

Wiltshire's Readiness To Meet The New Requirements For Raising The Participation Age (RPA)

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides an overview of Wiltshire's readiness to meet the new statutory duties for Local Authorities set out in the Education and Skills Act 2008, to Raise the Participation Age (RPA). These duties increase the minimum age at which young people in England can leave learning, requiring them to continue in education or training until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17 from 2013 and until their 18th birthday from 2015.

Background

2. The Government has set out the purpose of RPA as:
 - giving young people knowledge and skills that the economy need to prosper in the 21 century
 - reducing inequality and closing the achievement gap
 - ensuring participation, with a need for education and training opportunities to provide a good breadth and balance to enable young people to achieve their potential
3. The requirements set out in the Education and Skills Act 2008 in relation to RPA will require that young people remain in education or training. It does not mean however that young people must stay in school. They will be able to choose one of the following options:
 - full-time education, including school sixth form, college or home education
 - work-based learning, such as an Apprenticeship
 - part-time education or training if they are employed, self-employed or volunteering for more than 20 hours a week.
4. Young people who are currently in Year 10 are the first group of young people affected by the change of legislation; these young people will be required to continue in education or training until they are 17. The current group of pupils in year 8 (those who will be 16 in 2015) are the group who will be required to remain in education or training until they are 18 years of age.

5. In Wiltshire, in November 2011, 88.6% of 16 year olds and 83.2% of 17 year olds were participating in education, work based learning or a job with training. By February 2012 the figure for 16 year olds had increased to 90.3% and for 17 years had decreased slightly to 82.3%. The participation data in Wiltshire shows favourable trends with the number of young people entering post 16 education or employment with training rising dramatically from 2007 where it was 64%. Of those leaving Year 11 in 2011 who were in Education, Employment and Training (EET), 88% were in Education (FE or 6th Form). There has been an increase in the take up of apprenticeships by 4% from 2009/10 to a total of 1,137 16-18 year olds accessing apprenticeships in 2010/11. There has been a decline in young people entering employment, 6.2% in 2008 compared to 3.1% in 2011.
6. In Wiltshire, in February 2012, 856 16-18 year olds were not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) out of a cohort of 15,088 (5.7%). Although participation trends are favourable, the challenge is in moving from this position to one of full participation by 2015 against a background of a weaker economic position and less available funding to support young people continuing in education.
7. To meet the increased demand for places nationally the government has recently confirmed its commitment to increase the funded places for young people's education and training and to raising investment in Apprenticeships. The delivery of additional Apprenticeship places for young people will be assisted by the provision of funding for up to 40,000 incentive payments for small business to take on Apprentices age 16-24.
8. The RPA legislation places two duties on local authorities:
 - i) to promote the effective participation in education and training of young people resident in their area and
 - ii) make arrangements to identify young people in their area who are not participating

Although not a specific duty under RPA the expectation is that local authorities will lead partners as part of their wider responsibility for young people to ensure the identified young people are supported to re-engage in education and training. Further guidance on the specific detail relating to local authority duties is expected shortly following a national consultation on RPA regulations which closed on the 13 April 2012.

Key actions and main consideration for the Council

9. The 13-19 Strategic Board has been leading the Wiltshire Council response to RPA. It has established a strategy group who will oversee the implementation of Wiltshire's RPA Strategy and its subsequent action plan, both of which have been agreed by the 13-19 Strategic Board. The detailed RPA strategy and action plan is as Appendix 1. In summary, Wiltshire RPA Strategy focuses on:
 - a. analysing and understanding each cohort of young people in order to establish targeted activity
 - b. identifying those at risk of not participating and supporting them to participate,

- c. supporting young people in accessing appropriate pathways and progression information
- d. ensuring education and training provision is in place to meet the needs of all learners, especially those who are vulnerable
- e. working with employers to identify skills gaps within Wiltshire, support workforce development and support Apprenticeships as a route of participation
- f. raising awareness of RPA to all audiences

10. The delivery of the action plan will be further enhanced by a successful bid to the Department of Education (DfE) to participate in Phase 4 of the RPA locally-led delivery projects. The project outline and action plan (agreed with the DfE and contained within Appendix 2) have been designed to enhance and extend the Council's existing planning. The project is grant funded by the DfE at £75,000. This current phase of the project is focused on identifying the local challenges and the actions that can be taken to develop approaches to raise awareness and increase participation by 2013/15.

11. The RPA strategy, action plan and the DfE project have collectively identified a number of key performance indicators which will be monitored and reported on regularly via the various accountability structures, including to the DfE. A number of new indicators and tools will be developed as part of the strategy including the development of a 'risk of NEET indicator' (RONI); this indicator will help both providers (schools and the college) and the local authority to identify young people who are at particular risk of becoming NEET. In highlighting those who are most vulnerable, co-ordinated action can be taken to address individual needs. A 'RONI' pilot has been agreed with secondary Headteachers, looking at both the key cohorts and to inform wider practice.

12. A range of other actions are in place to support RPA and these include:

- a. development of a range performance indicators and data sharing protocols for partners and providers
- b. work with education and training providers regarding the curriculum offer and opportunities and development of increased capacity within key areas of Wiltshire
- c. improving information access for young people regarding local opportunities, including 'Your Choices' leaflet, website and App
- d. communication strategy, including a theatre tour and press campaign to ensure young people, parents, employers and the public understand RPA.
- e. work with employers and other key groups who will be able to support and provide opportunities in addition to those which are already in place.
- f. increasing the provision and opportunities for those who are already vulnerable, including through the development of Foundation Learning, Key Stage 4 Engagement Programmes, specialist LLDD programmes, monitoring and further development of post 16 engagement programmes through initiatives such as European Social Fund and Youth Contract.

Risk Assessment

13. RPA is a statutory requirement and the Wiltshire RPA strategy and action plan seeks by its nature to secure 100% participation for all young people to the age of 18 from 2015. Rigorous monitoring of the performance indicators, swift action and early intervention will help to secure full participation.
14. From the evidence to date it is anticipated those who need to be the focus of activity are those who are considered to be the most vulnerable against other measures coupled with those who are 17 and 18 year olds.

Financial Implications

15. The immediate financial implications for delivering the strategy and plan are being managed within planned budget and the additional resource (£75,000) from the DfE as part of the awarded bid.
16. As the strategy and plan are delivered there may be some additional financial demands, but it is anticipated that these will be managed within existing resources.

Conclusion and Recommendation

17. The Wiltshire RPA Strategy and action plan is in place with clear lines of accountability and a timeline agreed by the DfE and endorsed by Wiltshire's 13-19 Strategic Board. The implementation of the plan will be monitored and adjustments made in order that the key performance indicator of a 100% participation is secured.
18. The committee is invited to note the contents of the report.

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Unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report: None

Appendices

- 1 Wiltshire RPA Strategy and Action Plan.
- 2 Wiltshire RPA DfE locally led delivery project Phase 4 action plan