

Inclusive Growth Analysis Unit

Education and Skills from Cradle to Career: A whole-system approach for Greater Manchester

Ruth Lupton¹

Key points

- Education and training is key to inclusive growth, but there is currently no system-wide approach at the city-region level.
- Educational attainment in Greater Manchester is close to national levels, but too many people are left behind in a high inequality system. Gaps are wide in the early years and widen through school and into adulthood.
- There is no general crisis in quality, but issues in particular areas and with take-up, funding and progression need to be addressed.
- GM could forge new ground by establishing an integrated cradle-to-career learning system. This will require new structures and mechanisms, better intelligence and collaboration within and between phases.
- Equity must be at the heart of the system and this will require GM to do things differently. A relentless focus on school improvement and driving up standards will not produce a more equal system.

Introduction

That education and skills are central to GM's vision of inclusive economic growth is self-evident. But there is no education and skills 'system' at a city-region level. It is divided into chunks for different ages/phases. Very few powers reside at GM level. Some are with local authorities, others with national/regional bodies or groups of schools. Accountability mechanisms create different and competing incentives.

These arrangements also mean it is rare to find detailed cross-phase analysis of the issues to be tackled. Statements about low educational standards and failing schools loom large and may come to define understandings of the 'problem', missing the bigger picture.

This briefing paper is based on a longer report: "The Challenge for Greater Manchester: Education and Skills in the Era of Devolution"². It paints a picture of current patterns and trends in education and skills from the early years to adulthood. It also proposes some ways in which the opportunity of devolution might be used to develop a new system-wide approach to address inequalities and better meet the needs of residents and businesses.

¹ Ruth Lupton is a Professor of Education at the University of Manchester and Head of the Inclusive Growth Analysis Unit.

² Available on the Inclusive Growth Analysis Unit website www.manchester.ac.uk/inclusivegrowth

The Greater Manchester Situation

Educational attainment is close to the national level

Greater Manchester still has the hallmarks of its industrial past. The proportion of people with higher qualifications (equivalent to NVQ4 and above), at 35%, is lower than nationally (38%) and a higher proportion of people have no qualifications (10% compared with 8%). Across the working age population as a whole, these differences add up to many thousands of people. But the gaps are closing in the adult population, and for young people going through the education system now there is little variation from national levels - slightly below at age 5 and 16 and slightly above at age 11 and 19 (Figure 1).

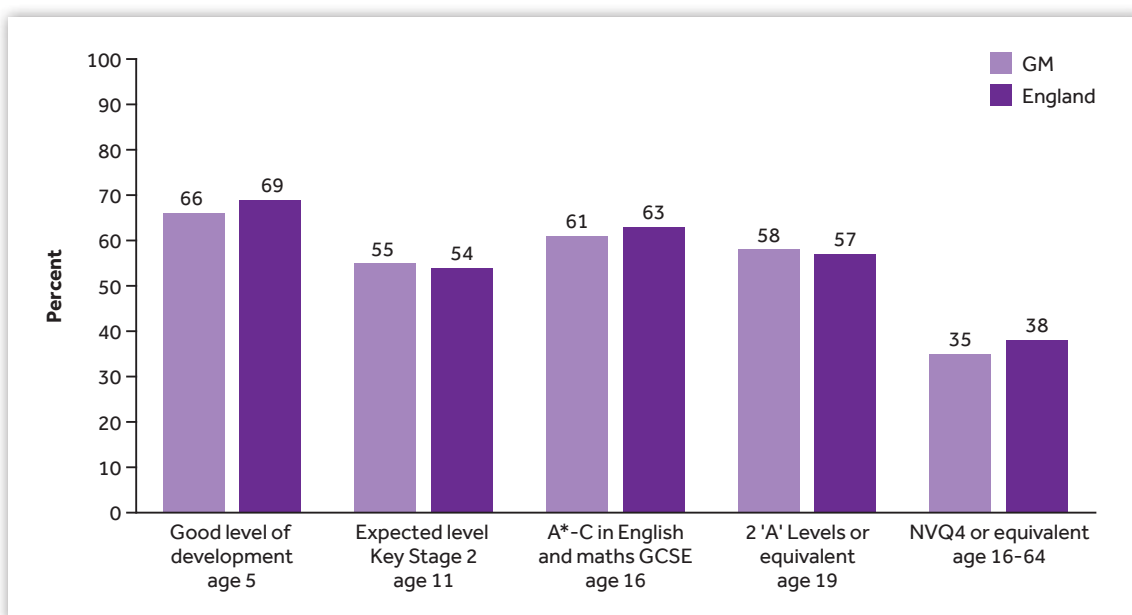


Figure 1: Percentage achieving different levels of attainment/qualifications in GM/England 2016

Sources: DfE Statistical First Releases SFR 50/2016, SFR62/2016, SFR03/2017, 01/2017 and Annual Population Survey (APS). All data up to 19 are for state funded schools/colleges only.

Inequalities are wide and there are large spatial disparities

Greater Manchester, like England as a whole, is being held back by wide inequalities. The biggest gaps are socio-economic. For GM overall in 2016 there was a gap of 17 percentage points between levels of development of pupils on Free School Meals (FSM) and others in the early years, widening to 22 percentage points at Key Stage 2, 27 percentage points at the end of Key Stage 4, then 26 points at age 19. Only 23% of 15 year-olds eligible for FSM had gone on to university by age 19, compared with 41% of their peers. For those not following the university route, futures are much less secure. Over 60% of pupils on FSM do not achieve A*-C grades in English and maths at GCSE and many of these do not make progress to a higher level of learning between age 16 and 18. Closing these socio-economic gaps would have a transformative effect on individual lives and on education levels overall in GM.

There are also very large variations in outcomes by local authority area. For example, 50% of pupils in Trafford entered university in the latest cohort compared with 31% in Tameside and 33% in Salford. 74% of 5 year-olds in Trafford had reached a good level of development compared with 61% in Oldham and 63% in Rochdale and Tameside. There are big differences in adult qualifications between areas.

Qualifications are not the only aim of education and focusing only on narrow academic outcomes can widen divisions rather than narrowing them. But these wide gaps do signal large differences in opportunities and life chances. Unless they can be addressed, it will be difficult to shape an economy and society in Greater Manchester in which everyone is able to participate and benefit.

There is no overall crisis in the quality of provision

In 2016, there were just 11 inadequate primary schools in GM (out of 854) and all GM local authorities had more children in good or outstanding schools than the national figure (90%). A higher proportion of secondary schools had problems – 9 out of 167, and three local authorities (Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside) had two-thirds or fewer of their secondary pupils in good or outstanding schools, compared with 82% nationally. Currently four out of ten FE colleges in GM are deemed to require improvement. All these numbers vary year-on-year. They suggest that some institutions and areas need attention and also that opportunities vary for learners in different areas, but the system overall is not in crisis. As nationally, however, there are issues with take-up, funding and progression, particularly in adult education, that hold some learners back.

We can learn from the GM Challenge

The GM school system can draw on experience from the successful adoption of a city-regional approach – the Greater Manchester Challenge (2008-2011). Its evaluation showed the benefits of: a positive, trusting and supportive approach; building on and sharing the expertise already in the system; using system-wide data; and focusing on disadvantage. These approaches need to be 'mainstreamed', but the system is now more complex. 76 Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) operate in GM and 42 Teaching Schools. There are widespread concerns nationally that the good practice of more effective MATs is not being spread, while not all are effective and some schools remain 'untouchable' and outside these structures. The Challenge only covered the school system, but it did demonstrate the value of a shared understanding and commitments, suggesting that the same approach for the whole education and skills system could be beneficial.

Something different will need to be done to address inequalities

Notwithstanding the benefits that could be gained from the GM Challenge approach, city-region collaboration on its own will not solve educational inequalities. These are persistent in English education. They reflect socio-economic divisions outside school, which have effects early in life and persist through each stage of education. And while the early years are important, research also demonstrates the negative impact of policy decisions such as an inadequate distribution of school resources in response to need; lack of investment in further and adult education; and narrow performance measures. In these contexts, school practices such as exclusions, setting and streaming, narrow pedagogies and curriculum, can all serve to entrench inequalities. Doing something different in Greater Manchester will require more than carrying out existing policies more vigorously in order to 'drive up standards'. At the school level, there is promising evidence on multi-agency approaches and strength-based pedagogies as well as on specific interventions. More broadly, academics have argued for the need to understand and dismantle the factors outside the school system that create inequalities, to focus on resource distribution and to identify measures and incentives (such as collective accountability between institutions) that support more equitable outcomes.



What the Mayor could do

The Mayor could:

- Set out a vision and strategy for education and skills as a whole linked to GM's social as well as economic objectives.
- Develop new structures to bring all aspects from cradle to career into one system.
- Work with partners to develop oversight and coordination of system resources including the type and quality of provision in relation to need, teacher demand and supply, teacher development, and funding.
- Develop analysis and intelligence capacity at the GM level. Develop better measures which capture a wider range of outcomes and enable a focus on transition and progression.
- Make maximum use of system capacity and move knowledge around, for example by setting up a knowledge-sharing hub, working with the Regional Schools Commissioner to identify schools in need of support, and maximising the contributions of universities.

He could also place equity and the reduction of inequalities at the heart of his strategy, and work with partners to:

- Consider how resources could be distributed within the system to focus more effort on the most disadvantaged people, institutions, and places which are the keys to success.
- Support place-based multi-agency approaches to address the "social determinants" of educational underachievement.
- Identify aspects of the current system that contribute to educational inequalities and work out which could be dismantled by local action.
- Draw systematically on research and on local evidence of success in addressing inequalities and make sure this knowledge is spread around the system.
- Advocate for strength-based approaches and those that work closely with families and communities.

How to find out more

This is the fifth in a series of policy briefings exploring how to promote inclusive growth in the context of devolution. Other papers cover city leadership for inclusive growth, employment charters, community banks, and planning for inclusive growth. All of these, and other reports and analysis on inclusive growth are available on IGAU's website: www.manchester.ac.uk/inclusivegrowth

We are grateful to colleagues at the Manchester Institute of Education and others who have shared their expertise and commented on earlier drafts of this paper. Fuller references to the statistics and research that support the claims made here are in the longer report referenced on Page 1.

The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL
United Kingdom
www.manchester.ac.uk

Inclusive Growth Analysis Unit
www.manchester.ac.uk/inclusivegrowth
igau@manchester.ac.uk
[@IGAUnit](https://twitter.com/IGAUnit)
IGAU is part of Manchester Urban Institute
www.mui.manchester.ac.uk