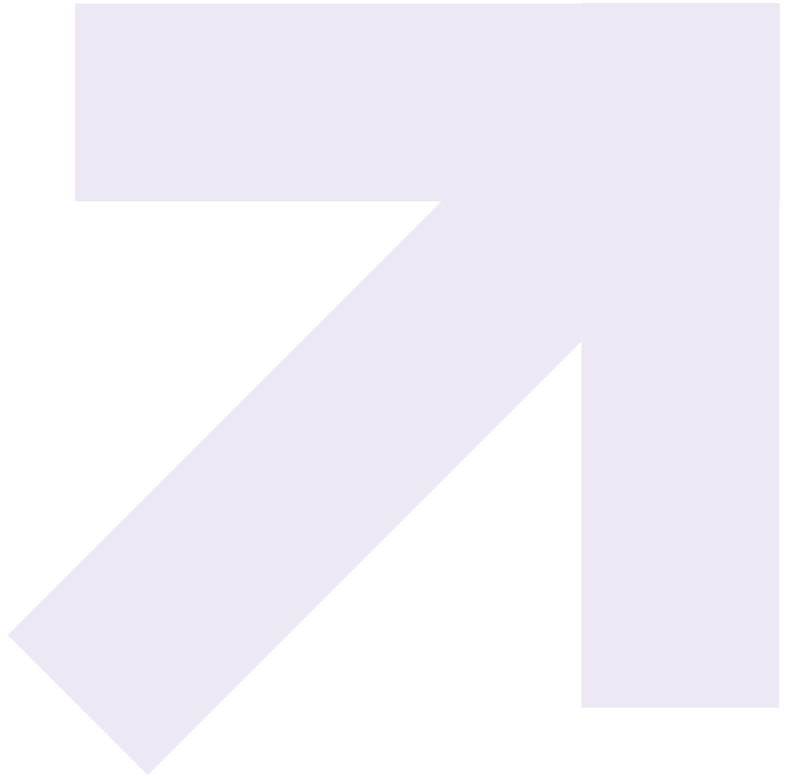# The path not taken:

Experiences and attitudes of non-graduate high attaining students

February 2024

Contents

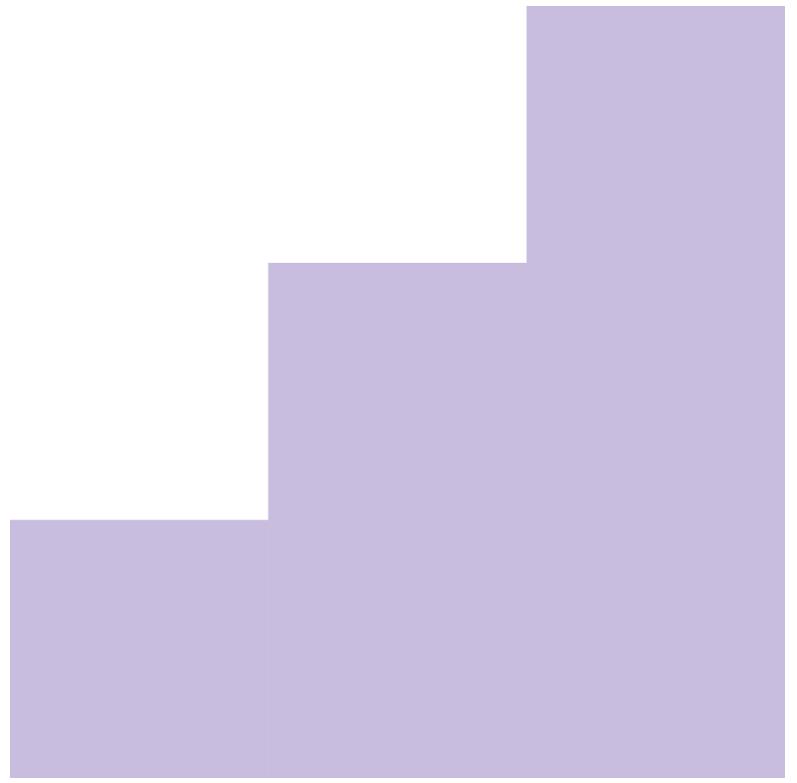# Foreword

Foreword: Sir Hamid Patel and Simon Henderson

Schools in this country have never been better. We have world class institutions both in the state sector, which has been transformed over the past two decades, and in the independent sector. Britain should shout about the success of its young people and their teachers more than it does.

However, despite this success, our education system is far from perfect and progress stalls too frequently: a high number of students perform very well at GCSE but do not go on to experience similar success at A Level and beyond. As a nation, we are not good enough at consistently ensuring that teenage potential is fulfilled in adult life.

Today the Eton Star Partnership has published a report which serves to illustrate exactly this point. Researchers from the Education Policy Institute and Public First have found that 5,000 young people who achieved very well in their GCSEs back in 2013 (achieving at least an A or A* in both English and maths) did not go on to university or complete a degree by the time they were 25.

Of course, there are diverse life stories behind these figures and a university education is not the sole measure of success. A decade on, many more opportunities are emerging – degree apprenticeships, higher technical qualifications, and specialist vocational courses – offering a range of pathways to suit individual circumstances and aspirations.

Whatever route a young person takes, it remains true that if we can nurture and develop their academic talent then this not only improves their own life chances, but also brings so much wider social and economic benefit to our communities.

In seeking solutions to systemic challenges such as this, there is power in partnership. That is why, as the leaders of our respective institutions, we have launched the Eton Star Partnership and are determined that it will serve not just as a 'Think Tank' but, more importantly, as a 'Do Tank.' Our partnership will be built on the dynamic interchange of ideas. Through a comprehensive conference and networking programme, we will gather the most influential school leaders and educational thinkers to explore current challenges, to propose solutions and to influence national policy and help drive change.

As we approach the opening of our three new academic sixth form colleges, we have confirmed plans to create education research centres in Dudley, Middlesbrough, and Oldham, with more to follow. These centres will work with schools, colleges, universities, sector organisations and international partners to ensure that their findings inform policy, investment, and school practice. We already have over 100 schools in our rapidly growing network, supported by our innovative Eton X digital platform which is used routinely by tens of thousands of young people in our state schools, free of charge.

We are driven by a shared, relentless pursuit of educational excellence for all. Our country and our communities simply cannot afford to allow so much young talent to go unrealised. The Eton Star Partnership intends to play an active role in helping to change that picture.

We are grateful to all of those who have made this first report possible, including our research partners Education Policy Institute and Public First, and colleagues across the Star network and Eton College, as well as the ongoing support of all of our partner schools.

Simon Henderson   **Sir Hamid Patel CBE**
Head Master   **Chief Executive**
Eton College   **Star Academies**
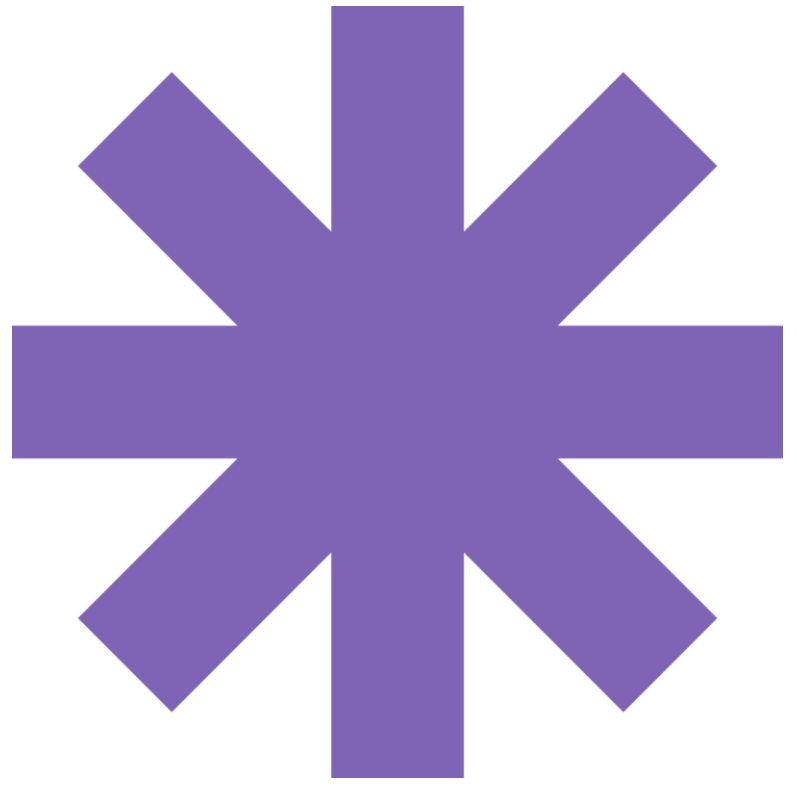
Executive summary

Executive Summary

We calculate that just over 8% of those who achieved an A* or an A in English and Maths GCSE – that is to say, among the very highest achieving young people – for the 2013 cohort, did not go to university by the age of 25 (that is, by 2022, for the most recent cohort for whom we have Higher Education participation data). That equates to over 5,000 young people not progressing to university in a year (with a total cohort size of 66,400, and 60,900 pupils progressing).

Such young people are spread widely around the country – indeed, they are in every single Local Authority.[1] And while there is some link to area based measures of disadvantage, some of the biggest numbers are in London and other areas of generally high university participation. More boys than girls do not progress. And there is a predictive effect of socio economic status of the young people themselves, with high achieving children eligible for FSM showing a larger gap to more affluent high attainers than exists by gender or local area.

As well as analysing and sizing this cohort, we also explore their drivers and motivations. We find:

- Attitudinally, this group are far more similar to 'other' non HE attending adults, than they are to other high attaining adults that have gone to HE. They show far more similarity with motivations and drivers of generally disengaged secondary students than they do with those with whom they share a grade pattern at GCSE but who progress on further in education.
- Contrary to some of our initial hypotheses, disengagement happened to almost all participants pre 16, not between 16 and 18 – but as many, if not more, of those who we studied just drifted, as opposed to actively disengaged.
- Members of this cohort all recall significant pressure from schools at 16, which then almost disappeared post-16 – many resented this pressure, but some also reflected on a lack of structure after 16 which held them back.
- All participants we studied were strongly in agreement that all that schools focussed on were GCSE grades, then A Levels, then university.
- However little they valued their grades, good GCSEs undoubtedly helped this group initially – especially those who ended up in careers with structured internal or professional training.
- In many ways, this proportion of the cohort carved out a pathway that degree apprenticeships now seek to do.

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[1] Excluding those for whom data samples of high achieving GCSE students are themselves very small, for whom we cannot analyse future progression rates anonymously.

Importantly, we do not conclude that all of this cohort should go on to university. The goal of the Eton Star Partnership is that all young people are supported to fulfil their academic potential and improve their life chances. For some, the most appropriate next step will be university. For others, that will be tertiary qualifications that mix work and study – most notably through Degree Apprenticeships. Some may want to take Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) at Levels 4 and 5. Some may choose specialist courses in Art, Music, or Creative Design. Some may move immediately into work via pathways that offer them clear advancement via industry standard courses and training – such as exists in law, accountancy, some retail, and professional services, among others.

But it is also the case that, with the exception of university, these pathways are specialised, small scale, or deeply geographically concentrated. Fewer than 1.5 adults in 1000 complete an HTQ at present every year, and in 2022, fewer than 2,500 Degree Apprenticeships were taken up by people aged 18-24. We need a system that supports all young people, and for high quality technical education to be a realistic alternative, it needs to be signposted, funded properly, and deliverable at more like 250,000 a year, rather than 2,500.

So the reason we explore here the pathways and motivations of those high attaining young people who didn't go to university, is that for this cohort, university was (and in some ways still is) the only scale option for tertiary advancement. And if 90% of these high attaining students do progress on to university, it is pertinent to explore the factors, and most importantly the motivations, of the proportions of this group who do not make that decision – to assess their drivers, their motivations, their outcomes in life, and whether a differing post-16 offer might have been of benefit to some of them.

Our goal is to help the Eton Star Partnership explore whether, and what, support and engagement might be offered to support all young people, and to explore whether there are additional barriers facing some young people who clearly have stellar academic ability, and whether there is more that the future Eton Star Colleges, and other education actors in an area, can do to help all young people be supported to fulfil their academic potential and improve their life chances.

As such, we make a number of policy recommendations that apply to government, but also to schools, colleges, and all of those who work with young people:

- Simply telling academic but disengaged young people that, GCSEs are critical, isn't sufficient. Raising aspirations for "bright but disengaged" students needs more attention as an area of focus.
- 11-16 education needs to focus on a broad and balanced academic curriculum, as well as wider aspiration raising. This is not easy, in the teeth of a funding environment for state schools that

remains very tight. But we are inspired by both Labour and the Conservative party's commitment to look again at this balance.

- Having a pathway open at 16 that combines academic stretch with personal attention and greater opportunities – that is to say selective sixth form colleges – can be a transformative opportunity for some.
- But equally, the system must be able to scale up different and legitimate post 16 options for some, including those who perform academically well at GCSE.
- Having a better system of 'second chances' will benefit this group, and others too

We pledge that our research will never simply be abstract, or call upon others to make changes. So we conclude by also make commitments for areas where we, as the Eton Star Partnership, will take action– including in the future Eton Star Colleges, and through the wider work of the Eton Star Partnership in 11-16 education.
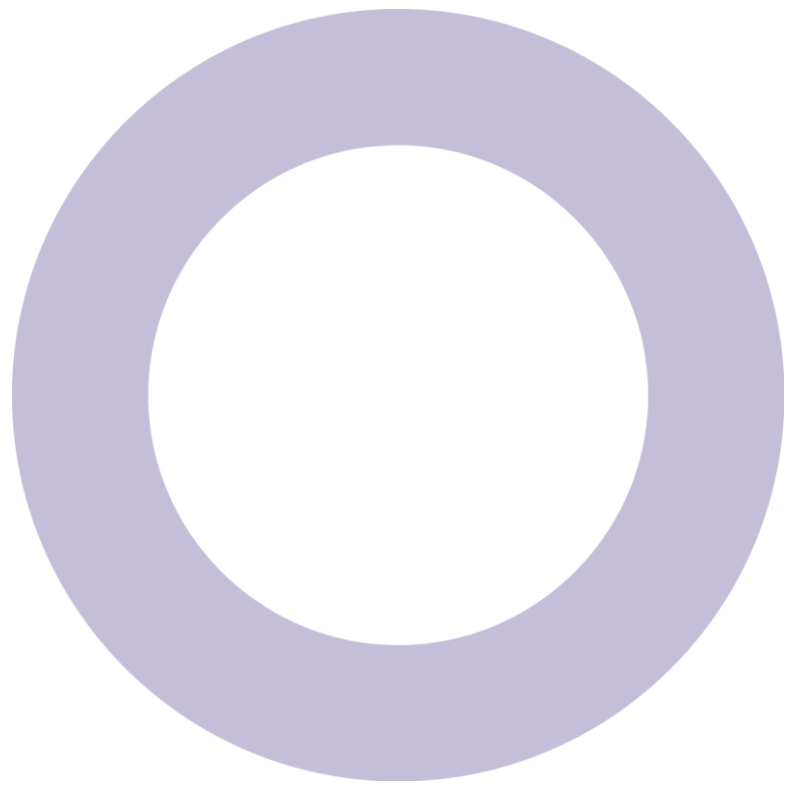
Introduction and methodology

Introduction and methodology

In summer 2023, Eton College and Star Academies were approved to open three new free schools for 16-19 year olds, in Dudley, Oldham and Middlesbrough.

As the vision document for these three schools set out, in the bid to the Department for Education:

"The proposal for Eton-Star schools – a trio of 480 place accelerator sixth form colleges – is rooted in the vibrant partnership that Eton College and Star Academies have formed with a shared goal of leading educational transformation in areas of deprivation and disadvantage. Bringing together the best of the independent and state sectors, this partnership believes passionately that communities will only emerge from deep-rooted inequalities – exacerbated considerably by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic - if their young people are given access to world-class education.

There is clear evidence that the progress of pupils with academic potential stalls at Key Stage 5 – as shown by low value-added scores across most institutions, low proportions achieving AAB or higher, and low data for progression onto high tariff higher education institutions. We know that a combination of high-quality teaching, a strong curriculum, a focus on co-curricular activities, and a programme of strong aspiration, can change this – as we have seen with accelerator and maths school sixth forms across the country, which demonstrate high value added scores even with large numbers of disadvantaged pupils."

But the bid documents also set out that these new colleges would only be an element of wider work taken forward by Eton College and Star Academies, under the auspices of the new Eton Star Partnership, which has been formalised and is launched alongside this report.

The Eton Star Partnership's mission is to elevate the life chances of young people from disadvantaged communities by promoting educational excellence, dismantling barriers to achievement, spurring social mobility and fostering civic agency.

The partnership unites two of the highest performing educational organisations in the country to blend ideas and expertise, bring a fresh perspective to education sector thinking and galvanise transformation. Eton College's global and historic reputation, combined with Star Academies' credibility in excellence and inclusion can deliver solutions to empower young people from disadvantaged communities to lead the world.

The aligned ambitions and aspirations of the partnership will underpin a strategic framework outlining the key activities that will create opportunities, remove inhibitors of progress, close the deep-rooted north-south attainment divide and metamorphose the education sector through academically credible research. Innovative programmes will be developed that build upon Eton's and Star's own expertise and experience and draw on the practice of renowned partners.

The Eton Star Partnership is a think and do tank whose research base includes practice that is incubated by some of the very best schools in the country.

Its distinctive feature is its 'top-down bottom-up' synergy: new ideas and approaches developed and implemented within networks of schools will be evaluated, refined and shared to allow the education sector to achieve more**.**

Three principal pillars will enable the Eton Star Partnership to remain at the forefront of educational research and leadership development, with significant potential to influence national policy and capacity. The partnership is truly inclusive: it offers opportunities at local, regional, national and international levels.

- Pillar 1: Research programmes to generate new insight on the key barriers that hold young people back from realising their potential. The Eton Star Partnership will commission academically rigorous research in local and national contexts. It will work with schools, colleges, universities, sector organisations and international partners to ensure that its findings – made available in an accessible format for all stakeholders – inform policy, investment and school practice.

- Pillar 2: A comprehensive learning exchange to stimulate best practice and spur growth and development of the sector. The Eton Star Partnership will gather the most influential school system leaders and solution-focused educational thinkers in the country to explore current issues and influence national policy. It will deliver comprehensive local and regional programmes of events, seminars, masterclasses and professional communities.

- Pillar 3: An innovation hub which puts research into practice on the ground and incubates high ambition, high impact initiatives which can be scaled up.

For this first piece of research, under Pillar 1 commissioned by the Partnership, the partners wanted to explore three questions:

- Are there are a group of young people who perform well, academically, at 16, but who then do not continue on to higher education after 18?

- If so, how many are there of these students, and where are they?

And most importantly:

- What do we know about these students and their motivations and decision making, and is this something where a differing post-16 offer might have been of benefit to them?

We carried out this project in two phases – quantitative data analysis to answer research questions 1 and 2, and subsequent qualitative research to answer research question 3. In order to take this piece forward, our methodology was as follows.

Phase 1:

We commissioned Education Policy Institute to measure how many young people achieved an A or an A* grade at GCSE in English and Maths (which we used as a proxy for high achievement), and who then didn't attend university by the ae of 25 (which we use as a proxy for not continuing in education at a high level; we use the age of 25 to account for those who initially decide not to participate but then make changes early on in adulthood).

EPI utilise data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) to identify a cohort of 16 year olds with high GCSEs, and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Database to track that cohort through to the age of 25, to see if they appear in the dataset. HESA data contains all students enrolled in any course of level 4 or above. Importantly, EPIs work examined students from the 2013 GCSE cohort as that cohort would have turned 25 in 2022, the latest available year for HESA data. This means that some elements of the secondary and post-16 education system have since changed, which is of interest when it comes to policymaking decisions. However, the higher education fees and funding system has remained consistent (with fees charged at £9,250 a year and students eligible for loans paid back on an income contingent basis), albeit the terms for student loan repayment have changed.

Having identified the cohort of 16 year olds who did not appear in HESA by the age of 25 or by the year 2022, EPI then conducted data analysis to demonstrate what we know about these children and young

people. They cut the data by gender, by Free School Meal status, by school type attended, and by Local Authority in which they were resident at 16.

We summarise some of this data in our report below, and all of this data is published today on EPIs website as a policy brief, commissioned by the Eton Star Partnership. We are grateful to EPI for their analysis that supports this wider work.

Phase 2:

We commissioned Public First to carry out four focus groups with relevant adults who fitted the criteria based on the EPI analysis. Following the delivery of phase 1 conclusions, which suggested a broad regional and gender spread of such students, Public First decided to recruit four groups of mixed gender, mixed region, adults aged 35 and under (to encompass all those who didn't progress by 25, and include a wider range of possible targets).

All participants for the four focus groups had achieved an A* or A in English and maths at GCSE, and had not completed a university degree (though some of them had entered university and subsequently dropped out). Occasional participants had completed vocational qualifications at tertiary level (normally Level 4 professional training), but the majority had not. Two groups ran in December 2023 and two groups ran in January 2024. All groups were moderated by Public First and ran for 75 minutes, in groups of between 6-8, over Zoom.
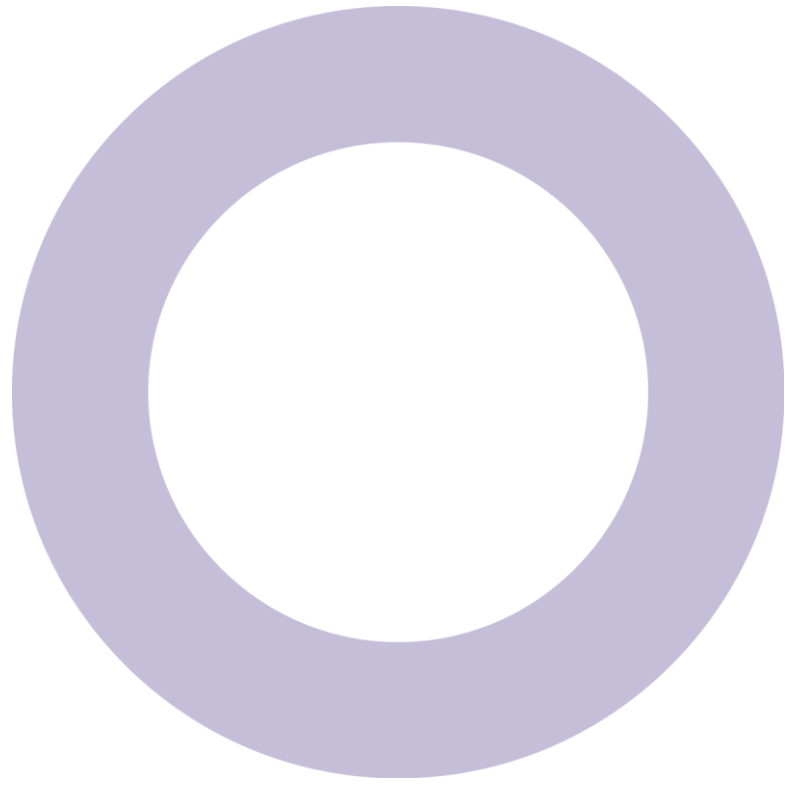
Section 1

Section 1: What do we know about young people who perform very well academically at 16, but who do not go on to university?

We are grateful here to EPI for conducting this analysis, and we summarise it here. The full Local Authority by Local Authority tables showing the percentages of the cohort who do not progress to university are set out in Appendix 1. All data presented here is courtesy of EPI.

Percentage of GCSE high attainers who enter higher education

Figure 1 Percentage of GCSE high attainers who enter higher education (credit: EPI)
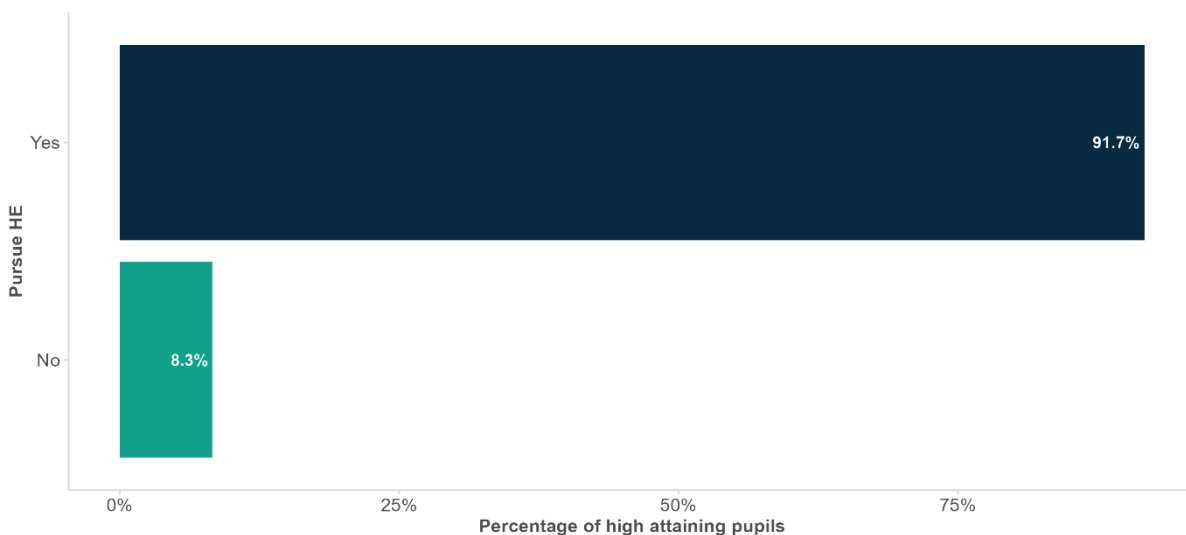
The overwhelming majority of pupils who were awarded A or A* in English and Maths entered higher education. Figure 1 shows that 91.7 per cent of top attaining GCSE students appeared in the HESA data by the time they were 25. Only 8.3 per cent did not progress to higher education. However, as the following figures show, these proportions vary by student characteristic.

Percentage of GCSE high attainers who do not enter higher education, by gender

Figure 2: Percentage of GCSE high attainers who do not enter higher education, by gender (credit: EPI)
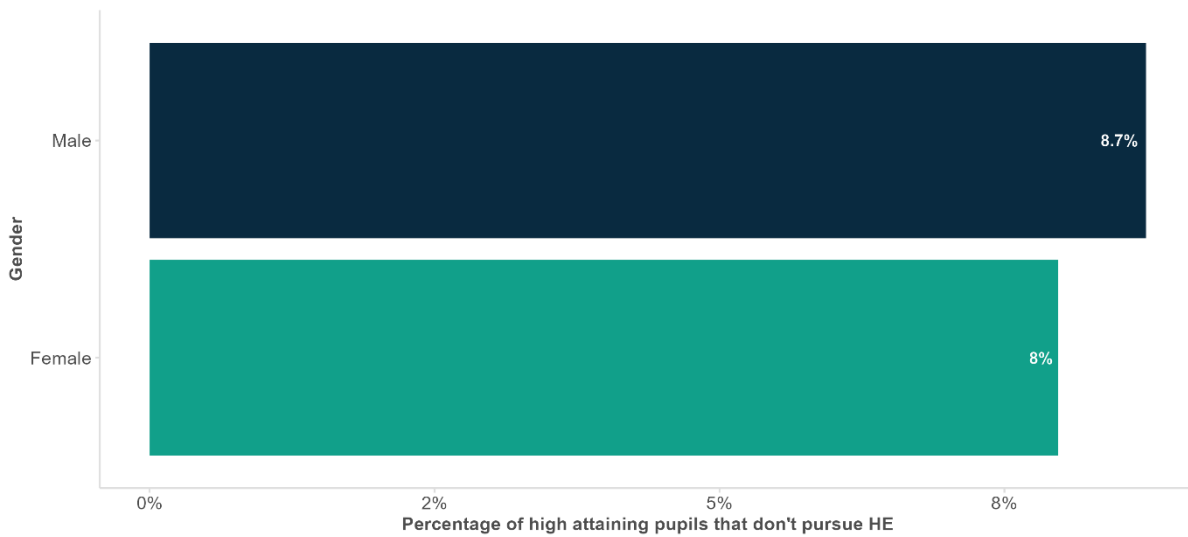
Historically, female students outperform their male counterparts both at key stage 4 and key stage 5. Figure 2 shows how this trend is also reflected in the percentage of high-attaining GCSE students that do not end up progressing into HE by the time they are 25, with 8 per cent of female students not going to HE, compared with 8.7 per cent of male students.

Percentage of GCSE high attainers who do not enter higher education, by disadvantage status

Figure 3: Percentage of GCSE high attainers who do not enter higher education, by disadvantage status (credit: EPI)
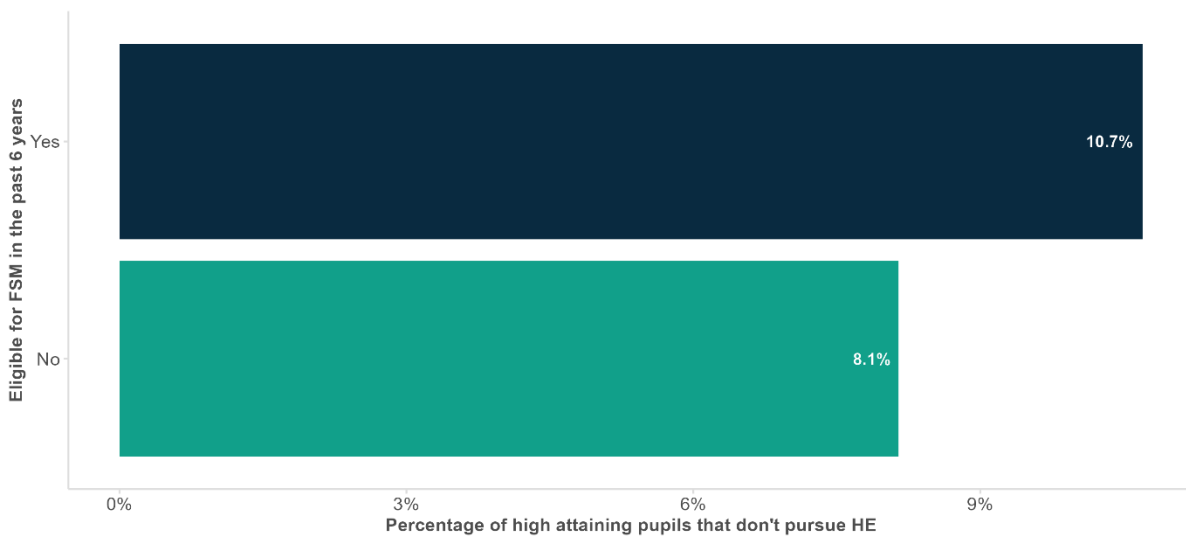
Figure 3 reveals a sizeable difference between disadvantage students, here defined as being eligible for free school meals in any of the six years prior to 2013, and their high-attaining peers. EPI find that 8.1 per cent of non-disadvantaged pupils with high GCSE grades do not enter HE, compared with 10.7 per cent among students eligible for the pupil premium.

Percentage of GCSE high attainers who do not enter higher education, by school type

Figure 4: Percentage of GCSE high attainers who do not enter higher education, by school type (credit: EPI)
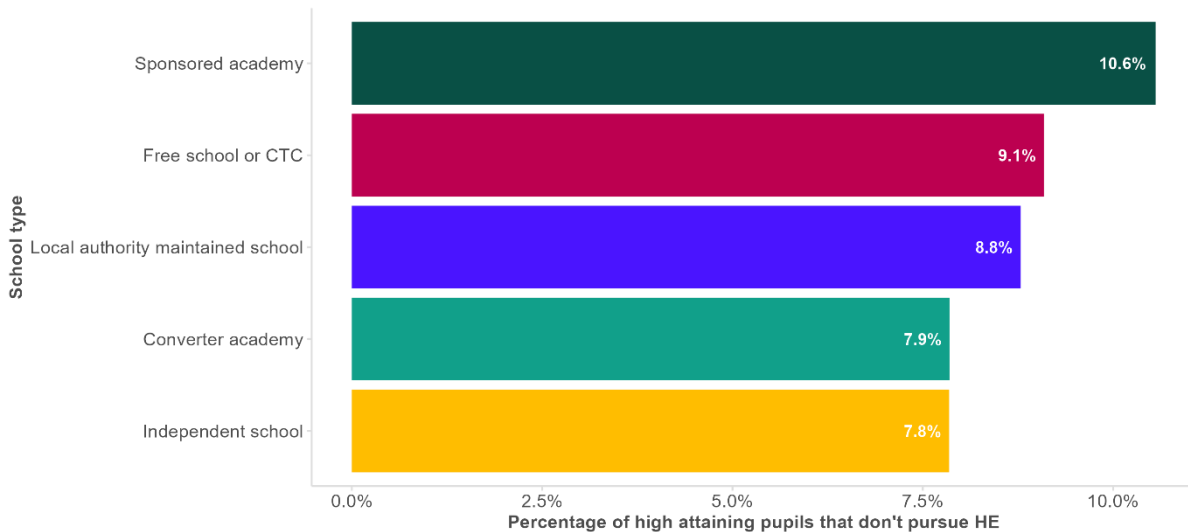
The proportion of high-attaining students not entering HE by school type reveal that students who completed their GCSEs in independent schools or converter academies are more likely to progress to HE compared to all other school types. Respectively, only 7.8 and 7.9 per cent of these students do not appear in the HESA data, compared with 8.8 and 9.1 per cent for local authority maintained schools and free schools or CTCs, and 10.6 per cent for sponsored academies. It is worth noting that schools with the highest proportions of high attaining pupils not going into HE are usually those with a higher percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals. This suggests that it could be the higher concentration of disadvantaged pupils driving differences here, rather than the governance model of the school.

Percentage of GCSE high attainers who do not enter higher education, by English region

Figure 5: Percentage of GCSE high attainers who do not enter higher education, by English region (credit: EPI)
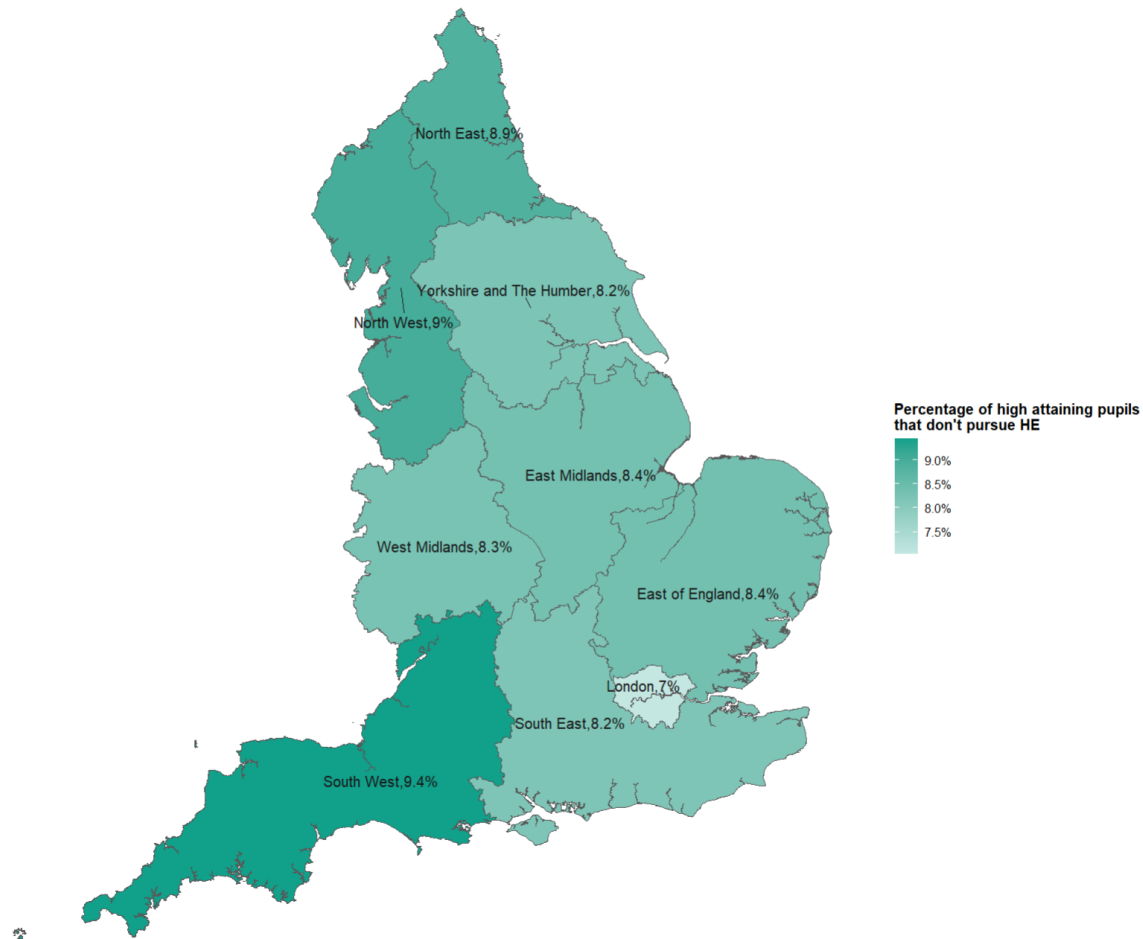
Results in GCSEs and subsequent qualifications are known to vary by region, and these differences persist when looking at the proportion of top-performing students progressing to HE. Pupils who sat their GCSE exams in London schools are more likely to enter HE than in any other region. Only 7 per cent of high-attaining London students do not end up in HE, compared with 8.2 per cent in the South East (second region), and with 9.0 and 9.4 per cent in the North West and South West respectively (the two regions with the highest percentage). EPI highlight how regions which typically have higher attainment at level 2 and level 3 qualifications, such as London and the South East, are among the regions with the lowest percentage of high attaining pupils not entering HE. On the other hand, regions with lower average grades are among those with a high percentage, such as the North West and the North East.

Percentage of GCSE high attainers who do not enter higher education, by local authority

Figure 6: Percentage of GCSE high attainers who do not enter higher education, by local authority (credit: EPI)
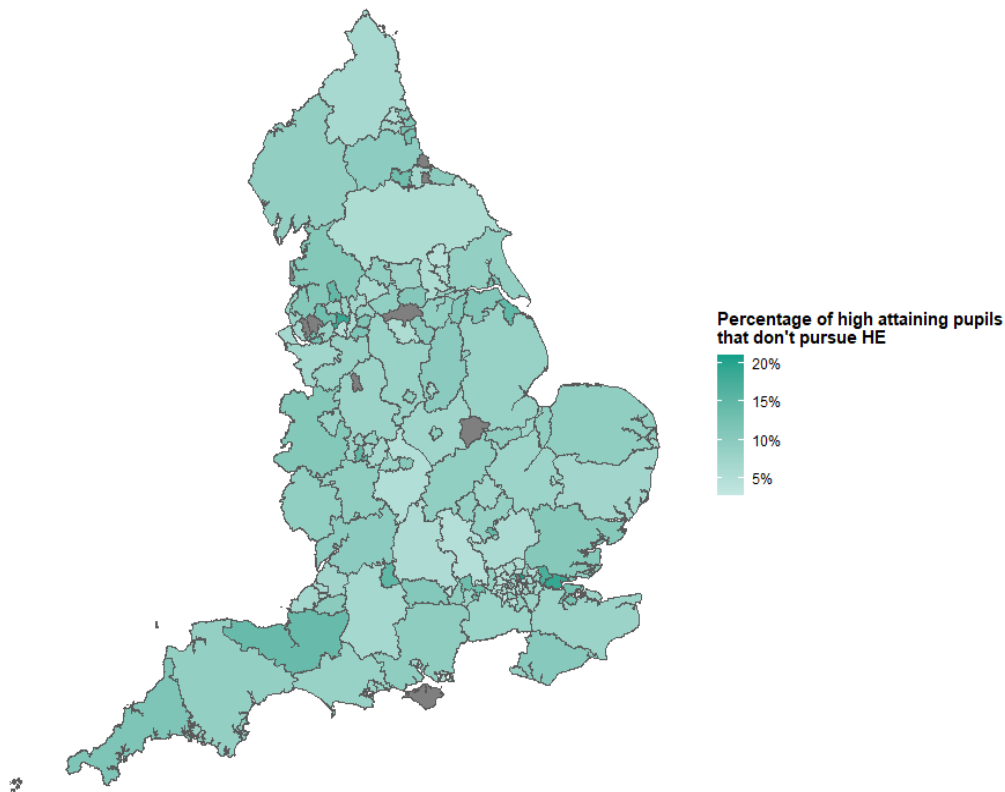
LAs with lowest percentages		LAs with highest percentages	
Kingston upon Thames	2.8%	Hackney	21.1%
Reading	3.8%	Salford	19.0%
Slough	4.5%	Thurrock	19.0%
Wandsworth	4.7%	Havering	17.3%
York	4.7%	Swindon	15.2%
Buckinghamshire	4.8%	North East Lincolnshire	15.0%
Trafford	4.9%	Dudley	14.8%
Tower Hamlets	5.0%	Blackburn with Darwen	14.7%
Portsmouth	5.0%	Luton	14.7%
Sutton	5.0%	Somerset	14.1%

Figure 6 shows results by local authority. The London borough of Hackney has the highest percentage of high-attaining pupils not entering HE in the country at 21.1 per cent, compared with an average of 7.0 per cent across the whole of London. Hackney is closely followed by Salford and Thurrock, both with 19.0 per cent of high attainers not pursuing the HE path. Havering, with 17.3 per cent, is the only other London borough which stands out as having a much higher percentage than the regional average. On the other hand, the smallest percentages nationally were in Kingston upon Thames, Reading, and Slough, at 2.8, 3.8, and 4.5 per cent respectively. Students in these boroughs also typically achieve higher grades than the national average.

Conclusions from quantitative data analysis

We draw here a number of conclusions about this group, drawn from the EPI analysis and our own observations:

- As hypothesised, the overwhelming majority – over 9 out of 10 – of students who perform very well at 16, go on to university by the age of 25.
- However, this figure shows that in numerical terms, for the 2013 cohort, 60,900 pupils out of a total group of 66,400 did progress. **In other words, over 5,000 young people nationally achieved among the very highest grades at GCSE, but didn't want or chose to progress on to higher education.**
- Of those who didn't progress – that 5,000 cohort – they were disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds. 10.7% of FSM students achieving these top GCSE grades did not progress, compared to 8.1% of non FSM children. Although this gap is much smaller than the overall gap in HE participation between FSM and non FSM students, it shows that even with the very highest grades, fewer disadvantaged young people choose university.
- The gender gap is relatively narrow, with only a 0.7% gap between girls and boys, compared to the 2.6% FSM gap referenced above.
- There is an interesting regional split. Contrary to what might have been hypothesised, these young people are scattered relatively evenly across the country, with even London, the region with the highest overall participation rate in HE, still showing 7 per cent of this cohort not in HE, compared with 8.2 per cent in the South East (second highest region for participation among this group), and with 9.0 and 9.4 per cent in the North West and South West respectively (the two regions with the lowest percentage from this group progressing). **In other words, this is neither purely an academic issue, nor purely an issue around concentrated disadvantage and low aspiration in certain regions.**

- Though caution needs to be expressed with Local Authority comparisons, given relatively small sample sizes, it is interesting to explore Local Authorities with low levels of these students progressing, compared to their overall HE participation rate. This is particularly stark in London. We can explore this by matching the EPI constructed LA list for the 2013 cohort, with the wider HE participation rate for 2015 entry (i.e., if this cohort would have progressed straight on to university age 19). This list is set out in Appendix 2. This identifies a number of LAs for whom overall HE participation is high, HE participation among FSM students is high, but progression for this high achieving cohort, though obviously higher in absolute terms than for this broader cohort, is nevertheless relatively very low, when ranking the LA against progression of this academic cohort by other LAs. For example, Hackney is the 19th highest LA in the country for overall HE participation in 2015; the 12th highest for FSM participation, but the 141st LA for participation of this high achieving cohort. Similarly, Camden is the 17th highest LA in the country for overall HE participation in 2015; the 19th highest for FSM participation, but the 124th LA for participation of this high achieving cohort. While it is beyond the scope of this analysis to look at specific Local Authority factors, we hypothesise that it may be linked to greater opportunities in the non-degree labour market in Inner London. We discuss this further in the conclusions from the qualitative research in phase 2.
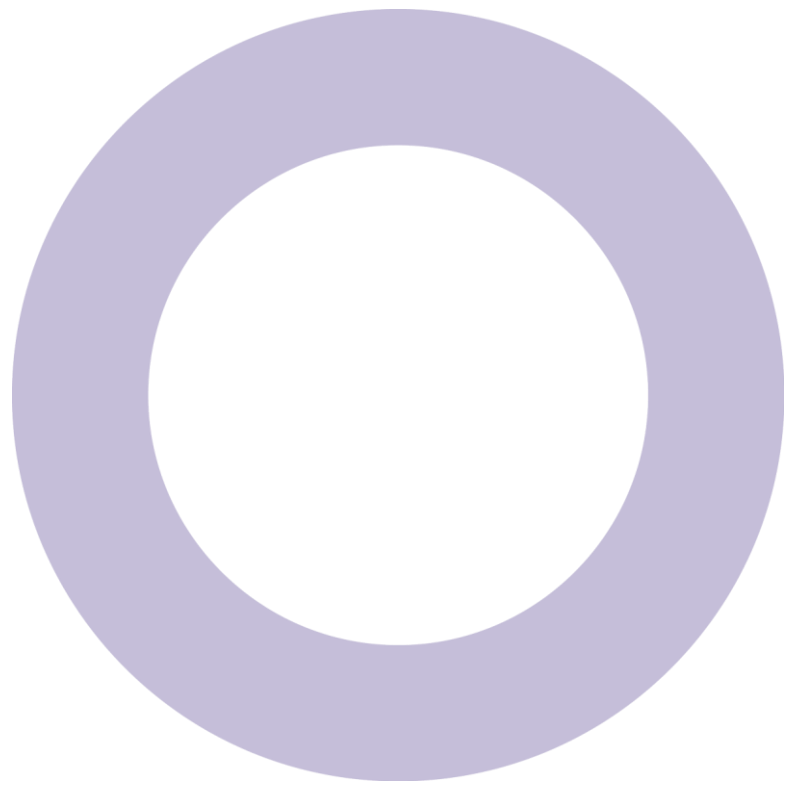
Section 2

Section 2: What do we know about these students and their decision making?

Phase 2 of this work explored what we could understand about the decision making drivers of the circa 5,000 a year high achieving 16 year olds, who we estimate don't go on to HE by the age of 25.

To do this, we ran four focus groups with between 6-8 participants each, all of whom fitted the twin criteria of achieving these GCSE grades and not having completed (or in the vast majority of cases, having started) Higher Education. All the participants were aged 35 or under. They were mixed gender, mixed ethnicity, and mixed geography around the country.

We now set out six overall findings as to their motivations, including direct quotations (anonymised) to illustrate our conclusions. Finally, we tentatively construct a loose typology of this group to illustrate their motivations both at 16 and now as adults – though given this is qualitative rather than quantitative research, we cannot and do not attempt to size each of the groups.

Conclusion 1: Attitudinally, this group are far more similar to 'other' non HE attending adults, than they are to other high attaining adults who did progress to HE.

- They expressed similar sentiments around lack of interest and engagement with school, a desire to explore vocational qualifications and enter the labour market to earn money, and a nervousness about debt, that repeat findings from Public First and others among other adults who had taken similar paths, with lower GCSE grades.
  - *"I started Sixth Form, had the uniform and everything. I did two days. And I said to my mum, do you know what? It's not for me. I just wanted to go and explore the big wide world. I come from a council house, and I really wanted to start working and earning my own money. So I did have really good grades, but I just knew after two days, it wasn't for me. So my mum said if you can find a job or an apprenticeship, you can leave. So I went for a couple of jobs. And I got the first one that I went for actually, so I ended up going into insurance. That was my first job."*

- - *"I think the education system was very outdated. I feel like what we were learning doesn't match or marry up with what you're doing in the real world. We all have to pay tax, people might buy a property, even a get a car, an expensive car: they're things that I think at school, you should be taught whereas here, we were just learning things that are not very relevant to everyday life".*
- In other words, what determines their attitude is less the grades at 16 than a mindset towards learning – with, in this group of people's experiences, good grades often coming almost as a surprise to them.

Conclusion 2: Contrary to some of our initial hypotheses, disengagement happened to almost all participants pre 16, not between 16 and 18. But as many, if not more, of those who we studied just drifted, as opposed to actively disengaged.

- Our starting hypothesis was that this group would have largely been engaged through to 16 – hence achieving good grades – and then would have disengaged from education post 16 for a variety of reasons.
- But it is clear from all four groups that this was not the case with them. With perhaps only one or two exceptions from all the participants, they all described a sense of disengagement discussed above from academic education happening during their GCSE years.
  - *"I remember a lot of pressure in senior school. I found the predicted grades put a lot of pressure on me. There's a bit of an expectation that I would meet or excel the grades that had been predicted for me and, and then it was pushed on me to go to sixth form and then to university. I did do quite well in my GCSEs. I didn't go to uni. And I was made to feel a bit thick for not going. But I feel like I was pushed out. That was the route they wanted, and I didn't want it".*
- For those who made active decisions to enter the labour market, this also happened at 14 or 15 – not post GCSEs.
  - *"School didn't fit me. For me, I didn't want to be there. So I was moved into an apprenticeship scheme from 14 or 15, which meant that I dropped pretty much all other subjects other than just the core subjects. And then I was moved into a job role, which is kind of two days a week one week and three days a week the next."*
- Some of the groups described a general sense of uncertainty over what to do, and falling into next stages without much of a clear idea, or driven by short term considerations.

- "I went to [names an FE college]. And I was there for two years. And I think I only went to college more because my mum said if you get if you get a job you're going to have to start paying rent. But I've met my best friend there, my daughter's godmother, and I'm so glad I actually took that path because I've met friends that I'm a lot closer to than it was in school."

- "I didn't actually hear anything about apprenticeships from the school whatsoever. So I never actually knew much about what you could do and where you could do it. We had the sixth form team come down, and they just basically said that if you get these grades, you can just continue staying at the sixth form. And we have a preference for our own students. And everyone else was going up to the sixth form, so I just stayed in that sixth form."

- "My school really pushed A levels. There was never much discussion about anything else. I think they were quite selective with who they pushed. I never wanted to do A Levels because although I did quite well in my GCSEs I hate exams, I absolutely hate them. So despite what my school was saying, I knew I wanted to do a BTEC at college. Because I'd rather do coursework which I've got a lot more control over, then, you know, risk an exam. I never even considered an apprenticeship. But I know that my school pushed it with certain students. And I wish they pushed it with me because I wish I'd have done an apprenticeship and learn a trade. And I think this is going to sound absolutely awful. But I think my school kind of pushed apprenticeships on who they thought were idiots. But I would have loved to have done that".

Conclusion 3: They all recalled significant pressure from schools at 16, which then almost disappeared post-16.

- Some of the groups exited education at 16, but the majority stayed on in some form of learning.
- For those who remained in education, whether they progressed to do A levels, or did college courses, they all drew a contrast between significant pressure from schools to get good grades at 16, with a much more relaxed attitude post 16.
    - "I don't remember there being any sort of advice from anybody about what to do next, after college, and do I don't remember any options being discussed at all."
    - "Yeah, they did use to talk about university being the next step after college. But I think with the fees and everything, that was quite off putting, because I thought how am I going to cover fees? I don't think the government scheme was explained very well. So, I still wasn't sure on that."

- Although the vast majority of participants in all groups started off sceptical of the pressure, several reflected by the end that it was helpful, and some form of it post 16 may have led them to achieve more academically (though a couple welcomed the more adult approach)
  - *"Like I said, I started sixth form for a couple of days. I remember leaving. No one even rang me. But with my GCSEs, and the pressure, you know looking back, it was all to do with the grades for the school. But if you can drop out [of college] after a couple of days, I feel like they're not invested in you, and you can't be [participating] like that".*
  - *"I think is a lot more relaxed, I think you get a bit more of a relationship with the teachers, not strict student teachers like before GCSE. There's a lot more, I suppose, understanding and they kind of can see your potential."*
  - *"[College] was more relaxed. They did treat you as adults, and not as regular students anymore. So it was more relaxed. But it just made me too relaxed. You're kind of left to your own devices to complete the work and maybe having the pressure is a good thing, because it does then put the pressure on you to complete work."*

Conclusion 4: All participants were strongly in agreement that all schools focussed on were GCSE grades, then A Levels, then university.

- With the caveat that they were describing experiences 15-20 years ago, there was very little sense that schools discussed other options with them – instead, the schools saw them as people who would get good grades and go on to university, and that was what the school wanted them to do.
  - *"The exams, I just remember a lot of pressure, you know, feeling if you don't get them, it's the end of the world kind of thing."*
  - *"And obviously, as a teenager, you're going through hormonal changes, you're worried about what's going to come after, and there was a lot of pressure back then on the young minds about, oh, you need this grade, or you're gonna end up working at McDonald's as this salt shaker."*
  - *"They had quite a classist view. They lumped all the gifted and talented in the top sets and gave them more support and the ones in the lower sets had less of that helping hand".*
  - *"they wanted me to just do A levels, and then progress on to university. So yeah, I guess that was the preferred route for the school".*
- Many participants were put off by costs of going to university, certainly compared to the benefits of earning money immediately.

o *"[My college] were talking about it, but I just wasn't that interested. I think at the time, I was also earning money. So I thought to myself, well, if I'm not in college anymore, then I can just earn more money because I was working and going to college. I just thought, forget this uni malarkey. But a lot of my friends did go into uni. And when they were moving away and stuff, I was getting a bit jealous, but only because of the fact that they've moved to like a new city and whatever. Again, I was very put off by the cost of going. And I thought, now I'd rather earn that money than spend that money."*

Conclusion 5: However little they valued their grades, the good GCSE grades undoubtedly helped this group of students initially.

- Most participants were relatively blasé about their grades, and it didn't drive their attitudes. They would often describe themselves as clever, and that this distinguished them from their friends, but this isn't something they then used.
  - o *"Within my sort of friendship group, I was the smart one, the academic one, and it was like, oh, you're going to go to university, you're going to do this, you're going to do that, you're going to go far in life. And I look at some of the friends that I'm still speaking to now, and they didn't go the same route as me, they didn't go to university, but I didn't go to university, and they've got really, really good jobs".*
  - o *"Literally, I don't think any job ever asked me for my grades or anything like this. I think rather than focus on GCSE, schools should do a lot more than that. Like how to use your money, because when you obviously start working, you're getting all this money, you haven't got a clue what to do with it at that age. And loads of people end up in debt. We didn't get taught that in school, we just go on about the exams, which I think really is pointless."*
- But it is clear that these grades undoubtedly helped many of them get jobs at 16 or 18. It also helped, in some instances, this group progress quite swiftly for the first few years of their professional roles – in some sense, during the time when it is most plausible that they might have returned to learning.
  - o *"So I went onto sixth form and did A Levels. And then while doing A Levels, I started a job in a hotel and loved it. So once I finished my A Levels the hotel did me an NVQ, in hospitality management as well".*
  - o *"When I started college, my plan was to go to uni, I wanted to be a criminal psychologist. So I did A Levels. But while I was doing them I got a job, which I absolutely loved, and got promoted quite quickly. So the idea of uni just didn't appeal anymore. Because I know I can do professional degrees in my industry. But I think my experience was more valuable*

than a degree or whatever would have been. So yeah, I just went completely went off the idea, never applied, never really looked into it."

- o *"I started as just a sales advisor. But when I was 19, I was promoted to branch manager. So I was really, really young, really, but I felt that my good grades at school definitely helped me get that position. I think life experience is just as good as the good grades, plus I had the gift of the gab and then I got that job. And then after a couple years that's when I went on to go to [new company] and I was there for 12 years. I always say to my children you can climb the ladder if you get into your mind to get a good apprenticeship at life skills. That is more important I think sometimes than just the grades that you get at school."*
- o *"I'd say that I've worked my way up, but like someone said earlier, my grades from GCSE really helped me in the beginning days and then to get that work experience."*

- And although most participants claimed satisfaction with their life choices, occasionally people would talk about possible opportunities that they might like to do, or wished they had done.
    - o *"when I dropped out of college, you kind of think that if you don't go to university after college that you still can, until you're a bit older, and now obviously it's just kind of a route that I've never needed. I've got quite a well-paid job at the moment. But being a social worker has been something that I've been wanting to think about. And I know there's been some advertising about where we can do an apprenticeship through University, which is free. So that's something I've been considering, while I'm working now. It's definitely something that I was thinking about when I was at college."*
    - o *"I think for me, definitely [going to uni later in life] is something that I've thought about because you think that's the sort of next step. When you're young, you're 16, you're about to leave school, Okay, what do I do now? Because you're in a routine, aren't you, Monday to Friday, you get up, you go to school, you come home, and then you've got your weekends off? And then you think, right, okay, what do I do once I've left school? And there's a lot of there's a big fear factor in that. So if you're not in college, then it's well, what do I do? I've got to go out and work and provide for myself. I always had universities as something that I thought about because that was sort of the thing to do, but unless you have those conversations at 16, you're privy to them, you might not do."*
    - o *"No, I was [thinking of going back to education] for a while, but I don't really know what I'd want to do. And now I've got three kids and a business and whatever else. So at the moment, no, it's not something I will be thinking about."*
    - o *"The only time I sort of think I'd like to come back and maybe study again, I look at some jobs, I think I'd like to apply for that and then see you've got to have either A levels or a degree; that's probably the only time that I think that and it's for a split second because you can move on to the next one. But I think maybe more in today's world for our children,*

maybe they will have to have that [qualification] to apply for good jobs. I don't know if you can be as lucky as leaving at 16 like me."

- But pay remained a clear obstacle to retraining, as well as family barriers.
  - *"[I had a chance to do a degree as an adult]. But it would mean, I'd have had to give up my job. They didn't offer it as an apprenticeship, they do now. So it just wasn't feasible. And I've moved out from home years ago when not being able to work would be possible. But now, in the position I'm in now, I couldn't be more grateful that like things panned out the way they did, I couldn't dream of being in that debt. If they offered me to go and do a degree to get climb higher up their hierarchy, like I'd be happy to do it. But I've been 100% clear I would never do it off my own back and pay. Like, nothing would be worth it. For me. I've kind of worked my way up enough. I feel the same without it. And now I know, I can do it. I don't need a piece of paper to tell me".*

Conclusion 6: In many ways, this proportion of the cohort carved out a pathway that degree apprenticeships now seek to do.

- Participants frequently described, culturally but also in their professional journey, what is now a familiar apprenticeship motivation and journey: they wanted to enter the job market initially, they wanted to train without university debt, they were excited to progress rapidly within a workplace, and they were pleasantly surprised when aged 21, they found themselves level with graduates coming into their industry – but these participants had no debt. Were this group now aged 16, you can imagine degree apprenticeships in particular, which combine features of apprenticeships (including no debt, and a salary) with the awarding of a degree and academic study, being highly attractive to them.
  - *"The cost of going to university, you end up in thousands of pounds worth of debt. So I've never fancied it. But then my mum, I think she was about 46 or 47 when she actually worked in the delivery suite at the hospital. She's an assistant practitioner. And she went to university, at a really late age, but she never got saddled with all the costs because it was paid for by work."*
- Some of this group had particularly done well by moving, accidentally or deliberately, into professions at 16 or 18, which often had its own professional training.
  - *"I have done the last two years in the job, working in the banking industry, there was lots of urging you to do a qualification you could do, you'd get out and you'd go into different directions. And I did a global association professional course, I went on a course for mortgage roles. And then even in the industry, I'm doing now in car sales, there's, different elements and qualifications you can get to help, it helps your CV for brands."*

- *"In the last year [of college], I decided that I didn't want to go to uni anymore. I wanted to get a job. And then I moved into finance. And I personally I think it was the best decision for me. Working in finance, you don't necessarily need a degree and if you do have a degree you still have to do an accountancy qualification anyway, you are just exempt from a few exams. So for me I got my accountancy qualification. I obviously needed my GCSEs and my A levels to kind of get that high level [in accountancy] but it definitely reduced my nervousness. I'm debt free. I haven't got say fifty grand of uni debt"*
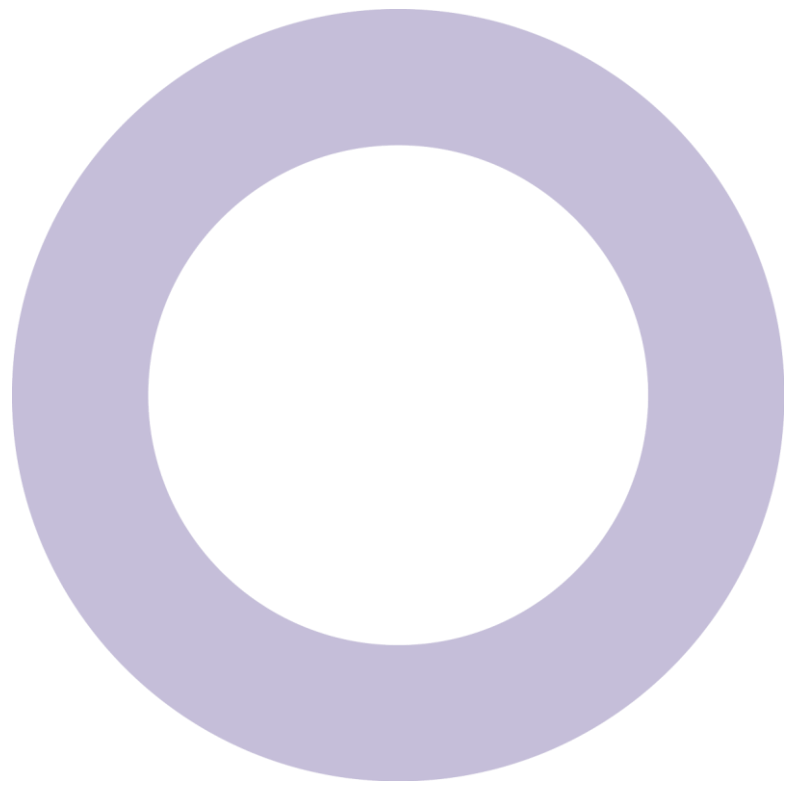
Section 3

Section 3: An illustrative typology for this cohort

On the basis of this work, we might tentatively illustrate the different decision making processes and journeys by way of two typologies of pre 16 year olds, and three further typologies of this group now as 25-35 year old adults.

Pre 16	
Group 1: The School Dismissives	**Group 2: The Undecided Drifters**
• This group is fairly clear, from at least the beginning of GCSEs and possibly earlier, that school isn't for them. • They don't see the benefit of exams (even though they are told they will do well in them), often because they think the content is irrelevant to their future lives. • This group, more than any other group, is motivated by the immediate benefit (and immediate need) to earn money, and lack of inclination to delay this for future education. • They resent pressure from school to do well, and to be told that they are clever. • Some will want to go on to college as a more adult form of education, but almost all of them are really focused on work as an alternative. • They see university as a continuation of academic education, with a large price tag, and no clear benefits.	• This group is broadly disengaged from school during GCSEs, but in a less active and planned way from Group 1 • They have almost universally received very poor careers advice or options about anything else, other than a default academic path (which depending on structures may be school sixth form, a sixth form college, or an FE College) • Almost all of this group will drift into post 16 education for want of a lack of an alternative. Some will do A Levels, and others will do BTECs or equivalents. Some only last a matter of weeks in post-16 before actively disengaging – effectively becoming Group 1. • Although some of them welcome the more flexibility of post 16 education, some of them also lose their way in a more relaxed setting. • They all report a similar lack of signposting for anything that isn't university; although some will consider it (and some may even start), none of them complete it.

Post 16 / Post 18		
Group 3: The Non-Degree Professionals	**Group 4: The Coping**	**Group 5: The (Reluctant) Regretters**
• Post 16, or post 18, a proportion of this cohort deliberately or accidentally choose professions which have an internally consistent and well-designed progression route. This can often involve extensive professional training, which may be certified (often at Level 4), or may not be, but has industry currency. • Typical examples of such professions include accountancy, some banking, insurance, and some law clerking. • Participants in this segment, particularly if they have strong GCSEs and personal qualities, can often accelerate very quickly in their career, and meet graduate intakes aged 21. • It is possible that some people in this group will continue to improve professionally, and may then pick up further training paid for by the employer.	• This group of adults are in a mixture of traditionally lower middle class or trade occupations, and some working class occupations (all by means of reference to national categories of socio economic status). This might include office administration, some public service roles, local government, motor maintenance, horticulture, retail, cleaning, or catering and hospitality. • Unlike Group 3, there is less of a defined career path in these roles, and / or a natural glass ceiling above which roles typically require further qualifications. • This Group doesn't feel a burning platform to retrain, and is mostly happy with their choices. They are aware that there may be opportunities for future training, but are relatively disinclined to consider this seriously.	• Like Group 4, this group are in jobs with relatively little internal progression, or ones that require qualifications to progress further on. • This Group are distinguished by being the most likely to articulate the choices which have been closed off to them because of a lack of education post 16, and to express some form of regret – though often they are reluctant to do so and often justify their current positions and happiness. • They are the most likely to say that they have noticed options available to them for further training, either through their employer, or that are needed in industries they might want to switch to. But they are highly reluctant to do so, because of direct cost, family barriers, time barriers, and a nervousness about how many years it will take to build up a successful career in a new industry. • They often say they wish they had done an Apprenticeship or "learned a trade" and are interested in employer supported or other work based ways to retrain – but even in this instance, barriers are likely to mean that few engage seriously with it.
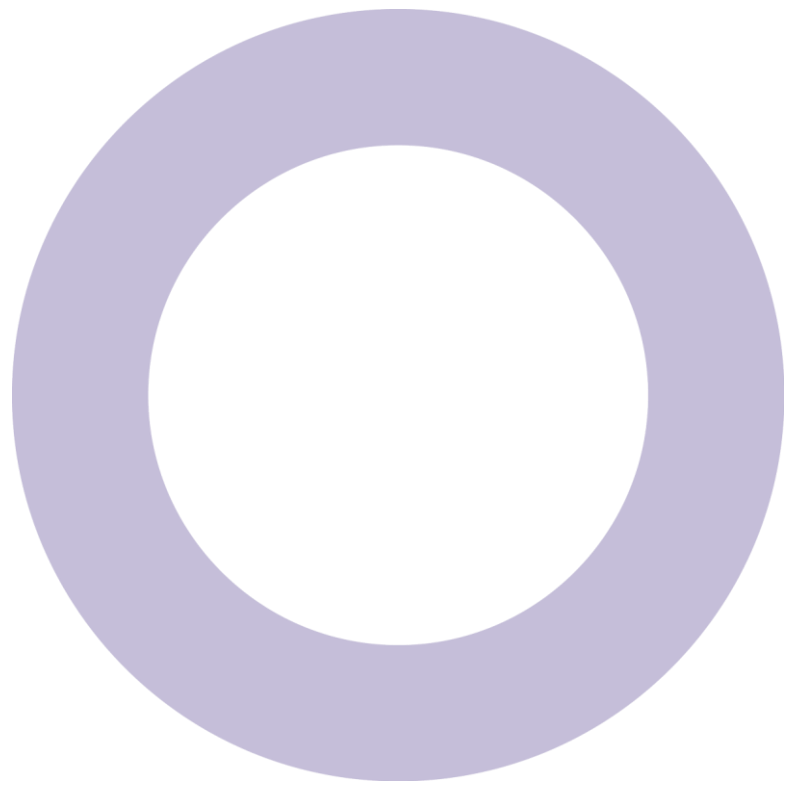
Section 4

Section 4: What policy conclusions, and conclusions for the education system, can we draw?

It is clear from this assessment of both the size of the potential cohort of high achieving 16 year olds, and their motivations, that there are a number of young people with considerable academic talent, who are not progressing onto university – or in many cases, any education beyond 18 at all.

We think, on the basis of this research, that there are a number of conclusions that speak to future efforts that an education system which wants to make the most of talent at 16, can and should do. Some of these will fall most naturally to government; but some also fall to schools and colleges working with these young people.

Conclusion 1: Simply telling academic but disengaged young people that GCSEs are critical, isn't sufficient. Raising aspirations for "bright but disengaged" students needs more attention as an area of focus. Many of our participants recalled huge pressure from schools on their GCSE grades, with schools telling them that they were bright and could and should go on and get good exam results, and a feeling that their life chances were being inextricably shaped at 16. They recalled feeling sceptical about this; and at worst, this led to feelings of greater disenchantment from the education system. The truth is more nuanced; GCSEs are a necessary protective factor for these and all young people, and do open up significant post 16 opportunities. For but those who are able but disengaged, a more nuanced message would benefit them – telling them about the importance but also the different options open. Yet conversely, leaving them free to make these choices on their own, as many experienced after 16, is also likely to lead to some missing out on opportunity. Our sense is that schools have moved a long way on this since the experiences of some of these groups; but we think raising aspirations among bright but disengaged young people (to university and more generally) from the age of 14, or even from the age of 11, is a subject that deserves further policy attention.

Conclusion 2: 11-16 education needs to focus on a broad and balanced academic curriculum, as well as wider aspiration raising. It follows from the above that young people need academic rigour. Indeed, the guiding principle of both Eton College and Star Academies is to support all our young people with the best that has been thought and said. But it is also to deliver an education which combines this knowledge with positive experiences and engagement for young people. At Star, we call this "nurturing

today's young people, inspiring tomorrow's leaders". The Star schools have a Leadership Framework which captures this commitment via the identification of moral, performance and civic virtues linked to a competency matrix that encompasses the entire schooling experience from Reception to Key Stage 5. We focus on opportunities and experiences for Star pupils to develop competencies through the prism of our five leadership foundations: sport; creativity; performing arts; enterprise and careers; and charity and social action. None of this is easy, in the teeth of a funding environment for state schools that remains very tight. But we are inspired by both Labour and the Conservative party's commitment to look again at this balance, and we want to play our part in seeking how we can support 11-16 education, both in our schools themselves but in the areas that the Eton Star Partnership will work in.

Conclusion 3: Having a pathway open at 16 that combines academic stretch with personal attention and greater opportunities – that is to say selective sixth form colleges – can be a transformative opportunity for some. Many of our participants knew they were the "clever ones" at school and different in some ways from their friends. Some had received special attention from their schools (ie top set work). But managing this type of differentiation is always going to be harder for schools managing large cohorts of children, across a wide range of GCSE subjects, with different academic ability. We firmly believe that there are a number of children who perform well at 16 – from within this cohort but also outside of this cohort – who could benefit and thrive from a smaller and more focussed environment which gave academic stretch and opportunity. This is the focus of what the Eton Star Colleges will do.

Conclusion 4: But equally, the system must be able to scale up different and legitimate post 16 options for some, including those who perform academically well at GCSE. We were struck during our research how many of these students essentially described the Degree Apprenticeship journey as something they wanted to do – a high quality pathway that combined some form of greater autonomy, earning money, avoiding student debt, and getting into the workplace. We are strong supporters of Degree Apprenticeships as a solution to some of this cohort, and indeed the reform and promotion of new Higher Technical Qualifications at Levels 4 and 5, which could be progressed to via either a traditional sixth form curriculum pathway, or an FE College pathway. But the numbers of such qualifications are still vanishingly small – recent IFS analysis suggests fewer than 1.5 adults in 1000 complete an HTQ at present every year[2], and although there are around 35,000 people doing a Degree Apprenticeship every year, only a few thousand of them are taken up by young people. Indeed, in the year ending in 2022, fewer than 2,500 places were taken up by people aged 18-24.[3] We need a system that supports all young

[2] https://ifs.org.uk/articles/missing-middle-higher-technical-learners
[3] https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/why-degree-apprenticeships-are-win-win-students-universities-and-employers

people, and for high quality technical education to be a realistic alternative, it needs to be signposted, funded properly, and deliverable at more like 250,000 a year, rather than 2,500.

Conclusion 5: Having a better system of 'second chances' will benefit this group, and others too. One of the weaknesses of the current system in England is that it focusses on pathways taken by those at the first opportunity – that is to say Level 2 qualifications at 16, then Level 3 by 18, then opportunity for various tertiary qualifications (and especially degrees) by 21 or 25. For students like the ones we study here, especially those who are not actively disengaged but simply do not know what they want to do and drift through a system, we are in danger of not providing sufficient opportunities for them to return to education should they wish to at a later stage. We have been inspired by the work we have seen in FE Colleges that work with adult learners, and those balancing work and study, or caring responsibilities. But it is clear that this is an area of the system under immense pressure to deliver. Policy reforms such as the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, which offer 4 years' worth of full time support for fees and maintenance for those at any age, undertaking any form of tertiary study, seem to us to have great promise. Equally, we see the Apprenticeship Levy as an area where employers can and should invest in their staff, including those who are younger and less established in their careers. It is essential that such mechanisms be allowed to grow and flourish, and that deliberately or accidentally, younger adults aged 25-35 are not locked out of changes they wish to make at the start of what will be a long and varied working career.

If we can collectively take action in these and other areas, we think that the future can be bright for all young people progressing through secondary education – and especially those for whom talent and ability can be identified and maximised.
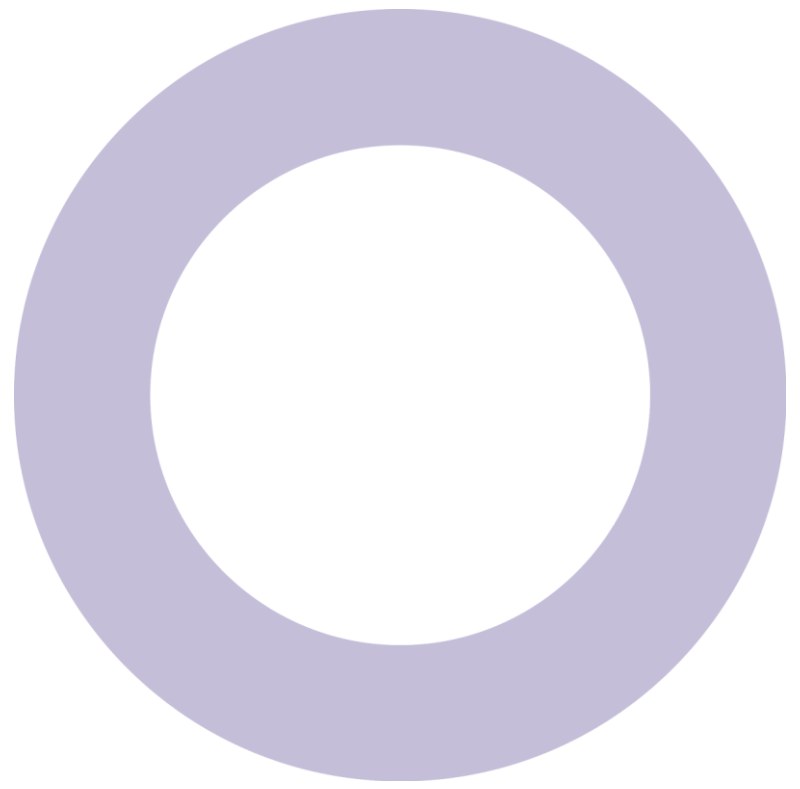
Section 5

Section 5: Implications for the Eton Star Partnership

The Eton Star Partnership is a think and do tank whose research base includes practice that is incubated by some of the very best schools in the country.

As such, we want to always conclude our research with conclusions not just for government and the education system generally, but with commitments which we will take as a partnership, including through the three new Eton Star Colleges, and our broader work with 11-16 education in the three areas where the schools will be.

We make the following conclusions and commitments, as relate to our forthcoming work:

Commitment 1: Our Eton Star Partnership work – and specifically our network of Centres for Innovation and Research in Learning (CIRLs) – will work with partner schools in the 11-16 phase to identify these talented young students in Years 10 and 11 – and even earlier - and to work with their schools on an intervention programme to encourage them to stay in structured post-16 environments after GCSE. Such environments will include our College but will not be limited to that; we want to also act as a clearing house for pathways to local degree apprenticeship opportunities and other post 16 and post 18 pathways, working with local colleges, university outreach partnerships, and all others in this space.

Commitment 2: We will explicitly design the curriculum and pastoral support in our Colleges to avoid 'drift', to continue an element of personal support and focus, and to put students' achievement at GCSE into a wider context of progression to HE (or elsewhere). The small size of the College, and our links to a broader ecosystem of educational actors operating in post 16 but also employers, will give us a natural ability to focus on this type of support for gifted students.

Commitment 3: We will focus much of our outreach work through the CIRLs and through the local engagement team around a clear Information and Guidance offer to better inform these cohorts about what their options are. Alongside this, we will deliver a programme in 11-16 education not just of academic support, but of character education, leadership, and aspirations – such that talented students recognise the options open to them, and are less likely to disengage. This builds upon existing work which we already offer through Eton X, as well as Star's clearly designed leadership programme for all Star students across their schools.

Commitment 4: We will look carefully at the period after GCSE results with partner schools - and seek to put in intervention structures to keep the highly attaining cohort in education. We want to provide additional capacity during this time when results are known, rather than just forecast. We know from this work that some of this group were almost surprised by these results; and that many just drifted into post 16 education without much clear idea. That 4-6 week period after results is an intense time when decisions can be made and pathways shown, backed by actual, rather than forecast results. We want to work with schools, colleges, employers and others to help give intensive support during this time, especially for those who might not have such strong familial and other networks to help them with decision making.
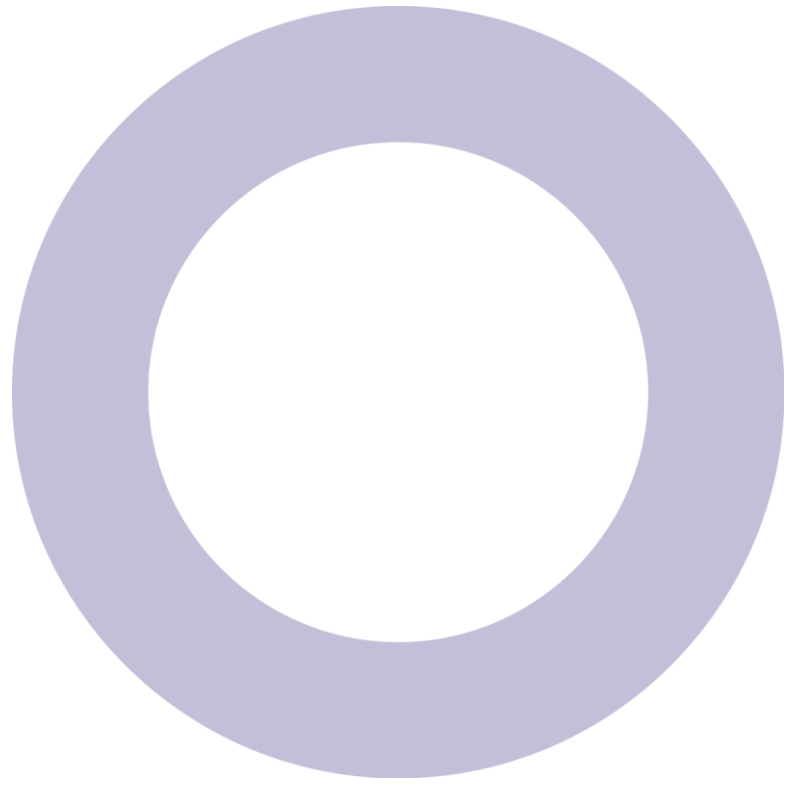
Appendices

Appendix 1: Percentages of the high attaining cohort at 16 who do not progress to university by 25, by LA

Local Authority	Percentage of high attaining pupils who don't pursue HE	Local Authority	Percentage of high attaining pupils who don't pursue HE
Kingston upon Thames	2.80%	Barnet	6.30%
Reading	3.80%	Northumberland	6.30%
Slough	4.50%	Bristol, City of	6.50%
Wandsworth	4.70%	Wirral	6.80%
York	4.70%	Calderdale	6.80%
Buckinghamshire	4.80%	Wiltshire	6.80%
Trafford	4.90%	Westminster	7.00%
Tower Hamlets	5.00%	North Somerset	7.00%
Portsmouth	5.00%	Stockton-on-Tees	7.00%
Sutton	5.00%	Birmingham	7.10%
Southwark	5.10%	Liverpool	7.10%
Haringey	5.10%	Rochdale	7.10%
Ealing	5.10%	Gateshead	7.10%
Harrow	5.10%	Suffolk	7.10%
Warwickshire	5.20%	Nottingham	7.30%
Brent	5.30%	Cheshire West and Chester	7.30%
Hounslow	5.40%	South Gloucestershire	7.30%
Newcastle upon Tyne	5.40%	Sandwell	7.40%

Oxfordshire	5.60%	Southampton	7.40%
Sheffield	5.70%	Bexley	7.50%
Redbridge	5.70%	Leicestershire	7.50%
Enfield	5.70%	Hammersmith and Fulham	7.50%
North Yorkshire	5.70%	Lewisham	7.50%
Richmond upon Thames	6.10%	Bedford	7.70%
Hertfordshire	6.20%	Cambridgeshire	7.80%
Manchester	6.20%	Kent	7.90%
Lambeth	6.20%	Bromley	7.90%
Newham	6.20%	Staffordshire	8.00%
Solihull	8.00%	Barking and Dagenham	9.40%
Bury	8.00%	Derby	9.40%
Surrey	8.10%	Hampshire	9.50%
Leeds	8.20%	Waltham Forest	9.60%
Derbyshire	8.30%	Peterborough	9.70%
Sefton	8.30%	County Durham	9.70%
Bolton	8.30%	Wokingham	9.80%
Dorset	8.30%	Torbay	9.80%
Poole	8.30%	Gloucestershire	9.90%
Lincolnshire	8.30%	Nottinghamshire	9.90%
Southend-on-Sea	8.40%	Bath and North East Somerset	10.00%
Bracknell Forest	8.50%	Redcar and Cleveland	10.00%
Plymouth	8.50%	West Sussex	10.10%
Cheshire East	8.50%	Rotherham	10.20%
Greenwich	8.50%	Kensington and Chelsea	10.50%
Wolverhampton	8.50%	North Tyneside	10.50%
Oldham	8.50%	East Sussex	10.50%
Telford and Wrekin	8.50%	Coventry	10.60%
Warrington	8.60%	Essex	10.60%
Bournemouth	8.70%	Wakefield	10.70%

Brighton and Hove	8.80%	Shropshire	10.80%
Croydon	8.80%	Lancashire	10.80%
Central Bedfordshire	8.90%	West Berkshire	10.90%
Milton Keynes	8.90%	North Lincolnshire	11.10%
Devon	8.90%	Tameside	11.40%
Hillingdon	9.00%	South Tyneside	11.50%
East Riding of Yorkshire	9.00%	Cornwall	11.60%
Merton	9.10%	Camden	11.70%
Walsall	9.10%	Kingston upon Hull, City of	11.80%
Doncaster	9.10%	Stockport	11.80%
Kirklees	9.10%	Sunderland	12.50%
Herefordshire, County of	9.10%	Medway	12.70%
Northamptonshire	9.10%	Halton	13.00%
Cumbria	9.20%	Wigan	13.10%
Worcestershire	9.20%	Darlington	13.30%
Leicester	9.30%	Windsor and Maidenhead	13.50%
Norfolk	9.30%	Somerset	14.10%
Bradford	9.30%	Luton	14.70%
Blackburn with Darwen	14.70%	Islington	NA
Dudley	14.80%	Knowsley	NA
North East Lincolnshire	15.00%	St. Helens	NA
Swindon	15.20%	Barnsley	NA
Havering	17.30%	Isles of Scilly	NA
Salford	19.00%	Hartlepool	NA
Thurrock	19.00%	Middlesbrough	NA
Hackney	21.10%	Rutland	NA
City of London	NA	Stoke-on-Trent	NA
		Blackpool	NA
		Isle of Wight	NA

Appendix 2: Overall ranked HE participation rate for entry in 2015, participation rate for FSM students, participation rate for high attaining students at GCSE in 2013, by LA

Rank	Overall HE participation at 18, 2015 entry	FSM HE participation at 18, 2015 entry	HE participation by age 2015, high attaining GCSE 2013 cohort (excluding LAs with no data / small participation)
1	Harrow	Isles of Scilly	Bedfordshire
2	Westminster	Westminster	Kingston upon Thames
3	Redbridge	Kensington and Chelsea	Reading
4	Hammersmith and Fulham	Redbridge	Slough
5	Barnet	Newham	Wandsworth
6	Kensington and Chelsea	Harrow	York
7	Slough	Brent	Buckinghamshire
8	Brent	Tower Hamlets	Trafford
9	Hounslow	Hammersmith and Fulham	Portsmouth
10	Sutton	Ealing	Sutton
11	Kingston upon Thames	Hounslow	Tower Hamlets
12	Enfield	Hackney	Ealing
13	Ealing	Enfield	Haringey
14	Newham	Haringey	Harrow
15	Buckinghamshire	Islington	Southwark

16	Wandsworth	Barnet	Warwickshire
17	Camden	Wandsworth	Brent
18	Trafford	Southwark	Hounslow
19	Hackney	Camden	Newcastle upon Tyne
20	Haringey	Lambeth	Oxfordshire
21	Tower Hamlets	Waltham Forest	Enfield
22	Wokingham	Slough	North Yorkshire
23	Merton	Merton	Redbridge
24	Lambeth	Lewisham	Sheffield
25	Hertfordshire	Croydon	Richmond upon Thames
26	Richmond upon Thames	Barking and Dagenham	Hertfordshire
27	Southwark	Kingston upon Thames	Lambeth
28	Waltham Forest	Luton	Manchester
29	Croydon	Birmingham	Newham
30	Bromley	Hillingdon	Barnet
31	Southend-on-Sea	Greenwich	Northumberland
32	Islington	Richmond upon Thames	Bristol, City of
33	Lewisham	Blackburn with Darwen	Calderdale
34	Windsor and Maidenhead	Buckinghamshire	Wiltshire
35	Calderdale	Bradford	Wirral
36	Luton	Manchester	North Somerset
37	Cheshire East	Bury	Stockton-on-Tees
38	Bexley	Oldham	Westminster
39	Bury	Sutton	Birmingham
40	Bedford	Kirklees	Gateshead
41	Warrington	Bolton	Liverpool
42	Lancashire	Bexley	Rochdale
43	Blackburn with Darwen	Calderdale	Suffolk
44	Birmingham	Bromley	Cheshire East
45	Surrey	Rochdale	Nottingham

46	Reading	Leicester	South Gloucestershire
47	Hillingdon	Wolverhampton	Sandwell
48	North Yorkshire	Windsor and Maidenhead	Southampton
49	Bolton	Coventry	Bexley
50	Barking and Dagenham	Milton Keynes	Hammersmith and Fulham
51	Isles of Scilly	Redcar and Cleveland	Leicestershire
52	Wirral	Bracknell Forest	Lewisham
53	Kirklees	Wokingham	Bedford
54	Solihull	Surrey	Cambridgeshire
55	Leicester	Dudley	Bromley
56	Milton Keynes	Trafford	Kent
57	Greenwich	Bedford	Bury
58	Rutland	Sandwell	Solihull
59	Cheshire West and Chester	Sefton	Staffordshire
60	Wolverhampton	Tameside	Surrey
61	Sefton	Solihull	Leeds
62	Central Bedfordshire	Lancashire	Bolton
63	Leicestershire	Sheffield	Devon
64	West Berkshire	Liverpool	Dudley
65	Oldham	Hertfordshire	Lincolnshire
66	York	Blackpool	Poole
67	Wiltshire	Walsall	Sefton
68	Warwickshire	Central Bedfordshire	Southend-on-Sea
69	North Tyneside	Salford	Bracknell Forest
70	Dudley	Middlesbrough	Cheshire
71	Cambridgeshire	Halton	Greenwich
72	Worcestershire	Southend-on-Sea	Oldham
73	Bradford	Cheshire East	Plymouth
74	Northumberland	Cornwall	Telford and Wrekin
75	Stockport	Stockport	Wolverhampton

76	Stockton-on-Tees	Telford and Wrekin	Warrington
77	Lincolnshire	Peterborough	Bournemouth
78	Poole	Medway	Brighton and Hove
79	Wigan	Newcastle upon Tyne	Cumbria
80	Gloucestershire	North Tyneside	Central Bedfordshire
81	Kent	Leicestershire	Doncaster
82	Oxfordshire	Worcestershire	Milton Keynes
83	Rochdale	Wiltshire	East Riding of Yorkshire
84	Redcar and Cleveland	Dorset	Hillingdon
85	Bracknell Forest	Brighton and Hove	Dorset
86	St. Helens	Poole	Herefordshire
87	North Somerset	Northamptonshire	Kirklees
88	Manchester	Darlington	Merton
89	Bath and North East Somerset	North Yorkshire	Northamptonshire
90	East Riding of Yorkshire	York	Walsall
91	Walsall	Havering	Darlington
92	Torbay	Oxfordshire	Worcestershire
93	Blackpool	Essex	Bradford
94	Liverpool	Wigan	Leicester
95	Herefordshire	Gateshead	Norfolk
96	Coventry	Bournemouth	Barking and Dagenham
97	Northamptonshire	Stockton-on-Tees	Derbyshire
98	Hartlepool	Stoke-on-Trent	Hampshire
99	Staffordshire	Cambridgeshire	Waltham Forest
100	Telford and Wrekin	Herefordshire	Coventry
101	Hampshire	Kingston Upon Hull, City of	Peterborough
102	Gateshead	Wirral	Torbay
103	Havering	Isle of Wight	Wokingham
104	Shropshire	Plymouth	Gloucestershire
105	Leeds	Hartlepool	Nottinghamshire

106	West Sussex	South Tyneside	Bath and North East Somerset
107	Tameside	Derby	Redcar and Cleveland
108	Dorset	Leeds	West Sussex
109	Darlington	Bath and North East Somerset	Rotherham
110	Bournemouth	East Riding of Yorkshire	East Sussex
111	Derbyshire	Rotherham	Kensington and Chelsea
112	Cornwall	Southampton	North Tyneside
113	South Tyneside	Reading	Croydon
114	Medway	Warrington	Essex
115	Cumbria	North Somerset	Wakefield
116	Plymouth	North East Lincolnshire	Lancashire
117	Peterborough	Torbay	Shropshire
118	Essex	Bristol, City of	West Berkshire
119	Sheffield	Sunderland	North Lincolnshire
120	Durham	Wakefield	Tameside
121	Derby	West Sussex	South Tyneside
122	Sunderland	Doncaster	Cornwall
123	Nottinghamshire	Warwickshire	Camden
124	Suffolk	St. Helens	Kingston Upon Hull, City of
125	Devon	Northumberland	Stockport
126	Newcastle upon Tyne	South Gloucestershire	Sunderland
127	Halton	Lincolnshire	Medway
128	Doncaster	Nottingham	Halton
129	Middlesbrough	Durham	Wigan
130	South Gloucestershire	Kent	Derby
131	Rotherham	North Lincolnshire	Windsor and Maidenhead
132	Sandwell	Somerset	Somerset
133	Salford	Devon	Blackburn with Darwen
134	Brighton and Hove	Gloucestershire	Luton
135	North East Lincolnshire	West Berkshire	Durham

136	Swindon	Staffordshire	North East Lincolnshire
137	Isle of Wight	Knowsley	Swindon
138	Somerset	Suffolk	Havering
139	East Sussex	Hampshire	Salford
140	North Lincolnshire	Thurrock	Thurrock
141	Wakefield	Derbyshire	Hackney
142	Norfolk	Cumbria	
143	Stoke-on-Trent	Norfolk	
144	Nottingham	Rutland	
145	Southampton	Cheshire West and Chester	
146	Bristol, City of	Swindon	
147	Thurrock	Nottinghamshire	
148	Kingston Upon Hull, City of	Portsmouth	
149	Barnsley	East Sussex	
150	Portsmouth	Shropshire	
151	Knowsley	Barnsley	