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## The evaluation of the raising the participation age locally-led delivery projects (RPA) 2011 to 2012: survey and case study findings

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### Background

1. The Education and Skills Act (2008) increased the minimum age at which young people in England can leave learning. From 2013, young people will be required to continue in education or training until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17 and from 2015 they will be required to continue until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

2. Raising the Participation Age (RPA) does not mean young people must stay in school; they will be able to choose one of the following options:

- full-time education, such as school, college or home education;
- an Apprenticeship; or
- full-time work with part-time education or training.

3. Work has already been undertaken to prepare for RPA at a local level. The previous phases of local work – the RPA trials – have already shown some of the steps that areas can take to prepare for full participation. In Phase 1 (September 2009 – March 2010) 10 local authorities (LAs) and one sub-regional group (SRG) focused on one of three specific themes: Information Advice and Guidance; Re-engagement of 16- and 17-year-olds; and the development of area-wide local solutions. In Phase 2 (April 2010 – March 2011) four new LAs and one SRG joined the programme. Areas were asked to maintain an in-depth focus on specific trial models in order to establish best practice on implementation of RPA.

4. This phase of RPA Locally-Led Delivery Projects (LLDPs) (April 2011 – March 2012) is different from the previous trials. It has focused on local determination of the challenges to be addressed and the actions local areas<sup>1</sup> could take to develop their approaches to increasing the numbers of young people continuing in education or training in the run-up to 2013 and 2015. Areas were asked to identify their priorities and to develop and test their own approaches to address these, rather than focusing on a specific theme. Nineteen individual LAs and three SRGs (comprising 16 individual LAs) have participated in the LLDPs.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'area/s' is used to refer to the LAs and/or SRGs collectively.

## Methodology

5. DfE commissioned Isos Partnership (Isos) and the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) to undertake an evaluation of the LLDPs in August 2011. The evaluation team used a mixed-method approach to explore the impact of the LLDPs including:

- a baseline survey (carried out during September and October 2011);
- case study visits (carried out from December 2011 to March 2012); and
- a follow-up survey (carried out during March and April 2012).

6. The baseline and follow-up surveys aimed to measure local areas' aspirations, levels of confidence, costs, activities and measures of success. This report presents summaries of the evidence from the survey findings and evidence collected from 18 case study visits completed between December 2011 and March 2012.

7. The report is structured around the six RPA priorities identified in earlier evaluations of the RPA trials. These are:

- Priority one: Understanding the Cohort
- Priority two: Determining Local Priorities
- Priority three: Managing Transitions and Tracking
- Priority four: Establishing Support Mechanisms
- Priority five: Identifying and Meeting Provision Needs
- Priority six: Communicating the RPA Message.

## Summary of key findings

### Overall progress, levels of confidence and ambition

- There has been a greater range and scale of activity seen in the LLDPs than in the previous phases of the RPA trials.
- At the point of the baseline survey, in October 2011, local areas reported feeling confident about how prepared they were for achieving RPA. Across the six priorities, between 18 and 23 areas<sup>2</sup> reported feeling 'quite' or 'very' confident in October 2011.
- This confidence appears to have increased between the baseline and final surveys. The final survey showed that, in April 2012, between 15 and 24<sup>3</sup> areas for each of the six priorities, reported feeling 'more confident' than they did in October 2011.

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<sup>2</sup> All but one area responded to this question in the baseline survey. The data reported is based on the collective response from one SRG and individual responses from 24 LAs, giving a total of 25 responses.

<sup>3</sup> A total of 26 areas responded to this question, at least in part, in the final survey. One SRG responded on behalf of their LAs; individual LA responses were received from all other LAs.

- Although areas felt confident, some had set ambitious targets for 2014/15. Some needed to raise participation rates by up to 19 percentage points for 17-year-olds and up to 10 percentage points for 16-year-olds to achieve their targets.
- Twenty-eight out of 35 areas had identified their priority groups in the follow-up survey. These groups included some of the most vulnerable young people, including learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LLDD), looked-after children (LAC) or care leavers and teenage parents.

## Overview of activities and costs

- Overall, local areas were undertaking the greatest number of activities<sup>4</sup> in priorities one and two<sup>5</sup>; understanding the cohort and determining local priorities (61 activities out of a total of 225 activities across all six priorities). Areas were undertaking the lowest number of activities in priority three: 'managing transitions and tracking' (30 activities).
- The highest median level of expenditure by priority was priorities one and two: 'understanding the cohort and determining local priorities' (£42,692) and the lowest was priority three: 'managing transitions and tracking' (£15,228). Areas spent the most on individual activities categorised as 'improving access' under priority five with a median of £50,624.
- In contrast, areas spent the smallest amount of money on individual activities categorised as 'understanding local needs' (priority four), with a median of just £2500 and 'support for vulnerable groups' (priority three), with a median of £6125.
- In order to deliver these activities, typically local areas spent just over half of grant funding on LA staffing. The majority of the remainder was spent on school/college staffing and commissioning. Most used existing budgets to supplement the grant.

## Measuring impact and value for money

- Firm conclusions about impact and value for money have been difficult to make. The evaluation team has provided their interpretation of the data based on assessment of the relevance, economy, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of RPA activity. In lieu of detailed evidence of impact, the evaluation team used the number of completed activities as a measure of success.
- Areas found it difficult to measure impact within the evaluation timescales (October 2011 to April 2012). Providing costs on a clear and consistent basis was also a challenge.
- Overall, areas were carrying out 225 activities to increase participation rates. Of these, 23 areas had completed at least one activity, accounting for over two-thirds of activities (150) across all six priorities.

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'activities' relates to an overarching aim or collection of tasks local areas undertook to enable them to increase participation. Areas typically undertook several activities in each priority.

<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of the research, priority one and two activities are reported together because of the close link between the use of data to understand the cohort and then determine local priorities.

## **Priorities one and two: Understanding the Cohort and Determining Local Priorities**

- Within these priorities, in the final survey, the most commonly reported activities in local areas related to identifying young people at risk, with 15 areas carrying out 25 activities. This is supported by evidence from the case study visits, with only four of 18 areas not having a risk of NEET indicator (RONI) or planning to develop one.
- Local areas' understanding of the cohort was much stronger than previously seen in the RPA trials. Evidence from the surveys shows that 21 out of 25 areas had now set goals for participation in 2013 and 2015. This was supported by evidence from the case study visits which showed the majority of areas were using data on a regular basis to challenge the performance of providers.
- The surveys showed that half of the areas were undertaking activities to develop or amend their RPA plan or priorities. The case study visits supported this finding. All of the 18 areas visited had or were developing a RPA plan.
- Case study visits also showed that governance arrangements for managing RPA were more clearly focused and tighter than those seen in the previous RPA trials.

## **Priority three: Managing Transitions and Tracking**

- Survey responses showed that nine areas were undertaking 10 activities related to 'managing transitions', and case study evidence showed an increased focus on support for transitions throughout a young person's education including in Key Stage 3.
- Local areas provided limited evidence about managed moves protocols or the risk of NEET indicator (RONI) being used to share information between pre- and post-16 providers.
- Five areas demonstrated good practice being developed by colleges to improve their own retention rates and ensure young people were not dropping out.
- Although there was much activity taking place to improve tracking (survey responses showed that 14 areas were undertaking 17 activities to improve tracking), the case study findings showed that local areas' biggest concerns related to this issue.
- Areas had concerns about tracking related to local authority decisions regarding Connexions services and they also had concerns about how the new duty on schools to provide independent and impartial careers guidance would be delivered. However, they also identified how local areas could mitigate these risks through the use of RONIs and local Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) networks.

## **Priority four: Establishing Support Mechanisms**

- The survey data showed that a small number of local areas were supporting vulnerable groups of young people (with nine areas undertaking 14 activities). Activities included the creation of support mechanisms and packages for vulnerable groups, and developing a particular role to help support vulnerable young people.
- Building on the work of previous RPA trials, two case study visits provided evidence of developing early-leaver protocols.
- One area was able to demonstrate impact as a result of engaging with schools to provide support and through the use of RONIs. In this area, from a cohort of 76 young people targeted for additional support, only six remained with an 'unknown' or 'unintended' post-16 destination.

## **Priority five: Identifying and Meeting Provision Needs**

- The survey responses showed that 10 areas were undertaking 23 activities to develop provision to meet local needs, including developing new provision or particular types of provision, e.g. Apprenticeships or other work-related learning routes.
- The case study visits illustrated different approaches to mapping provision gaps. Linking local areas' mapping of provision gaps to progression routes or looking at current rates of pre- to post-16 progression made gaps easier to identify.
- The evaluation team found examples of innovative new provision being developed. One area, for example, had developed a flexible full-time holding course which combined Foundation Learning provision with opportunities for volunteering and work experience. In addition, they had developed a new pre-Apprenticeship route.
- Three of the case study areas identified reducing numbers in Jobs without Training (JWT) as a top priority. They identified work around identification and prevention work around pre-16 in relation to JWT as critical to reducing numbers in JWT.

## **Priority six: Communicating the RPA Message**

- Most activity within this priority related to the ongoing dissemination of information and awareness raising around RPA (with 22 areas undertaking 43 activities).
- Overall levels of awareness amongst schools, colleges and other providers that were visited during the case study visits were generally high. RPA was on the agenda for most school and college senior leaders, but with varying degrees of understanding of RPA amongst classroom teachers and lecturers.

## **Top tips from the LLDPs for other areas to consider**

### **Local areas might want to consider how they can...**

- develop or refine early identification indicators (EIT) or RONIs for use post-16 as well as pre-16 and decide how best to present the data to schools and other providers to make it as easy as possible for them to understand;
- develop projections for participation in 2013 and 2015 that take account of assumptions about non-participants; strengthen trajectory planning and be clearer about the link between their data analysis and the priorities for action they have set;
- review governance arrangements to ensure reporting lines at a political level are clear to ensure responsible lead members have a thorough understanding of RPA;
- discuss with post-16 providers that have low participation rates at age 17, their own retention practices and whether there is anything to learn from others;
- develop systems to use an EIT or RONI to act as the mechanism by which targeted support is deployed to young people, and then used to evaluate the impact of that support;
- ensure that early notification systems and protocols emphasise the importance of providers' own pastoral care systems and moves between providers;
- identify whether gaps in provision exist by mapping the most common progression routes and consider developing new provision to meet any gaps;

- consider whether they can distinguish the characteristics, pre-16, of young people who are at risk of JWT from the characteristics of young people who are at risk of NEET and focus on activity to prevent young people from entering JWT; and
- continue to communicate the RPA message as widely as possible. Consider developing a local brand for RPA so messages are recognised.

**Additional Information**

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/>  
Further information about this research can be obtained from  
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