

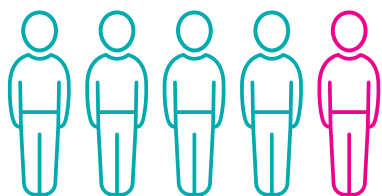
Nacro Further Education and Skills

## **LEARN WITHOUT LIMITS**

**Tackling the disadvantage attainment gap for 16–19 year olds**

June 2021

#LearnWithoutLimits



**1 in 5**

young people are **failed** by the  
current education system<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Too many young people are being held back from achieving their potential, unable to gain the skills that they need to achieve what they want with their lives – a situation that the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated.

As the Government looks to the education and skills system as part of the post-COVID recovery effort, it must act to ensure that the chances of young people are not hampered by their background or where they come from. This action was much-needed pre-pandemic, and is now urgent post-pandemic.

Much debate about education policy and post-COVID recovery has been focused on school-age children. Less emphasis has been placed on the needs of 16–19 year olds and the final years of compulsory participation in education. For this age group, there is a clear and significant attainment gap between those from disadvantaged backgrounds when compared with their better-off peers. Yet, further education remains an underfunded sector and policies to tackle the attainment gap have mainly been focused on school age children and the early years.

This paper therefore makes the case for action to support those young people who have either faced an interrupted education throughout their lives or who come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

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1. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/level-2-and-3-attainment-by-young-people-aged-19/2019-20> (See Table 4: Level 2 attainment at 19 by pupil characteristics, 2010/11 to 2019/20 (based on pupils recorded in mainstream state-funded schools in England in year 11) Statistic refers to the number who do not achieve the equivalent of five GCSEs at grade 4.

## THE DISADVANTAGE GAP

On average, young people from poorer backgrounds are less likely to achieve the same level of qualifications as their better-off peers. In addition, we know through direct experience that there are additional factors which can lead to disadvantage in education such as gaps in young people's school careers, experience of the care or justice system, learning difficulties, mental health and/or family issues.

This disadvantage gap, measured through educational attainment, has long been identified by policymakers as a problem requiring solutions. There has been welcome action to try to close the gap for school-age children and across early years provision. Yet 16–19 year olds, and young people in further education more specifically, have been largely overlooked, even though the need for action – as shown by this report – is growing.

### Why focus on 16–19 year olds?

In England the proportion of people achieving the equivalent of five GCSEs at grade 4 or above (also referred to as Level 2 attainment)<sup>2</sup> by the age of 19 is falling and has been for five consecutive years – currently almost one in five young people do not achieve this. For those eligible for free school meals (FSM), Level 2 attainment has dropped even more significantly – from 72% in 2014/15 to 62.2% in 2019/20 – an almost 10 percentage point drop.<sup>3</sup>

As the Education Policy Institute sets out in its recent report “Measuring the disadvantage gap in 16–19 education”<sup>4</sup>, the gap between disadvantaged students and their non-disadvantaged peers – from 16–19 – is significant, with little closing of the gap in the years immediately preceding the pandemic. And the report features some significant findings, namely that:

- Disadvantaged students on average attain the equivalent of three A-level grades lower than their better-off peers
- When controlling for students' prior attainment and qualification type, poorer students still achieve poorer grades compared to their more affluent peers – around the equivalent of half an A-level grade
- This is significant, as it shows poorer students face an extra attainment penalty during the 16–19 education phase
- Further education providers have notably lower attainment than other provision which appears to be largely related to differences in student characteristics, i.e. students from disadvantaged backgrounds are far more likely to attend further education colleges than sixth form colleges

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2. Ibid.

3. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/level-2-and-3-attainment-by-young-people-aged-19/2019-20> (See “Level 2 and 3 attainment at 19 by pupil characteristics”)

4. <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/disadvantage-gap-16-19-education/>

Whilst we agree that efforts to close the attainment gap should start in the early years, this evidence underlines the critical need for continued intervention in the 16–19 age group to avoid the most disadvantaged young people falling even further behind their peers. This need for action has only increased in light of the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the most disadvantaged young people.<sup>5</sup> Action at this age can make a real difference to young people's future prospects.

## How is disadvantage defined?

### FSM vs. non-FSM:

There are a number of ways of defining disadvantage – the most common is by looking at those eligible for FSM and, in this instance, by comparing the educational outcomes of those children who are eligible for FSM with those who aren't. The evidence shows that progress through education remains heavily weighted against people from poorer backgrounds. For those eligible for FSM, the chances of progressing to higher education by the age of 19 are much lower than those who aren't eligible for FSM, with the gap at its largest since 2007<sup>6</sup>, at 18.8 percentage points.

In the year 2019/20, the percentage of pupils at the end of secondary school (at the age of 16) on FSM who achieved grades 4 or above in their English and maths GCSEs was 49.2%<sup>7</sup>. For all non-FSM pupils, this figure was 75.4%, a gap of 26.2 percentage points. The gap also exists when looking at overall attainment. The rate of Level 2 attainment by the age of 19 has been dropping significantly over recent years – over one in three young people (37.8%) on FSM do not reach this level. The attainment gap between those eligible for FSM and those not currently stands at 21.9 percentage points – a figure which has increased from 16.5 percentage points in 2014/15. Between 2014/15 and 2019/20, there has been a 17.1% rise in the numbers of those eligible for FSM who reach 19 without Level 2 attainment.<sup>8</sup>

### Level 2 attainment at 19 years for those eligible for FSM:



**17.1% RISE**  
**of those without Level 2**  
**attainment by the age of 19**

over 5 years since 2014/15

5. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/youth-unemployment-pandemic-jobs-b1868740.html>

6. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education> (See "Headline facts and figures - Free school meals")

7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/key-stage-4-performance-2020> / <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/2893f8e5-2a6e-4a87-9dcb-04a47f8462d6>

8. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/level-2-and-3-attainment-by-young-people-aged-19/2019-20> (See Table 4: Level 2 attainment at 19 by pupil characteristics, 2010/11 to 2019/20 (based on pupils recorded in mainstream state-funded schools in England in year 11))



### CIN vs. non-CIN:

It is important to acknowledge that looking at disadvantage on the basis of FSM eligibility doesn't cover all disadvantaged children. There are other factors which are important beyond the socio-economic background of young people which can be partially taken into account by looking at the outcomes of those defined as 'children in need' (CIN). CIN are "defined in law as children who are aged under 18 and"<sup>9</sup>:

- Need local authority services to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development
- Need local authority services to prevent significant or further harm to health or development
- Are disabled

CIN are disproportionately likely to have worse educational outcomes than their peers not classified as CIN.<sup>10</sup> In 2019/20, there were 860,130<sup>11</sup> pupils known to have been CIN over the last six years, with only 23.6% of CIN achieving a grade 4 (pass) and above in English and maths GCSEs, compared to 71.2% of the general population.

Those defined as CIN can face multiple barriers to progressing through education at school and beyond, with half being eligible for FSM, compared to 15% of all pupils. 37% have a special educational need or disability (SEND), compared again to 15% of all pupils.<sup>12</sup>

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9. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/17>

10. Note: This definition includes looked after children

11. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england/2020> (See "Children who have been in the need in the last 6 years")

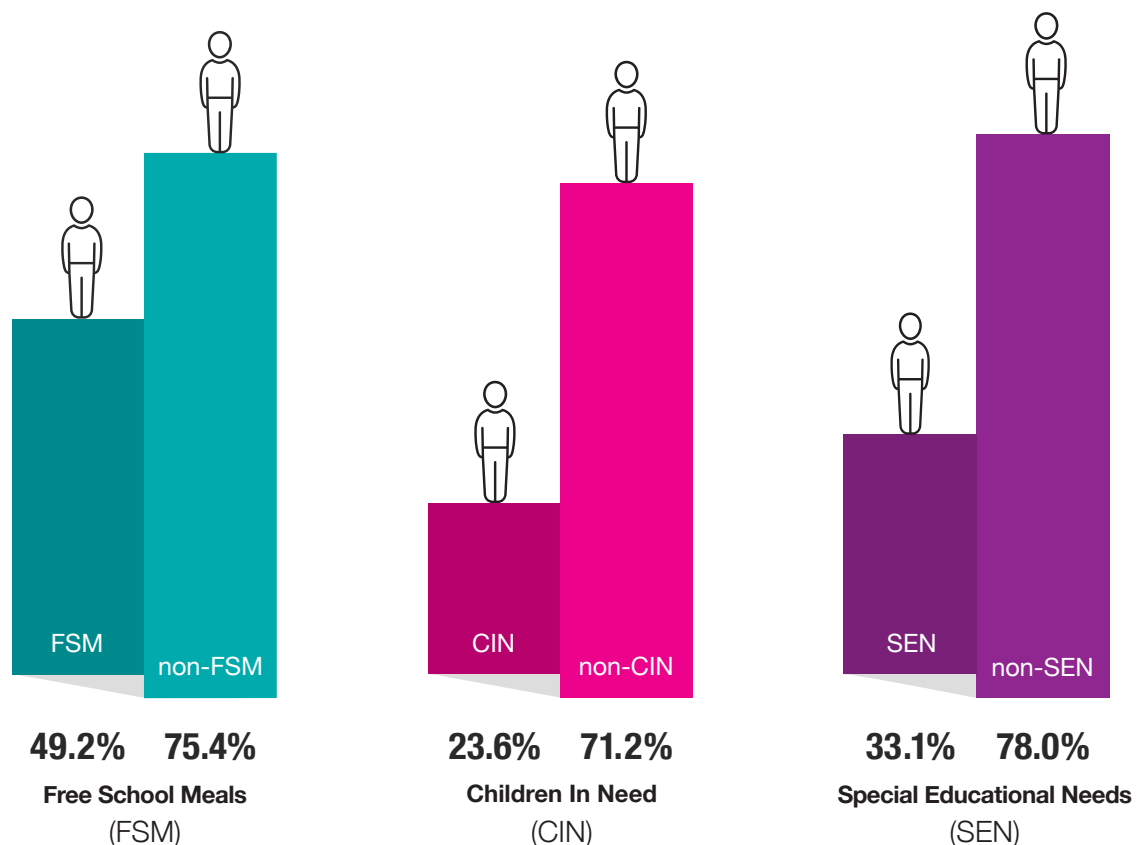
12. Ibid.

## SEN vs. non-SEN:

For those pupils identified with a ‘special educational need’ (SEN), the gap in outcomes with their non-SEN peers is also significant. Put simply, students with a SEN are three times more likely not to achieve a grade 4 or above (standard pass or above) in their English and Maths GCSEs as those with no identified SEN. In 2019/20, only 33.1% of young people with a diagnosed SEN<sup>13</sup> achieved grade 4 or above in English and maths GCSE, compared to 78% of all non-SEN pupils.

Looking at Level 2 attainment by the age of 19, there has been a sharp decline for those with an identified SEN from 65.8% in 2014/15 to 52.4% in 2019/20. This means that almost one in two young people diagnosed with a SEN do not have Level 2 attainment by the age of 19. This is an attainment gap of 33.7 percentage points when compared with the attainment of those with no identified SEN.<sup>14</sup>

### Percentage achieving grades 4 or above in GCSE English and Maths:



Clearly, these figures show that a young person's educational prospects continue to be shaped by the obstacles that they face. These obstacles are in addition to fundamental flaws within our education system, such as unequal access to resources, which doubly penalises the most disadvantaged young people.

13. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/130c2bfc-d576-4b8c-ba7e-6b66b896acb8>

14. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/level-2-and-3-attainment-by-young-people-aged-19/2019-20> (See Table 4: Level 2 attainment at 19 by pupil characteristics, 2010/11 to 2019/20 (based on pupils recorded in mainstream state-funded schools in England in year 11))



## THE PROBLEM

### A two-track education system

#### Focus on Level 3 overlooks the importance of Level 2

The direction of travel in further education, under successive governments, has been geared towards a pathway that does not best support disadvantaged young people in achieving their full potential.

By focusing most attention on providing young people and adults with fully funded qualifications at Level 3 and above<sup>15</sup>, the Government risks turbocharging the gap between those who have attained Level 2 qualifications by the age of 19 and those who haven't.

This includes the Government's £2.5 billion investment in the National Skills Fund<sup>16</sup>, which includes specific funding for free access to a range of Level 3 qualifications for those aged 19 and over. Aspiring to reach a Level 3 qualification is commendable and to be encouraged, but it is essential to put the building blocks in place to allow everyone to progress through the lower-level qualifications initially, without which Level 3 attainment isn't possible for too many.

Recent data shows that this isn't happening. According to the Department for Education's latest statistics<sup>17</sup>, Level 2 attainment by the age of 19 is falling, and has now done so for five consecutive years between 2016 and 2020. This is a worrying trend.

In England, 82.8% of all 19 year-olds have Level 2 attainment and 81.3% of those in mainstream state-funded schools<sup>18</sup>. 60% of all 19 year-olds have Level 3 attainment and 57.4% of those in mainstream state-funded provision.

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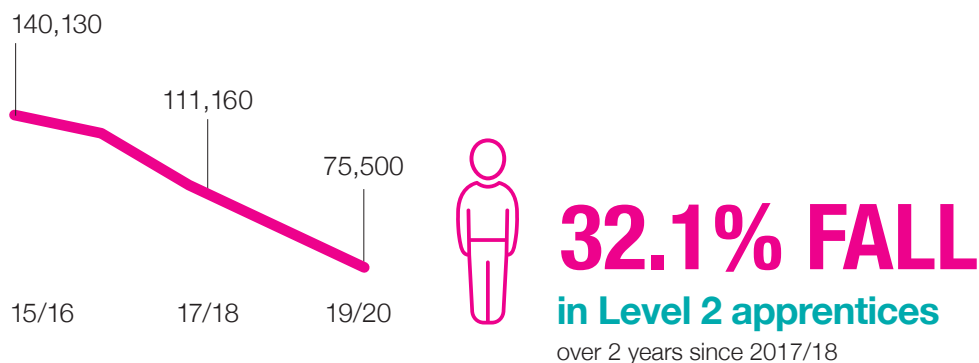
15. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hundreds-of-free-qualifications-on-offer-to-boost-skills-and-jobs>

16. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-skills-fund>

17. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/881199/Level\\_2\\_and\\_3\\_attainment\\_by\\_19\\_2019\\_statistical\\_commentary.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/881199/Level_2_and_3_attainment_by_19_2019_statistical_commentary.pdf)

18. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/level-2-and-3-attainment-by-young-people-aged-19/2019-20>

### Number of Level 2 apprentices:



In addition, recent evidence highlights a particular concern on the availability of Level 2 apprenticeships: In 2017/18, there were 111,160 Level 2 apprentices. In 2019/20, there were only 75,500, which is a fall of 32.1%. In that time frame, there has been a 35.1% drop in Level 2 apprenticeships for U19's in the bottom 20% of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (compared to 27.1% in the least deprived 20%). It is important that there are high-quality choices for all young people aged between 16 and 19 years old, irrespective of the level of the qualification they are working towards.<sup>19</sup>

We need a renewed focus on Level 2 qualifications. Ignoring the merits of these puts in place a barrier for progression to Level 3 qualifications for some young people and ignores the fact that for industries such as, health and social care, hospitality, construction and retail, lower-level qualifications act as an entry level point into the jobs market for millions of people.

Without creating and maintaining pathways for learners on lower-level qualifications, we will create a two-track education system whereby those at Level 3 and above continue to work their way through the system, with much brighter employment prospects as a result, and those working towards Level 2 qualifications or below, are left even further behind.

19. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/f677999b-03fe-4762-b1da-55dd4af429ea>



### CASE STUDY: **Conor**

Conor from Walker in Newcastle left school at 14 to become a full-time carer for his mother, unable to juggle learning with his responsibilities at home. He had no qualifications and struggled in school with learning needs. He worked to do his exams on his own, but was unsuccessful due to the lack of support available and not being in full time education. He was faced with the prospect of leaving education permanently with no qualifications or prospects before finally coming to Nacro.

At Nacro he received specialist support on his Study Programme, gained his Level 1 and 2 functional skills in English and Maths and Level 2 Motor Vehicle, leading to an apprenticeship at a local garage and the prospects of a stable, fulfilling career.

### CASE STUDY: **Callum**

Callum suffered family losses in his childhood, he started taking drugs and was taken into care. He was angry and frequently got into fights, leading to temporary exclusions from school. Callum left school with no qualifications or prospects at 16. He said that this made him feel hopeless.

“I had nothing to do, wasn’t good at anything, my problems were escalating. I felt worthless. When you leave school without your GCSEs you’re told you’re no good at anything, I didn’t just want to be sat around going mad but didn’t know what to do.”

Callum enrolled on a Study Programme including a Construction Level 2 qualification with Nacro, and English and Maths. He particularly enjoys tiling and worked on a building restoration project during his studies. He now works in construction with the aim of setting up his own business one day, so he can help others who have a similar life to him.

“I found what I’m good at, I worked hard, I love it. It was active and made me feel good about myself. I didn’t know I was good at things until I did this. I love just doing it, looking at my work and seeing that I’ve done something well and made something.”

## Government proposals need to take into account pathways taken by the most disadvantaged young people

The Department for Education (DfE) is proposing a “transition programme” as a one year programme for those who haven’t achieved Level 2 to start studying at Level 3. However, this transition period of a year fails to take into account the barriers faced by the most disadvantaged young people and risks entrenching disadvantage. It also doesn’t necessarily reflect the pathways young people want to take and may make it more difficult for young people to enter the labour market and progress, if there is no qualification attached to the transition year.

Many learners who have faced multiple barriers to participation in mainstream education, will need more than a year to make that transition up towards a Level 3 qualification. As it stands, the achievement rate for young people who do not pass English and Maths GCSE at school and subsequently have to resit, is currently very low. 38.3% achieved a lower score<sup>20</sup> than previously according to the Department for Education’s statistics. Within the sector, it is commonly agreed that this is not the ideal approach for them to achieve the skills that they need to progress.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to be ambitious for all young people, but we need to create achievable pathways and not set unrealistic expectations which set them up to fail. Vocational qualifications at Level 2 can be particularly important in enabling young people to move into meaningful careers and act as a fundamental stepping-stone towards further progression. They equip learners with core skills and a wide range of softer skills to help them become ‘work ready’. Without these critical skills, taking on a Level 3 qualification with a significant work placement is not possible for some.

It is important, therefore, that there are a range of high quality Level 2 pathways and not just a leap up to an intensive Level 3 T-level or A-level with insufficient bridging of the gap between Level 1 and Level 3. Without such a pathway many young people will struggle.

It is not the Government’s ambition that is wrong, it is the route map that needs changing. The focus on getting all learners to Level 3 by the age of 19 overlooks the significant challenges faced by learners held back by multiple disadvantage. To achieve the Government’s aim of levelling up, it must take action to support disadvantaged 16–19 year olds.

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20. [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-16-to-18-results-2018-to-2019-provisional?utm\\_source=e4eca6d7-a1e6-46c7-ba4e-a0731d1e81f6&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-16-to-18-results-2018-to-2019-provisional?utm_source=e4eca6d7-a1e6-46c7-ba4e-a0731d1e81f6&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate) (See “English and maths table”, tables 11a and b)  
21. <https://www.tes.com/news/its-time-end-negative-cycle-gcse-resits>

## CASE STUDY: **Kayleigh**

17 year-old Kayleigh lives in Bramble and Thorntree in Middlesbrough, which has been defined by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods<sup>22</sup> as a ‘left behind ward’, marked by high levels of deprivation and community need. She has struggled with depression and anxiety since she was young and found college difficult, where she felt unsupported and found it difficult to be around a lot of people.

Kayleigh is now on a Study Programme working towards a Level 2 Childcare qualification and her GCSEs in English and Maths with Nacro in Middlesbrough. She enrolled on a Level 2 Study Programme because it gives her the option to move into work directly, as the work placement, safeguarding modules and basic childcare skills she learns will qualify her for work as a nursery nurse. From here she can move on and earn while she learns within a nursery environment. She also needs the Level 2 in order to progress, as Level 3 courses require experience of working with children in a formal setting in addition to her GCSEs.

Completing her Level 2 Study Programme will give her the planning skills, educational skills, work-experience and safeguarding knowledge to work with children and progress further. It is the vital stepping-stone for gaining the experience and qualifications that will lead to work.

## **Wide range of provision required at Level 2**

We need a broad range of qualifications at Level 2 and below, endorsed by employers, to ensure a smooth pathway to employment and further learning. This should be backed by the right funding support for the most disadvantaged young people, to ensure that their circumstances don’t hold them back from achieving their full potential.

A proposed reduction in the breadth of Level 2 vocational qualifications available in the Government’s review of post-16 qualifications risks further increasing the disadvantage gap. To tackle this, we need to improve qualifications at Level 2 and below, giving learners a range of high-quality choices so that they can find something appropriate for their career ambitions. Instead we are concerned that the Government will narrow the pathways for young people who are following a vocational route.

## Further education is an underfunded sector – targeted support is needed

Further education remains an underfunded sector with further education colleges and sixth forms seeing the largest falls in per pupil funding of any sector in the education system since 2010/11. Funding per student in further education and sixth-form colleges fell by 12% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2019/20. Despite a small increase in per student funding 2020/21 – for both further education and school funding – this gap still persists. In 2021, the minimum funding per pupil in secondary schools sits at £5,000, whereas across further education providers it is £4,166. To note, this does not take into account the reduced rate for 18 year-olds. The significant attainment gap for 16–19s outlined above, combined with the underfunding of further education over many years, as well as the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on young people's opportunities, means there is an urgent need for action, particularly for the most disadvantaged.<sup>23</sup>

There is already additional funding for disadvantaged learners within the school system. The Pupil Premium was introduced into schools in 2011 with the aim of closing the attainment gap and helping disadvantaged young people. The rate is currently £1,345 for pupils in reception to Year 6 and £955 for those in Year 7 to 11. For looked-after children this rate is £2,345. There are also additional funding pots such as for those in Alternative Provision.

This additional Pupil Premium funding doesn't extend into further education. There are currently two blocks of disadvantage funding – one accounts for students' economic deprivation and one for low prior attainment in English and Maths. Economic deprivation is based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The figure varies depending on postcode as it is linked, on a ward-by-ward basis, to the levels of deprivation in the areas where learners are based. There is also an additional amount for looked after children or recent care leavers.<sup>24</sup> Whilst this additional funding is welcome, it doesn't go far enough and doesn't fully reflect the differing circumstances of the most disadvantaged learners.

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23. <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/14369>

24. [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-rates-and-formula/funding-guidance-for-young-people-2021-to-2022-rates-and-formula#progr\[...\]e-aims](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-rates-and-formula/funding-guidance-for-young-people-2021-to-2022-rates-and-formula#progr[...]e-aims) (See "Disadvantage funding")

## Nacro: a provider's perspective

Nacro's 14 Education and Skills centres, and its subcontracted provision in several deprived areas, aim to provide learners in need with all of the equipment and support that they need in order to attend learning and to pursue their careers. This support comes from a bursary budget and is intended to cover equipment, books and travel but, for many, covers the cost of travel alone.

The COVID pandemic has highlighted the stark digital divide which already existed between disadvantaged students and their better-off peers, and our experience during COVID was that access to digital equipment and data is absolutely critical for learners. At the start of the pandemic, 60% of our learners didn't have to access to data or a device of their own.

Even with the Government commitment to provide equipment, provision was patchy and digital devices for some learners were not available until the end of January 2021.

Simplifying the bursary budget and guaranteeing the maximum amount of £1,200 for the most disadvantaged learners would be an efficient means to ensure that learners have the equipment they need – helping to bridge the digital divide. It would be particularly beneficial if bureaucratic measures could be removed to allow the funding to be spent on data, which is critical for many.

In addition, a Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) would enable the funding of specialised wraparound and individualised support. This would target both academic and wider non-academic barriers to learning, and support young people to catch up and reach the same level as their peers.

To date, Nacro has received COVID catch-up funding across its centres to be distributed across learners who have yet to achieve a grade 4 in GCSE English or Maths. The funding has allowed for small group catch-up classes and helps centres to both identify specific barriers of learners and also determine the right interventions along with additional teaching.

This much-needed funding, however, illustrates the existing structural funding issue, because it came late, and was both too specific and bureaucratic. This bolsters the case for an additional funding pot at this Autumn's Spending Review, through a PP+, to enable additional and specialised support for the most disadvantaged learners.

Whilst welcome, COVID catch-up funding is a temporary stop-gap measure, and not a permanent funding stream. It is currently helping education providers help learners who have 'missed out' during the pandemic. But these learners were already missing out. This is why permanent support is urgently needed, or those who were held back pre-COVID will continue to be held back without additional support.



## Why does all this matter?

### Diminished employment prospects and broader economic impact

Through no fault of their own, the most disadvantaged young people face the prospect of not being in education, employment or training (NEET). One in four<sup>25</sup> without five GCSEs at grade 4 or above become NEET in the long-term. Disadvantaged young people are also 50% more likely<sup>26</sup> to be NEET, long-term, compared to their better-off contemporaries.

This situation has been exacerbated by the pandemic, with young people bearing the brunt of job losses. 63% of payroll jobs lost since February of last year have been lost to U25s<sup>27</sup> and between February 2020 and February 2021, 693,000 fewer people were in paid employment in the UK<sup>28</sup>.

The decline in working hours<sup>29</sup> for young people with no qualifications (34%) has been five times higher than the decline for those with a degree-level qualification (7%). The pandemic is therefore having a disproportionate impact on young people without qualifications, who are most likely to already face multiple disadvantage.

From an economic perspective, the Learning & Work Institute has set out in a recent report<sup>30</sup> that a “prolonged youths jobs crisis” would cost the economy £7 billion by next year – purely related to lost economic output. Even with a wider economic recovery, youth unemployment will “remain high.” Long-term, they forecast a £14.4 billion impact on the economy over the next seven years in terms of “earnings and damage to employment prospects.”

Without the right support for those facing the greatest obstacles during the early stages of their lives, and without clear pathways to further education and skills, the most disadvantaged young people will continue to be held back. These pathways need to cover the entire range of progression routes, ensuring that there are routes into employment, but also towards further education training or higher education.

Otherwise, our workforce will not have the skills needed to compete globally, and we risk an entire generation of disadvantaged young people being prevented from moving forward with their lives.

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25. <https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/publication/left-behind-understanding-communities-on-the-edge/>

26. <https://www.impetus.org.uk/assets/publications/Youth-Jobs-Gap-The-Long-Term-NEET-Population.pdf>

27. <https://leftfootforward.org/2021/03/revealed-young-people-have-borne-the-brunt-of-job-losses-during-the-pandemic/>

28. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/march2021>

29. <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/news-views/2021-learning-and-work-research-launch-with-hsbc>

30. <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/prolonged-youth-jobs-crisis-is-set-to-cost-uk-economy-almost-7-billion-next-year/>



## THE SOLUTIONS

It is clear that we need to take action to address the disadvantage gap. The steep drop in attainment over recent years at Level 2 by the age of 19 for those on FSM or who have an SEN should be a wake up call to policy-makers. We need to broaden out our understanding of what constitutes disadvantage in education and provide the right support to those who need it. The impact of disadvantage clearly does not stop at the age of 16. Without urgent action for disadvantaged 16–19 year olds, we risk failing a generation of young people.

We believe that the following measures would play an important role in increasing the attainment and future life chances of the most disadvantaged young people.

This package of measures incorporates:

- 1. Targeted funding for the most disadvantaged** young people in the form of a PP+ including a maximum guaranteed bursary funding pot to ensure that learners in need can access the necessary equipment for their studies and training
- 2. A clear route map to employment** with a broad provision of vocational and technical qualifications at Level 2, enabling access to employment and higher level skills, supported by Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance; and through connections with employers
- 3. A Digital Inclusion Guarantee** in order to close the digital divide

These are fundamental to ensuring that the Government fulfils its ambitions of levelling up the country, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

## **Funding for the most disadvantaged**

- PP+ – £1,000 per learner per year, to help level the playing field for 16–19 year olds held back by disadvantage; the learner would receive the funding in the years after turning 16, 17 as well as 18 for those who need it
- To be available for those who have an SEN, are eligible for FSM or have been classified as CIN in the last six years
- Simplified bursary funding structure to guarantee £1,200 for the most disadvantaged learners: this would require removing the arbitrary distinction between the “vulnerable” and “discretionary” pots currently available, to be replaced with one discretionary pot based on broadened eligibility criteria to ensure that the most vulnerable and in need can receive the maximum level of funding
- The PP+ criteria would be extended to bursary funding, so would include those who fall within the CIN classification and those with a SEN (currently a significant number of students with an Education, Health and Care Plan are not currently eligible for the “vulnerable” bursary pot), as well as those eligible for FSM
- Include a guarantee that all PP+ recipients are eligible for free travel passes to ensure they are able to attend their further education setting

## **A route map to employment**

- Provision of a high quality, vocational and technical Level 2 offer that can lead directly to good jobs in the workplace and access to higher level skills
- Ensure a wide range of employer-endorsed meaningful qualifications at Level 2 and below which act as a stepping stone for young people enabling direct entry into the world of work and into higher skills
- The current Government consultation on Level 2 qualifications must not remove qualifications which provide young people with these stepping stones and keep them engaged in learning



## **A Digital Inclusion Guarantee**

- A Government guarantee that every disadvantaged young person has access to sufficient data, along with an appropriate learning device
- This needs to be in conjunction with digitally enabling all staff, to ensure that they have the digital skills required, as well as ensuring that providers have the required digital infrastructure
- All providers need adequate funding to deliver all-encompassing digital learning
- This guarantee must cover young people learning in not-for-profit ESFA-funded Independent Training Providers to ensure all learners can access the same equipment and support no matter where they learn



## About Nacro

Nacro is a national charity and one of the country's largest independent training providers of its type, committed to giving people the best chance at a second chance. We know that by removing the barriers and providing the right support, we can give people the chance they need to create a better life for themselves, their families and their communities. For more than 50 years we have delivered services across the country, whilst speaking out for those we support.



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