

Comparing policy, participation and inequalities in education and training across the UK

EDUCATION
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Employment and Skills Wales Convention 2024
November 13th 2024

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Post-16 outcomes and inequalities

Lower qualifications for young people in Wales

Larger share of young adults with Level 3 & 6 in England and Scotland

Lower level of qualifications in Wales and Northern Ireland

Strong effect of parental background across UK

- Young people from working –class backgrounds less likely to achieve Level 3 and Level 6
- Effects is stronger in Wales & Northern Ireland

Figure 4.1. Level 3 or higher in the four UK nations (%), ages 22 to 30

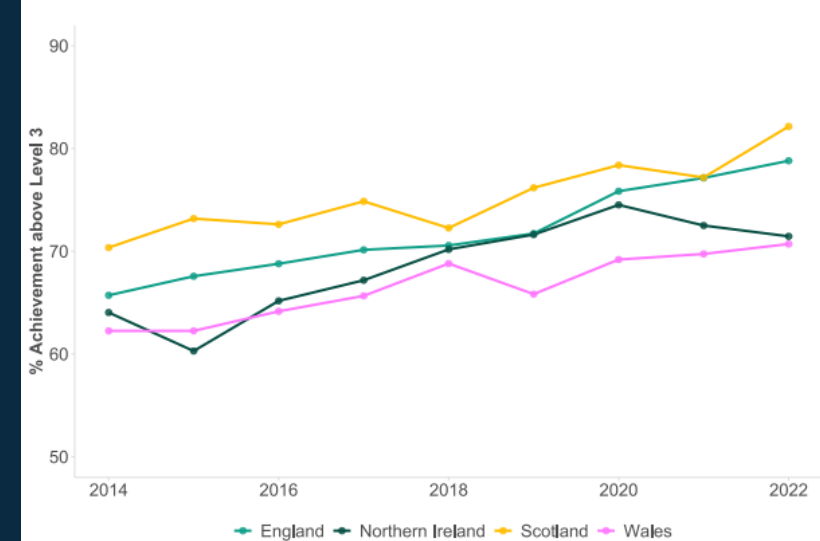
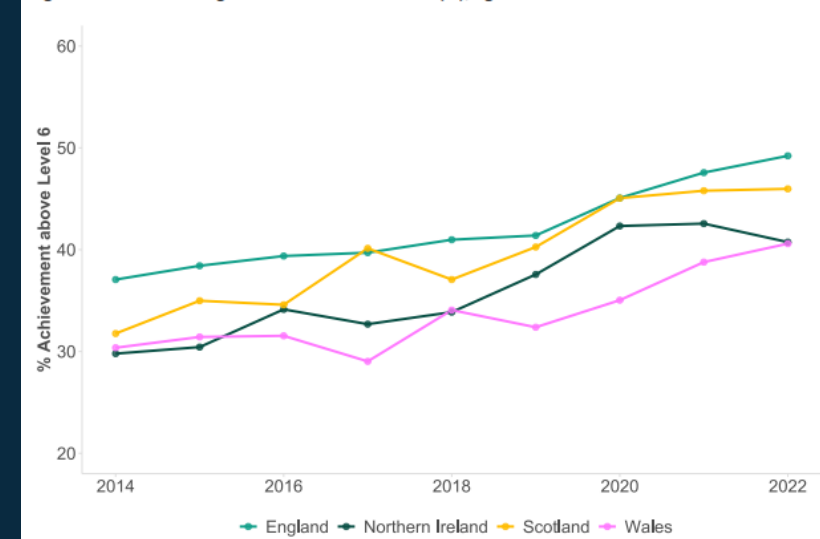


Figure 4.5. Level 6 or higher in the four UK nations (%), ages 22 to 30



Lower employment & high NEET in Wales

Highest employment in England and Scotland, lowest in Wales & NI

- Those from working-class backgrounds in Wales & NI least likely to be employed

Higher share of young people classified as NEET in Wales

- 10% of 16-22 year olds in Wales
- 13% of those from working-class backgrounds

Figure 4.9. Employment levels in the four UK nations (%), ages 22 to 30

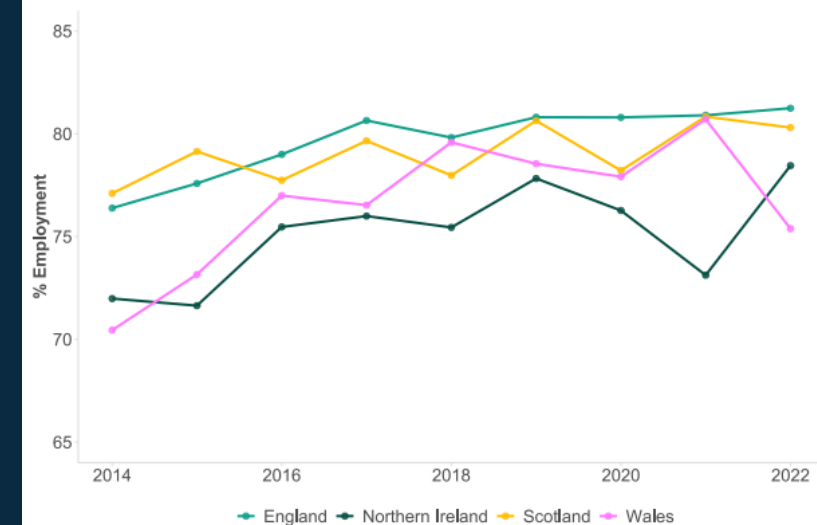
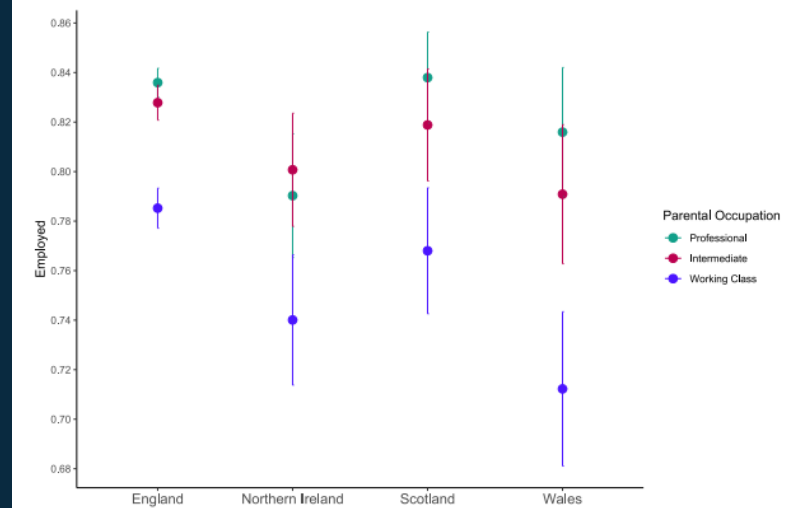


Figure 4.10. Employment levels by nation and parental background



Lower HE participation in Wales

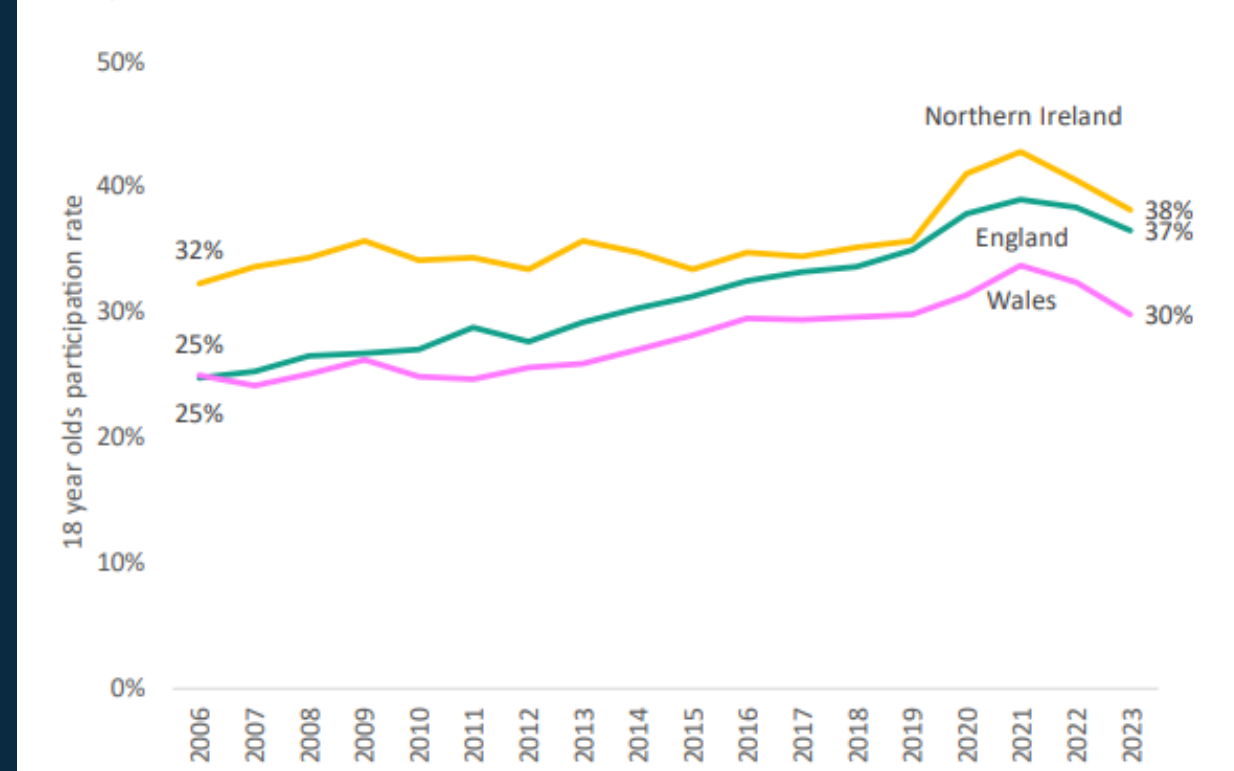
37-38% attending HE in England & NI, compared with 30% in Wales

- Other data suggests Scotland is more similar to England and NI

Particularly low HE participation for Welsh boys (24%)

Higher HE participation in deprived areas in England (20%) than in Wales and Scotland (15-16%) and NI (13%)

Figure 3.32 – Higher Education participation rate of 18-year-olds, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 2006 - 2022



Differences in provision in Wales

Higher use of colleges in England and Wales

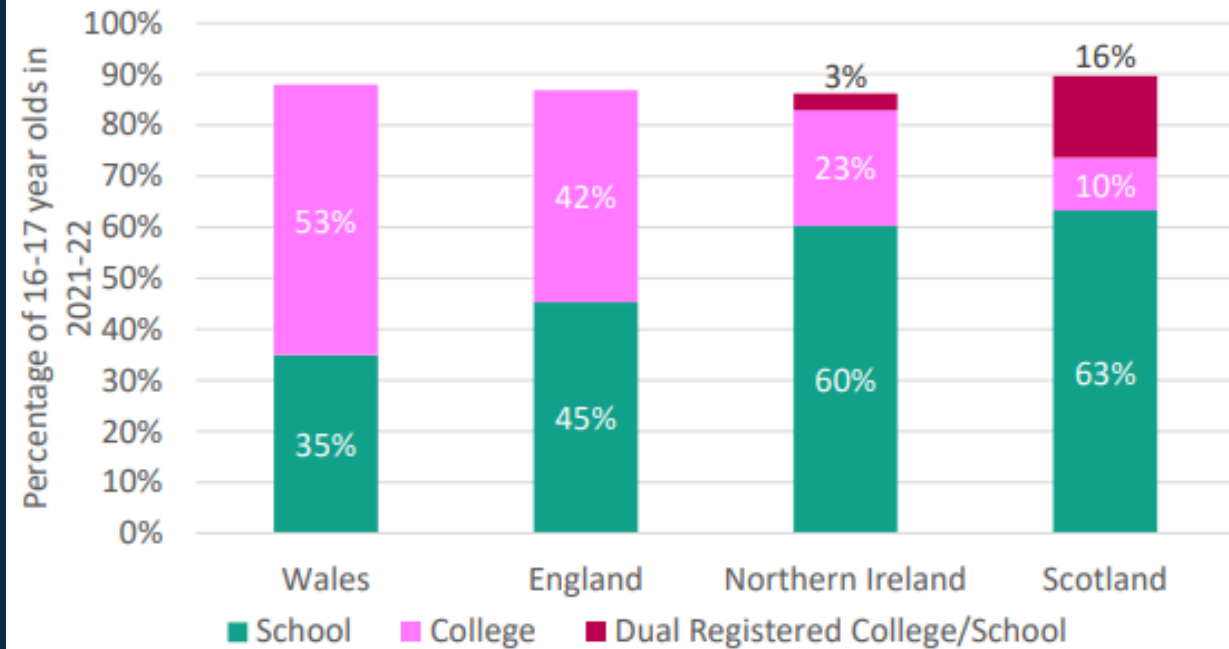
High shares of young people in school in Scotland (63%) and NI (60%)

High use of colleges in Wales (53%) and England (42%)

Overall impact depends on nature of courses taken in colleges & schools

- Academic vs vocational?
- Level 3 or lower?

Figure 3.8. Comparing the share of 16-17-year-olds in schools and colleges



Large differences in types of programme

Boys less likely to be in sixth form and more likely to be on vocational or WBL courses

- Girls in FE and WBL highly likely to be taking health, care and beauty courses

Students from poorer backgrounds less likely to be in sixth form and more likely to be on vocational or WBL courses

Table 2: Percentage of Key Stage 4 learners progressing to Sixth Form and FE by personal characteristics 2011/12–2016/17

	NET	Sixth Form	FE	Both	N
Gender					
Female	5%	37%	47%	11%	95,860
Male	8%	30%	53%	9%	100,380
FSM status					
FSM	9%	15%	67%	9%	165,940
Non-FSM	6%	37%	47%	10%	30,300

Table 5: Percentage of Key Stage 4 learners' PCET programme type by personal characteristics, 2011/12–2016/17

	AS level	A level	Vocational	WBL	N
Gender					
Female	49%	36%	49%	18%	95,860
Male	37%	25%	56%	23%	100,380
FSM status					
FSM	19%	11%	65%	31%	165,940
Non-FSM	47%	34%	50%	18%	30,300

Wales is beautiful!

But it makes it very hard to deliver high-quality post-16 provision!

The geography and ageing population has made it particularly hard for school sixth forms

Where you live plays a big role in determining your post-16 options



Differences in apprenticeships

High share of adults taking up apprenticeships in England & Wales

- Likely to reflect policy targets
- In NI, funding is mostly focused on young people

Rising share of apprenticeships at higher levels in England and Wales

- Connected to age differences
- Apprenticeships like re-training?

Figure 3.18 – Proportion of total apprenticeship starts who are aged 25+, all nations

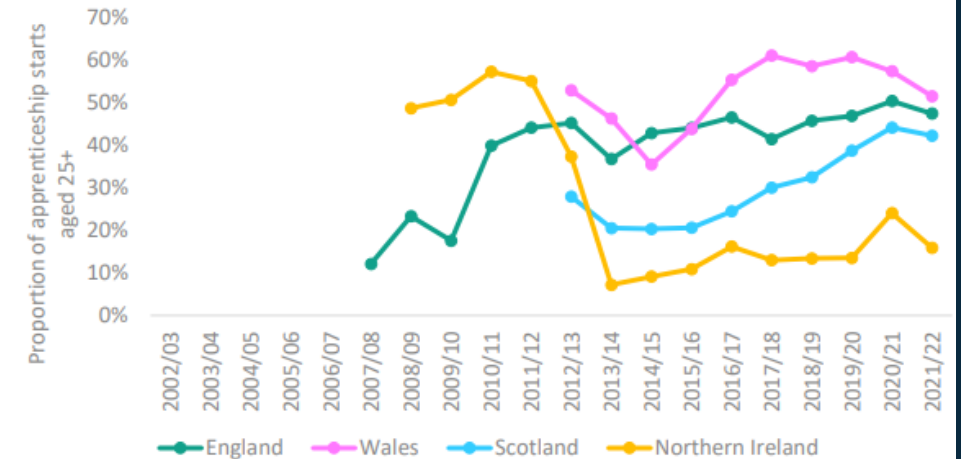
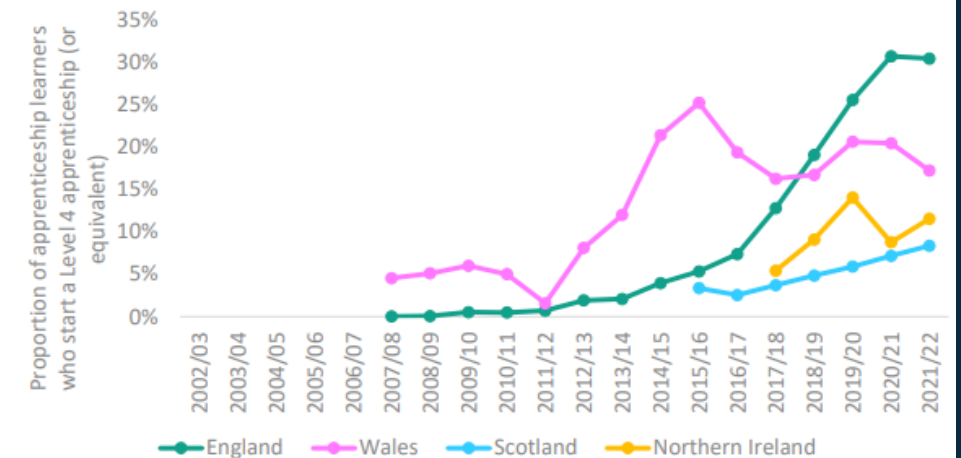


Figure 3.21 – Proportion of total apprenticeship starts at Level 4+, all nations



Role of school inequalities

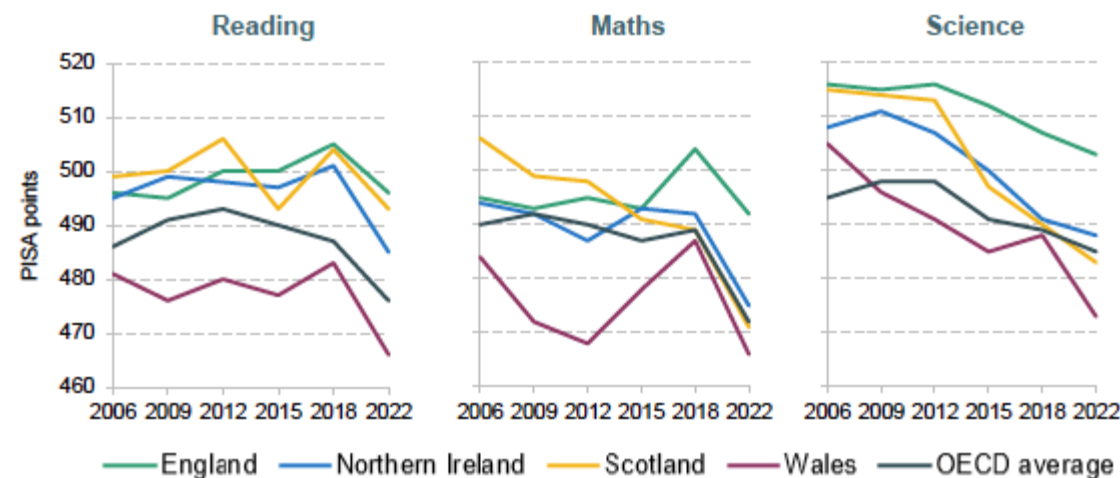
Declining skill levels

Inequalities in post-16 choices & outcomes mostly explained by what happens in school

Declining skill levels in Wales, which are below OECD and other UK nations

Disadvantaged pupils in Wales have lower performance than in other UK nations

Figure 1. PISA scores across UK nations over time



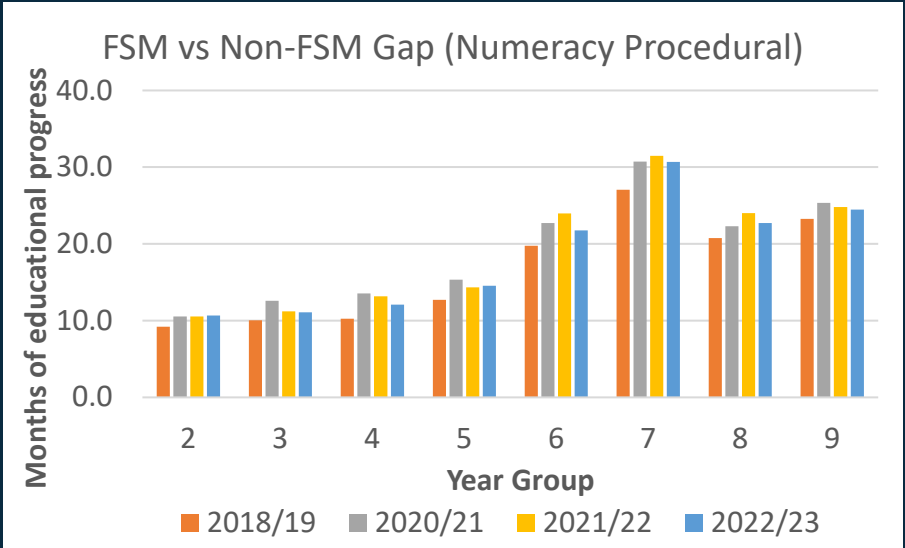
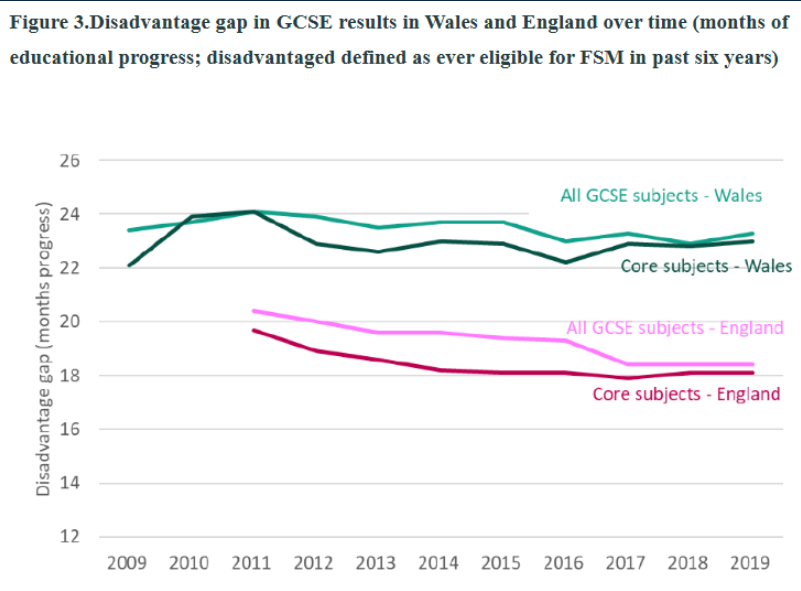
Higher inequalities in GCSE outcomes

Higher disadvantage gap in GCSE outcomes in Wales than in England

Gap between England and Wales is longstanding

Very similar sized gaps observed in annual literacy and numeracy tests

- Years 6 & 7 being particular pinch points



Highest inequalities in local areas in Wales

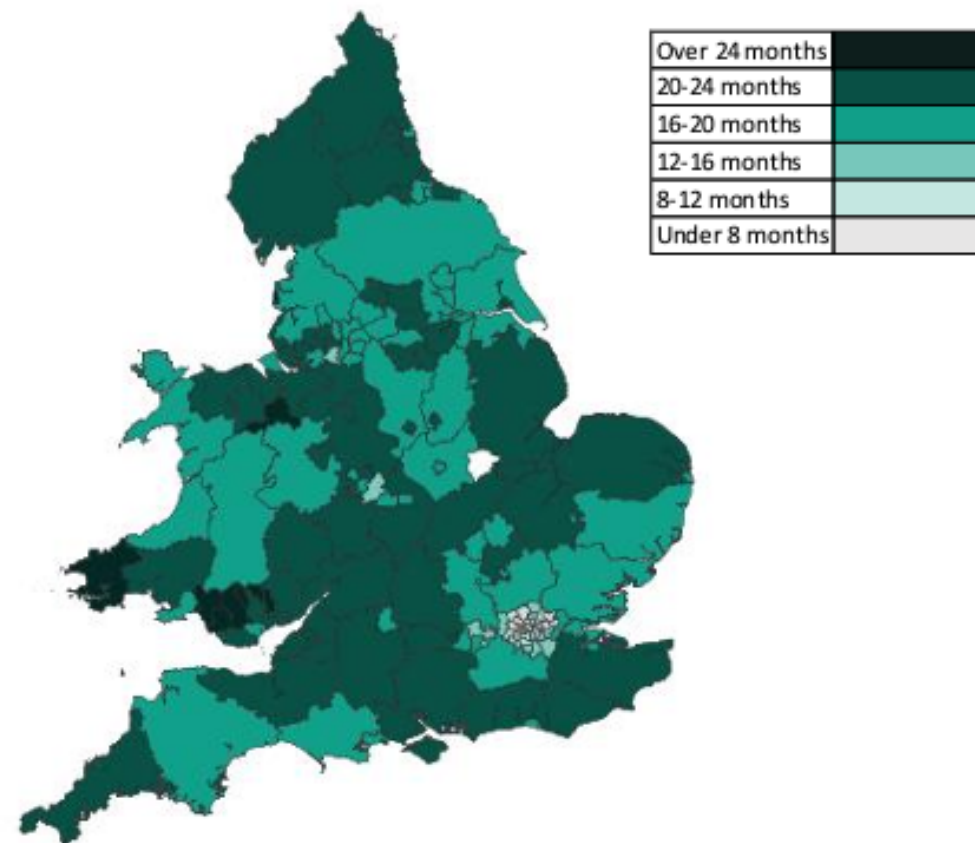
Local areas with highest disadvantage gaps almost all in Wales

Not explained by demographics or differences in poverty

Many similar local areas in England have lower inequalities

- E.g. Gateshead, Liverpool, Portsmouth, Salford, Newcastle, Rotherham Barnsley

Figure 5.4 Disadvantage gap across local authorities in Wales and England, 2019



Explanations and policy implications

Many of the changes and differences we see are longstanding

- Higher inequalities and lower skills in Wales can be seen back to at least mid-2000s
- Improvements in England seem to begin from early/mid 2000s
- Decline in Scotland for at least 10 years, and more recent decline in Northern Ireland

Good teaching of reading is fundamental

- Widespread and consistent uptake of synthetic phonics in England from 2006
- Less consistency on use of phonics in Wales, and less specific teacher training

Curriculum changes

- Vague descriptions of learning in new Curriculum for Wales risk increasing inequalities
- Scotland and Northern Ireland are already rowing back and introducing much more specific knowledge benchmarks for specific ages

Summary and conclusions

Lower post-16 outcomes and higher inequalities in Wales

Provision more geared towards colleges and strongly shaped by geography and demographics

Larger inequalities in school outcomes, which will play a very large role in explaining post-16 outcomes and inequalities

Focus on reducing school-age inequalities and access to high-quality provision right across Wales