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This year marks an historic change for young people. From the start of the 2013/14 academic year, all young people are required to participate in education or training until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17. From 2015, this requirement will apply to their 18th birthday. We published statutory guidance in April 2013 setting out the duties on both local authorities and their partners to enable you to prepare for raising the participation age (RPA) – available at <http://tinyurl.com/dx2qjgh>. I am writing now to highlight some key points to bear in mind given your authority is now under the new duties to promote the effective participation of all 16 and 17 year old residents in your area, and identify those young people who are not participating.

Firstly, I am sure that you, like me, are frustrated when we hear the media refer to RPA as 'raising the school leaving age'. This is confusing for young people and their parents and I look to you to ensure your officers, schools and contracted services understand the implications of the new legislation. To help you with this, we have made a range of resources available at <http://tinyurl.com/cbx4sbp>. Your authority can use these to promote RPA and to make it clear that young people can participate through: full-time education – for example, the recently launched Study Programmes; an Apprenticeship; or full-time work or volunteering combined with part-time study.

Secondly, it is vital that all young people have access to education and training provision that meets their needs. As you know we have been working to strengthen the vocational options for young people. Traineeships were introduced from August 2013 to give young people who are focussed on employment, but not ready for apprenticeships, the opportunity to develop the skills and workplace experience that employers require. More information can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/acrr9gm>.

From September 2013, new 16 to 19 Study Programmes are being introduced, supported by changes to post-16 funding. All students in full or part-time education aged 16 to 19 are expected to follow a Study Programme tailored to their individual needs, education and employment goals - including students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. More information can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/o4mq9ab>.

Whichever route is best suited to the individual, we expect your officers to be working now to make sure that all 16 and 17 year olds have an offer of a suitable place in education or training for the start of the new academic year through the September Guarantee. Your authority should also be working with your regional Youth Contract provider, to use this safety net service to ensure that the most hard to help are supported to meet their duty to participate.

Finally, you will already be clear that the tracking of participation amongst all 16-19 year olds resident in your area and recording their activity on the Client Caseload Information Service (CCIS) is essential. Not only does this allow your authority to identify and support those most in need, but it is the source of statistics which demonstrate the performance of schools, colleges and LAs in this crucial area. It is only through accurate input of data that we can accurately reflect your work.

We are publishing data on the proportion of 16 and 17 year olds in education and training on the DfE website each quarter and you can find the latest data here <http://tinyurl.com/lse18bp>. We have also published Destination Measures showing what proportion of young people achieve a sustained destination in education, employment and training here <http://tinyurl.com/co8qveq>. These show that whilst many engage at some point in the year following KS4, there are too many who do not sustain their participation. In order to help you tackle this, the RPA legislation places a new duty on schools and colleges to notify you when a young person 'drops out' so that you can support them to re-engage. You will want to make sure that all your schools and colleges are aware of their duty and that they know who it is in your authority that they should be contacting.

Local authorities can also learn from those authorities which have been engaged in our RPA project work. We will shortly be publishing an evaluation of the last set of those projects and this will give some top tips on approaches you may want to consider. You will have also received an invitation to the RPA Evaluation dissemination event on 26 September, and I hope you or a representative can join colleagues from other authorities at the event. If you have a query about the event please contact RaisingTheParticipationAge.MAILBOX@education.gsi.gov.uk.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to help our young people to fulfil this new requirement and equip themselves for the future.



MATTHEW HANCOCK