



Annual Parent Survey 2017

Part 2 – Social Mobility and children's work readiness

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This research was conducted as part of the PTA UK Annual Parent Survey. PTA UK are now known as Parentkind following a name change in February 2018.

The survey was conducted online by Research Now. Respondents were recruited through their UK panel and took part in the survey from 20th August – 11th September 2017. It involved a sample of 1,507 parents from England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have at least one child aged 5-18 attending state school. The sample is representative of the parent population by gender, age and social grade. Sub-samples in Wales and Northern Ireland were boosted to achieve a large enough base of respondents to compare findings across the three regions of England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

The research was undertaken and the report written in collaboration with Caterina Violi from Preseli Partnerships. She is a freelance researcher based in Tuscany, Italy, who works for the non-profit sector. Her journey as a researcher began at Oxfam and carried on at research think tank nfpSynergy where, over the years, she has managed a number of syndicated and bespoke research projects for charities such as Macmillan Cancer Support, Cancer Research UK, Friends of the Earth, WaterAid, Care International and The Outward Bound Trust. After working in house for London based education charity A New Direction, Caterina relocated to Italy where she continues to work as a freelance researcher.

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1. About the research

Overview

The Parentkind (formerly PTA UK) Parent Survey gives an annual snapshot of parents' behaviour and attitudes towards their child's school and education. This is the third wave of the survey which tracks views of parents in England, Northern Ireland and Wales who have at least one child in a state school.

As with our [2016 parent survey](#), the 2017 survey was commissioned through world leading data collection company Research Now to gain a deeper understanding of parents' views on key educational issues, as well as whether or not some views are changing over time. Key topics tracked in all waves of the survey include:

- Parents' attitudes to their child's school and schooling including their views on supporting their child's learning, how the school takes their views into account and how effectively school communicates with them
- Whether or not they believe their voice is heard by education policymakers at all levels.
- The different ways in which parents involve themselves in school life, and their awareness or otherwise of parent groups
- The cost of education and school funding, including parents' perceptions of whether or not costs are increasing and which costs are of most concern.
- Donations to the school fund

About this report

This is one of a series of mini-reports looking in depth into specific topics of the survey. Here we explore **parents' perceptions of the extent to which schools promote social mobility and work readiness**

Other reports based on our 2017 findings look at:

- The cost of schooling
- Parents' representation and schools' accountability
- Enabling positive home-school partnerships
- Parents' participation in their child's school

2. Summary of key findings

- Parents' views on the role of education in promoting social mobility are divided, with high levels of uncertainty
 - 56% of parents agree that schools are doing enough to provide all pupils with opportunities to succeed in life, while the rest either disagree or are uncertain
 - 47% of parents agree that schools are doing enough to help disadvantaged pupils and 42% neither agree nor disagree or do not know
- Parents with children who are still in primary school and those living in London are more likely to be positive about the role of schools in ensuring pupils have fair chances in life
 - 17% of parents with children in primary school strongly agree that their school is doing enough to help disadvantaged pupils compared to 12% of parents with children in secondary school and 10% of parents with children in further education
 - In London parents are more likely to strongly agree that their child's school is doing enough to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds (20%) compared to parents in the East Midlands (7%), in the East (9%) and in Northern Ireland (8%)
 - They are also more likely to strongly agree that it is getting easier for children from less affluent backgrounds to improve their opportunities through education (19%) compared to parents in Yorkshire and Humber (10%), in the East Midlands (8%) and in the East of England (10%)
- Parents' views on their children's education, work and financial prospects vary considerably with age; parents under 45 are consistently more optimistic than older parents
 - 61% of parents aged 25-34 and 56% of parents aged 35-44 compared believe that their children's career prospects are better than their own compared to 44% of 55+
 - 64% of parents aged 18-24 and 58% of those aged 25-34 think their children will have a better standard of living compared to 40% of those aged 55+
 - Only 44% of parents aged 55+ agree that the quality of their children's education is better than what they received compared to 63% of 18-24 and 57% of 25-34 year olds
- The majority of parents actively talk to their child about their future
 - 83% report talking to their child about which subjects they enjoy to help identify what they are good at
 - 78% talk to children about what education means to help them understand how it will shape their career opportunities, and the same proportion talk to children to give them ideas on how education will help them reach their potential

- Older parents (35+) and parents of children in secondary school are more likely to be talking to their children about this than younger parents
- Most parents are confident about their ability to help their children make decisions about school and their future and, interestingly, a large proportion (62%) report basing their advice mainly on personal experiences
 - Older parents are more confident than younger ones in giving advice (83% of 55+ compared to 64% of 18-24 and 73% of 25-34 year olds) and so are parents from higher socio-economic groups (80% of ABC1s compared to 76% of C2DEs)
 - Despite being less confident, younger parents are less likely than older parents to look beyond their own personal experience when advising children on their future (67% of 25-34 report giving advice based on their own experience compared to 59% of 55+)

3. Full findings and analysis

3.1 Social mobility in the UK

Social mobility, defined as individuals' ability to move from one level of society to another¹, has for a long time been at the centre of the political debate in the UK. In England, it has recently been revived as a concept by former Secretary of State for Education Justine Greening and it is also at the basis of both Wales and Northern Ireland's current education policies. Seen as an engine for a fairer, more cohesive and more productive society, it is something which almost every government over the last twenty years has placed at the heart of its agenda².

A recent study carried out by the Boston Consulting Group on behalf of social mobility think tank The Sutton Trust highlights three main drivers of social mobility in any country: economic opportunities (the quantity and quality of jobs available), capability development (the development of both cognitive and essential life skills through formal and informal education that allow individuals to access jobs) and, finally, access to job and education opportunities³.

Therefore, despite not being the only determinant of social mobility, education plays an important role in determining children and young people's ability to succeed and reach their full potential over the course of their lives. Considering that a large body of scientific evidence suggests that many aspects of inequality have their roots in the early months and years of children's development, school remains one of the key levellers of individuals' life chances beyond family life and parental influence.

Education outcomes for children and young people are one of the proxies normally used to measure the extent to which a society is becoming socially mobile alongside income mobility (comparing parents' income to the adult earnings of their children) and social class mobility (comparing parental and children's occupations).

Although international comparisons of social mobility are not easy due to differences in measurements and inconsistencies in datasets, it is estimated that, alongside the US, the UK is

¹The Cambridge Dictionary (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/social-mobility>)

²The State of Social Mobility in the UK" The Boston Consulting Group & The Sutton Trust, 2017

³"The State of Social Mobility in the UK" The Boston Consulting Group & The Sutton Trust, 2017

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amongst the least socially mobile countries across the OECD, with Canada, Australia and the Nordic countries in Europe consistently ranking as the most mobile⁴.

Recent studies monitoring the gap in school attainment between disadvantaged children and their peers over time also show that improvements in social mobility made over the past twenty years have been slower than expected, particularly if set against the policy interventions implemented.

The Education Policy Institute recently found that the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers has seen slow progress over the past 10 years. Currently, a child from a disadvantaged background is estimated to be 4.3 months behind their peers at Early Years (down by 22% since 2007), 9.5 months at primary school (down by 23% since 2007) and a staggering 19.3 months in secondary school (down by 19% since 2007). This means that by the time they reach secondary school, children from disadvantaged backgrounds will have fallen behind by on average 2 months per year over the course of their education compared to their affluent peers⁵. The same study estimates that, at the current rate, it will take 50 years for the attainment gap to close by the time children reach GCSE level.

Some of these trends are echoed by another recent study by the Social Mobility Commission which found that it will take 120 years for young people from poorer backgrounds to be as likely to achieve A-levels (or an equivalent qualification) compared to children from more affluent backgrounds. Similarly, it estimates that the gap in participation to higher education will need 80 years to close⁶.

Alongside trends in education attainment, it is also important to consider how the economic prospects of the last few decades have heavily shaped social mobility in the UK. While the decades immediately following World War II saw remarkable growth and structural changes in the job market with an increased number of professional occupations and strengthened wage growth, this trend slowed down from the mid-1960s, further deteriorating in the 1980s; it has also been compounded by the recent financial crisis.

This has created a new intergenerational divide whereby Millennials (those born between the mid- 1980s and the mid/late 1990s) are set to be the first post-WWII generation to be earning less in real terms than their parents. Although unemployment fell slightly over the course of the past two decades, the young people of today are experiencing an environment of falling real wages, deteriorating quality of job prospects where contracts tend to be precarious and uncertain (e.g. zero-hours contracts) and careers advice tends to be patchy and inconsistent.

As well as challenging labour market conditions, social mobility continues to be held back by entrenched advantage. There is evidence that young people from affluent backgrounds have a comparative advantage in accessing good job opportunities through phenomena such as 'hoarding' of networks and information asymmetries, while social bias remains a key issue in many recruitment processes. It is estimated that even when less well-off students attend the same university and study the same subject as their wealthier peers they still earn in excess of 10% less per year⁷.

⁴ "Going for Growth; A Family Affair- Intergenerational Social Mobility across OECD countries, OECD, 2010

⁵ "Time for Change: An Assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility", Social Mobility Commission, 2017

⁶ "Time for Change: An Assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility", Social Mobility Commission, 2017

⁷ "The State of Social Mobility in the UK", The Boston Consulting Group and Sutton Trust, 2017

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Even vocational qualifications such as apprenticeships, which have seen a huge and consistent rise in interest and investment since 2009/10, have been shown to be characterised by low pay and a range of hidden costs or lack of financial support in the areas of travel, childcare, sick pay and loss of child benefits for parents. Therefore, despite being seen as an instrument to foster social mobility, apprenticeships are unlikely to be a viable option for many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds⁸.

These statistics suggest that overall social mobility remains a pressing issue for the UK and one that the education system can and should help the progress of. But what are parents' views on this? Are they convinced that schools are doing enough to give all pupils the same opportunities in life? Do they believe pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds have a better chance of improving their prospects through education today? Are schools preparing children for the world of work? What conversations are parents having with their children about their future?

By asking parents these questions we hope to create a starting point in actively and meaningfully engaging parents in the social mobility discussion.

The next sections of this report give an in-depth account of parents' opinions on these questions.

3.2 Parent views on the role of schools in promoting social mobility

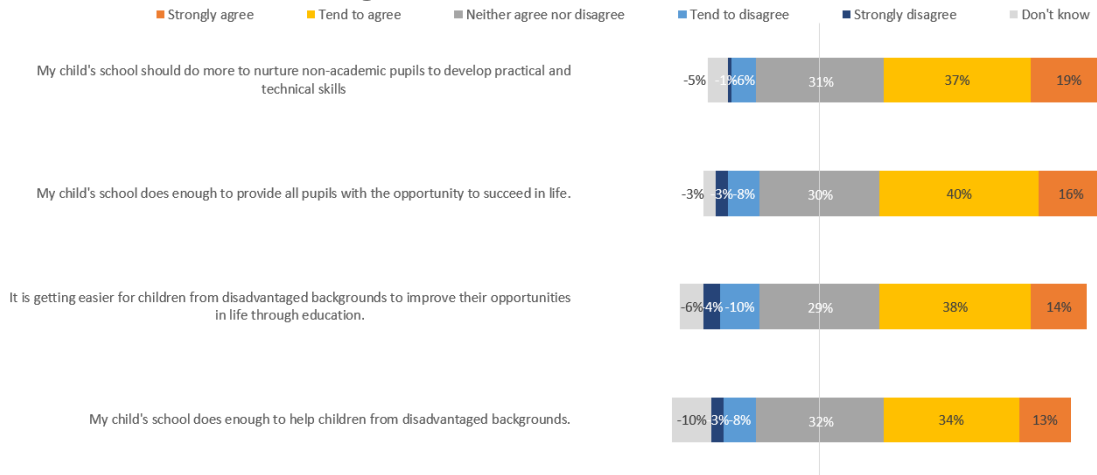
Parents' views are fairly divided on the subject of social mobility through education. More than one in two parents (56%) agree that schools are doing enough to provide all pupils with opportunities to succeed in life, while the rest either disagree or are uncertain/do not know.

Opinions are even more polarised on whether schools are doing enough to help disadvantaged pupils specifically, with 47% of parents agreeing and 42% neither agreeing nor disagreeing or not knowing and 11% actively disagreeing.

At the same time, a similar proportion of parents (56%) agree that their child's school should do more to nurture non-academic pupils to develop practical and technical skills, which again shows how divided parents are on whether schools are doing enough to ensure all pupils, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities and inclinations are able to have the best chance in life.

⁸ "Forget me not", National Union of Students, 2015

Social mobility



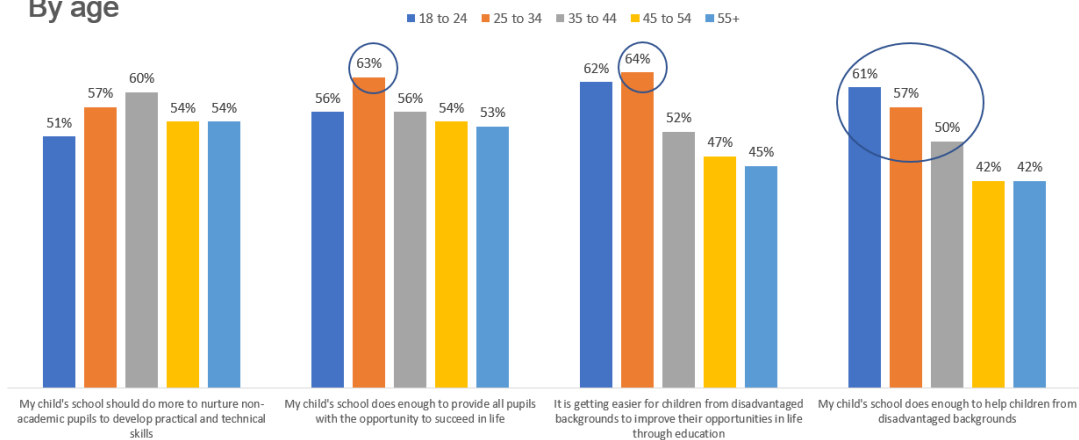
Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents
 Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" **Ranked by Strongly Agree**

Parents' uncertainty on the matter could be due to the fact that the issue of social mobility is complex and one that they may not have a clear picture of (either through the news or from the school itself) and therefore feel unable to comment on.

However, younger parents (particularly those aged 25-34) are generally more positive than older parents about the fact that it is getting easier for disadvantaged children to improve their opportunities in life through education (64% agree compared to 45% of parents aged 55+). They are also more likely to think that schools are doing enough to help disadvantaged pupils (57% compared to 42% of parents aged 55+).

Social mobility

By age



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
 Base: 18-24 (33), 25-34 (222), 35-44 (535), 45-54 (514), 55+ (203)
 Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" **Strongly Agree + Tend to Agree**

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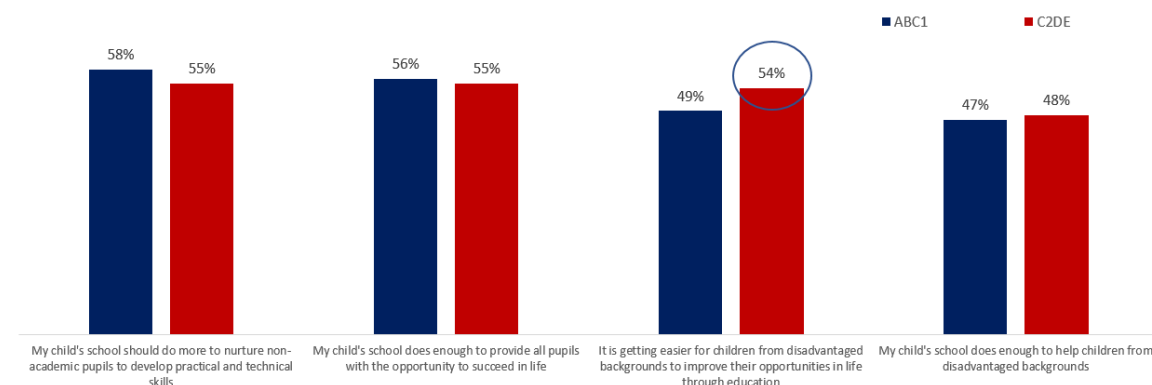
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This could be linked to their child's school phase. As data on attainment shows, the cognitive and skills gap between disadvantaged pupils and their affluent peers tends to widen as pupils go through school phases, which suggests that for school to be able to counteract this, initiatives need to be implemented when pupils are young. Examples of these programmes include Early Years initiatives such as Free for 2 places (free places for 2 year olds in early years settings), FAST programmes (supporting children's learning at home)⁹ and also initiatives run by charities (e.g. volunteer reading programmes in school, the Bookstart programme by the Book Trust¹⁰).

Parents of young pupils therefore may have more direct experience of some of these solutions implemented by schools, early settings and other charities and may therefore be more optimistic about the outcomes. In our data, parents whose older child is still in primary school, for instance, are more likely to strongly agree that their school is doing enough to help disadvantaged pupils (17% compared to 12% of parents with children in secondary schools and 10% of parents with children in further education) and they are more likely to tend to agree that their school is doing enough to provide all pupils with opportunities to succeed (45% compared to 37% in secondary schools and 39% in further education). Parents whose older children are in secondary school are also more likely to disagree that it is getting easier for disadvantaged pupils to improve their opportunities in life through education.

Social mobility

By social grade



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: ABC1 (799), C2DE (708)
Question "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" **Strongly Agree + Tend to Agree**

Although, in general, opinions of parents from different social backgrounds are fairly similar, those in professional and managerial occupations are less likely to agree that it is getting easier for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their opportunities in life through education (49% of ABC1 parents compared to 54% of C2DEs). This could be because, in general, parents from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to report keeping up to date with

⁹ <http://www.familiesandschoolstogether.com>

¹⁰ <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/supporting-you/families/our-programmes/bookstart/>

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news about education (see section 3.5) which might make them more cautious in drawing conclusions about such a complex topic.

From a regional point of view, parents in London appear to be more positive than parents in other regions about the role of education in improving life chances for pupils. In the capital, parents are more likely to strongly agree that their child's school is doing enough to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds (20% of parents compared to 7% in the East Midlands, 9% in the East and 8% in Northern Ireland). They are also more likely to strongly agree that it is getting easier for children from less affluent backgrounds to improve their opportunities through education (19% of parents in London compared to 10% in Yorkshire and Humber, 8% in the East Midlands and 10% in the East of England).

This is unsurprising, given the significant efforts and resources devoted to improving the quality of schools in the capital since the early 2000s. In London, initiatives such as the London Challenge, Teach First, the academies programme and improved targeted support from Local Authorities to schools have played a fundamental role in this, making London today one of the places where children have access to the best life opportunities through education¹¹.

In general, the attainment gap in London, the South and the East of England (16-18 months) is substantially smaller than in the East Midlands, the Humber, the North and the South West (22 months by the end of Key Stage 4). London is also home to some of the best performing local authorities when it comes to supporting disadvantaged children in performing as well as their peers in school – in Newham, for instance, disadvantaged 5 year olds are achieving as well as their non-disadvantaged peers nationally, while Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster have the smallest attainment gap within secondary schools in the country¹². It is therefore to be expected that London parents are more positive about schools' efforts to give pupils from all backgrounds a fair chance of success in life compared to parents from other regions.

3.3 Career prospects and living standards

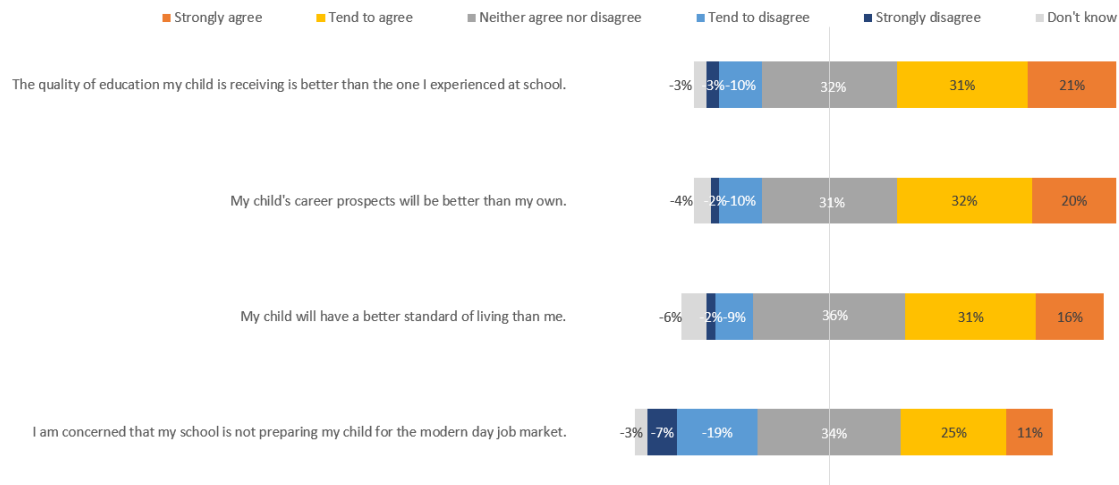
Parent opinions remain divided when it comes to predicting children's career prospects and future standard of living compared to their own. More than half of parents (52%) believe that the education their children are getting is better than their own and that their career prospects will also be better than their own. However, a substantial proportion (35%) neither agree nor disagree or don't know.

A similar proportion believe that their children will have better living standards than them (47%) but, again, a staggering 42% are unable to express an opinion about this.

¹¹ "Lessons from London Schools: Investigating Success", Centre for London, 2014

¹² "Closing the Gap? Trends in Educational Attainment and Disadvantage, Education Policy Institute, 2017

Career prospects and standard of living



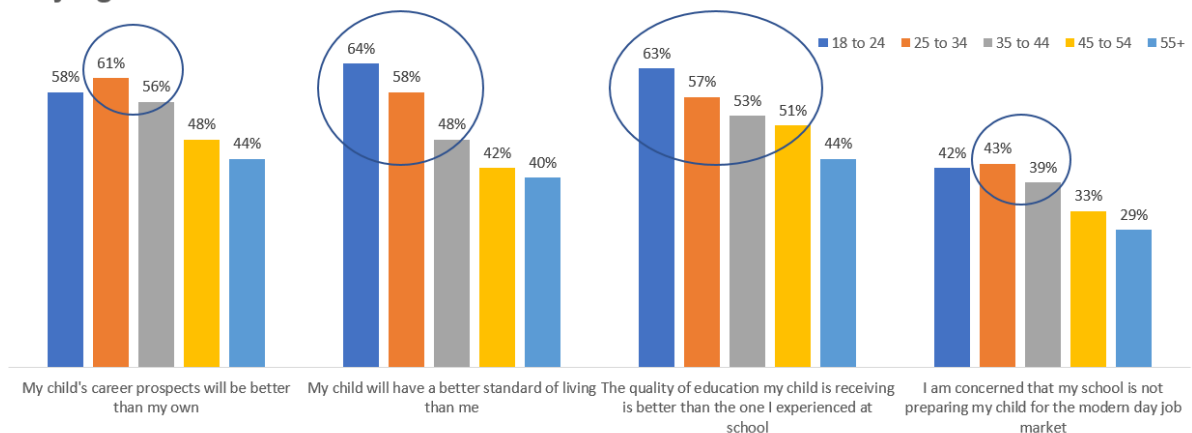
Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents
 Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" **Ranked by Strongly Agree**

Perhaps the starkest difference in views on this topic is between younger and older generations of parents, with parents under 45 being consistently more optimistic than older parents about their children's education, work and future financial prospects.

Younger parents are more likely than older parents to believe that their children's career prospects are better than their own (61% of parents aged 25-34 and 56% of parents aged 35-44 compared to 44% of those aged 55 or above) and that their children will have a better standard of living (64% of 18-24 and 58% of 25-34 compared to 40% of those aged 55 or above). Older generations (55+) are also less likely than younger generations to believe that their children's education is better than their own.

Career prospects and standard of living

By age



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
 Base: 18-24 (33), 25-34 (222), 35-44 (535), 45-54 (514), 55+ (203)
 Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" **Strongly Agree + Tend to Agree**

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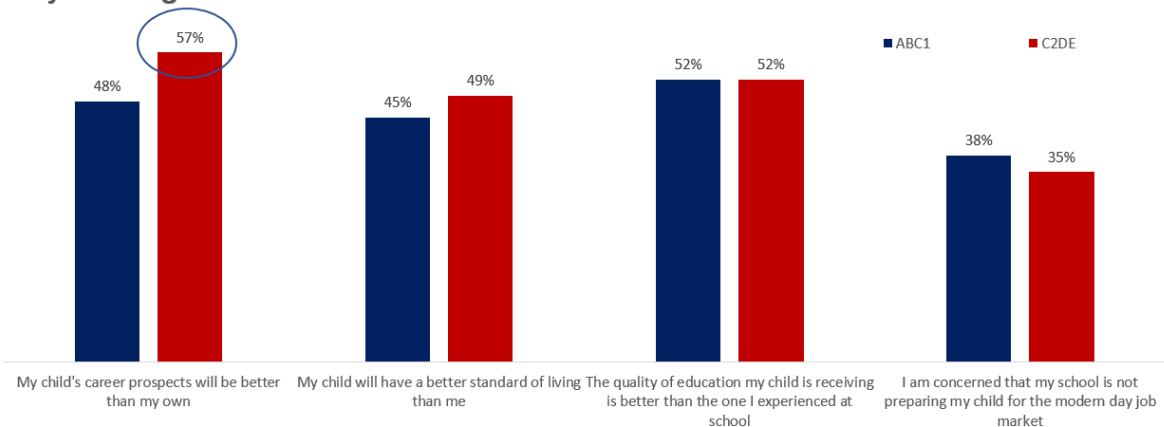
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This is likely to reflect how the financial position of different generations has evolved in the past three decades. Crucially, those born in the 1980s (the current under-35s) are the first post-war generation not to start their working years with a higher income than their parents; they are the cohort that just entered their working life as the 2007 credit crunch and recession hit and those for whom home ownership, a normal aspiration of previous generations, is becoming increasingly harder to achieve. In contrast, older parents who are at or approaching retirement age are likely to have experienced more stable careers, better paid jobs and a better financial position throughout their working lives, followed by the prospect of a good pension.

Therefore, given the hardship experienced compared to older generations, it is likely that younger parents are hoping their children will stand a better chance in terms of job opportunities and, consequently, in terms of standard of living, than they did. By the same token, older generations may be more pessimistic about this, as they are aware of the exceptional economic prosperity that they were able to enjoy throughout their lives compared to younger generations.

Career prospects and standard of living

By social grade



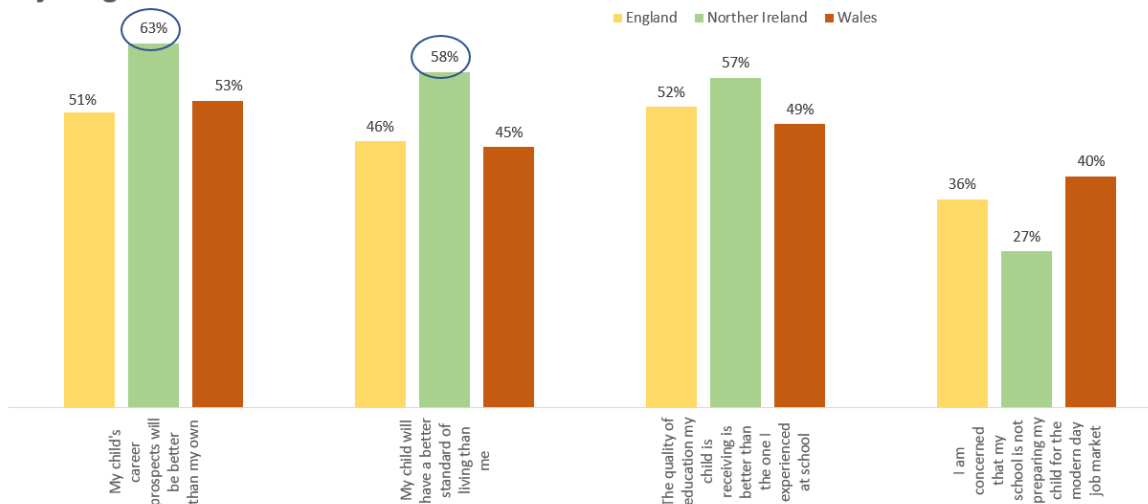
Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: ABC1 (799), C2DE (708)
Question "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" **Strongly Agree + Tend to Agree**

Interestingly, there are no marked differences in parent opinion about this topic across different social groups, with the only exception of parents from C2DE groups being significantly more likely to believe that their children's career prospects are going to be better than their own.

Regionally, parents who live in Northern Ireland are more likely to think that their children will have both better careers and standards of living than their own, compared to parents in Wales and England.

Career prospects and standard of living

By Region



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: England (1205), Northern Ireland (99), Wales (203)

Question "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" **Strongly Agree+Tend to Agree scores**

3.4 Work readiness – the role of schools and parents

The gradual shift of UK economy from a manufacturing to a service-based one has been amplified by a series of factors which make the modern day job market a very different one to what it used to be a few decades ago – tougher, less secure and more competitive at the same time.

The range of skills needed to earn a good living has changed dramatically and is continuing to do so. More and more the UK is seeing a polarisation of occupations and pay, with an increasing volume of professional, higher wage work requiring advanced qualifications at the top of the earning distribution and of low wage service sector jobs at the bottom. At the same time the number of jobs in the middle of the earning distribution is declining.

A more flexible labour market also means less regulation, low unemployment benefits, more ease for firms to hire and lay off workers, an increase in shorter term contracts and zero hour contracts. The share of private sector graduate jobs is increasing at the expense of more secure and, often, better paid, public sector posts – it went from 78 to 80.8% between 2009 and 2012¹³.

Moreover, there continue to be substantial regional disparities in the country with London and the South East seeing the highest levels of Gross Value Added per capita (the value of goods and services produced on average by individuals in an area) compared to northern regions and also a much higher incidence of jobs requiring higher qualifications.¹⁴ Graduate employment tends to be concentrated in cities such as London, but also Manchester, Newcastle, York, Sheffield,

¹³ "The Modern Jobs Economy: trends in employment for study leavers", National Union of Students and New Economics Foundation, 2013

¹⁴ "The Modern Jobs Economy: trends in employment for study leavers", National Union of Students and New Economics Foundation, 2013

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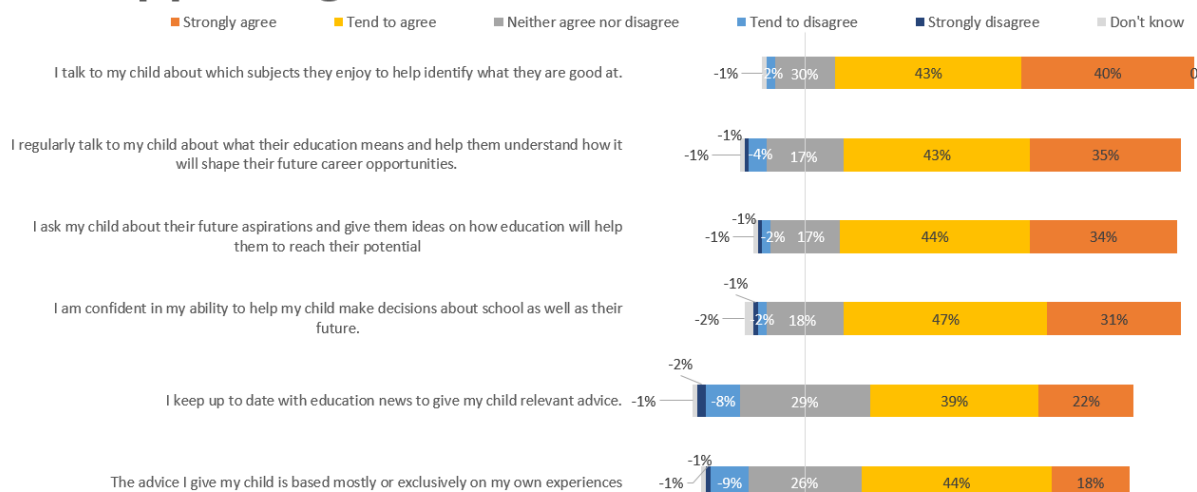
Leeds, Bristol, Bath, Edinburgh and Glasgow amongst others¹⁵. This means that local jobs prospects for a young person vary dramatically based on where they live. All of this needs to be set against more general trends such as the mounting anxiety of the impact of technology and automation on the job market.

In the context of such a rapidly changing landscape, parents do seem to be showing some concern that schools are not preparing their children for the modern day job market. Overall, just over one in three parents are concerned about this compared to one in four who disagree.

Rates of concern are much higher amongst younger parents (43% amongst 25-34 year olds compared to 33% amongst 45-54 and 39% amongst 55+), possibly due to the fact that younger generations are more likely to be acutely aware of the substantial changes affecting the quantity and nature of jobs available in the current labour market, having potentially experienced some of the challenges themselves. Regionally, parents in Northern Ireland are less concerned about this than their counterparts in England and Wales.

Many parents also seem to be active in guiding their children through their future choices, perhaps mindful of the challenges of entering the current job market and of the fact that schools may not be able to do all the work themselves. With the government transferring the responsibility of providing career services from local authorities directly to schools in 2012, the quantity and quality of career advice provision has been deeply questioned¹⁶. A recent report by the Careers and Enterprise Company, for instance, highlighted that the vast majority of schools fall short of Government endorsed standards for good career service¹⁷. This means that now more than ever young people's ability to make informed choices about their future rests on their parents' ability to provide that advice.

Supporting children's future



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
 Base: All respondents
 Question: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" Ranked by "Strongly Agree"

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/careers/2016/jan/18/what-will-the-graduate-job-market-look-like-in-2016>
¹⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/education-20452398>
¹⁷ <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-are-meeting-more-careers-advice-benchmarks/>

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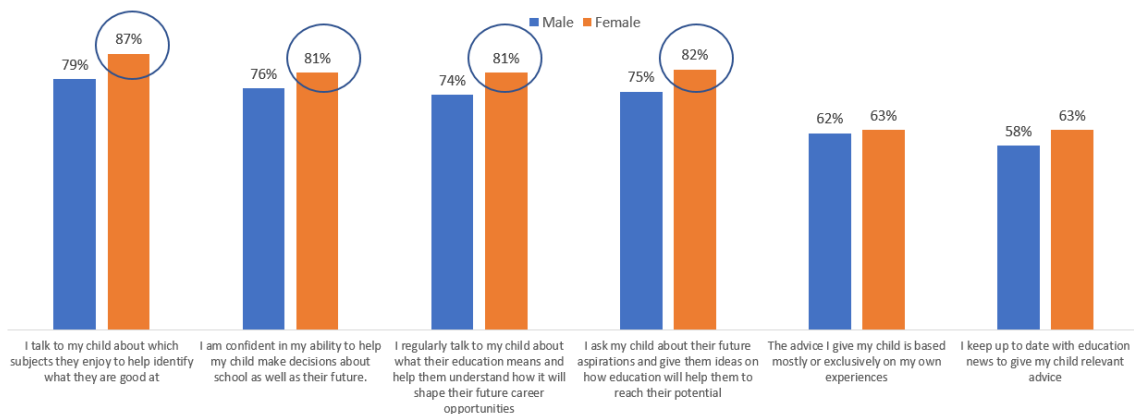
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Around 4 in 5 parents (83%) report talking to their children about which subjects they enjoy to help identify what they are good at and a similar proportion (78%) talk to children about what education means to help them understand how it will shape their career opportunities and to give them ideas on how education will help them reach their potential.

Most parents are also confident about their ability to help their children make decisions about school and their future and interestingly, a large proportion (62%) report basing their advice mainly on personal experiences. Although it is reassuring that parents have the confidence to do so, this may also come with limitations.

Supporting children's future

By gender

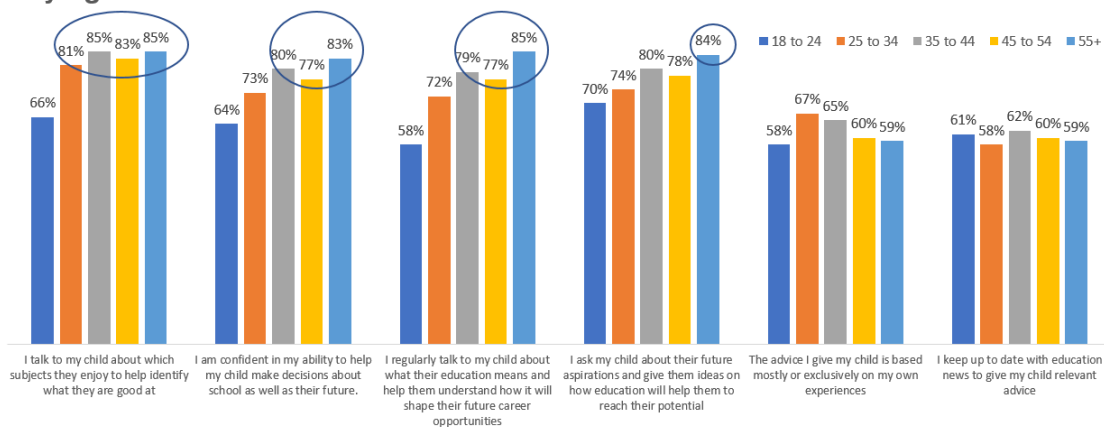


Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
 Base: Mothers (760) and Fathers (747)
 Question "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" **Strongly Agree + Tend to Agree**

Overall, mothers tend to be more active in the dialogue compared to fathers, and more confident in guiding children through their choices. This could be because they tend to spend more time looking after children than fathers do and therefore may have more of a chance to engage with them in this type of conversations.

Supporting children's future

By age



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
 Base: 18-24 (33), 25-34 (222), 35-44 (535), 45-54 (514), 55+ (203)
 Question "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" **Strongly Agree + Tend to Agree**

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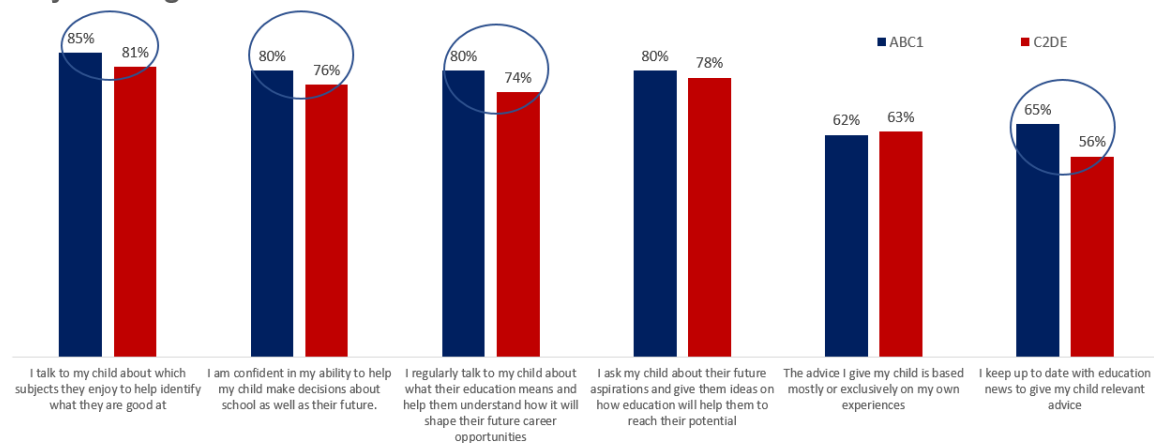
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Older parents (35+) and parents of children in secondary school are more likely to be talking to their children about this than younger parents, possibly because of the education stage at which their children are at. They appear to be much more confident in supporting children through their choices, particularly compared to the youngest parents (83% of 55+ compared to 64% of 18-24 and 73% of 25-34 year olds). This could be down to the fact that younger parents will naturally have less experience of navigating the job market themselves.

Interestingly, younger parents do not seem to be more likely to compensate for their lack of experience by drawing on external help, with 67% of 25-34 year olds giving advice mainly based on their own experience compared to 59% of 55+. This raises the issue of how younger parents should be best supported when guiding their children through their future career choices, especially with this issue become more salient as they progress through the school system.

Supporting children's future

By social grade



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school

Base: ABC1 (799), C2DE (708)

Question "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" Strongly Agree + Tend to Agree

It is not only younger parents who report being less confident about guiding children through their decisions about school and their future, but also parents from lower socio-economic groups (76% of C2DE parents compared to 80% of ABC1 parents). This group also seems to be slightly less active in talking to their children about the importance of education for their future and in helping them identify what they are good at.

Finally, they are substantially less likely to keep up to date with education news to give children relevant advice. As with younger parents, there is an important question here for schools on how to best support this group of parents in their dialogue with children on their future.

4. Conclusions

Social mobility remains a pressing issue for the UK. Although data on attainment suggests that levelling inequality in education is a slower process than expected, schools and early years settings should continue to play an important role in driving progress.

When it comes to parents' views on the extent to which schools are doing enough to level out inequalities in life chances, there is a lot of uncertainty and opinions are polarized. This could be because the issue is complex and difficult to assess, but also potentially because what schools are doing is not as visible and clear to parents as it could be.

Parents of children in primary schools are an exception as they tend to be more confident that schools are doing enough to ensure that all pupils have good chances in life and to support disadvantaged pupils specifically; this could be because initiatives to close the attainment gap are more common and more visible at the beginning of a child's school journey where differences in cognitive and life skills are not as pronounced and therefore easier to correct.

Parents in London are also more confident than parents in many other regions about the role of schools in promoting social mobility. This raises the question of what schools around the country may be able to learn from the London experience, which has seen a dramatic improvement in standards and in the ability to level inequalities in opportunities over the past 15 years.

When it comes to preparing children and young people for the world of work, there is some concern amongst parents that schools are not able to do this adequately for the modern day job market. These worries are likely to be rooted in the rapidly changing nature and dynamics of the job market and the recent changes in provision of career advice by schools which has been shown to have resulted in a patchy and inconsistent system.

Parents also report having a regular and open dialogue with their child about the future. Most of them regularly talk to their child about their future and are also confident about their ability to help their child make decisions about school and their future. Interestingly, nearly 2 in 3 report basing their advice mainly on personal experiences.

This suggests that now more than ever parents' influence is key in supporting children's learning and guiding children through their choices. Therefore more thought needs to be given by policy makers to the value of parental engagement in education and how best to support them in this¹⁸.

Our data shows that this question is crucial for certain groups of parents in particular such as young parents who not only report lower levels of confidence in advising children on their future but are also less likely to look beyond their personal experiences when doing this. Similarly, how can parents from lower socio-economic groups be supported in their role to guide children, given that they are less likely to be in conversation with them about their inclinations (e.g. asking them which subjects they enjoy) and also report being less confident about guiding them.

¹⁸ Although going into the depth of what parents can do to support their child's learning and help narrow the attainment gap goes beyond the scope of this report, as an organisation PTA UK is currently working to produce a series of guidelines that help schools engage parents in their children's learning.

5. Appendix

5.1 Methodology and sample

The survey was conducted online by fieldwork agency Research Now. Respondents were recruited through Research Now's UK panel (which includes more than 500,000 active panellists) and were given a small monetary incentive to take part in the survey.

Fieldwork was conducted between 20th August and 11th September 2017. During this period, 1,507 parents were surveyed, of which 1,205 live in England, 99 in Northern Ireland and 203 in Wales. Parents had to have at least one child aged 5-18 attending state school in order to qualify for the survey. Overall, the sample is representative of the parent population in England, Northern Ireland and Wales by gender, age and social grade.

As the survey is not polling the entire population of parents in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but rather a sample, results are subject to a margin of error which is estimated to be between 0.5 and 2.5 percentage points for the whole sample. The exact margin of error varies with the proportion considered.

This means that, if for instance, according to the survey, 59% of respondents strongly agree that they would like to have a say on their children's education, in reality the proportion is likely to be between 61.5% and 56.5% (i.e. the margin of error would be +/-2.5%).

Parentkind

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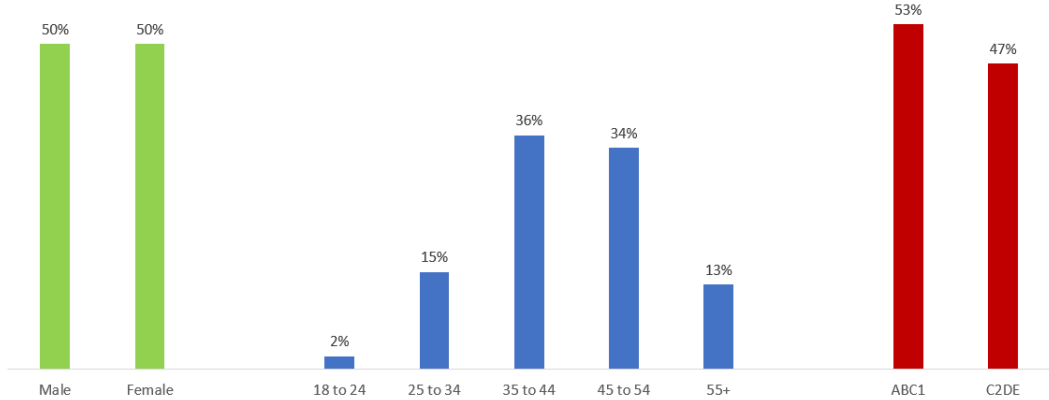
5.2. Demographics

To ensure the survey truly reflects views of parents, its gender, age and social grade make-up mirrors the one of the parent population in England, Northern Ireland and Wales with children in school age.

This means that respondents are equally split between mothers and fathers and that most (70%) are between the ages of 35 and 54. The sample is also made up of slightly more parents belonging to high social grades ABC1 (that is, in managerial, administrative or professional occupations) than there are parents belonging to lower social grades C2DE (manual, casual workers, pensioners, retired and full time students).¹⁹

Demographics

Age, gender, social grade



Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents

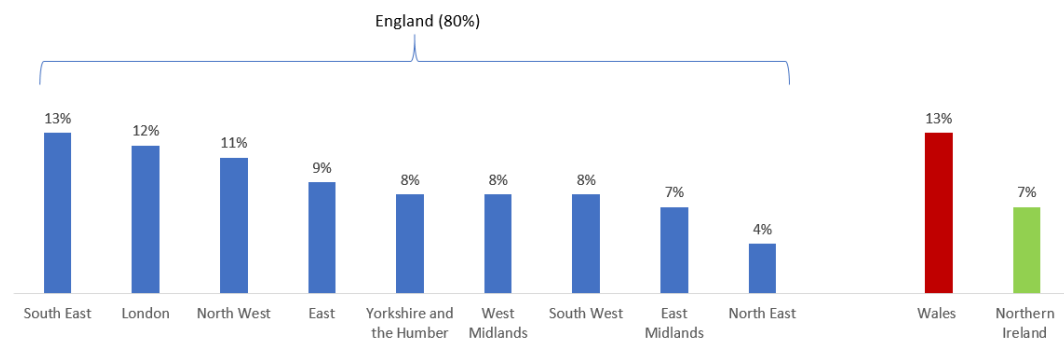
The majority of the sample (80%) is comprised of parents from England and is representative of the parent population by English regions. Subsamples for Wales and Northern Ireland have been boosted over and above natural fall-out of respondents to ensure each sample base was large enough to allow cross-regional comparisons.

¹⁹ The NRS social grades are a system of demographic classification originally developed by the National Readership Survey to classify readers but are now used by many organisations and have become a standard market research classification tool. It is based on the occupation of the head of the household and the categories are as follows:

- A – Higher managerial, administrative or professional
- B – Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional
- C1 – Supervisory or clerical and junior managerial administrative or professional
- C2 – Skilled manual workers
- D – Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers
- E – Casual or lowest grade workers, pensioners and others who depend on the welfare state for income

Demographics

Region

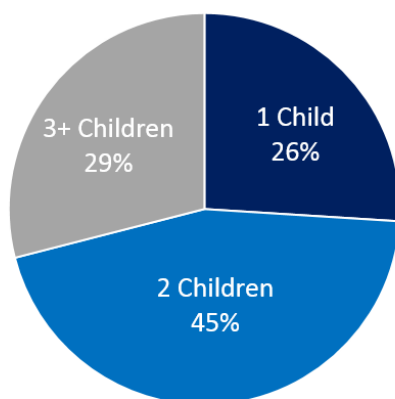


Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents

Nearly half of parents in the sample have two children, while just over one in four have one and nearly one in three have more than three. The largest school phase represented is secondary (45%) followed by primary (32%) and further education (21%).

Demographics

Children in the household



School phase of the oldest child

Primary	32%
Secondary	45%
Further Education	21%
Not applicable - my oldest child doesn't attend school	1%

Sample: 1507 parents in England (1,205), Northern Ireland (99) and Wales (203) who have children aged 5-18 in state school
Base: All respondents