

## [The Social Mobility Commission's State of the Nation report](#) (Published November 2017)

### Introduction

The Social Mobility Commission, an advisory non-departmental public body has produced its fifth annual report. The report states that socio-economic inequality cannot be understood as 'a simple north-south divide'. Instead, the report identifies 'hotspots' and 'coldspots' found in almost every part of the country. The report ranks all 324 local authorities in England in terms of their social mobility prospects for someone from a disadvantaged background using a range of 16 indicators for every major life stage, from early years through to working lives. The results revealed that London dominates the hotspots — areas with high levels of social mobility — whereas the East and West Midlands are the worst performing regions. The North East region currently has the lowest performance on the youth social mobility indicators, indicating the worst opportunities for disadvantaged youngsters.

### Overview of the Sunderland and North East Picture

Sunderland's overall Social Mobility Rank out of 324 local authorities is 86, this comprises of four sub-rankings:

- Early Years Rank = 12
- School Age Rank = 54
- Youth Rank = 234
- Adult Rank = 247

Consistent with Sunderland's picture the North East performs well for disadvantaged children early in life, but does worse than other regions in later life stages. Early outcomes in Sunderland do not always translate into success in adolescence and beyond.

- **Early Years Rank - 12**

Good outcomes for disadvantaged children have recently been bolstered by the region's effective roll-out of the free education offer for two-year-olds from low-income families. Uptake in Sunderland is 75%, compared with 81% in the North East and 71% nationally.

Ofsted ratings for both preschools and primary schools are positive in the North East. Stockton is ranked first nationally and Sunderland fifth nationally, this is based on the percentage of nursery providers rated as 'outstanding' or 'good.'

Despite the high percentage of outstanding and good nursery providers, the Sunderland ranking for the percentage of children eligible for free school meals (FSM) achieving a 'good level of development' at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage is ranked as 162. Only Hartlepool and Newcastle perform better in the North East, ranking 98 and 153 respectively. Interestingly Stockton which ranks first nursery provision ranks the worst in the region at 308.

The Commission are clear that positive development outcomes for disadvantaged children in the early years are a result of (i) strong promotion and take-up of the free childcare offer, (ii) high-quality preschool settings, (iii) effective training and advice for childcare workers, (iv) evidence-based support for parents on home learning, and (v) integrated family services. They suggest the role of LAs is crucial, particularly to focus on disadvantaged children as otherwise changes to child benefits and government-funded childcare can both have negative impacts.

- **School Age Rank - 54**

Sunderland performs well at the percentage of children eligible for FSM attending a primary school rated 'outstanding' or 'good' by Ofsted, ranked 29 nationally, second best in the region (North Tyneside is ranked 9<sup>th</sup>). Overall in the city we have 83 primary schools, of which 12 are rated as outstanding, and 64 rated as good.

The ranking for the percentage of children eligible for FSM attending a secondary school rated 'outstanding' or 'good' by Ofsted is 241 in Sunderland. There are 18 secondary schools in the city, only one is outstanding (St Anthony's RC Girls Academy), and 8 are rated as good. Regionally, South Tyneside performs best on this measure, ranking 61 nationally.

Sunderland has a relatively high percentage of children eligible for FSM achieving at least the expected level in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2 (44% in 2016 and 50% in 2017), which ranks Sunderland at 29 nationally, third highest in the region (Gateshead and Redcar and Cleveland are ranked higher at 23 and 24 respectively). *The attainment gap between FSM and non-FSM in Sunderland was 21 and 23 percentage points in 2016 and 2017 respectively, this compares to 21 and 22 percentage points gap nationally. The gap in 2017 in Sunderland has widened.*

While 46% of children on free school meals in the North East (2017) achieve the expected standard at key stage 2, the average Attainment 8 score per pupil on free school meals is only 37.8, compared with the national score of 51.6 for all other children. Sunderland performs third highest in the region ranking 107 nationally.

- **Youth Rank - 234**

The effect of postcode on prospects is more acute at this life stage. In youth, the North East region currently has the lowest performance on the youth social mobility indicators, indicating the worst opportunities for disadvantaged youngsters. The North East has the worst drop-out rates after GCSE and the worst entry rates to selective university for disadvantaged young people. Until recently, it also had the worst careers support in schools and colleges.

Sunderland's ranking on these indicators is not good. Sunderland and Hartlepool have the lowest percentages of disadvantaged<sup>1</sup> young people at age 15 entering higher education at a selective university by the age of 19 in the region (both ranking 318 of 324 nationally)

Despite having a university the city ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> worst in the region for the percentage of young people eligible for FSM at age 15 entering higher education by the age of 19 (ranking 22)

Whilst the average points score per entry for young people eligible for FSM at age 15 taking A-level or equivalent qualifications is quite high (ranking 64), the percentage of young people eligible for FSM at age 15 achieving 2 or more A-levels or equivalent qualifications by the age of 19 is less positive (ranking 201) and the percentage of young people eligible for FSM that are not in education, employment or training (NEET) after completing KS4 ranks at 201 nationally

- **Adult Rank - 247**

Problems continue into working lives in the North East – with low levels of pay and the second lowest employment levels in the country. Compared with all people on low pay in Britain, residents of the North East are the most likely to be continuously stuck in low pay over a decade. In terms of living conditions, house prices are, on average, more affordable than in other regions, but the

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<sup>1</sup> Disadvantage status is given as in year 11. Disadvantaged pupils are defined as those who were eligible for free school meals at any point in the previous six years or having been looked after by their local authority. These are the pupils who would have attracted the pupil premium when in year 11. Pupils with no key stage 4 record were not known to be disadvantaged in year 11 and are included in all other pupils.

average rate of home ownership for families is the lowest in the country, except for London. Sunderland ranks 234 on the percentage of families with children who own their home.

Sunderland ranks badly on the proportion of well-paid jobs, having the lowest percentage in the region of people that live in the local area who are in managerial and professional occupations (rank 316); and ranking third worst for median weekly salary in the region (rank 254). The city ranks average regionally on the percentage of jobs that are paid less than the Living Wage Foundation living wage (rank 149).

Sunderland does perform well on average house prices compared to median annual salary of employees who live in the local area (rank 16 nationally), with only Durham and Hartlepool ranking higher (8 and 13 respectively).

- **Social Mobility Commission general observations**

Part of the explanation for poor social mobility in youth and working lives in the North East is that the region comprises many isolated towns and former industrial areas. Across England, these areas struggle most at social mobility because new industries have been slow to replace mining and manufacturing, while poor transport links make opportunities difficult to reach.

Outcomes vary widely across the region – including between seemingly similar districts. In Darlington, for example, less than half of disadvantaged pupils attend a secondary school that is rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’, while in South Tyneside more than 90 per cent do – and South Tyneside’s Attainment 8 score per pupil on free school meals is accordingly 5.5 points higher. The worst-performing district at secondary level, Northumberland, is the least deprived but is the most sparsely populated, making it more challenging to deliver support for dispersed disadvantaged youngsters. Northumberland suffers from the worst key stage 4 performance, the highest drop-out rates after GCSE, and among the lowest rates of university entry for the region.

Despite all this, the region has made some progress in recent years. Youth unemployment has halved since 2014 and adult unemployment has also fallen in that time. This is partly due to the region’s investment in supporting the transition from school to work. For example, the North East Local Enterprise Partnership area is coordinating delivery of the Gatsby careers support benchmarks. A full 60 per cent of local schools have committed to achieving the benchmarks, compared with 4 per cent nationally.