

MEDWAY CHILDREN'S TRUST BOARD

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RAISING THE PARTICIPATION AGE

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to invite comments and suggestions from members on the RPA Action Plan (see Annex 1), which is the basis of a local delivery project being funded by the Department for Education in preparation for Raising the Participation Age.

2. Background

The Education and Skills Act (2008) places a duty on all young people to participate in education or training until their 18th birthday.

Raising the participation age does not mean that young people must stay in school and they will be able to choose one of the following options:

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

The legislation raises the participation age in two stages - to the end of the academic year in which a young person turns 17 from 2013 and until their 18th birthday from 2015. Pupils currently in Year 9 will be expected to remain in education or training until they are 17, while those in Year 8 and below will be expected to remain until they are 18. However, the Government is legislating (through the current Education Bill) to allow the enforcement process to be introduced at a later stage.

The DfE recently invited bids from local authorities to deliver projects in preparation for RPA. Medway Council successfully submitted a bid, following discussion with members of the 14-19 Strategy Forum. The Council's project is one of 24 selected nationally by the DfE. We have since submitted more details of the activities to be involved in an Action Plan (Annex 1) and these need to be delivered by the end of March 2012. The main objectives are to:

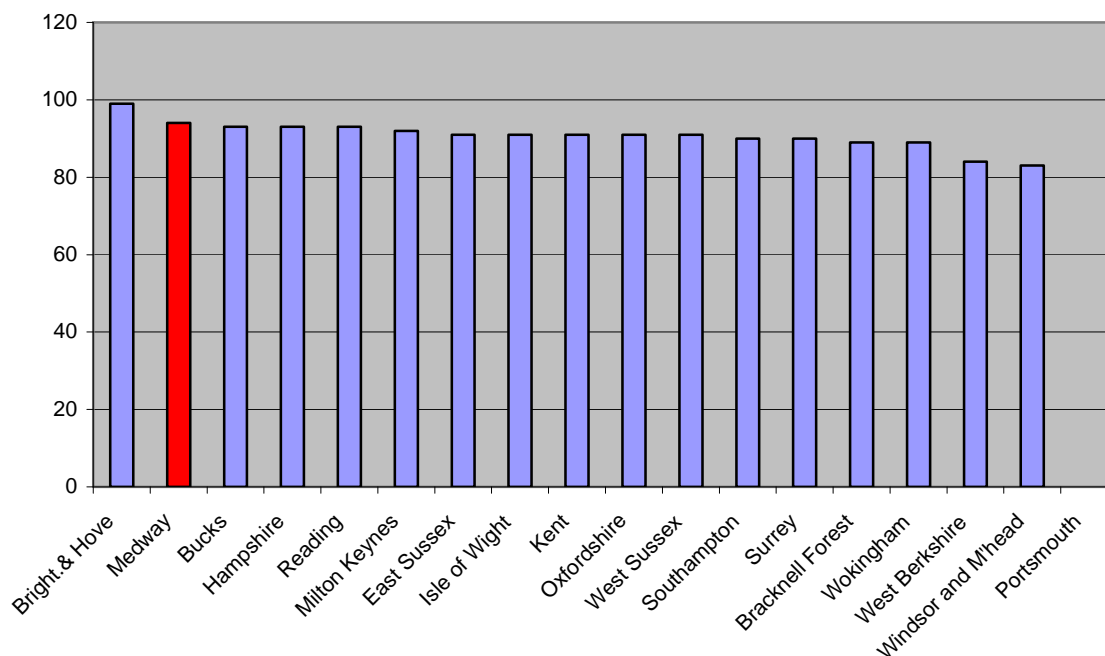
- Raise awareness amongst young people and parents about the legislation
- Ensure young people are aware of all the options at age 16
- Influence the planning of provision to ensure the needs of all young people aged 16-18 can be met
- Test approaches to the above and disseminate our findings and good practice to the DfE and other LAs

The DfE has agreed a total funding of £75,000 which will cover the costs of project management, software and resources to identify learners at risk of dropping out of learning (called "Hidden Patterns"), additional research into the needs of vulnerable groups and the production of materials to raise awareness of RPA amongst young people and parents.

3. Advice and analysis

Medway is starting from a relatively strong position in terms of participation. The ONS participation survey for 2009 shows that 94% of 16 year olds were in full or part-time education or training, which was the second highest rate in the South East.

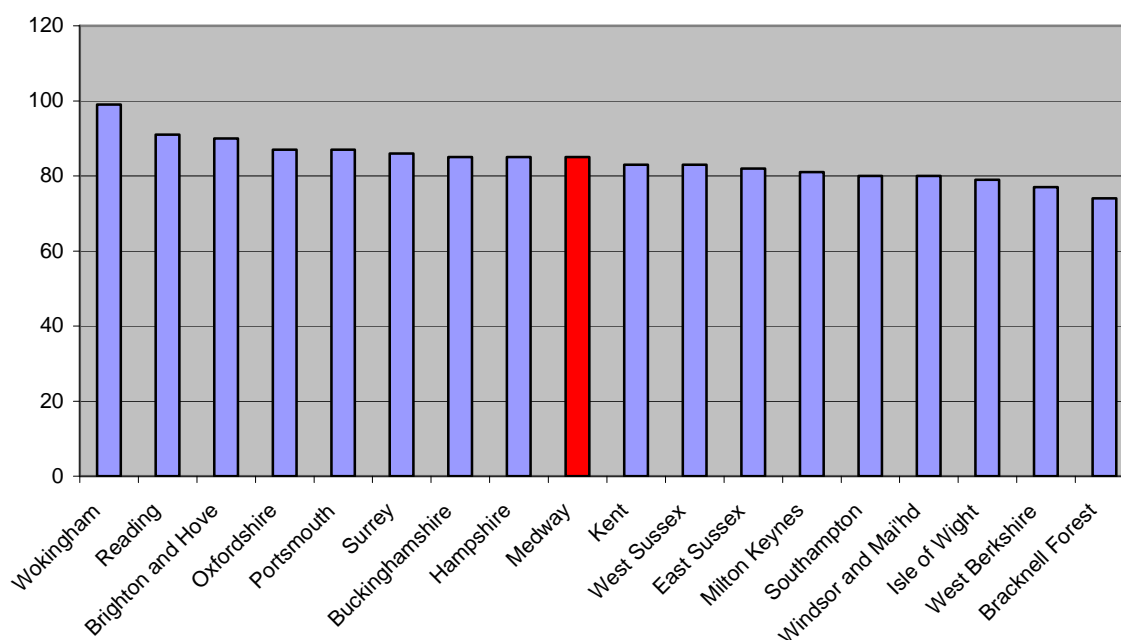
Participation Rates in SE LAs at Age 16 (%)



Source: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000938/index.shtml>

However, the participation rate for 17 year olds fell to 85%, which is an issue we need to address as we prepare for RPA.

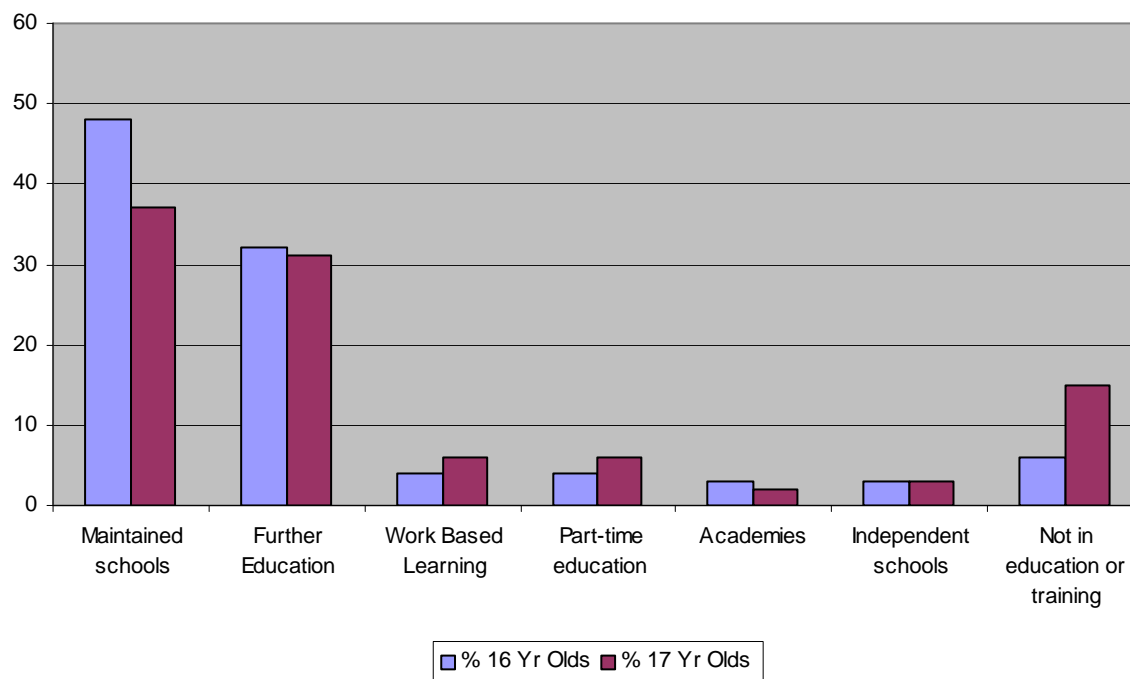
Participation Rate in SE LAs at Age 17 (%)



Source: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000938/index.shtml>

The following table shows that the largest volume of leavers at age 17 is from schools.

Medway LA: Participation in Education and Training 2009



Source: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000938/index.shtml>

These figures indicate that young people who leave at 17 are more likely to take up jobs without training or to become NEET.

In addition to raising awareness of RPA and increasing the understanding of the options available for young people, we need to address provision issues. Our action plan includes the following objectives:

- Identify gaps in provision
- Identify barriers to progression, particularly for vulnerable groups
- Increase the range and flexibility of options and ensure young people are aware of these
- Increase the number of employers offering apprenticeships locally
- Identify those most at risk of dropping out of education and offer support to encourage and enable them to remain in learning
- Follow up those who have dropped out and encourage re-engagement
- Identify and make clear the progression routes for young people
- Improve the links between pre and post 16 providers to develop and strengthen progression routes and enable a smooth transition for all learners in transferring from pre to post 16 provision

4. Consultation

All members of the 14-19 Strategy Forum were consulted on the Expression of Interest submitted to the DfE and on the action plan.

We now need to consult more widely on its implementation and engage more partners and providers. In particular, the plan specifically includes involving young people in the planning of the campaign and in the production of materials. We also need feedback from young people on barriers to progression and the reasons for not continuing education or training at 17.

5. Implications for Looked After Children

The current gap in achievement between Looked After Children and others is significant at 16 and 17, which presents a real challenge. The RPA media campaign will be varied to take into account the different client groups and the aim is to encourage all young people to see the benefits of structured learning.

Care leavers will be entitled to the new 16-19 bursary, which replaces EMA. However schools and other providers are likely to give payment in kind and will decide on goods and services to be provided (e.g. bus fares, meals, laptops, protective clothing). This would reduce the opportunity for young people to make their own spending decisions as they did with EMA.

There is an established policy to transfer care leavers into independent accommodation at the earliest opportunity. It is essential, where care leavers are living independently, that they are offered support to remain and succeed in structured learning.

6. Financial and Legal Implications

The activities outlined in the RPA action plan will be funded from the DfE project funding. However the DfE project funding cannot be used to support marketing and publicity for RPA and we have therefore set aside £5,000 for this activity, identified from under-spend on other 14-19 projects.

The local delivery project ends on 31 March 2012. In order to continue preparations for RPA in 2015 we will need to identify methods of sustainability during the project so that the momentum is not lost.

7. Recommendations

Members are invited to comment on the action plan and to make suggestions regarding its implementation.

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