

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

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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

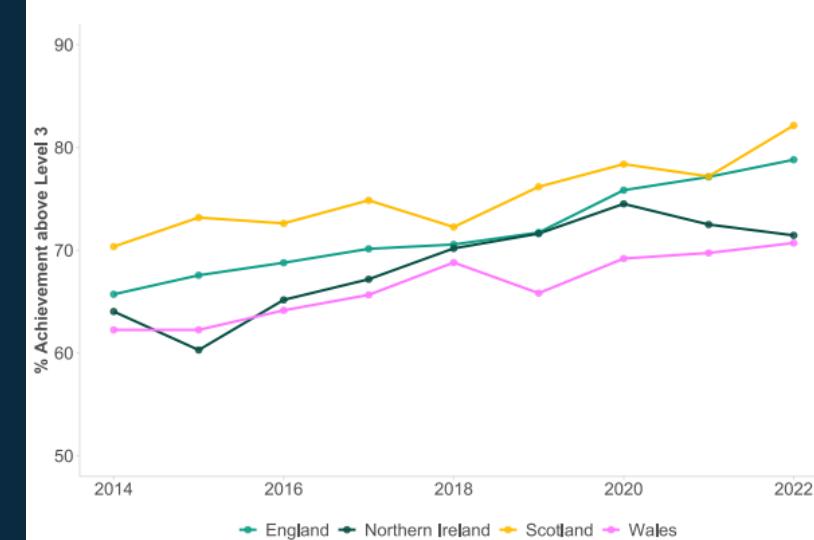
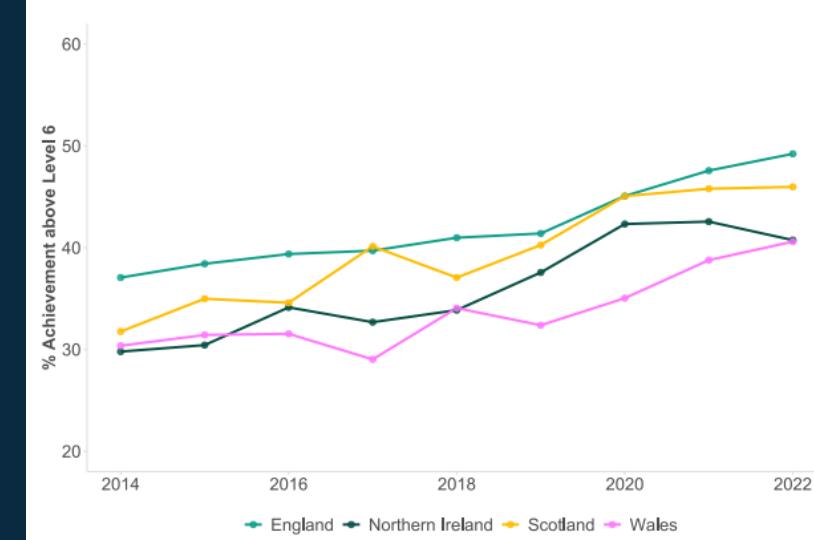


Figure 4.5. Level 6 or higher in the four UK nations (%), ages 22 to 30



# 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

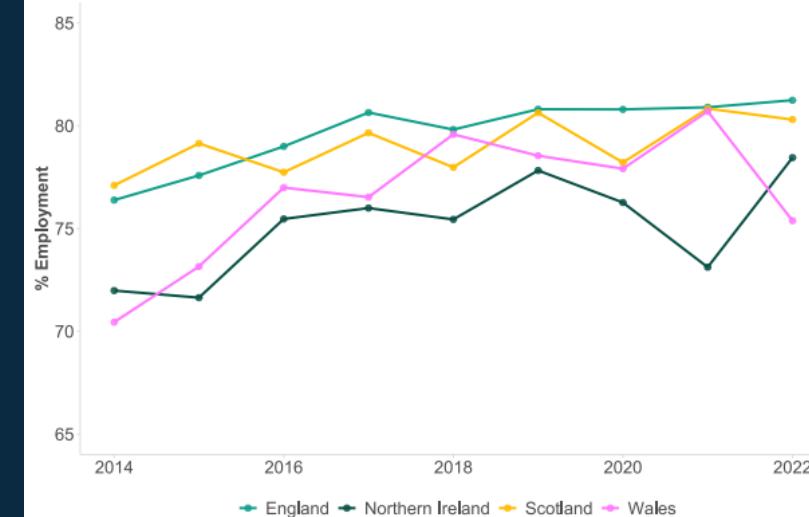
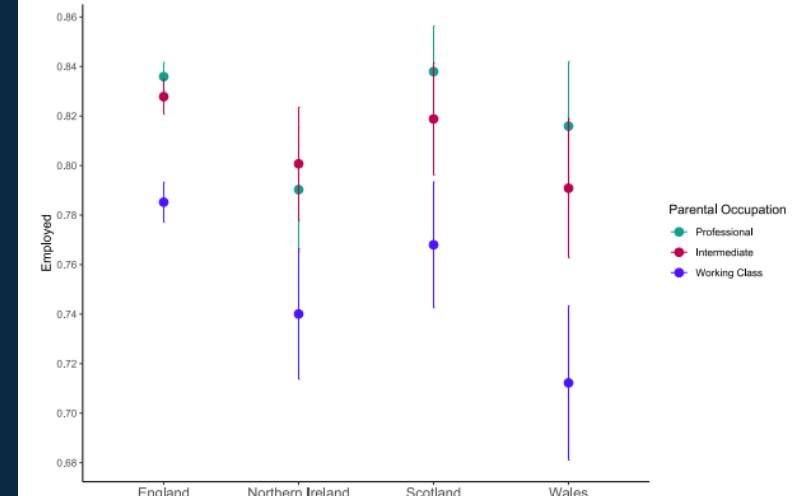


Figure 4.10. Employment levels by nation and parental background



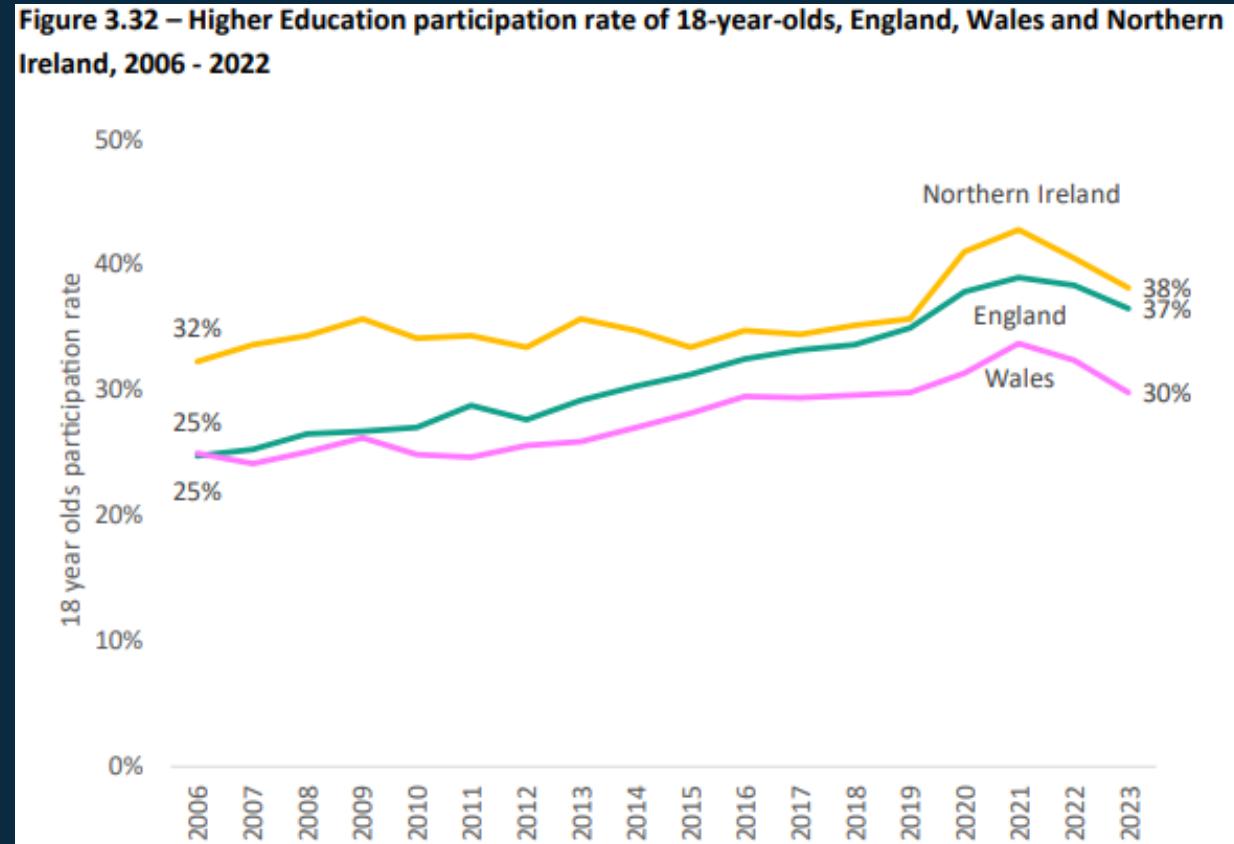
# Lower HE participation in Wales

**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%)**



# Differences in provision in Wales

# Higher use of colleges in England and Wales

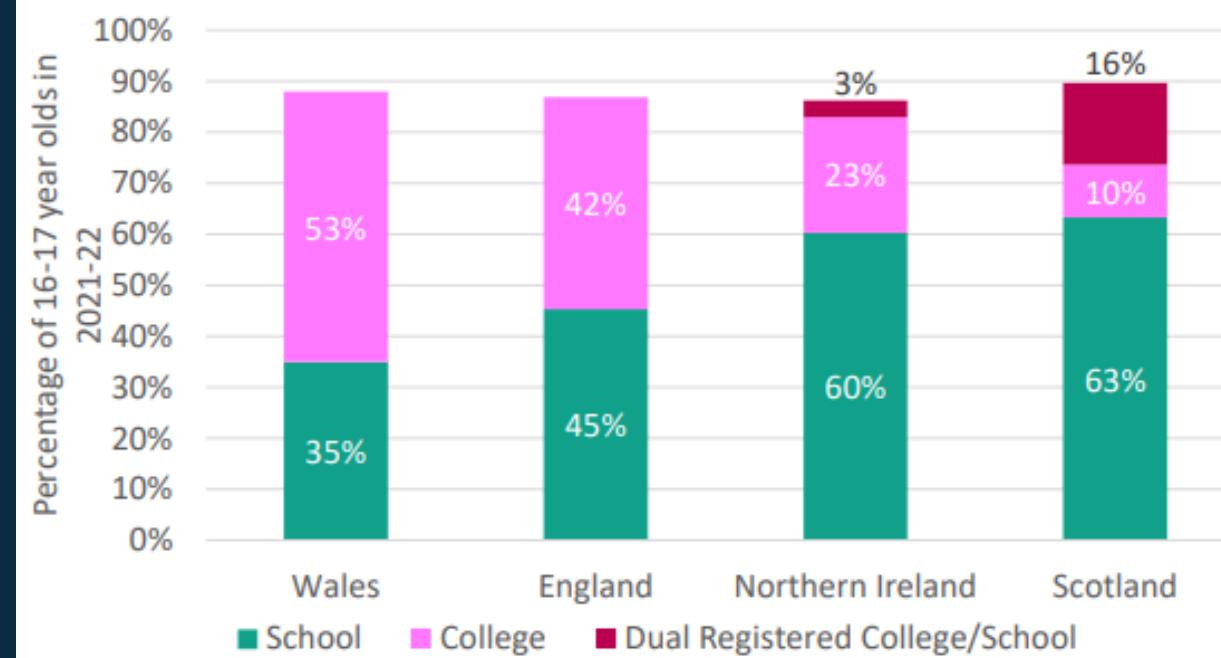
High shares of young people in school  
in Scotland (63%) and NI (60%)

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
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	5%	37%	47%	11%	95,860
Male	8%	30%	53%	9%	100,380
<b>FSM status</b>					
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
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	49%	36%	49%	18%	95,860
Male	37%	25%	56%	23%	100,380
<b>FSM status</b>					
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

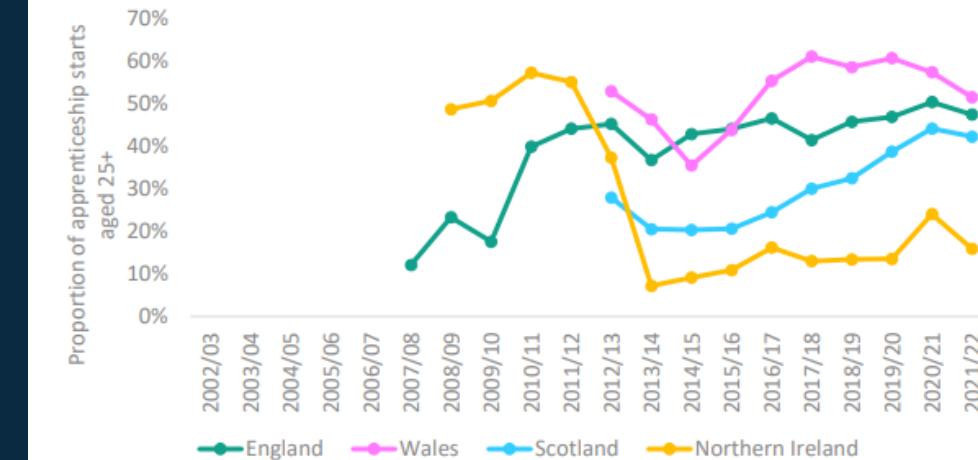
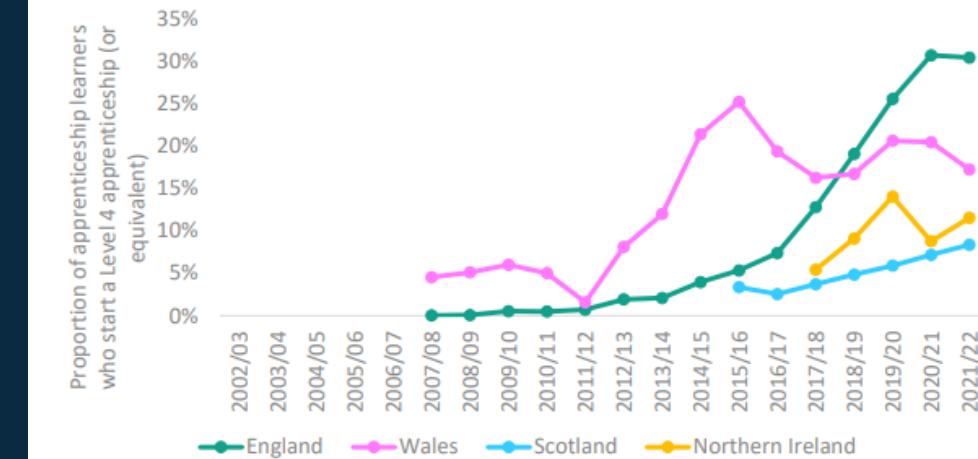


Figure 3.21 – Proportion of total apprenticeship starts at Level 4+, all nations



# Role of school inequalities

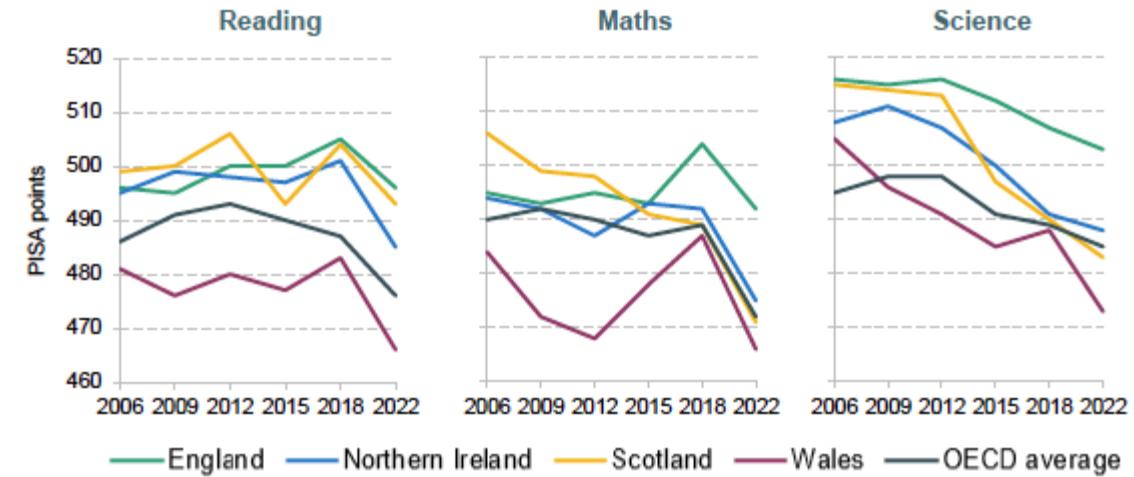
# Declining skill levels

**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

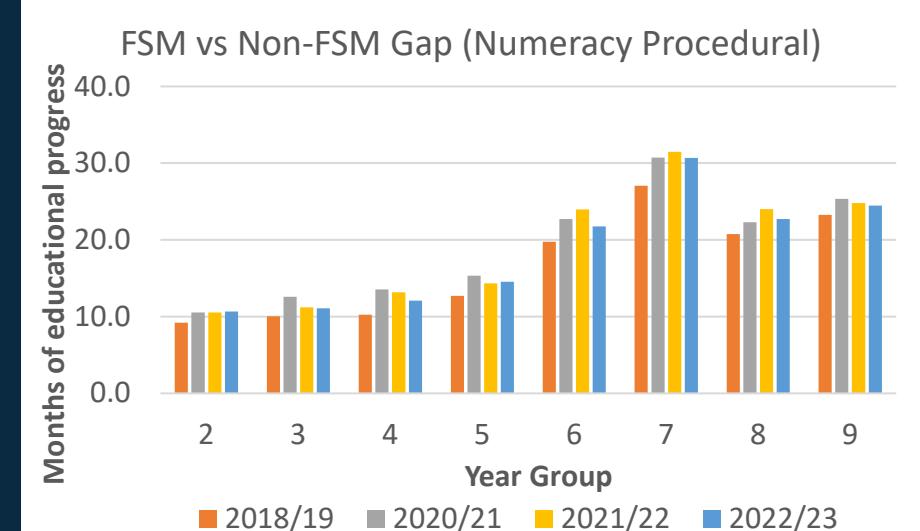
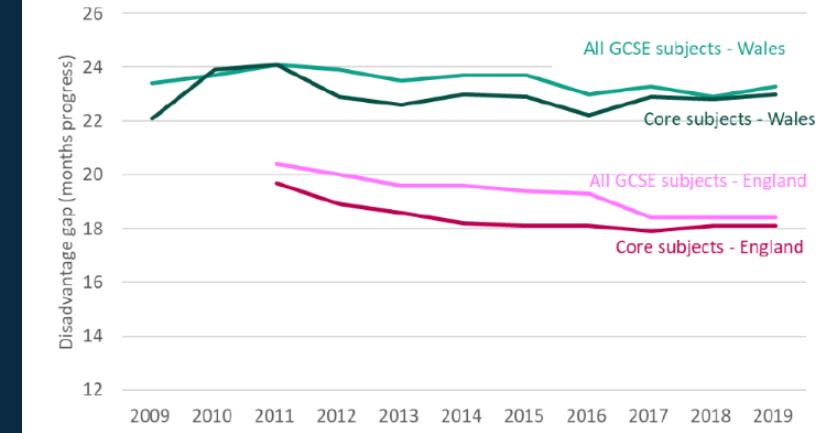
**Higher disadvantage gap in GCSE outcomes in Wales than in England**

**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

Figure 3. Disadvantage gap in GCSE results in Wales and England over time (months of educational progress; disadvantaged defined as ever eligible for FSM in past six years)



# Highest inequalities in local areas in Wales

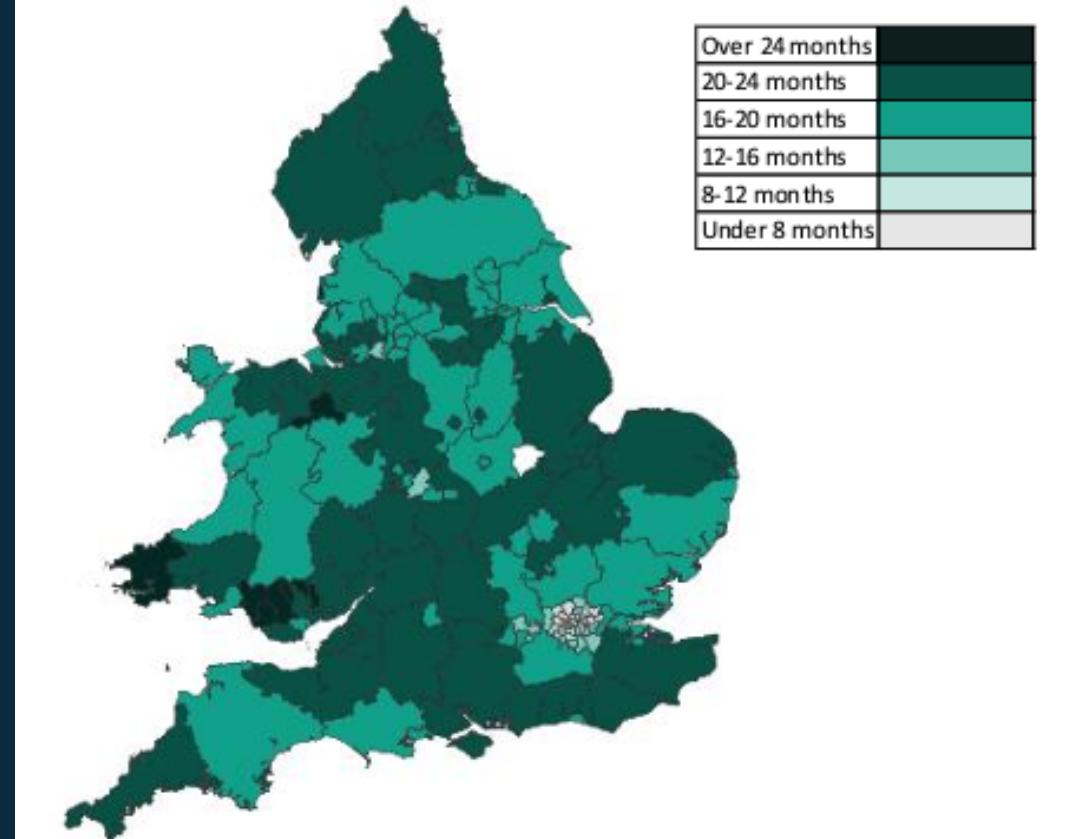
**Local areas with highest disadvantage gaps almost all in Wales**

**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**