE performance¹⁴. This has provided an inflated sense of learner preparedness for study at the next level up, particularly when they embark on A Levels that require a different form of study.
- London is highly divided socially and educationally both between and within boroughs. In this sense, there is not one London GCSE performance, but several variations of performance within the accepted thresholds for progression to Level 3 study that require more textured borough-based and institutional analysis.

10. Taken together, these factors suggest that the progression implications of different types of GCSE performance should be investigated. We therefore decided, with MIME Consulting, to explore patterns of attainment and their relationship with post-16 participation, retention and attainment using eight different measures – four focused around 5+ GCSE A*-C grades and four around 8+ GCSE A*-C grades.

5+ A*-C grades or equivalent

5+ A*-C grades or equivalent with maths and English

5+ A*-C grades in GCSEs only

5+ A*-C grades with maths and English in GCSEs only

8+ A*-C grades or equivalent

8+ A*-C grades or equivalent with maths and English

¹³ Spours, K., West, J., Stanton, G. and Vesey, R. (2012)

¹⁴ Wolf, 2011

8+ A*-C grades in GCSEs only

8+ A*-C grades including maths and English in GCSEs only

The attainment of 5+ and 8+ A*-C grades at GCSE (no vocational equivalents)

11. In 2011 a total of 59.8 per cent of London Year 11 students gained 5 A*-C GCSE grades, with borough variations ranging from 74.4 per cent in Sutton to 49 per cent in Islington. Slightly fewer - 53.4 per cent - gained 5 A*-C GCSE grades including English and Maths. Here the inter-borough variation ranged from 71 per cent in Sutton to 42.3 per cent in Islington.

12. Concerning the attainment of 8+ A*-C GCSE grades, a total of 41.5 per cent of London students reached this threshold in 2011 and marginally fewer – 40.5 per cent - including English and Maths. However, the inter-borough variation was greater than the 5 A*-C GCSE grade measure, ranging from 60.3 per cent in Sutton to 28.4 per cent in Dagenham and 59.8 per cent to 28.3 per cent including English and Maths.

Figure 2. Proportion of 16 year olds gaining 5 and 8 GCSEs A*-C grades (GCSE only)

i)	Total Pupils	5+ A*-C Grades	8+ A*-C Grades	5+ A*-C inc. Eng & Maths	8+ A*-C inc. Eng & Maths
Sutton	2,664	74.4%	60.3%	71.0%	59.8%
Redbridge	3,347	73.0%	56.9%	67.3%	55.5%
Kingston U. Th.	1,535	69.3%	55.0%	65.5%	54.3%
Barnet	3,336	70.9%	54.6%	64.9%	53.1%
Richmond Up. Th.	1,279	64.7%	50.9%	58.4%	49.3%
Ken & Chelsea	635	69.1%	50.7%	66.3%	50.6%
Harrow	2,192	63.2%	48.8%	57.6%	47.2%
Bromley	3,374	66.2%	48.0%	61.2%	47.3%
Westminster	1,398	69.5%	47.7%	62.9%	46.0%
Ham & Fulham	1,145	63.3%	47.7%	57.8%	46.7%
Hounslow	2,627	62.4%	44.8%	53.8%	42.8%
Bexley	3,345	60.3%	42.4%	56.6%	41.9%
Ealing	2,959	59.0%	42.1%	51.9%	40.5%
Havering	3,071	61.4%	41.4%	55.3%	40.5%
Brent	2,940	57.7%	40.5%	52.0%	39.6%
Newham	3,710	57.8%	39.2%	53.7%	38.5%
Enfield	3,782	57.3%	38.9%	49.5%	37.6%
Merton	1,579	56.6%	38.3%	50.3%	37.0%
Hackney	1,700	56.4%	37.9%	51.1%	37.2%
Hillingdon	3,009	56.9%	37.7%	51.1%	36.5%
Wandsworth	1,888	54.8%	37.6%	46.0%	34.8%
Camden	1,534	59.2%	37.2%	52.8%	36.4%
Croydon	3,753	56.9%	36.9%	52.5%	36.3%
Haringey	2,181	54.2%	35.9%	50.0%	35.4%
Tower Hamlets	2,542	56.3%	34.9%	51.9%	34.2%
Greenwich	2,284	54.9%	34.0%	50.8%	33.5%
Waltham Forest	2,705	52.9%	33.5%	45.5%	32.5%
Southwark	2,400	51.5%	33.3%	46.8%	32.6%
Lewisham	2,388	51.6%	33.0%	45.8%	32.0%
Lambeth	1,891	51.7%	30.7%	48.9%	30.3%
Islington	1,604	49.0%	29.9%	42.3%	28.7%
Barking & Dag	2,195	51.8%	28.4%	47.7%	28.3%
London Average	76,992	59.8%	41.5%	54.3%	40.5%

Source: Mime Consulting, 2013

13. What Figure 2 shows is that the proportion attaining 8 GCSE A*-C grades (either with or without maths and English) is just over 40 per cent compared with those attaining 5 GCSE A*-C grades with English and Maths (54%).

14. The difference between highest and lowest performing boroughs can be summarised as follows:

5+ A*-C	25 points
5+ A*-C (E & M)	29 points
8+ A*-C	32 points
8+ A*-C (E & M)	32 points

The attainment of 5+ and 8+ GCSE grades (including vocational equivalents)

15. The picture differs slightly when measuring GCSE attainment including vocational equivalences (see Figure 3). Overall, 80.7 per cent of London Year 11 students attained 5+ GCSE A*-C grades including vocational equivalences. The borough variation ranged from 91.1 per cent in Sutton to 69.5 per cent in Lewisham. Considerably fewer - 59.4% - gained 5 A*-C GCSE grades or equivalents including English and Maths. Here the inter-borough variation ranged from 74.2 per cent in Sutton to 47.4 per cent in Islington.

16. Concerning the attainment of 8+ A*-C GCSE grades or equivalent, a total of 63.6 per cent of London students reached this threshold and 54.2 per cent including English and Maths. The inter-borough variation ranged from 78.5 per cent in Sutton to 48.3 per cent in Lewisham and 70.8 per cent to 42 per cent including English and Maths.

17. The difference between highest and lowest performing boroughs on 5+ and 8+ GCSE A*-C grades or equivalent can be summarised as follows:

5+ A*-C	22 points
5+ A*-C (E & M)	27 points
8+ A*-C	30 points
8+ A*-C (E & M)	29 points

Figure 3. Proportion of 16 year olds gaining 5 and 8 GCSEs A-C grades or equivalent*

i)	Total Pupils	5+ A*-C Grades	8+ A*-C Grades	5+ A*-C inc. Eng & Maths	8+ A*-C inc. Eng & Maths
Sutton	2,664	91.1%	78.5%	74.2%	70.8%
Ken & Chelsea	635	85.4%	77.0%	75.1%	71.0%
Bromley	3,374	91.4%	75.5%	67.3%	63.2%
Kingston U. Th.	1,535	87.2%	73.2%	69.4%	65.6%
Bexley	3,345	87.3%	71.5%	63.1%	60.3%
Westminster	1,398	86.0%	71.2%	67.7%	62.8%
Redbridge	3,347	85.3%	71.1%	69.2%	64.2%
Barnet	3,336	84.2%	69.2%	67.0%	61.9%
Croydon	3,753	84.6%	69.0%	59.6%	55.9%
Hillingdon	3,009	83.8%	67.3%	58.3%	53.8%
Greenwich	2,284	84.8%	66.4%	59.9%	55.6%
Hounslow	2,627	83.3%	66.3%	57.9%	53.5%
Wandsworth	1,888	82.0%	64.8%	50.1%	46.1%
Harrow	2,192	80.7%	64.0%	60.8%	55.2%
Merton	1,579	82.6%	63.8%	57.2%	52.6%
Ham & Fulham	1,145	79.0%	62.8%	61.3%	55.2%
Southwark	2,400	80.0%	62.4%	54.8%	50.2%
Tower Hamlets	2,542	80.8%	61.6%	58.9%	52.4%
Richmond Up. Th.	1,279	80.7%	61.6%	61.5%	55.6%
Lambeth	1,891	80.4%	61.6%	59.0%	52.7%
Havering	3,071	79.7%	61.5%	60.0%	54.2%
Barking & Dag	2,195	79.4%	60.1%	55.3%	49.6%
Ealing	2,959	75.5%	59.4%	55.1%	50.2%
Enfield	3,782	78.8%	58.4%	53.4%	49.0%
Newham	3,710	73.6%	57.5%	57.4%	51.3%
Brent	2,940	74.7%	57.1%	56.0%	50.4%
Haringey	2,181	76.2%	57.1%	56.8%	50.9%
Camden	1,534	74.8%	55.6%	56.9%	49.9%
Hackney	1,700	72.9%	54.0%	55.7%	47.6%
Islington	1,604	70.6%	53.4%	47.4%	42.1%
Waltham Forest	2,705	71.9%	50.6%	48.8%	43.0%
Lewisham	2,388	69.5%	48.3%	50.7%	42.0%
London Average	76,992	80.7%	63.6%	59.4%	54.2%

Source: Mime Consulting, 2013

Different measures of GCSE attainment in London: a summary

18. The most inclusive measure of GCSE attainment is 5+ GCSE A*-C grades with vocational equivalents. This threshold is achieved by 81 per cent of London 16 year olds. The most exclusive measure of GCSE achievement is 8+ GCSE A*-C grades including English and Maths. This narrower threshold is achieved by only 54 per cent of London 16 year olds.

19. The gap between the highest and lowest performing boroughs, largely reflecting differences in the level of social deprivation, varies between 22 points on the most inclusive measure (5+ A*-C grades or equivalent) and 32 points on the most exclusive measure (8+ A*-C grades including English and Maths). As we will see these attainment measures have an important impact on 16-19 participation, retention, attainment and progression.

17+ participation and retention

Participation at 16, 17 and 18+: London and England compared

20. The Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) reflects an assumption that upper secondary education (14-19 education and training in England) should be a universal phase and that all young people should be in some form of education and training up to the age of 18 years by 2015.

21. London is slightly ahead of national trends in terms of post-16 participation in education and training. In 2010/11, as Figure 4 shows, 91 per cent of young people participated at 16, dropping to 86 per cent at 17. This compared well with national figures of 91 and 84 per cent respectively. However, there is considerable inter-borough variation at 16 (100% in Richmond and 85% in Barnet) and at 17 (95% in Richmond and 80% in Barnet and Hillingdon). National data indicate that education participation tails off significantly at 18 and we must therefore assume that participation in London does too.

Figure 4. Participation in education and work-based learning 2010/11

Age	England	London
16	91%	91%
17	84%	86%
18	59%	Unknown

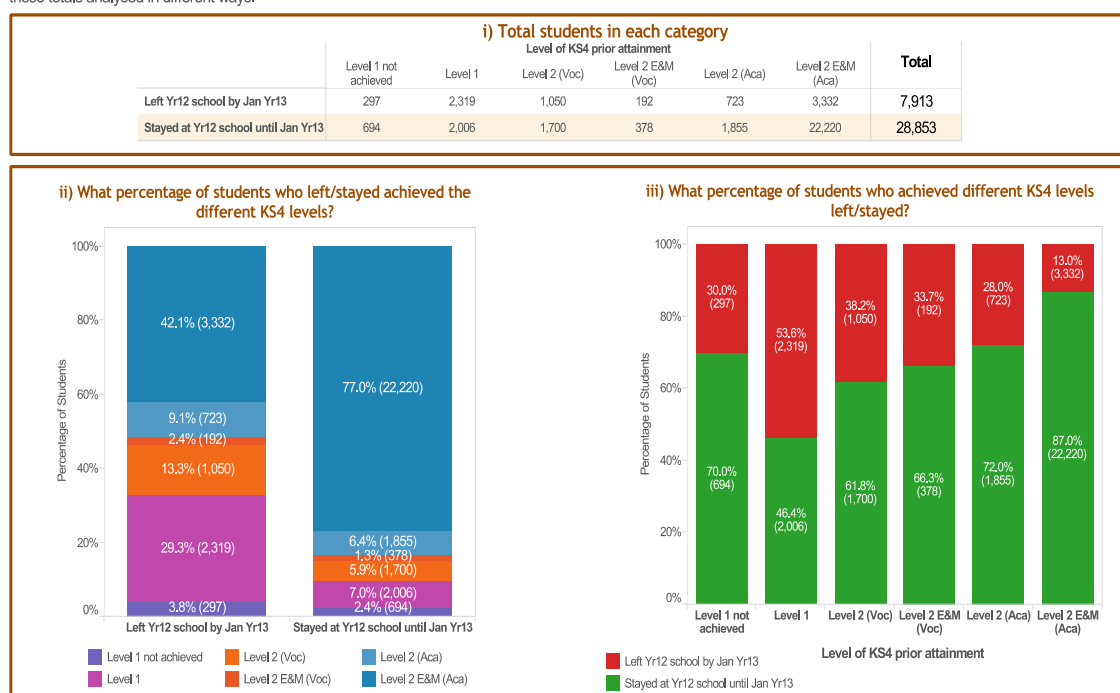
Source: DfE, 2013a

The relationship between Key Stage 4 attainment and 17+ participation in schools

22. This section of the report analyses the relationship between Key Stage 4 attainment and 17+ participation. More specifically it examines the impact of the attainment of 5+ and 8+ A*-C GCSE grades on the likelihood of staying within a school sixth form until Year 13. Staying within a school sixth form at 17+ is a strong indicator of continuing on Level 3 study into the second year, particularly in A Levels.

Figure 5. The impact of 5+ GCSEs with Maths and English and equivalents on 17+ participation in schools

1) Table shows Year 12 students on roll in a school in January 2011, and whether they were in the same school in January 2012. Split by KS4 prior attainment. Charts show these totals analysed in different ways.



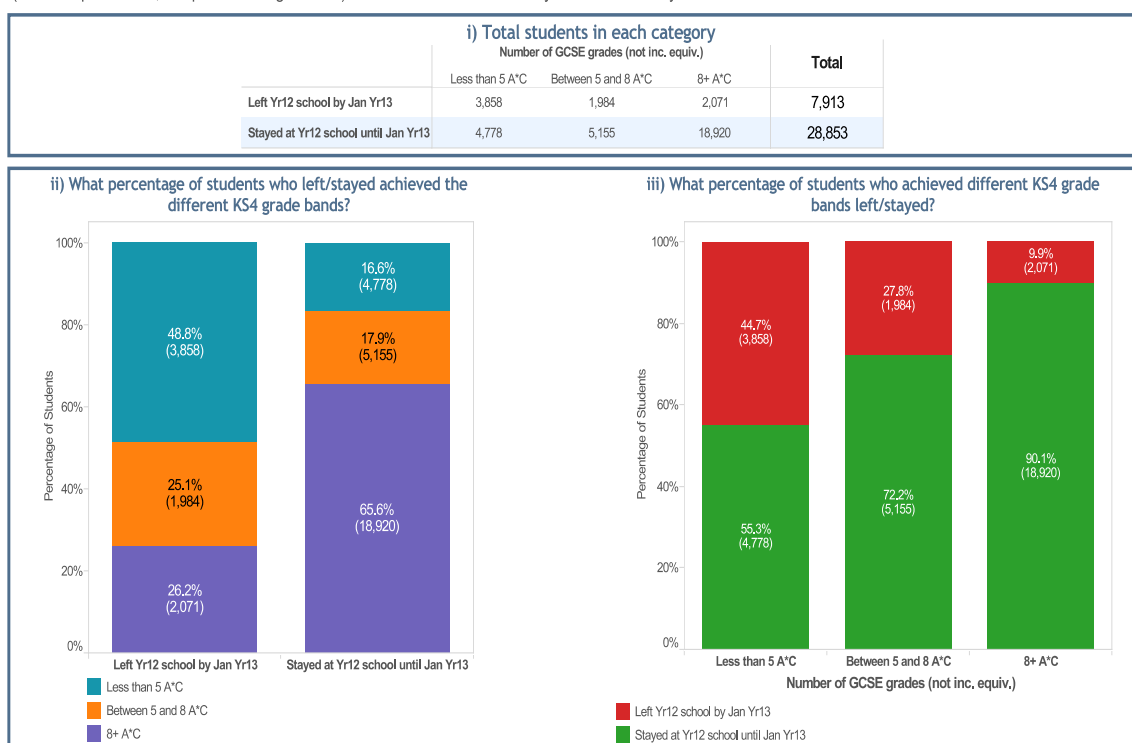
IMPORTANT - Data covers mainstream schools, academies and special schools.
- Aca (= Academic) means the student reached the Level 2 threshold at KS4 without including vocational qualification achievements; Voc (=vocational) means the threshold was only reached when the achievement of vocational qualifications is included
- Analysis considers students on roll in January of Year 12 and whether they are on roll January of Year 13 (using school census returns)
- Numbers in brackets on charts denote number of students

Source: Mime Consulting, 2013

23. What Figure 5 shows is that higher academic attainment at Key Stage 4 is a strong predictor of 17+ participation. A total of 87 per cent of learners with 5 A*-C GCSE only grades plus English and Maths attained in 2010 were still in the school sixth form in Year 13 in January 2012. This compared with 62 per cent who attained 5 A*-C GCSE grades or vocational equivalents. Lower attaining learners were more likely to leave the sixth form before the January of Year 13 except those with below Level 1 attainment who may not have had the resources to make a move at the end of Year 12. However, what Figure 5 also shows is that high attainers at Key Stage 4 (those with 5+ GCSE A*-C grades in GCSE only and/or with English and Maths) are the single largest leavers group at 17+, over 50 per cent by volume. This, we assume, is the result of the 'AS cull' and the weeding out of those learners who did not attain sufficiently high AS grades in Year 12. It is clear, therefore, that attaining 5+ GCSEs including English and Maths is not an absolute guarantee of remaining in a school sixth form.

Figure 6. The impact of 8+ GCSE A*-C only compared with 5+ on 17+ participation in schools

2) Table shows Year 12 students on roll in a school in January 2011, and whether they were in the same school in January 2012. Split by GCSE A*-C grades achieved (not inc. equivalencies, irrespective of Eng & Maths). Charts show these totals analysed in different ways.

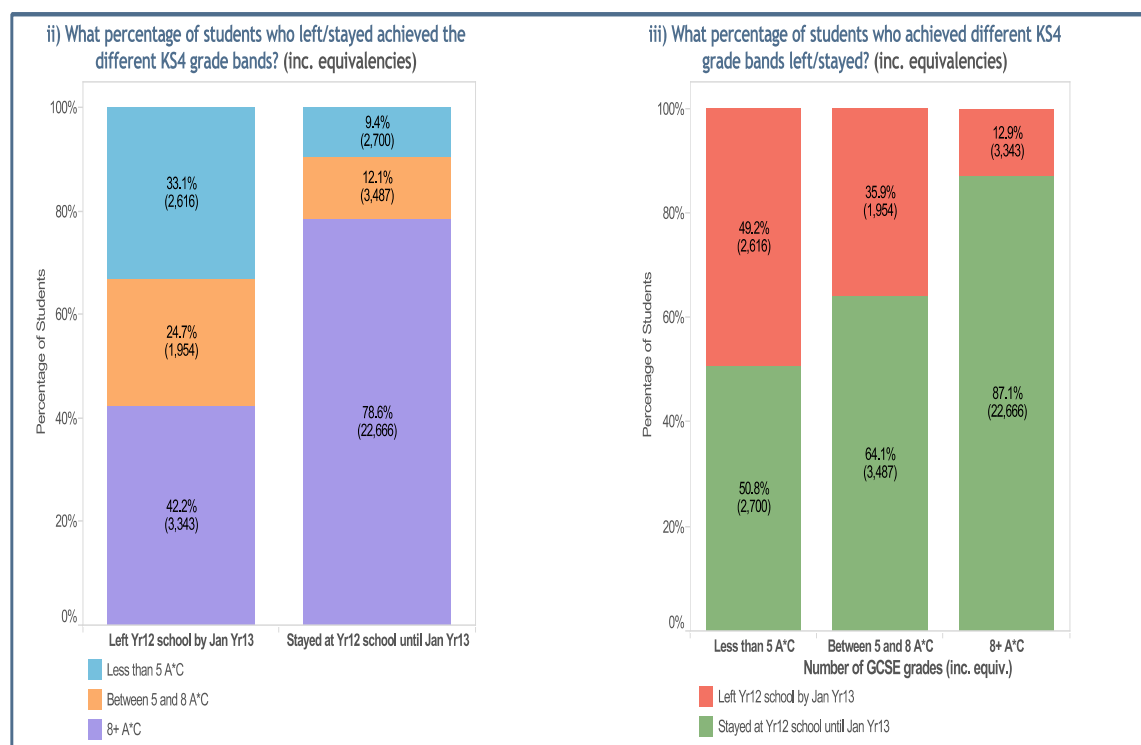


IMPORTANT - Data covers mainstream schools, academies and special schools.
- Aca (= Academic) means the student reached the Level 2 threshold at KS4 without including vocational qualification achievements; Voc (=vocational) means the threshold was only reached when the achievement of vocational qualifications is included
- Analysis considers students on roll in January of Year 12 and whether they are on roll January of Year 13 (using school census returns)
- Numbers in brackets on charts denote number of students

Source: Mime Consulting, 2013

24. Figure 6 reports the impact of the attainment of 8+ GCSE A*-C grades compared with 5+ and fewer than 5 A*-C grades at GCSE. Over 90 per cent of those learners who had attained 8+ GCSE only A*-C grades were still in the school sixth form in Year 13 compared with just over 70 per cent who had attained above the 5+ GCSE threshold, but fell short of the 8+ benchmark. This finding is in line with the Youth Cohort Study that showed that the attainment of the minimum 5+ GCSE threshold was not a guarantee of retention or successful completion in post-16 Level 3 study. High achievers at GCSE (8+ and 5+ GCSEs A*-C) still constitute the largest group of leavers during or at the end of Year 12 by volume.

Figure 7. The impact of 8+ GCSE A*-C grades or equivalent compared with 5+ on 17+ participation in schools



Source: Mime Consulting, 2013

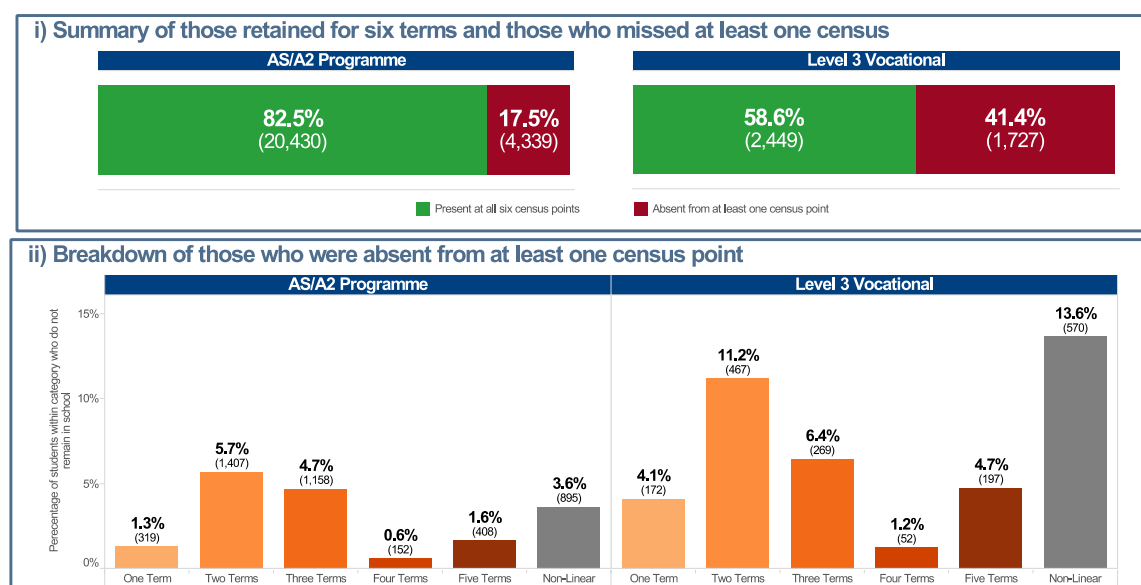
25. Taken together, Figures 5, 6 and 7 suggest that the attainment of 5 or more A*-C grades in GCSE only, inclusive of English and Maths or 8+ or more A*-C grades in GCSEs or vocational equivalents, are influential in reducing the chances of leaving school or dropping out of a two-year post-16 programme in the same school. Both dimensions of attainment deliver well over 80 per cent chance of sustained post-16 participation compared with 62 per cent for those with only five or more GCSE A*-C grades or equivalent. However, high attainers at GCSE (5-8+ GCSE A*-C or equivalent) remain the largest group of Year 12 leavers.

17+ retention in Level 3 academic and vocational programmes in schools

26. Data reported in Figure 8 suggest that Level 3 vocational programmes have much lower retention rates than A Levels. Just under 60 per cent of learners on vocational programmes in schools were present at all six census points compared with over 80 per cent in AS/A2 programmes. Moreover, there appears to be a particular difference in dropping out part way through the first year. The reasons for this may be because those learners on Level 3 vocational programmes have a lower GCSE attainment profile and are therefore more likely to find Level 3 study a challenge than those on A Levels. They may also be more prone to the lure of the

labour market or wish to take a vocational course at a further education college. Overall, a total of 78 per cent of learners in school sixth forms from both types of courses stayed on for the full two years.

Figure 8. Retention in A Level and Level 3 vocational programmes schools in 2011



Source: Mime Consulting, 2013

17+ participation and retention in London: summary

27. The main conclusions arising from an analysis of 17+ participation and retention in London are:

- London 17+ participation rates are slightly higher than the national average.
- 17+ retention in London schools' A Level programmes (82%) is considerably greater than in their Level 3 vocational programmes (59%).
- Just under a quarter of Year 12 Level 3 starters 'dropped out' of sixth form before 18.
- Drop out from Level 3 programmes in schools was primarily at the end of Year 12, particularly for vocational courses. This also includes those students with high Key Stage 4 attainment.
- The attainment of GCSE English and Maths at grades A*-C is highly important in sustained 17+ participation.
- Broad attainment at Key Stage 4 (e.g. 8+ A*-C grades or equivalent including English and Maths) delivers 87 per cent chance of completing a Level 3

programme. This is marginally exceeded by the anticipated outcomes of 8+ A*-C GCSE only grades including English and Maths (91%).

London Level 3 attainment outcomes

Level 3 performance: London compared nationally

28. This section of the report discusses the important issue of Level 3 attainment¹⁵. The average Level 3 points score per student in London (750) is below the national average (775) and this pertains to both Inner London (709) and Outer London (765). The lowest performing borough is Greenwich (646) and the highest is Sutton (876). However, London is just above the national average on three other indicators listed below:

- The percentage of students attaining at least two substantial Level 3 qualifications, where London scores 97.8 per cent compared with a national average of 97.7 cent. There is little noticeable difference between Inner and Outer London on this indicator.
- The percentage of students attaining 3 A*-A grades or better at A Level or applied equivalent is 11 per cent across London as a whole compared with 10.5 per cent nationally. The difference between Inner and Outer London is more marked on this indicator, with Inner London standing at 8.5 per cent and Outer London at 11.9 per cent. What is most striking is the inter-borough differences, ranging from 1.7 per cent in Islington to 26.2 per cent in Kensington and Chelsea.
- A new measure is the percentage of students achieving AAB or better in A Level or equivalent awards. These grades play an important role in access to research intensive universities. Here London is above the national average at 18.6 compared to 17.6 per cent. As might be expected from the previous figures, there is a difference in performance between Inner (15.8%) and Outer London (19.5%) as well as strong inter-borough variation¹⁶.

¹⁵ The data in this section relates to all state-funded school students

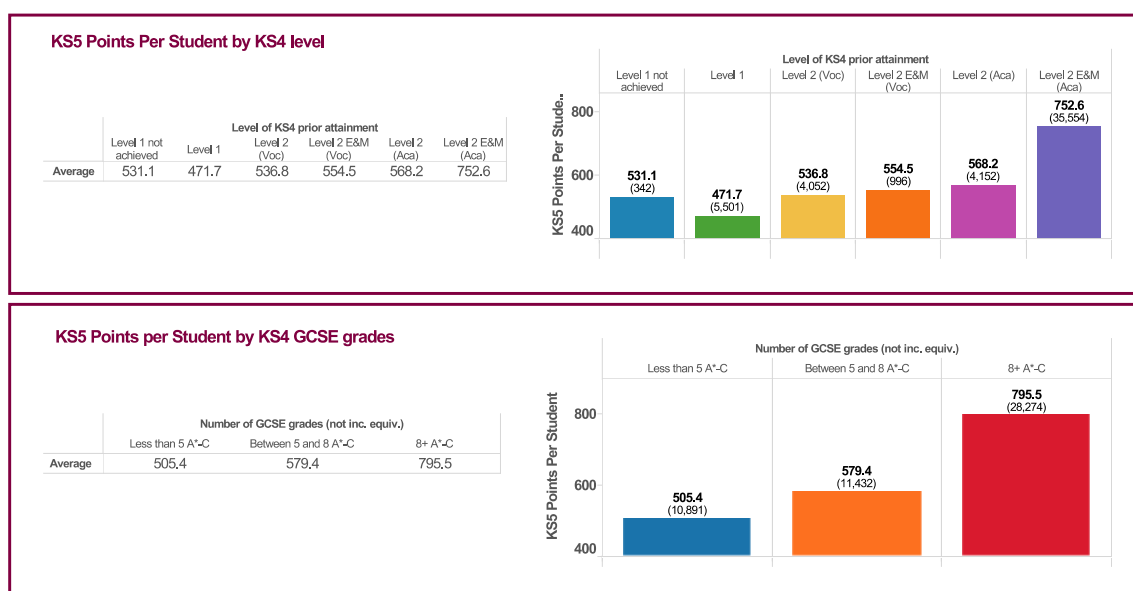
¹⁶ The source for all above data is DfE 2013b

The impact of Key Stage 4 attainment on Level 3 outcomes in schools

29. In the previous section, we analysed the impact of Key Stage 4 attainment on 17+ participation. Here we analyse its impact on Level 3 outcomes. Data reported in Figure 9 suggest that the effects of high levels of Key Stage 4 attainment have an even more dramatic impact on Level 3 attainment than they do on 17+ participation. The attainment of 5 GCSE only A*-C grades inclusive of English and Maths results in the average attainment of 752 Level 3 points (about 30 above the national average), while those without GCSE English and Maths and a mixed programme of 5+ GCSEs are 200+ points behind. The attainment of 8+ GCSE only A*-C grades including English and Maths results in an even higher average score of 795 points.

Figure 9. The impact of KS4 attainment Level 3 outcomes (schools)

1. Average number of KS5 points broken down by level of prior attainment at KS4.



IMPORTANT - Data covers level 3 qualifications at mainstream schools, academies, special schools and colleges. Data is unvalidated and analysis may therefore differ to published sources.
 - Aca (= Academic) means the student reached the Level 2 threshold at KS4 without including vocational qualification achievements; Voc (=vocational) means the threshold was only reached when the achievement of vocational qualifications is included
 - Key Stage 5 points based on all Level 3 qualifications achieved in the 3 years after KS4 up to and including results achieved in Summer 2012
 - Numbers in brackets on charts denote number of students

Source: Mime Consulting, 2013

A comparison of 'stayers' and 'movers'

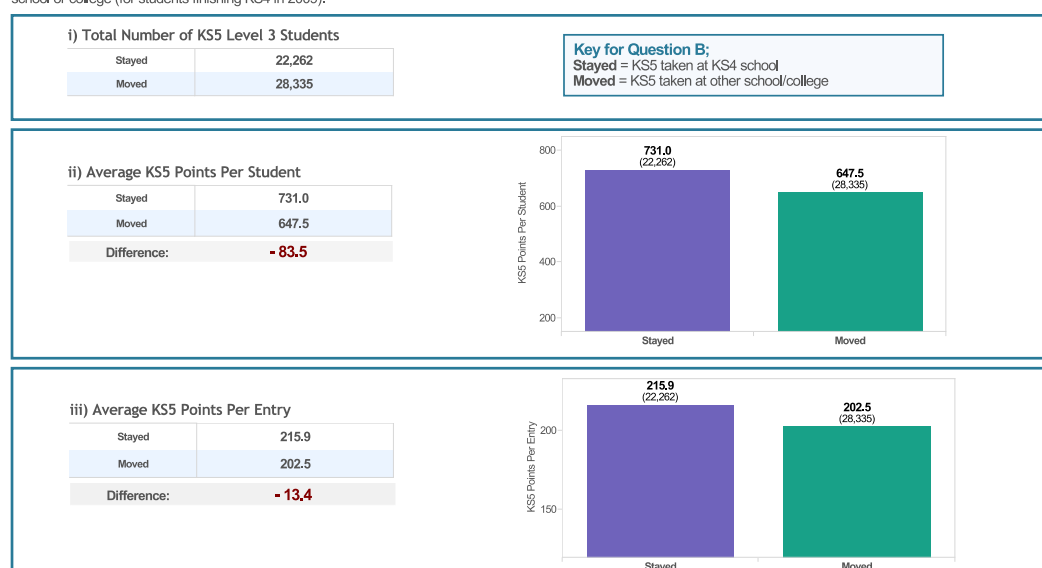
30. In collaboration with MIME Consulting, we also collected and analysed data on those who stayed on at school and those who decided to leave. Figure 10 suggests that those who stay in a school sixth form attain more highly at Level 3 post-16 than those who leave (731 points) compared with 675 for those who leave at the end of Year 11. Furthermore, stayers outperform movers for those who attain more highly at Key Stage 4 (i.e. 5 A*-C grades at GCSE including English and

Maths) – 785 points compared to 720 points. However, as Figure 11 shows, stayers' performance lags behind movers' performance in all the other prior attainment categories.

31. Figure 12 indicates that stayers with 8+ GCSE only A*-C grades attain more highly than movers (821 compared with 766) and reveals a dramatic gap between these students and those with between 5 and 8 GCSEs without English and Maths (573 and 583 respectively).

Figure 10. A comparison of 'stayers' and 'movers' - the effects of Key Stage 4 attainment on Level 3 outcomes

1) Summary tables show Level 3 KS5 performance of students who stay at the same school that they attended for KS4, compared with those who move to a different school or college (for students finishing KS4 in 2009).



IMPORTANT - Data covers level 3 qualifications of mainstream schools, academies, special schools and colleges. Data is unvalidated and analysis may therefore differ to published sources.
- Aca (= Academic) means the student reached the Level 2 threshold of KS4 without including vocational qualification achievements; Voc (=vocational) means the threshold was only reached when the achievement of vocational qualifications is included
- Key Stage 5 points based on all Level 3 qualifications achieved in the 3 years after KS4 up to and including results achieved in Summer 2012
- Numbers in brackets on charts denote number of students

Source: Mime Consulting, 2013

Figure 11. A comparison of 'stayers' and 'movers' - the effects of Key Stage 4 attainment on a range of qualifications outcomes

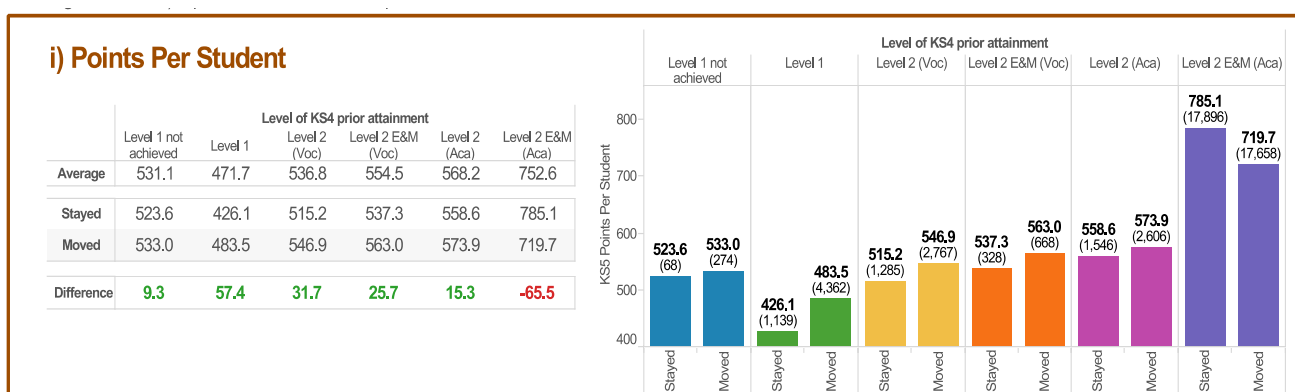
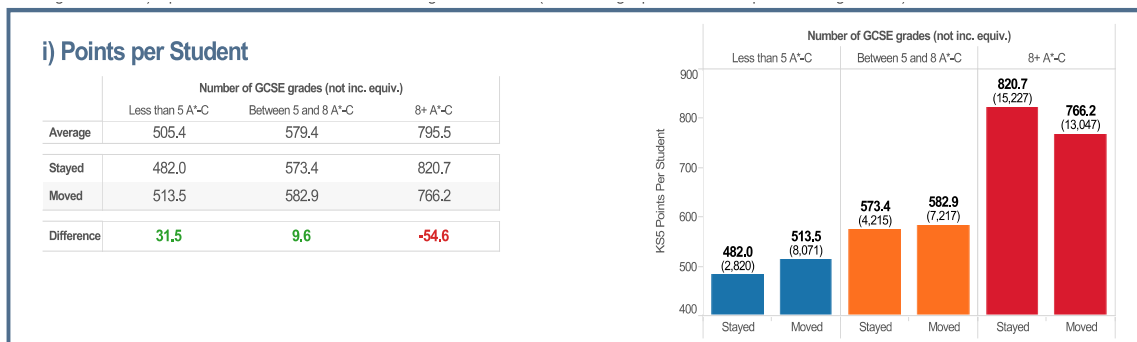


Figure 12. A comparison of 'stayers' & 'movers' – the effects of 8+ GCSE A*-C grades



Source: Mime Consulting, 2013

London Level 3 attainment outcomes: summary

32. Broader attainment at Key Stage 4 produces better outcomes post-16. The majority of London learners (65%) have at least 5 GCSE A*-C grades including maths and English and they score on average 753 points at Level 3. Those with 8+ GCSE A*-C grades including maths and English score on average 795 points. Highest performing students at Level 3 tend to be 'school stayers', although 'movers' perform more highly at all the other qualifications levels.

33. However, about 30 per cent of Level 3 learners in London schools do not have A*-C grades in GCSE English and Maths and while the LPUK data (LPUK, 2012) suggest that 15 per cent of this group attain three A Levels, they must do so with relatively low advanced level scores. Overall, this diverse group scores on average 540 points. It is probably this group that accounts for the overall London lag in this area.

17+ participation – progression from Level 2 to Level 3 post-16 in schools

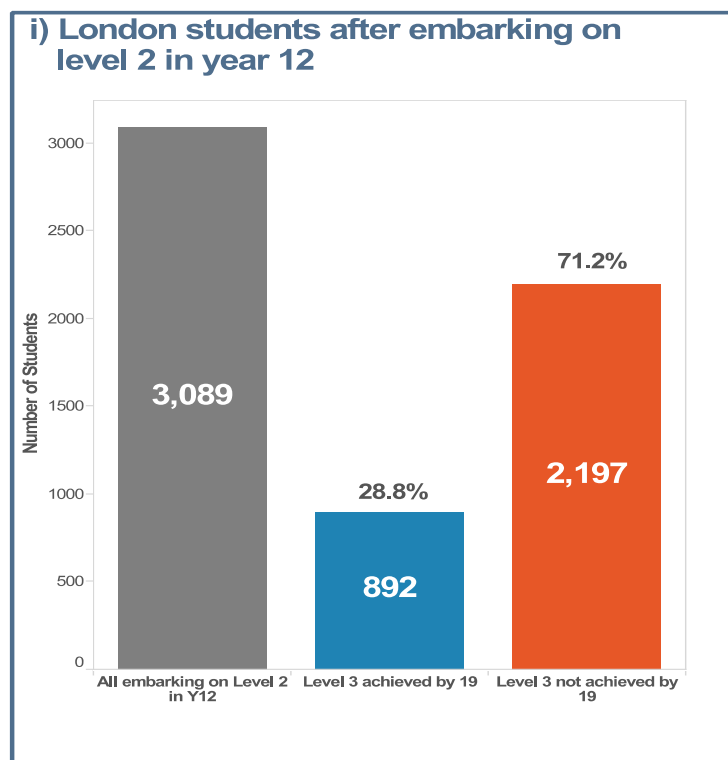
34. While the preceding analysis has focused on progression from Key Stage 4 to post-16 Level 3 study, the 17+ participation issue also includes that of Level 2 to Level 3 progression. As Figure 13 shows, less than 30 per cent of students embarking on Level 2 in Year 12 achieved Level 3 by 19. This finding, while

concerning, does not come as a surprise. A previous study¹⁷, suggested that this attrition is due to the cumulative effects of three factors:

- Drop-out during the Level 2 course (about 30 per cent).
- Non-achievement of Merit or Distinction grades that facilitate progress to Level 3 (50%).
- The pull of the casualised labour market and caring responsibilities at home.

35. However, there is a very noticeable borough based variation (14% to 56%). Not surprisingly, there are higher proportions of Level 2 learners in boroughs with higher levels of deprivation, but higher performing boroughs in post-16 Level 2 vocational qualifications are not the same as those with high performance in academic qualifications at Level 3. This might suggest that schools in those local authorities that work well with socially disadvantaged students pre-16 are the same boroughs that work well with Level 2 students post-16.

Figure 13. Level 2 to Level 3 progression in London



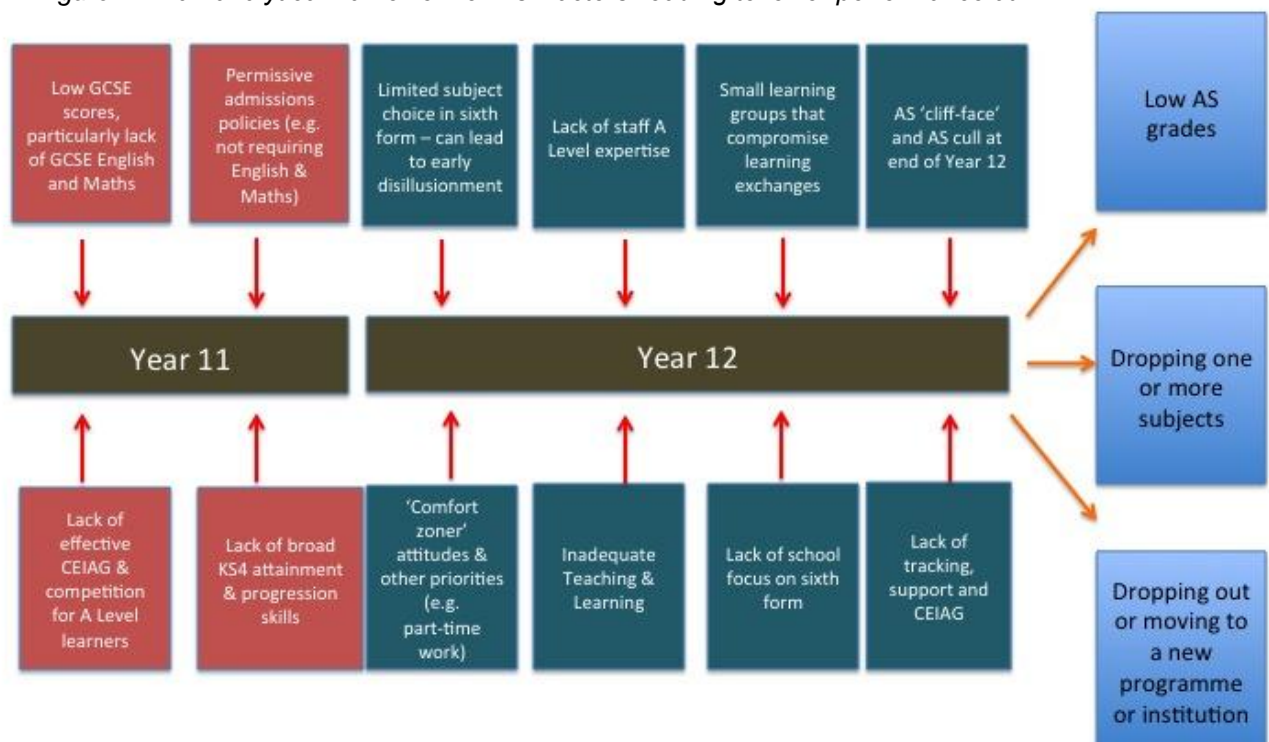
¹⁷ Spours, K., Hodgson, A., Brewer, J. and Barker, P. (2009)

C. The 17+ issue – factors and dynamics

1. As the previous data suggest, progression through the 14-19 phase is a process comprising a number of steps that reflect the complex relationship between learner course choices and motivation; levels of attainment; institutional policies and practices regarding admission, teaching, learning and progression and the nature of the qualifications themselves. For a minority of high performing learners 14-19 progression is a relatively simple process of moving between Key Stage 4 and post-16 study in a single institution. For others it is more akin to a set of steps or hurdles, each of which has to be negotiated.

2. Based on the data discussed earlier in this report, discussions with 14-19 local authority leads in London and previous studies on the 14-19 phase¹⁸, we have devised an initial framework for analysing the various factors that lead to less than optimum outcomes at 17+ - low grades; dropping one or more subjects at Level 3 or dropping out of the programme altogether. Figure 14 below focuses on the 17+ issue in relation to A Levels both because this is the majority form of participation and because this is the area that holds the most data. The two major categories of factors are 'pre-16 readiness for post-16 study' in Year 11 and the 'initial experience of advanced level study' in Year 12.

Figure 14 – an analytical framework of 'risk factors' leading to lower performance at 17+



¹⁸ Hodgson and Spours, 2013

Key Stage 4 and readiness for post-16 study

3. Reading Figure 14 from left to right, the first group of factors relate to Key Stage 4 and GCSE study. The Figure lists four major risk factors affecting readiness for Level 3 study post-16. The level of preparedness for post-16 study is becoming a critical factor as staying-on in education post-16 has become the norm and is now enshrined in legislation. Moreover, rising levels of GCSE or equivalent attainment have raised student aspirations to study A Levels at a time when these qualifications have become somewhat more difficult to attain (as a result of the 2008 reforms¹⁹). At the same time, there has been the growth in the number of school sixth forms in London with increased competition for A Level learners. In this context, while GCSE performance in London has improved significantly in recent years and London outperformed the other regions in 2012, it may not be as strong as it appears on the surface in terms of the preparedness of students for post-16 study.

4. *Minimal GCSE scores* – the data suggest a dramatically differing attainment prognosis for learners who just ‘creep over’ the GCSE 5 A*-C threshold, particularly those who have low scores in English and maths, compared with those who have attained more highly at Key Stage 4. Factors contributing to this phenomenon of just getting students to the main national benchmark at 16 include schools targeting the GCSE A*-C borderline and a potential tension between these institutional performance targets and the level of attainment, knowledge and skills required for effective participation in and progression to post-16 Level 3 courses, A Levels in particular. In addition, there has been the liberal use of vocational courses as alternatives to GCSEs at Key Stage 4 in some schools because of the ‘equivalences’ points they afforded to boost GCSE performance²⁰. This too has provided an inflated sense of learner preparedness for study at the next level up.

5. *Lack of progression readiness* - one of the reasons for the problems of 17+ participation is the degree of ‘preparedness for progression’ that Key Stage 4 has afforded students aiming for Level 3 study post-16. One way of calculating ‘preparedness for progression’ is by the ‘breadth’, ‘type’ and ‘volume’ of Level 2 attainment – i.e. whether a learner has attained GCSE English and Maths (*breadth*); whether the student has attained the five GCSE benchmark with or without vocational equivalent qualifications (*depth*); and whether Level 2 has been attained

¹⁹ The planned further reform of A Levels, with a reduction in modularity, a greater focus on synoptic assessment and external examination, is likely to continue this trend.

²⁰ This will no longer be the case because vocational/applied qualifications at Key Stage 4 will now only count as one GCSE regardless of their size.

across a high *volume* of subjects (i.e. grades of A*-C in 8+ subjects rather than the commonly accepted institutional benchmark for admission to Level 3 post-16 study of five subjects at GCSE at grades A*-C or equivalent). The data discussed in this report indicate is that 2010 London students were more likely to remain in the same school until the January of Year 13 if their KS4 attainment profile had breadth, depth and volume

6. *Permissive recruitment practices* - school sixth forms play an important role at 16+ and are on the increase in London. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that many of the new or small sixth forms are tempted to boost numbers by recruiting learners without strong GCSE profiles to a limited range of A Level courses. In London, which is culturally diverse, there are relatively high and traditional parental and learner aspirations, particularly in black and minority ethnic communities²¹. It is likely that these attitudes would lead to a preference for A Levels.

7. *Careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG)* - is not always as impartial or as informative as it should be (Ofsted, 2013), leading learners to opt for the most familiar qualifications and environment and to take on courses for which they are not adequately prepared. Previous research suggests that a particularly vulnerable group are 'middle attainers', who elect to continue into the school sixth form to take A Levels because of its familiarity and traditional offer. These relatively unmotivated learners, who take the line of least resistance by applying only to their own school sixth form may exhibit what has been termed 'comfort zoner' attitudes that compromise their commitment to the hard work and intellectual climb required for Level 3 study²².

8. *Policy changes may be leading to a narrower school sixth form curriculum* - the decline of Diploma provision and a reversion to more traditional A Levels in school sixth forms means that there is less Level 3 broad vocational provision (e.g. BTECs) available. While, as indicated above, these qualifications are not necessarily the first choice for learners and their parents, they may well lead to more successful outcomes at both 17+ and 18+.

²¹ Butler and Hamnett, 2011

²² Hodgson and Spours, 2013

The initial experience of post-16 advanced level study

9. Given the gap between Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications in the English system, it is not surprising that advanced level study is seen as challenging by many learners.

10. Data from a local study outside London suggested that the major decline in A Level participation takes place at the end of Year 12 (i.e. at 17+)²³. It also indicated that many of the learners who do leave at the end of Year 12 attempt to restart Level 3 study in broad vocational courses in a general further education college.

11. The dynamic of factors affecting the quality of 17+ participation and progression in relation to Level 3 qualifications includes:

- a. *The AS cliff-face* - AS Level comes as a shock to some students – many are not well prepared in terms of knowledge, skills or attitudes to study.
- b. *Part-time work* - some take up part-time work, which may clash with a more demanding curriculum and the time required to study outside the classroom. Moreover, this type of employment may appear more appealing than study when jobs are scarce and learners' successful attainment is not assured.
- c. *Lack of adequate support for the more marginal A Level learners* – successful A Level teaching requires a particular kind of expertise and experience that is not the same as teaching for GCSE or at Key Stage 3. In new sixth forms this expertise and experience is not always present and there may be a small number of staff who engage in this activity, providing little peer support. Until recently during school inspections Ofsted has tended to focus less on the sixth form than on other aspects of the school and this has resulted in a concentration on Key Stage 4 rather than post-16. The situation for teachers who teach A level in the sixth form has not been helped by constant revisions to specifications/syllabuses and changes in the type of students who are entering A Level study with a wider range of attainment levels than in the past. According to 14-19 local authority leads in London, there is often an issue with teachers not being able to adequately differentiate their teaching to meet the needs of these more diverse student groups. Moreover, in some institutions, performance data are not used adequately and monitoring and tracking of students is not carried out sufficiently rigorously. In this context it

²³ Hodgson and Spours, 2013

is perhaps not surprising that the more marginal A Level learners do not attain highly at AS Level and are thus at risk of being excluded from A2 or decide for themselves to drop out at the end of Year 12.

- d. *Limited subject choice* – small sixth forms, unless they work in partnership with others, cannot provide the full range of A Level subjects and students in these institutions may well not have been able to take the three or four subjects that they would ideally like to study. Furthermore, as reported earlier, there is a very big step up from GCSE to AS Level and the type of learning is very different. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that some students in Year 12 become disillusioned with their AS choices (often having received inappropriate advice in Year 11). In many smaller institutions there is little opportunity for mixed general and vocational study at Level 3 post-16 or for a Level 2/Level 3 mix of study to help with the AS gradient.
- e. *Relatively poor 17+ CEIAG* - those young Londoners who continue to study A Levels in Year 12 and experience disappointing AS examination results then face a difficult decision about what to do at 17+, often with less CEIAG available to them than they received at 16+.
- f. *AS 'cull'* - at this point learner actions can be influenced by school policy - some select out the 17+ students who have low AS grades²⁴ while others allow them to continue, albeit with a modified or entirely different programme. In the latter case this may represent a scaling down of student ambitions and leads eventually to the lower cumulative point scores at A level discussed earlier in this paper.

12. The accumulation of the Year 11 and Year 12 risk factors for a proportion of London learners can lead to three outcomes at 17+ – low AS grades; dropping one or more subjects; dropping out or moving to a new programme or institution. The first two outcomes compromise final cumulative A Level scores. The third outcome leads to a disrupted and lengthened post-16 experience.

²⁴ Rowley (2013) reviewed the selective practices of independent and state schools at the end of Year 12.

D. Conclusion

1. In the era of Raising of the Participation Age it is vital that young Londoners participate, progress and attain between the ages of 14-19 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. The main reason for this study is to understand why London does not perform better than the rest of the country in Level 3 study post-16 given its strong attainment profile pre-16.
2. The research so far suggests that broad attainment at Key Stage 4 is the best predictor of success in post-16 study and that young people need adequate preparation prior to embarking on Level 3 programmes. However, we have also identified that there are a number of areas where schools need to improve their practice in order to reduce the risk of drop-out, drop-down and low attainment in Level 3 study post-16.
3. While the research has highlighted a number of interesting patterns in relation to participation, attainment and progression in London, investigation into the '17+ issue' is far from complete. The discussion has been limited primarily to Level 3 study and to schools. We need to know more about the role of colleges and vocational qualifications post-16 and the destinations of those who move course at the end of Year 12.
4. In addition, it would be useful to examine the patterns related to certain groups (e.g. middle attainers) whom we suspect struggle to successfully engage with A Level study; the impact of the 'poverty penalty'²⁵ and the possible widening gaps between different socio-economic groups post-16; and the impact of institutional effectiveness post-16.
5. However, we are aware that this type of quantitative data will only go so far in explaining what happens to young people in London between the ages of 16 and 19. It will be important to supplement it with qualitative evidence in order to both test out the risk factors highlighted in Figure 14 and to explore the interaction between them. This will require an in-depth study of a small number of boroughs together with information gathering about institutional policies and practices.

²⁵ Hodgson and Spours, 2012

6. During the period of the research a number of possible practical developments for improving 14+ participation, progression and attainment were suggested in our meeting with 14-19 borough leads, which need to be discussed in greater detail. These included:

- a. Strategies for building in progression skills at Key Stage 4 (e.g. encouraging breadth and volume of study and attainment pre-16; the possible introduction of a Level 2 Extended Project Qualification which supports the development of independent learning for progression to Level 3 study).
- b. Reviewing progression thresholds to post-16 study and improving CEIAG for Years 10 and 11, using destinations data.
- c. Three-year study programmes; mixing of study post-16 and the introduction of level 2.5 programmes for those students who struggle with the gradient between Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications.
- d. A focus on A Level teaching and learning and their underpinning support systems including improved CEIAG at 17+ and more rigorous monitoring and tracking of students in Years 12 and 13.
- e. Raising performance through partnership working to provide greater choice of programmes of study, to increase teacher expertise, to improve access to specialist facilities and to provide a community of practice for professional development.

References

- Butler, T. and Hamnett, C. (2011) *Gentrification, Ethnicity and Education in East London* Bristol: Policy Press.
- DfE (Department for Education) (2013a) *Participation in education, training and employment by 16- to 18-year-olds in England, end 2012*, Statistical First Release 22/2013 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/participation-in-education-training-and-employment-by-16-to-18-year-olds-in-england-end-2012> (accessed 17 October 2013).
- DfE (2013b) *A Level and other Level 3 results in England: academic year 2012 to 2013 (provisional)* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-level-and-other-level-3-results-in-england-academic-year-2012-to-2013-provisional> (accessed 18 October 2013).
- DfE (2013c) *Level 2 and 3 attainment by young people in England. Measured using matched administrative data: Attainment by age 19 in 2012* Statistical First Release 13/2013 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/attainment-by-young-people-in-england-measured-using-matched-administrative-data-by-age-19-in-2012> (accessed 18 October 2013).
- Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2012) *Young people's participation, progression and transition to higher study and work: A London perspective* London Councils; Institute of Education
- Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2013) *Middle attainers and 14–19 progression in England: half-served by New Labour and now overlooked by the Coalition?* *British Educational Research Journal*, DOI: 10.1002/berj.3091.
- Learning and Skills Council (LSC) (2009) *London Strategic Analysis for Young People 2009-10* London: LSC.
- Learning Plus UK (LPUK) (2012) *Travel to Success: Pan London Report* Reading: Learning Plus UK.
- London Councils (2013) *Participation, Achievement and Progression: The Priorities for Young People's Education and Training in London 2013/14*. <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policylobbying/children/education14to19/14-19Summer2013Update.htm> (accessed 17 October 2012).
- Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (2013) *Going in the right direction? Careers guidance in schools from September 2012* London: Ofsted.

- Rowley, T. (2013) We shoot a few to encourage the others *Daily Telegraph*, 30 August, p. 23.
- Spours, K., Hodgson, A., Brewer, J. and Barker, P. (2009) Improving progression for younger learners in further education colleges in England *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 61 (4) 431-446.
- Spours, K., West, J., Stanton, G. and Vesey, R. (2012) *The overlooked middle: in danger of becoming the new NEETs in 14-19 education and training?* Centre discussion paper, Centre for Post-14 Research and Innovation, Institute of Education, University of London.
- Wolf, A. (2011) *Review of vocational education: the Wolf Report*. London: DfE.
- Wyness, G. (2012) *London schooling: lessons from the Capital*. London: Centre Forum.