



Challenges facing rural 16-18 year olds in accessing appropriate education and work based learning

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The requirement to undertake education or work based learning

Whilst young people may still leave school at the end of the summer term after they turn 16 they must then do one of the following until they are 18:

- Stay in full-time education
- Start an apprenticeship or traineeship
- Spend 20+ hours a week working or volunteering, while in part time education or training

Free school transport ceases at the end of compulsory education.

The Research

This involved:

- A range of published research and statistics
- Responses to an on-line survey
- A small number of more detailed questionnaires and telephone interviews

There is little reliable published information about the choices made by young people at 16+ and none that I could find about the choices they would have liked to have made if they had had the opportunity to do so.

Published statistics rarely allow for detailed rural analysis.

Rural disadvantage

Whatever route rural young people take after compulsory school leaving age, three interrelated factors leave many of them at a disadvantage compared to their urban counterparts:

- choice
- accessibility
- cost

This disadvantage affects both the individual young person's life chances, and social mobility more generally.

"...the new social mobility coldspots in our country are concentrated in remote rural or coastal areas and in former industrial areas..."

- Social Mobility Commission (2017)

Academic attainment

In 2017/18 the proportion of pupils attending schools in rural areas who left school with English and Maths GCSEs at grades A* to C or equivalent was higher than in urban areas.

However, for a given level of deprivation, the attainment levels of pupils living in rural areas were lower than for pupils living in urban areas with a similar level of deprivation. *(2018 data, DfE statistical release)*

A smaller percentage of students leaving schools or colleges located in predominantly rural areas go on to Higher Education compared to leavers from urban based institutions.

Choice

Whilst research by the social mobility commission indicates that young people growing up in London have, on average, a choice of 12 institutions to choose from 42% of the respondents to our online survey stated that 16-18 year olds in their rural communities had only one accessible college or school and a further 28% indicated that there was a choice of two.

“I’m happy with the courses I have chosen [at school sixth form]...that’s just as well really because it is the only school or college I could feasibly travel to.”

- Annie, “middle of nowhere” Devon/Cornwall border

Choice - type of post 16 institution.

Choice is not only about the number of accessible post 16 education establishments but also the range of types of institutions, e.g. school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and further education colleges. This varies widely across the country.

FE colleges, which tend to cater for more vocational qualifications, are usually in larger urban centres which may be impracticable for rural students to reach.

“I think a lot of youngsters end up studying for A levels, even though they may not be appropriate for them, simply because there is nothing else available.”

- Parent, Cumbria

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship options are often very limited in number and difficult to access.

“If I had not been able to take my daughter and son to their apprenticeship placements/colleges they would not have been able to complete their courses.”

- Parent, Somerset village

Notably none of the young apprentices interviewed had found their apprenticeships through advertisements. Family contacts, Saturday/ holiday jobs and work experience seemed the most common routes.

Accessibility

Long and complex journeys were widely reported. Journey distance of over 30 miles, or an hour and a half in duration, are not uncommon.

“a number of buses need to be taken- there is not one single bus that goes through the village direct to any school /college in the area.”

- Parent, Cambridgeshire village

“Getting to Exeter College was a bit of a nightmare involving catching the 06.55 bus...I’d often have to wait in the pouring rain...the return journey wasn’t much better and I had to wait until 17.10 regardless of when my last session finished. “

- Emma, Devon village

For many access by public transport is impossible and there is heavy reliance on parents.

“In order that Lynn could attend Kendal College I drove her there, a 45 minute journey in each direction. It was fortunate that I was able to do so and could afford it.”

- Parent, Cumbria

“Removal of the local bus service means that 16-18 year olds can only get to and from their place of full-time education if their parents are able to transport them.”

- Survey respondent, Hampshire

Travel costs

Travel costs of £200 per term or more are common.

Students from my local village are currently charged £972 a year to travel by bus to their nearest FE College.

These costs raise issues of:

- intergenerational fairness, pensioners having free bus passes
- geographical fairness. Why should young people from remoter rural areas have to pay so much more to travel for essential education or training when they have no other realistic options?

16-18 year olds, unlike older students, have no choice about where they live; are unable to drive at 16 (when their courses typically start); and cannot obtain student loans.

Is it really equitable that rural 16-18s should be at such a disadvantage compared to their urban counterparts in terms of access to education and work based learning?

There is an urgent need for larger scale research on this topic to fully identify the scale of the issues raised and the impacts on particular sub-groups e.g. young people from income disadvantaged families or those with SEND.