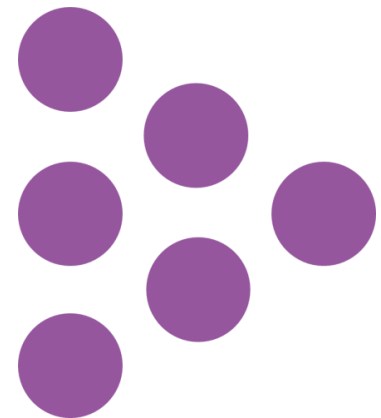


## Discussion note

# Measuring pupil disadvantage: The case for change

Report of an expert roundtable to discuss the available options

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)



# Measuring pupil disadvantage: The case for change

Caroline Sharp, Jenna Julius and Jude Hillary

Published in March 2023

By the National Foundation for Educational Research,  
The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ

[www.nfer.ac.uk](http://www.nfer.ac.uk)

© 2023 National Foundation for Educational Research  
Registered Charity No. 313392

**ISBN:** 978-1-912596-77-5

**How to cite this publication:**

Sharp, C., Julius, J. and Hillary, J. (2023). *Measuring pupil disadvantage: The case for change*.  
NFER: Slough.



## About NFER

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to producing high-quality, independent research and insights to inform decision-makers about key issues across the education system. Our mission is to generate evidence and insights that can be used to improve outcomes for future generations everywhere, and to support positive change across education systems. Visit <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/>

## Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to all of the individuals and organisations who attended the roundtable and contributed insights to inform the proposals set out in this note. We would particularly like to thank officials from the Department for Education, the Confederation of School Trusts, Julie McCulloch (Association of School and College Leaders), Sam Freedman, Dave Thomson (Fischer Family Trust), Emily Hunt (Education Policy Institute), Steve Strand (University of Oxford), Stephen Gorard (University of Durham) and John Jerrim (UCL Social Research Institute). The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of these individuals or their organisations.



## Executive summary

There is a large and long-standing gap in education outcomes between pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers in England (EEF, 2018; Hutchinson *et al.*, 2020). The attainment gap is a key measure to assess progress in improving outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and supporting social mobility, but recent changes are about to undermine its usefulness.

Transitional arrangements introduced to ease the roll out of the new Universal Credit system could significantly change the number and types of pupils considered to be disadvantaged and the composition of the group from 2023/24 onwards. It will be increasingly difficult to tell whether trends in the size of the disadvantaged pupils' attainment gap are being driven by changes in the composition of the disadvantaged group, economic conditions or real changes in attainment. **This is crucial as it will be impossible to identify whether there is any genuine progress in reducing the gap.** It will also affect the targeting of funding (e.g. the Pupil Premium) to schools.

**Action is needed now to ensure we can hold the Government to account for progress in reducing the gap and improving outcomes of pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.**

To discuss the implications and suggest the best ways forward, NFER convened a roundtable in summer 2022 of experts involved in policy and research on economic disadvantage and education. This followed on from [research](#) by NFER published in January 2022 (Julius and Ghosh, 2022) exploring these issues in detail. The roundtable

discussion informed the development of three key policy recommendations.

**Proposal 1:** The Government should explore the feasibility of establishing a household income-based measure of disadvantage for the future.

**Proposal 2:** The Government should explore the feasibility of introducing a 'continuity measure' of disadvantage from 2024 onwards. This would be based on the underlying eligibility criteria for FSM, and remove the effect of the transitional arrangements.

**Proposal 3:** The Government should consider replacing the current rank-based disadvantaged pupils' attainment gap measure with a simpler metric based on average point scores.

**Eligible for free school meals (FSM):** A pupil who meets the eligibility criteria for free school meals and whose parent(s) or carer(s) make a claim (eligibility is not determined automatically).

**Disadvantaged pupil:** A pupil who has been eligible and claimed for free schools meals at any point in the last six years (FSM6) or has been in the care of the local authority at any point.

**Universal Credit (UC):** Financial support available to UK residents aged from 18 up to state pension age who are on low incomes and have £16,000 or less in money, savings and investments.

**Pupil Premium (PP):** Pupils who are considered to be 'disadvantaged' attract additional funding for their school to improve their educational outcomes. Any pupil who is currently FSM6, has been in the care of the local authority at any point, or is from a service family is eligible for PP.

## Background

There is a large and long-standing gap in education outcomes between pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers in England (EEF, 2018; Hutchinson *et al.*, 2020). Although there is some evidence of improvement since 2011, the gap has widened recently, largely as a result of school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic (Tuckett *et al.*, 2022; Howard *et al.*, 2021; Rose *et al.*, 2021).

The Government is committed to improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils (HM Treasury, 2021). The disadvantaged pupils' attainment gap is a key metric to assess progress in narrowing the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. However, this gap measure will soon become largely meaningless due to definitional changes.

## Eligibility for free school meals is currently a key means of identifying disadvantaged pupils

Economically disadvantaged pupils are identified by their eligibility for free school meals (FSM)<sup>1</sup>. Any pupil who has been eligible and claimed for FSM at any point in the last six years (FSM6) attracts additional funding for their school and is counted as 'disadvantaged' in the measurement of the attainment gap. Throughout this report, unless stated otherwise, these pupils will be defined as 'disadvantaged'.

---

<sup>1</sup> Since April 2018, all pupils whose families are in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) and have a household income of £7,400 or less are eligible to claim FSM. This is alongside pupils who met the eligibility requirements for FSM as part of a number of legacy schemes (see DfE, 2023a for further details).

## Universal Credit transitional arrangements are increasing the time pupils stay eligible for FSM

When UC was first introduced in 2013, all children in households in receipt of UC were given entitlement to FSM. This was a temporary measure, pending the full roll out of UC (see DfE, 2021). In April 2018, the Government introduced transitional arrangements to ease the roll out of the UC system. These had been set to end in 2023, but they have just been extended until March 2025<sup>2</sup> (DfE, 2023b).

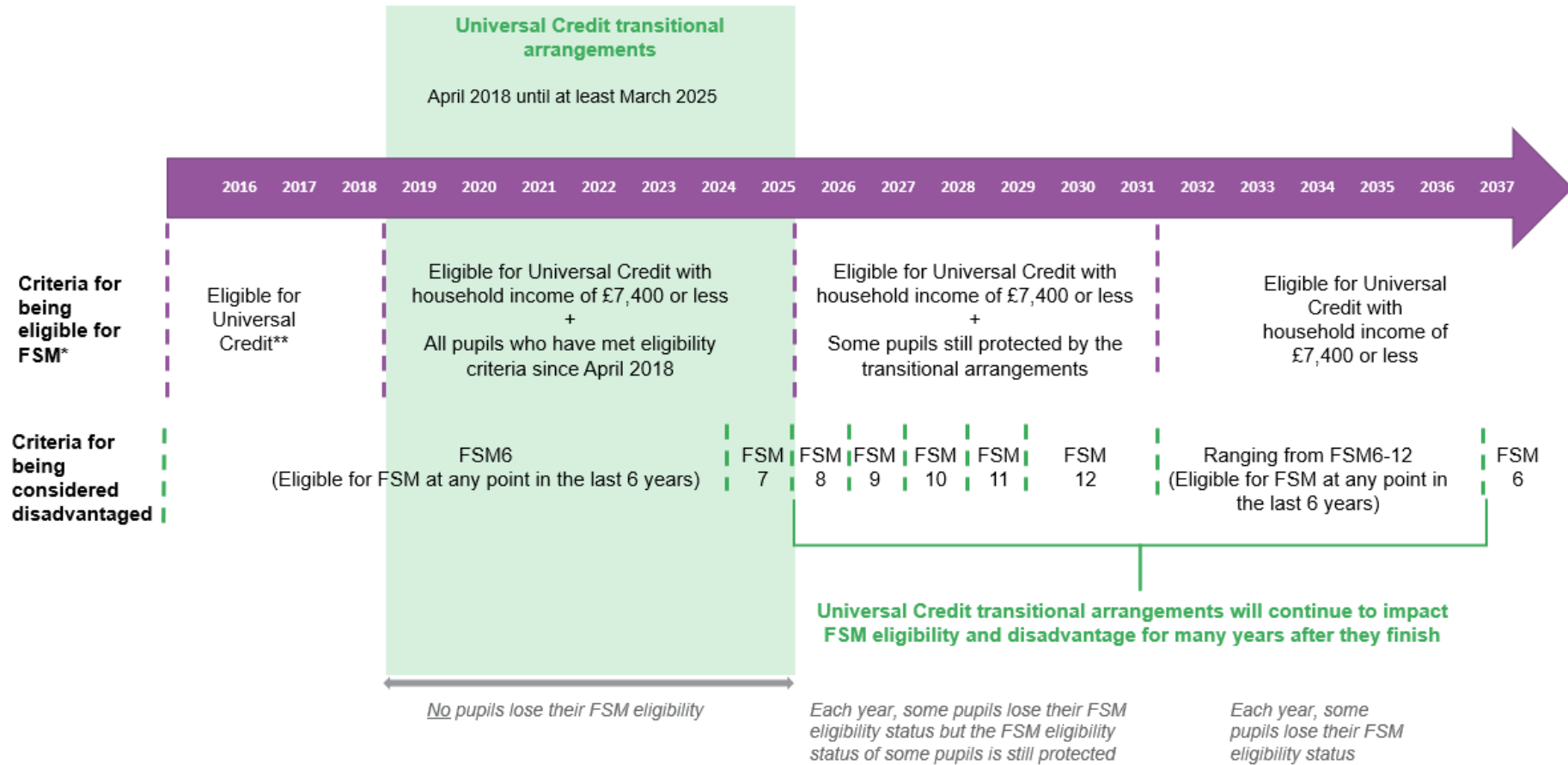
The UC transitional arrangements will significantly increase the FSM-eligibility rate, and – all else being equal – will continue to do so until at least the end of the current decade. This is because an FSM pupil whose family ceases to be eligible for UC or whose income increases above the threshold will continue to be eligible for FSM for the entire UC roll-out period. Pupils who are eligible for FSM at the end of the transitional period will retain their eligibility until the end of their current phase of primary or secondary education (see Figure 1).

Because eligibility for FSM is used to identify disadvantaged pupils, the UC transitional arrangements will also lead to a big increase in the number of pupils who are identified as disadvantaged (Julius and Ghosh, 2022). This will start to impact the numbers of disadvantaged pupils from 2023/24 onwards<sup>3</sup> – six years after the introduction of the transitional arrangements. It is, however, important to note that this increase in disadvantage is set to be largely among pupils who may already have been considered in need of additional support.

<sup>2</sup> Transitional arrangements were extended until March 2025 on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2023.

<sup>3</sup> The impact in 2023/24 itself will be minimal, but the magnitude of impacts will increase over time.

**Figure 1: How UC transitional arrangements will affect eligibility for FSM and the disadvantaged group**



\* Pupils will also be eligible for FSM if their households still qualify for a number of legacy benefits.

\*\*When UC was first introduced in 2013, all children in households in receipt of UC were given entitlement to FSM. This was intended to be a temporary measure.

## It will no longer be possible to follow the attainment of disadvantaged pupils over time

As illustrated in Figure 1, pupils who would ordinarily no longer be entitled to FSM will continue to be so during the UC transitional period. The first year after the end of the transitional period, the disadvantaged pupil measure effectively becomes an FSM7 measure; in the following year it becomes an FSM8 measure and so on. Between 2024 and 2036, the definition of disadvantage will effectively change each year, which will make it impossible to assess the Government's progress in reducing the disadvantaged pupils' attainment gap<sup>4</sup> because we will no longer be comparing like with like.

## What are the solutions?

As there will no longer be a consistent measure for identifying disadvantaged pupils over time once the transitional arrangements end (which will effectively render the disadvantaged gap measure meaningless), NFER convened a roundtable of experts involved in policy and research on disadvantage and education to discuss the implications and explore the best ways forward. The debate focused on two key questions:

1. Which pupils should be considered to be economically disadvantaged?
2. How should we measure the disadvantaged attainment gap?

---

<sup>4</sup> It will also not be possible to identify pupils who are persistently disadvantaged (i.e. those whose families experience low incomes year on year) and are particularly at risk of low attainment (see Gorard *et al.*, 2021a and b; Julius and Ghosh, 2022).

## How should we measure disadvantage?

**Disadvantaged pupils' attainment gap:** The difference in the average rank of performance in national assessments of pupils in the non-disadvantaged group and the average rank of pupils in the disadvantaged group. FSM6 is used to define the group of pupils who are considered to be 'disadvantaged' (see DfE, 2014 for further details).

**Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI):** A composite index measuring the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 living in a particular area from income-deprived families.

As outlined above, the UC transitional arrangements mean that from 2023/24 onwards<sup>5</sup>, the current measure of disadvantage will cease to be comparable over time. The existing measure also has other limitations because it creates a 'cliff-edge' of disadvantage by simply dividing pupils into two categories: eligible and non-eligible for FSM<sup>6</sup>.

In light of these issues, the roundtable participants discussed a number of options for measuring economic disadvantage, including those based on household income, as well as area-based measures. In doing so, we considered a range of criteria that could be used to weigh up the relative merits of each (see the Appendix for further details of the options and criteria the group discussed).

In general, participants wanted a simple, straightforward metric that would maintain consistency with previous measures of disadvantage,

<sup>5</sup> The impact in 2023/24 itself will be minimal, but the magnitude of impacts will increase over time.

<sup>6</sup> See Gorard *et al.*, 2021b.

but with the aspiration of moving towards a more precise and robust way of identifying disadvantage in future.

**Proposal 1:** The Government should explore the feasibility of establishing a household income-based measure of disadvantage for the future.

We suggest the Department for Education (DfE) could draw on data from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)<sup>7</sup> to identify pupils' household income. If successful, this would provide a more direct and accurate measure of disadvantage for a range of purposes (e.g., research), with the added benefit of capturing information on the extent of disadvantage experienced by each pupil<sup>8</sup>.

Changes in legislation in recent years, such as the Digital Economy Act (GB. Parliament. HoC, 2017), should make it possible to share this information across government departments.

The proposed new measure would provide the basis to achieve a greater understanding of the relationship between the extent of economic disadvantage and pupil outcomes, which is not possible using the existing binary FSM eligibility measure. This could allow the Government to target greater support on pupils whose attainment is most profoundly affected by economic disadvantage, should they wish to do so.

Through further data linkage, the construction of a household-level dataset would also provide an opportunity to generate insights into the impact of other household factors on the relationship between family

---

<sup>7</sup> This is the source of data currently used by schools to check the eligibility of pupils whose parents apply for FSM.

income and education outcomes. For example, researchers could use this data to investigate the relationship between household access to area-based services (such as health, housing and social services) and education outcomes. Such insights would help the Government to target services and provide support more effectively in future.

There are three main limitations to introducing the proposed new measure: first, the additional time and expense involved in setting up the dataset and using it to identify pupils and their economic circumstances. Second, there are a number of complexities and challenges involved in using household income as a measure of disadvantage which would need to be considered. For example, some households may have large assets, but low income. Third, as with any dataset, it will only be as good as the quality of data within it. In particular, there is a time-lag for data on household income to be updated, which may affect families with irregular incomes. This might limit the extent to which household income could be used for operational purposes (as opposed to monitoring overall trends).

We encourage the DfE to explore the benefits and limitations of replacing the current FSM measure with one based on household income for a range of purposes (e.g., research) as a matter of urgency. While we wait for a better measure, the group felt we should continue to identify disadvantaged pupils as those currently FSM6.

<sup>8</sup> This does not mean removing a threshold of eligibility for FSM and related funding (such as the PP). However, it would enable the government to identify those pupils experiencing the greatest economic deprivation and for the longest time.



**Proposal 2:** The Government should explore the feasibility of introducing a ‘continuity measure’ of disadvantage from 2024 onwards.

This ‘continuity measure’ would identify what the disadvantage status of pupils would have been in the absence of the UC transitional arrangements. In other words, it would only identify pupils as disadvantaged if they actually met the underlying eligibility criteria for being considered as disadvantaged at that given point in time. A continuity definition of disadvantage could be constructed using data on household income collected by DWP to facilitate comparisons over time.

This could be used to re-construct measures of FSM6, as if the transitional arrangements had not been introduced.

The proposed continuity measure would enable us to look at trends in the disadvantaged attainment gap before, during and after the introduction of the UC transitional arrangements using the same, familiar measure. Limitations are similar to those outlined above, albeit the complexity and costs of constructing this ‘continuity measure’ are likely to be much less. In addition to these limitations, a continuity measure could create some possible confusion by creating a second measure of pupil disadvantage.

### Did we consider other measures of disadvantage?

The roundtable also debated the merits of adopting area-level measures of disadvantage (such as IDACI) instead of pupil-level ones.

This would build on evidence that the area a young person grows up in has an impact on their attainment outcomes over and above their eligibility for FSM (see Classick *et al.*, 2021; Renaissance Learning and EPI, 2021). Such an approach could also address area-based policy concerns (such as the need to ‘level up’ opportunities across England). The main issue with area-based measures is their lack of precision, given that some disadvantaged families live in more advantaged areas and vice versa<sup>9</sup>.

### How should we measure the disadvantaged attainment gap?

Some of our roundtable participants pointed out that the current attainment gap measure is difficult to understand. This is because it is based on ranking the attainment of all pupils, and then using these rankings to construct a gap measure by comparing the average ranking of disadvantaged pupils to the average ranking of their non-disadvantaged peers. Another drawback of the current measure is that it has no ‘units’ (such as grades or point scores), which makes it difficult to interpret changes in the size of the attainment gap.

The main reason the DfE gave for adopting the current rank-based gap measure was to enable consistent comparisons over time, for example during periods of curriculum and assessment reform (DfE, 2014). However, the group felt that there were other ways of addressing this concern.

---

<sup>9</sup> See Jerrim, 2021.

**Proposal 3:** The Government should consider replacing the rank-based measure with a more straightforward measure based on the average point scores<sup>10</sup> achieved by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, compared with their peers.

The group preferred a measure based on average point scores in maths and English for KS4 because these subjects are taken by the majority of pupils in the country. These scores could be presented on a consistent scale<sup>11</sup> to mitigate the influence of changes to the curriculum or assessment. This would also enable comparisons between the size of the gap in primary and secondary education.

We recommend the use of average point scores rather than the percentage of pupils achieving a particular threshold as the main indicator – such as the percentage of primary pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. This is because threshold-based measures provide an incentive for schools to target their attention on pupils whose attainment is close to the threshold, whereas using average scores encourages schools to raise attainment for all.

**Action is needed now to ensure we can hold the Government to account for progress in reducing the gap and improving outcomes of pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.**

<sup>10</sup> Based on point scores achieved in Key Stage 2 assessments in reading, writing and maths (primary education) and English and maths GCSEs (secondary education).

<sup>11</sup> By providing a consistent scale, we mean converting the distribution of scores achieved by primary and secondary pupils each year so that they are all measured on the same distribution (e.g. by adjusting by standard deviations or pooled standard

deviations to present standardised scores or standardised average differences in scores respectively).

In terms of the data used in schools, there was consensus among roundtable attendees that information provided to schools should continue to be presented as they are now (i.e. in terms of ‘unadjusted’ point scores, rather than adjusted or ‘standardised’ scores). We also suggest that the DfE should continue to publish the mean point scores achieved by disadvantaged pupils and their peers alongside the new gap score.

### Did we consider other ways of reporting the disadvantaged attainment gap?

The group considered replacing the rank-based measure with a disadvantaged gap score based on sub-groups such as quintiles or deciles. However, they decided not to recommend this because it offers no clear advantage over the current rank-based system and would be equally difficult to understand.

### Conclusions

Changes to FSM eligibility pose a challenge to understanding the extent to which the relative attainment of disadvantaged pupils is improving over time. The recent extension of the UC transitional arrangements until March 2025 from March 2023, has only prolonged this challenge for even longer<sup>12</sup>. They also provide an opportunity to

deviations to present standardised scores or standardised average differences in scores respectively).

<sup>12</sup> Transitional arrangements were extended until March 2025 on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2023.

consider how we might improve on the current system by making it more meaningful and efficient in future.

Our proposals are designed to improve clarity and provide greater consistency. Although there are no perfect solutions, action is needed now so we can understand how the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is evolving and continue to hold the Government to account for ensuring they are adequately supporting the outcomes of young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

If the Government takes no action to address these issues, the current disadvantaged gap measure will be seriously undermined. An alternative approach would be to cease reporting the disadvantaged pupils' attainment gap between 2024 and 2036, when the effects of the UC transition arrangements will have worked themselves through. However, this would leave the wholly unsatisfactory situation of having no credible national metric available during this period for monitoring progress in closing the disadvantaged attainment gap and helping disadvantaged pupils to achieve more similar outcomes to their peers.

## References

Classick, R., Hope, C. and Sharp, C. (2021). *IELS Thematic Report: Young Children's Development and Deprivation in England* [online].

Available:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1001552/IELS\\_Deprivation\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1001552/IELS_Deprivation_Report.pdf) [21 February, 2023].

Tuckett, S., Hunt, E., Robinson, D. and Cruickshanks, R. (2022). *COVID-19 and Disadvantage Gaps in England 2021* [online].

Available: [https://epi.org.uk/wp-](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Covid19_2021_Disadvantage_Gaps_in_England.pdf)

[content/uploads/2022/12/Covid19\\_2021\\_Disadvantage\\_Gaps\\_in\\_England.pdf](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Covid19_2021_Disadvantage_Gaps_in_England.pdf) [21 February, 2023].

Department for Education (2014). *Measuring Disadvantaged Pupils' Attainment Gaps Over Time*. Statistical Working Paper 40/2014.

[online]. Available:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/398657/SFR\\_40\\_2014\\_Measuring\\_disadvantaged\\_pupils\\_attainment\\_gaps\\_over\\_time\\_updated.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398657/SFR_40_2014_Measuring_disadvantaged_pupils_attainment_gaps_over_time_updated.pdf) [21 February, 2023].

Department for Education (2018). *Estimating the Number of Additional Free School Meal Pupils under Universal Credit* [online]. Available:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/707466/Additional\\_free\\_school\\_meal\\_pupils\\_under\\_Universal\\_Credit.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/707466/Additional_free_school_meal_pupils_under_Universal_Credit.pdf) [21 February, 2023].

Department for Education (2023a). *Complete the School Census. Data Items 2022 to 2023* [online]. Available:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complete-the-school-census/data-items-2022-to-2023> [21 February, 2023].

Department for Education (2023b). *Free School Meals. Guidance for Local Authorities, Maintained Schools, Academies and Free schools* [online]. Available:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1133262/Free\\_school\\_meals.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1133262/Free_school_meals.pdf) [21 February, 2023]

Education Endowment Foundation (2018). *The Attainment Gap* [online]. Available:

[https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Annual\\_Reports/EEF\\_Attainment\\_Gap\\_Report\\_2018.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Annual_Reports/EEF_Attainment_Gap_Report_2018.pdf) [21 February, 2023].

Gorard, S., Siddiqui, N. and See, B. H. (2021a). 'Assessing the impact of Pupil Premium funding on primary school segregation and attainment', *Research Papers in Education*, **37**, 6, 992-1019 [online]. DOI 10.1080/02671522.2021.1907775.

Gorard, S. Siddiqui, N. and See, B. H. (2021b). 'The difficulties of judging what difference the Pupil Premium has made to school intakes and outcomes in England', *Research Papers in Education*, **36**, 3, 355-379. DOI 10.1080/02671522.2019.1677759.

Great Britain. Statutes (2017). *The Digital Economy Act 2017* [online]. Available:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/30/contents/enacted> [22 February, 2023]

HM Treasury (2021). *Spending Review 2021: Priority Outcomes and Metrics* [online]. Available:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/u>

[ploads/attachment\\_data/file/1029277/Supplementary\\_Document\\_on\\_Outcomes\\_Metrics.pdf](#) [21 February, 2023].

Howard, E., Khan, A. and Lockyer, C. (2021). *Learning During the Pandemic: Review of Research from England* [online]. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learning-during-the-pandemic/learning-during-the-pandemic-review-of-research-from-england> [21 February, 2023].

Hutchinson, J., Reader, M. and Akhal, A. (2020). *Education in England: Annual Report 2020* [online]. Available: [https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/EPI\\_2020\\_Annual\\_Report\\_.pdf](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/EPI_2020_Annual_Report_.pdf) [21 February, 2023].

Jerrim, J. (2021). *Measuring Disadvantage* [online]. Available: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Measuring-Disadvantage.pdf> [21 February, 2023].

Julius, J. and Ghosh, A. (2022). *Investigating the Changing Landscape of Pupil Disadvantage* [online]. Available: [https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4762/nfer\\_investigating\\_the\\_changing\\_landscape\\_of\\_pupil\\_disadvantage.pdf](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4762/nfer_investigating_the_changing_landscape_of_pupil_disadvantage.pdf) [21 February, 2023].

Renaissance Learning and Education Policy Institute (2021). *Understanding Progress in the 2020/21 Academic Year. Findings from the Summer Term and Summary of all Previous Findings* [online]. Available: [Understanding progress in the 2020 to 2021 academic year \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) [21 February, 2023].

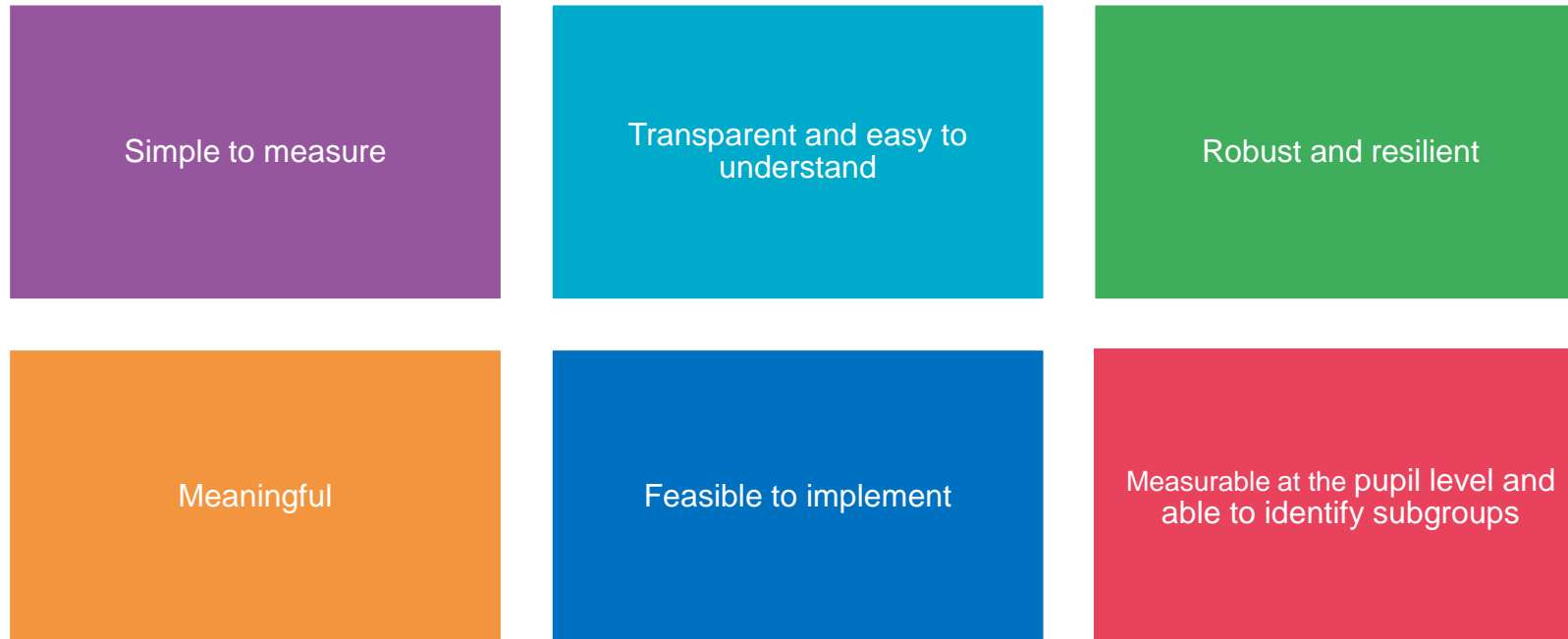
Rose, S., Twist, L., Lord, P., Rutt, S. Badr, K., Hope, C. and Styles, B. (2021). *Impact of School Closures and Subsequent Support Strategies on Attainment and Socio-Emotional Wellbeing in Key Stage 1: Interim Paper 2* [online]. Available: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/impact-of-school->

[closures-and-subsequent-support-strategies-on-attainment-and-socio-emotional-wellbeing/](#) [21 February, 2023].

## Appendix

The group used the following criteria to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of alternative measures of economic disadvantage. In general, there was consensus among the group that measures scoring more highly on robustness and resilience were more likely to score lower on transparency and ease of understanding.

**Figure 2: Features of an ideal disadvantage measure**



**Table 1: Comparison of alternative measures of disadvantage**

Measure of disadvantage	Pros	Cons
Currently available FSM eligibility measures (e.g. FSM, FSM6)	<p>Measurable at pupil level and feasible to implement.</p> <p>Correlate highly with other measures of socio-economic disadvantage</p> <p>Already available (although FSM6 will be effectively superseded by an FSM ever measure due to the UC transitional arrangements)</p>	<p>Not very meaningful because binary measures lack information on the extent of disadvantage</p> <p>Substantial year-on-year variability due to pupils remaining eligible even if their circumstances change due to transitional arrangements</p> <p>Variability due to changing personal circumstances, economic conditions and eligibility thresholds</p> <p>Rely on families actually claiming FSM</p> <p>Persistence of pupil disadvantage, as measured by the length of time a pupil has been disadvantaged, cannot be observed</p>
<p>'Continuity' measure of disadvantage</p> <p>This would identify what the disadvantage status of pupils would have been in the absence of the UC transitional arrangements. In other words, it would only identify pupils as disadvantaged if they actually met the underlying eligibility criteria for being considered as disadvantaged at that given point in time.</p>	<p>Needed to enable consistent measurement of disadvantaged group over time (during UC transitional arrangements)</p> <p>Enables identification of persistently disadvantaged pupils</p> <p>Measurable at pupil level</p> <p>Improved efficiency of the system used to identify FSM eligibility</p>	<p>Not currently available</p> <p>Depends on access to DWP data and would require resources to construct and test</p>
Identify children in low-income families using household income	<p>Highly robust, resilient and meaningful</p> <p>Measurable at pupil level</p>	<p>Depends on access to DWP data and requires resources to construct</p>

Measure of disadvantage	Pros	Cons
	Would provide a continuous measure of disadvantage	There may be insurmountable challenges in identifying household income data  Time-lag in obtaining the most recent data  Relies solely on income (which does not account for other causes of poverty in higher-income families)
Area-based measures of disadvantage	Feasible to implement and relevant to the 'levelling up' agenda  Would provide a continuous measure of disadvantage	Not meaningful for pupils whose family income differs from the average in their area (high false positive and false negative rate)  Measures tend to be updated infrequently, and so may miss more rapid changes in geographic disadvantage
Broader measures of socio-economic disadvantage (e.g. parental education, parental occupation, household possessions, access to basic necessities)	Robust and meaningful  Potential to select measures with greater comparability over time.  More valid and accurate reflection of pupil disadvantage (socio-economic status)	Difficult and costly to collect  This data is not recorded in administrative databases and would only be available for a sample



# Evidence for excellence in education

## Public

© National Foundation for Educational Research 2023

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without prior written permission of NFER.

The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berks SL1 2DQ

T: +44 (0)1753 574123 • F: +44 (0)1753 691632 • [enquiries@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@nfer.ac.uk)

[www.nfer.ac.uk](http://www.nfer.ac.uk)

**NFER ref.** IMPP

ISBN: 978-1-912596-77-5

