

Moving to Inclusion

Focus on...Age

A statistical examination of economic
exclusion in the South West of England

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OVERVIEW

- 60% of the South West's resident population is of working age. The region has more residents of state pensionable age than under 16s and has the highest percentage of residents of state pension age of all Government Office regions.
- Not all age groups are projected to increase in number over the ESF programme period (2007 to 2013) – there will be fewer young people (aged 10 to 19), fewer adults aged 35 to 44 and fewer older adults (aged 55 to 64).
- The youngest and oldest residents are least likely to have a qualification at NVQ Level 2 or above (Figure 3); residents aged 25 to 49 are most likely to have a degree level qualification (Figure 4) and one-third of those with no qualifications or a qualification below NVQ Level 2 are aged 50 and over (Figure 5).
- Employment probabilities increased for all age groups except 16 to 24 year olds in the UK between 2001 and 2008 partly reflecting the rising participation in Further and Higher Education of this group. Employment rates for those aged 50 and over increased faster than for those aged 25 to 49.
- Employment rates in the South West are highest for 25 to 49 year olds. Just over half of 16 to 19 year olds, three-quarters of older people of working age and over one-in-ten people of state pension age are in work. Employment rates in the region are higher than the UK average for all age groups under state pension age. It is not possible to conclude with any statistical confidence whether the employment gap for older workers in the region or the UK has narrowed over the last three years.
- The under 25s are considerably less likely to be working in managerial and professional occupations than other workers and are more likely to be working part-time mainly because they are combining work with education or training.
- There is little difference in the percentages of older workers of working age employed either part time or in higher-level occupations than those aged 25 to 49. Employed people of state pension age are, however, more likely than any other age group to work part time and are less likely to be employed in managerial or professional occupations than younger workers aged 25 and over.
- Unemployment rates are considerably higher among young people than those aged over 25 but are lower in the South West than the UK average and have fallen over the 12 months September 2007 to October 2008. The employment rate for working age people aged 50 and over has increased by one percentage point over the same period. This was a greater increase than for any other age group.

- Almost one-in-ten South West residents of working age claim out of work benefits. Most are aged between 25 to 55 and older people aged 55 and over account for a larger share of claimants than the under 25s. Most claimants aged over 25 do so because of ill-health or disability.
- Economic inactivity rates are highest amongst residents of state pension age and among the working age population, and young people aged 16 to 19. Young people are inactive mainly because they are students whereas older working age residents are most likely to be inactive due to illness or disability.
- Less than 6% of 16 to 18 year olds in the South West are not in education, employment or training. This is a full percentage point lower than the England average.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this report

This report is part of a suite of thematic statistical briefings that individually and collectively present a portrait of economic disadvantage in the South West through the lenses of gender, age, disability and ethnicity. The work updates and extends the quantitative element of the 2003 *Moving Towards Inclusion* report and shares the aims and intended audience of its predecessor, that is to “offer as comprehensive a picture as possible of current levels of disadvantage amongst the population of the South West” with the principal aim of ensuring that ESF activity is informed by robust and accessible evidence.

Whilst those involved in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the ESF programmes remain key audiences for this report, it is also hoped that the focus on equality strands and indicators that provide a regional and sub-regional perspective on the work and education equality domains identified in the 2007 Equalities Review will provide a foundation for further work in this emerging area, by quantifying the scale and nature of inequality in the South West as manifested in differences in labour market performance.

1.2 Scope and Focus

The 2003 *Moving Towards Inclusion* report provided rich descriptions of the barriers many individuals face to social inclusion. It provided a short history of the social inclusion policy agenda and described some of the problems in defining and researching what it means, or feels like to be excluded. The conceptualizations, barriers and policy issues identified in the 2003 report remain as valid today as they were six years ago and therefore the previous report is commended to those who wish to explore these issues in more detail.

This report, rather, has a quantitative emphasis and its scope and focus is informed to a large extent by the equality strands and domains that make up the Equality Measurement Framework (EMF). The report focuses on the gender, age, disability and ethnicity domains of the EMF. Faith & religion is not included because of the dearth of reliable published labour market data at the regional level – although the Labour Force Survey does collect some information. There is very little information available even at the national level about individuals’ sexual orientation and how this impacts on the extent and nature of labour market participation. Where data allows, attention within these strands has also been paid to more narrowly defined ESF priority groups, with sections on lone parents, older workers and young people at risk of exclusion as well as black and minority ethnic groups, and people with a disability.

The gender section and age section also include an examination of those who do not have Level 2 qualifications.

Given the intended ESF applicability of this report, the focus is solely on the employment and, to a lesser extent, education experiences and outcomes of the working age population, as opposed to the broader dimensions of exclusion and inequity that may impact at younger and older ages. Very broadly therefore the analysis is confined to the productive and valued activities, and education domains of the EMF. Furthermore, data limitations mean it is possible to provide only partial coverage of these two domains due to a lack of regional data. A project setting out the national indicators that will underpin the EMF has yet to set out its prescription, but provisional 'spotlight' national indicators for the productive and value activities domain are: the employment rate, risk of low earnings and the pay gap, horizontal occupational segregation, discrimination in employment and unpaid care and free time. Of these, only the employment rate, the pay gap and the share of managers and professionals in the employed workforce (a measure of horizontal occupational segregation) are readily available from NOMIS. Our analysis supplements these three indicators with indicators of part-time working, job-relating training, unemployment and receipt of out-of-work benefits, economic inactivity and highest qualification.

1.3 Analytical approach

The two issues – exclusion and equity – are explored together within the framework. This is done by describing for each indicator, firstly the rate or level (for example, of the employment rate) *across* equality strands, and secondly, the difference – or gap – in 'performance' on each measures *within* an equality stand. This approach is particularly helpful when making comparisons over time and determining whether an improvement, for example in the employment rate in absolute terms from say 70% to 75%, is accompanied by a narrowing of the 'gap' in employment rates of the 'best' and 'worst' performing groups.

The reliability of labour market data for equality strands at the sub-national and especially the sub-regional level is a serious impediment to drawing firm conclusions about the scale of disadvantage or inequity at the local level. This is because the information used to measure progress against many indicators comes from surveys as opposed to the Census or administrative sources. This means that the estimates – and they are only that – are subject to a margin of error. In conventional statistical terminology this is called a 'confidence interval' and refers to the range of values which includes the unknown 'true' value at any given level of confidence. Usually this is 95%, and means that if the survey was repeated 100 times, the survey estimate would lie within the confidence interval 95 times. Confidence intervals, therefore, summarize the variability in survey estimates and are important when comparing estimates over time, or between localities or within and across equality strands. Technically speaking, if two confidence intervals overlap, then the difference between

the two is not statistically significant. This report contains published confidence intervals to illustrate – for the first time – how the variability of survey estimates restricts what conclusions can be drawn from the data.

2. POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

2.1 Introduction

This section describes the characteristics of the South West's population in terms of age. More specially, it examines:

- Children;
- Working age including highest qualification;
- State pension age.

2.2 Children

There are almost one million children aged under 16 living in the South West (Table 1). Together they account for 18% of the region's total population (slightly less than the UK average of 19%) with variations within the region ranging from 14% in West Somerset and the Isles of Scilly to 21% in North Wiltshire¹ (Map 1). Children aged under 16 are split across three five year age bands: 0 to 4 years (29% of children aged under 16), 5 to 9 years (30%) and 10 to 15 years (41%).

Table 1: Broad age structure, South West and United Kingdom, 2007

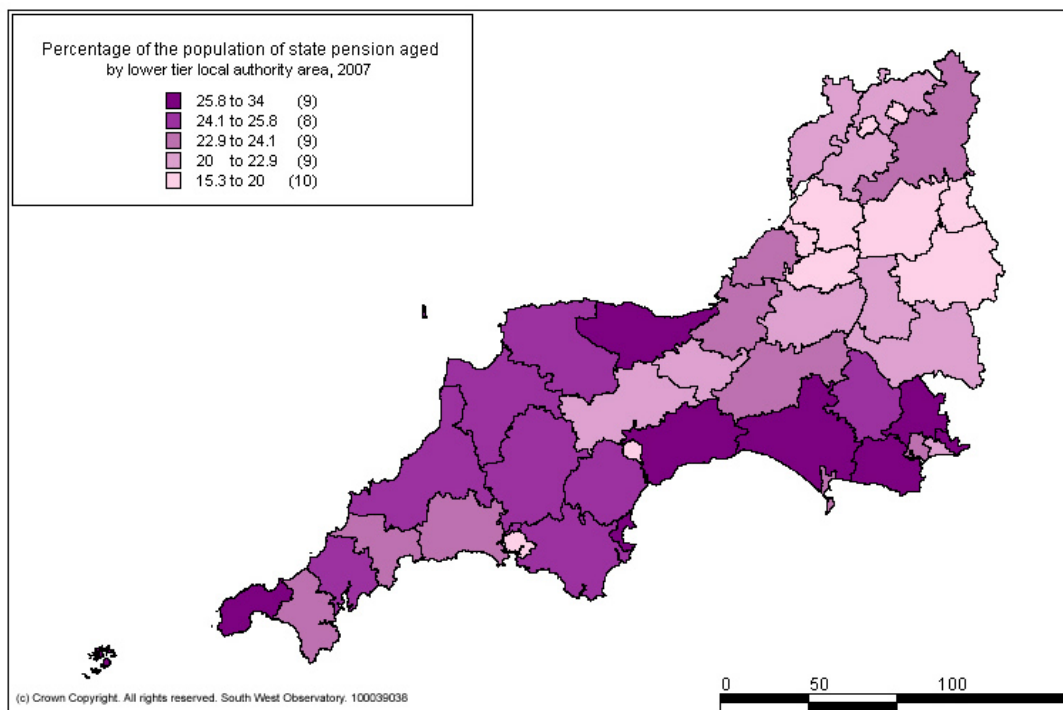
	South West		UK
	000s	%	%
Under 16	921.4	17.8	18.9
16-18	203.7	3.9	3.9
19-24	393.0	7.6	8.1
25-49	1,682.5	32.5	35.0
50-59F/64M	832.5	16.1	15.1
60F/65+	1144.9	22.1	19.0
All ages	5178.0	100	100

Source: ONS mid-year population estimates

The number of children in the South West and the UK fell by 2% between 2002 and 2007 although increases were recorded in some parts of the region, most notably: North Somerset, East Devon, Mid-Devon, Torridge, West Devon, North Dorset, Taunton Deane, Kennet and North Wiltshire. Projections suggest that the number of children will increase by 2.5% in the South West over the ESF programme period.

¹ With 20% of their population aged under 16, Swindon, Gloucester, Mendip and Kennet also have relatively 'young' populations.

Map 1: Percentage of the working age population aged under 16 by lower-tier local authority district, 2007, South West



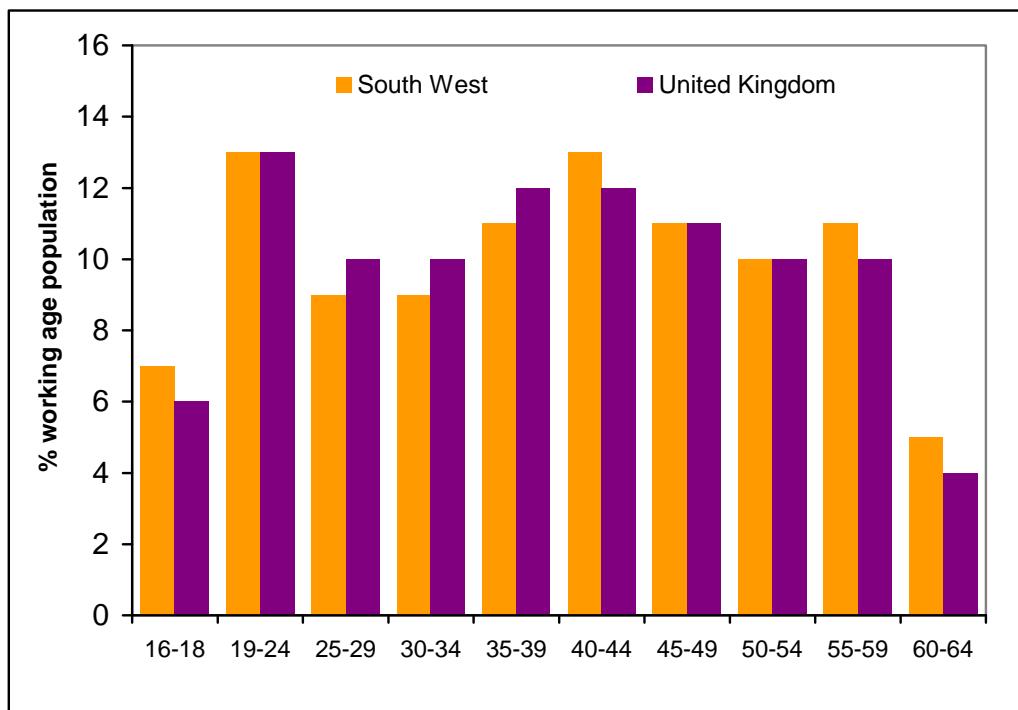
2.3 Working age

2.3.1 Age distribution

The majority (60%) of the South West's population is of working age. Definitions of the working age population vary but generally include all those aged 16 to state pension age (currently 59 for women and 64 for men). Some targets, however, including those for adult skills, relate only to the working age population aged between 19 and state pension age. Over half the working age population in the South West (51%) is aged 40 and over and 27% is aged 50 and over.

The age distribution of the South West's working age population is compared to that of the UK in Figure 1. It shows that while the South West has a slightly higher proportion in the youngest age groups (16-24 years) than the UK, it has a slightly lower proportion aged between 25 and 39 (30% compared to 33%) and a slightly higher proportion aged 40 years and over (51% compared to 48%).

Figure 1: Age distribution of the working age population by quinary age groups, South West and United Kingdom, 2007

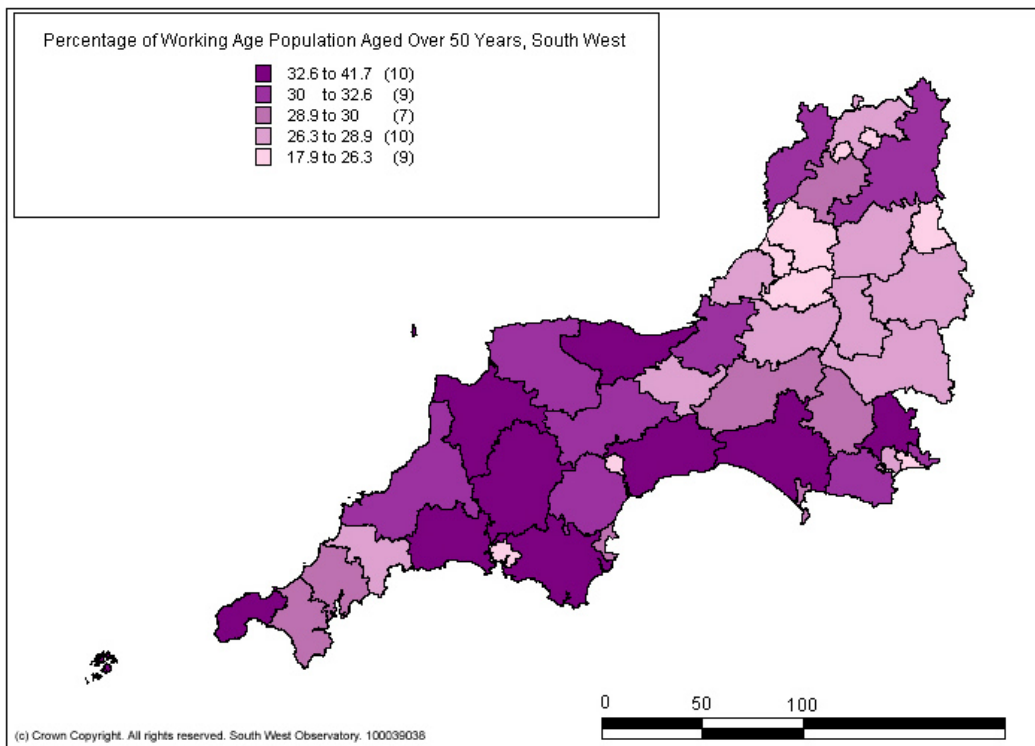


Source: ONS Mid-year population estimates
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15106>

2.3.2 Local authority area

The region contains some of the oldest local labour markets in the country: 60% of all lower-tier local authority areas in the South West feature among the oldest quartile nationally, with the Isles of Scilly and West Somerset (with 42% and 36% of their working age population already aged over 50 respectively) topping this list of 354 areas. Rural local authority areas tend to have older workforces than urban ones (Map 2).

Map 2: Percentage of the working age population aged 50 and over by lower-tier local authority district, 2007, South West



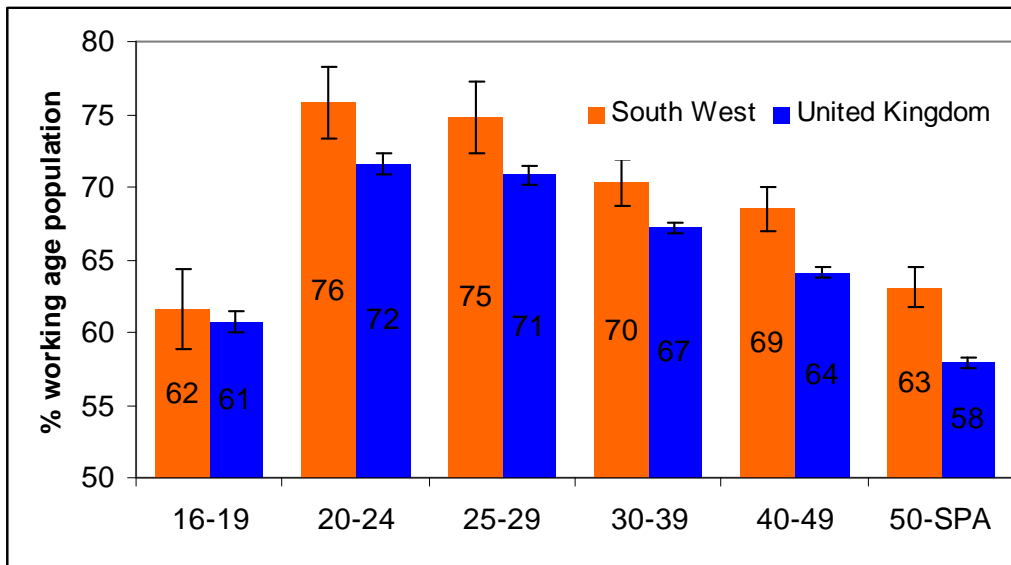
Source: ONS Mid-year population estimates

2.3.3 Highest qualification by age

2.3.3.1 NVQ Level 2 or above

The proportion of the working age population qualified to at least NVQ Level 2 is lowest amongst the youngest population group, peaks at ages 20 to 24 and declines steadily thereafter (Figure 2). At the regional level, only differences between the young people (aged 16 to 19), those aged 20 to 29 and those aged 30 to 49 are statistically significant although those for older workers are statistically different from those aged 20 to 29 and 30 to 49. The regional figures are statistically different from the UK average for all age groups over 20 years.

Figure 2: Proportion of working age population qualified to at least NVQ Level 2 (or equivalent) by age, January to December 2007, South West and United Kingdom

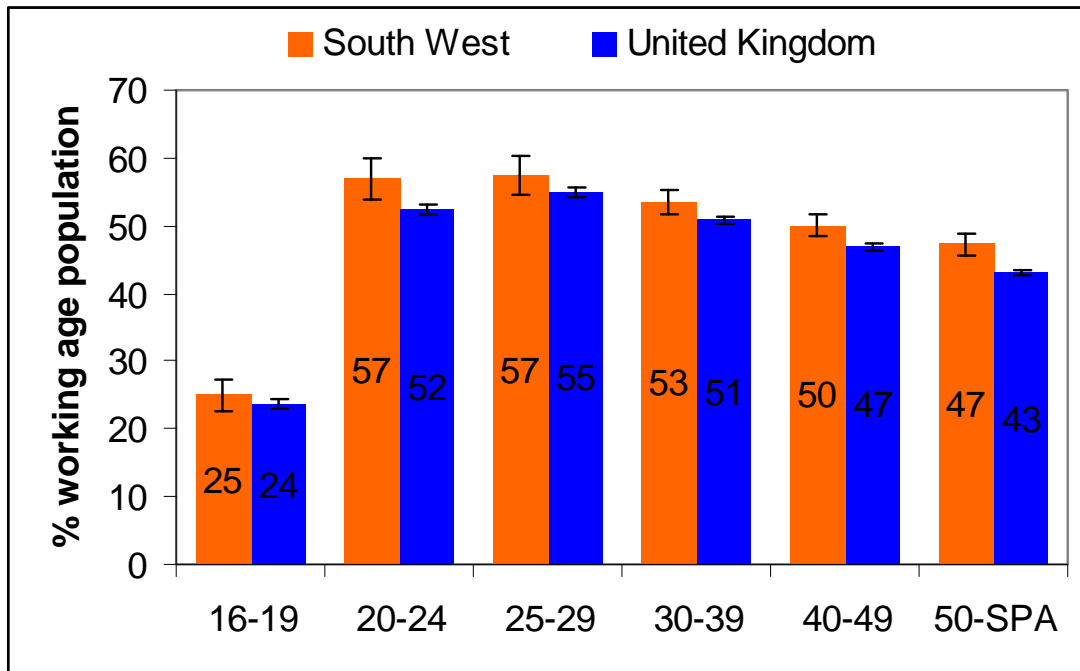


Source: Annual Population Survey (NOMIS)

2.3.3.2 NVQ Level 3 or above

In the UK the proportion of working age residents with at least NVQ level 3 qualifications rises progressively through the youngest ages to reach a peak of 57% at age 25 to 29 and then falls slightly for each older age group (Figure 3). Whilst the South West appears to follow a similar pattern, only differences between the youngest group (aged 16 to 19), those aged 20 to 49 and 50 and over are statistically significant.

Figure 3: Proportion of working age population qualified to at least NVQ Level 3 (or equivalent) by age, January to December 2007, South West and United Kingdom

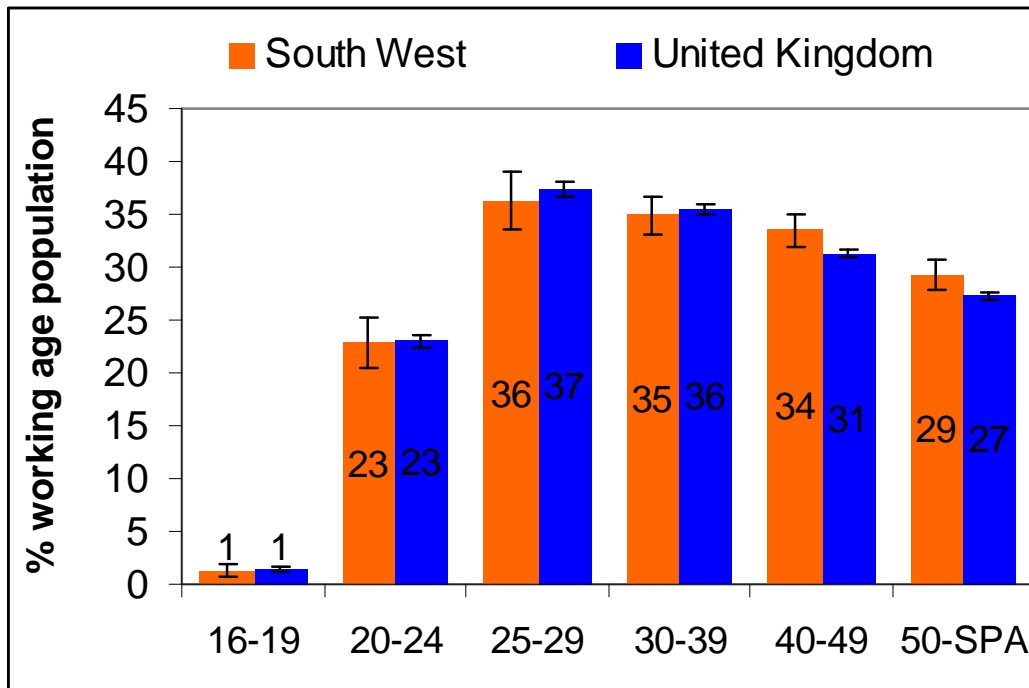


Source: Annual Population Survey (NOMIS)

2.3.3.3 NVQ Level 4 or above

More than one-third of the working age population aged between 25 and 49 have at least a first degree (or equivalent) qualification. The younger and older age groups are less likely to have qualifications at this level – the former because it includes only those who move into Higher Education within a few years of completing their compulsory education and the latter because participation in higher education was much lower among these earlier generations. Only the South West estimates for residents aged 40 and over are statistically different from the UK results for the same age.

Figure 4: Proportion of working age population qualified to at least NVQ Level 4 (or equivalent) by age, January to December 2007, South West and United Kingdom

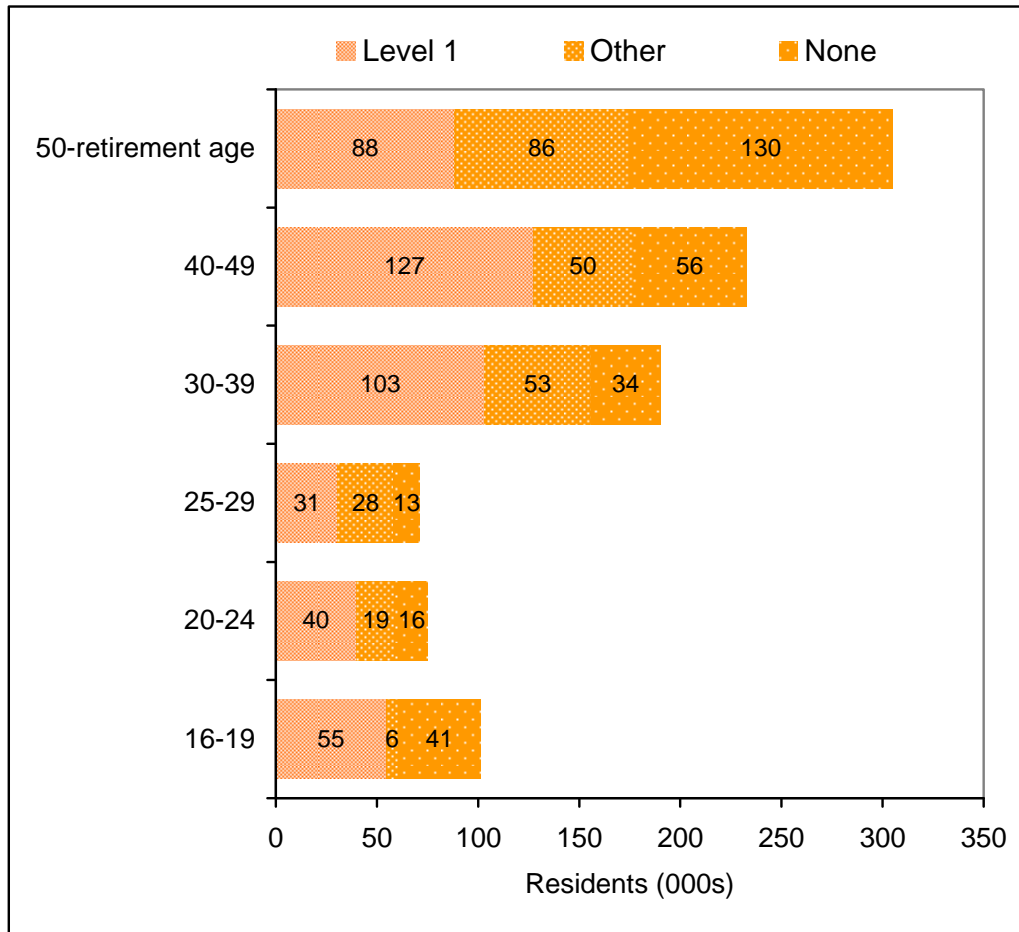


Source: Annual Population Survey (NOMIS)

2.3.3.4 No or low level qualifications

Almost one million South West residents of working age do not hold a qualification at Level 2 or above. Within this group almost half (46%) have a Level 1 or equivalent, one-quarter (25%) have a qualification below Level 1 and 30% do not have any formal qualifications. Three-quarters of working age South West residents with no or low level qualifications are aged 30 and over, and one-third are aged 50 and over.

Figure 5: Number of working age residents with no or low level qualifications by age group, South West, 2007



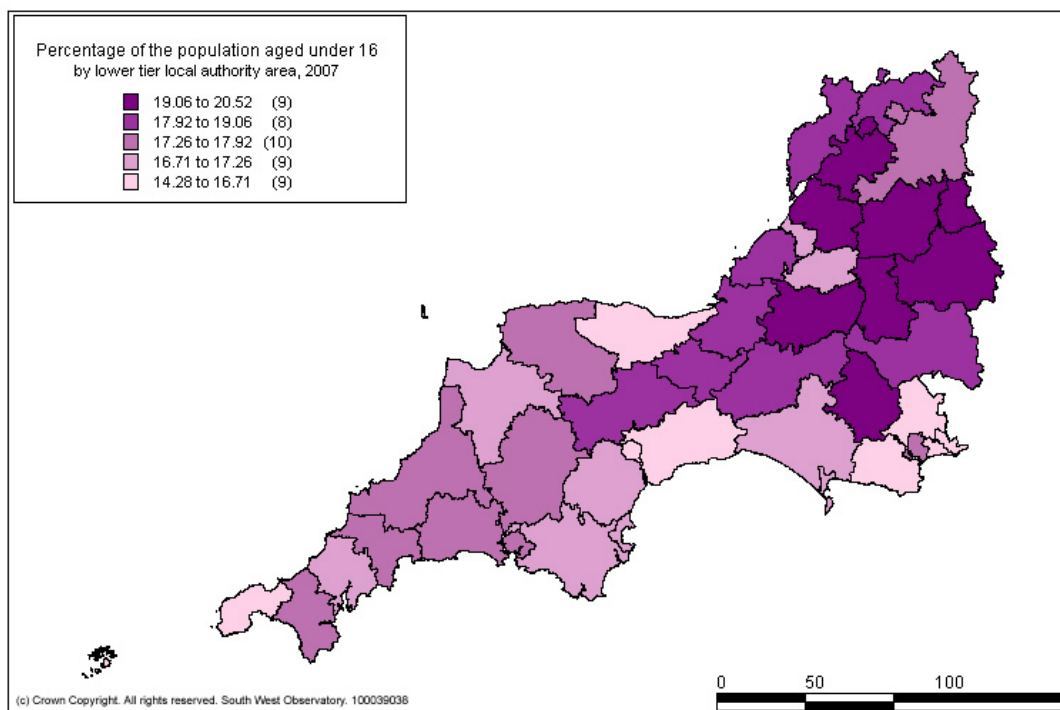
Source: Annual Population Survey (NOMIS)

2.4 Pension age

More than 1.1 million South West residents are of state pension age, making up more than one-fifth (22%) of the total population. The South West has the highest proportion of residents of pensionable age in its population of all Government Office Regions in the UK. Christchurch and West Somerset, with 34% and 33% of their population respectively of state pension age, are the 'oldest' local authority areas in the UK. The City of Bristol (15%) has the lowest proportion of state pension age residents in the South West (Map 3).

The number of pension age residents is projected to increase by over 100,000 or 9% between 2007 and 2013 with most of this growth occurring amongst men.

Map 3: Percentage of the population of state pension age by lower-tier local authority district, 2007, South West

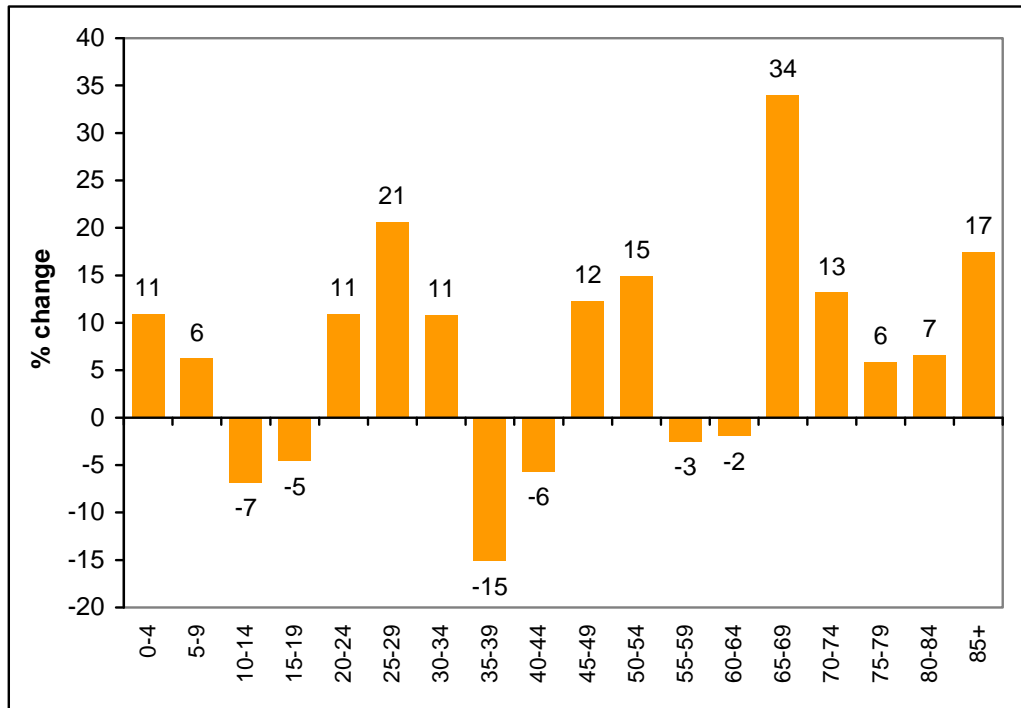


2.5 Population projections

The South West's working age population increased by almost 5% between 2002 and 2007, a slightly higher rate than that recorded across the UK as a whole (3.5%)². Projections suggest that the working age population will increase by 170,600 during the ESF programme period (equivalent to an increase of 5.5%), with changes to the state pension age of women that will take effect from 2010, contributing 55,200 to this total. Not all age groups will increase in number, however. The number of young labour market entrants will fall slightly, and the number of residents aged between 35 and 44 will decrease by 10% (Figure 6).

² Only Yorkshire and the Humber and the East Midlands increased by a greater percentage.

Figure 6: Change in the working age population by age group, South West, 2007 to 2013, percentages



Source: ONS Mid-year population estimates

3. EMPLOYMENT AND JOB QUALITY

3.1 Introduction

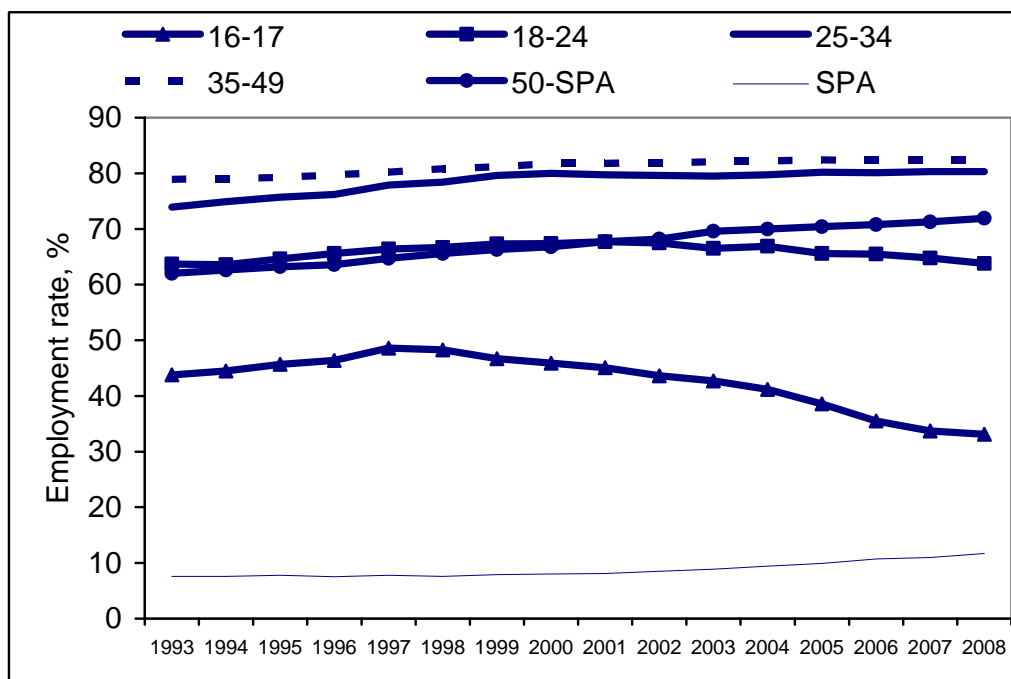
In this section:

- UK employment trends;
- Employment gap in the South West;
- Job quality.

3.2 UK employment trends

Employment rates vary considerably by age (Figure 7): participation in paid work tends to rise with age until a peak at ages 35 to 49 (82%) and then falls rapidly as people approach and become of state pensionable age (60 for women and 65 for men).

Figure 7: Employment rate by age, 1993 to 2008, United Kingdom



Source: Labour Force Survey

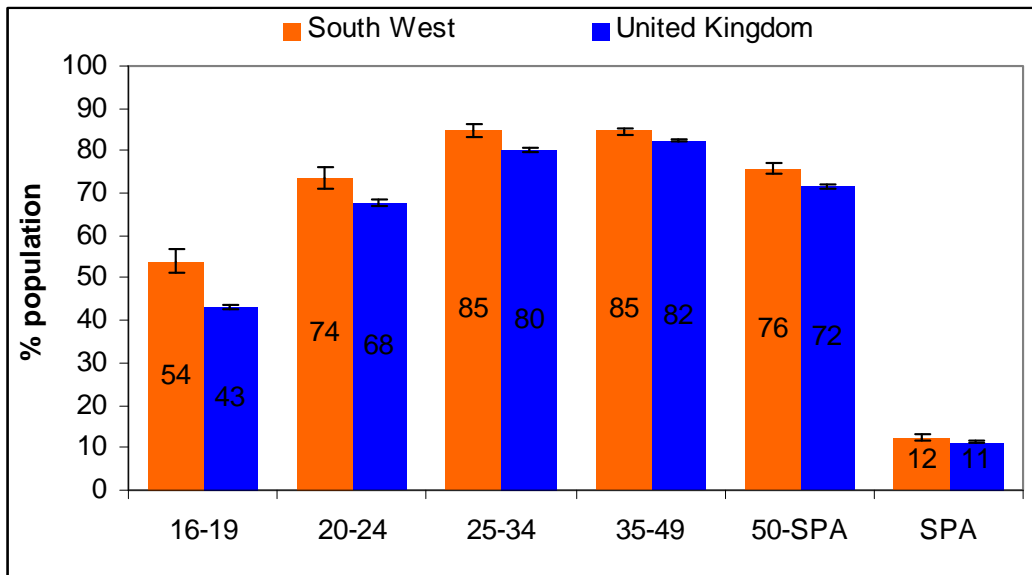
While employment rates of older people have risen steadily in recent years - particularly for older women - the working age employment rate of older men in the UK is still almost 12 percentage points lower in 2009 than it was in 1979.

3.3 Employment gap in the South West

3.3.1 All age groups

Employment rates in the South West peak at 85% for 25 to 49 year olds and then fall, relatively slowly at first but then steeply as people reach state pension age (Figure 8). Employment rates in the region are higher than those for the UK at each age except for those working beyond state pension age.

Figure 8: Employment rate by age, September 2007 to October 2008, South West and United Kingdom



Source: Annual Population Survey

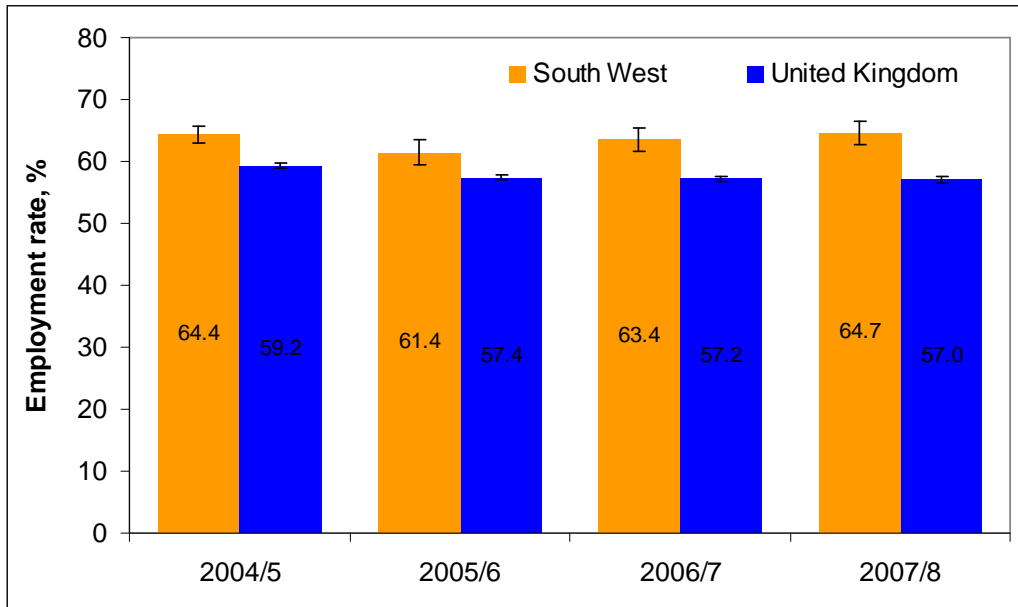
The subsequent analysis focuses on the youngest and oldest age groups (of working age) as these are the groups that have the lowest employment rates.

3.3.2 Young people

The regional estimates suggest a downward trend which is consistent with the rising percentage of young people staying on in education although the differences are not statistically significant (Figure 9).

³ The employment rate for men aged 50 to 64 was 84.3% in 1979 (see http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/foop05/Olderpeople2005.pdf). The January to March 2009 estimate puts figure at 72.8%.

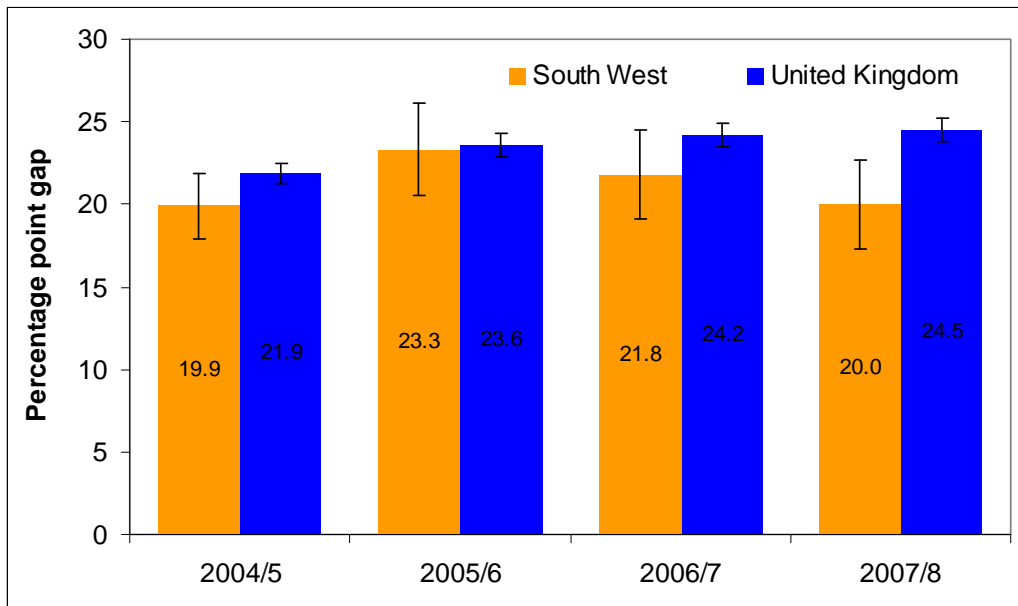
Figure 9: Employment rate people aged 16-24 years, October to September 2004 to 2008, South West and United Kingdom



Source: Annual Population Survey

There is some evidence nationally that the employment gap has widened for young people - the figure for 2007/08 is statistically different from that for the same period three years earlier.

Figure 10: Employment gap for people aged 16 to 24 years, October to September, 2004 to 2008, South West and United Kingdom

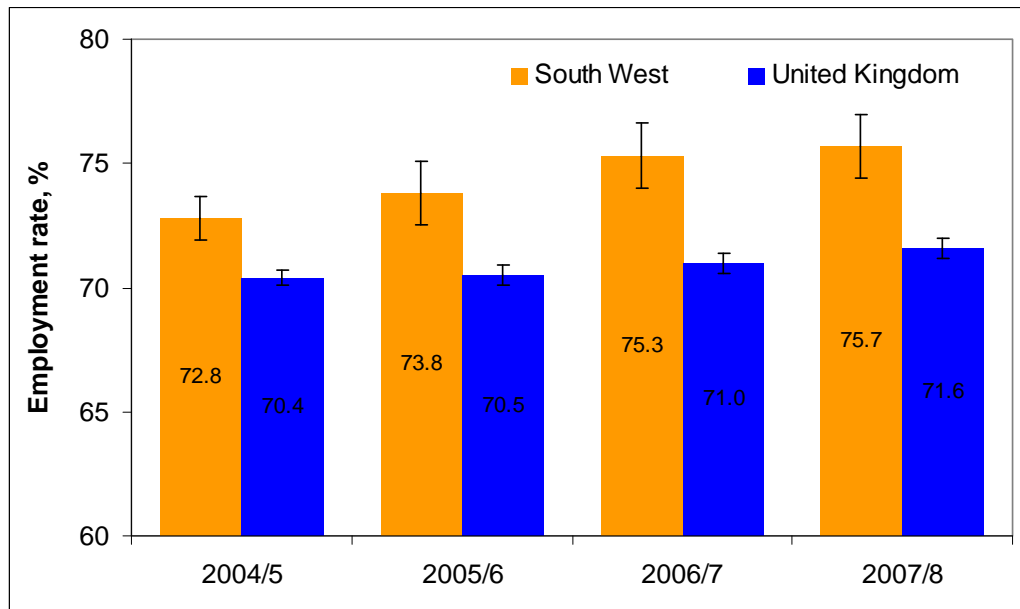


Source: Annual Population Survey

3.3.3 Older people

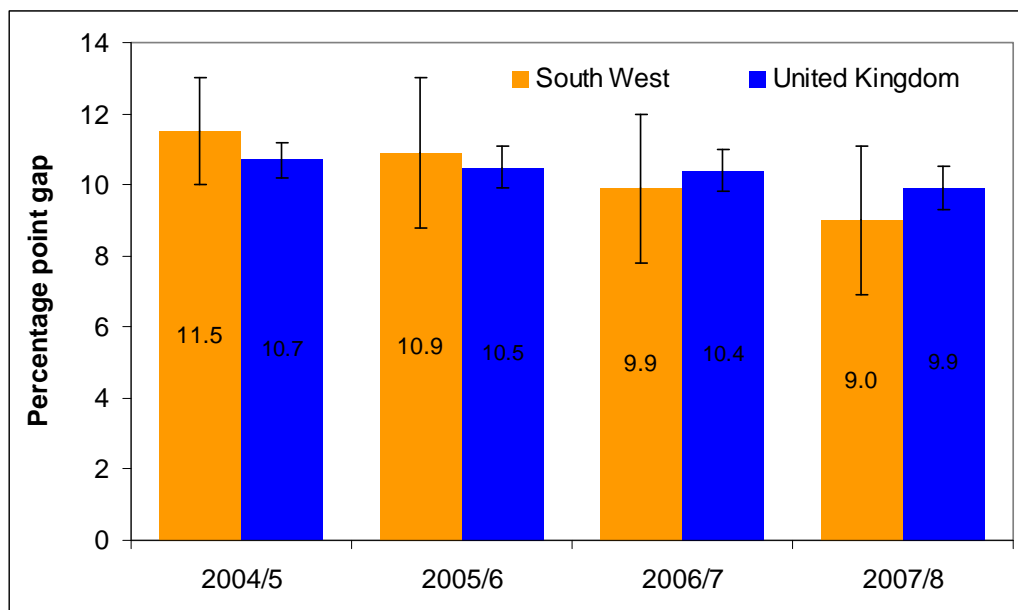
The employment rate for older people (aged 50 to state pension age) has increased in the South West over the last four years with the figure for 2007/8 statistically significantly higher than those for 2004/5. It is not possible, however, to conclude whether the employment gap has narrowed.

Figure 11: Employment rate people aged 50 to State Pension Age, October to September, 2004, 2008, South West and United Kingdom



Source: Annual Population Survey

Figure 12: Employment gap for people aged 50 to State Pension Age, October to September, 2004 to 2008, South West and United Kingdom



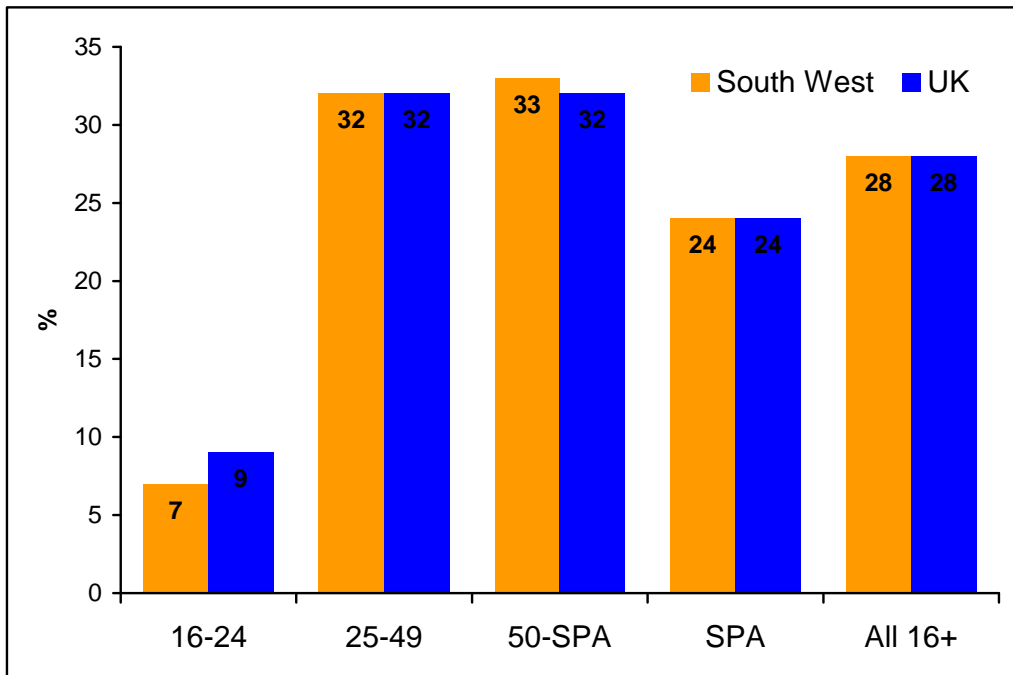
Source: Annual Population Survey

3.4 Job quality

3.4.1 Employment in high level occupations

One-third of South West residents aged between 25 and state pension age are employed in managerial or professional occupations (Figure 13). This is equal to the UK average. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given their relatively recent entry to the labour market, young people aged between 16 and 24 are significantly less likely to be working in these occupations than people in older age groups. The figures also show that people working beyond state pension age are less likely than those aged between 25 and state pension age to be working in these high-status, high-skill occupations. This could reflect a number of trends: firstly, occupational 'down-shifting' either by choice or through restricted opportunities; secondly, early retirement among relatively affluent managers and professionals, leaving a slightly lower occupational profile among remaining older workers; and thirdly, reduced access to professional occupations among a generation who are less likely to hold the higher level qualifications that are entry requirements into these roles.

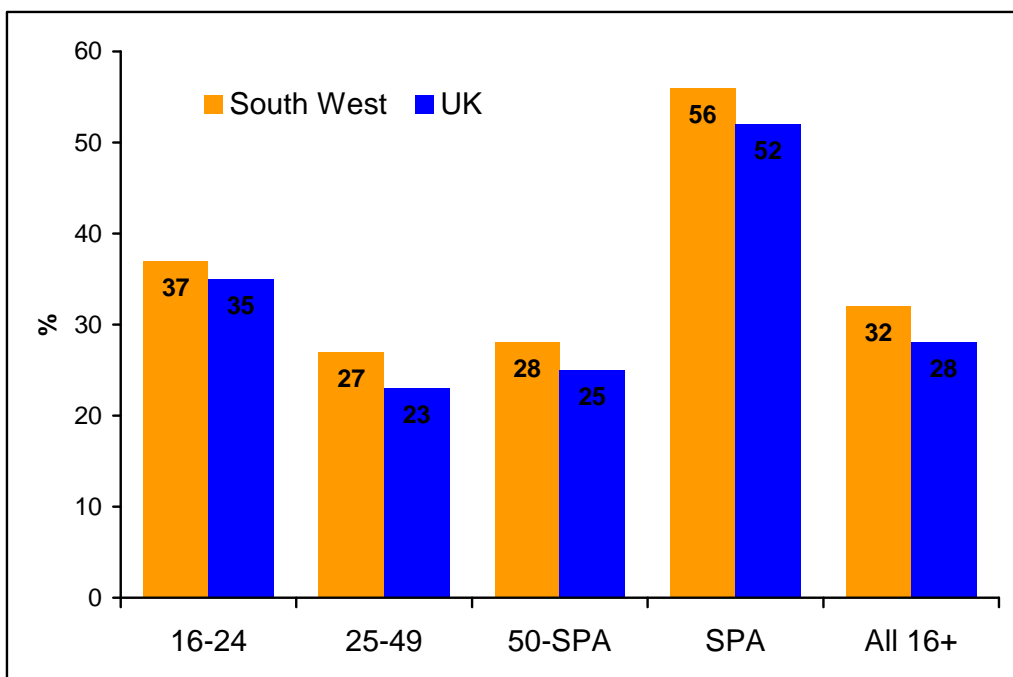
Figure 13: Percentage of those aged 16 and over in employment working in managerial or professional occupations by age group, September 2007 to October 2008, South West and United Kingdom



Source: Annual Population Survey

3.4.2 Part-time working

Figure 14: Percentage of all those aged 16 and over in employment working part time (main job) by age group, September 2007 to October 2008, South West and UK



Source: Annual Population Survey

Most (88%) of the 600,000 part-time workers in the South West aged 25 and over are doing so because they do not want a full time job. Young people (aged under 25), by contrast, are doing so because they are combining work with full or part-time study. Few people of any age are working part-time because they could not find full-time work although the proportion of part-time workers wanting full-time work is highest for the under 25s (13%) and those aged 50 to state pension age (9%).

4. WORKLESSNESS

4.1 Introduction

In this section:

- Unemployment;
- Out of work benefits;
- Economic inactivity;
- Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

4.2 Unemployment

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of unemployment, 102,800 South West residents were looking for work during September 2007 to October 2008 - up slightly from the 100,400 recorded 12 months earlier. Unemployment is broadly evenly split across the age groups.

Table 2: ILO unemployment by age, September 2007 to October 2008, South West and UK

Age	South West		United Kingdom
	Level	Rate	Rate
16 to19	19,200	11.9	19.9
20 to 24	18,300	7.2	10.8
25 to 34	15,600	3.1	4.9
35 to 49	28,000	2.9	3.5
50 to SPA	18,700	2.9	3.2
SPA	3,000	2.1	1.7
All ages	102,800	3.9	5.3

Source: Annual Population Survey

Table 3: Change in ILO unemployment by age, on year to September 2007 to October 2008, South West and United Kingdom

Age	% change in level		Percentage point change in rate	
	South West	United Kingdom	South West	United Kingdom
16 to 19	-21	-2	-2.6	-0.2
20 to 24	-3	7	-0.8	0.4
25 to 34	-8	4	-0.3	0.1
35 to 49	9	1	0.2	0.1
50 to SPA	60	3	1.1	0.1
SPA	7	-1	-0.1	-0.2
All ages	2	2	0.0	0.1

Source: Annual Population Survey

4.3 Out-of-work benefits

Almost one-in-ten working age residents in the South West were claiming out-of-work benefits in August 2008, a figure that has remained reasonably stable over the last five years. Whilst comparable age-based claimant rates are not published, it is possible to examine the level or number of claimants by benefit type and broad age group.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of people of working age claiming out-of-work benefits are aged between 24 and 54 (Table 4). They account for the bulk of the IB claimants, jobseekers and lone parents (Figure 15) with the majority – two-thirds - of benefit claimants of this age claiming benefits because of poor health or disability (Figure 16). There are 2% more benefit claimants in this age group than 12 months ago.

Table 4: Working age client group benefit claimants by age group and type of out-of-work benefit, August 2008, South West

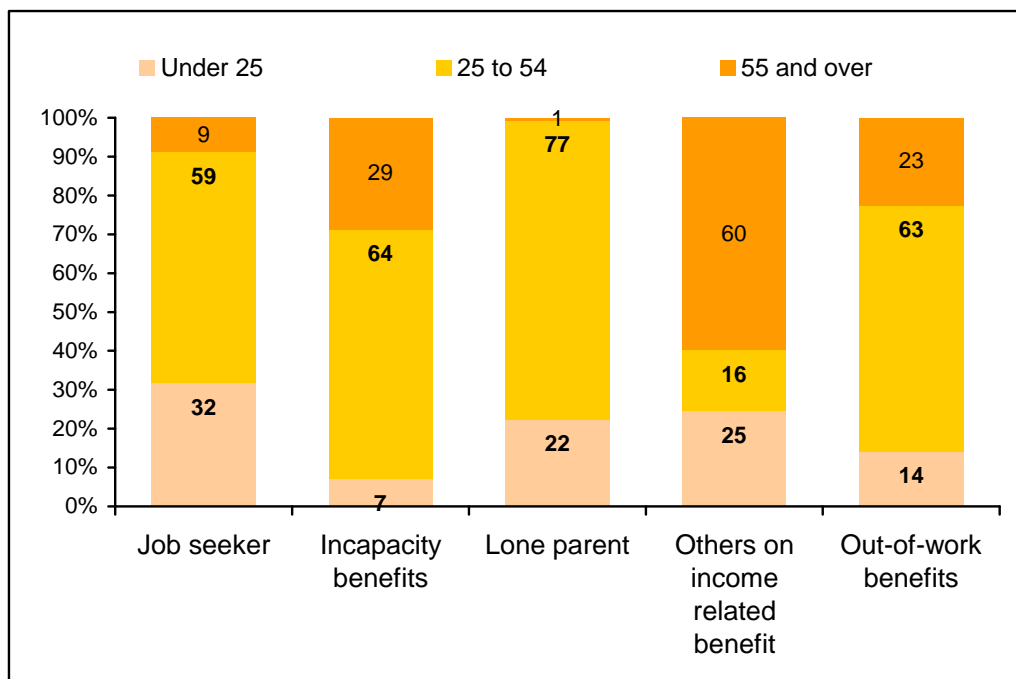
	Under 25	25 to 54	55 to SPA	All ages
Jobseeker	14,770	27,690	4,110	46,580
Incapacity benefits	13,650	122,830	55,080	191,560
Lone parent	10,290	35,380	310	45,980
Others on income related benefit	3,050	1,940	7,430	12,420
All out-of-work benefits	41,770	187,850	66,920	296,540

Source: DWP benefits data, NOMIS

Older people account for the second largest share of out-of-work benefit claimants (Figure 15) with almost all – more than eight of ten – claiming IB (Figure 15). Unlike other age groups, the numbers of older people making out-of-work benefit claims has fallen – by 2% – over the last 12 months.

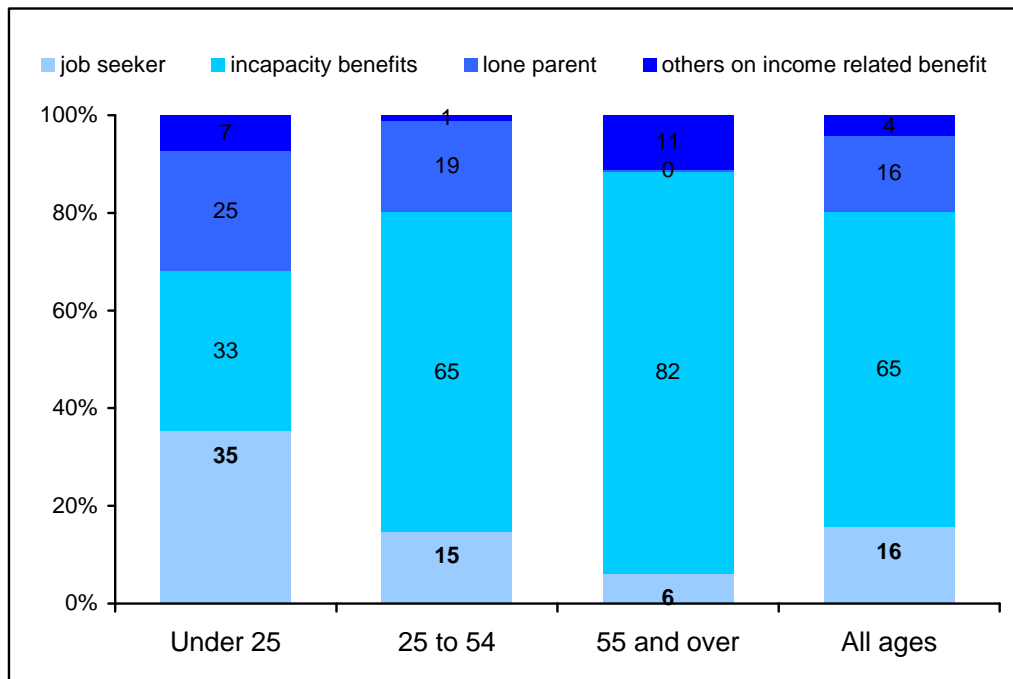
Young people (aged under 25) make up the smallest group of out-of-work benefit claimants (14%). Unlike the older age groups that tend to be mainly IB claimants, younger people are more equally distributed across the jobseekers, IB and lone parent client groups (Figure 15). The number of young people making these claims has increased by 8% over the last 12 months.

Figure 15: Out-of-work benefit claimants by age and benefit type, August 2008, South West



Source: DWP benefits data, NOMIS

Figure 16: Out-of-work benefit claimants by age and benefit type, August 2008, South West

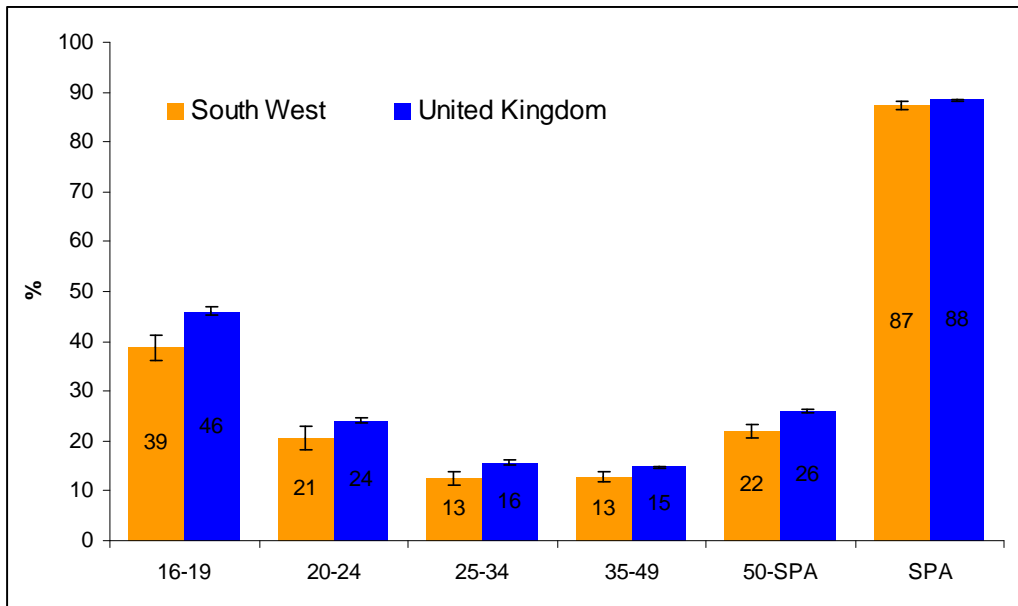


Source: DWP benefits data, NOMIS

4.4 Economic inactivity

More than half a million South West residents of working age (18% of the total) were economically inactive during September 2007 to October 2008. This category includes students, those who are looking after a home or family, the temporarily or long-term sick, retirees and those who are not working or looking for work for some other reason. Most individuals of state pension age (87%) are economically inactive and as a cohort they comprise two-thirds of the economically inactive population aged 16 and over.

Figure 17: Economic inactivity rates by age, September 2007 to October 2008, South West and United Kingdom

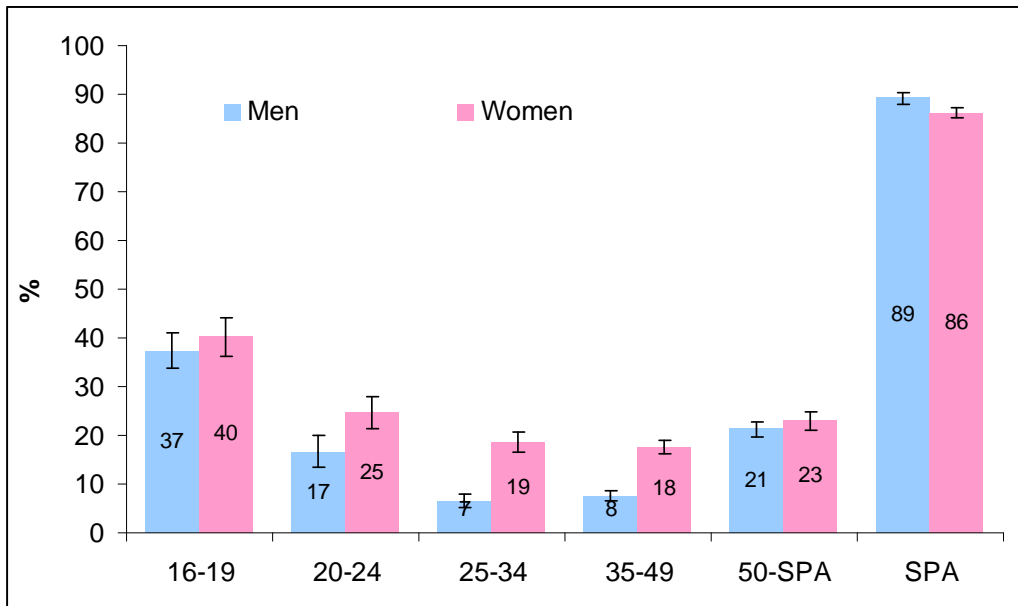


Source: Annual Population Survey, NOMIS

Within the working age population, economic inactivity is highest among young people, reflecting their participation in Further and Higher Education, and is lowest among the middle age groups but rises again among people aged 50 to state pension age. Economic inactivity rates for all age groups are lower than the UK average.

Inactivity rates tend to be higher for women than men at each age (Figure 18) – with the exception of those of state pension age – although the differences are not statistically significant for young people aged between 16 and 19 and aged 50 to state pension age.

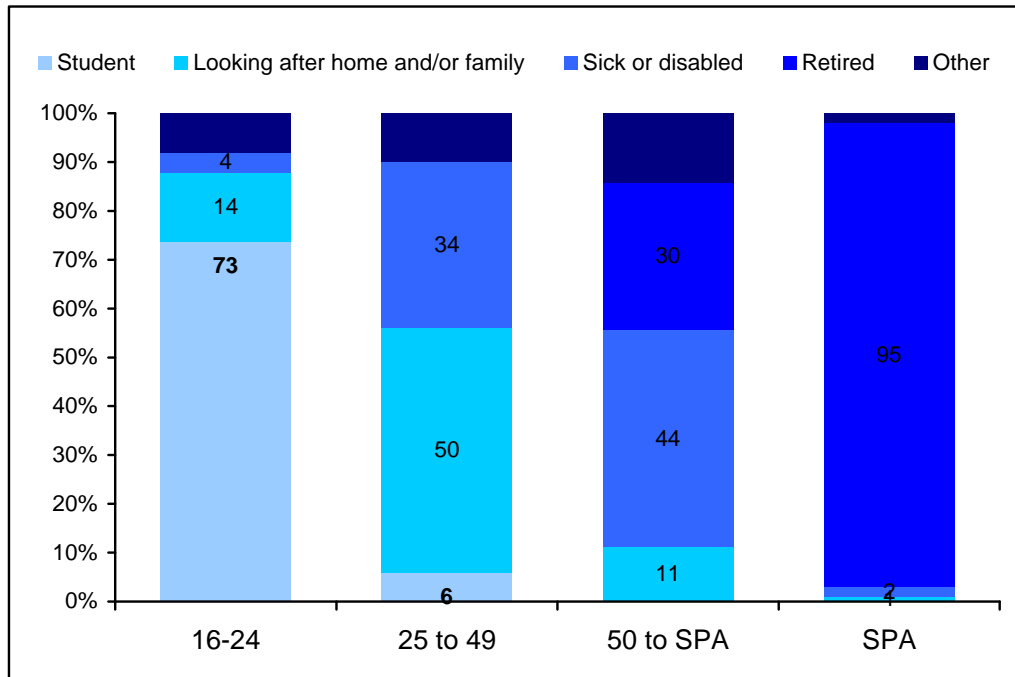
Figure 18: Economic inactivity rates by age and gender, September 2007 to October 2008, South West



Source: Annual Population Survey, NOMIS

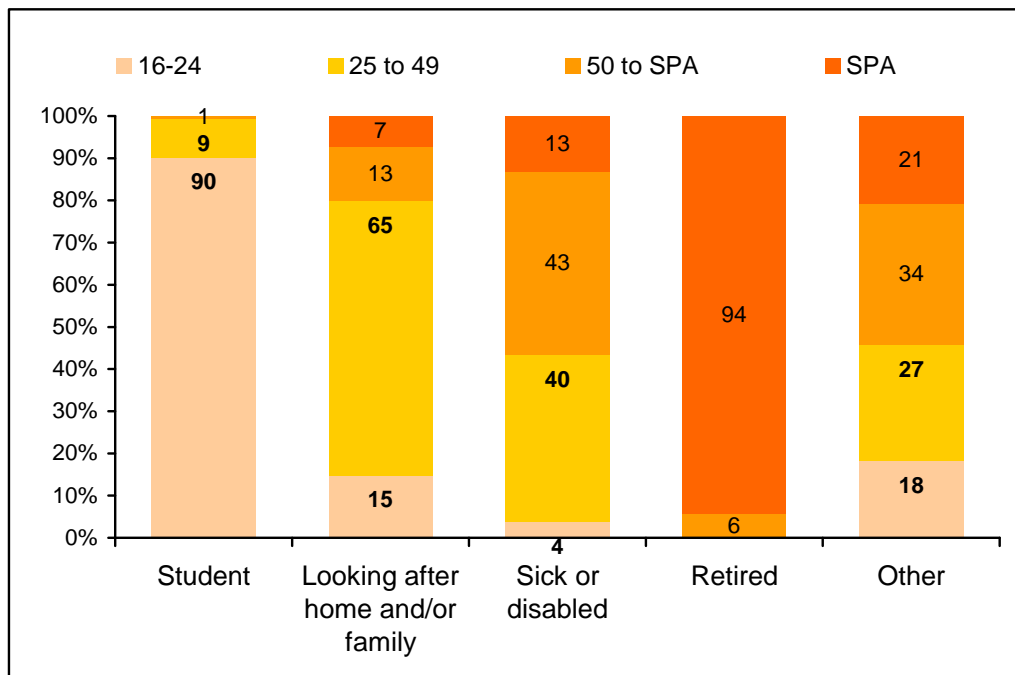
Examination of the reasons for economic inactivity confirms that young people are inactive principally because they are students and almost all people of state pension age are retired (Figure 19). Looking after the home and/or family and illness or disability are the main reasons for economic inactivity among people aged between 25 and 49 while those aged 50 to state pension age are most likely to be sick or disabled, or (early) retired (Figure 20).

Figure 19: Reasons for inactivity by age group, September 2007 to October 2008, South West



Source: Annual Population Survey (UK Data Archive)

Figure 20: Age group by reasons for inactivity, September 2007 to October 2008, South West



Source: Annual Population Survey (UK Data Archive)

Taking a slightly different perspective on the same statistics, Figure 19 shows that:

- the vast majority of students are under 25;
- almost two-thirds of those who are inactive because they are looking after a home and/or family are aged between 25 and 49;
- most sick and disabled people are aged between 25 and state pension age;
- almost all retirees are of state pension age.

Most economically inactive individuals do not want to work. This ranges from 98% of those of state pension age to two-thirds of those aged 25 to 49. Around three-quarters of economically inactive young people aged 16 to 19 (74%) and economically inactive people aged 50 to state pension age (78%) do not want to work.

4.5 16 to 18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

The ability of young people to make a successful transition from school to Further Education, employment or training has been identified as being crucial safeguard against social inclusion in later life (Pemberton, 2008). In recognition of this the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has a PSA target to reduce the proportion of NEET 16 to 18 year olds by two percentage points, from 9.6% in 2004 to 7.6% by 2010. Progress against the target is measured annually using data published in the Statistical First Release (SFR) *Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 Year Olds In England*. The current figure relating to the end of 2007 shows that 9.4% of 16 to 18 years olds are NEET, one full percentage point lower than the previous year but only one-fifth of a percentage point down on the baseline figure.

'Unofficial' in-year estimates of the NEET population drawn from the Labour Force Survey suggest that the decline in NEET rates that had been recorded since the end of 2006 has been reversed, with the figure for the final quarter of 2008 0.6 percentage points higher than the same quarter the previous year. This is due solely to a decline in the proportion of NEETs who are in employment.

Regional and local authority estimates of the NEET population are derived from the Client Caseload Information system (CCIS) maintained by the Connexions Service and are not directly comparable to those obtained from the SFR or the Labour Force Survey, partly due to differences of definition, for example, the Connexions NEET data excludes gap year 'students' and those in custody. According to this source, 9,180 of the 160,296 young people aged 16 to 18 year olds known to Connexions were NEET in 2008. The regional NEET rate of 5.7% is a full percentage point lower than the England average and only marginally higher than the East Midlands which has the lowest rate (5.4%). The North East has the highest regional NEET rate at

9.8%, although the highest local authority area rate – 14.4% – is found in Knowsley in the North West. The highest local authority rates in the South West are in Bournemouth (8.2%), Swindon (8%) and City of Bristol (7.9%) and the lowest rates are in Somerset (3.8%), Gloucestershire (3.8%) and Bath and North East Somerset (3.9%). The lowest rate nationally is 1.8 percent, in Rutland.

The number of young people aged 16 to 18 who were NEET increased by 7% between 2006 and 2007 in the South West, compared to 1% across England. This increased the regional NEET rate by 0.2 percentage points. The national NEET rate fell marginally because the number of 16 to 18 year olds increased slightly faster than the NEET population of the same age. Most local authority areas in the region recorded an increase in their NEET populations, and those that did not tended to have a relatively high percentage of young people with unknown status.

The characteristics of NEET children are described in the DCSF publication, *Youth Cohort Study & Longitudinal Study of Young People in England: The Activities and Experiences of 16 years olds: England 2007*⁴. The results show that more than one-third (36%) of 16 year old respondents who had left school with no qualifications were NEET (compared with 2% of those who achieved at least five GCSE grades A*-C), as were just over a quarter (27%) of persistent truants. Children from families where the head of household (HOH) worked in lower supervisory, routine or (especially) other/not classified occupations, or where the HOH had low or no qualifications, were also much more likely to be NEET. Personal characteristics appear less important: white respondents were more likely to be NEET than those from other ethnic backgrounds and those with a disability were almost twice as likely to be NEET than those without an impairment (15%, compared to 8%).

⁴ See Chapter 6.2 for statistical tables describing the personal and family characteristics of young people NEET http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000795/YCS_LSYPE_Bulletin_final.pdf