



# The Educational Attainment Gap

Aspire NI exists to work with young people in Northern Ireland in poverty to help close the educational attainment gap that exists between rich and poor

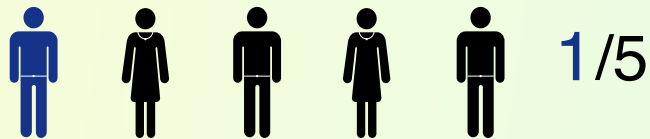
Aspire NI is a registered charity in Northern Ireland (NIC107570)

# The Educational Attainment Gap

The Educational Attainment Gap refers to the disparity between individuals from low-income backgrounds and those from more affluent ones. This translates educationally into lower academic achievements for young people from low-income backgrounds, reducing their likelihood of pursuing higher education at university and subsequently obtaining higher-paying jobs. This cycle makes it challenging to break the cycle of poverty within their families.

## Northern Ireland

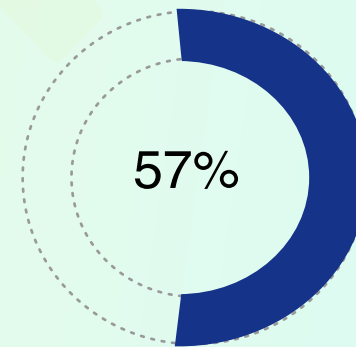
Unfortunately over the last 8 years poverty levels have risen exponentially. 1 in 5 people are living in relative poverty in Northern Ireland resulting in [103,400 children today in Northern Ireland living in poverty](#). When we began Aspire this figure was only at 69,000. So now more than ever young people need our help and support.



**1 in 5 people are  
in relative poverty  
in Northern Ireland**

(State of the Nation 2021: Social mobility and the pandemic; Social Mobility Commission; p116).

A parents income can also massively affect a child's education. More than half (57%) of low-income student said they missed school trips because they were too expensive and JRF research found that children and young people worry about worrying their parents by asking for even small amounts of money for school and there is evidence from a range of studies to show that this affects their ability to enjoy school and to concentrate on learning.



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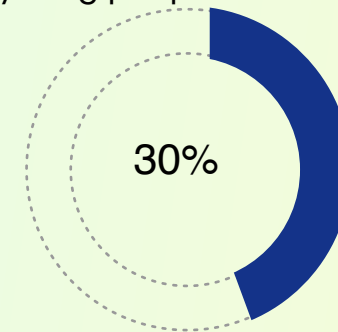
# The Educational Attainment Gap

In the 19th Century there was a movement led by Christians in inner city London. They began to open up what were known as ragged schools. These were charitable organisations dedicated to the free education of destitute children in Britain. The schools were developed in working-class districts of the rapidly expanding industrial towns. In 1844, the Ragged Schools Union was established to combine resources throughout the country, providing free education, food, clothing, lodging and other home missionary services for these children.

Free education now exists in the UK, and it may seem like ragged schools now belong in museums but even now social class remains the strongest predictor of educational achievement in the UK, where the social class gap for educational achievement is one of the most significant in the developed world.

In the UK, being born into the bottom fifth of society means there's a 30 percent chance you'll stay there. So for many working class children the fact that they are born poor often means they will die poor.

It's knowing that these facts exist in such a prosperous nation that we want to help fight this issue and make a difference in young peoples lives.



**There is a 30% chance that if you are born in the bottom fifth of society in the UK, you'll stay there.**

# The Educational Attainment Gap

**There are 4,200,000 children in poverty in the UK.**

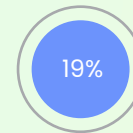
## Child Poverty NI:

Nearly one in eight (12%) children in Northern Ireland are materially deprived, meaning their families can't afford the basic items and activities the Government considers essential to a happy and healthy childhood.

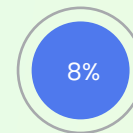
In Northern Ireland approximately 100,000 children live in families unable to save at least £10 a month (31%), with a similar number of children having parents who can't replace broken essential goods such as fridges or washing machines (12%).

Children in poverty are twice as likely to leave school without 5 good GCSEs. They are also more likely to suffer poor mental health and have fewer years of good

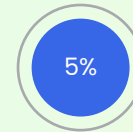
## Child Poverty UK:



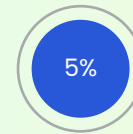
2.7 million have parents who can't replace broken essential electrical goods such as a fridge or washing machine



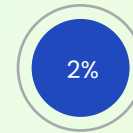
1.2 million have parents who can't keep up with bills



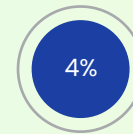
800,000 have parents who can't afford to keep the house warm



700,000 who can't afford to have friends around for tea or a snack once a fortnight



300,000 children in families that can't afford to eat fresh fruit or vegetables each day



200,000\* children are in families that can't afford to go to a playgroup once a week

% of the 4.2mil  
Children in poverty

# The Educational Attainment Gap

## UK Wide:

Early years foundation stage:

Disadvantaged pupils have, on average, lower attainment, than other pupils and this disadvantage gap widens as pupils progress in their education. In 2022, the disadvantage gap among pupils aged 5 was 4.8 months, up from 4.2 months in 2019. This increase comes after a sustained period (2016–2019) where the gap had remained broadly stable at just above 4 months. The post-pandemic gap of 4.8 months – the largest since 2014 – is a setback, given the earlier progress in narrowing the gap during 2013–2016.

## Primary school:

The disadvantage gap at the end of primary school increased between 2019 and 2022 from 9.3 to 10.3 months – the second largest gap since the start of our series in 2011, when it was 10.6 months. Following sustained progress in narrowing the gap from 2011 to 2018, the gap increased slightly in 2019 even prior to the pandemic, and then substantially increased in 2022, wiping out nearly all the earlier progress. Based on the historic rate of progress

in gap-narrowing prior to the pandemic, the Department for Education expects that it may take another ten years to simply return the gap to the level it was in 2019.

The disadvantage gap at the end of primary school widened in 2022 to above its 2012 level, wiping out a decade of progress in narrowing the gap.





# The Educational Attainment Gap

## Secondary school:

One-quarter of pupils are defined as disadvantaged by the end of secondary school, a smaller proportion than the 29 per cent of pupils at the end of primary school. This is because, as children get older, their parents are more likely to enter work and exceed the earnings threshold for free school meal eligibility. The disadvantage gap in GCSE English and maths widened to 18.8 months in 2022 – its largest since 2012. Following good initial progress in narrowing the gap between 2011 and 2014 (from 19.7 months to 18.2 months), the gap then remained at around 18 months in the years leading up to the pandemic.

## Northern Ireland

In the 2018–19 academic year, only 49.5 per cent of

school leavers with FSME achieved at least five GCSEs including English and Maths, compared with a Departmental target of 60.0 per cent and a 78.5 per cent attainment rate for non-FSME school leavers. The attainment gap between non-FSME and FSME school leavers has not changed significantly in the last 15 years. The gap between the percentage of non-FSME and FSME school leavers achieving at least five GCSEs including English and Maths fell slightly, from 32.1 percentage points in 2005–06 to 29.0 percentage points in 2018–19.

In 2019/20 there were 96,686 FSME pupils in Northern Ireland.

One-quarter of pupils are defined as disadvantaged by the end of secondary school



Only 49.5% of School leavers with free school meals achieved at least 5 GCSEs



In 2019/20 there were 96,686 free school meal pupils in Northern Ireland.



More information available at  
[www.aspireni.org](http://www.aspireni.org)

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