

# The Next London Challenge

Converting strong educational performance into great jobs  
for disadvantaged Londoners

Kathryn Petrie



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathryn is Chief Economist at the SMF. Since joining the SMF she has worked on several policy areas including education, social care and financial services. Prior to joining the SMF Kathryn worked at the National Employment Savings Trust (NEST) as a Strategy Analyst. She has a BSc in Economics from Brunel University and an MSc in Economics from the University of East Anglia.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Political debate around social mobility tends to describe London as a success story. This reflects the tendency among politicians and commentators to see social mobility through the lens of school performance and exam results. The Social Mobility Commission (SMC) refers to London as a social mobility hotspot; however, this warrants closer investigation.

The aim of this research is to understand to what extent disadvantaged Londoners can translate their better-than-average education attainment into successful careers.

### London's education story

Disadvantaged young people do exceptionally well in London's education system up until the age of 16. Although students eligible for free school meals (FSM) underperform against the wider student population in London, the difference between the groups is much less marked than in other regions. Unfortunately, this performance at 16 does not continue into A level. Inner London's strong performance at GCSE does not appear to translate into high A level grades.

London does exceptionally well at sending students from disadvantaged backgrounds to university. However, this is only part of the story - we know students at university in London are more likely to drop out of university compared to the other regions of England. Graduates are also affected by degree class attainment gaps by ethnicity and socio-economic status.

### London's labour market

Although London has higher wages than other regions, London also has above average unemployment. The competitive nature of the city's labour market can mean that graduates from London struggle to obtain graduate jobs. Graduates who lived in London prior to university have the lowest employment rate of graduates in England, and this is true one, three, five and ten years post-graduation. For those who gain employment, the story is more positive, with graduates from London having one of highest median salaries across the same time period.

Using the Next Steps dataset (LYSPE), we can track Londoners who performed well at GCSE (5+ A\* to C grades including English and Maths) into the labour market. This shows that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds have significantly lower earnings at age 26 compared to those from more advantaged backgrounds. Londoners who have a degree and are from lower socio-economic backgrounds experience a 'pay penalty' of £1,664 per year. For those without a degree this pay penalty stands at £4,004.

Those from disadvantaged backgrounds who attended university are significantly less likely to have needed their highest qualification to secure their current job.

### What are the barriers to success?

During this project we have conducted qualitative research with 20 young Londoners who were eligible for FSM during their school years, performed well during their GCSEs and were aged 24 to 28 at the time of interview. This research, combined with conversations with prominent London employers and third sector organisations, enabled us to identify five barriers to success facing Londoners.

**Barrier 1: The importance of self-belief and ‘soft’ skills**

‘Soft’, or more appropriately named, essential skills are increasingly important to get through interviews and succeed in the workplace, yet they are developed less in those from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Barrier 2: Education choices and pathways**

Young disadvantaged Londoners are let down by poor access to and low-quality careers advice. In some instances, individuals choose career paths due to pressures from family and peers rather than following their own interests.

**Barrier 3: Gaining work experience and internships**

London’s job market is competitive. Work experience is important in helping secure employment and allowing young people to discover their strengths. Internships are common practice in the capital, often secured through connections and/or unpaid, which adds further barriers for those from disadvantaged backgrounds who are often unable to access these opportunities. The number of professional sectors and occupations within London, which have themselves their own barriers to access, means the issues associated with social and cultural capital are exacerbated.

**Barrier 4: The implications of financial disadvantage**

Unfortunately, financial disadvantage still plays a role in the opportunities available to, and undertaken by, Londoners. Concerns about student debt can mean some do not pursue higher education regardless of their ability. For those who do attend university, the need for income during gaps in study means internships are not accessible, and there can be financial pressure to secure any form of employment post-graduation.

**Barrier 5: The role of recruitment practices**

Securing employment is one of the final hurdles for disadvantaged Londoners. Unfortunately, recruitment practices can add further difficulty. These include practices such as UCAS grade requirements, university filtering, the use of social connections and biased assessment practices.

**Policy recommendations:**

The report puts forward ten policy measures to combat some of these barriers.

**1. Promotion of alumni networks**

Alumni networks can be used to encourage students to visualise people like themselves in specific roles and industries. This type of engagement can help to break down stereotypes about the opportunities available to different genders, ethnicities and those from different socio-economic backgrounds. These are being developed by organisations such as Future First. We propose that funding is provided to scale up and roll out these networks.

**2. Improved essential skills**

“Character Education” has been added to the school curriculum but this formal provision of essential skills will still exclude those who have left this stage of education. Essential / employability skills should be incorporated into the university and adult education curriculum. By

making the development of these skills compulsory it would remove the ability of students to self-select out of the activities and ensure coverage in all types of academic setting.

### **3. Ring-fenced funding for careers advice**

The Department for Education should commit to creating a ring-fenced fund for careers advice and guidance, with additional weighted funding to schools with large numbers of pupils on FSMs.

### **4. The creation of a schools' outreach database**

The Mayor of London should facilitate the creation of a school outreach database. This would enable employers to connect with schools that currently lack partnerships and help to diffuse the geographical concentration of outreach activity.

### **5. The Mayor's community careers champions**

The Mayor should create groups of community careers champions. These community groups can spread information on how to navigate all available educational choices, the university admission processes and the best subjects to study for the long run. The champions could encourage parents to allow their children to follow the paths of their own choosing.

### **6. Compulsory work experience in Year 12**

The introduction of T levels means that those taking the vocational route during level 3 will be required to take part in work experience. We recommend that *compulsory* work experience should occur within Year 12 regardless of the qualification route taken. The government should release criteria that allows schools, students and employers to understand what constitutes as high-quality work experience.

### **7. The Mayor's challenge**

The Mayor should challenge large employers to engage with London universities to fund internship opportunities for students at firms where paid internships are not feasible or the norm.

### **8. The reintroduction of maintenance grants**

The government should implement the recommendation from the Augar review of post-18 education to reintroduce maintenance grants to students from low income backgrounds to reduce their level of student debt.

### **9. Evaluation of assessment practices**

The Behavioural Insights Team should investigate recruitment practices in industries where there is underrepresentation of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

### **10. Fair recruiter trademark**

Employers and recruitment agencies should receive a trademark if their business complete several steps associated with fair and equal recruiting. There is scope to use the results of the recommended Behavioural Insights Team's assessment of practices to develop the trademark.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Political debate around social mobility tends to describe London as a success story. This is largely reflective of the tendency among politicians and commentators to see social mobility through the lens of school performance and exam results. Since London's schools have, by many measures, been performing better than comparable schools elsewhere in England,<sup>1</sup> it is sometimes inferred that London must have a better record on social mobility.

This view has been reinforced by the work of the Social Mobility Commission (SMC), which has designated London a "social mobility hotspot" and suggested that the capital is a model for others to follow. "Britain's social mobility problem has a profound spatial dimension as well as a social one. Many regions have fallen further and further behind London," the Commission said in its State of the Nation report.<sup>2</sup>

The SMC's conclusion about London warrants closer investigation. Those conclusions are aggregates based on analysis of factors including 1) the educational attainment of poorer children in an area, and 2) the outcomes achieved by adults in that area. Whilst London performs very well across the measures of attainment, its record on working lives is not as impressive. When focusing purely on adult outcomes, SMC findings show that six of the 32 worst-performing areas in England are in London.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the picture of social mobility measured by adult outcomes may be even worse in London than the analysis suggests. The 'working life' measure focuses on the London labour market as a whole, this includes the outcomes for all adults in London, not simply those educated in its high-performing schools. Given the net inflow of workers to London (from the rest of the UK and elsewhere), it seems reasonable to theorise that high levels of competition for employment could mean young disadvantaged Londoners could miss out on high-paying, high-status jobs despite their educational outperformance.

### Aim of the research

The aim of this research is to understand to what extent disadvantaged Londoners are able to translate their better than average educational attainment into successful careers. There is no universal definition of the term 'disadvantaged.' Throughout this research, it is predominantly used to refer to those who receive(d) free school meals (FSM) unless otherwise stated. Through this research we will address the following questions:

- What is the educational performance of disadvantaged Londoners pre and post 18?
- Do disadvantaged Londoners translate their strong educational performance into good jobs?
- Are there barriers to success for disadvantaged Londoners, and if so, what are they?
- How should policy adapt to address these barriers?

### Methodology

This project uses both qualitative and quantitative research to analyse and explore the research question.

The quantitative analysis uses secure access data from the Next Steps Survey (waves one to eight). This data tracks young people from the age of 14/15 (2004) to 25 (2015). Rapid

improvements are observed from 2005 to 2010 with regard to London's performance at GCSE. The respondents to the survey concluded their GCSEs in 2006 and therefore are one of the first groups to benefit from the substantial improvements. Access to this dataset is through the UK Data Service.

Full data citation: University College London, UCL Institute of Education, Centre for Longitudinal Studies. (2018). *Next Steps: Sweeps 1-8, 2004-2016: Secure Access*. [data collection]. 4th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 7104, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7104-4>

The qualitative research is based on conversations with 20 Londoners between the ages of 24 to 28 in 2018. These individuals were educated in London (pre-university), performed well in their GCSEs and were eligible for FSM during secondary school. Due to their ages they completed their GCSEs in London between 2006/7 and 2010/11 and therefore were educated during the time of London's educational improvement.

To understand the challenges facing young Londoners looking for employment, we also conducted interviews with a range of employers and third-sector organisations within London.

### Report structure

- **Chapter 2** explores how London performs on education.
- **Chapter 3** analyses the transition of Londoners from education to employment.
- **Chapter 4** discusses the barriers to success in education and the labour market for disadvantaged Londoners.
- **Chapter 5** examines the role of policy in helping to mitigate and remove these barriers.

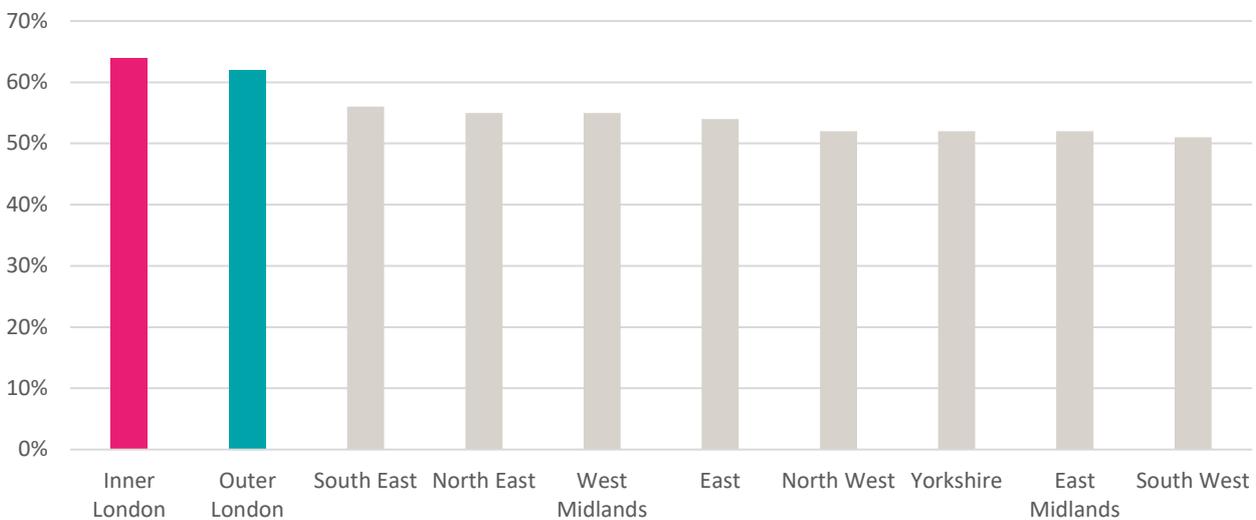
## CHAPTER 2: LONDON’S EDUCATION STORY

In this chapter we explore the outcomes of Londoners at different stages in their lives, looking at education and labour market data. We analyse whether Londoners can effectively translate their better than average performance at GCSE into successful careers.

### London’s educational outcomes pre-university

The London education system has improved remarkably in the last decade. It has outperformed many of the English regions on student outcomes and particularly in relation to the outcomes of disadvantaged students. The educational differences between London and the rest of the country are evident even within the first year of schooling.

**Figure 1: Percentage achieving at least the expected standard in all Early Learning Goals if eligible for free school meals, 2018**



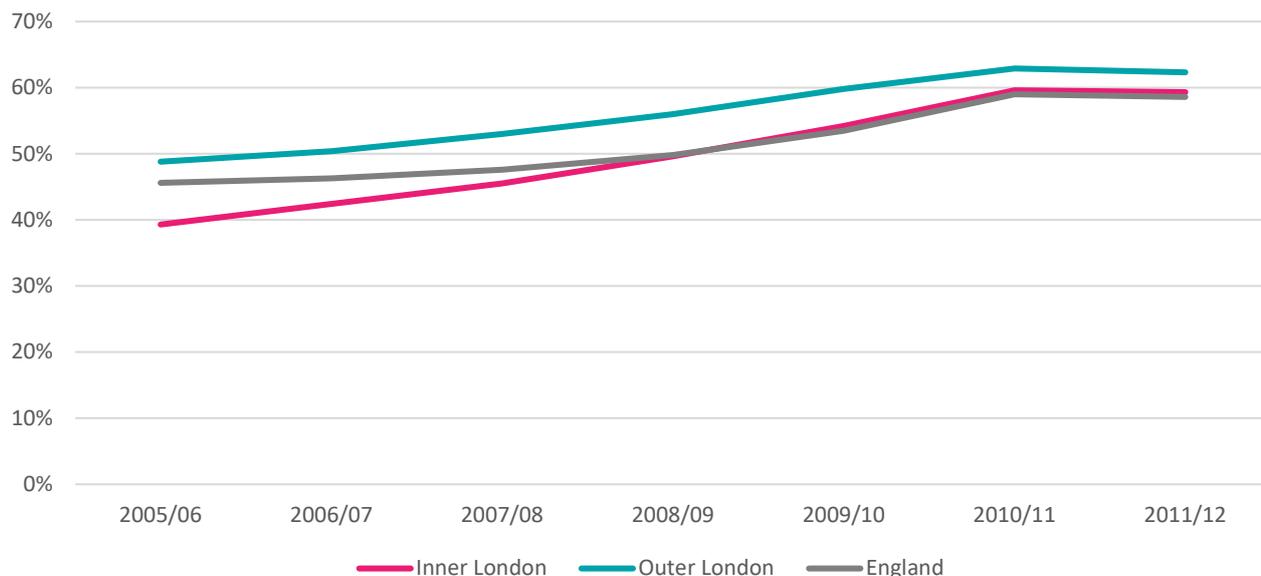
Source: Department for Education (2018)<sup>4</sup>

Inner London has the highest proportion of individuals who are eligible for FSM achieving at least the expected standard in all Early Learning Goals, which is the standard that a child is expected to achieve by the end of their reception year. Inner and Outer London are the only two areas where more than 60% of those eligible for FSM achieve the expected standard.

It has not always been the case that Inner London outperformed the rest of the country on education. In 2005/06, Inner London was the worst performing region<sup>1</sup> within England, and only 39% of students received 5+ A\*-C GCSE grades including English and Maths, noticeably lower than the national average of 46%. Yet, as shown within Figure 2, from 2009 onwards Inner London has marginally outperformed the English average.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Within this analysis Inner and Outer London are treated as separate areas

**Figure 2: Percentage of students gaining 5+ A\*-C grades at GCSE including English & Mathematics GCSEs**

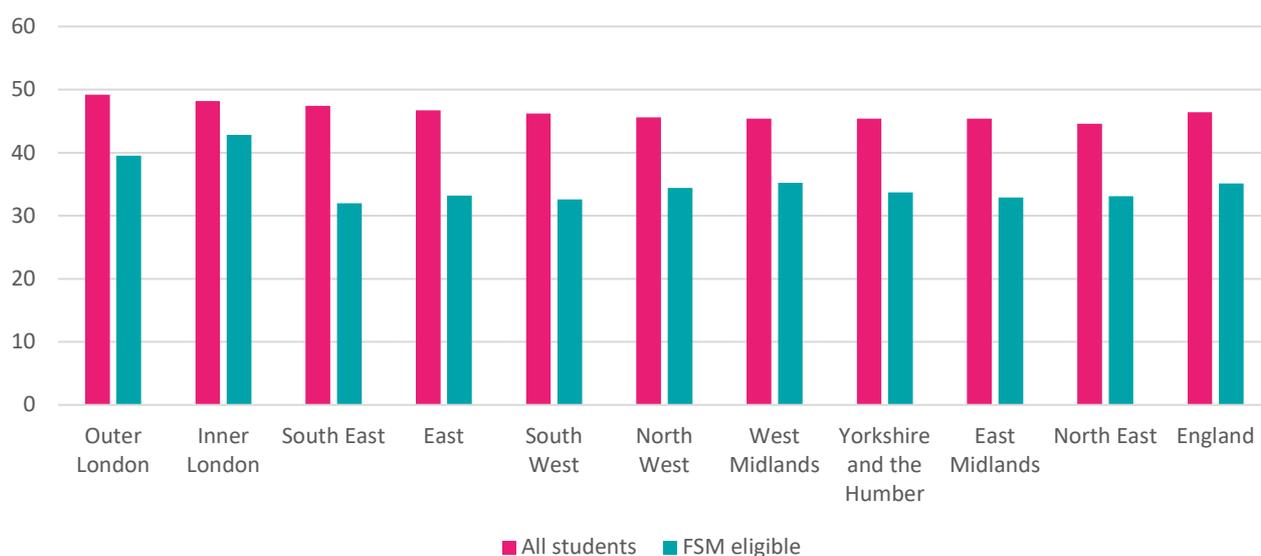


Source: Department for Education (2013)

Part of the improvement witnessed within Inner London is due to changes in the demographics of disadvantaged students in London schools. However, this does not explain all the difference. Evidence suggests that most of the improvement in outcomes at 16 (key stage 4) is as a result of improvements in prior attainment at the end of key stage 2 (end of primary school). This suggests that primary schools are playing an important role in the performance of disadvantaged students during their GCSEs.<sup>6</sup>

Inner London has continued to build upon its GCSE success - going from the worst performing region in 2005 to the second best in 2016/17. Using the new measure of GCSE success “attainment 8” – which measures performance across eight subjects - Figure 3 shows the performance of Outer and Inner London compared to the rest of the country.

**Figure 3: Average attainment 8 score per pupil by region by FSM eligibility status 2016/17**



Source: Department for Education (2018)

Figure 3 shows London’s strong record regarding the education outcomes of those eligible for FSM. The first thing to note is the marked difference in average attainment 8 scores for students on FSM compared with the wider student population. Disadvantaged Londoners are more likely to achieve high GCSE grades compared to disadvantaged students within other parts of the country. There is some evidence to suggest that major cities, such as Manchester and Birmingham, have similarly positive GCSE results for disadvantaged students.<sup>7</sup>

However, outcomes at age 16 are only part of the educational journey of young people. Evidence suggests that for Londoners performance in post-16 education is much more mixed. Figure 4 focuses on academic qualifications and shows the proportion of students receiving AAB or better at A level. This is clearly only part of the post-16 picture, as some students take other qualifications such as BTECs, but A levels remain the most common qualification.

**Figure 4: Proportion of students receiving AAB or better at A level, state schools only 2016/17**

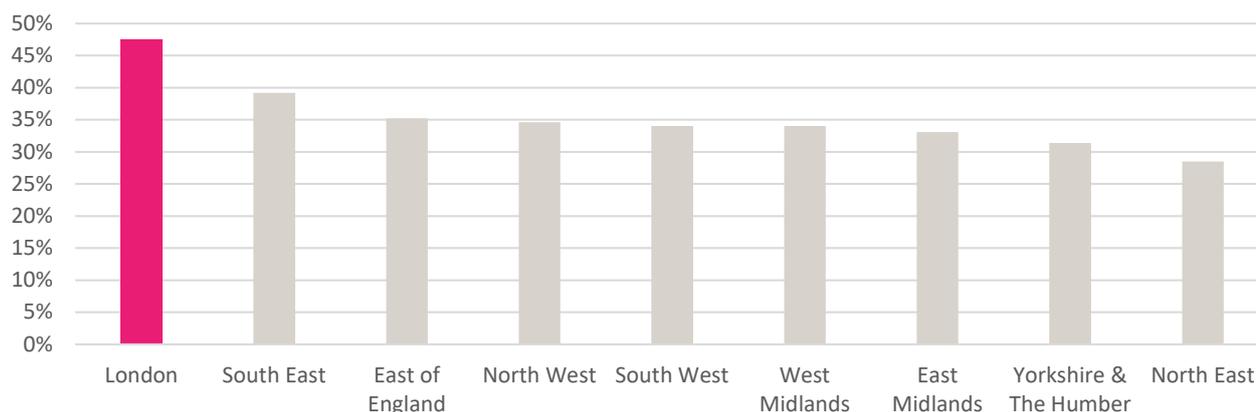


Source: Department for Education (2018)

Based on the outstanding performance of Inner London at GCSE it would be reasonable to expect students in Inner London to perform well during 16-18 education. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Inner London is the second-best area for GCSE attainment, however it slips to seventh out of the ten areas for A level attainment. This suggests that those from Inner London may face difficulties translating positive outcomes at age 16 into the same success at 18.

### University education

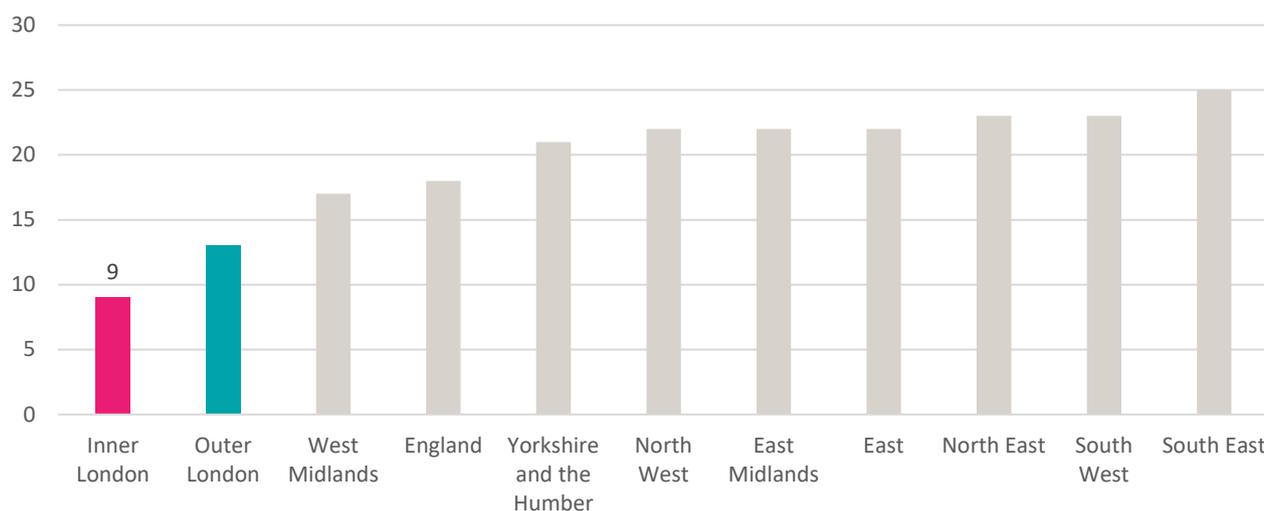
London is well known for sending a large proportion of students to university, as is evident in Figure 5. Almost half (48%) of young Londoners attend university, compared to four in ten of those from the South East (next highest) and three in ten from the North East.

**Figure 5: Median higher education participation rate by region of home, 2017**

Source: Higher Education Funding Council for England (2018)

Whilst London succeeds in sending young people from all backgrounds to university, the same is not true across England, and the link between socio-economic background and the likelihood of attending university remains. In 2016/17, only a quarter (26%) of those who were eligible for FSM at age 15 entered university by age 19, this is compared to 43% of those who were not eligible for FSM.<sup>8</sup>

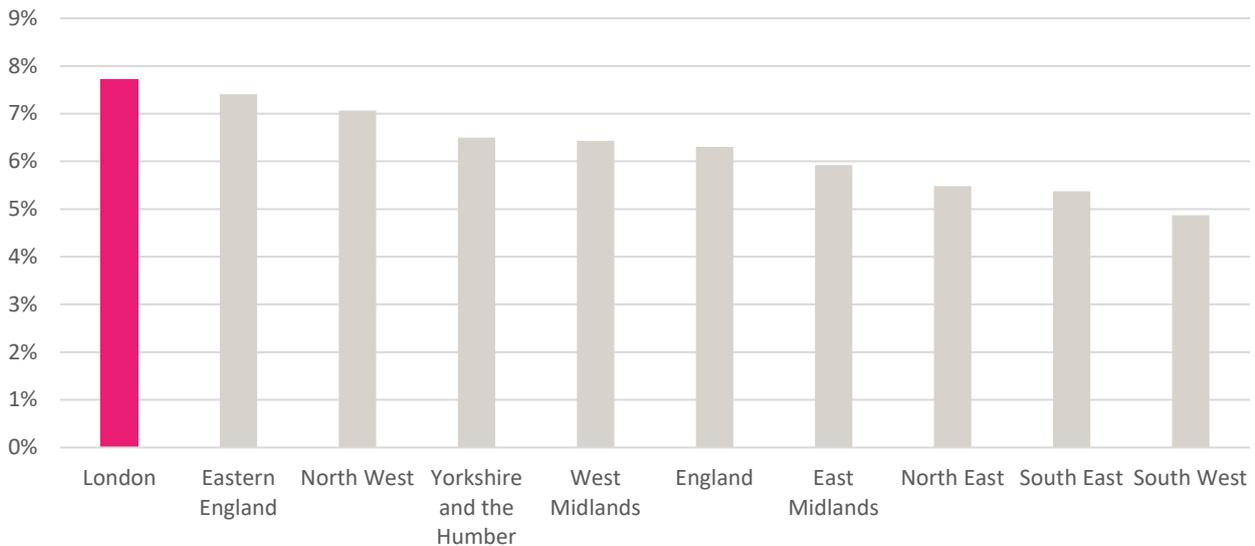
The negative relationship between FSM eligibility and university attendance is less prominent in London. In Inner London those eligible for FSM are only nine percentage points less likely to attend university compared to those not eligible, in contrast the gap is 25 percentage points in the South East.

**Figure 6: Percentage point gap between non-FSM and FSM participation in higher education by age 19 by region, 2016/17**

Source: Department for Education (2018)

University attendance only tells part of the story - previous SMF research has shown that London has the highest HE non-continuation rate for young people of all regions, with a non-continuation rate of 7.7% compared to an English average of 6.3%.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 7: Rate of non-continuation in higher education by region of study, 2016/17 entry (young, first-degree, UK-domiciled students)**

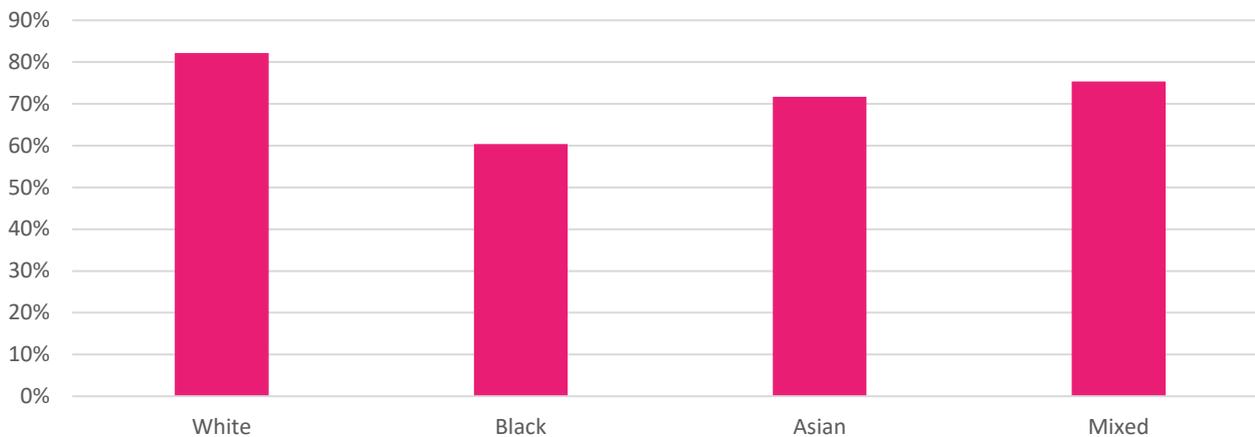


Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (2019)

Figure 7 represents all students studying in London – previous SMF research has shown that more than one in ten Londoners studying in London leave higher education. Very little is known about the outcomes of Londoners studying outside of the capital. Our work has shown that for students studying in London, socio-economic status, entry qualifications and student accommodation choices are linked to the likelihood of withdrawal from university.<sup>10</sup>

Evidence suggests that students from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds have varying levels of degree attainment. Figure 8 shows the degree attainment differences between ethnic groups in the UK. More than 80% of white students obtain a first or upper-second class degree, compared to 60% of black students. Whilst some of the difference can be explained by observed differences, 17.3 percentage points of the difference are unexplained.<sup>11</sup> Due to the demographics of London’s young population, graduates from London are more likely to be from ethnic minority backgrounds and therefore could be graduating with lower class degrees.

**Figure 8: Percentage of students obtaining a first or upper-second class degree, 2016/17 UK**



Source: Office for Students (2018)

The difference is less stark between socio-economic groups but still evident. Further research is needed on the attainment of graduates by ethnicity and socio-economic status controlling for region of domicile prior to university.

#### **Summary of educational outcomes for Londoners**

- 1. Disadvantaged young people do exceptionally well in London's education system up until age 16. Although students on FSM underperform against the wider student population in London, the difference is much less marked than in other regions.**
- 2. The performance of the capital drops off significantly after strong achievement at GCSEs – with A level results in Inner London being considerably lower than would be expected.**
- 3. Participation in higher education is high in London, however drop-out rates are also high. There are issues with non-continuation and attainment by ethnicity and socio-economic background.**

## CHAPTER 3: LONDON’S LABOUR MARKET

This chapter takes the journey from education into work. It describes London’s labour market and the outcomes Londoners achieve when they go into work.

The London labour market is a mixed picture, both the rate of unemployment and median wages are higher than the English averages. The unemployment rate within the capital is closer to the levels seen within the north of England rather than the regions directly surrounding it.

**Figure 9: Unemployment rate of those aged 16 and over by region, October to December 2018**



Source: Office for National Statistics (2019)

### Labour market differences

Figure 9 above shows the overall rate of unemployment within London; however, this differs substantially between ethnicities (as is shown in Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Unemployment rate in London and the UK by ethnic group, 12 months to December 2018**



Source: NOMIS, Annual Population Survey (2019)

It is evident from Figure 10 that the unemployment rate of those from ethnic minorities is considerably higher than that of white individuals across London and the rest of the UK. The unemployment rate of ethnic minorities in London is more than twice the rate experienced by white individuals.

The headline ethnic minority grouping hides huge variation - Londoners who identify as Indian have an unemployment rate of 3.6% compared to 10.5% for those of Black or Black British ethnicity.<sup>12</sup> In the year to December 2018, youth unemployment was higher in London than in the rest of the UK (excluding London). The unemployment rate of those aged 16 to 24 in London was 14.9% compared to 11.2% across the UK (excluding London).<sup>13</sup> Research has found that middle and highly qualified Londoners are more likely to be NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) compared to those with similar qualifications in other regions, likely due to the high rate of Higher Education participation of disadvantaged groups in London.<sup>14</sup>

For those in employment the picture is better. London has the highest median earnings for full time employees by place of work. As previously stated, the median weekly earnings in London are £713 per week, which is £124 more per week than the next highest region (South East).<sup>15</sup> Crucially, however, this covers the entire London jobs market and thus captures individuals who have migrated to London at different stages in their life and those who commute into the capital. Hence it may mask the reality of those brought up in London. The data also fails to consider the higher than average cost of living within London and therefore this wage premium may not reflect a large difference in real disposable income. Below we turn to focus on the employment outcomes of those brought up in London. As noted earlier, such individuals are affected by factors that may affect their work and career prospects, such as the large flow of international and UK migrants to the capital, many with good qualifications, which increases competition for jobs.

### Graduate outcomes

A large proportion of young Londoners attend and graduate from university, therefore it is important to understand the extent to which they can translate their success at university into sustained employment. Data on graduate outcomes post-university shows that students who were living in London prior to attending university have the lowest employment rate of graduates from all English regions. This is true one year, three years, five years and ten years post-graduation. Ten years after graduation, the difference in the employment rate between London and the North East is five percentage points. There are several factors that could be contributing to the regional differences however these figures are still alarming.

**Table 1: Percentage of young graduates in further study, sustained employment or both by home region, one, three, five and ten years after graduation (tax year 2016/17)**

Region	One	Three	Five	Ten
North East	87.9%	87.6%	86.7%	85.3%
North West	87.5%	86.9%	86.3%	85.1%
Yorkshire & Humber	88.6%	87.6%	86.8%	85.7%
East Midlands	89.1%	87.9%	86.9%	85.2%
West Midlands	88.7%	87.6%	87.6%	85.2%
East of England	88.3%	87.6%	86.7%	84.4%
<b>London</b>	<b>84.6%</b>	<b>84.0%</b>	<b>83.2%</b>	<b>80.5%</b>
South East	87.4%	87.2%	86.2%	82.9%
South West	87.9%	87.6%	86.7%	84.3%

Source: Department for Education (2018)

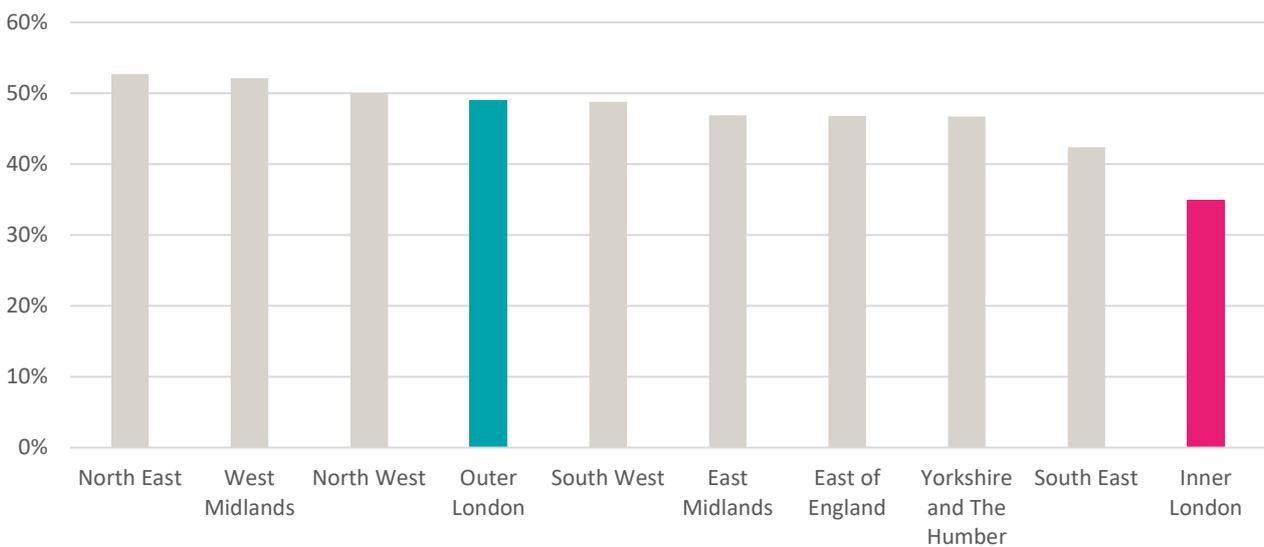
Evidence suggests that graduates from ethnic minorities and from lower socio-economic backgrounds have lower sustained employment rates post-graduation, which could explain part of the London effect. The population of Londoners who attend university is diverse and therefore

the graduate employment rates of certain ethnic groups within London could be considerably lower than is represented by the average figures.

The current evidence does not allow for analysis to be conducted on the outcomes of ethnic minorities or those from lower socio-economic backgrounds by region of home. This would be worth further analysis.

Not only are many graduates not in work, but London has a mixed record of putting graduates into graduate jobs. Figure 11 shows the proportion of recent graduates working within non-graduate jobs. There is a clear difference between the performance of Inner and Outer London.

**Figure 11: Percentage of recent graduates working in non-graduate roles, by region of residence 2017**



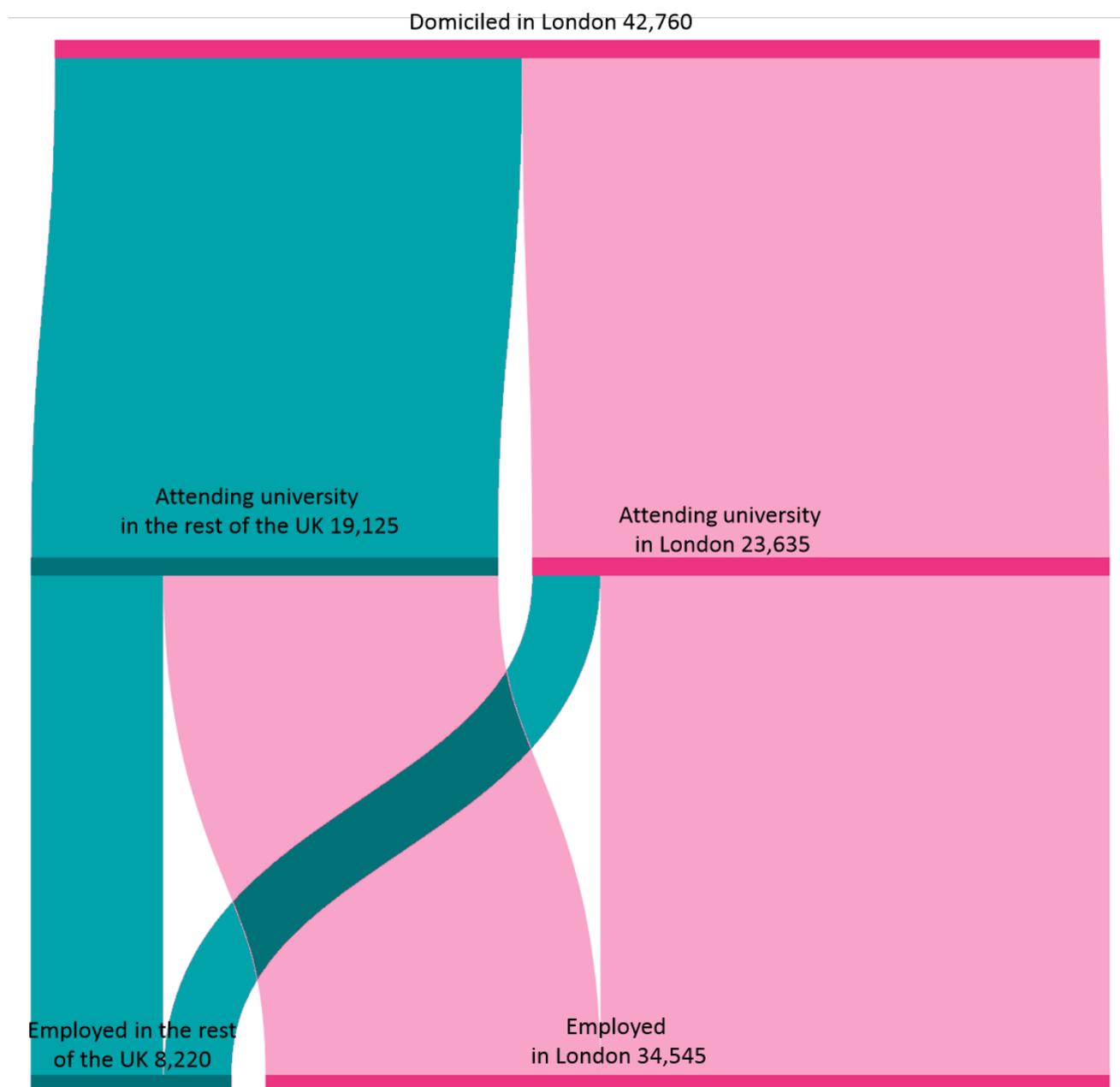
Source: Office for National Statistics (2018)

Recent graduate is defined as someone who is a graduate and who left full-time higher education within the last five years<sup>16</sup>

Almost half of graduates in Outer London are working in roles that do not need a degree, whilst Inner London has the lowest proportion of graduates in non-graduate jobs. It is important to note that this data does not differentiate between those brought up in London and those who have moved to London post-graduation. For instance, the strong results in Inner London may be partly explained by the performance of non-London graduates who subsequently move to London for work. This data tells us little about outcomes of disadvantaged Londoners.

Figure 12 highlights the geographical movement of Londoners to university and to the labour market. Whilst 44% of Londoners attend university outside of the capital, a clear majority (80%) return to London for employment. Therefore, it is essential that the London labour market offers great opportunities for Londoners.

Figure 12: Higher education leavers from London in work in the UK by region of HE provider and region of employment, 2016/17



Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (2018)

### Tracking Londoners from school to work

In this section of the report we use longitudinal data to follow individuals educated in London (at age 16) into the labour market. To do this we use the Next Steps Survey (Waves 1 to 8, secure access via the UK data service).<sup>2</sup> The survey follows young people from the age 13/14 (in 2004) to age 25 (2015).

<sup>2</sup> Full citation: (University College London, UCL Institute of Education, Centre for Longitudinal Studies. (2018). *Next Steps: Sweeps 1-8, 2004-2016: Secure Access*. [data collection]. 4th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 7104, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7104-4>

Due to the scope of this research, the group of most interest is those from lower socio-economic backgrounds – with a specific focus on the outcomes of those who performed well during their GCSEs.

Due to sample size restrictions we are unable to concentrate on those who were eligible for free school meals (FSM). We use the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) to create two groups of deprivation. The less deprived group were living in areas where the IMD score was in the bottom 50% of scores at age 16, those from more deprived areas had IMD scores in the top 50%. Whilst this is not a fully accurate definition of socio-economic disadvantage it is the closest approximation due to data limitations.

The analysis shows that Londoners who achieved 5 A\* to C grades at GCSE (including English and Maths) were the least likely to be employed (employee and self-employed) or in education at age 25 compared to the other regions of England.

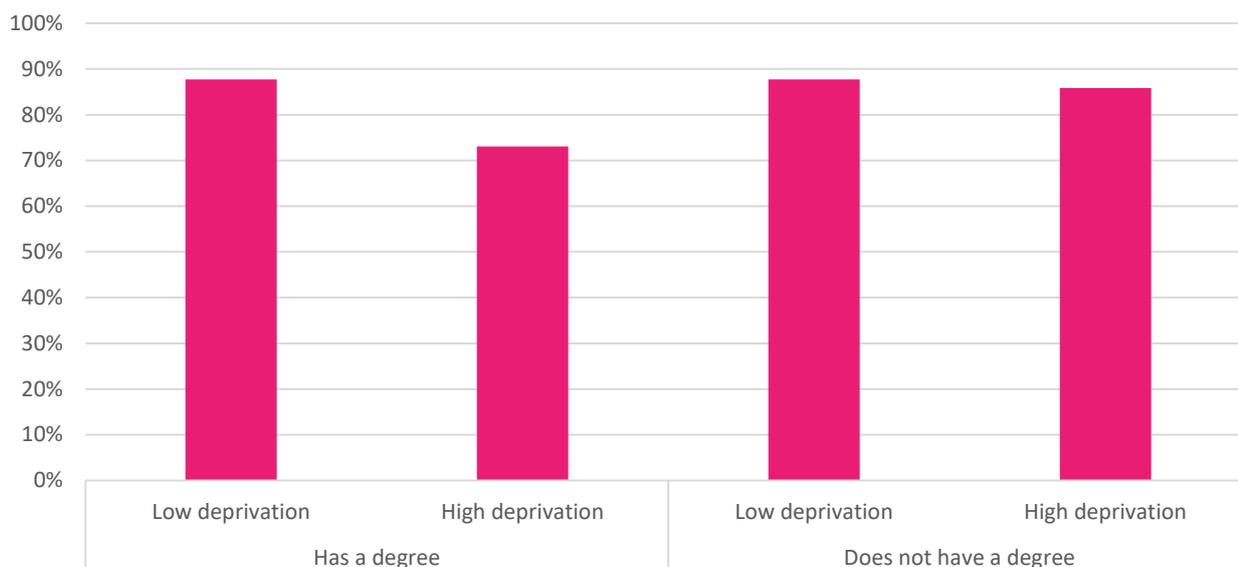
**Figure 13: Proportion in employment or education at age 25 by region (at 16) given they achieved 5+ A\* to C GCSEs including English and Maths**



Source: Next Steps wave 8; weighted data (secure access to GCSE data)

Figure 13 does not control for whether the individual went to university – which could influence the likelihood that they will be in employment at age 25. Figure 14 below shows that Londoners from more deprived areas are less likely to be in employment compared to those from less deprived backgrounds, regardless of degree status. Londoners with a degree who achieved well at GCSE are 15 percentage points less likely to be in employment compared to their advantaged counterparts. For those without a degree the employment gap is less than 2 percentage points. Due to sample size restrictions it is not possible to compare the proportion still in education.

**Figure 14: Proportion in employment (employee or self-employed) at age 25 by IMD at 16 and degree status, Living in London at 16 and they achieved 5+ A\* to C GCSEs including English and Maths**

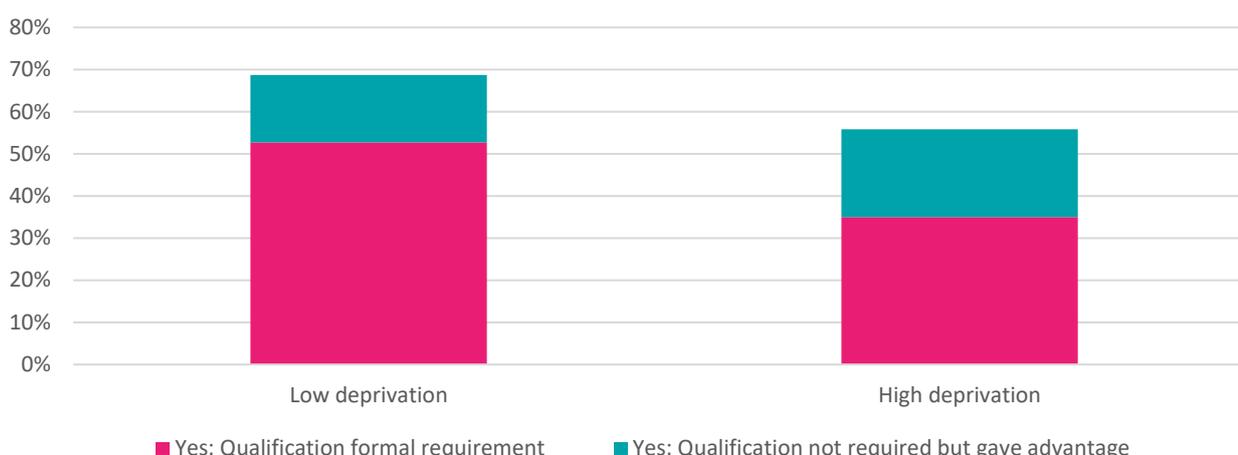


Source: Next Steps wave 8; weighted data (secure access to GCSE data)

National data published by the Department for Education has shown that graduates who lived in London prior to university have the lowest level of sustained employment (Table 1) – our analysis suggests that the national figures may be ignoring the realities faced by those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

For many graduates, gaining employment is a step towards higher wages and fulfilling work – however a significant number end up working in careers that do not require a degree and some can get trapped in low-paid work. This is not just true for graduates – our analysis shows that when controlling for GCSE attainment, those from less deprived areas are more likely to be in employment that required a qualification or where their qualification gave them an advantage.

**Figure 15: Proportion stating highest qualification was needed to secure latest employment by IMD at 16, Living in London at 16 and they achieved 5+ A\* to C GCSEs including English and Maths**



Source: Next Steps wave 8; weighted data (secure access to GCSE data)

Working in a role that does not require formal qualifications, or where a young person’s highest level of education is not needed, could increase the likelihood of being in low pay or earning below what is expected given their level of education.

**Figure 16: Difference in gross median weekly wages by IMD at 16 and degree status (only those with gross wages), Living in London at 16 and they achieved 5+ A\* to C GCSEs including English and Maths**



Source: Next steps wave 8; weighted data (secure access to GCSE data)

Due to data restrictions, it is not possible to report the values of median wages, however the gaps between these figures can be produced.

There is a median wage difference of £32 per week<sup>3</sup> by deprivation for those who went to university – equivalent to £1,664 per year (there is a risk that the use of two deprivation categories masks the real wage difference between the most and least advantaged in London). For those without a degree, the gap in median wages stands at £77 per week (£4,004 per annum).

At the upper end of the earning scale, those from less deprived areas are much more likely to be earning higher wages than those from more deprived backgrounds. The wage gap between those in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of wages stands at £152 per week for those with a degree. This could signal a ceiling in the wages of highly educated disadvantaged Londoners.

These average figures are likely to hide the significant variation between the genders and between ethnicities. This analysis is not possible due to sample sizes, it is essential that more research is conducted to understand the outcomes of disadvantaged Londoners from different backgrounds.

**Summary of outcomes for Londoners in the labour market**

1. Although London has stronger wages than other regions, London has a higher than average unemployment rate.
2. Many individuals brought up in London and graduate at university fail to find work. London graduates have the lowest employment rate across the regions of England.
3. Large numbers of recent graduates work in non-graduate roles in Outer London.
4. Tracking Londoners who go to university into the labour market shows that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds who have a degree experience a ‘pay penalty’ of £1,664 per year. For those without a degree this pay penalty stands at £4,004.

<sup>3</sup> Rounded to the nearest pound

## CHAPTER 4: WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS FOR DISADVANTAGED LONDONERS?

Chapters 2 and 3 reveal a London where strong performance in education tails off post 16, and where young disadvantaged Londoners struggle to translate their academic success at school into highly-paid occupations. This suggests that London is not as much of a ‘social mobility hotspot’ as is often stated.

This chapter draws on qualitative research with young Londoners and discussions with employers, third-sector organisations and London policymakers on the factors that affect the employment trajectories for young Londoners. It identifies five barriers to successful careers for disadvantaged Londoners. Some of these barriers are universal, applying also to disadvantaged young people outside of the capital - others are likely to be London-specific, whether this is because of the nature of the jobs market, the demographic characteristics of the London population or other factors.

### 1. The importance of self-belief and essential skills

Soft skills and self-belief are important factors in whether a young person succeeds in certain situations. Low levels of self-belief could lead to an individual holding themselves back from reaching their full potential. Soft skills, or “essential skills” on the other hand are necessary if young people are to succeed in securing employment.

#### Do Londoners suffer from imposter syndrome?

Research has shown that there are significant differences in a young people’s belief of their own academic ability by socio-economic background, even when controlling for levels of academic attainment.<sup>17</sup> Lower levels of academic self-confidence / belief are associated with low levels of participation in A levels, again, controlling for prior attainment. This highlights how confidence influences the decisions young people make, regardless of their actual academic ability.

This phenomenon was evident in some of our interviews. Young disadvantaged Londoners felt that a lack of self-belief would influence their peers’ choices in life, influencing which subjects they choose to study, whether they attend university and the jobs they apply for.

*“I think that people lose confidence in their ability... they don’t think they can do the career that they want to do”- Male, 25, White British*

*“Upbringing plays a huge part, I have seen people have the mindset that they can’t amount to anything”- Female, 27, Black British*

Michelle Obama, the former US first lady, attended an Inner London girls’ school where she spoke on issues such as self-doubt and aspiration. During this visit, she said: “I still have a little impostor syndrome; it never goes away. It’s sort of like ‘you’re actually listening to me?’”.<sup>18</sup> Imposter syndrome is the feeling a person gets when they feel they do not belong in certain environments. Those with imposter syndrome often put their achievements down to luck rather than merit and feel they will eventually be ‘found out’. Our interviews suggested that bright disadvantaged Londoners can suffer from a sense of imposter syndrome when applying for, or working within, top jobs within London.

*“I feel like I’m sort of limiting myself doing what I’m doing... I don’t apply for jobs that are out of my comfort zone”- Female, 27, Mixed race*

*“Most of the people I work with are from Surrey, Kent... Of my team the majority were private schooled, and I found that ... even speaking to my manager in the final interview, trying to speak not like I normally do, trying to speak a bit proper... I didn’t want to come across too common” – Male, 27, White European*

### When and where are skills built?

As the labour market landscape shifts due to technological innovation and increased connectedness, skills like critical thinking, oral and written communication are increasingly in demand. Research by the Sutton Trust showed that 94% of employers believe that life skills are as or more important than academic qualifications in determining the success of young people.<sup>19</sup>

The importance of soft skills is more marked in London, due to the concentration of the service industry. While some of these skills can be taught in a classroom, many cannot; they are often developed through work experience or extracurricular activities. Evidence suggests that extracurricular activities such as sport and music are not as common in London (and other urban locations) as they are in regions such as the South West or South East. Only 46% of young people aged 10 to 15 participated in sports-based activities in London compared to 61% in the South West.<sup>20</sup>

The Department for Education has coined the term ‘character education’ to refer to the non-cognitive ‘soft’ skills which are needed in life and work alongside academic skills. There is very little available evidence on the provision of character education in schools by area. University can be a place where soft skills and confidence are developed, however, many disadvantaged Londoners do not attend university or are required to work during their studies to earn money. Therefore, ensuring soft skills and confidence are developed during core learning time and throughout different stages of education is important.

*“I loved uni, it was the best four years of my life, I took from it being organised, being efficient and learning life skills... especially being out there by yourself...Uni does mould you into someone... you become quite professional in a way...It gave me confidence.”- Female, 27, Black British*

One manifestation of soft skills is the ability to write a strong CV that sells the individual’s attributes and skills; another is the ability to interview well. Interviewees reported that during their years of education, they had not been helped with their CV or been exposed to an environment like an interview. Hence, they felt unprepared and out of their comfort zone during interviews.

*“In terms of the interview technique I wasn’t great... I think there is a bit of a technique for it which I didn’t have...And I wasn’t perhaps very confident” – Male, 27, Black British*

*“It was a whole new world going into an office, you have to do everything online, to apply online...Go through the whole interview processes...I had*

*never been exposed to that type of environment to be honest”- Male, 28,  
British Asian*

### Role models and diversity

Those from more disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have family or friends in high-paid careers. This can influence the career decisions of young people. Research by The Prince’s Trust shows that approximately 30% of young people who were eligible for FSM throughout their education have never met someone who does a job they would like to do. This is considerably higher than those who were never eligible for FSM.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, 45% of young people claim that they do not have a parent who they consider to be a role model and 15% claim they do not have any role models.<sup>22</sup>

Role models can show young people that it is possible to achieve their goals regardless of their ethnicity or socio-economic status.

*“For you to be a high-paid person within marketing you need to go through years and year of experience and work your way up and I didn’t want to take that risk...There are fewer people in ethnic minorities who are able to secure roles within those spaces, so for me I didn’t want to take that risk and do that and not be able to hit the level that I want to achieve” –  
Female, 27, Black British*

Role models are not only important as young people decide on their career path, but also influence how they feel in the work environment. In our interviews, people spoke of a lack of diversity at the top of their organisation or within their industry and this often translated into a feeling that they were different to the rest of their colleagues.

*“I just think when you look at the seniors, and you look at management and CEO, they are all very cut from the same cloth...There is not much of an ethnic mix really but it’s a bit disappointing to see...Everyone is very white, late 20s to early 40s, very middle-class and I don’t feel like I fit that demographic...I can imagine for some people it would feel like an extra barrier”- Male, 27, White European*

## **2. Educational choices and pathway**

Educational decisions made at age 15 have a direct effect on the path a young person will take. A decision to take a certain route post-16 can influence the subjects you are able to study at university, the university you can attend and the career path you are able to pursue.

There are several degrees which require specific A level subjects, such as maths. Being unaware of this when choosing A level subjects could limit a young person’s options. This highlights the weight of the decisions young people make and how, without the correct advice and guidance, the wrong decision can have serious consequences.

### Policy context

There has been a considerable amount of government intervention in careers advice since the students interviewed went through the education system.

Many of the students we spoke to had heard of, or had interactions with, Connexions. Connexions was created in 2000 following the Learning and Skills Act, it offered advice and support on a range of topics including education. In 2008, the responsibility of providing Connexion services was devolved to Local Authorities and due to local cuts and the creation of the National Careers Service, it is no longer a national service.

The National Careers Service was launched in 2012 – the aim is to provide information, advice and guidance through face-to-face and telephone advice, web chat and email. The Careers Strategy published in December 2017 shows that the service is still a major part of the Government's ambition for the future of career advice in England.<sup>23</sup>

In 2014, the Government launched the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC). The aim is for the CEC to be the coordinating function for employers, schools, colleges, funders and providers and to provide high impact careers and enterprise support for young people (12 to 18). Since its creation the CEC has also become responsible for monitoring the progress of schools and colleges across the eight Gatsby Benchmarks.

The eight Gatsby Benchmarks were established in 2013 by the Gatsby Foundation. The eight Benchmarks identify a framework schools and colleges should be using to improve their careers provision.<sup>24</sup> The Gatsby Benchmarks were adopted by the Government in 2017 as part of the Careers Strategy.

### The role of advice

Not all young people are able to rely on their current network for advice. Therefore, accessible careers advice is imperative if all young people are to be aware of, and access all, the opportunities available to them. Unfortunately, the availability and quality of careers advice within London is low.

The quality of careers advice is monitored against the eight Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance. The median number of Benchmarks achieved by Local Enterprise Partnerships across England is 2.15 - the average within London is two. This masks significant variation between schools within London itself. The research by the Careers and Enterprise Company shows that the number of Benchmarks being achieved in London ranges from zero to all eight.<sup>25</sup>

Figure 17 shows the percentage of schools and colleges in London that fully achieve each Benchmark. London performs worse than the national average in six of the eight Benchmarks – with London only performing better than average on Benchmarks three and four. Given the sheer number of employers and workplaces within the capital, you might expect students in London to be in contact with employers and workplaces – however London performs worse than the national average on Benchmarks five and six.

**Figure 17: Percentage of school and colleges in London fully achieving each Benchmark (as of July 2018)**

Source: CEC (2019)

Whilst the internet is a source of vast amounts of information on the routes available to young people, without high-quality advice and guidance it can be difficult to make the best choice. Our interviews revealed the influential role that advice (or its absence) could have on careers.

*“My school had the gifted and talented scheme and I fell into it. So, they sort of pushed me in that way to use how intelligent I was, but I didn’t know where I would be going...It’s one thing to be intelligent but that’s not anything if you don’t have any guidance” – Female, 27, Mixed race*

*“I did well in my A levels... but I went to university and it was fine and everything... I think maybe I picked the wrong career choice for me” – Female, 26, White European*

Young people who were able to turn to family members benefitted substantially from this advice. Often this meant choosing A levels or post-16 qualifications that enabled them to pursue the path of their choosing.

*“My uncle has always been a big influence to me... he advised me a lot on ... what to do at college” – Male, 27, White European*

For disadvantaged Londoners, the decision on what to do post-university can be as important as the decision to attend. Many subjects do not lead to a specific career and graduates can find themselves with several pathways available upon graduation.

*“At the time I was made to understand that it was pretty linear [degree to job]. Maybe perhaps if they had given me some ideas?”- Male, 27, Black British*

*“I feel like you are in a box [at university]. You don’t see what is outside very much, then you get thrown into the outside world when you are done and it’s, like, ‘oh my god’”- Female, 26, White European*

The Mayor's 'Skills for Londoners' strategy takes the same view. It states, "barriers faced by Londoners in accessing education and employment opportunities include a lack of coherent, effective careers information, advice and guidance".<sup>26</sup>

### Family pressures

Through our interviews with young Londoners, it became clear that families play a substantial role in helping a young person navigate their options. In many cases this is positive and leads to the best outcome for the young person. However, this is not always the case. Some interviewees reported that the advice and influence of older family members led them to pursue educational routes that they were not interested in.

*"I feel like I was influenced a lot by family...At the time I enjoyed the arts more... but I didn't know what kind of career path I could have taken" – Female, 26, White European*

*"Education was a really big thing at home...the path was already written for me...Even when it came to choosing my degree, I wanted to study History at one point, and I literally had my whole family around the table trying to talk me out of it"- Male, 24, White*

For some, the additional pressure to go to university or college may be the exact push they need, for others the time spent at university was simply time away from what they were truly interested in.

*"We weren't really taught about letting out our passions and being creative...we were told go to college or sixth form and then go to uni"- Female, 27, Black British*

*"If I had it my way I would have done performing arts, but no that wasn't happening with my parents...I probably would have gone to drama school" – Male, 27, Black British*

For many the time spent concentrating on a degree or career area that they are not passionate about has delayed their ability to concentrate on their true interests.

### The transition from school to sixth-form or college

Our evidence in Chapter 2 suggests that young people in London can struggle with the jump from GCSE to A level. While there has been much interest in the transition from primary school to secondary school and attending university, there is much less focus on this transition from school to college or sixth-form. From our interviews, young people who left their school to attend a different institution often struggled with the independence that occurred as a result of this change.

*"I don't think we got that much one-to-one time with the tutors at college. They treated you more as an adult, where you would seek them out...I didn't have that mentality" – Male, 28, British Asian*

*“A levels were very hard... We just didn’t get prep, they don’t tell you how independent college is... At sixth form you get a bit more help, at college it’s more independent and you don’t get chased up... It was a wide contrast... It was a lot of work... I went too far out. If I was to make the decision again I would stay at my sixth form, just because of the support”*  
– Female, 27, Black British

For some, the freedom of college meant a fall in performance or even non-completion. College comes with a sense of freedom not too dissimilar to university. For some, their lack of commitment to college acted as a warning for how they might struggle at university.

*“I think it was the freedom thing that did it for me... It wasn’t the right support for me, the teachers weren’t bad but that’s what college is... you need to be self-motivated... As soon I got into college, I thought no this isn’t for me... I just don’t know how well I would have done with the whole lecturing thing, you get even more freedom when you are at uni”* – Male, 25, White

### 3. Gaining work experience and internships

Work experience and internships can be important events in a person’s passage into work. They can instil confidence, provide knowledge of the job market, and can set their CVs apart from the crowd.

#### Policy context

In 2004, the provision of work experience for students aged 14 to 16 became a statutory requirement. However, following the recommendations of the Wolf review the statutory duty was removed in 2012.

This was due to a preference for work experience to occur amongst older students (post 16). The current non-statutory guidance from the government to providers of 16 to 19 student programmes is that “all study programmes should include work experience and non-qualification activities, which complement the other elements of the programme, and support the student to progress to further or higher education or to employment.”<sup>27</sup>

Unpaid internships were one aspect of the Taylor Review (2018) – the review suggested that “the Government should ensure that exploitative unpaid internships, which damage social mobility in the UK, are stamped out”.<sup>28</sup> In its response to the review, the Government committed to taking several steps to reduce the prominence of unpaid internships. However, the government has not taken any clear steps to reduce unpaid internships and advice for employers is still not clear.

#### Work experience

Work experience is commonly undertaken during the penultimate year of secondary school. However, the quality and effectiveness of this work experience appears to be very mixed. This is likely to particularly affect more marginalised groups in London, as they do not have the informal networks that enable them to identify and secure relevant positions.

Many of the young people we spoke to during this project had been through secondary school when work experience was compulsory.

*“I went to every single shop and eventually got one [a placement] ...Set people had already been chosen for certain work experiences that they could acquire and then everyone else kind of fended for themselves” – Female, 27, Black British*

Our qualitative research revealed that many students felt that they were responsible for finding their own work experience and this often consisted of working in a retail-based environment and had very little overlap with their career aspirations. The individuals we spoke to range in age from 24 to 28 and therefore this may not accurately describe the current quality of school provision.

Evidence from the Careers and Enterprise Company suggests that student-led approaches to work experience do not effectively challenge class or gender stereotypes.<sup>29</sup> The ‘What Works?’ report argues that schools should be acting as brokerage services to enable students to find higher-quality work experience. Enabling students from disadvantaged backgrounds access to the breadth of careers available in London from a young age could go some way in correcting negative assumptions regarding specific industries.

For some, an inability to secure work experience during various points in their lives made securing well-paid opportunities difficult.

*“A lot of places wanted experience, it made zero sense. For me to get experience I need to work. And you would explain on your CV that you are newly qualified... Which was really disheartening” – Female, 27, Black British*

### Internships and the prominence of unpaid internships

Internships are a common route into employment for young people and particularly for graduates looking for valuable experience. In 2018, The Sutton Trust surveyed employers and found that, across Great Britain, 46% of employers reported offering internships. This increased to 62% in London, the highest rate of any area in Britain.<sup>30</sup> Internships are extremely common within specific sectors, with 74% of firms within the legal sector and 64% of those in the financial and accounting profession reporting offering internships.<sup>31</sup>

The Sutton Trust surveyed graduates under the age of 30 to understand the take-up of internships. Four in ten (39%) of graduates surveyed reported having done an internship, increasing to 57% within London.<sup>32</sup> Research suggests that working-class graduates are less likely to take part in internships compared to middle-class graduates (31% to 43% respectively).<sup>33</sup> Our interviewees expressed regret at not completing internships, having not understood the importance or value of the activity at the time.

*“I made the error of not applying for internships because that opened up the door to a lot of people after graduating... After I graduated I started to apply for graduate schemes mainly... When you hear the figures you think there’s no way in hell that I will get through... You just think shall I walk out the door right now?” – Male, 28, Middle Eastern British*

*“[It was] at the end of my second year when I decided to actually start applying for investment banking roles, where you have to really be in your first year and applying for internships” – Male, 24, White European*

Whilst HMRC guidance has tried to reduce the prevalence of unpaid internships, they are still common within specific industries and within London. Research suggests that graduates in London are the most likely to undertake an unpaid internship (43%).<sup>34</sup>

*“Nepotism is key... with the creative industries you need to be able to finance yourself for a little bit because there are unpaid opportunities and internships... There are 100% barriers to entry for working creatively” – Female, 24, White Other*

*“These were internships that I found myself, but obviously it was all unpaid and so at the time as I’d left home I couldn’t keep that up for too long, which was a shame... It was terrible, they weren’t even covering my travel... It was just really exhausting for nothing. I was basically doing a full-time job for free” – Female, 27, Mixed race*

*“In the beginning you do end up having to do a lot of work for free, trying to make a name for yourself, get a portfolio and have a reputation and contacts” – Female, 26, Black Caribbean*

The high cost of living within London means that working unpaid is a challenge for all individuals, but particularly for disadvantaged Londoners who may not be able to rely on their parents to subsidise their cost of living during this period. The Centre for London have identified unpaid positions as a barrier to social mobility within the creative industries, stating that many view it as a necessary step to get their foot in the door.<sup>35</sup>

### Social connections

Connections play an important role in how individuals gain work experience and internships. For those from disadvantaged backgrounds, not being able to rely on family or friends to help you gain these opportunities can be a significant barrier to success.

*“I think in terms of internships and landing internships, it’s about who you know, which is what I have learnt very, very quickly, which is unfortunate... For you to land an internship you need to know someone and unfortunately my parents didn’t know people in the space that I wanted to work in” – Female, 27, Black British*

*“I feel, for me, it was the whole experience of not knowing anyone, not really knowing the field, and then it’s just seeming like this really scary place” – Female, 26, White European*

Mentors can play an important role in helping young people navigate the pathway to a successful career, particularly for disadvantaged Londoners who may not be able to rely on their current network for advice and guidance. Mentors can help expose young people to the variety of roles on offer within their chosen field.

*“I think a mentor is invaluable, someone can that can give you on the ground, objective advice. Letting you know what your skills are and what you should be pursuing... Not knowing that there are positions that I would love could be a downside to me” – Female, 24, White Other*

Connections also play a role in securing employment. This can either be through knowing someone who can help navigate the processes involved in working for a certain company or can recommend an individual for a specific role. This can hinder the ability of disadvantaged Londoners to get ahead.

*“When I finished at university it took a few months before I did get a lab job...I did wish sometimes that I had some kind of connection or someone who could perhaps make things a bit easier for me” – Male, 27, Black British*

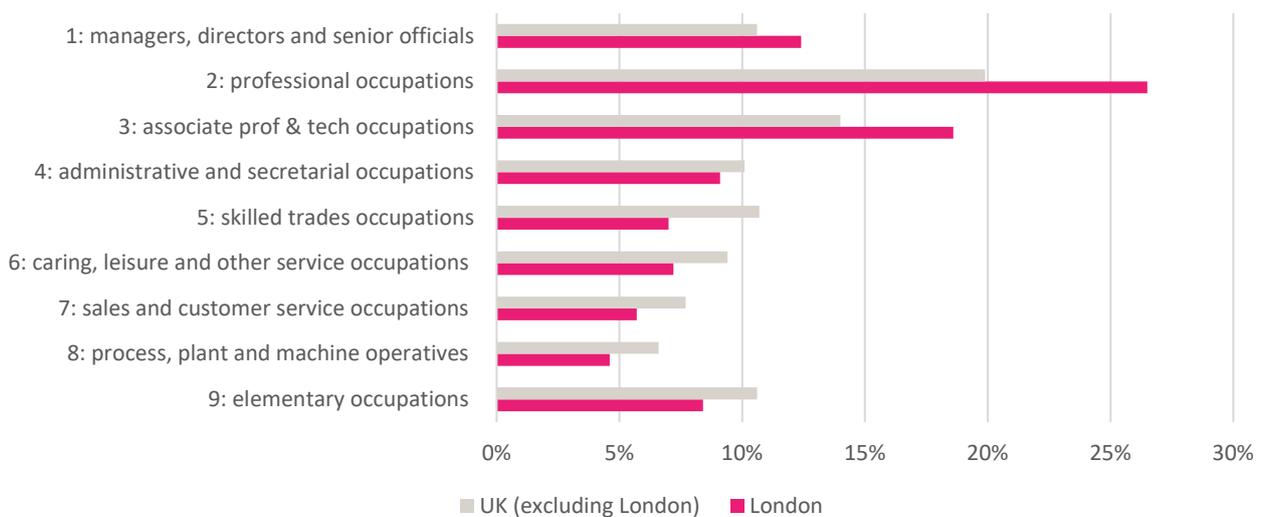
*“She [sister in law] sort of told me all the right things to say and what they want to hear and what not...” – Male, 27, White European*

The importance of industry concentration

London’s population is highly educated. More than half (53%) of Londoners aged 16 to 64 have an NVQ4 or above (level 4 and above) compared to 39% throughout the UK.<sup>36</sup> For Londoners without a degree or equivalent qualification, competing against highly-qualified individuals for jobs could prove difficult. The difference in qualification levels between London and the rest of England is likely to be partly explained by the young age demographic of London and the increased take up of higher education over time.

London’s labour market is different to the rest of the UK in several ways. Workers in London are more likely to be classified as working in “professional occupations” than the rest of the UK (as is shown in Figure 18).

**Figure 18: Occupational classification of workers by region, April 2018 – March 2019**



Source: NOMIS, Annual Population Survey (2019)

The data shows that four in ten (39%) workers in London are in professional occupations (groups one and two) compared to three in ten (30%) of those in the UK (excluding London). Due to the concentration of professional occupations in the city, Londoners who do not possess the qualifications or social capital to access such jobs could find themselves struggling.

#### 4. The implications of financial disadvantage

Whilst financial disadvantage plays a role within many of the barriers described above, it is also its own barrier for several reasons.

##### Reasons for not going to university

Nine of the 20 individuals we interviewed for this project had not been to university. For some, this was never part of their plan, and for others the decision not to go was made after applying and receiving offers. Many acknowledged that the cost of university and the considerable amount of debt that they would find themselves in post-graduation acted as a deterrent to entering or applying for university.

*“It was too expensive and I didn’t want to spend any money, and I always thought if I was going to do uni I could do it at any point and then they made it really expensive...I just didn’t want to have a big debt, I would much rather work and not start with a big debt”- Male, 28, White British*

*“No [I did not go to university], because I wanted to start earning. I am from quite a poor background and I am the youngest child... I wanted to take the pressure off my parents as well; my sister had already flown the nest” – Female, 28, White British*

There was often a considerable lack of knowledge of how the student loan / repayment system worked, which made individuals anxious about how they would afford loan repayments.

*“I worried for myself about how I would pay for it, I know you get a bursary and stuff but I didn’t want that sort of debt on me... I didn’t have the finances at the time ... I definitely think I should have gone to uni just because I was quite naturally gifted and I didn’t do anything with it” – Female, 27, Black British*

Interviewees who did not go to university frequently spoke of knowing friends who had graduated and who were not working in fields related to their degree and often working in non-graduate roles. The current value for money debate within higher education often focuses on students who have a considerable amount of debt following university yet fail to secure graduate level employment. Highlighting these stories is important - however, the messaging can be harmful for young people who might fail to see university as one of the routes to success.

*“I think about it sometimes in terms of, like, furthering my education and, like, getting a higher pay grade... A lot of the kids in my class went to university and I see my friend working in Topshop and I’m just like, how much debt you in?”- Female, 28, White British*

*“I sometimes wish I had [gone to university] but equally I think I know people who have done degrees, but they aren’t necessarily where I am, financially or within my career so it’s a hard one”- Male, 25, White British*

### The need for income

Whilst the injustice of unpaid internships has already been explored, it is important to remember that many of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds need to earn money during their studies and during academic breaks. This limits their opportunities for unpaid work experience and internships.

*“I considered them [internships]... but I don’t know if it was viable at the time. During the summer I could really work and have some extra money, top up my savings that kind of thing, because I was really conscious at the time that I was in debt...Working in the summer as an intern or something like that wasn’t high on my list of things to do” – Female, 27, Black British*

Those in lower income households may feel pressure to help financially. Following graduation many Londoners will be living in their family home, having potentially moved back following graduation or having never left. When living in a low-income household many individuals spoke about feeling a responsibility to provide and repay their family for the sacrifices they had made during their time at university. This can lead to a young person prioritising short-term income over long term career prospects.

*“When I came back home from uni, I felt like I needed to contribute. So, I kind of thought let me get anything and then see from there where I might get a job” – Female, 27, Black British*

*“When I first finished uni I was kind of just at home for nearly six months... I kind of wanted to sign on...It was depressing, no one wanted to take you on...I managed to get a job as an administrator for a little while... but I wasn’t using my brain”- Female, 27, Black British*

Many recognised the difficulty of applying for jobs in their chosen field, particularly with lengthy graduate recruitment processes, whilst also working a full-time job. If there are prolonged gaps between the end of study and moving into work, this period out of employment can also have knock-on effects on the individual’s confidence and attitudes towards their time in higher education.

*“When I first graduated I had three months with no work... That’s why I ended up going into retail...It felt like a disappointment, like I’d wasted my time and wasted my money” – Female, 26, Black British*

### Training and further qualifications

Due to the poor provision of careers advice and guidance in London, it is not surprising that disadvantaged Londoners can take longer to decide on their ideal career. Unfortunately, further training and learning in later life can be difficult, depending on the availability of finance and other

responsibilities. For those in jobs that do not provide fulfilment, either through the work on offer or the salary, taking the steps to move into another industry can be difficult.

*“Because, as I said, I am low on income, I don’t want to commit too much [money] to do a course where I might not be guaranteed a job... If I had the finances in place I probably would be going on more courses that could lead myself to a specific career.” – Male, 28 British Asian*

Others were in the process of training to better their current level of qualification, but the lack of finance meant that this process was slower than they would like. Others who worked within the public sector were already in the process of undertaking training which was being paid for by their employer. This highlights the potential differences in opportunity between sector and industry.

*“If I have enough money in any given month I will probably put that away for an exam, that’s why I haven’t started doing the exams”- Male, 24, White European*

*“What I am doing now is not what I necessarily wanted to do, but I sort of enjoy it enough to be like, ok this is a career move that I could stick with... I feel like I can do more, I feel like I’m sort of limiting myself doing what I’m doing... The fulfilment side of it has reached its peak so that’s why I’m doing training” – Female, 27, Mixed Race*

## 5. The role of recruitment processes

Equipping disadvantaged young people with the skills and education they need to succeed is only part of the story. It is also essential that the recruitment process is fair and enables individuals to succeed regardless of their background. The recruitment process can vary substantially between industry, firm and level of entry which can make success difficult for those less experienced with these differences.

Research by the Social Mobility Foundation shows that only one in four employers who respond to their annual employer index survey remove the candidate’s name from their application / screening stage of recruitment and one in five remove the university attended.<sup>37</sup> Both of these steps have been shown to influence the success rates of applicants from certain demographics.

### Graduate schemes

Historically, firms that hire graduates at scale have used UCAS points (attainment during 16-18) as a filter, allowing them to reduce the pool of candidates without a significant time commitment. This filtering means that, in some instances, students who do not achieve a certain number of UCAS points are unable to apply for graduate schemes, regardless of how they perform in their degree. A recent survey suggests that 28% of employers use UCAS points or A level results as a minimum selection criteria.<sup>38</sup> Research by Rare Recruitment has shown that disadvantaged students often perform better during their degree than they do in their A levels.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, there is a risk that A level filtering disadvantages those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

*“Even having a degree at a 2:1, I think having good A levels is a must to get a grad scheme. Especially those good grad schemes. Even any accountancy grad schemes will want like 300 / 320 UCAS points...I still find that it holds you back”- Male, 24, White European*

As we have seen in Chapter 2, those in Inner London can struggle to translate their good GCSE results into high A level grades. Therefore, UCAS points filtering may have an impact on Londoners. In the last couple of years, several large graduate employers have removed UCAS points from their eligibility criteria in a bid to broaden their pool of talent.

Given the low awareness of careers and poor careers advice given to Londoners pre-18, it is essential that Londoners attending university are aware of all their options post-graduation. This is where graduate recruitment fairs can play an important role: in spreading awareness of the different roles available and helping students understand that they can succeed with the high-profile graduate employers. However, this is not always the case and employers do not always reach out to more marginalised or disadvantaged groups.

*“I realised none of these institutions come to our graduate fairs...We don’t get that...I realised that actually maybe going to [specific university] and with my A level grades I could be at a disadvantage applying for those jobs”  
– Male, 24, White European*

Research conducted by the Social Mobility Foundation shows that there has been a widening in the types of universities being attended by employers who respond to their annual employer index. In 2017, 70% of all university visits were to Russell Group universities, compared to 56% in 2018.<sup>40</sup> For some employers, over 90% of their university visits are still to Russell Group institutions.

### Assessment practices

Many large companies use psychometric testing during their graduate recruitment, this includes verbal reasoning and numerical testing.

This type of testing often advantages those who receive preparation for the tests either through their networks or because they attend one of the top universities. It has been noted that whilst there are a variety of websites offering practice tests, students from more disadvantaged backgrounds may not be aware of this or in some circumstances may be unable to afford access, due to practice tests being offered at a fee.<sup>41</sup>

*“I still do apply for graduate schemes... Situational judgement never goes my way. Despite how many times I think about it, it never tallies up with what they want” – Male, 28, Middle Eastern British*

*“A lot of the roles that I apply for and didn’t get, it was on the verbal and maths reasoning which I am strongly against... In all my years of working I have never been given a task which is like, work out how oil is increasing in price over six years and I have 10 seconds to work that out” – Female, 27, Black British*

Our conversations with employers revealed an awareness among some that these tests can disadvantage those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Through our discussions with employers we noted that some were moving away from this type of testing, however this work is in its very early stages and there is some reluctance to share good practice between firms.

### Summary of barriers that affect the career prospects of young Londoners

#### 1. The importance of self-confidence and soft skills

Soft or essential skills are increasingly important to succeeding in the workplace and getting through interviews, yet they are weaker among those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. There is a considerable amount of literature on how confidence and “polish” can determine whether someone is successful in certain industries.

#### 2. Education choices and pathways

Young disadvantaged Londoners are let down by poor access to and low quality of careers advice. In some instances, individuals choose routes due to pressures from family and peers rather than their own interests.

#### 3. Gaining work experience and internships

London’s job market is competitive and gaining work experience is important in helping secure employment and allowing young people to discover their interests. Internships are common practice in the capital, often secured through connections or unpaid. This adds further barriers to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The concentration of professional occupations and sectors within London means issues associated with social and cultural capital are exacerbated.

#### 4. The implications of financial disadvantage

Unfortunately, financial disadvantage still plays a role in the opportunities available to and undertaken by disadvantaged Londoners. Attitudes to debt can mean Londoners do not pursue higher education regardless of their ability. For those who do attend university the need for income during gaps in studying can mean internships are not viable and there is pressure to secure any form of employment post-graduation.

#### 5. The role of recruitment practices

Securing employment is one of the last barriers to success for disadvantaged Londoners. Unfortunately, recruitment practices can add further barriers. These include practices such as UCAS grade and university filtering and assessment types.

## CHAPTER 5: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In Chapter 4 we identified and discussed the barriers faced by disadvantaged Londoners. In this section we put forward policy suggestions for education providers, local and national government, and the third sector to help tackle these issues. Some of the barriers discussed in the previous chapter are structural issues within our society and education system and cannot be changed through specific policy suggestions, rather they broader questions that need to be asked of society.

### Combating imposter syndrome

For many disadvantaged Londoners, being able to visualise themselves working within a specific industry or role is essential if they are to pursue that career. There are several outstanding organisations and charities working with disadvantaged Londoners to enable them to develop the confidence needed to succeed.

#### Case study of alumni networks: Future First

Future First is an organisation that aims to promote the creation of alumni networks across the UK. Through the creation of these networks Future First is able to facilitate relationships between alumni and current students. In 2017/18 they supported 503 state secondary schools. Enabling students to visualise themselves working in a certain role or industry can expand a young person's horizon and alumni can play an important part, particularly as role models and mentors. They provide great opportunities for both the students and the school.

Many young Londoners remain in London for their working lives. Therefore, London is the ideal location to create strong alumni networks. The provision of these networks should be strengthened to ensure that the current school population is able to engage with successful alumni. The ability to see someone like yourself in a desirable occupation is powerful.

#### Recommendation 1: Promotion of alumni networks

Alumni networks can be used to encourage students to visualise people like themselves in specific roles and industries. This type of engagement can help to break down stereotypes about the opportunities available to individuals of different genders, ethnicity and socio-economic status.

We propose that a small funding programme is set up to further develop and roll out these networks and make seed capital available.

Encouraging the creation and development of alumni networks will complement the work of the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC). The CEC is investing £4 million into 39 mentoring programmes across England.<sup>42</sup> The creation and development of alumni networks could help contribute to future increases in the number of mentoring opportunities available to young people.

### Further development of essential skills

The lack of essential / soft skills may be holding back disadvantaged Londoners from achieving their full potential. The incorporation of 'character education' onto the curriculum is a welcome step, however there are cohorts of young adults who are not able to benefit from this development.

**Evidence of skill development: East London Business Alliance**

ELBA operates in East London and enables partnerships between business and the community. Their knowledge of London's communities enables them to help companies channel their resources and influence into the best places to make the most impact. Many of their programmes focus on development, soft-skills and building relationships. Their Higher Education team helps students gain experience of mock interviews, business mentoring, CV and LinkedIn profile reviews. This helps to make sure students have the best chance of succeeding during the recruitment process.

Essential skills should be incorporated into degree and adult learning programmes. By incorporating essential skills into core programmes this removes the chance of self-selection and therefore ensures all students benefit. More research should be conducted into the importance of these skills and where supply shortages are occurring.

**Recommendation 2: Improved essential skills**

Essential skills should be incorporated into the university and adult education curriculum. It is important that these skills form part of core learning so as to reduce the opportunity for only those who are engaged to select into these activities.

**Better advice and guidance**

Given London's weak performance on advice and guidance, strengthening this provision throughout all stages of a Londoner's life should be a priority.

**School based careers advice and guidance**

There is a requirement for schools to provide impartial careers guidance for students from Year 8 to 13. However, there is no universal funding given to schools to cover the cost of providing this advice, such as training staff. The absence of advice is felt particularly among those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who are often unable to rely on families and friends for advice or guidance.

**Careers guidance case study: Career Ready**

Career Ready work across the UK to connect disadvantaged young people to the world of work. In 2018, their network of 5,500+ volunteers from 400 employers worked with 30,000 young people in 300+ schools & colleges. Their work enables schools to work towards seven of the eight Gatsby Benchmarks. The Career Ready programme includes a range of activities and helps to educate the students on their options and how to be work ready.

The Department for Education should provide ring-fenced funding for schools to be used on activities associated with careers advice. The funding should be weighted based on the level of disadvantage in the school population. This could be based on the Pupil Premium formula.

**Recommendation 3: Ring fenced funding for careers advice**

The Department for Education should commit to creating a ring-fenced fund for activities associated with providing careers advice and guidance, with additional weighted funding to schools with higher populations of pupils on FSMs.

Outreach activities by employers and employer partnerships with schools and colleges can play a pivotal role in providing insights, guidance and opportunities to young people. This type of partnership can significantly increase the exposure young people have to the variety of careers available in the modern workforce.

However, such opportunities are spread unevenly across London. For instance, our interviews with employers revealed that there is a large concentration of partnerships in a select few London boroughs, such as Southwark, Hackney and Tower Hamlets, in a large part due to their proximity to employers in the City. In London, there are pockets of deprivation in wealthier boroughs - and only engaging with schools in three or four boroughs does little to improve the offering for all disadvantaged students in London.

Part of the problem lies in poor information and a lack of connections between employers and schools. The Mayor of London has a programme known as the Enterprise Advisor Network - Enterprise Advisers are business volunteers who work in senior roles. They volunteer their time and help school and college career leaders to increase their engagement with businesses and to access local careers resources.<sup>43</sup> However, this could go further: one simple, but potentially important intervention would be for the Mayor of London to facilitate the creation of a school outreach database. This could fit into the London Ambitions Careers Offer Framework which is supported by the London Enterprise Panel, the Mayor of London and London Councils.<sup>44</sup>

The database would make accessible a range of metrics, including, but not limited to, the demographics of the school, the number of employers connected with each school and the type of outreach activity being undertaken. This would enable employers to identify and connect with schools that are not already working in partnership with employers and could allow proactive schools to connect with employers who are working with schools locally or who are not involved in partnerships.

#### **Recommendation 4: The creation of a school outreach database**

The Mayor of London should facilitate the creation of a school outreach database. This would enable employers to connect with schools that currently are lacking in partnerships.

Third sector organisations, such as community charities, often play an important role in helping support collaboration between employers and schools. The database would not replace the need for such organisations but support them in their activities.

#### **Improving community-based careers advice**

Family and peers play an important role in the decisions young people make. We spoke with several young people who chose their pathway based on pressure from family members. This seems more common amongst BAME groups and the children of migrants. Following a path not of your choosing can be discouraging and lead to poor outcomes. The education and labour market changes with time and parents are not always best placed to offer the most up to date advice.

Holding careers or education sessions within schools is one way to spread correct information to parents; however not all parents are able to attend. We have heard anecdotally that connecting with parents on the matters of education can be challenging and we believe that is where the community can and should be utilised. There is a role for the community to be engaged in the

spreading of information on the routes available to young people (including alternatives to university) and the courses which may best suit the individual and lead to positive outcomes.

#### **Recommendation 5: The Mayor's community careers champions**

The Mayor should create groups of community careers champions who encourage parents to allow their children to follow their own interests. These community groups can spread information on how to navigate university admission processes and the best subjects to study for the long run.

### **Promoting work experience**

Compulsory work experience for those aged 14 to 16 was removed by the government in 2011. Where work experience does occur, it is still commonly undertaken by students in their penultimate year of secondary school. The patchy nature of this work experience means that for many students this experience does not enable them to gain useful insight into the type of career they would like to be working in.

#### **Promoting work experience: PRIME**

PRIME is an alliance of law firms across the UK committed to improving access to the legal profession through work experience. The mission is to provide work experience to young people who have the least opportunity. PRIME was founded in 2011 and has provided work experience to over 742 students per year. As part of the work experience firms commit to offer careers advice, maintain contact one the work experience is finished, offer a number of work experiences places that is not less than 50% of the training contracts on offer and guarantees at least 30 to 35 hours of contact time.

The introduction of T levels will result in some students taking part in compulsory work experience during Years 12 and 13. We believe that consideration should be given to making post-16 work experience universal and compulsory for all students in these years regardless of their course. The “on the job” learning section of T levels is expected to last a minimum of 315 hours (approximately 45 days)<sup>45</sup>, for those on an academic pathway the work experience component would be much shorter – such as two weeks.

Taking work experience in Year 12 should enable students to choose work experience related to their A levels and enable them to make educated choices on their route post 18.

#### **Recommendation 6: Compulsory work experience in Year 12**

Compulsory work experience should occur within Year 12, regardless of the qualification route taken. The government should release criteria that allows schools and students to understand what constitutes as high-quality work experience. Where possible, the sixth-form or college should act as a broker for work experience to reduce the importance of a students network.

The variation in quality of work experience is often one of the drawbacks for making it compulsory. There is considerable evidence on what constitutes quality work experience, such as a report by LKM Co and Workfinder.<sup>46</sup> The government should use the available evidence to release criteria that allows schools and students to understand what is considered high-quality work experience.

Unpaid internships are common practice in London, but they can be unobtainable for Londoners from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The removal of unpaid internships would be a welcome step; however not all employers can offer paid internships e.g. due to relying on fundraised income or volunteers, or being a small business.

We recommend the creation of a Mayor's Opportunity Fund to help fund internships opportunities for disadvantaged young people at firms where the firm would not be able to pay the national living wage. This could form as an additional pillar in the Mayor's Good Work Standard – the Good Work Standard sets the benchmark that the Mayor wants every London employer to work towards and achieve.<sup>47</sup>

#### **Recommendation 7: The Mayor's Opportunity Fund**

The Mayor should challenge large employers to engage with London universities to offer internship opportunities to students at firms where paid internships are not feasible or the norm. Where businesses do not want to engage directly with university there is a role for the Fund to establish the creation of internships.

There are already some innovative partnerships between employers and universities – and we propose that the Mayor's fund could build on these. For instance, Santander has collaborated with Brunel University London to offer an SME internship scheme. The scheme allows students from Brunel to gain experience in their chosen field and is partially or fully funded by Santander.<sup>48</sup>

Social / familial connections also play a role in securing work experience. The box below shows how the Social Mobility Foundation have worked to reduce the disadvantage of those without connections whilst not removing the role connections can play.

#### **Moving beyond connections: Social Mobility Foundation One +1**

One +1 is a scheme launched by the Social Mobility Foundation to offer work experience to a sixth-form student who lacks connections within the profession. The name comes from the principle that professionals should match the opportunities they may offer their own children or the children of friends or colleagues with a placement for a Social Mobility Foundation student.

### **Reducing the impact of financial disadvantage**

It is concerning that, for many, the cost of university is one of the barriers to attend. The UK student loan system is set up in a way that means cost should never be a barrier to access. However, for those from disadvantaged backgrounds the thought of large amounts of debt and a lack of understanding of the loan system can be a deterrent.

The independent review of post-18 education and funding (the Augar review) published its findings in May 2019 – the review puts forward several recommendations regarding the higher education funding system ranging from lower tuition fees, longer repayment periods and the reintroduction of maintenance grants.<sup>49</sup> The removal of maintenance grants in 2016 means that those from the poorest backgrounds often graduate with the highest levels of debt.<sup>50</sup>

**Recommendation 8: Reintroduction of maintenance grants**

The government should reintroduce maintenance grants to students from low income backgrounds to reduce their level of student debt – a recommendation put forward by the Augar review.

**Challenging recruitment practices**

Recruitment practices can act as a barrier to successful careers for disadvantaged Londoners. Unfortunately, there is very little evidence available on what constitutes best practice in recruitment. Research has shown how the wording in job advertisements can deter women from applying for positions<sup>51</sup> and at which points minority applicants drop out of the recruitment process for the police force.<sup>52</sup> However there does not appear to have been any evaluations of the recruitment landscape faced by those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) should conduct an investigation into recruitment practices, particularly for graduate roles, and their effect on those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Due to the low numbers of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds working in fields such as medicine, journalism and law, these areas should be considered a priority for evaluation.<sup>53</sup>

**Recommendation 9: Evaluation of assessments**

The Behavioural Insights Team should conduct an investigation into the recruitment practices used in industries with a low proportion of workers from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

We believe that the Mayor should consider testing whether the Good Work Standard in London helps promote employment opportunities for disadvantaged Londoners.<sup>54</sup> The standard contains references to open recruitment processes – however, it could go further and require employers (and recruitment agencies) to adopt practices that research suggests are associated with fairer employment and progression prospects for those from disadvantaged outcomes. These could include undertaking unconscious bias training, conducting name and university blind recruitment and gender balanced interview panels.

There is scope to use the results of the above recommended BIT assessment to develop a fair recruiter trademark – this could be used in combination with other youth employment initiatives, such as the Youth Friendly Employer logo created by Youth Employment UK.<sup>55</sup>

**Recommendation 10: Fair recruiter trademark**

Employers and recruitment agencies should receive a trademark if their business completes several steps associated with fair and equal recruiting. There is scope to use the results of the recommended evaluation to develop the trademark.

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