



Department
for Education

Birmingham and Solihull Area Review

Final report

November 2016

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Background

In July 2015, the government announced a rolling programme of around 40 local area reviews, to be completed by March 2017, covering all general further education colleges and sixth-form colleges in England.

The reviews are designed to ensure that colleges are financially stable into the longer-term, that they are run efficiently, and are well-positioned to meet the present and future needs of individual students and the demands of employers. Students in colleges have high expectations about standards of teaching and learning and the extent to which their learning prepares them to progress further education and training, to higher education or directly into employment.

The Birmingham and Solihull was the first review to be conducted. The area is contiguous with the boundaries of Birmingham City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council but does not include either the rest of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP area or the wider area that will form part of the West Midlands Combined Authority. Subsequent area reviews will look at provision in those areas so the outcomes can be aligned to support the direction of travel towards the scope of the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The colleges involved in this review were: Birmingham Metropolitan College (BMet), Bournville College, Solihull College, South & City College Birmingham, Cadbury College, Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College and The Sixth Form College Solihull.

The local steering group was chaired by Sir David Collins, the Further Education (FE) Commissioner, supported by the Sixth Form College Commissioner. The steering group met on 6 occasions between September 2015 and March 2016, and additional, informal meetings between the colleges also took place to consider and develop options in greater detail, with the support of the Deputy FE Commissioner. Membership of the steering group comprised each college's chair of governors and principal, representatives from The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership and the 2 local authorities (Birmingham City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council), the Regional Schools Commissioner, and representatives from the former Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), the Education Funding Agency (EFA), and the Department for Education (DfE).

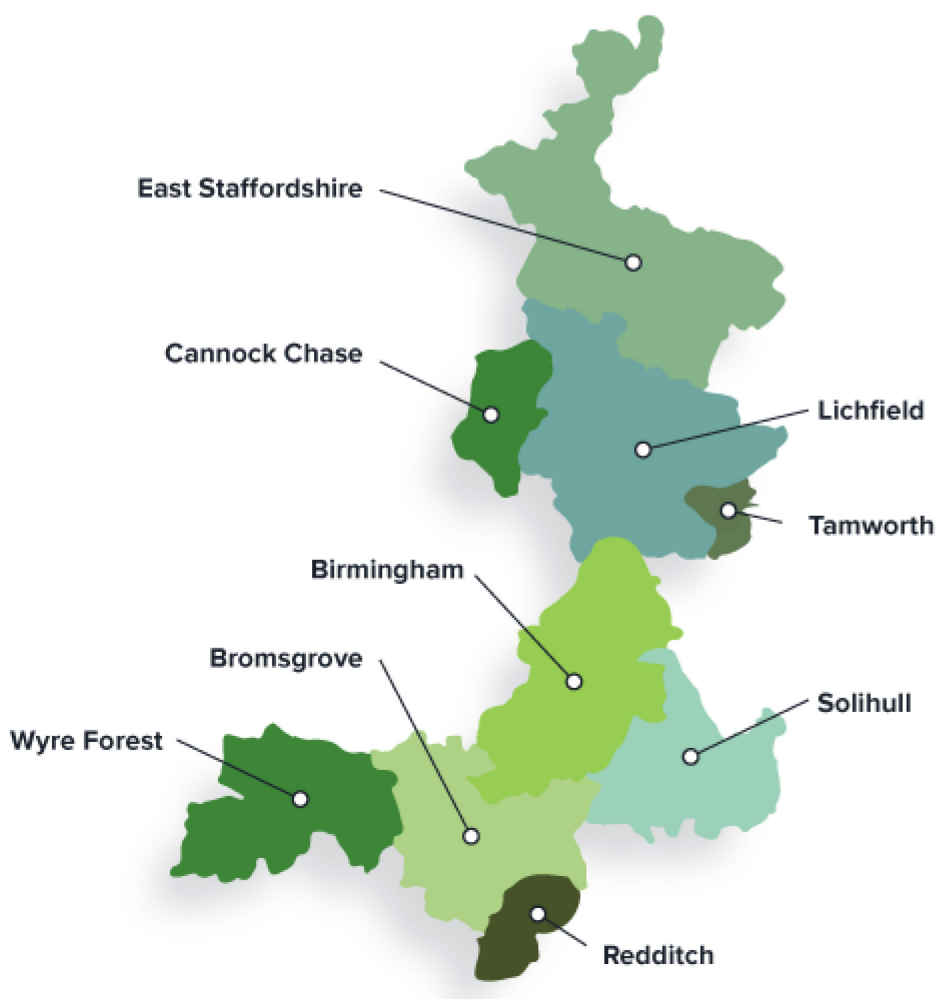
Visits to colleges and support throughout the process were provided by staff from the FE and Sixth Form College Commissioners' teams. The Joint Area Review Delivery Unit (JARDU) provided the project management, administrative support and developed supporting materials and papers used by the steering group. JARDU also led on consultations with local stakeholders.

The needs of the Birmingham and Solihull area

Demographics and the economy

The Birmingham and Solihull area review covers the 2 local authorities of Birmingham and Solihull, with a total population of about 1.32 million people. Birmingham and Solihull is an urban area with a diverse population. Nearly half of 16 and 17 year olds are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and it is important to ensure that their needs continue to be fully served.

The area is illustrated on the map¹ below in the context of the whole Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP (GBSLEP) area:



¹ GBSLEP area map

The table below provides a snapshot of key demographic and economic data², which has acted as a starting point for this review.

	Birmingham	Solihull	Great Britain
Total population (2015)	1,111,300	210,400	63,258,400
Population aged 16 to 64	64.1%	60.1%	63.3%
% with higher education qualifications ³	32.6%	35.7%	37.1%
Those formally qualified to level 2+	64.7%	84%	73.6%
Gross weekly pay £ of residents	£488.20	£593.30	£529.60
Gross weekly pay £ by workplace	£538.70	£569.10	£529
Out-of-work benefit claimants	4.2%	1.6%	1.8%
% of main benefit claimants	17.0%	10.2%	11.8%
Jobs density ⁴	0.78	0.91	0.82
Total workplace units:			Average for the West-Midlands
Micro ⁵	80.5%	83%	82.6%
Small	15.1%	13.1%	13.9%

2 ONS Local Authority Profiles – see data annex: Local socio-economic data. Please note that ONS update the data set on a regular basis and that the data included relates to the point at which the report was written

3 Percentages relate to those aged 16 to 64

4 Job density - the level of jobs per resident aged 16 to 64. For example, a job density of 1.0 would mean that there is one job for every resident aged 16 to 64. The job density for the West Midlands as a whole is 0.78 which is below the national average.

5 Micro-business have a total of 1 to 9 workers; small businesses 10 to 49 workers (2015 data)

	Birmingham	Solihull	Great Britain
Medium	3.7%	3.3%	3%
Large	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%

The key points to note are:

- Birmingham has the lowest working age employment rate in the region - for all ages, not just for young people - compared to other local areas in the region. And while the rate is rising, it is not catching up with the region as a whole, or with national averages. Solihull is a little higher, but overall the GBSLEP area falls behind both regional and national levels
- qualification levels in Solihull are higher in respect of those who have attained at least level 2 than either nationally or in Birmingham. Solihull also has a higher rate of residents qualified to level 4 and above compared to Birmingham, although it remains below the national proportion
- the average weekly earnings of Solihull residents are significantly higher than either Birmingham or national figures and jobs based in Solihull also attract higher pay. Birmingham-based employers also pay a little more than the national average
- Birmingham has a higher rate of unemployment and benefit claimants than Solihull and well above national percentages in both cases
- Solihull has a higher jobs density than either Birmingham or the regional and national levels.

Patterns of employment and future growth

Birmingham City Council has a high rate of employment and support allowance claimants, which is not falling and, while job seeker's allowance claimant levels are falling, the rate for Birmingham is the highest amongst all core cities and concentrated in the inner city wards of Birmingham, with some pockets in deprived outer city areas.

Overall, employment in the area is forecast to increase by 147,200 jobs by 2030, an increase of 17.4% on 2015.

The skills devolution deal for the West Midlands Combined Authority (including GBSLEP) as well as the forthcoming development of HS2 provides an opportunity for a strategic overhaul of the local employment and skills system.

There is an imperative to increase qualification levels among the GBSLEP population and to ensure that residents are equipped with the right skills to fully benefit from the opportunities that will arise across a range of key sectors. Currently:

- 49.4% of working age residents are qualified to level 3+. This is low compared to national averages (56.5%). 13.6 % of working age residents have no qualifications. This compares to a 9% national average⁶
- rates of progression to higher education in Birmingham are below both national and regional levels, although Solihull residents have a higher progression rate that is well above the national average.

The employment forecasts show that new demand will increasingly focus on higher level skills, specifically for those with higher education (HE), graduate and post-graduate qualifications. This message is reinforced both by the accelerated growth forecast to be generated by the mainly knowledge intensive transformation sectors and by the analysis of long-term jobs arising out of HS2 and the associated developments⁷. For instance, of the 81,000 post-HS2 completion jobs forecast for the period, 43% are expected to be at least level 3+ and 25% at level 4+.

Employment opportunities for those with lower skills are most likely to be generated as a result of replacement demand particularly in sectors such as health and social work, business support services and wholesale retail.

In addition to the HS2-specific requirements, projections⁸ indicate that growing sectors of the economy such as health and social care, support services (+8,000 between 2012 and 2020), professional services (+7,000) and construction (+6,000) will provide the largest numbers of employment opportunities in the GBSLEP. However, other sectors of the economy – even those that are projected to shrink in absolute size – will continue to offer opportunities in the form of replacement demand (for example, manufacturing).

LEP priorities

Data from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP⁹ show that there are skills gaps in the area that need to be filled to ensure that productivity targets can be met and these are mainly around higher level skills in a range of industries:

- there is potential for increased employment in emerging sectors such as digital and creative (+22%), low carbon and environmental technologies (+13%) and advanced manufacturing and engineering, which is forecast to increase by 13% by 2030
- the construction of the HS2 will increase demand for manufacturing and construction type skills from 2017¹⁰

⁶ Population Survey 2014

⁷ Albion Economics, HS2 Consortium, Solihull Observatory

⁸ Working Futures data provided for GBSLEP Skills for Growth Plan

⁹ GBSLEP Skills for Growth Plan

¹⁰ [HS2 planning for GBSLEP](#)

- LEP data indicate that future demand for STEM qualifications is likely to outstrip supply; precise technical skills will be mixed with more general aptitudes for project management and problem solving as factories become more technologically advanced
- the digital/ IT sector demands highly qualified people and there are significant opportunities for job creation here. Evidence shows that many students are doing basic IT courses but more need to move into higher level courses that cover specific IT skills for example website analytics
- overall 45% of the total demand for employment, including replacement demand, will be for those with a first degree or HE level qualification, whereas only 5% of jobs will require level 1 or below. Increasing the skills levels of local residents will be critical to ensuring that residents are able to keep up with the rising demand for higher level skills in the workplace
- there is potential to grow significantly both 16 to 18 and adult apprenticeships, working closely with employers who will pay the apprenticeship levy. The colleges will need to consider their delivery models and employer engagement in order to increase the volume of apprenticeships delivered, and their market share.

The GBSLEP Strategy for Growth identifies a number of key ‘high growth, high value added’ sectors which are areas of natural strength and which present the biggest opportunity for creating and sustaining growth. These sectors are:

- advanced manufacturing and engineering
- life sciences
- digital and creative
- business, professional and financial services
- low carbon and environmental technologies and services.

Supporting the above sectors is also a key element of the LEP’s current Strategic Economic Plan (SEP)¹¹. Programme 4 of the SEP is entitled ‘Enhancing our Growth Sectors’ and sets out the detailed programme activity that will support growth in these sectors. The SEP targeted the creation of 70,000 net private sector jobs in the priority sectors by 2020 and 3,500 trainees and apprenticeships.

As well as the priority sectors above the GBSLEP has also identified the following key sectors:

- digital technology
- transport and logistics
- construction and infrastructure

¹¹ [GBSLEP Strategic Economic Plan](#)

- food and drink
- tourism and hospitality
- education
- emerging technologies.

The LEP has indicated that HS2 is expected to generate jobs in 2 distinct phases:

HS2 Construction¹² - The construction of HS2, from London to the Midlands, is likely to create thousands of jobs in Birmingham, with the majority of construction activity taking place between 2017 and 2022. A large proportion of HS2 construction jobs will be on a contract basis, which means that the actual labour requirement is unlikely to greatly exceed 10,000 jobs in any one year. These jobs will be primarily in the fields of design, project management, civil engineering construction and specialist railway engineering.

Research commissioned by HS2 from the National Skills Academy for Rail Engineering (NSARE) and other partners suggests that HS2 construction skill shortages and/or recruitment pressures are most likely to occur in the following disciplines:

- train control systems design engineers and technicians
- overhead line design engineers and technicians
- track design engineers and high output plant operatives
- rolling stock
- civil engineering operatives
- plant operatives
- plant mechanics
- scaffolders.

Industry experts note that, in the short term, the range of skills required would include site supervisor skills, management skills, project skills and data revolution skills. In the longer-term the requirements will also include higher technical skills in signalling systems, a broad range of digital skills and data communication skills.

Long Term – Post Construction - Post build, around 81,000 new permanent jobs will be generated in the wider economy. The majority of these jobs can be directly linked to the new development opportunities available in and around Curzon Street (36,000), UKC Interchange & Hub (16,500) and Washwood Heath (2,900). However, the benefits of increased connectivity across the whole region will also be a significant factor in terms of new job creation (24,000 attributable to wider connectivity impact).

These jobs are expected to be delivered on a phased basis over a 20-year period through to 2045. On average this will involve an additional 4,000 jobs per year for 20 years across the wider West Midlands area. The majority of these new long-term jobs are expected to be generated in a range of key target sectors including business, professional and financial

¹² [GBSLEP HS2 Growth Strategy](#)

services, low carbon, advanced manufacturing and digital and creative as identified in the GBSLEP Strategy for Growth and Strategic Economic Plan¹³.

Feedback from LEPs, employers, local authorities and students

Feedback from LEP representatives, local authority representatives and employers consulted during the area review process drew attention to:

- education and training provision to be flexible and responsive to the future skills demands. The LEP recognises that the FE sector has a key role to play in meeting future skills needs, but that it is part of a much larger, complex system of meeting demand from learners and its role therefore needs to be viewed within this context
- sufficient and appropriate progression pathways both in terms of accessing and successfully exiting FE provision
- a coordinated approach to provision, delivery and progression into technical education pathways, specifically including apprenticeships up to degree level with curriculum that is driven by business need
- colleges to harness the purchasing power of advanced learner loans
- focus and specialisation in key growth sectors
- elimination of oversupply in skill areas with limited forecast demand
- maximising funding towards learning delivery including, for example, by reviewing the level of sub-contracted delivery
- engagement with employers to ensure that their needs are met and that there is a comprehensive, joined up response to harnessing their purchasing power, particularly through the apprenticeship levy
- the ability to flex and adapt as the local economy, funding and policy context changes and as the outcomes of area reviews in neighbouring areas emerge, particularly within GBSLEP
- a flagship Institute of Technology
- a focus on outcomes and the improvement and maintenance of a high quality offer.

The LEP and local authorities have agreed to work with colleges to carry out a detailed assessment of the curriculum plans that will be developed to support the implementation of recommendations arising from the review, in the context of the college contributions to addressing the strategic skills needs the LEP has outlined.

Colleges' employer contacts had the opportunity to contribute views about the post- 16 offer locally. Those that responded were positive about their experience of working with the colleges, have access to and receive good advice and service, and, along with their

¹³ [GBSLEP Strategy for Growth and Strategic Economic Plan](#)

apprentices, were clear on expectations from the programme and the range of evidence to be collected. There were no indications of skills gaps from those employers that responded. The 3 sixth-form colleges are engaged with the LEP in the analysis and development of skills needs and delivery.

Independent training providers locally and colleges from outside the area review deliver significant volumes of apprenticeship provision in the area. In comments received from them, there was recognition of the opportunity to work with colleges on apprenticeships developments and on creation of an Institute of Technology. Other providers were similarly focused on the need for better outcomes for learners in Birmingham and Solihull.

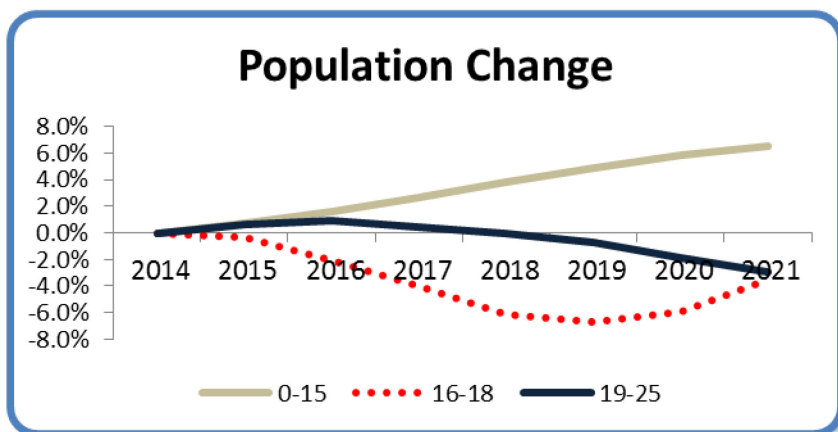
As part of each area review there was engagement with students coordinated by the National Union of Students (NUS). Where the NUS submitted a report on the views of students these are available on [NUS connect](#).

The quantity and quality of current provision

The steering group considered information provided by each local authority about population projections, focusing on the changes in the numbers and needs of young people aged 16+.

The number of school places in Birmingham has increased significantly in the past few years at all ages and Birmingham's plans on school sufficiency of places¹⁴ demonstrate the need to meet increased need for primary places, which starts to move through into secondary at year 7 from 2017 onwards. The local authority plan indicates a requirement for an additional cumulative 1,664 primary places by 2020, after which numbers start to move through to post-16. The local authority suggests that post-16 growth at that stage is likely to be absorbed by the schools and colleges already in the area, where additional places already exist. The local authority place plans indicate no need for further sixth-form provision to be established in the city. Solihull schools provision has not grown at such a fast rate.

The Birmingham and Solihull area overall is in decline in both the age 16 to 18 and age 19 to 25 cohorts¹⁵. The low point of the 16 to 19 demographic dip is predicted to be 2018 to 2020, after which it starts to recover sharply as shown in the diagram below which shows predicted population change in the Birmingham and Solihull area. The decline in the age 19 to 25 cohort continues until at least 2021.



It is important to note that these projections take into account only resident populations and not those travelling into the area to access provision.

The declining age 16 to 18 cohort in the Birmingham and Solihull area described above indicates that, there may be increasing competition for learners across the area. This may

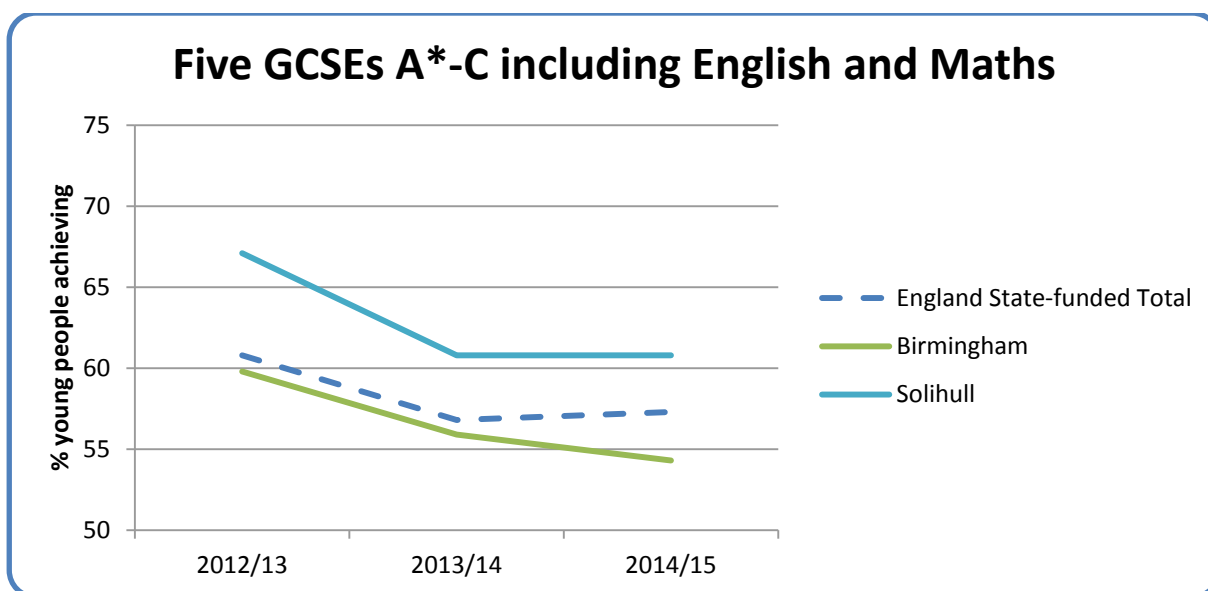
¹⁴ [Birmingham City Council](#)

¹⁵ ONS sub-national population projections – see data annex: Population projections

bring risks for some providers and some provision where class sizes are small and do not support a broad curriculum offer.

Performance of schools at Key Stage 4

The trend in GCSE pass rates for 16 year old school pupils completing year 11 across the 2 local authorities is illustrated below¹⁶.



The overall performance of schools at year 11 (key stage 4) within Solihull is above the national average, with regard to attainment of 5 A*-Cs including English and maths¹⁷. In Birmingham performance at key stage 4 with regard to attainment of 5 A*-Cs including English and maths is below the national average.

The GCSE results, coupled with future growth in the number of young people, reinforce the need for significant provision for post-16 at level 2 and 3 (either based in the classroom or in the workplace). The short-term demographic picture in the area, with fewer 16 to 18 year olds, suggests that colleges will need to consider carefully the implications of this in putting forward plans for growth.

Schools with sixth-forms

Area reviews of post-16 education and training institutions are predominantly focused on general further education and sixth-form colleges in order to ensure there is a high quality

¹⁶ School Key Stage 4 results – see data annex. Local authority and total (state-funded sector) figure covering achievements in state-funded schools only.

¹⁷ In 2013 to 2014 a change in how the GCSE performance of schools was defined led to a drop in the overall numbers of students achieving 5 GCSEs A*-C, including maths and English.

and financially resilient set of colleges in each area of England. Schools with sixth-forms have the opportunity to seek to opt in to a review if the local steering group agrees.

The underpinning analysis for the review included current post-16 provision in the area made by schools with sixth-forms. Regional Schools Commissioners and local authorities have had the opportunity to identify any issues with school sixth-form provision, and feed these into the review. We expect Regional Schools Commissioners to take account of the analysis from area reviews in any decisions they make about future provision.

There are currently 66 funded schools with sixth forms¹⁸ in the review area, including 19 local authority maintained and 47 academies. This includes 3 free schools, a studio school and 2 university technical colleges. Most school pupils in the age range 16 to 18 are enrolled on A level courses.

Overall funded student numbers in school-sixth forms increased by 8% in the 3 years 2013 to 2014 to 2015 to 2016, with a total of 12,555 young people taught in a sixth-form setting. The school sixth-forms within the Birmingham City area vary in size but, using as a guide, for illustration purposes only, the application threshold of 200 for new school sixth-forms in academies, there are 37 school sixth-forms (including local authority maintained and academies but excluding special schools) that were funded below that figure in 2015 to 2016.

At the time of the area review, 70% of the Birmingham City schools were graded by Ofsted as good or outstanding and 8 were in special measures in the city. Of the schools in Solihull, 7 were graded as outstanding by Ofsted, 5 had a grading of good and 2 were graded as requires improvement at the time of the review.

The further education and sixth-form colleges

Seven colleges (3 sixth-form colleges and 4 general further education colleges) participated in this review.

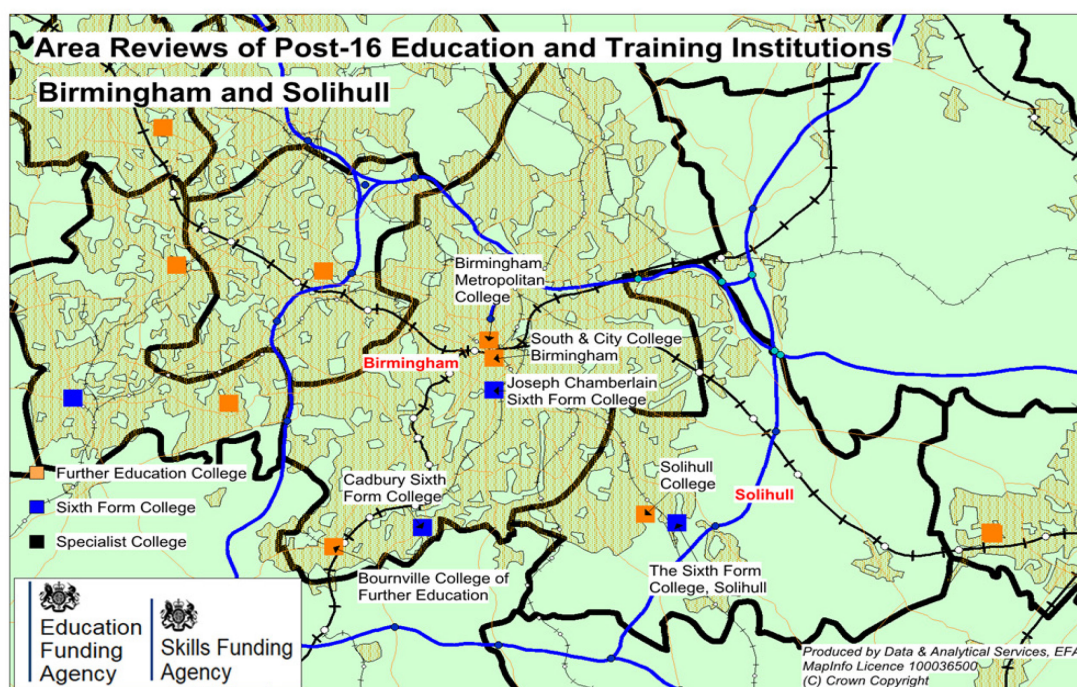
- Birmingham Metropolitan College (BMet)
- Bournville College
- Solihull College
- South & City College Birmingham
- Cadbury College
- Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College
- The Sixth Form College Solihull

18 EFA allocations – see data annex: 16 to 19 funding: Where part of a local authority is in the review area, that local authority has been included in the school sixth-form data.

The configuration of the current college sector in the area is partially a result of previous mergers that have created 2 large multi-site general FE colleges (BMet and South & City College Birmingham), and a number of smaller colleges. A combination of factors including financial weakness in some of the colleges, and the declining cohort mentioned above, point to the need for a resolution from the area review to ensure the stability and continued viability of a strong, sustainable local post-16 offer for students of all ages.

The quality of provision across the colleges and different courses offered is variable. Colleges will need to focus on the priorities identified by the local authorities to ensure that all learners have access to high quality learning programmes that will allow them to succeed and progress.

The location of these colleges is shown below:



Part of the area review process involved a visit to each college by specialist further education and sixth-form college advisers who report to the respective commissioners. The advisers met with governors, senior managers and staff, and reviewed a wide range of documents and data relating to each college's current range and quality of provision, their track record in attracting students, and their overall financial health. Through a data sharing protocol between members of the steering group, the information from each of the visits was shared with colleges and has informed the evidence base to the steering group for this review.

The current offer in the colleges

When reviewing the curriculum offer, the steering group found that much of the work had already been done to strip out duplication in provision across Birmingham since the

previous FE college mergers. However, with the large number of sites from which provision is delivered, the colleges may identify scope for rationalisation for example where there are small class sizes and below average levels of estate utilisation, while still ensuring good access to learning for students, particularly at the lower levels where students are less likely or less able to travel.

The colleges in Birmingham and Solihull provide a broad offer in terms of both subject and level across the area and in sectors that match well with the skills needs identified by the LEP and local authorities. The general further education colleges are large providers of technical education, but Bournville College and BMet also have significant A level offers. While the 3 sixth-form colleges concentrate on A levels for 16 to 18 year olds, they have also broadened their offer to include a wide range of BTECs and blended learning opportunities to their students. Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College also has a significant contract to deliver provision for adults.

The colleges have distinct recruitment areas and there is little significant duplication in their offer. The colleges have reviewed areas of the A level curriculum with low numbers including, for example, music, dance, drama and languages.

A particular focus for the steering group was the sustainability of the language offer in the longer term, across schools as well as colleges, given that attracting inward investment to the Birmingham and Solihull area may depend on local linguistic abilities. The local authorities agreed to undertake further work on mapping the language offer following the area review, not just post-16, but also pre-16, as the sustainability of the post-16 offer depends on learners making choices to learn languages at GCSE level in schools. This work will continue outside the scope of this review.

The technical education and the adult offer across the area are diverse and are well-aligned with the LEP priority sectors. The 4 general FE colleges offer a significant number of courses in LEP priority areas such as:

- advanced manufacturing
- construction
- health and social care
- science
- digital and creative
- business administration
- building and construction.

However, there is further scope for the colleges to continue to strengthen their collaboration to plan provision to meet longer term skills needs. This will require an offer to increase opportunities for progression to and delivery of specific higher level technical qualifications that will meet the needs identified for the future.

Quality of provision and financial sustainability of colleges

The table below provides a summary of the size and quality in each of the colleges.

College	Most recent overall Ofsted grade ¹⁹	EFA allocations (2015 to 2016) ²⁰	SFA allocations (2015 to 2016) ^{21, 22}	Total college income ²³
Birmingham Metropolitan College	Requires Improvement (May 2015)	£33,748,604	£20,623,550	£66,620,000
Bournville College	Good (May 2014)	£9,709,914	£8,793,119	£36,087,000 ²⁴
Solihull College	Requires Improvement (March 2015)	£18,698,699	£6,271,704	£33,630,000
South & City College Birmingham	Good (November 2015)	£18,421,823	£23,069,916	£53,686,000
Cadbury College	Good (March 2014)	£4,229,586		£4,631,000
Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College	Good (September 2014)	£8,213,178	£2,060,771	£10,991,000
The Sixth Form College Solihull	Good (September 2013)	£9,665,138		£10,162,000

Where a college was subject to a financial notice of concern or a financial notice to improve, this factor was taken into account in the assessment of options for structural change in the review. Bournville College is subject to a financial notice of concern issued by the Skills Funding Agency.

¹⁹ Ofsted – see data annex: College inspections

²⁰ EFA allocations – see data annex: 16 to 19 funding: EFA published funding allocations for 2015 to 2016 will not reflect changes made post- September 2015.

²¹ SFA allocations – see data annex: 16 to 19 funding: SFA published funding allocations reflect the position at September 2015.

²² Adult skills allocations to sixth-form colleges are primarily to fund students aged 19 and older.

²³ College accounts academic year 2014 to 2015: see data annex: College accounts

²⁴ 2013 to 2014 income from Bournville College's accounts

Overall, the condition of college buildings is good. Some colleges have higher average space per student than others, but this does not necessarily indicate being over-spaced. Each college has unique circumstances and constraints regarding estates. The area review has highlighted where rationalising or further investment might be needed and for further consideration during implementation.

Higher education in further education²⁵

Published data on the progression of young people to higher education across Birmingham and Solihull by the age of 19, show that there is a disparity in the progression rates between the 2 local authority areas.

Participation data published by HEFCE in 2012 for the 2005 to 2006 to 2010 to 2011 academic years and shows that Solihull is in the upper quintile of progression, with more than 40.7% of students accessing HE by age 19. The Birmingham City progression rate is in the 27.7 to 31.3% range, compared to an overall West Midlands average of 32.2 to 32.5% and a Solihull rate of >39.3%. Neighbouring areas to the west, such as Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall are the areas with the lowest rates of participation in the region.

The area is well served for higher education provision with 5 universities in the locality: Aston University, Birmingham City University, Newman University, the University of Birmingham and University College Birmingham, who between them offer the majority of HE provision in the area²⁶. The 4 local FE colleges also deliver higher education programmes.

The most popular HE subjects overall at all 4 general FE colleges delivering higher education courses are business and administrative studies, education, with engineering technology coming in third.

While the 4 general FE colleges all deliver higher education programmes and there is a significant university presence in the area, the latter is mainly academically-focused provision and the FE colleges play a key role in widening participation. There are areas of provision where there is a need to develop the progression routes to higher level technical skills to support the expected skills demand over the next decade and beyond. The colleges also have the opportunity to consider where there is potential to specialise and centralise delivery for these higher level technical skills in sector areas where investment is needed. In some of these higher level areas, the costs of equipment and specialist teaching for delivery means that individual colleges would be likely to find delivery unviable in small groups. Instead, centralising delivery in one place may create more sustainable opportunities. Consideration will be given to the impact on travel to learn patterns due to any proposed changes emerging from the review during the implementation of recommendations.

²⁵ HEFCE POLAR 3 data – see data annex: Higher education progression

²⁶ HEFCE – see data annex: Higher education providers

The colleges are keen to respond to the local skills gaps by considering the establishment of an Institute of Technology, focusing on higher level technical skills, and will develop plans for this, working with government to align their proposals with emerging policy and funding plans.

Provision for students with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and high needs²⁷

In 2015 to 2016, the EFA funded 1,133 post-16 places across the 2 authorities in colleges, maintained special schools, special academies, non-maintained special schools, general FE colleges, sixth-form colleges and specialist post-16 institutions. The general FE colleges and sixth-form colleges deliver a total of 315 funded places between them.

There are a total of 256 funded high need places across the 5 Birmingham-based colleges for 2015 to 2016, which represents 1.64% of the total number of funded students at those institutions. 744 post-16 high needs places have been funded across the schools and special schools in the Birmingham City Council area.

The EFA has funded a further 59 places in the 2 colleges in Solihull, 0.98% of their total number of funded students. In addition, there are 74 post-16 high needs funded places across the 4 maintained special schools in the Solihull area.

Local authorities will have funded additional places from their post-16 SEN budgets or will have chosen to supplement higher levels of funding for specific learners. There are also 2 specialist post-16 providers, Fircroft College and Queen Alexandra College that deliver specialist provision in the review area that complements the college offer.

Comments received from the 2 specialist post-16 institutions in consultation on the review focused on the need to ensure that any changes in the area would not impact adversely on accessibility to suitable good quality learning provision for high needs students. All of the colleges and the local authorities, which are the commissioners of provision for these learners, as well as other members of the steering group, wholly supported this objective.

During the review, neither of the local authorities expressed concerns about either the supply or quality of the current offer for learners with additional needs, although it is clear that fewer learners with additional needs participate in post-16 in Solihull when compared to the rate of participation for those without additional needs²⁸.

The steering group acknowledged that structural changes taking place as a result of the review should not disadvantage post-16 students with SEN or high needs.

²⁷ EFA allocations – see data annex: High needs

²⁸ DfE 16 to 18 Participation SFR – Local authority level data

Apprenticeships and apprenticeship providers

The 4 general FE colleges deliver apprenticeships in areas of LEP priorities such as advanced engineering, health and social care. However, the majority of the delivery of apprenticeships in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP area is undertaken by the 50 independent training providers operating in Birmingham and Solihull in 2014 to 2015, rather than the colleges.

The 4 general FE colleges jointly have a comparatively small portion of the apprenticeships market locally²⁹. Of the 13,600 apprenticeship starts in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP area in the 2014 to 2015 academic year, the 4 general FE colleges in the review area delivered 1,160 starts, which is a 9% share. The colleges are agreed that they must do significant work jointly to maximise the opportunity to grow apprenticeship places to contribute to the government's target and the LEP's ambitions. The colleges will consider how to secure a stronger place in apprenticeship delivery and discussions are underway about the development of a joint apprenticeship company.

College planning for future apprenticeships delivery will need to take into account the fact that delivery structures and funding will change in 2017, with the introduction of the apprenticeship levy³⁰, and the changing demands from employers.

Providers with good relationships with the larger employers are likely to have a major advantage in working collaboratively to grow apprenticeships numbers.

²⁹ Number of apprenticeships by provider and local authority - see data annex: Apprenticeships

³⁰ 'Apprenticeship levy and how it will work' on gov.uk

The need for change

Area reviews are intended to ensure that the further education sector has a strong and sustainable future – in terms of efficiency of operation, quality of provision, and the responsiveness of courses to the needs of individuals and employers.

At the start of the review the 2 local authorities and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP set out their priorities that provision in the area should:

- ensure the development of a robust offer around and progression routes to higher level technical skills in key priority areas that will support the development of local infrastructure projects linked in particular to HS2 as well as other skills priority areas
- develop the apprenticeships offer to better meet the needs of employers that are likely to arise from the apprenticeships levy
- provide a flexible offer to meet the needs of all learners and allow them to progress to higher level skills development
- look at the development of an Institute of Technology to support the STEM and digital agenda linked to key skills priorities.

The key areas for change

Taking the preceding points into account, the key issues in relation to this review, and deliberated during steering group meetings, were:

- the weak financial performance of Bournville College and BMet and the need for all colleges to secure greater financial resilience to enable ongoing flexible responses to meet the needs of the local economy and improve productivity
- the colleges are not yet key players in the local apprenticeship market, but recognise the importance of expanding apprenticeships to meet employer and learner demand. They are agreed that they must do significant work jointly to take advantage of the growth opportunity that apprenticeships provide and which is key to contributing to meet the government's ambitions to double the delivery of apprenticeships by 2020. Within this it is important to develop the relationship with employers to maximise the opportunities to work with the new levy and address risks to ongoing delivery
- despite all 4 general FEs delivering higher education programmes and the significant university presence in the area delivering more academically-focused provision, there is a need to develop improved progression routes to higher level technical skills to support the expected change in demand over the next decade and beyond
- the opportunity for increased efficiency of colleges' operations and rationalisation of the estate
- the need to consider where there is potential to specialise and centralise delivery for these higher level skills in sectors where investment is needed, balanced with the need to ensure continued access to local provision for learners, especially those

below level 3. The real opportunities for specialisation will come in the higher level technical education areas

- the colleges are keen to respond to the local skills gaps by considering the establishment of an Institute of Technology, focusing on higher level technical skills and working with the universities. There have already been discussions with some of the universities about potential collaborative work in the future and there are emerging university plans for a virtual polytechnic.

Initial options raised during visits to colleges

During their visits, advisers reported that all colleges had given thought to potential strategic options in advance. In some cases, this meant informal discussions with neighbouring colleges and stakeholders to canvas views and to assess the potential level of support for change.

The types of options discussed were:

- formal structural change (including mergers, federations and joint venture companies) primarily to reduce management and back-office costs, strengthen quality of provision and curriculum planning, or share the costs of investment in new areas of work (for example, expanding apprenticeships, increasing commercial income or developing international markets)
- sharing services. The 4 general FE colleges have discussed ways to share services to create greater efficiency in operations
- discussions between colleges about the case for specialisation. Concerns were expressed about not weakening access to provision, including at lower levels, although transport routes are relatively good in the area
- the case for remaining stand-alone, where student numbers had increased despite growing competition, and underlying finances were sufficiently strong to withstand policy and funding changes
- conversion to an academy. This option is available primarily but not exclusively, to sixth-form colleges. By becoming an academy, a college is able to develop partnerships more easily with other schools in the area. In order to be approved, academisation proposals must be able to demonstrate how they will lead to strong links with schools, whether through joining or establishing a multi-academy trust (with other academies) or as a single academy trust collaborating with other schools in the area. Like other academies, sixth-form colleges which become academies would be eligible to receive reimbursement of their non-business VAT and would be classified as public sector bodies.

Criteria for evaluating options and use of sector benchmarks

Evaluation criteria

In each area review, 4 nationally-agreed criteria are used for the process of evaluation. These are:

- meets the needs of current and future learners and employers
- is feasible and generates financial sustainability
- raises quality and relevance of provision, including better outcomes
- achieves appropriate specialisation.

FE sector benchmarks

To support rigorous evaluation of proposals, particularly options leading to major structural change, DfE have developed a set of sector 'quality and financial indicators' and related criteria.

Financial benchmarks relate to delivering annual operating surpluses of 3% to 5%, ensuring borrowings stay below 40% of annual income (the maximum threshold set for affordability), staff costs of no more than 65% of total income (FE sector average), and a current ratio greater than 1. Financial plans were assessed for each option, including colleges seeking to stand-alone, prior to consideration by the local steering group.

A number of other indicators are also taken into account by the steering group. These relate to the impact of proposed changes on quality of provision, on teaching efficiency, and how they actively support growth in apprenticeships and work at levels 4 and 5. Within proposals, overall levels of provision for high needs students should be maintained. New strategic plans need to be supported by LEPs and local authorities. Colleges may also need to review their senior staffing and their governance to ensure that they have the required skills, and the capacity to implement rapid change.

The assessment of options indicated that, based on the information available to the area review steering group, the colleges would move towards the benchmarks and indicators through successful implementation of options, and that the protected characteristics groups, including high needs students, would retain at least equal access to learning.

More detail about these benchmarks is contained in Annex F³¹ of the area review guidance (revised March 2016).

³¹ [Reviewing post-16 education and training institutions: updated guidance on area reviews Annex F, Pages 49 to 53](#)

Recommendations agreed by the steering group

During the review, the colleges looked at a wide range of possible options, including a combination of merger configurations, and these were narrowed down on the basis of viability or achievability within a reasonable timeframe. A merger of all of the FE colleges was concluded to be a step too far at this stage (although it may be considered at a future time, once local provision is stabilised), with such a significant change bringing too high a level of both complexity and risk, especially under current operating circumstances.

Eleven recommendations were agreed by the steering group at their meeting in January 2016. These were:

- Joseph Chamberlain College remains as a stand-alone institution, collaborating with schools and colleges in the area and with an ambition to achieve teaching college status. Joseph Chamberlain College will also review the potential for conversion to academy status
- The Sixth Form College Solihull pursues conversion to academy status and merger with the Ninestiles Academy Trust to form a new trust which will offer a more sustainable structure and will generate cost savings
- Solihull College remains as a stand-alone general FE college, working in collaboration with other colleges, in particular on developing shared services, apprenticeships and an Institute of Technology
- Bournville College and South & City College Birmingham merge to form a single college (this may also include Cadbury College)
- Cadbury College remains on its current site and forms a multi-academy trust with South Birmingham schools, or in the event that it does not convert to academy status, merges with Bournville College and South & City College, Birmingham
- Birmingham Metropolitan College remains as a stand-alone institution and concentrates on financial recovery, working in collaboration with other colleges, in particular on shared services, apprenticeships and an Institute of Technology
- the colleges work towards establishing a jointly-owned apprenticeships organisation and an Institute of Technology focusing on higher level skills, working in synergy with interested HEIs
- the colleges work towards developing a shared services offer (excluding The Sixth Form College Solihull - and possibly Cadbury College - which would develop shared service arrangements within the academy trust)
- the colleges will continue the work on reviewing areas of provision where there are small class sizes to determine whether it is possible to improve efficiency
- Birmingham City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council map the offer across the area for modern foreign languages, including the pre-16 routes into A level, to ensure that the offer can provide sufficient learners with language skills to attract international companies to the area

- The Birmingham and Solihull Councils and the Regional Schools Commissioner recognise the need for school sixth forms to be viable in the future. Birmingham City Council is already working with schools to consider options for rationalisation

All modelling of the potential merger options is indicative based on information received to date. Further assessment of detailed financial and implementation plans will be required as part of due diligence for the proposed merger and at the point of application for either sixth form academisation, or a request for support from the Restructuring Facility where all other sources of finance have been exhausted.

Each of the key structural options is now outlined in more detail:

Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College

To continue as a stand-alone college, collaborating with schools and colleges in the area and with an ambition to achieve teaching college status. Joseph Chamberlain College will also review the potential for conversion to academy status.

- the college recruits from a focused radius around the campus, serving the specific needs of the local area. It offers a broad curriculum at all levels and for all ages that the college plans to continue to develop
- the college indicates it is in a good financial position and has a growing cohort but the college will maintain the existing collaborative ties with other colleges in the city to consider cost savings via shared services where appropriate and advantageous
- the current Ofsted rating is good with outstanding leadership and management and with success rates above average and improving. 91% of students progress to HE
- over time, the college may form a new multi-academy trust with a mix of schools (secondary and primary)
- this option offers the potential for a robust outcome that will deliver long term viability for the college.

The Sixth Form College Solihull

To pursue conversion to academy status and merger with the Ninestiles Academy Trust to form a new multi-academy trust, which will offer a more sustainable structure and will generate cost savings.

- the college is in a healthy financial position. Initial financial modelling suggests sustainability. Merged back office functions should generate substantial cost savings
- the proposal for academisation with local partners would strengthen ability to plan and deliver a curriculum responsive to learner and employer needs
- this option offers the potential for the development of a broad, viable and sustainable local offer that provides significant benefits to local students. The college has worked on its application to the Regional Schools Commissioner and Sixth Form College

Commissioner. Assessment of this will take into account the impact on and position of all multi-academy trust partners when assessing the viability of this option

- the multi-academy trust expects to achieve improvement in quality and outcomes across the whole trust through carefully selected joint teaching appointments, bringing pre-16 skills into post-16 delivery, and post-16 opportunities to enhance retention and recruitment of staff. It will create better career and professional development opportunities for staff across the multi-academy trust
- jointly, they would have the capacity to identify, consider and properly resource, new projects to support quality and relevance of curriculum
- the collaboration will support new partnerships and opportunities such as free school and studio school sponsorship, partnerships with employers and apprenticeship providers, and imaginative HE links to enable greater specialisation.

Solihull College

To continue as a stand-alone general FE college, working in collaboration with other colleges, in particular on developing shared services, apprenticeships and an Institute of Technology.

- the college has a history of strong financial management and has sufficient critical mass in student numbers and funding to achieve further efficiencies. The financial resilience of the college, the focus on driving up quality and the responsiveness of the college to the skills agenda are all positive indicators and it is above the sector benchmark indicators
- the college offers a curriculum that is planned to support local economic needs and they offer provision in all key growth sectors. They plan to offer aerospace, aviation, engineering and computer centres to respond to LEP identified needs and are now developing a Life Sciences Centre. The college is committed to continuing to develop the curriculum to meet need and create more progression pathways to higher level technical skills as well as to secure a more effective apprenticeship delivery model
- engagement in the development of shared services, joint apprenticeships planning and the Institute of Technology could improve the financial position further and the college will also look to achieve efficiencies in its staffing
- while the college currently has an Ofsted requires improvement rating, it is focused on achieving a step change in the learner outcomes and quality management needed to achieve a better grade at the re-inspection visit expected in autumn 2016. A self-assessment report and quality improvement plan are in place and the college has significantly improved success rates which are now at or above national benchmarks
- the college is committed to continuing to work with the other colleges in the review area to develop shared services approaches, improved and increased apprenticeships delivery, and on the creation of an Institute of Technology.

Bournville College and South & City College Birmingham

The 2 colleges will merge to form a single college (with or without Cadbury College). The individual brands would be retained, as would provision on the Longbridge site. The merged institution will also work in collaboration with the other colleges in the review area on developing shared services, apprenticeships and an Institute of Technology.

- the proposal shows opportunity to build on brands and maximise curriculum offer given complementarity. It creates opportunities for efficiencies and estates rationalisation
- financial plans for the merger show a strengthening financial position and a clear move towards achieving sector benchmarks
- both colleges have a good Ofsted rating and the merger should provide greater opportunities to share good practice and spread this consistently across all areas
- proposals consolidate a broad based curriculum offer to ensure the college continues to meet the needs of the LEP and identified needs for HS2 development etc. and a chance to ensure improved access across sites and greater specialisation, as well as improved access to higher levels technical education.

Cadbury College

The college will remain on its current site and form a multi-academy trust with South Birmingham schools, or in the event that it does not convert to academy status, merge with Bournville College and South & City College, Birmingham.

- the college has developed a blended A level/BTEC pathway to HE to respond to student need and to improve progression opportunities
- the college proposes to remain on its current site, and income from a planned land disposal will contribute to building financial resilience if successful
- the college was graded as good by Ofsted in March 2014
- sixth-form college academisation is an option that was raised as a possibility towards the end of the area review process when options were already being considered and evaluated. Prior to this, the college had indicated a preference for a merger with Bournville College and South & City College. The academy conversion option was insufficiently detailed to allow any robust assessment during the area review although the corporation of Cadbury College unanimously supported the recommendation to pursue academisation. A proposal for the development of a multi-academy trust led by Coventry University and allowing for a South Birmingham sub multi-academy trust has since emerged which is being fully explored and developed by Cadbury College. The college will need to submit a robust and credible plan to share and reduce costs and attract more students aged 16 to 18 into the college, for consideration by the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Sixth Form College Commissioner.

Birmingham Metropolitan College

To remain as a stand-alone institution and concentrate on financial recovery, working in collaboration with other colleges, in particular on shared services, apprenticeships and an Institute of Technology.

- the college is making good progress delivering its recovery plan. The college plans further improvements to quality and management information systems as well as greater engagement with employers to grow apprenticeship provision
- a curriculum mapping exercise undertaken by the 4 general FE colleges has demonstrated little potential for curriculum rationalisation, although this will be explored in the context of greater alignment at each campus and opportunities for specialisation for the development of higher level technical skills
- while the financial position of the college has been poor and exceptional financial support has been provided from the SFA, the financial situation is improving and a rationalisation of the extensive and under-utilised college estate will help to generate a positive cash-flow and get the college back on track
- the college is rated by Ofsted as requires improvement but have ambitions to raise quality for learners. Plans are in place and being delivered
- the college will attain further specialisation through the campus alignment and working with the other colleges on a joint apprenticeships development and the Institute of Technology.

Development of an Apprenticeship Company and an Institute of Technology

The colleges agreed to work towards establishing a jointly-owned apprenticeships organisation and an Institute of Technology (IoT) focusing on higher level skills, working in synergy with interested HEIs.

These proposals were still high level at the time the review was completed and required further development during the implementation stage, including with regard to the corporate nature and status of an apprenticeship company in relation to the colleges, to employers and to funding agencies. The apprenticeships proposal will:

- establish a new limited company owned by the 4 general FE colleges to develop the marketing function to generate employer demand
- provide the first collaborative college-owned company delivering a dedicated service to employers to increase the range, volume and quality of apprenticeships in the Birmingham and Solihull area
- be driven by employer demand and focus on all sectors and occupations and will provide a one-stop shop for local employers looking for workforce recruitment, training and development solutions

- provide apprenticeships primarily at level 2 and level 3, with the potential for higher level apprenticeships if required by employers
- provide a focus on delivery to private and public sectors within the Greater Birmingham & Solihull area although the company will follow and deliver to employer demand where necessary
- be locally owned and will reflect a deliberate commitment to invest in the local infrastructure to provide sustainable solutions to GBSLEP skills priorities and needs
- work closely with the local colleges and schools to develop the skills of young people who want to progress in to apprenticeships.

There was no financial information to underpin the proposal at the time of the area review, in terms of outputs or clear costs and how this would impact on the financial position of the colleges if apprenticeships delivery is novated to the new company. Further development of this plan is required before an assessment of the likely impact could be made.

It is important that this proposal, or something similar, is delivered to ensure the colleges individually and collectively are in a stronger position to increase their delivery of apprenticeships and secure funding opportunities available through this route. This has the joint benefit of addressing employer demand and providing a more secure financial footing with the new apprenticeship levy.

The IoT proposal was at a similarly high level, so the impact and costs were not quantified at this stage of the review, but in outline the proposal (possibly in partnership with universities):

- will focus on increasing the number of people progressing to higher level skills (level 4+) in 10 to 20 specialist, technical STEM curriculum areas
- will be a virtual offer, which will establish and promote clear progression routes between existing local FE and HE partners to drive up demand for higher level skills. Whilst this will primarily focus on classroom-based delivery, the IoT offer will also signpost higher level apprenticeship provision
- will commission research to map existing provision, building on analysis carried out for the area review, and identify any gaps in current higher level STEM provision. Where there is an identified need for new provision, the IoT will work with partners to consider how best to develop this
- will work with anchor employers in the identified curriculum areas to ensure that the supply of higher level skills reflects current and future skills demand.

Further work is required during implementation to develop proposals that align with emerging policy and local skills needs.

The development of shared service arrangements between the FE colleges

The colleges agreed to work towards developing a shared services offer (excluding The Sixth Form College Solihull - and possibly Cadbury College - which would develop shared service arrangements within the academy trust).

Savings generated through this approach will be beneficial to each of the colleges for their own financial resilience and ability to deliver on their respective agendas. This closer working may also expand to feed in to curriculum planning and delivery and may therefore have broader synergies and benefits in the longer term.

The colleges should continue the work on reviewing areas of provision where there are small class sizes to determine whether it is possible to improve efficiency.

Working with schools

The Birmingham and Solihull Councils, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the LEP have committed to continue to provide strategic leadership in supporting the reshaping of the local 14 to 19 education and training system (although this review was focused on the 16+ provision) and will work effectively with partners to ensure that there is sufficient quality learning provision and progression pathways for all learners, including those with special educational needs and disabilities in order to secure economic prosperity. To ensure this can be done, the colleges, LEP and local authorities will establish a forum to carry on these discussions beyond the end of the review.

Conclusions from this review

The purpose of area reviews is to put colleges on a stronger financial footing whilst also enabling them to better meet the economic and educational needs of learners and employers for the long term.

Throughout the review, colleges have worked closely with their LEPs, local authorities and the review team, sharing detailed information about their performance and processes. Each steering group member has been in a position to offer ideas for change, and make comments and assessments about others' proposals and plans for their area. The review team is grateful for the positive approach taken by all the local stakeholders involved in the review.

The issues identified in 'The need for change' will be addressed through:

- securing a viable future for FE provision offered by Bournville College through resolution of the current debt position, and identifying South & City College Birmingham as a merger partner. This is an urgent and important recommendation to arise from this review to secure continuity of provision
- proposals by the colleges to develop specialisms, particularly at levels 4 and 5 which will provide learners and employers with improved access to training, and address skills gaps and skills shortages, including in LEP identified priority sector areas such as provision to meet the needs of HS2 development. This includes plans for an Institute of Technology
- growth in apprenticeships, in particular through the commitments made by each of the 4 general FE colleges to establish an apprenticeships company to improve employer engagement and increase their market share
- improved financial sustainability through cost savings identified as a result of collective shared services development, the Bournville and South & City Colleges' merger and BMet's estates rationalisation plans
- academisation also has the potential to reduce non-pay expenditure at both The Sixth Form College Solihull and at Cadbury College should the latter develop its plans in that direction.

Next steps

The agreed recommendations will now be taken forward through recognised structural change processes, including due diligence and consultation.

Proposals for merger, sixth-form college conversion to academies, or ministerial approval, for example of a change in name, will now need intensive work by all parties involved to realise the benefits identified. Colleges will want to give consideration to making timely applications for support from the [Restructuring Facility](#), where they can demonstrate that the changes cannot be funded through other sources. Colleges exploring academy conversion will be subject to the application process and agreement by the Sixth Form College Commissioner and the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Primary responsibility for implementation of recommendations relating to individual colleges rests with those institutions. However, it will be important to understand how progress is going in the round in each area and each set of area review recommendations will be formally monitored at both national and local levels. As the [guidance](#) produced for LEPs and local authorities sets out, all those involved in the local steering group will be expected to play their full part in ensuring that changes happen within the timescale agreed. In this context, LEPs and local authorities are expected to retain their focus on driving changes, and assessing how implementation of recommendations is contributing to local economic performance. The EFA and SFA, with oversight from the FE Commissioner and Sixth Form College Commissioner, will also be monitoring how progress is going across all areas.

A national evaluation of the area review process will be undertaken to assess the benefits brought about through implementation of options. This will include quantitative measures relating to the economy, to educational performance, to progression, to other measures of quality, and to financial sustainability. This analysis will also take account of the views of colleges, local authorities, LEPs, students and employers about how well colleges are responding to the challenges of helping address local skills gaps and shortages, and the education and training needs of individuals.



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