



Opportunity Areas Selection Methodology

Introduction

The Opportunity Areas programme was [announced](#) in October 2016, at that stage the initial six areas were identified and a further six areas were identified in January 2017. The primary purpose of Opportunity Areas is to focus local and national resources on a common goal - to increase social mobility. This programme will involve focusing the Department for Education's energy, ideas and resources to provide children and young people with the opportunities to fulfil their potential. This programme will adopt a place-based approach involving the whole education community, from early years to employment, in the areas of the country where social mobility is lowest.

Top tier Local Authority (LA) level figures may hide pockets of poor performance within the LA so we have focussed on Local Authority Districts (LAD). The LADs are a well known geographical grouping which provide a balance between not missing areas which would benefit from support without disaggregating to a level where we would be focusing on individual schools.

There are a range of indicators and differing data sources that could have been used to identify the areas most in need of additional support. In order to be transparent about the selection criteria, the two previously published sources, listed below, were used to identify the potential Opportunity Areas. This paper outlines the approach used to identify these Opportunity Areas and the data.

Social Mobility Index

In January 2016 the Social Mobility Commission published the [Social Mobility Index](#). This index seeks to identify which are the best and weakest LADs in England in terms of the opportunities young people from poorer backgrounds have to succeed. There are a range of indices across each life stage which are grouped under four headings: early years, school, youth and adulthood. Further detail on this index can be found in the [Social Mobility Index](#) publication.

Achieving Excellence Areas Index

In March 2016 the Department for Education published the [defining Achieving Excellence Areas methodology note](#) which focused on school performance and capacity to improve and gave an overall indicator at local authority district level. This Achieving Excellence Areas (AEA) experimental analysis sought to combine indicators which showed current educational performance with indicators which showed capacity to improve to define areas most in need of support. It included a total of 11 indicators – 5 educational standards indicators, and 6 capacity to improve indicators. Further details on these indicators can be found in the [AEA methodology paper](#).

How we arrived at the 12 Opportunity Areas

The purpose of Opportunity Areas is improving social mobility; using education as a key driver to achieve this. Therefore the Social Mobility Commission's Social Mobility Index was used as the starting point to identify these areas. The 324 LADs (excluding City of London and Isles of Scilly due to size) were arranged into six equal groups (sextiles) based on this index to identify the group of LADs with the greatest challenges and fewest opportunities. From this the LADs in the lowest sextile were cross referenced with the AEA index, identifying those LADs that were also in the weakest sextile based on this index. That gave a 'long-list' of 32 areas. This list of 32 LADs can be found in the associated data file, published alongside this document. As can be seen from the above descriptions, these two indices focus on different problems so low performance on one does not automatically imply low performance on the other. Therefore the selection criterion used, being in the lowest performing on each index, identified the areas that were in most need of additional support across a wide range of issues. In order to have a consistent and fair approach in selecting the opportunity areas announced in January 2017, the same data sources were used for the areas announced in October 2016.

We want to better understand the challenges each of these areas face, identifying any common themes and what is unique to a particular area. This will then aid our learning about what works in different types of areas so we can look to apply this to other areas as appropriate. When narrowing this list down we therefore considered the following factors:

- Regional spread – we wanted to include districts in the North, Midlands and South
- Type of area – we wanted a spread of coastal, urban and rural areas
- Ensuring we have a spread of areas across the long list of 32 to understand differing needs and allow for better comparison between areas

This led us to choose 12 areas to work with. The 12 Opportunity Areas are:

- West Somerset
- Norwich
- Blackpool
- North Yorkshire Coast¹
- Derby
- Oldham
- Fenland and East Cambridgeshire
- Hastings
- Bradford
- Stoke on Trent
- Doncaster
- Ipswich

Please note that we are not suggesting that these are the weakest areas in England for education. They are amongst the areas which face the greatest challenges across a range of issues.

© Crown copyright 2017

¹ Since the initial announcement, we are now referring to the Opportunity Area covered by the Scarborough local authority district as the North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area, to better distinguish between references to Scarborough town and the wider area.