



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

Paper 02/17

6th December 2016

NIAR 505-16

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Children and Young People's Strategic Indicators

1 Introduction

In 2006 the former Office of the First and deputy First Minister published *Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge: A ten-year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006-2016*.¹

The strategy aimed to ensure that, by 2016 'all our children and young people are fulfilling their potential'. It set out five high level outcomes, each of which included a number of indicators. The outcomes were:

- Healthy;
- Economic and environmental well-being;
- Enjoying, learning and achieving;
- Positive and valued contribution; and
- Living in safety and with stability.

¹ Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (2006) *Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge: A ten-year strategy for children and young people in Northern Ireland 2006-2016* Belfast: Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The strategic indicators aim to allow for measurement of the strategy's success. On the 17th November 2016 The Department of Education (who now has overall responsibility for the strategy) published data on the indicators.²

This briefing paper considers a number of the educational indicators within the 'enjoying, learning and achieving' outcome, based on this data. It also employs other data from the Department of Education, including school performance data.³

2 Educational attainment

Primary

Two of the strategic indicators are based on primary key stage assessment outcomes. In 2012 the Department introduced new assessment arrangements using Levels of Progression.⁴ These assessments differ and cannot be compared directly with results prior to 2012.⁵

In addition, a period of industrial action in response to Levels of Progression assessments has led to limited uptake of the tests, undermining analysis of the results.⁶ As such, robust benchmarking is not possible and the data must be treated with caution.

Prior to 2012, there had been a general upward trend in the proportion of pupils achieving level 4 or above in key stage 2 English and maths, rising to 83% of pupils in English and 84% in maths in 2011/12.

GCSE

The strategic indicators show that there has been a year-on-year increase in the proportion of year 12 pupils obtaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, increasing from 61% in 2004/05 to 83% in 2014/15. However, wider data on year 12 pupils draws a broader picture of results for some groups of students in 2014/15, for example:⁷

- Almost all (98%) year 12 students in grammars achieved this benchmark, compared to less than three-quarters (72%) of their non-grammar counterparts;
- A total of 70% of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM) achieved five GCSEs at grades A*-C, compared to 87% of those without the entitlement;

² Department of Education (2016) *Children and Young People's Strategic Indicators 2016 Update* [online] Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/children-and-young-peoples-strategic-indicators-2016-update>

³ Department of Education *School performance* [online] Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-performance>

⁴ Legislation.gov.uk (2012) *The Education (Levels of Progression for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012* [online] Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2012/444/pdfs/nisr_20120444_en.pdf

⁵ Department of Education (2016) *Statistical Bulletin 8/2016: Children and Young People's Strategic Indicators* Bangor: Department of Education

⁶ Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (2015) *CCEA Annual Report 2014/15* Belfast: CCEA

⁷ Department of Education *School performance* [online] Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-performance>

- When including maths and English, 67% of all pupils achieved five GCSEs at grades A*-C, while just under half (47%) of non-grammar students and 46% of students entitled to FSM did so; and
- There were also differences by gender, with 42% of boys entitled to FSM achieving five GCSEs at grades A*-C compared to 50% of their female counterparts.

Over this period there has also been an overall increase in the proportion of year 12 pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-G, from 89% to 98% of all pupils, and from 82% to 97% of pupils at non-grammar schools.

A level

At A level there has been little change in the proportion of students achieving three or more A levels at grades A*-C or equivalent, rising from 62% in 2004/05 to 65% each year between 2009/10 and 2014/15.

Again, the wider data⁸ provides a more mixed picture, with just under half (48%) of non-grammar students achieving three or more A levels at grades A*-C, and 50% of pupils entitled to FSM doing so.

Educational indicators

The OECD reports that the targets used to evaluate the education system in Northern Ireland have limited scope. It notes that while student achievement information is a valid outcome measure, such outcomes are often linked to a range of factors outside government's control, and therefore cannot be simply attributed to government action.⁹

Around the world, many countries complement performance data with a wide range of education indicators, based on demographic, administrative and contextual data collected from schools. In addition, international benchmarking is becoming increasingly common.¹⁰

The Children and Young People's Strategic Indicators on educational attainment do not include value-added measures which can take account of students' prior achievement or socio-economic background (a key factor in educational outcomes). Such measures would allow for a more accurate measurement of the value the education system has added.

⁸ Department of Education *School performance* [online] Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-performance>

⁹ Shewbridge, C., Hulshof, M., Nusche, D., Stenius Staehr, L. (2014) *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Northern Ireland* OECD Publishing

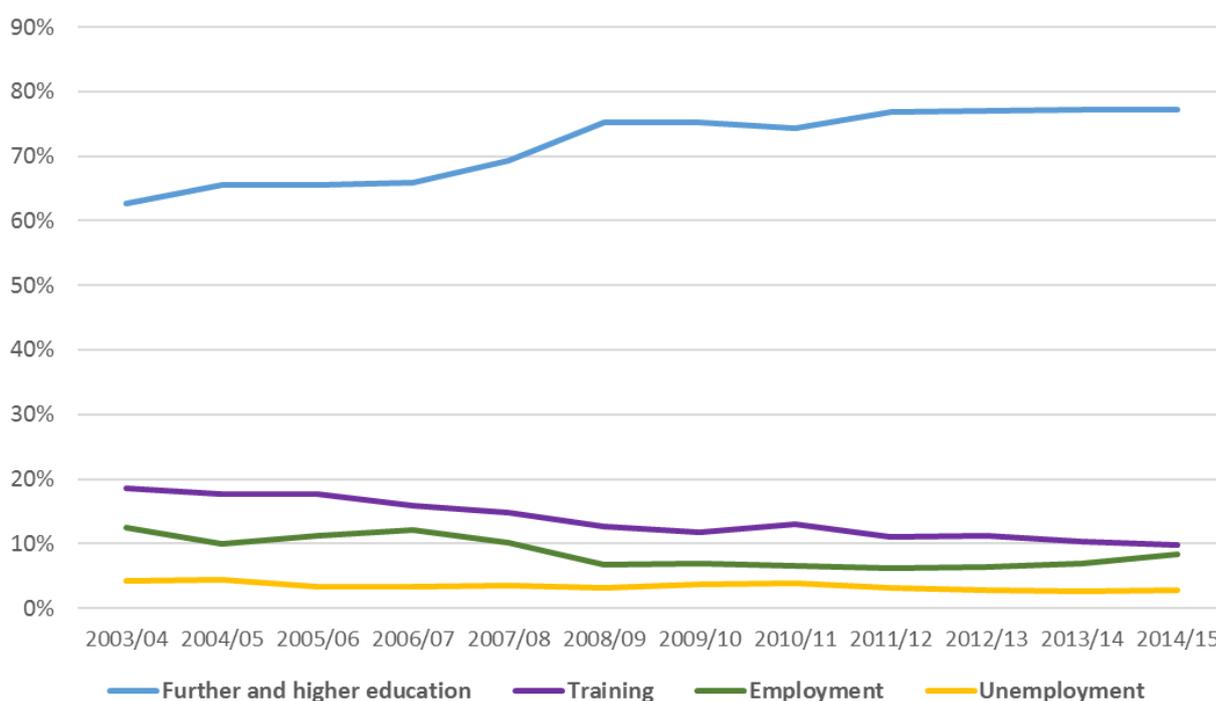
¹⁰ OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment* OECD Publishing

3 Destinations of school leavers

Over the past 12 years there has been an upward trend in the proportion of school leavers who progress further and higher education, rising from 62.7% in 2003/04 to 77.3% in 2014/15.

This period has seen an overall decline in the proportion of students entering training or employment, although in 2014/15 there was an increase in the proportion entering employment from the previous year. Figure 1 below illustrates these findings.

Figure 1: Destinations of school leavers, 2003/04 to 2014/15



Drawing on data from the school leavers' survey, there is a large disparity in the destinations of school leavers from different groups. In 2014/15:¹¹

- Grammar students were more likely to progress to further and higher education (91% compared to 68% of non-grammar students);
- Grammar school leavers were more likely to attend higher education (70% compared to 23% of non-grammar students);
- Non-grammar students were more likely to continue to further education (45% compared to 22% of grammar students);
- Catholic school leavers were more likely to attend a higher education institution (45% compared to 39% of Protestants); and

¹¹ Department of Education (2016) *Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers 2014/15* Bangor: Department of Education

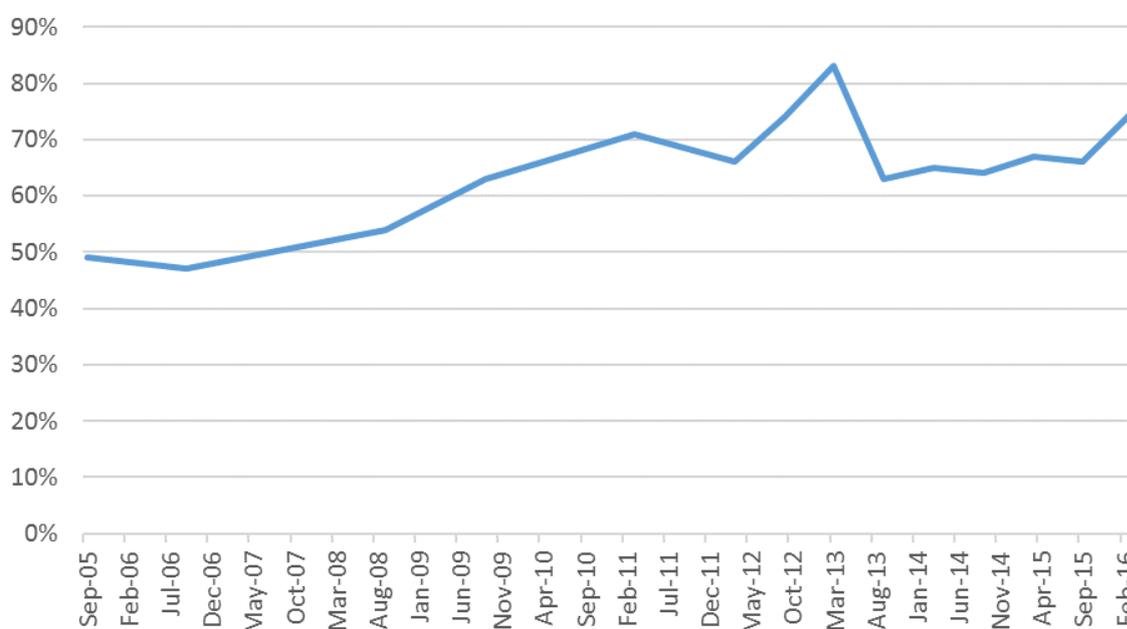
- Pupils entitled to FSM were much less likely to attend higher education (22% compared to 49% of those without FSM entitlement).

4 Looked after children

Educational outcomes for looked after children are significantly poorer than for those of other children, particularly at post-primary.¹² Contributing factors include placement and school changes, type and length of placement and access to high quality teaching.¹³

One of the *Children and Young People's Strategic Indicators* shows a fluctuating picture of the proportion of qualifying¹⁴ looked after children in education, training and employment, within an overall upward trend, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Percentage of qualifying looked after young people in education, training and employment



Research highlights the complex challenges many looked after children face. In light of this, the evidence suggests that an emphasis on progress, rather than on outputs, is likely to provide a more realistic picture of the achievements of the care system and the value government has added.¹⁵

¹² Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2015) *Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2013-14, Statistical Bulletin* Belfast: DHSSPS

¹³ Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J. et al. (2015) *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data* Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education: University of Oxford

¹⁴ Young people looked after for any period less than 13 weeks since aged 14 which may include a period of being looked after whilst 16 or 17 years old; young people aged 16 or 17 who have been looked after for more than 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who are still looked after; young people aged 16 or 17 who were previously eligible and are no longer looked after; those aged 18-21 who were previously eligible.

¹⁵ Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J. et al. (2015) *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data* Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education: University of Oxford

5 Conclusion

This briefing note has highlighted a number of the *Children and Young People's Strategic Indicators* in relation to education. While the overall trends within the selected educational indicators tend to show improvements in outcomes, consideration of the wider data highlights differing outcomes for a number of groups of students, including lower results for those at non-grammars and those entitled to free school meals.

Areas for consideration could include what indicators the Department is planning to use within the new Children and Young People's Strategy. For example, the extent to which they would provide a broad and balanced picture of outcomes for children and young people, and the extent to which they would demonstrate the value government has added to outcomes.