

# councils' views on the effectiveness of the 16–19 commissioning process

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# Councils' views on the effectiveness of the 16–19 commissioning process

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# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>vii</b>
Key findings	vii
Conclusions and council recommendations	viii
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Context	1
1.2 Purpose and aim	2
1.3 Methodology	2
1.4 Structure of report	3
<b>2 Overall effectiveness of the 16–19 commissioning process</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 Overall effectiveness	4
2.2 Meeting local need	5
<b>3 The role of the council</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 Councils' views on their influence, resources and involvement in the funding of 16–19 provision	8
3.2 Changing local commissioning	9
<b>4 Commissioning of re-engagement activities</b>	<b>10</b>
4.1 EFA-commissioned re-engagement provision	10
4.2 Collaboration between the EFA and SFA	11
<b>5 High needs students</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6 Concluding comments and councils' recommendations</b>	<b>14</b>
6.1 Concluding comments	14
6.2 Councils' recommendations	14
<b>References</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Appendix A Case studies</b>	<b>17</b>
A.1 Barking and Dagenham	17
A.2 Dudley	19
A.3 Kent	22
A.4 Shropshire	25
A.5 South Tyneside	27



# Foreword

Local government is ambitious for all young people, wanting to give them the best possible support to become independent and prosperous adults. It is our ambition that all partners collectively work towards this objective in every place.

In our view, success is underpinned by coherent and responsive relationships between services around young people as they grow up, and between services, employers and young people across the areas in which they live their life.

Councils are uniquely placed to make this happen, and have moral, democratic and statutory responsibilities to do so. In short, we are best able to convene partnerships of providers and build strong relationships that bind services around a set of quality progression options for young people, and use their responsibilities for planning, transport and business rates to engage employers.

We have therefore commissioned this survey with the aim of understanding the extent to which the national funding of further education (FE) and re-engagement activity through the Education Funding Agency (EFA) helps councils fulfil these responsibilities.

There are, in our view, two significant conclusions to be drawn from the research. Firstly, that the current national funding model is often struggling to respond to the unique circumstances across different local areas. Secondly, and importantly, local partners do not have sufficient opportunity to help prevent or resolve this problem where they identify it in their areas.

The lagged funding payment method, absence of local authority influence, and a move towards larger contracts are factors regularly identified as being responsible for this. Insufficient funding, the split of responsibilities between the EFA and Skills Funding Agency (SFA) are identified as key barriers for supporting high needs students.

This is an issue for us all, and one that we want to work with all partners to resolve. The post-16 learning landscape is undergoing significant reform, and at a time when the transition from education into the workplace is becoming longer and more challenging.

Many of these reforms are positive. The Raising of the Participation Age, the Study Programmes, and the associated focus on numeracy, literacy and work experience are all positive policy reforms that should be driven through at the national level.

But it is fundamental that the funding of national reforms delivers a responsive and flexible system that recognises and supports the unique local demographic and economic circumstances of different places, rather than hindering it.

So we want to explore with government how the reforms to the funding of 16 to 19 re-engagement and education provision can support local authorities to enable coherent, responsive models across their local areas.

In the short term we want to look at how local authorities can influence the funding of further education and re-engagement provision as early as possible, and to ensure that it continues to meet the shifting need and local service offer across each place.

In the longer term we want to explore alternative funding models that reinforce the ambition for high-quality and responsive post-16 education, but which reinforce, rather than detract from, the collaborative local approaches between providers, local authorities and employers across local areas.

It is crucial that we get this right. All services must work together around young people, giving them the best chance of benefiting from opportunities for growth. All services have to work together around young people to achieve this.

We hope this survey on the experience and activity of councils helps take forward that debate.



Councillor David Simmonds  
Chair of the LGA Children and Young People Board



# Executive summary

The aim of the research was to examine councils' views on the current approach to commissioning education and training provision for 16–19 year olds, managed nationally by the Education Funding Agency (EFA), and to assess its effectiveness and local impact. The methodology involved an online survey of councils, and in-depth case-study telephone interviews with representatives from five councils. In total, 73 council representatives responded to the survey.

## Key findings

### Overall effectiveness

Over half of the council respondents (53 per cent) reported that the commissioning process for local 16–19 education and training provision is effective overall, with 52 per cent stating it is fairly effective and one per cent stating it is very effective.

### Responsiveness to local need

The majority of respondents believed that the EFA is restricted in the extent to which it is responsive to local need:

- Nearly half stated that the EFA is responsive to local need to only a 'limited extent' (45 per cent) while a slightly smaller proportion stated that the EFA is responsive to 'some extent' (37 per cent). A notable minority of respondents (14 per cent) believed that the EFA is not responsive to local need at all.
- Over half of the respondents (52 per cent) do not think that the EFA is fast enough in its response to councils' needs.
- The majority of respondents (77 per cent) reported that they agree that the lagged system is a barrier to a locally flexible and responsive allocation of funds.

Over half of council respondents (58 per cent) do not agree that the EFA is sufficiently driven by the needs of

young people and employers (not providers). Around one in five (19 per cent) think that the EFA is sufficiently driven by these needs.

Over half of the respondents (60 per cent) believe the EFA does understand a need for holistic provision, but almost one in five (19 per cent) stated that they do not believe this is the case.

### The role of the council

The majority of respondents (86 per cent) felt that their council does not have sufficient influence over their EFA funding allocation and 76 per cent reported that it is difficult to change the commissioning of local provision. Most respondents (92 per cent) said that the EFA needs to provide more funds so that councils can commission more local provision.

### Re-engagement activity and high needs students (HNS)

Over half of respondents (51 per cent) said that the approaches/processes adopted by the EFA are limited in the extent to which they are able to reflect local needs to reduce the number of those not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The majority of respondents stated that they believe that the effectiveness of the collaboration between the EFA and SFA is restricted to some degree:

- Thirty-eight per cent of respondents said that the EFA and SFA work together effectively 'to some extent' to ensure local employment/skills needs are met while the same proportion stated that this is to a 'limited extent'.
- Over two-fifths (44 per cent) reported that they believe the EFA and SFA work together effectively to ensure HNS' needs are met 'to a limited extent' while 30 per cent stated 'to some extent' and 19 per cent said 'not at all'.

Nearly three-fifths of respondents (58 per cent) reported that they are dissatisfied with funding for HNS in their local area.

## Conclusions and council recommendations

Councils responding to the research had a range of views on the effectiveness of the current EFA approach to funding and commissioning courses and programmes for 16–19 year olds. However, there was some agreement that the approach could be improved in the areas of: responsiveness to local need; flexibility to meet local demographic change; and providing appropriate opportunities for vulnerable groups.

The main recommendations made by council representatives are presented below.

- Councils should have more influence on decisions that the EFA make about awarding contracts for 16–19 provision in their area.
- The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in determining need and commissioning and delivering provision should be made very clear.
- There should be more effective lines of communication with the EFA and SFA.
- There should be parity of esteem between participants involved in the dialogue so that all contributions are valued equally.
- Commissioners should take into account young people's views about what learning and training offers should be provided.
- There should be more transparency regarding the provision that the EFA and SFA are commissioning local providers to deliver.
- There should be greater flexibility in national funding rules to enable local discretion to meet local needs.
- Decisions about 16–19 provision should be based on the most up-to-date and detailed information and intelligence available.
- Where possible, councils and providers should work in partnership to make a more localised, broader and better-quality learning and training offer.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Context

The post-16 learning landscape in England is undergoing major reform. As a result, councils are working with and responding to organisational and policy changes affecting the funding and commissioning of 16–19 provision.

At the local level, the rapid increase in the number of academies during 2011–12 has, for many authorities, resulted in a new mixture of sixth-form provision in the maintained and academy sectors. This creates a situation where local 16–19 provision comes from a mixture of: sixth forms in academies; sixth forms in maintained schools; independent colleges and other training providers.

Among the key national policy developments that have affected 16–19 education and training are the following:

- The government accepted the recommendations of the Wolf report (2011) which called for major changes in the content, rigour and certification of vocational education which will result in a reduction in the variety of courses.
- The introduction of Study Programmes for 16–19 year olds in September 2013. Funding for these programmes is ‘per student’ rather than ‘per qualification’ (Department for Education and Education Funding Agency (2012)).
- Authorities and providers have implemented the first phase of the Raising of the Participation Age agenda for those young people aged 17 in 2013–14, and are making preparations for the second phase for those aged 18 in 2014–15.
- Changes to the information advice and guidance regime that influence young people’s choices at 14 and 16 were implemented in 2012 with schools taking responsibility for ensuring access to impartial and independent careers guidance (England and Wales. Statutes (2012)).

Through all this change councils have been required to fulfil their statutory duty in respect of securing sufficient suitable education and training opportunities to meet the reasonable needs of all young people in their area. This is exemplified by the ‘September Guarantee’ to 16 and 17 year olds, of a suitable offer of education or training in a school, college, work-based training or apprenticeships. To meet this duty, authorities have been required to:

- continue work that determines what are the ‘reasonable needs’ of young people, responding to significant economic and demographic changes affecting many local areas
- maintain changing relationships with current and potential providers, as well as neighbouring authorities and national agencies, in order to secure appropriate provision.

The 2012 September Guarantee figures show that an offer of a suitable place in education or training was made to 92.4 per cent of young people aged 16–17 in England. This ranged from 90.2 per cent in the south east to 94.2 per cent in Yorkshire and the Humber. The September Guarantee ‘offer not appropriate’ – young people who did not apply for education or training because they were in employment without training or who have barriers to address before education or training can be considered – applied to 1.9 per cent of 16–17 year olds in England, ranging from 0.5 per cent in London to 2.7 per cent in the east of England. ‘No offer’, meaning that young people did not receive an offer because they were undecided about what to do next, awaiting the result of an application or were not able to find a suitable place, applied to 1.6 per cent of 16–17 year olds in England, ranging from 0.9 in London to 2.3 per cent in the West Midlands. The September Guarantee dataset includes figures for individual councils which require interpretation with reference to the local context. This was undertaken within the case-study stage of this research.

A feature of 16–19 provision is that it exhibits wider local variation compared to pre-16 education, to

reflect local demographic characteristics and economic pressures. Historically, the council has been at the centre of shaping local provision, often as part of the work of the local economic, strategic or 14–19 partnerships.

The key player in determining education and training provision is now the Education Funding Agency (EFA), an executive agency of the Department for Education (DfE). Established in April 2012, the EFA has a range of responsibilities in relation to 16–19 provision including:

- allocating 16–19 revenue funding and learner support budgets
- maintaining and developing funding systems for 16–19 education and for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities up to age 25
- tendering and funding the Youth Contract allocations for disengaged 16 and 17 year olds
- giving support to providers on funding and financial matters.

In addition, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) has responsibility for funding provision for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities (LLDD) who are aged over 19 and under 25.

How councils are working with the EFA and SFA in the context of current national procurement arrangements is the focus of this project.

The purpose and aims of the research are presented below.

## 1.2 Purpose and aim

The purpose of the research was to examine the current approach to commissioning education and training provision for 16–19 year olds, managed nationally by the Education Funding Agency (EFA), and to assess its effectiveness and local impact.

More specifically, the aims of the research were to capture, analyse and report councils' views on the range of EFA funds targeting 16–19 year olds, including:

- the current EFA approach and whether it is efficient and effective, results in suitable provision offered to

local areas, and reflects local needs or requires local areas to fit into the national process and available provision

- EFA funding support for the provision of an integrated education and training offer which meets the needs of all young people (including high needs students aged 16 to 24)
- EFA mainstream and re-engagement provision and whether it meets need and has impact
- vocational funded provision (and whether it results in job outcomes)
- the extent to which young people and employers value the learning offer
- whether re-commissioning of local provision is needed
- whether improvements in learning provision for 16–19 year olds are required
- the challenges that councils face, if any, in having to additionally deal with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funding for skills training. It will explore how councils must work with the SFA and the EFA and the impact on local areas.

## 1.3 Methodology

The methodology comprised four stages:

### Stage 1 Scoping study (March – April 2013)

The scoping study included interviews with three stakeholders who have a strategic understanding of commissioning 16–19 education and training provision. This enabled the research team to gain a wider view of the opportunities and challenges involved in shaping provision to meet changing local needs. After this, the research team drafted the online survey and piloted it with relevant staff in two councils.

### Stage 2 Online survey (May – July 2013)

The survey questions covered councils' views on the efficiency and effectiveness of the EFA approach to

commissioning 16–19 education and training provision and the extent to which this meets local needs.

The online survey was emailed to all 152 councils in England. The online survey was administered by the NFER's Research Operations department who put in place procedures for engaging respondents and maximising response rates. This included reminders by telephone and email. At the end of the survey, we asked councils if they were willing to take part in the case-study stage of the research.

In total 73 councils responded to the survey, a response rate of 48 per cent. The majority of respondents were senior managers in councils including service leads and skills and education managers.

### **Stage 3 September Guarantee figures analysis**

We undertook a brief analysis of the September Guarantee figures on offers of education or training for 16 and 17 year olds (published on 31 January 2013). The September Guarantee figures help councils to fulfil their statutory duties in relation to post-16 participation, especially the extent to which the education and training offer is appropriate to young people's needs. This analysis helped to add context to the report and the figures for particular councils were discussed with case-study interviewees.

### **Stage 4 Case studies (July – September 2013)**

In this stage of the research, we carried out five council case studies. The selection of the case studies was drawn from those councils which had self-nominated through the online survey. We included councils in different regional and urban/rural geographic and socio-economic areas.

The case studies comprised up to two telephone interviews: one with a senior manager in the council, and where appropriate, one interview with an elected member who has knowledge and responsibility for policy on commissioning education and training for 16–19 year olds. In total five interviews were completed with senior managers and three interviews with elected members. Where we were unable to secure a telephone interview with the elected member, we asked for their feedback on the case-study write-up. These case studies are presented at the end of this report.

## **1.4 Structure of report**

The structure of the report is detailed below:

- Chapter 2 presents council views on the effectiveness of the 16–19 commissioning process including the extent to which it meets local need.
- Chapter 3 focuses on the role of the council in the allocation of EFA funding and the commissioning of local provision.
- Chapter 4 provides evidence on the commissioning of re-engagement activities for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- Chapter 5 focuses on the funding and commissioning of provision for high needs students (HNS).
- Chapter 6 presents concluding comments and a summary of councils' recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the 16–19 commissioning process.

Details on the five council case studies are provided at the back of the report (Appendix A).

## 2 Overall effectiveness of the 16–19 commissioning process

This chapter presents the research evidence on councils' views of the overall effectiveness of the current 16–19 commissioning process and the extent to which local needs are being met.

### 2.1 Overall effectiveness

Councils were asked to rate the overall effectiveness of the commissioning process for local 16–19 education and training provision from September 2013 onwards. As can be seen in Figure 2.1, over half of the respondents reported that the commissioning process was effective overall (53 per cent; 39 of 73 respondents), with 52 per cent stating it was fairly effective and one per cent stating it was very effective.

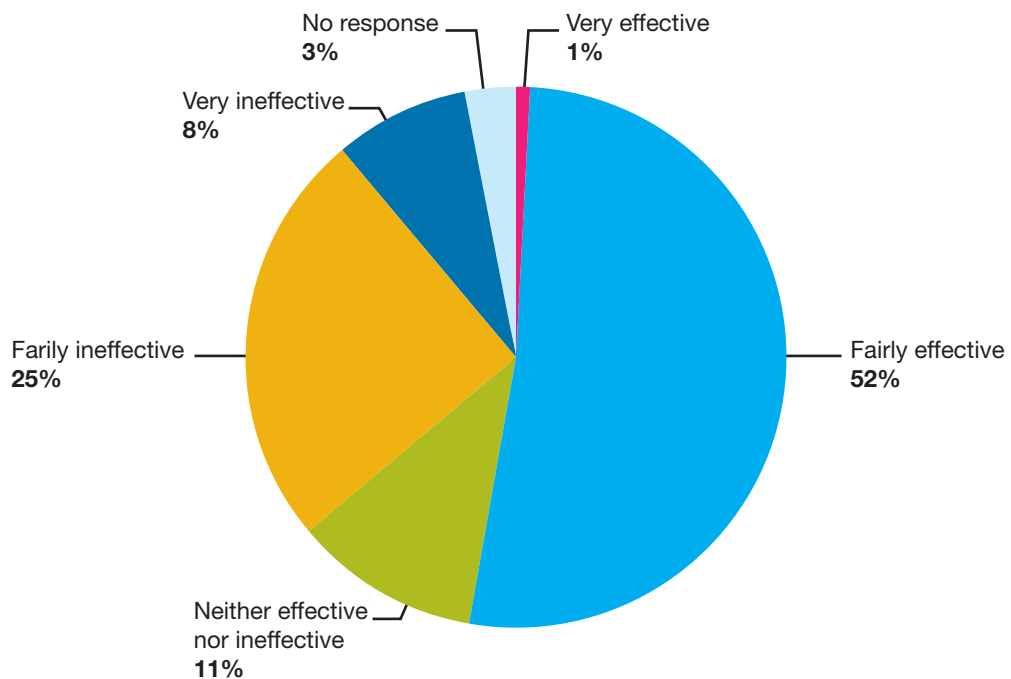
A third of respondents (33 per cent, or 24 out of 73 respondents) considered that the overall approach was ineffective, with eight per cent (6 respondents) rating it as very ineffective. Eleven per cent described the process as neither effective nor ineffective (8 respondents).

Those council representatives who considered the process to be effective, generally felt that overall the system works well but that there are some gaps. Most of these respondents stated that there are gaps in allocations for those with specific needs, such as high needs students (HNS), or other vulnerable groups, as this respondent remarked:

*We feel that the current system works well for the majority of our young people but are concerned about the most vulnerable minority.*

This view was also highlighted in the case studies. For example, one council reported they had received less funding than required to meet the needs of its HNS. They identified a mismatch between policy and funding in that the resource allocation meant they could only provide a minimum service that was unlikely to meet parental choice. Another council considered that the HNS funding formula should be simplified to ensure that providers claimed the right level of resource.

**Figure 2.1 Councils' view on the overall effectiveness of the 16–19 commissioning process**



Source: Survey of councils 2013. Results based on responses from 73 councils.

Other respondents stated that the reason they view the commissioning process as effective is because they have a good local network of providers or good communication with providers.

Those respondents who believed the system to be ineffective were more likely to state this is because the council has a lack of influence or they felt that there is a lack of linking with local priorities, or because the current system is too complex or bureaucratic. Comments included:

*There is no link to local authorities in terms of shaping and influencing. This allows a clear disconnect between the local economy and the local offer.*

Others described the funding model as being unresponsive and problematic, particularly as a result of the lagged funding model, where allocations are based on the previous year's number and type of young people. One council respondent commented:

*[the] Lagged system doesn't support responsiveness, and doesn't help bring new providers into the market.*

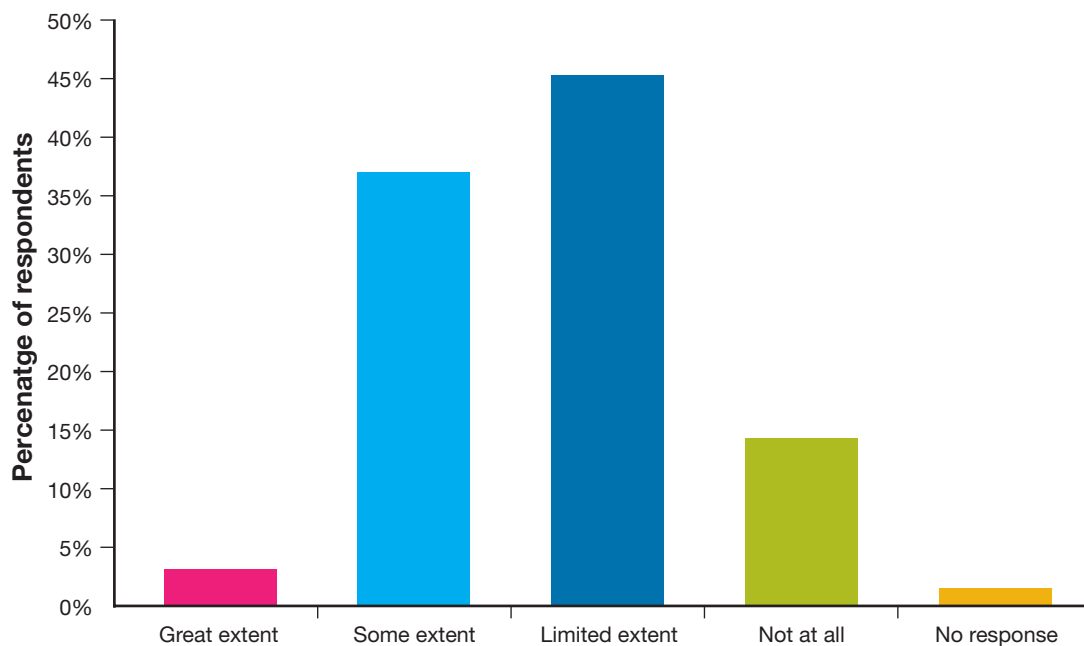
## 2.2 Meeting local need

The majority of respondents believed that the EFA is restricted in the extent to which it is responsive to local need. Indeed, nearly half of the respondents stated that the EFA is responsive to local need to only a 'limited extent' (45 per cent, 33 respondents) while a slightly smaller proportion stated that the EFA is responsive to 'some extent' to local needs (37 per cent, 27 respondents). A notable minority of respondents (14 per cent, 10 respondents) said that the EFA is 'not at all' responsive to local need. Furthermore, just three per cent of council respondents believed that the EFA is responsive to local need to a 'great extent'.

The most common reasons council representatives gave for their views were:

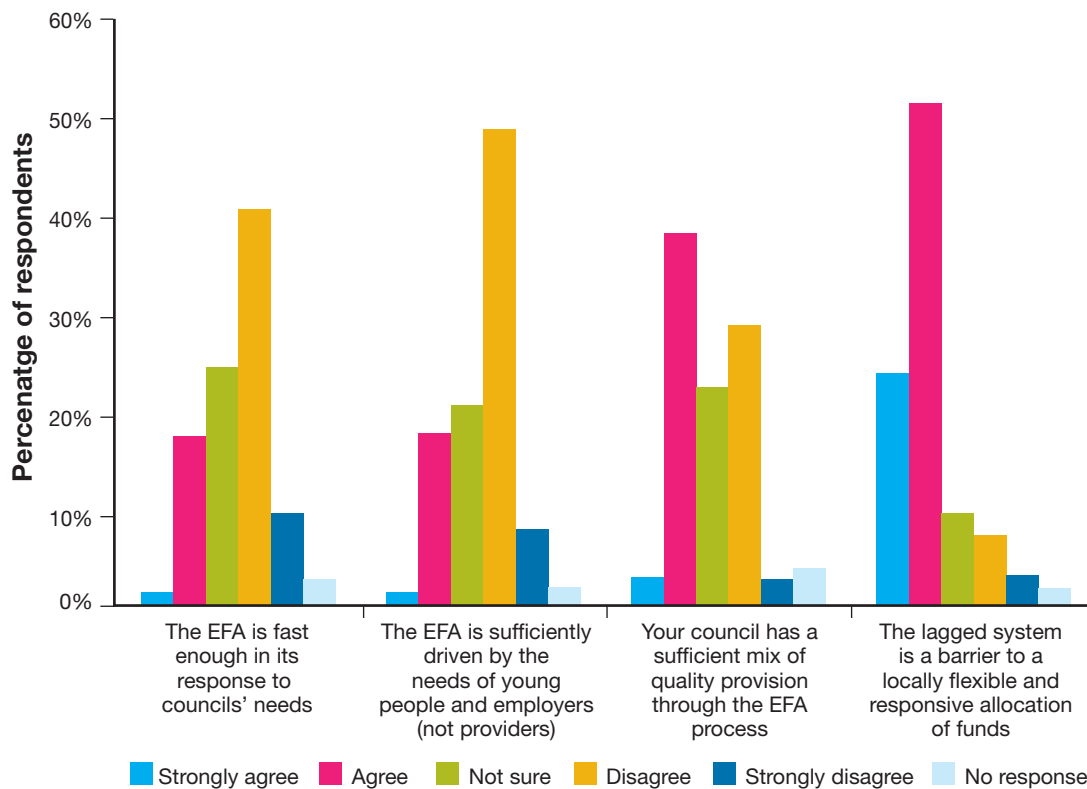
- A lack of communication/support or continuity of staff from the EFA means local needs are not met: '[The EFA is] arms length and now the communication is poor. Decision making is not transparent and there is no conversation to support understanding.'
- The funding model is slow and unresponsive or inflexible: 'Lagged funding methodology with exceptional business cases is not flexible enough to be completely responsive.'

**Figure 2.2 Councils' view on the extent to which the EFA is responsive to local need**



Source: Survey of councils 2013. Results based on responses from 73 councils.

**Figure 2.3** Extent to which respondents agreed with a series of statements about meeting local need



Source: Survey of councils 2013. Results based on responses from 73 councils.

- The system is too bureaucratic or complex/lacks clarity: 'Processes are too lengthy, aligned to a national bureaucracy and weighted towards existing contractors.'
- The council has clear direction, communication and support from the EFA: 'The EFA does try to be responsive at a pan-London level through work with London Councils.'

Council representatives were asked to what extent they agreed with a number of statements relating to the commissioning process for 16–19 provision. As can be seen in Figure 2.3, over half of the respondents (52 per cent, 38 respondents) stated that they disagree with the statement 'the EFA is fast enough in its response to councils' needs' while just under a fifth (19 per cent, 14 respondents) said that they agree with this statement. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (77 per cent, 56 respondents) reported that they agree that 'the lagged system is a barrier to a locally flexible and responsive allocation of funds', with just 11 per cent (eight respondents) disagreeing with this statement. These findings reflect the comments given above by

councils relating to their view that the funding model is slow and unresponsive.

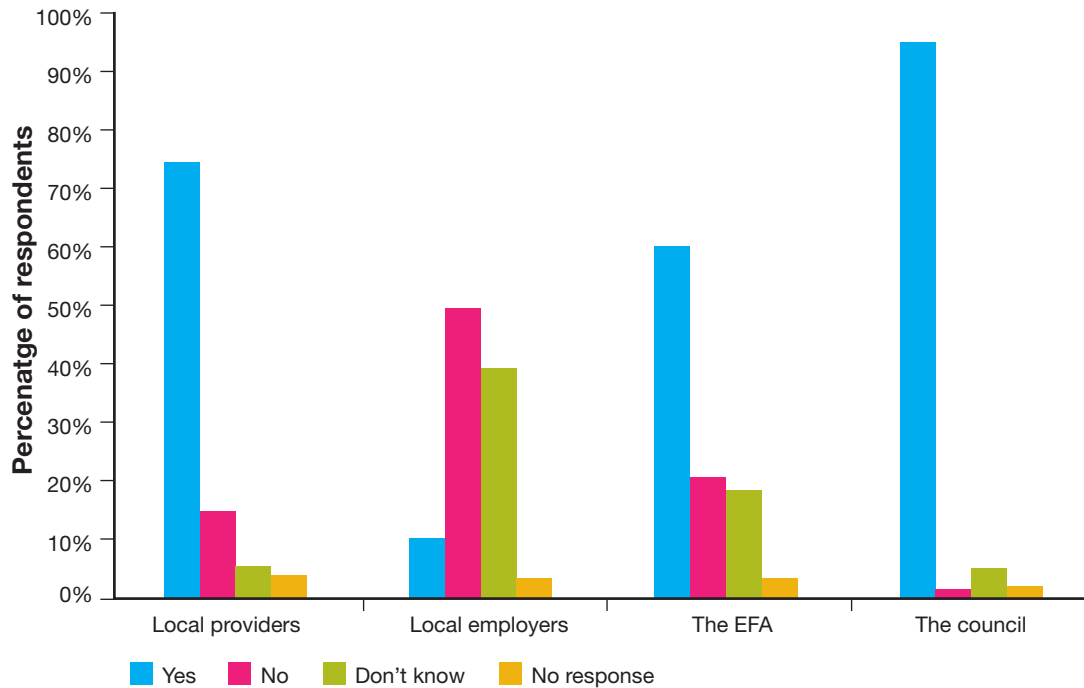
The majority of council respondents (58 per cent, 42 respondents) reported that they disagree with the statement 'the EFA is sufficiently driven by the needs of young people and employers (not providers)'. Nineteen per cent (14 respondents) said that they agree with this statement.

Overall, council representatives are more positive about the mix of provision in the local area. Indeed, 42 per cent (31 respondents) reported that they agree with the statement 'your council has a sufficient mix of quality provision through the EFA process' while 32 per cent (23 respondents) stated that they disagree with this statement. Twenty-two per cent (16 respondents) said that they are not sure regarding this statement, suggesting that they are not sure of the mix of quality of provision locally.

Council representatives were asked whether they believed that local providers, local employers, the EFA and the council understood the need for holistic 16–19 education and training provision in their local area.



**Figure 2.4 Do the following organisations understand the need for holistic 16–19 education and training provision?**



Source: Survey of councils 2013. Results based on responses from 73 councils.

There is need for local provision to be holistic so that it meets the full range of learning, training and skills needs in the area. Unless the local offer is broad and covers the full range of need, then it is likely to adversely affect the educational outcomes of young people and not meet employer needs. Figure 2.4 highlights council representatives' response to this question.

Overall, the majority of survey respondents stated that the council (95 per cent, 69 of 73 respondents) and local providers (75 per cent, 55 of 73 respondents) understand the need for holistic 16–19 provision. However, 16 per cent (12 respondents) reported that local providers do not understand this. Over half of the respondents (60 per cent, or 44 out of 73) reported that they believe the EFA does understand a need for holistic provision, but almost one-fifth (19 per cent, 14 respondents) stated that they do not believe this is the case, with a similar proportion (18 per cent, 13 respondents) stating that they do not know. Very few

respondents stated that local employers understand the need for holistic provision (10 per cent, seven respondents), with around half (49 per cent, 36 of 73 respondents) stating that the local employers do not understand this need.

The case studies showed that councils have used a range of strategic plans and intelligence which has helped them to understand the need for holistic 16–19 provision. These include Children and Young People's Plans, Raising Participation Age strategies and annual assessments of provision, educational outcomes and progression. In addition, one council described how they have conducted an analysis of growth and decline sectors to identify maximum employment potential and gaps in provision that needed to be addressed. Elsewhere, an council's Apprenticeship Task Group was focusing on improving the match between apprenticeship provision and local employment requirements.

### 3 The role of the council

This chapter presents research findings on the role of the council in the allocation of EFA funding and the commissioning of local provision.

#### 3.1 Councils' views on their influence, resources and involvement in the funding of 16–19 provision

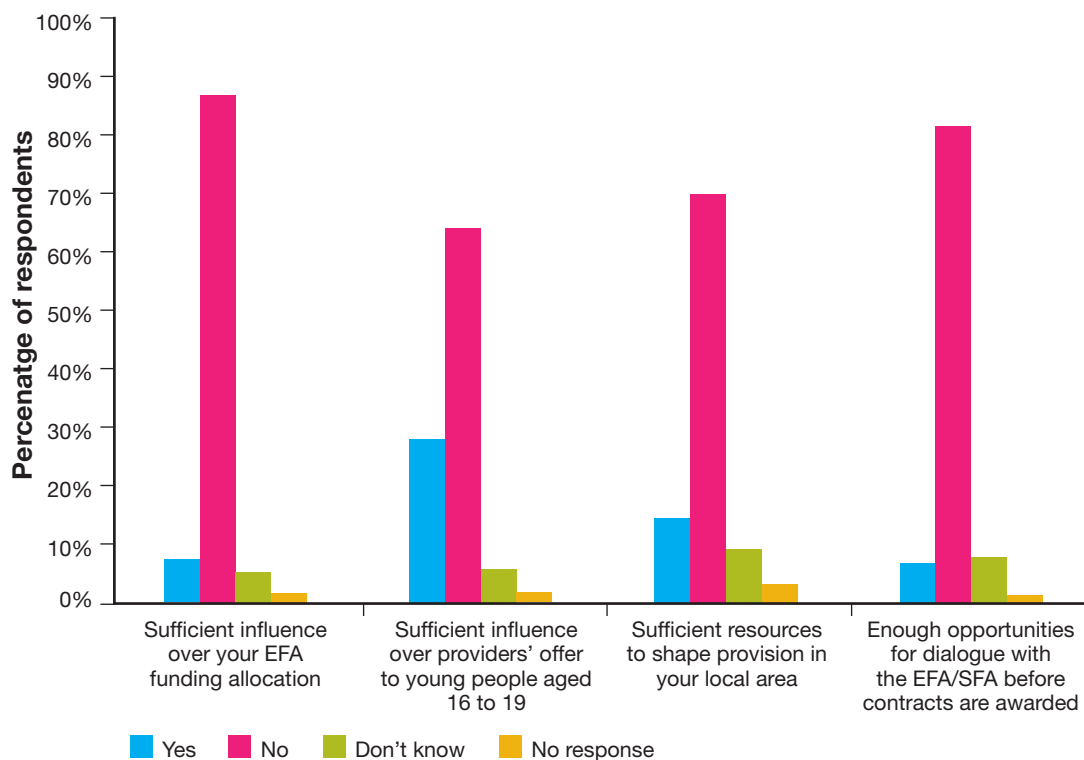
As Figure 3.1 shows, the majority of respondents (86 per cent, 63 respondents) felt that their council does not have sufficient influence over their EFA funding allocation. This finding was echoed by case-study interviewees.

Similarly, most respondents stated that their council does not have:

- sufficient influence over providers' offers to young people aged 16–19 (64 per cent; 47 of 73 respondents). Over one in four respondents responded 'yes' to this question (29 per cent, 21 respondents)
- sufficient resources to shape provision in their council (71 per cent, 52 respondents)
- enough opportunities for dialogue with the EFA/SFA before contracts are awarded (84 per cent, 61 respondents).

The majority of respondents reported that they agree with the statement that 'the EFA needs to provide more funds so that councils can commission more local provision' (92 per cent, 67 respondents).

Figure 3.1 Perceptions of the level of influence and ability to shape provision at the local level



Source: Survey of councils 2013. Results based on responses from 73 councils.

### 3.2 Changing local commissioning

Council representatives were asked to comment on how easy or difficult they feel it is for their council to change the commissioning of local provision. As can be seen from Figure 3.2, the majority of respondents (75 per cent, 55 respondents) reported that it is difficult to do so (either fairly difficult or very difficult). Fifteen per cent of survey respondents stated that it is neither easy nor difficult, while a further seven per cent said that they feel it is fairly easy for their council to change the commissioning of local provision.

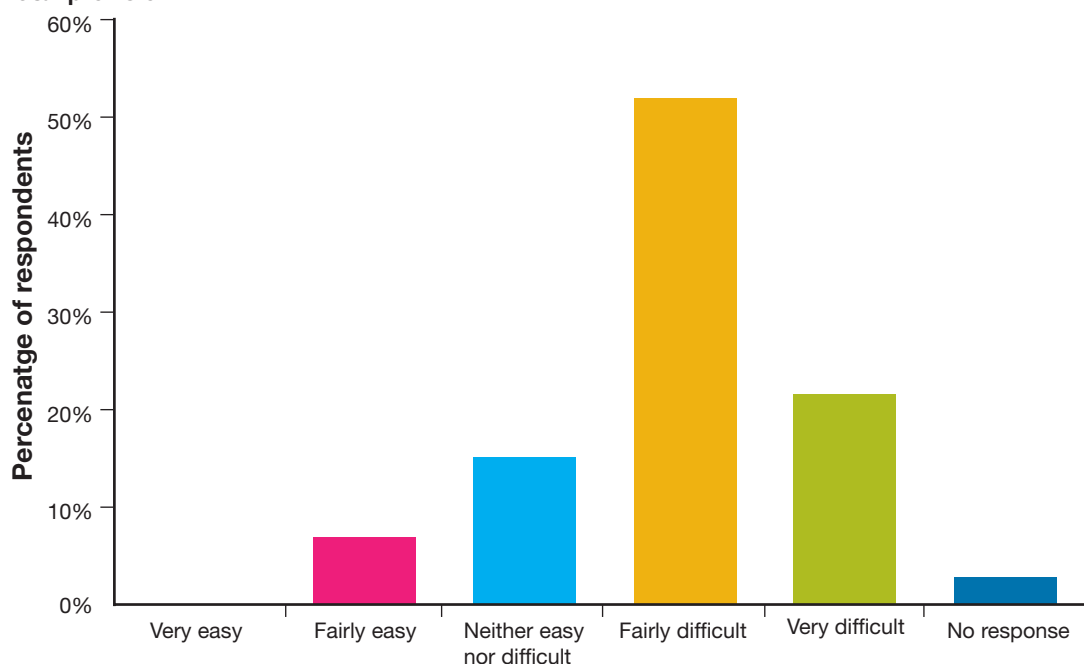
Councils who stated that it is difficult to change the commissioning most commonly stated that the reason for this is because they have little or no involvement in the funding allocation and their role is one of influencing only. Comments included:

- We have little influence over funding allocations.*
- We rely on influencing providers to use their allocations in line with our analysis of needs.*
- The LA can only influence through dialogue with providers and encouraging partnership working.*
- The LA does very little commissioning.*

These survey findings were also reflected in the case-study evidence we collected. Council senior managers and elected members considered that they did not have enough say in the funding of 16–19 provision and wanted more local discretion in the commissioning process. For example, one council was disappointed that it had virtually no voice in establishing externally commissioned provision. Elsewhere, a council representative, who observed that contracts were usually awarded to national providers with limited knowledge or no physical location in the area, remarked that: ‘We know the area best and would like to create the right provision but our hands are tied’.

Despite what councils considered to be their limited role in 16–19 commissioning, the case studies provided illustrations of innovative practice. For example, one council’s Apprenticeship Task Group was working to support all aspects of apprenticeships including encouraging local employers to create apprenticeships and increasing take-up by young people. In another case study, taster programmes were provided to enable school leavers to sample local training and employment opportunities. Elsewhere, a council had supported the development of the International Baccalaureate Career-related Certificate and link to Level 3 apprenticeships which provide increased access to an International Baccalaureate education and a flexible learning framework that can be tailored by school to meet the needs of students.

**Figure 3.2 Councils’ views on the level of difficulty for their council to change the commissioning of local provision**



Source: Survey of councils 2013. Results based on responses from 73 councils.

## 4 Commissioning of re-engagement activities

Re-engagement activities aim to support young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) to transition back into education or training. Successful re-engagement activities tend to be individualised and flexible and offer a range of support to meet the often complex needs of the young person (Nelson & O'Donnell., 2012). This section explores councils' perceptions of the commissioning of re-engagement activities, including the extent to which the EFA and SFA work together to meet local needs and ensure appropriate re-engagement provision. As both agencies are involved in funding provision, it is important for them to work closely and in a joined-up way to ensure that the full range of learner needs are met in a local area.

### 4.1 EFA-commissioned re-engagement provision

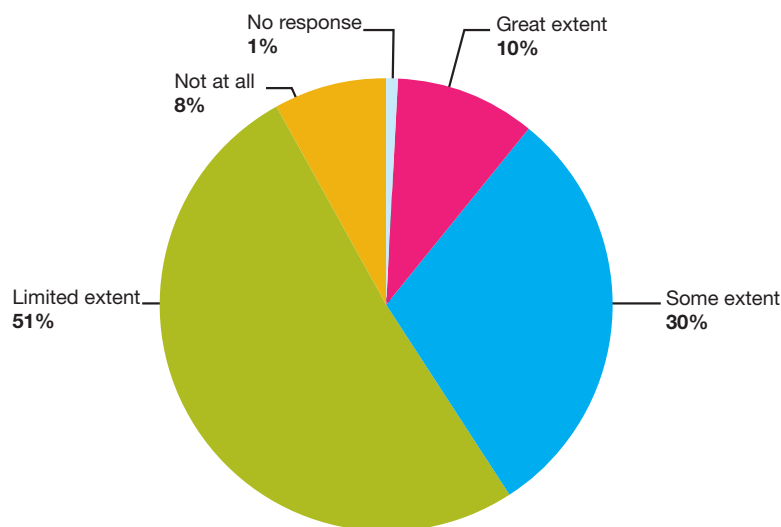
The EFA nationally commissions re-engagement provision such as the European Social Fund and Youth Contract. As shown in Figure 4.1, around half of respondents (51 per cent, 37 respondents) said that the approaches/processes adopted by the EFA are able to reflect local needs to reduce the number of those not in

education, employment or training (NEET) to a limited extent. This compares with 30 per cent (22 respondents) who said to 'some extent', ten per cent who responded a 'great extent' (seven respondents) and eight per cent (six respondents) who said 'not at all'.

Over three-fifths of respondents (62 per cent, 45 respondents) felt that the approach/processes adopted by the EFA are able to provide them with sustainable employment to a limited extent. This may reflect the fact that the EFA aims to provide positive outcomes such as further education or training, rather than focusing solely on employment opportunities.

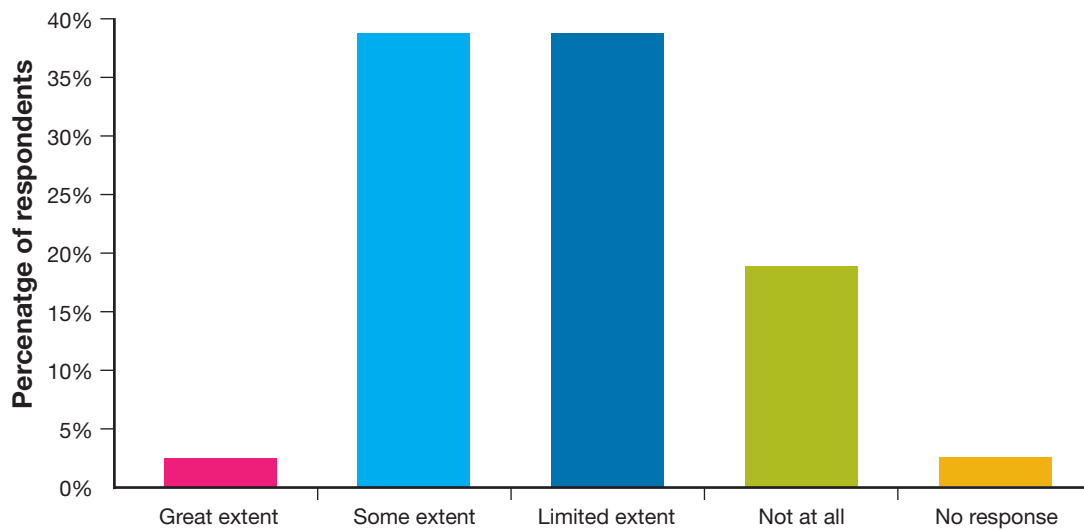
The case studies identified effective practice in the provision of re-engagement activities. For example, one case-study area reported that they had strong re-engagement providers and an infrastructure in place to facilitate such working. Examples of the processes for providing engagement provision included offering information, advice and guidance and providing tailored programmes for NEET young people. In another case study, the council had provided a programme for teenage parents-to-be which had enabled participants to progress to other courses.

**Figure 4.1 Extent to which the approaches/processes adopted by the EFA are able to reflect local needs to reduce the number of those who are NEET**



Source: Survey of councils 2013. Results based on responses from 73 councils.

**Figure 4.2 Extent to which the EFA and SFA work together effectively to ensure local needs are met**



Source: Survey of councils 2013. Results based on responses from 73 councils.

## 4.2 Collaboration between the EFA and SFA

As Figure 4.2 shows, the majority of survey respondents reported that the EFA and SFA work together effectively to ensure that local employment/skills needs are met to an extent (79 per cent, 58 respondents). However, the majority of these respondents said that this effective working is restricted to some degree, for example 38 per cent said that they work effectively to 'some extent' while the same proportion stated that this is to a 'limited extent' (28 respondents in each category). Indeed just three per cent (two respondents) reported that they feel the EFA and SFA work together effectively to ensure that local employment/skills needs are met to a 'great extent'. A notable minority of respondents

(18 per cent, 13 respondents) stated that they feel the two agencies do not work together effectively at all.

When asked to comment on the extent to which the EFA and SFA work together effectively to ensure appropriate re-engagement provision, nearly half of the respondents (45 per cent; 33 respondents) stated that they do so to a 'limited extent'. A further 27 per cent said to 'some extent' (20 respondents). In addition, around one in five respondents said 'not at all' (13 respondents). Those respondents who felt that collaboration between the EFA and SFA was limited, frequently cited comments relating to the EFA/SFA not meeting local needs, including a lack of engagement at the local level, little understanding of the local context and a lack of communication or joined-up working between agencies.

## 5 High needs students

This chapter examines councils' perceptions of partnership working between the EFA and SFA to meet the needs of high needs students (HNS) and explores levels of satisfaction with funding for HNS at the local level.

Figure 5.1 illustrates respondents' perceptions of the extent to which the EFA/SFA work together to effectively ensure HNS' needs are met. Over two-fifths of respondents reported that they do so to a limited extent (44 per cent, 32 respondents), 30 per cent (22 respondents) stated to some extent and 19 per cent (14 respondents) said not at all. Just five per cent of respondents reported that the EFA and SFA work together effectively to a great extent.

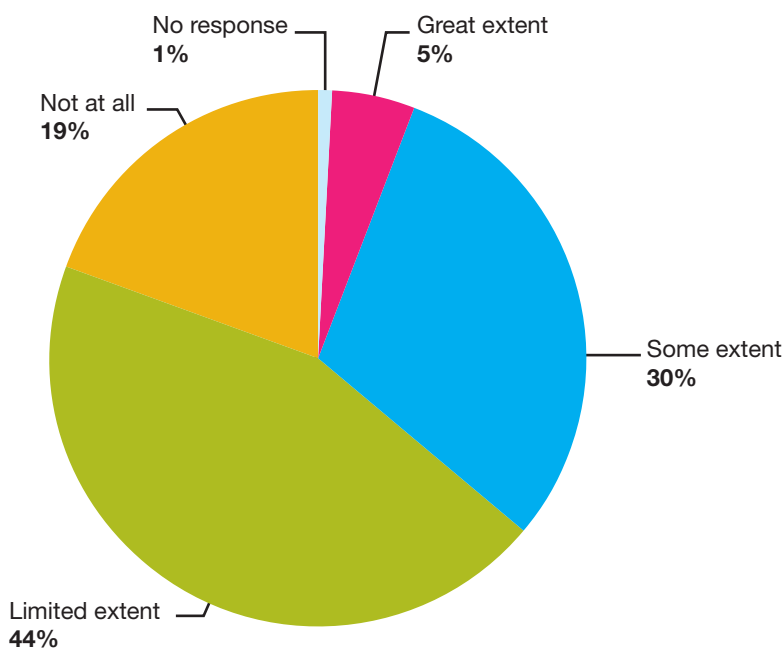
As shown in Figure 5.2 overleaf, nearly three-fifths of respondents reported that they are dissatisfied (either fairly or very dissatisfied) with funding for HNS in their local area (58 per cent, 42 respondents). The most commonly cited comments related to concerns about sufficient funds to meet local needs or demand. For

example, one respondent noted: 'the local authority is still subsidising a significant element of this provision'. Examples of other frequently cited responses included:

- Concerns about the funding process such as a lack of clear guidance from the EFA about the allocation process: '[the] HNS allocation process was very stressful because of lack of clear guidance from the EFA'.
- The lagged funding model is problematic, as illustrated by the following comment: 'Our HNS allocation was capped, not based on actual learner numbers (12/13) and takes no account of historic spend over Special Educational Needs (SEN) block grant to meet needs'.

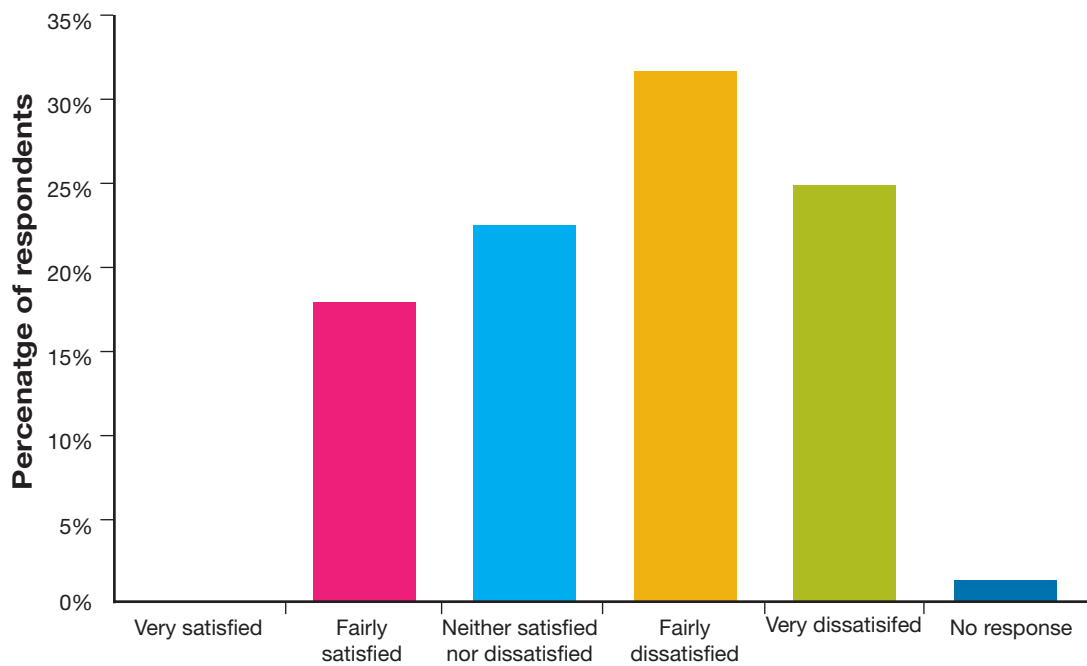
Twenty-three per cent (17 respondents) said that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and a further 18 per cent (13 respondents) reported being fairly satisfied. None of the respondents stated that they are very satisfied with funding for HNS in their local area.

**Figure 5.1 Views on EFA/SFA working together effectively to meet the needs of HNS**



Source: Survey of councils 2013. Results based on responses from 73 councils.

**Figure 5.2 Satisfaction with funding for HNS in your local area**



Source: Survey of councils 2013. Results based on responses from 73 councils.

A case-study interviewee further noted that the government’s current approach for funding 16–19 provision was not fully meeting the needs of young people with SEN and disabilities/high needs, as the following comment illustrates: ‘they are not as loud a voice. I feel we are letting them down’ (Elected Member).

Despite these views, the case-study interviews did reveal examples of effective practice in the area of HNS funding. For example, one council has been working with colleges and providers to develop targeted provision for HNS, teenage parents and ex-offenders. Another council drew attention to the creation of a sub-regional HNS group of staff which was helping to develop common processes for commissioning provision.

## 6 Concluding comments and councils' recommendations

### 6.1 Concluding comments

Councils responding to the research had a range of views on the effectiveness of the current EFA approach to funding and commissioning courses and programmes for 16–19 year olds. However, there was some agreement that the approach could be improved in the areas of: responsiveness to local need; flexibility to meet local demographic change; and providing appropriate opportunities for vulnerable groups.

There are three main reasons which explain why the approach does not meet the needs of all young people:

- 1 Councils do not feel they have sufficient involvement or influence which means that their local knowledge and experience is not fully used to inform EFA funding and commissioning or re-commissioning decisions.
- 2 There is the 'lagged funding system' issue where funding allocations are based on the previous year's data on learners and provision which is often out of step with current cohorts resulting in underfunding.
- 3 Some contracts are awarded to national providers who do not necessarily have an understanding of the education and training needs of young people in a local area.

The 16–19 funding and commissioning model could be improved if the EFA and SFA worked together more effectively, in conjunction with councils, to ensure that local needs are met. Council survey respondents consider that needs are not being met owing to a lack of joined-up working between the agencies which is inefficient and less responsive than it could be to local context. Councils think that having separate conversations with each agency instead of an inclusive dialogue is a barrier to achieving holistic and integrated provision for young people whatever their needs.

Where possible, councils are working with local providers to initiate or further develop practice and provision. Both national agencies and councils have

worked to clarify roles and responsibilities since the structural changes in 2010. The case studies reveal several examples where councils, in partnership with providers, are discharging their statutory duties by seeking to secure good-quality provision and bring forward offers of innovative re-engagement programmes and increased access to training opportunities.

### 6.2 Councils' recommendations

The council senior managers and elected members interviewed for the case studies made several recommendations for improving the funding and commissioning of 16–19 provision. The recommendations focused on five themes: decision making, communication, flexibility, the use of information and intelligence, and partnership working.

The main recommendations from council representatives are presented below.

#### Decision making

- Councils should have more influence on decisions that the EFA makes about awarding contracts for 16–19 provision in their area. They think that their knowledge would be critical in making decisions about what range of provision should be funded to meet local need.
- The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in determining need and commissioning and delivering provision should be made very clear.

#### Communication

- There should be more effective lines of communication with the EFA and SFA. For example, there should be a single conversation between councils, providers and the EFA and SFA rather than bilateral discussions about 16–19 provision.



- There should be parity of esteem between participants involved in the dialogue so that all contributions are valued equally.
- Commissioners should take into account young people's views about what learning and training offers should be provided.
- There should be more transparency regarding the provision that the EFA and SFA are commissioning local providers to deliver. This would enable councils to support providers to shape, promote and deliver the courses and programmes that have been commissioned.

### **Flexibility**

- There should be greater flexibility in national funding rules to enable local discretion to meet local needs, particularly for young people who need support to help them engage in local provision. Council representatives think that this would more easily

enable providers to develop innovative provision and short courses that better meet the learning and training needs of young people living in their area. This is especially important for vulnerable groups and for effective commissioning of provision for young people outside the mainstream of sixth form and college courses.

### **Information and intelligence**

- Decisions about 16–19 provision should be based on the most up-to-date and detailed information and intelligence available. Councils believe that this would help to shape provision that meets the changing needs of different cohorts of young residents.

### **Partnership working**

- Where possible, councils and providers should work in partnership to make a more localised, broader and better-quality learning and training offer.

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# Appendix A Case studies

## A.1 Barking and Dagenham

Improving school and post-16 education and raising levels of skills and attainment for young people are considered key to the realisation of Barking and Dagenham council's vision for the borough of 'building a better life for all'. The borough's 14–19 service area is committed to contributing to improving the levels of aspiration and achievement of young people by facilitating a range of high-quality applied and vocational learning programmes. Barking and Dagenham influences the shape of local provision through its contact with providers on a one-to-one basis and in the 14–19 partnership but has less of a voice in establishing externally commissioned provision.

### Context

Barking and Dagenham is an outer London borough approximately 11 miles east of central London with a population of 179,000. It was one of the six east London boroughs which hosted the 2012 Olympics. The south of the borough is within the London riverside development area of the Thames Gateway, the largest regeneration area in Europe. Barking and Dagenham has high levels of poverty and deprivation: it is 22nd out of 354 most deprived councils in England. Nearly a quarter of pupils in the borough are eligible for free school meals.

The 0–19 age population of Barking and Dagenham is the fastest growing in London which creates a large demand for school places. Over 50 per cent of school pupils are from ethnic minority communities and over a third speak English as a second language with over 100 different languages spoken. The borough has low numbers of young people qualified at Level 3 or above by age 19, low numbers entering university and high levels of youth and adult unemployment.

Barking and Dagenham, which was awarded Beacon Status for Transforming Secondary Education in 2003, has ten secondary schools, one special school and two colleges. There is a Technical Skills Academy which is managed and run by Barking and Dagenham College.

There are numerous independent training providers in the borough.

The council is a delivery partner for the information, advice and guidance strand of Youth Contract provision.

### Establishing provision to meet local needs

Barking and Dagenham's priorities for education and training provision are guided and driven by the borough's Core Strategy, Regeneration Strategy, Education Business Plan, Raising Participation Age Strategy and Children and Young People's Plan. These plans express a commitment to ensuring continuing improvement in GCSE results and 14–19 provision.

Barking and Dagenham has enough places to meet demand for academic and vocational 16–19 courses. A challenge is for information, advice and guidance staff in the Connexions service, which returned to LA control in 2012, to work with young people and help them access the right provision. Another challenge is ensuring the supply of provision for young people aged 17 and above, which is less secure compared to that for younger age groups, because older teenagers' travel-to-learn-and-train area is larger and the council has to rely on other providers outside the borough to offer appropriate courses. This complexity was brought into sharp relief recently when a local college outside the council which some Barking and Dagenham residents use suddenly announced that it is no longer offering A Level courses.

The September Guarantee figures for 2012 showed that, although 93 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds in Barking and Dagenham received an offer, 1.2 per cent of them did not receive an appropriate offer and 0.6 per cent did not receive an offer at all (lower than London as a whole – 0.9 per cent). The council is using this intelligence to improve on these figures in the future.

Barking and Dagenham is not clear how flexible and responsive the funding system for 16–19 provision is to its needs as it's a new system which has not run full

cycle yet. However, the observation was made that the lagged system, whereby provision is funded on the basis of the previous year's data, is likely to restrict the degree to which the system can be flexible or responsive.

There is plenty of provision for re-engaging young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The council's view is that 'we have strong re-engagement providers'. Funding from the Mayor's Fund for London has been obtained to deliver some of the provision. Barking and Dagenham College provides Media Citizens multi-media training which is very popular. The council would value being informed about provision for NEET young people that is commissioned via the European Social Fund.

Councils now have responsibility for providing funding for learning and training opportunities for high needs students (HNS) and a challenge experienced by Barking and Dagenham has been to establish the number of HNS learners. Staff have appreciated liaising with staff in a sub-regional HNS group of London councils about planning provision and contract management.

### **Working relationships at a local and national level**

The borough has a 14–19 partnership which is chaired by a headteacher and includes representatives of schools, the two colleges, the University of East London and the council. There is also a 14–19 partnership data group. The council has good working relationships with local schools and colleges. The council meets Barking and Dagenham College staff to discuss the planning of provision.

London Councils, which represents the 33 London boroughs, is a sub-regional body which communicates with the EFA about 16–19 provision across the capital. Currently, Barking and Dagenham Council does not have one-to-one contact with the EFA and would appreciate a dialogue about what type of provision is commissioned.

### **Effective practice**

The creation of a sub-regional HNS group has helped London boroughs to develop common processes for commissioning provision which will be used from autumn 2013. This will make practice more streamlined and efficient. For example, a college in Barking and Dagenham that delivers HNS learning and training for 19 councils, will be able to use one contract format with each council.

### **Recommendations from the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham:**

- There should be more transparency regarding the outcomes that the EFA and SFA expect of providers to achieve. This would be achieved if the EFA and SFA shared with councils information on what providers are commissioned to deliver. Councils could then see how they can support providers to deliver what is required. There would be a two-way benefit.
- Young people's views should be taken into consideration by the commissioning process for 16–19 provision.

## A.2 Dudley

Working closely with local colleges and training providers, Dudley Metropolitan Council (MBC) has been able to introduce changes to provision for vulnerable young people and high needs students (HNS) over the last two years. They would like to see more flexibility and discretion in the use of funding for these groups, based on analysis of the most up-to-date information. They work well in collaboration with neighbouring Black Country authorities to address gaps in provision for vulnerable learners and create new provision where this is required, for example, 16–24 apprenticeship places across the sub-region.

### Context

The metropolitan district of Dudley lies in the Black Country, to the west of Birmingham, along with Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Cooperation across the Black Country in terms of provision for 16–19 education and training as well as economic development is an established and growing feature of local activity<sup>1</sup>. The focus of the Black Country City Deal reflects on existing work with companies in the High Value Manufacturing (HVM) sector and proposals include the development of a new package to meet the training needs of HVM companies, such as more advanced apprenticeships in engineering and manufacturing, supporting the progression from Level 2 to Level 3 and Level 4.

Dudley's analysis of the demographic changes shows falling numbers for the 16–19 cohort up to 2020, so in terms of total numbers, there will be sufficient places even allowing for raising of the participation age (RPA). However, more analysis is required to ensure places are available at the appropriate qualification levels and geographic areas especially where high levels of young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Dudley has three maintained schools with sixth forms, one academy, three further education colleges and a sixth form college. There are five training providers with a base in Dudley and two Black Country Apprenticeship Training Associations. They also work closely with the

Black Country Training Group who represent a number of training organisations across the Black Country.

### Establishing provision to meet local needs

The council undertakes an annual assessment of current provision to identify where learners are studying and training and how well they achieve and progress to further learning or employment. The last annual assessment to be completed revealed that 70 per cent of learners aged 16–18 whose courses were funded by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) were on Level 3 programmes and 13 per cent were on Level 2 programmes. Dudley is attempting to grow pre-Level 2 provision to meet local need and is working with the provider base to introduce more flexible programmes under Study Programmes and Traineeships to widen the offer for young people and increase participation on apprenticeships. The council has set up an action plan to resolve the drop in the number of young people aged 16–19 on apprenticeships. The borough's Apprenticeship Task Group is focusing on the need to improve the match between apprenticeship provision and local employment needs.

The September Guarantee figures for 2012 revealed that 88.7 per cent of 16–17 year olds in Dudley received an offer (lower than the 92.4 per cent figure for the West Midlands), 0.9 per cent did not receive an appropriate offer and 1.6 per cent did not receive an offer at all. The council is working on trying to improve these figures in the future and its approach to any shortfall is 'when we get the intelligence, we act on it'. It faces two challenges in improving re-engagement provision: Youth Contract provision caters for a small number of the 300 plus young people aged 16 and 17 who need support; and reductions in Connexions staff (part of the Integrated Youth Service) mean that there is a lack of resources to track young people who do not engage with the education and training system, a particular problem with 397 at age 18 who are NEET. However, the 16–19 Funding and Commissioning Team has worked with Connexions to develop provision for young people who are NEET and for vulnerable groups. For example, the council has met with a group of providers to create a programme for young mums-to-be and

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1 For example, please see <http://www.lepnetwork.org.uk/blackcountry-city-deal-bid.html>

teenage parents as there are currently over 100 young people in this group.

The authority liaises with the EFA about obtaining funding for specific programmes and the response is usually that there are sufficient places and that provider contracts, which are nationally negotiated, are not at maximum value. The council would like more flexibility in the system, because although 70 per cent of the provision commissioned by the EFA meets local need, there are challenges in meeting the needs of other young people, especially those in vulnerable groups. The largest group of NEET young people at age 17 years are those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Local experience suggests that smaller providers are more likely to address the needs of specific vulnerable groups through taking a flexible approach and working longer with the young people on a programme. The council observes that 'we know the provision we want to grow but we can't always grow it'.

The council considers that the transfer of funding to Dudley for HNS has been unsatisfactory because it received £1.9 million rather than the £2.3 million required to meet the level of local need. This is explained by the funding allocation being based on student numbers in 2010–2011 but the number of HNS has increased by 24 per cent (from 109 to around 135). The council thinks that there is a mismatch between policy and funding: the resource allocation means that the council can only provide a minimum service to meet the duty which cannot meet parental choice. This will become more critical when Education, Health and Care Plans are fully operational.

Dudley Council has been successful in four applications in the last two years to the government's 16–19 Demographic Growth Capital Fund which will resource new school and college facilities for young people with complex and special educational needs. These additional facilities are important given that the cohort of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) is increasing.

Dudley has adequate funding to meet raising participation age (RPA) requirements for Level 3 and most Level 2 provision but less resource than it needs for the RPA requirements for vulnerable groups and those who wish to enter employment without training. The resource for 16–18 apprenticeships is available; however, more work needs to be done to promote this

route to young people and increase engagement by employers.

## **Working relationships at a local and national level**

Dudley Council is a member of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and is growing its relationship with the LEP through its involvement in the Black Country City Deal bid and applications for European Union funding for learning provision.

The working relationship with the EFA has been generally good. Owing to staff changes and reductions, the support the EFA used to offer providers has reduced significantly. As a result, providers now increasingly approach the council for support. Dudley has productive working relationships with the EFA and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) on an individual basis. However, it meets these two organisations separately which makes it difficult to coordinate action and would present problems for a major initiative for provision that spanned a wide age range.

The council considers that it does not have enough say in the funding of 16–19 provision in the Dudley area, especially funding for re-engaging NEET young people who need a different type of offer from mainstream provision. This provision is usually awarded to national providers with limited knowledge or no physical location in the local area. 'We know the area best and would like to create the right provision but our hands are tied', is the council's view. The council thinks that 16–19 provision is cost-effective in the main but notes that, when young people are lost to the system, this is not cost-effective because of the considerable investment of resources to re-engage them.

## **Effective practice**

Dudley points to joint working with colleges and providers to create new provision to address the needs of specific groups including teenage parents, ex-offenders and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, as an example of effective targeted provision.

A new initiative was launched in September 2013 for students at Sutton Special School who remain in school at post-16 for a period to participate in a programme

delivered by Dudley College as the first phase of transition to learning at college. This was introduced in response to the previously high drop-out among HNS to support their transition to college.

An innovative approach to reach young people who might be missed by the system was set up in Dudley town centre on 'results day', to offer advice about choices post-16. This comprised an exclusive event for young people who are NEET where they meet with local colleges and providers to discuss careers opportunities, early sharing of information about learners between schools and colleges to improve transition and recently a pop-up shop run by Connexions.

The council Apprenticeship Task Group is a cross-Directorate group working together to support and improve all aspects of apprenticeships including increasing 16–19 participation, working with large contractors in Dudley to encourage them to create apprenticeships, creating work experience opportunities

for young people and helping looked-after children to apply for apprenticeship vacancies. In addition, Dudley MBC has created over 100 apprenticeships for its employees and hosts an annual 'Real Apprentice' event.

### **Recommendations from Dudley MBC:**

- Greater flexibility in funding rules and local discretion to meet local needs, particularly for young people who need support to help them engage in local provision.
- A single conversation between the council, providers, other stakeholders and both national funding bodies (EFA and SFA).
- Better access to more timely data and finer-grained data analysis.
- The creation of a Black Country sub-regional group to work together to bid for funds and commission more localised provision.

## A.3 Kent

Kent's strategic plan for learning, employment and skills has identified that the quality of education for 14–19 year olds in Kent is variable. While there is good progress in some aspects of developing provision, such as an increase in the number of apprenticeships, there remain real gaps in what is needed to support young people to access employment. The council is seeking to provide strategic leadership, working proactively with local partners and national agencies, but would like to see more local discretion in the commissioning process.

### Background

Kent is one of the largest education authorities in England, educating 270,000 children and young people aged five to 19, and responsible for services across 12 contrasting districts from Thanet in the east to Sevenoaks in the west. Kent is within England's least deprived third of authorities: however, there are areas that fall within the 20 per cent most deprived. There is a wide range of performance at GCSE which overall is above national average. Around 62 per cent of 16–19 provision is in sixth forms: 94 out of 100 secondary schools in Kent and 75 per cent of these are judged good or better by Ofsted.

In October 2012 Kent launched the 14–24 Learning, Employment and Skills Strategy 2013<sup>2</sup>–2016, designed to link the world of learning to the world of work more successfully, and to bring about more rapid transformation in young people's skills, qualifications and employability. There are four key areas of focus for the strategy:

- to raise attainment and skill levels
- to extend and improve vocational education, training and apprenticeships
- to increase participation and employment
- to target support to vulnerable people.

### Establishing the need for provision and working relationships

Kent publishes district-wide data packs for each of its 12 districts<sup>3</sup>. From this it is possible to look at the spread of provision and mix of levels in the offers for 16–19 year olds. It also enables all partners to address issues arising from the Raising of the Participation Age, vulnerable groups and young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). In November the council produced its commissioning statement for the EFA based on the strategy themes. It identified that there are significant gaps in provision for 16–19 year olds particularly in pre-apprenticeship programmes and courses of all types with meaningful work experience, as well as a need for more offers in mathematics and English. This is communicated to the EFA through the commissioning statement and monthly partnership meetings which also includes Kent Association of Further Education Colleges (KAFEC), the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), and training providers.

Kent has also undertaken an analysis of growth and decline in employment sectors in Kent to identify maximum employment potential and gaps in provision. This suggests that there is too much training provided in sports and leisure and not enough in manufacturing and engineering, partly because these are expensive courses. Kent has advocated a more creative approach to study programmes, for example, a 2-1-2 day study programme model for 16–18 year olds providing opportunities to achieve Level 2 in mathematics and English, a high-quality vocational qualification and some work experience.

Kent considers that the working relationship with the EFA is good because of the work done and the systems created by Kent. Kent provides detailed information to the EFA and would want to see better use made of this in making decisions about the funding of providers. It is a concern to Kent that an increasing number of training providers are giving up on offering what they still perceive to be foundation learning, since that is no longer funded as a separate programme. Some aspects of the funding are making commissioning new provision

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2 Kent CC 14-24 Learning, Employment and Skills Strategy 2013-2016: [http://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/education-and-learning/plans-and-consultations/strategic-plans/14\\_24strategy2013.pdf](http://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/education-and-learning/plans-and-consultations/strategic-plans/14_24strategy2013.pdf)

3 Kent district profiles: [http://www.kent.gov.uk/your\\_council/kent\\_facts\\_and\\_figures/area\\_profiles.aspx](http://www.kent.gov.uk/your_council/kent_facts_and_figures/area_profiles.aspx)



more difficult, which in turn is not helping to keep pace with learner needs. A further difficulty is where providers are not achieving good Ofsted inspection outcomes, there is a diminishing market offering opportunities for vulnerable learners.

In the September Guarantee figures for 2012, 2.8 per cent of 16 year olds in the council were reported as having offers that were not appropriate and 1.9 per cent were not given an offer at all. In 2012, the September Guarantee process has been transferred from CXK (formerly Connexions) as the contract came to an end. This process is now managed by the council's Skills and Employability service. The transfer is part of a strategic review of tracking all young people to age 19. The review has the aim of developing processes that use the data collected to be transferred into intelligence that can inform decisions about provision gaps.

The current funding arrangements present issues about provision at Foundation Level which will have an impact on meeting the RPA requirements as providers see offers in this area as more risky and cannot guarantee students on this type of course will stay. As a result, there are gaps in provisions.

For a young person in mainstream education moving into sixth form, the process is clear. However, it is more problematic for students outside of the mainstream system, for example, those moving into Level 1 provision. For students in these circumstances, it is more difficult to see how the current system supports them. The current system encourages providers to offer a 'safe way through' for students, offering courses that reduce risks to funding and are easy to run. This can mean that there is 'over provision' that is easy to fund but which may be at the expense of not catering for the needs of lower-attaining and vulnerable learners. As such, providers are opting for the safe option and are not being creative in their provision offer to students. This means the provision offered may not meet the needs of the students who tend to need the most support.

### **Re-engagement activity**

To support the process of providing re-engagement provision, CXK have been working under contract to deliver targeted support for vulnerable and disengaged learners. This has included doing some work with the Prince's Trust. It has been hard to find appropriate

provision for these groups. The analysis of the data by the council suggests that where achievement on re-engagement has been low, it is linked to lack of Level 1 provision.

### **High needs students (HNS)**

Provision for HNS is determined by the council working with colleagues in the SEN and learning disability assessment team and making the necessary information available to the EFA. This process is new and is not yet well established. In 2012–13 the council had to make an additional claim to the EFA to ensure there was a better match between the funding arrangements and the provision that was needed. The council expects this process to improve in the coming year.

### **Effective practice in 16–19 commissioning**

- Kent has been proactive in shaping provision, for example: encouraging more school sixth forms offering three A levels to offer Level 2 courses as well; supporting bids from schools from demographic growth fund for FE colleges including SEN provision; and supporting the establishment of three teaching schools as hubs for the development of Level 2 maths and English for post-16.
- Kent supported the development of the International Baccalaureate Career-related Certificate (IBCC) and link to Level 3 apprenticeships. The IBCC aims to increase access to an IB education and is specifically designed to provide a flexible learning framework that can be tailored by the school to meet the needs of students.

### **Recommendations from Kent County Council:**

- There is a need to encourage more collaborative or a shared approach across sixth forms to ensure a broader offer is available in some local areas by schools and other providers working together. There are ongoing concerns around small sixth forms which can struggle to match larger units both in terms of breadth of curriculum offer, quality of provision and value for money.

- Kent's strategy seeks to ensure that provision better addresses labour market need by being tied in to labour market information, developing high-quality employability skills programmes, improving the vocational offer at 14 and 16 and continuing to expand apprenticeship opportunities for 16 to 24 year olds.
- Currently all key funding decisions are made outside the council, from the size of the funding allocation and the distribution formula and the council does not have 'amending power'. Kent would like more influence and discretion, especially to fund short flexible courses to respond to need and the capacity to work with the EFA to make this happen.

## A.4 Shropshire

Shropshire has faced challenges in maintaining effective provision for young people 16–19 across the authority, particularly in rural areas. Through building their relationships with local providers and keeping an open line to the Education Funding Agency (EFA), they have exerted their influence to shape provision and are hopeful that they can ensure that the needs of young people will continue to be met despite the demographic changes forecast for the next few years.

### Background

Shropshire became a unitary authority in 2009, bringing together the former county and five district councils. The area includes some sparsely populated rural parts as well as a number of small towns, so travel to learn patterns and the issue of having a critical mass of students to make provision viable are major considerations. The 16–19 population is forecast to decline up until 2020, particularly in the more rural south of the area. This will increase the challenges where student numbers make it difficult to support the range of provision needed to meet student needs.

The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) covers the Shropshire, Herefordshire and Telford & Wrekin council areas, reflecting the economic patterns of the area. Employers range from advanced manufacturing and security and defence organisations to artisan food producers, agriculture and home-based enterprises. The council is a member of the Learning Enterprise Partnership (LEP) skills board, which is a good conduit for discussions about skills needs.

County Training is the largest training provider in Shropshire with seven bases across the county. They offer a variety of courses as well as information and advice. They currently operate as part of the council but are being externalised to operate as a private provider from 2014. There are 20 to 40 other training providers giving a fluctuating base of both local and out-of-county providers, eight secondary schools with sixth form, four colleges two of which are general FE, an independent specialist provider and a special school which caters for students up to the age of 18.

### Establishing need and local working relationships

Shropshire's processes for identifying need work at a number of levels. Building on the analysis of school data, a key element is the ongoing dialogue with the well-established local provider networks at headteacher/principal level as well as out-of-county providers. The colleges are seen as adept at matching to market need, with the council playing an influencing and negotiating role as the funding streams go through providers. Alongside this is dialogue with both the EFA and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to identify gaps and establish the suitability of provision. On budgets, the council considers that the EFA listens but it is not clear how far the council influence is felt. The SFA is now much more focused on matching funding to market needs, and the LEP role is developing, although funding constraints have been an obstacle to tailoring bespoke provision or matching to location of students.

Currently provision for A Level is meeting needs, but the council is anticipating diminished A Level demand through a combination of finance and demographic change. The council anticipates issues around being able to offer access to sufficient breadth of choice, which in turn may lead to further reduced take-up and a shift away from A Levels. The authority has identified a demand and expectation for apprenticeships that cannot be met because of the current employer base in the county. In terms of raising the participation age, funding rules are to some extent an obstacle to ensuring provision that is needed. Shropshire has bid for European Social Fund money, over which the council would have more control so that the resulting provision could be better targeted and fit for purpose.

Shropshire had concerns when continuity of provision in the south of the authority was threatened by financial issues with one of the main providers. This rural area presents issues with access to provision. Addressing the issues was complicated by the fact that they arose at the point that the government was changing the role of the council and national agencies at the same time. The imperative to maintain provision led to market testing to find new providers, and an out-of-county provider with more stable finances was the preferred option. Through this process the council took a back seat while it was

managed by the EFA. However, the council lobbied the EFA over ensuring the right curriculum was offered, that undertakings were made about future investment and student access. The new entity is now running provision, 18 months after the issue first arose and the council is satisfied that the influence it was able to exert led to a more appropriate outcome.

The council considers it does not have enough say on determining provision, although the working relationship with the EFA is now better than it was, helped by consistency of contact and greater clarity in roles and responsibilities. There is an open line to the EFA but the constraints on both the EFA and the council have not recently been tested.

The issues around meeting the target for the September Guarantee centre on the ability to find appropriate offers that provide value for money and in some areas the viability of provision, given low and falling student numbers mean there is no critical mass in the right places to be able to offer courses. The challenges are therefore more often about the landscape rather than characteristics of the student population.

Shropshire has also identified a group of young people, typically those leaving school with lower grades at GCSE, who struggle to know what would be the best course for them to access and need help with readiness to access further education or training. To address this need, Shropshire has initiated a 12-month Level 2.5 programme (a programme that helps students bridge the gap between Level 2 and Level 3 courses). For example, Skill Up is a personalised learning programme that integrates vocational learning, personal and social development, and functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT. Students also receive ongoing information, advice, guidance and support. There are issues around the funding of programmes of this type as the funding is channelled through the providers.

## High needs students

Shropshire maps the need for provision for high needs students (HNS) in the same way as for the mainstream provision, based on school information such as statementing data. The issues arising from the geography of the area are particularly acute for high needs provision, so placing students on appropriate courses can be an issue, especially when value for money considerations are taken into account.

Having identified a funding shortfall, Shropshire bid for, and received, additional funds from the EFA. However, this still did not cover all needs. Shropshire also succeeded with a Demographic Growth Fund bid but funding for high needs remains an issue. A preferable solution for funding this area of provision would be for capital release on a rolling programme arising from an ongoing dialogue about needs.

## Recommendations from Shropshire County Council:

- There should be very clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders in determining need, commissioning and delivering provision.
- Discussion needs to be on the basis of 'talking as equals' so that none of the parties feels they are being 'done to'. Routes for dialogue between councils and national agencies need to be smoother and kept open at all times. A positive dialogue held locally with providers would be most effective as the first stage in addressing any issues such as appropriateness or suitability of provision.
- Supporting those young people who are less likely to engage in education or training often requires a more bespoke approach, and opportunities/mechanisms to combine funding streams would be helpful. This is particularly important for a rural area where the issue is often around the access to suitable education and training provision, particularly in relation to transport infrastructure difficulties.

## A.5 South Tyneside

South Tyneside is working to bring targeted and innovative programmes to the young people of the area and to match provision to the needs of localities. It is having mixed experiences of dealing with national agencies and providers to achieve this. An Ofsted inspection of South Tyneside Council Adult and Community Learning (STCACL) in March 2013 rated the service as good with outstanding leadership and management. The report notes<sup>4</sup>:

STCACL is extremely responsive to the education and training needs of South Tyneside communities, hard-to-reach learners and its stakeholders, and has widened participation outstandingly.

### Context

South Tyneside is the smallest metropolitan borough in England, forming part of the Tyneside conurbation, between Newcastle and Gateshead on one side and Sunderland on the other. The borough is the 52nd most deprived area in England out of 354 councils. There are two schools with sixth forms and the local South Tyneside College, which as well as offering courses for local young people incorporates the internationally known South Shields Marine School. A much wider range of providers offer training within the borough, and there is provision in surrounding boroughs that is also an important part of the offer to young people.

In response to the recent need to reorganise and reduce services, a range of support services, such as the former Connexions team and education welfare, have been brought together under the banner Services for Young People (SYP). More information is available on their ST19 website<sup>5</sup>. As well as offering information and advice, this service is proactive in engaging young people.

### Establishing provision to meet local needs

To build a picture of the local need for provision a strategic analysis is undertaken. The foundation for this

is the schools data: to this is added destination data, NEET data and information about vulnerable groups such as care leavers and high impact families. The council's team works closely with SYP and some data-sharing issues have arisen and are being addressed. Wherever possible, data from health sources and youth justice is also included in the analysis and relevant agencies and groups are also engaged in the planning process.

Some issues require information beyond the core data. For example, STCACL undertook a survey of young people on foundation learning courses that revealed a high level of depression and anxiety amongst the group. To address this an emotional resilience programme was put in place.

September Guarantee figures for 2012 showed that one per cent of 16 year olds did not receive an appropriate offer and 1.9 per cent did not receive an offer at all. STCACL's view is that a more realistic picture of the take-up of places only emerges at the end of September when take-up and initial retention rates can be seen. The most important factors in reducing the number of young people without an offer or appropriate offer is effective information advice and guidance especially targeted at the most vulnerable groups, who are often unaware of the provision on offer, and the ability to match provision to the needs of smaller localities, as these can vary even across a relatively small area such as South Tyneside.

For high needs students, STCACL would like to see greater flexibility in the funding rules. This would:

- Enable new providers into the market as the current system is based on predictions of where learners will go which protects stability of providers.
- Simplify changes if the actual assessed need is different to the prediction and it is necessary to transfer funding.
- Address situations where families that move have to be reassessed in order to get funding allocated. On this last issue, STCACL are part of a group of

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4 Ofsted report: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/54492>

5 ST19 website: <http://www.st19.net/>

authorities seeking regional agreements to enable funds to follow learners.

## Working relationships at local and national level

The work of the STCACL team in relation to provision for young people aged 16–19 has had a focus on vulnerable groups and targeting provision. They see their role as seeking to shape and grow the provider market and be proactive in commissioning from small local third sector organisations. Their view is that small niche providers understand the needs of vulnerable groups and can engage with them, as well as design models of learning delivery that are community based and fit local needs. Such providers often have roots in the local community and are familiar with local circumstances, and sometimes with individual families, which can be a real advantage in engaging with hard-to-reach groups.

STCACL have had challenges in relation to procurement processes and national funding in pursuing this policy. On procurement, their approach requires moving away from a single contract and single model of working. Their view is that a range of providers is more responsive and spreads risk and that no one model of provision will meet all needs. This requires a good analysis of the issues and effective management of providers. Ofsted's report<sup>6</sup> comments that:

STCACL's subcontracting arrangements are extremely thorough and effective; all subcontractors have fully embraced the drive for continuous improvement.

In terms of national agencies, the STCACL team meets the Education Funding Agency (EFA) regularly and has found both the EFA and the national providers contracted through the EFA responsive to meeting requests. However, the funding rules and the approach adopted by the national providers contracted to offer

courses locally have presented challenges in terms of presenting a suitable range of local offers. The approach adopted by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) has been helpful in being flexible and responsive to proposals from STCACL that reflect the local employment market.

## Effective practice

The work of the STCACL team shows that effective practice must be based on good analysis of issues and monitoring of provision. The Ofsted report states<sup>7</sup>:

STCACL collects data and information about learners' progress and development and uses it to monitor and improve the effectiveness of its provision exceptionally well. The service's self-assessment process and quality improvement system are very thorough.

An example of innovative and targeted provision is a teenage parents-to-be programme which started with ten young people and has grown to include 80, with further expansion due in September. This has delivered 100 per cent success and retention rates and progression to further courses.

South Tyneside has piloted a programme for NEET young people with qualifications but no pathway into employment. It is a 'boot camp' programme comprising two weeks, 9–5 intensive training and has achieved a 78 per cent success rate in positive outcomes in terms of progression.

In July 2013 young people of school leaving age were given the chance to sample what training and employment opportunities were available to them once they finish school in a series of taster programmes<sup>8</sup>. A number of local approved providers were involved in offering advice and exposure to a variety of work settings.

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6 Ofsted report: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/54492>

7 Ofsted report: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/54492>

8 Press release on taster programme: <http://www.southtyneside.info/article/18989/young-people-being-given-a-chance-to-sample-workskills-south-tyneside-taster-programme>

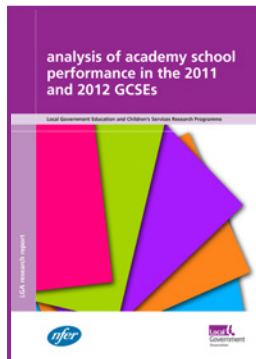
### **Recommendations from South Tyneside Council:**

The approach adopted by STCACL, endorsed by Ofsted, is demonstrating the effectiveness of the council role in shaping provision for 16–19 young people. They would like to see funding and procurement rules that:

- more easily enable innovative and flexible provision, especially with respect to highly targeted and short courses for vulnerable groups
- give councils more influence over the contracts with national providers active in their area.

# Recently published reports

The Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme is carried out by NFER. The research projects cover topics and perspectives that are of special interest to local authorities. All the reports are published and disseminated by the NFER, with separate executive summaries. The summaries, and more information about this series, are available free of charge at: [www.nfer.ac.uk/research/local-government-association/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research/local-government-association/)



## Analysis of academy school performance in the 2011 and 2012 GCSEs

Analysis of the 2012 school level GCSE results highlights varying degrees of progress depending on whether outcome scores include or exclude equivalent qualifications. Analysis looked at school level progress between KS2 and GCSE to determine associations with school status. Interpretations varied depending on outcome measure used.

[www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGGA01](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGGA01)



## Evaluation of the sector-led peer challenge programme 2012/13

NFER's study explores regional lead stakeholders' views on the impact of the sector-led improvement programme. It involved 43 interviews across the nine regions. Stakeholders are overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of the programme in bringing improvements to services, despite the challenges involved.

[www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/SLPC01](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/SLPC01)



## The longer-term impact of safeguarding children peer reviews

This report sets out the expectations and anticipated outcomes of six local authorities participating in an LGA safeguarding children peer review. This report forms part of a longitudinal study comprising interviews with local authority officers and their partners to explore the longer-term impacts of the review over one year.

[www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGPR01](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGPR01)

For more information, or to buy any of these publications, please contact: The Publications Unit, National Foundation for Educational Research, The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ, tel: +44 (0)1753 637002, fax: +44 (0)1753 637280, email: [book.sales@nfer.ac.uk](mailto:book.sales@nfer.ac.uk), web: [www.nfer.ac.uk/publications](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications).



The NFER was commissioned by the LGA to examine councils' views on the current approach to commissioning education and training provision for 16–19 year olds, managed nationally by the Education funding Agency (EFA), and to assess its effectiveness and local impact.

This report captures councils' views on:

- the effectiveness of the current 16–19 commissioning process and the extent to which it meets local need
- the role of the council in the allocation of EFA funding and the commissioning of local provision
- the commissioning of re-engagement activities
- the funding and commissioning of provision for high needs students.