



London-Centric Bias & the North/South Divide



Is there a London-centric bias and does this contribute to the North-South divide? – Emily Fewkes | Freya Hughes | Jessica Dobby | 2022



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Abstract

This paper will define what a London-centric bias is and conclude whether or not there is one in the UK, define the North-South divide and also explore whether or not there is a clear bias towards London in terms of funding and investment compared to other major northern cities such as Manchester, Newcastle and whether or not this bias contributes to disparities between the two regions. The factors that will be examined are healthcare and education in the UK, parallels between London and the north in terms of these two factors will help us to justify the claim that there is a London centric bias that contributes to regional inequality and the North-South divide.

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Introduction

This paper will examine to what extent there is a London-centric bias and how inequalities in areas such as education and health contribute to the North-South divide. As part of this, the paper will agree that the North-South divide exists and investigate whether or not there is a London-centric bias within the UK government and general public. By examining a number of different factors that are affected by the London-centric bias, conclusions will be made as to whether or not the North-South divide has been exacerbated by this bias.

Defining what a London-centric bias is and exploring whether or not there is one.

In order to tackle the question of whether or not a London-centric bias contributes to the North-South divide it is necessary to first define what a London-centric bias is. London-centric is defined as centred on or based in London, when looking at development and funding as a whole, a primary focus on the capital city London would be considered a London-centric bias and can cause disparity and division between the capital and the rest of the UK. London continues to gain investment, tourism, publicity, and funding whilst leaving the rest of the UK behind, since February 2022, London has the highest government spending per head in England at £10,835 per person, this is significantly different to the rest of the UK with the next highest (The North East) having £550 less per head (Institute for Government, 2022).

London is no doubt a majorly important and influential world city, with its connections through international trade and its global importance economically as more than a third of global foreign exchange takes place every day in London. (World Cities Culture Forum, 2022).

World cities can be assessed on the presence of global financial and business services firms which have multi-state locations. One study assessed cities on four significant corporate services: accountancy, advertisement, banking, and law. The cities involved in the research were assessed as having a prime, a major or a minor centre for each activity, scoring 3, 2 or 1 for each section. The researchers awarded London, alongside other cities such as New York and Paris, a maximum score of 12. The same study however scored other UK cities such as Birmingham and Manchester only two points. Researchers found that these two major cities in the UK were not world cities like London (Beaverstock, 1999). One reason for London's global role was linked to the city's airport links and therefore excellent international connectivity (Greater London Authority, 2008). Another reason is that London's economy is also mainly serviced based with only 9% of its outputs coming from primary and secondary industries (Wingham, 2016). Globalisation has allowed for rapid growth in business services, London in particular is one of the leading financial centres of the world. International access to services has supported this growth. Whilst globalisation has created opportunities for London and allowed it to develop further, regions dominated by more traditional sectors such as the linen industry in Belfast have faced difficulty in adjusting to the more recent shift towards the 'knowledge economy' (Brown, 2008).

The UK displays large regional disparities in productivity compared to other industrialised countries, there is a large gap between London and most other regions in the UK, this difference in productivity effects standard of living, the amount of investment outside of London, this difference is caused by multiple reasons including London's status as a world city and also low levels of productivity in an



average UK region (Peter Gal, 2018). Productivity is an effective measure of economic performance as it is measured by the ratio of output divided by the labour input. In 2015, the Nominal gross value added per hour worked levels was 32% above the UK average in London and 19% below the UK average in Wales and Northern Ireland with the average hours worked higher than UK average in London and lower in the Southwest of England. South Yorkshire had the lowest labour productivity of the city regions with 17% below the UK average (Office for National Statistics, 2017).

Transport infrastructure investment is lower outside London and the Southeast of England. Poor and inadequate transport links can halt growth in Northern cities. Transport infrastructure in many Northern cities was linked to more traditional industries and economies (Brown, 2008), a lack of funding in order to better link people to more service-based jobs can affect the prosperity of certain cities. One example is Hull. Rail links to the port are reaching full capacity and with poor connectivity to other regions in the UK, the threat to the growth of Hull's economy is increased. Improved transport links would allow Hull to create productive and sustainable businesses (Brown, 2008). In terms of public spending, almost 30% of all transport infrastructure spending occurs in London, mainly by Transport for London (Peter Gal, 2018). This difference in spending is also seen on a per capita basis with transport investment spending in London being around GBP 1,000 per resident compared to only GBP 500 per resident in Scotland which comes second in terms of spending (HM Treasury, 2016). Underinvestment in transport in the North means connections between bigger Northern cities is more limited. This has a detrimental effect on economic growth in Northern regions compared to London. In London in 2013/14 the total planned spend per resident on transport infrastructure was £3,095, which provides an extreme contrast to the £460 in the Northwest and £263 in the Northeast (Raikes, 2015).

London is a major tourist destination attracting millions of visitors due to the City's attractions and heritage sites, for example, in 2017 there were 39.2 million recorded tourists and 37.9 million in 2018, in July 2019 alone, £2.9 billion was spent in London by overseas residents (Condor Ferries, 2022). The city also generates £47 billion for the UK's economy annually, accommodates its nearly 9 million population and employs one in six people in the UK (World Cities Culture Forum, 2022).

Within the UK, London also dominates the economy. The city generates 22% of UK GDP despite only accounting for 12.5% of the overall population and according to the Centre for Economic and Business Research, it makes a net contribution to the Exchequer of £34 billion (Kelly, 2015). Whilst Inner London generates £346,627 million in GDP, Greater Manchester only generates £82,743 million and the West Midlands only £76,128 million compared to London (statistica, 2020). Interestingly in 2013, it was reported that (approximately) London's 10 richest boroughs were worth more than all of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales combined (Kelly, 2015). John Lancaster, the author of 'Capital and How to Speak Money' stated that London is "where all the media is, all the power is, all the culture is, all the money is" (Kelly, 2015). These multiple different factors also encourage major Trans-national corporations and institutions like the BBC to establish themselves here. It is important to establish the reason behind the vast difference between London and any other UK city because the gap is unlike many other countries. For example, in Germany, there are multiple different cities famously known for different things, for example, whilst Berlin is the capital and the main political power, Frankfurt is known as the financial hub of Germany, Hamburg and Munich are also



recognised as significant industrial centres (Kelly, 2015). To illustrate this, Frankfurt is home to more than 200 banks, 80% of which are foreign, and Frankfurt is ranked 10th in the Global Financial Centres Index. The European Central Bank (ECB) is also based in Frankfurt which is the central bank of the 19 member states of the European Union meaning it is globally recognised as the financial hub for Germany. (bankenverband, n.d.) This begs the question why and what must be done as a country to close the gap between London and the rest of the UK.

This desire for a more balanced country has had substantial recent focus in the Houses of Parliament. In 2014, Prime Minister (at the time) David Cameron said that the UK economy had been “too London-focused and too centralised.” Also, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne said at the time that the country was “too imbalanced” and “reliant too much on the success of London”.

London’s economy and influence over the UK can be traced back centuries ago and is linked to the physical geography of the land. London’s location near the river Thames meant it was a key area for global trade since the Thames was the main way of transporting people and goods. Its location allowed it to act as a port but also meant that it was near enough agricultural land compared to coastal cities. Alex Werner, head of history collections at the Museum of London said that “It’s really the 17th Century when you are seeing London beginning to emerge as a global centre,” whilst other cities were growing steadily at this time, London’s title as the capital of England and its position as the home of all the major political power meant it had a great advantage over the rest of the UK (Kelly, 2015). During the industrial revolution, despite the rise and growing significance of northern cities such as Manchester and Liverpool that became important industrial hubs, northern cities still failed to overthrow London as the capital city and major political power of the UK. In October 1986, the London Stock Exchange’s rules changed (London Stock Exchange, 2022) (Will Kenton, 2022), this led to an increase in market activity, it attracted overseas banks to London, many old firms were taken over by larger banks. These alterations to the structure of the financial market secured London’s status as the major financial hub in the UK and kick started the rapid rise in skyscrapers and a change to London’s urban geography, this allowed London to develop and expand further.

It is evident that there is clear difference between London and other major northern cities. A cluster of political, economic, and cultural power in one place however can lead to devastating effects on the rest of the country as the government could create London-centric decisions that benefit the capital, but negatively affect the wider country. Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester expressed his opinion on the matter stating in 2019 that after the EU referendum, people have focused on the divisions brought about by this, however “there’s probably a bigger one underlying it, which is London versus the rest.” He also stated that the division “creates that sense of two countries” and that he found “the London-centric nature of our establishment and political system extremely problematic for the country as a whole.” Burnham’s opinion should be listened to cautiously due to his clear conflict of interest and his location due to his role as mayor of Manchester however he emphasises the large disparities between London and the North and calls for change. Examples of decisions that directly benefit London more than other cities are found in multiple different factors , even in simply public spending across the UK within 2020/21, In London, spending £2,042 per person compared to £1,423 per person in the Northwest and £1,203 per person in the Northeast (Brien, 2021). It is easier for the government to allocate funding based on economic performance instead of where it is needed more socially for example within healthcare, education services, and transport infrastructure, e.g., healthcare expenditure is positively associated with the indicators of labour



productivity, GDP, and economic performance. The better the health of citizens of a region, generally it results in an overall better economy (Viju Raghupathi, 2020). Burnham(2018) suggested that the government must trust the regions more to make their own decisions (Pidd, 2019), after all, only when the London-centric bias in the UK fades will funding be more equal across the rest of the UK.

After comparing London with other regions in the UK in terms of GDP, productivity and funding, a London-centric bias does appear to exist and increase the disparities between London and the rest of the UK. More awareness from the government surrounding decisions that affect the whole country is needed in order to counter any initial London-centric bias.

Defining the North-South divide and whether or not it is a growing problem.

Defining the North-South divide

The North-south divide and a London centric bias are different concepts. In England, the North-south divide can be defined as to the economic, social, political, and cultural differences between Southern England and Northern England whereas as mentioned previously, a London centric bias is when government, TNCs and the public view London as separate from other regions in the UK and therefore prioritise it in terms of funding and investment. In this scenario, although London is in the South, the South is not grouped with London in terms of its bias. London operates *in a world of its own*.

Is the North-South divide a growing problem?

Throughout history the existence and importance of the North-South Divide in England has been heavily contested and challenged with many significant public figures and politicians keen to deny the North-South Divide and publicly state that it's nothing more than a myth. According to The Daily Telegraph in 1986 (Jewell, 1994), the Prime Minister at the time, Margaret Thatcher claimed that 'there were simply areas of difficulty in all parts of the country' in an effort to dismiss the importance of the increasing North-South Divide. Furthermore, during "questioning time" on Budget Day in 1989 (Jewell, 1994), Margaret Thatcher declared that the North-South divide had gone, despite clear arguments (Jewell, 1994) that suggested there was an issue and disparity between the two sides of the 'poor North' and the 'rich South'. The paymaster General Kenneth Clarke declared talk of a North-south divide was 'a ridiculous simplification'.

The social and economic inequalities that are exacerbated by the North-South divide are deeply rooted within society and can be traced back to inequalities in previous centuries and the historical physical geography of England (Jewell, 1994). The Economist's regional affairs correspondent, Emma Duncan (1994) mentioned that the South's "false and outdated view of the North was based partly on a prejudice as old as the Industrial revolution." Industrial decline after the industrial revolution is one factor to why there is such a disparity between the North and the South. During the industrial revolution, most Northern cities' economies were dominated by secondary industries such as mining, manufacturing, and the production of raw materials. The Great Northern Coalfield was the biggest producer of coal in the country and other industries were established on the banks of the Tyne and Wear due to the region's coal supply and access to waterways. In 1850, there was a dramatic increase in North-East coal production, from 4.5 million tonnes in 1800, to 10.5 million tonnes in 1850 with 45



million tonnes by 1900 (sitelines.newcastle, n.d.). During the second world war, coal supplied both people's homes and industries (Jewell, 1994) and in 1947, the labour government nationalised 800 coal companies to create a state-owned industry (Jewell, 1994). However, in the 1960s England saw the start of the gradual shut down of the countries mining industry. A global shift occurred in which secondary industries outsourced to developing countries under the 'New international division of Labour' (Misis Institute, n.d.). Meanwhile England shifted to a more tertiary and quaternary based economy and invested more in the 'knowledge economy (Hayes, 2021)'. Events such as the UK miner's strike in 1984-85 led to negative public opinions associated with the North and an increase in economic inequalities (Duncan, 2004).

When trying to contextualise the North-South divide and establish where it stemmed from, it is also important to look at the relationship between the North and South of England as long ago as the Tudor and Stuart times. Politically, the changing relationships with Scotland, and the subsequent effects these relationships had on Southern perspectives of the North were significant after 1603. In the Tudor era in London, trade significantly increased (Jewell, 1994), and the city's population grew as a result. The rise in the number of immigrants arriving from the rest of the UK and the Huguenot refugees arriving from France also contributed to this. (Jewell, 1994) Alex Werner, head of the history collections at the Museum of London said, "it's really the 17th Century when you are seeing London beginning to emerge as a global centre". In the medieval period, the Northerners' rebellion against King John, the Norman anxieties surrounding Northern separatism, the War of the Roses and William the Conqueror causing extensive damage to many towns and estates in the North, all contributed to the deep-rooted inequalities seen between the North and South of England now and the reduced wealth of the North (Jewell, 1994). These examples throughout the past few centuries highlight that this divide has been prevalent throughout history, and all contribute to the perceptions people have of the North and South.

While the North-South divide is prevalent it is worthy of noting that there are many affluent urban areas and cities located North of the divide and equally there are poverty-stricken areas of deprivation in the South, particularly in city centres. In 2004, a report by Barclays Bank even highlighted that the wealthiest parliamentary constituency outside London was actually Sheffield Hallam, suggesting that the inequality and differences in wealth, education and health could be due to multiple other factors, not just location.

Whilst the North Divide is not necessarily a physical division of the landscape and more associated with the social, political, and economic disparities between the North and South, geomorphologically, there is a division that separates the Southeast from the Southwest and could also be linked to what we know as the North South Divide in England. A ridge of Jurassic limestone runs through the middle of England (Southwest all the way to the Northeast). This Jurassic divide shows that the Northwest is of higher ground than the South. This land is fertile and more suited to farming livestock (Jewell, 1994). In the Southeast the land is of lower ground and suitable for arable cultivation (meaning it is able to be ploughed for profit) (Jewell, 1994). The difference in land and what it might be useful for affected settlement patterns. In prehistoric times, agricultural practices played a significant role in social structures in the different regions. (Jewell, 1994) It affected culture and economy in prehistoric times and continued to do so through the Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods which suggests that the physical environment throughout history can also be linked to the present-day disparities (Green, n.d.). After looking at previous governmental figures and their dismissal of the North-South divide, previous centuries and how the North-south divide has grown in size and



also the physical geography of the UK, it has become clear that the North-South divide does exist and that the government's London-centric bias has exacerbated this. In the next section, the paper will outline how education impacted this North-South divide.

How is education impacted by this?

Education is undoubtedly the key to social advancement, and social mobility, acting as a crucial tool for levelling out opportunities nationally. The global partnership for education sees it as a human right (Global Partnership for education, 2022) whilst Nelson Mandela viewed education as 'the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world (Mandela, 2017).' Yet still, in a highly developed country like the UK, with a human development index of 0.92 (UNDP, 2020), and one of the richest economies in the world, inequality within education is evident. Children growing up in poorer families typically leave school with significantly lower educational attainment levels than those from richer households (Paul Gregg, 2010).

Educational inequality is a significant issue in the UK particularly, ranking 23rd in educational inequality within primary schools and 16th within secondary schools, meaning that there is huge disparity between the quality of education received by children across the country (Books2All Team, 2020). In this chapter, the spatial distribution of educational inequality within the UK will be explored, looking into evidence of a London-centric bias and North South divide, whilst investigating the causes and implications of this asymmetrical delivery of education to children across the country.

One way to investigate the distribution of child poverty is through looking at the dispersal of eligible children for free school meals. These are defined as "a statutory benefit available to school-aged children from families who receive other qualifying benefits and who have been through the relevant registration process" by the UK Government Department for Work and Pensions (Department for Work & Pensions, 2013). Government statistics show that the Northeast have the highest rates of eligibility with 29.1% of pupils qualifying for free school meals, followed by the west midlands with 26.5% of students having eligibility (gov.uk, 2022), giving evidence to support the idea of childhood poverty being higher in the North of the country than the South, translating to a North-South educational divide. However, London, joint with the West Midlands, showed the highest increase in eligible pupils for free school meals by 2% over the 2021 to 2022 academic year (gov.uk, 2022). This data, although supporting the claim of a North-South educational divide, contradicts the idea of a London-centric bias, as the data shows rising levels of poverty within the city. The free school meals data allows us to see what regions of the country struggle most with child poverty, however, this does not necessarily directly translate to a lower quality of teaching or education. To research the impact of child poverty on education other forms of statistics must be examined, such as public exam results.

GCSEs and A-levels are important public exams sat by the majority of students in the country, generally between the ages of 16 and 18. Data shows that there is a correlation between high A-level grades and earnings, with the London economics report to the department of education claiming that there is a "strong positive wage returns to A-levels- irrespective of whether the individual goes on to



complete further or higher qualifications” (Gavan Conlon, 2015). The report then goes on to explain that “Men with A levels at grades A-C achieve a significant earnings premium (over 10%) compared to those without” (Gavan Conlon, 2015). This data supports the importance of education as a tool to allow individuals to escape poverty.

Generally, the most privileged and affluent regions obtain higher grades in public exams due to the superior access to high quality teaching and resources, with the 2015 GCSE results showing that one in three disadvantaged students received the Governments pass mark compared to more than 60% for more privileged pupils in the country (Adams, 2015). This statement above can be further supported by looking at the number of private schools in different regions across the country. Surrey is one of the richest counties in the UK, with its homes having an overall value of almost £288 billion which is representative of 5.1% of the UK's total property wealth of £5.6 trillion (Barton Wyatt, n.d.). The county is home to 47 private schools, (My Top Schools, 2022), illustrating the wealth of the county and high-quality education and opportunities many children in the county are offered. This is significantly higher than many other areas of the country, with Merseyside in Liverpool having 12 private schools (gov.uk, n.d.)and Cornwall having only 5 (GOV.UK, n.d.). London has 101 private schools, significantly more than any other region in the UK (My Top Schools, 2022). This displays the uneven accessibility for students across the country and asymmetrical distribution of opportunity. The table below (Figure 1) (Richard Blundell, 2013) shows that despite the Northwest of the country not being the worst in terms of educational participation, its numbers remain significantly lower than

Table 1. Percentage of young people entering higher education by region and free school meal (FSM) status

Region	FSM (%)	Non-FSM (%)	Gap (ppt)
East of England	19	42	23
East Midlands	20	41	21
London	45	57	12
Inner London	48	58	9
Outer London	42	57	15
North East	19	44	25
North West	23	46	22
South East	18	44	26
South West	18	39	22
West Midlands	27	45	18
Yorkshire and the Humber	22	43	21

London, giving evidence to support the existence of a London-centric bias, allowing pupils based in London to have more educational opportunities, contributing to London’s high number of people entering higher education (Richard Blundell, 2013).

However, this distribution of opportunity is not simply between the North and South. Although the south is home to the

Figure 1: Percentage of young people entering higher education by region and free school meal status (Richard Blundell, 2013)

most affluent county, with access to the highest number of private schools, this is not necessarily the case for all southern counties, and there are several regions in the South who have inadequate access to a high quality of education, with Havering, a borough in London, having 44% of 19 year olds lacking a level 3 qualification in 2016 (Barker, 2016) The same applies to the North, where despite there being areas where education is insufficient, there are other more affluent regions where the quality of education children receive much higher, with Leeds having 80.7% of students receiving at least level 3 qualifications (Leeds Observatory, 2020) Therefore, data does show evidence of inequality within education, but the spatiality of this inequality is not simply between the North and



South but can be found in almost all areas of the country, including London, where some of the most income-deprived neighbourhoods are found north of Kensington and Chelsea.

Family income is a vital factor directly contributing to the differentiation between members of society and the widening of the chasm between groups in the country (Kerris Cooper, 2013). The existence of private schools allows more financially stable families to send their children to these better equipped independent schools, which open a multitude of doors through the increased access to opportunities, resources, high quality teaching, as well as connections to highly ranked universities. These conditions enable children to thrive, reaching their full potential, and maximising their public exam grades which consequently puts them on a trajectory to attend the best universities and benefit from a high paying job in the future. The reverse however happens in low-income families, when quality education is unattainable, isolating children from opportunities and grand career paths, making breaking out of the poverty trap near to impossible. In many deprived areas, schools do not receive the minimum funding needed to create an appropriate working environment for children to thrive, restricting their ability to reach their full potential and putting them at a significant disadvantage compared to children attending highly ranked private schools with large amounts of funding and an abundance of resources, exacerbating inequality, and enhancing the positive feedback loop. The National association of head teachers spoke out about the Governments “failure to invest” in the state school sector in 2021, with close to 1/3 of school leaders being forced to make cuts to balance their budget and a further 35% who, at the time, expected that they would be forced to make cuts during the 2022 academic year (NAHT The School Leaders' Union, 2021). In addition to this, 26% of school leaders envisaged a 2021-22 deficit budget based on their current funding levels (NAHT The School Leaders' Union, 2021). These financial pressures put on many schools in the state sector force them to reduce their pupil support, enrichment activities as well as undergo staff cuts (NAHT The School Leaders' Union, 2021). Private schools are less likely to experience these pressures because they have a steady income of money from school fees and don't rely on unstable and inconsistent government funding.

This gives evidence to support the educational divide, but is the divide across the north and south of the country and is there a government bias towards London? The 2019 annual government educational report released information stating that London continues to dominate areas with the smallest disadvantage gaps,' expanding to say, 'Poorer pupils are only 3.9 months behind their peers at GCSE in Westminster, and 5.3 months behind in Tower Hamlets' (Hutchinson, 2019). This statistic clearly illustrates the different standards of education provided in different areas of the country; however, both these Boroughs are located in London, giving evidence to counter the argument for the existence of a London centric bias, with areas all around the country, including London, experiencing levels of varied educational quality, with the most disadvantaged pupils being on average 12 months behind the more privileged member of the cohort by the age of 16 (London Assembly, 2020). This supports the idea that despite the UK being riddled with social inequality, which directly influences children's access to education and opportunities, the spatial distribution of the issue is not as simple as 'North' and 'South'. London itself has some of the highest inequality rates



in the country, with many families moving into the city to take advantage of the higher wages and abundant job opportunities, however struggling to withstand the significantly higher living costs, dragging many families into poverty, with 28% of people in London living in poverty in 2020, which is higher than the national average of 22% (Trust for London, 2022).

On the other hand, however, the 2019 education report quotes, “large disadvantage gaps remain well-established in several areas in England but are particularly acute in the North. In Rotherham and Blackpool, poorer pupils are trailing their peers by over two years by the time they finish their GCSEs” (Hutchinson, 2019). This statistic gives evidence to support the existence of a north south divide, with educational inequality levels generally being much higher in the North. The fact that northern secondary schools receive £1,300 less per pupil than schools located in London most likely plays into the uneven levels of education across the country as well and also supports the idea of a London-centric bias (Weale, 2016). The government plays an instrumental role in levelling our opportunities across the country and providing every child with an equal and valid level of education, however, with government spending towards schooling being so un-universal nationally, the educational divide has no hope of closing, setting more and more children behind, restricting their abilities, and holding them back from reaching their full potential academically.

The concern of educational inequality was only exacerbated as a result of the covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic took an especially huge toll on the economy, and social services, mainly the NHS, however it is crucial that we consider the astonishing impact the pandemic had on education in the UK and the asymmetrical delivery of schooling provided across the country. Throughout the various lockdowns initiated by the Government in attempt to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus, levels of education received across the country varied massively, with some students receiving daily, full-time online school, through video calls with teachers, and work set online, whilst others had no access to teaching or educational resources throughout the entire time of school closures. The impact this has had on this generation’s education and division of pupil’s abilities is significant (Trust, 2017)

So why was there such disparity in levels of teaching across the country? Firstly, for more privileged families, whose children attend more financially stable schools in more affluent areas, accessibility to electronic devices and an appropriate working environment would have been less of an issue. These schools tended to have existing online learning resources in place and were therefore able to adapt to the new restrictions much quicker and more efficiently, minimising the amount of learning loss for these children. These conditions are drastically contrasted in other areas, where under-funded schools in the state sector had no means to provide teaching in the same way many private and grammar schools were. Most students do not have access to their own electronic device to contact teachers or access online resources (Whittaker, 2020) and living conditions do not accommodate suitable learning environments, hence resulting in a massive loss of learning, setting these children back significantly from more privileged members of their cohort.

Research shows that at private schools, 51% of primary and 57% of secondary students were provided with daily online lessons to keep students up to date with their learning. “This is twice more likely



than their counterparts in state schools” as said by the children’s commissioner (commissioner, 2020). Schooling is vital to establishing a range of skills in children and the loss of schooling as a result of the pandemic will result in a lower-skilled cohort, leading to significant implications for this generation’s future, as well as potentially the future economy. Generally, evidence suggests that there is a strong link between earnings and skill set, with national statistics inciting that higher skill levels lead to higher earnings (The DELVE Initiative, 2020). The delve initiative released that “Each school year brings approximately a 10% return, so for students who have missed two years of schooling, earnings are likely to be potentially 20% lower than members of their cohort who had access to quality schooling during the pandemic, putting them at high risk of facing poverty in the future.” (The DELVE Initiative, 2020). This, however, is not the case for all children across the country, as whilst some individuals lost over a year’s worth of teaching, others experienced minimal impact on their educational attainment and progress, massively widening the chasm and exacerbating inequality throughout the country.

However, how does this translate to a north south divide and London-centric bias? The Office for national statistics released that remote learners in schools with higher rates of children eligible for free school meals covered less in-class learning materials than remote learners attending schools with a lower number of pupils eligible for free school meals (Office for National Statistics, 2021). As mentioned earlier in the paper, the number of children eligible for free school meals is higher in the North of the country than the south, meaning that generally, pupils in the North suffered more education loss than those in the south, suggesting that Covid-19 has increased the significance of a North South divide.

Evidence suggests that although data proves that inequality within the educational sector is evident and widespread throughout the country, it tends to be slightly more concentrated in the North rather than the South, with the North showing higher inequality levels and reduced state funding per pupil. Data supporting the existence of a London centric bias however is limited, with London additionally showing high levels of inequality and higher poverty levels than the remainder of the country.

How is healthcare impacted by this?

From a range of figures, we can see that overall, there is a lower average lifespan for both male and females in the north of England than in southern England. This is backed up by people in London having an average lifespan of 80.9 years and people in Southeast and Southwest England having an average age span of 80.6 years, compared to those in the Northwest and Northeast who have an average lifespan of 78 and 78.4 years respectively (White, 2020). Moreover, it has been stated that, Males living in the four most southerly regions of England had life expectancies at birth exceeding 80 years, whereas regions of the Midlands and the north fell short of 80 years; London exceeded the Northeast region by almost three years’ (White, 2020). This evidence shows the disparity in quality of life and living conditions between the two areas.

Evidence for the lower life expectancy is partly due to the fact that London has the largest ratio of patients registered with a GP compared to the number of citizens recorded on the census than any



other area of England (Baker, 2016). On average, London practices have 6% more patients on their lists than local census data suggests would live in the practice area (Manchester, 2018). This compares with an average over-registration level of 3.9% for the entire English population (Burch, 2018). With GP's being the place that people go to undergo medical screening the lower and 70% of cancer cases being preventable there is a positive correlation between the number of cancer cases and deaths in the north of England. The lack of ease in making GP appointments has risen since the outbreak of COVID-19. With over 10% of patients in Yorkshire having to wait more than 15 days for an online appointment in 2021 (Park, 2020). , online appointments increase the healthcare divide between the North and South because the average age of a person living in Yorkshire is 40.3 years old and (a high proportion of these residents ages are concentrated in the over 65 meaning a greater number of people do not have access to the internet or do not have a sufficient technological competency to undertake online appointments. (Park, 2020)

The highest volume of specialist children's hospitals in England are based in London, (including Great Ormond Street and Evelina Children's hospital) (Williamson, 2022). However, it can be argued that the health divide is largely down to accessibility as only 55% of rural households are within five miles of a hospital in comparison to 97% of urban areas such as London (NHS Providers, 2021) The expense of having specialist doctors and equipment in each hospital is extortionate and simply not feasible.

People in the North of England are generally less healthy in terms of food intake than those in the South. This is true across all social groups and among both men and women (Raleigh, 2021). There is a 2-year life expectancy gap between the northern regions and the rest of England, and premature death rates are 20% higher across all age groups (Raleigh, 2021). Over the past 50 years, this is equivalent to over 1.5 million northerners dying earlier than if they had experienced the same lifetime health chances as those in the rest of England (Clare Bambra, 2021).

A report by the Royal College of Physicians found that there has been an unequal health impact as a result of COVID-19. There is evidence from a number of studies to support this (Clare Bambra, 2021). COVID-19. This is a result of the underlying health issues citizens have in this area. Mortality rates in the 'Northern Powerhouse,' between March and July of 2020 as a result of COVID, when the first UK lockdown was implemented were much higher than rates in London. On average a surplus of 12.4 people per 100,000 died than London. Moreover, an extra 57.7 people in 100,000 people died in this region as a result of other health issues. This is however expected due to the difference in population density, in 2020, London's population density was 5,701 people per square kilometre, this is more than 10 times higher than that of the next most densely populated region of England: The Northwest (Park, 2020). Covid transmissions are more likely in areas with large population densities.

These statistics give evidence to suggest that there are disparities between healthcare in London and Northern England. The University of Manchester found that Greater Manchester's health and health social care spending was estimated to be £2 billion in deficit by 2020 and the fact that London, a city with a young population and a median of 0.38 health conditions per patient, which is lower than the national median of 0.51, receives more funding than the Northeast, with a median of 0.59 and Northwest with a median of 0.55 (The University of Manchester, 2018) suggests that a London-centric bias within the healthcare sector is evident, this in turn exacerbates the North- South divide.



Conclusion

After defining the term 'London-centric bias', evidence suggests that in the fields of both education and healthcare, a London-centric bias is an evident contributor to the North-South divide. London's location within the UK, the industrial revolution and its status as a world city has allowed it to gain more funding and produce a higher percentage of the UK's GDP compared to any other region in the UK. Similarly, past historical settlements and the physical geography of the UK alongside a lack of accountability within government for the disparities between London and the rest of the UK has meant that there is a North-South divide. These initial problems have contributed to inequalities between the North and the South in terms of education and healthcare within the UK. Whilst this paper did not look into crime as a significant factor affected, future research papers should research this as it also highlights that there is a London centric bias, and it does contribute to the North-South divide.

In regard to education, it is evident that educational inequality exists within the UK and the Covid-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the issue, widening the gap between the fortunate and less fortunate. Although educational inequality can be found across the country as a whole, data suggests that it is slightly more concentrated in the North, with government spending per pupil being lower in the North than South (Weale, 2016), and child poverty being higher in the north with an increased number of children eligible for free school meals (GOV.UK, 2022), therefore supporting the idea of a North South divide. A London centric bias within education however is harder to prove, as despite spending per pupil being higher in the city (Weale, 2016), levels of both inequality (Oakley, 2021) and poverty remain elevated (Trust for London, 2020).

In terms of healthcare disparities within the UK, it is evident within the paper that there are indeed differences in quality of healthcare across the North and South of the UK, with this gap being widened as a result of COVID-19. Though healthcare quality varies across the whole country, there is a London-centric bias within the system, due to there being more funding and specialist hospitals in London than anywhere North of England as mentioned previously.



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