

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE - STUDENT JOURNEY

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Student Journey held in the Swale 2, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 22 July 2011.

PRESENT: Mr M C Dance (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Mr I S Chittenden, Mr P J Homewood and Mr R J Lees

ALSO PRESENT: Andy Brading, ABC Consulting, Becci Newton, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Employment Studies, Lindsay Jardine, Network Manager, and Mark Easton, Chief Officer, Kent Association of Training Organisations (KATO)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr G Romagnuolo (Policy Overview Research Officer) and Mrs C A Singh (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Interview with Andy Brading, AB Consulting

(Item 1)

The Chairman and Members welcomed Mr Brading to the meeting and thanked him for the written response to the questions that had been forwarded to him in preparation for the meeting.

Mr Brading gave a brief introduction on his working background that lead up to him in his role in AB Consulting.

Q – **When do you introduce the world of work to young people?**

A – A lot of schools were unable to take on more ‘support’ especially those schools within high deprivation. In his opinion the teaching staff felt beleaguered by the number of initiatives and the different elements they need to incorporate into their schemes of work. He felt that in those schools there was, rightly, a focus on numeracy and literacy. He explained that in his role he was trying to help teaching staff understand that enterprise was about good teaching.

Q - Were the schools that you were in supporting the students that were very good, and left the other children?

A – There was an element of that. In most schools the children were streamed or set and often those viewed as the least engaged were involved in other interventions such as the Increased Flexibility programme. I was more than happy to work with those students.

Q - Did you find evidence that business people felt that young people had poor numeracy and literacy when they came to them for a job?

A – Mr Brading said that they did and in particular commented on the importance of the young people’s spelling and basic grammar when it came to job applications. He then referred to the Wolf report agreeing with the importance that the report attaches to raising the level of reading, writing and use of number. He felt that this was an important element to focus on in addition to the wider employability skills.

Q - Were the schools listening to you?

A – As a rule, the schools were already aware of the need to focus on Maths & English; it was my task to talk about the wider skills base and raise awareness of that agenda.

Q – If you took 6 months off to give some thought to what you were doing in your role and were then given a pot of money to improve things what would you do?

A – Mr Brading said that it did come down to funding. He felt that there was a disconnection between education and work. He said that until you engage employers properly, making sure that they viewed getting involved with schools was worthwhile and meaningful, and also provided an easily accessible process for schools to engage, it would not happen. He considered that this would need to be brokered well to become useful. The brokering should be managed for the employers and schools to make it effective. He did not feel that businesses would seek reimbursement for their time but if available would be likely to respond to a tax break or chargeable expense. The Chairman advised that in his electoral area there would be an Enterprise Zone, which would be doing something similar.

Mr Brading said that he was working in Gravesham at present to establish a project relating to commercial viability of engagement of businesses, the majority of which are SME. This might be, for example, through positive PR with the students' and parents in the area gives the businesses a commercial edge.

The Chairman suggested that a way to engage could be for the business to go to the school and say that over the next 10 years they would need 10 electricians and set up an experiment giving the students the opportunity to have work experience and see who would be interested and suitable in taking this further. This would not just be for trades but for all types of occupations.

Q – With apprenticeships are SME being offered?

A - I am not involved in apprenticeships. From the professionals and parental point of view accessing apprenticeships was difficult. There were not a lot of paid traineeships and there was a lot of competition for each placement.

A Member mentioned that in the past companies use to pick those coming out of university and what had just been suggested was on the same lines but on a smaller scale and that he could see this working.

Mr Brading said that, as an example of this his nephew did work experience for Jaguar who used work experience as a filter, screening young people who had potential to do their apprenticeship. He was now 25 years old and had developed a successful career, working for Jaguar in Dubai as a technical trainer.

Q - What are your views on the Wolf report recommendations?

A – Mr Brading felt that it was a well considered and researched document and broadly accurate. However it should be remembered that the review dealt specifically with vocational education. There were wider issues. The report did not deal with enterprise learning and work related learning. Work related Learning was largely dismissed and was equated with work experience which is inaccurate.

Q – What is Enterprise learning?

A - Mr Brading explained that Enterprise learning was in 3 strands:-

- Enterprise capability – which was about “how” eg soft skills communicating, personal skills.

- Economic and Business Understanding – which is about establishing an understanding of how business and the broader economy work
- Financial capability

Work related learning is more about the “what”, i.e. delivering learning in the context of work as a means of engaging with young people. He referred to the QCDA framework for Work-related Learning

Mr Brading referred to the Ofsted report in June 2011, which he said highlighted the economic and business understanding aspect of enterprise education. He drew the distinction between Enterprise and Entrepreneurship making the point that the enterprise agenda was originally about engaging teaching and helping young people develop appropriate employability skills in the course of their learning rather than an overt focus on business.

Q - Was there a mismatch of what employers needed and young people’s qualifications?

A – Mr Brading felt that the situation in Kent is likely to mirror the national picture in relation to general employability skills which he felt are lacking as evidenced by the numerous reports and surveys about employers’ views. There was a need for young people to have soft skills such as being able to communicate and having an understanding of the working world. It was about preparing them for life.

Q - How effective is KCC? Are we achieving anything? What does KCC need to do for the future?

A – Mr Brading said that Kent is a large and diverse county. Enterprise learning and apprenticeships would need to be different in each area in Kent to reflect those local differences. Each area should have its own local focus. He added that it was important for KCC to be able to engage with the small business community and that it had seemed difficult for KCC to do that effectively. He said that he had worked with Emma Jenkins on the extended services agenda which is an example of a part of KCC trying hard to work well with smaller businesses and providers who find the system difficult to access. Mr Brading referred to the commissioning process for framework agreements. As an example he said that he had won a contract but it took 12 ‘person’ days to prepare the tender document which had ended up providing no work to tender for. There had recently been an even larger contract for early intervention but he did not take it up as the process for the tender was far too long and inaccessible and this put him off.

The Chairman indicated that this was an issue that KCC could identify.

Q - If they cannot access the frameworks what are we doing? We need joined up thinking.

A – The process needs to be managed. KCC wouldn’t be expected to quality assure providers but could provide a process for checking elements such as liability insurance, child protection, health & safety issues etc. Businesses and providers would be responsible for evidencing the quality of their programmes and the outcomes of their activities. The outcomes need to be clear to both the schools and the businesses. Schools could then access a range of providers and businesses.

Q – How early do you think young people should be introduced to enterprise skills?

A – Mr Brading felt that primary school age was the right time to introduce enterprise skills when they were doing a range of cross-curricular activity and were often very enterprising. He felt that at KS3, often the focus became immediately subject-based

which is when those skills were lost. Some schools had adopted a project based learning approach at KS3 which provided a means of continuing the development of enterprise skills and that in KS4 this became applied to the context of work. He felt that if at Yr7 they were allowed to develop their enterprise skills by the time they reached GCSE level they would be more confident, enterprising, independent and more able to identify their own skills and what they were good at.

Q - You feel that their ambitions were killed at secondary school?

A – GCSEs are subject headed and the focus is on ‘passing’ those subjects with a C grade or above. The curriculum is available to develop vocational options and to engage students at KS4 more fully in their learning.

Q - Are there any other issues that you feel that we have not covered?

A – Engage Kent’s small businesses and providers with schools and make the process more accessible. Take advantage of the wealth of knowledge and skills that the businesses have. The Chairman asked Mr Brading to expand on this aspect by following up with Mr G Romagnuolo after the meeting

The Committee thanked Mr Brading for attending the meeting.

2. Interview with Becci Newton, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Employment Studies *(Item 3)*

The Chairman and Committee welcomed Ms Newton to the meeting and thanked her for the comprehensive written evidence she had submitted in answer to questions that had been forwarded to her in preparation for the meeting.

Ms Newton gave a brief introduction explaining that the Institute of Employment Studies (IES) was a charitable organisation and seeks to undertake research. It often carried out work for government projects. The IES had a small network of 15-20 companies. The network had suffered in the recession. Ms Newton said that her work area tended to be based on public sector policy.

Q – Do you carry out age profiling in the public sector?

A – We do but I do not specialise in this area. My work is based on young people engagement. IES does 14-19 years and post 19 years level research.

The Chairman advised that KCC employees were currently an average age of 54 years. The 24 years and under age group was dropping, which was never meant to happen.

Ms Newton said that she came into contact with KCC when she was doing a project on flexicurity (a concept which combines flexibility and security in employment for employer and employee) in the EU and she wanted to gather a case study. She came across the apprenticeship scheme that KCC had been running and was aware of the actions that KCC was making to try and improve the situation for young people.

Ms Newton explained that IES work expanded to unemployment, 14-16 element in schools and graduates and health and wellbeing.

Ms Newton considered that Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) was absolutely critical and needed to start at the earliest age possible. In her opinion students should be thinking about the world of work from primary school.

Q - What type of guidance can KCC give to that age group?

A – At that age it is more about opening their eyes to the world of work. Young people are influenced by their parents, if their parents do not have particularly wide horizons then neither would the child, by the time they hit their work placement at secondary age often that would be brokered through their parents unless they are affluent or well networked. It was about opening their eyes to get the sense of what they needed to do to get to be say a nurse or doctor. Do they know what stages that would take?

IES has explored intergenerational unemployment and its effect on young people and is also involved in reviews of the impacts of the changes introduced by the Employee Support Allowance (ESA) which replaces incapacity support allowance and seeks to transition ISA claimants to job seekers allowance should they be capable of work. Ms Newton explained that she had been carrying out work on the Evaluation of the Activity Agreements, which were targeted at young people, where she had encountered young people from intergenerationally inactive families.

Q – Moving from Primary to secondary how do you build this up?

A - It was about keeping the focus. KCC needed to build its links with employers and have engagement with the curriculum which was very tricky. She advised that she carried out did research for young apprenticeships and found that Taster Days were a very effective way of offering advice and guidance. KCC may find that employers would want to come into schools and have a discussion about what their business was about. Taster Days were to prepare the post 16 year olds transition. They had been making a choice to enter into vocational training at 14-16 years, which was equivalent to 5 GCSEs that they would do alongside the 13 other GCSEs that young people were encouraged to do. Young people often would not have had experience of vocational qualifications and needed to know what they were about, what their equivalencies were and what it was worth to them.

Q – Would you do the Taster Days in a school setting?

A – Taster Days can be carried out a variety of ways.

**Ms Newton agreed to send a paper with a toolkit of ways to hold Taster Days.*

The Chairman commented that the Committee was hearing from organisations that were stretched in all directions and that the funding was not as good as it was. A toolkit would be useful. He considered that more businesses would be able to attend the school rather than students visiting the businesses. Ms Newton advised that one business can come in and talk about what their business does and all the types of jobs needed to run the business.

Q - Does a Taster Day require external funding?

A – There was no funding, it was about forming relationships with the schools and businesses, trainers were useful in organising them.

Q – Were the schools interested or was it a time issue?

A – Schools varied, Those with a more academic focus tended to think “Do we need vocational training”. Young people needed the information to be able to make a judgement on Further Education.

Q – How effective are Tasters Days?

A – IES had FE colleges that collected data. The impact was that more students took up FE courses they had not previously thought of and retention in courses was improved.

**It was suggested that KCC could be a facilitator as it had huge contact with businesses and schools.*

**The Chairman suggested that as Paul Carter, Leader of KCC was fully behind the apprenticeships scheme, if he wrote to SME companies to invite them to engage with certain schools they would go. That was a way of marketing with the SME businesses. There was also an issue of how best we use our officers and the best people to bring in to support this. Ms Newton advised that IES had a document that may be helpful with preparing employers.*

Q – What are your views on the advantages and disadvantages on recent national policies with regards to youth unemployment?

A - This was a rapidly changing environment. There had been a focus on 16-18 year old NEETs, which had been a concern in Kent. To address that there had been a number of actions that had been effective for the 16-17 year olds, resulting in the rates of NEETs fell.

Q – Do you know about the NEETs that we can't find?

The suggestion is that the known NEET rate was falling; the unknown NEET may be growing as a result of the disbanding of Connexions services, which would suggest stability in the people that are NEET.

A – Looking at the past 10 years in the 16 to 18 year olds. 16-17 year olds were staying in education and entering into employment but the 18 year olds were starting to fall through the gap because the unemployment services do not generally intervene prior to the age of 18. The 16 to 17 years plus were receiving focus as a result of the EMA payment (although the new government has removed this), the September and July guarantees for education places. We wait to see if the new targeted support works (this replaces EMA), but the evaluation did find that the EMA had been effective.

Ms Newton presumed that the September and July guarantees were not under threat (information on the DfE website indicates the policy, if not the name, remains a priority). Everything that the IES had looked at concluded that flexibility was key. Having the January start would allow KCC to catch those that did not come through immediately as there was a lot of inertia amongst young people, they did not get on with applying through the Summer. January starts were a good solution. She felt that Apprenticeship expansion was key, saying that this was a huge commitment and achieving it was a big commitment but in order to think about expansion of apprenticeship places employers had to establish if there was a business case, was it within the current strategy. For the companies they had to ask do I want to take on that additional person.

Q – The apprenticeship was becoming a more favoured route in testing out young people before businesses took them on.

A – That was an interesting point of using it like a talent spot. Getting a blue chip apprenticeship was as competitive as getting into Oxford or Cambridge universities. At the same time there were apprenticeships running for 6 months at level 2 in retail which were very different.

**Ms Newton referred to Fuller and Unwin Expansive Restrictive good practice model of apprenticeships which she agreed to forward to the committee. This had a model of how best apprenticeships could be delivered, where it worked best and how it worked best.*

The Chairman advised Ms Newton that the previous witnesses, KATO, were asked how many NEETs were satisfied with their jobs. They advised 30% were satisfied. Ms Newton felt that that was very interesting; she considered which apprenticeships were they doing and their relation to the expansive—restrictive model. She was concerned about what happened to students after the apprenticeship finished and whether there was the option for more training within the work place. She felt there needed to be a career development structure if progression in training was to exist. The question may be; does the company want the apprentice to go to the next level.

Q - A Member said that he had heard that some companies were offering apprenticeships at a level 4, degree level.

A – Ms Newton understood that 100 of those were delivered last year, particularly in Management/Leadership.

Q - You mentioned that some of the university degrees were falling away since the cost of courses had risen.

A - The changes to fees will be implemented for the 2012-13 academic year so we don't know their impact yet. It would be likely to depend on how well the fees were communicated to the students so that they realise that they would not be paying the loan back until they reached a certain salary point. There was a debate on whether, in light of increasing participation in HE, graduates would attract a wage premium in the same way as they have in the past ie when we have large numbers participating, up to 50% of the cohort.

Q – Is there still a misunderstanding by the students on how the student fees/loans worked?

A – This had not affected anyone yet. The government was trying now, with Martin Lewis, money expert, to communicate how the loans and financial support was going to work. The salary point when they had to start paying the loan back was around the point when they had a salary of £23k plus, then 5% off top. The higher their income the more they had to pay back.

Ms Newton advised that the Government was interested to explore views of student loans in FE colleges and apprenticeships.

The Chairman suggested that there could be a shift for people to attend the FE colleges instead of the universities because of the rise in fees. This could create great competition. If there was a fee for attending the FE colleges it would put everyone on an equitable basis. Some of the FE colleges were now offering degree courses cheaper than the universities.

Ms Newton advised that the colleges were offering foundation degrees among their HE provision which often had a vocational focus.

**Ms Newton advised that the fees charged by FE for HE course could be roughly estimated at around 2/3rds of the fee for a course delivered in a university*

Q – What are your views on the Wolf Report and its recommendations?

A - It is a very valuable report. The report highlights that vocational training was an essential offer. It was important that students had qualifications of value. It was useful to draw this together and to think about how best we offer vocational courses at Key Stage 4. There was a strong recommendation within the report on the aspiration that young people achieve A* to C in Maths and English, how you go about that for post 16 years and what that might do to an apprenticeship when you have applied numeracy and literacy within the scheme which was different to those in general education.

Ms Newton said that she had had discussion with a national employer body for an EU study on Apprenticeships where a point was made about how far employers would be to release a young person to achieve A*-C in these subjects ie about their willingness to make up for what they perceive to be the failures of the school education system. The interviewee referred to had also contended that this drive for the achievement of A* to C was the educationalists trying to take back the training agenda.

Ms Newton referred to the National Employer Skills Survey advising that it says that only 10-11% of employers recruited a young people straight from school or FE colleges. Of those employers 66% believed that the 16 year olds they had employed were well prepared for work, that figure rose to 75% for those recruiting 17-18 year olds and for graduates that reached to 85%. She felt that this sent positive messages of how those employers that employed young people felt that they were prepared for work despite some of the negative press coverage on school leaver.

Q – The evidence on volunteering that you sent us put volunteering in another light. Do you have any more evidence that might help?

A - I did a report on behalf of the National Young Volunteers Service, which was a comparative look at the Future Jobs Fund and volunteering opportunities, to look at the outcomes; whether volunteers would get certificates, build networks, employability and soft skills development. She found that structured volunteering compared favourably with the future Jobs Fund. The right volunteering gave young people skills, networking and employability. Disadvantaged young people gained an opportunity to feel better about themselves and gained the ability to handle relationships – with peers and adults– better. For graduates, along side their degree they were able to build on their experience. Volunteering in the relevant sector meant that they would have some insight as to whether this was a long term prospect.

Q - What sort of volunteering?

A – This was structured volunteering, either full or part-time. The full-time opportunities were with Public Sector bodies and FE colleges and there was financial support. V (the national youth volunteering service) was funding it; the funding was equivalent to an EMA, – Learning Support assistance and covered the expenses incurred by individuals. Full-time volunteers got involved in doing level 2 qualifications which lead to a lot of them being rooted back into learning and some

made of the transition into full time education. The study also looked at part time volunteering, it was structured and young people could gain a sense of leadership.

**The Chairman suggested that KCC could influence on this.*

**A Member suggested that there was a need to look at where the funding it came from and whether it still existed as there was a need for financial support.*

The Chairman gave the example of a school in a deprivation area that asked to speak with one of the Mums at the school gate, advising her that they needed someone to help in the playgroup and thought she would be the right person. She now sings the praises of the school and had been part of a massive community drive. It was about getting volunteers for the right reasons doing meaningful things.

** A Member suggested that parents should be invited in for Taster Days at schools. (Ms Newton noted that information about this was contained in the toolkit she would send).*

Q – What should the Select Committee recommend to improve youth unemployment?

A – Ms Newton suggested the following:-

- KCC to offer leadership and facilitate between the school and employers/businesses.
- Work on breaking down the barriers with young people becoming more mobile.
- Scope what people wanted, their routes through learning, training and their destinations.
- IAG is critical from early phases and intensifying by KS4 particularly with vulnerable/disadvantaged groups.
- Offer tailored/personalised training for the most vulnerable/disadvantaged.

The Chairman and Committee thanked Ms Newton for attending the meeting and reminded her to forward the toolkit for volunteering.

3. Interview with Lindsay Jardine, Network Manager, Kent Association of Training Organisations (KATO)

(Item 2)

The Chairman and Committee Members welcomed and introduced themselves to Lindsay Jardine and her colleague Mark Easton, Chief Officer for KATO to the meeting. Ms Jardine provided notes to the questions forwarded to her in preparation for the meeting.

Q – How do you fit in with the secondary school educators? And how can you influence young people and are you finding your influences too late in the process or are you ok with it because you are asked to come in at an earlier stage?

A – Mark Easton introduced himself as the Chief Officer and Treasurer of KATO. He also managed the skills part of community learning and skills, which was Key training and traditional Adult Education. Ms Jardine introduced herself as the Network Manager for KATO supporting 60 training providers, including 6 FE colleges and supporting their work based learning agenda acting as a conduit for the schools

funding agencies, YPLA, AELP, KCC and Medway Council and sharing information on both sides.

Q – A tutor in a FE college advised that he was still waiting for assignments from last year from students. They were receiving the best practical and written advice but the tutor felt that he was getting nothing back. The students were not engaged. Are there real issues in Further Education (FE), funding and people not finishing courses?

A – There were a plethora of offers available to young people from the private public and independent FE sectors. The FE landscape was quite traditional and from experience in talking to learners, the FE sector was less flexible than perhaps the independent providers. There were cases where young people come out of secondary education at level 2 academic standard then went onto a classroom based vocational course eg BTEC and had to commence that course at a level 1 position. There would be a question on the skill base that young person had so would commence at a rudimentary level.

Q – A young person could switch on or off at this point if you get it wrong?

A – It depended on giving them an expectation, stretch and aspiration. They were more likely to be engaged and retained and achieve.

The Chairman commented that the tutors view was that there was a problem with the classroom based learning, that it seemed less about the industry.

A – There was a case for classroom based activity especially for those who had been disengaged with secondary education and did not academically achieve at school. A lot did not feel that they fitted into the academic structure whether that was because of their home environment or something else. Each young person needed to have a position of their own to be taken account of when they were initially engaged in any form of training or education.

Q – Was anyone doing psychometric testing on the young people?

A – Not in the purest sense but for those coming onto a work based programme there was an in-depth initial assessment that took account of their personal position, expectations, aspirations, financial position, learning styles and academic abilities. KATO could signpost them to a provision at the right time. An initial assessment for a NEET would be slightly different. KATO had to gauge their emotional intelligence and their communication skills. For an apprentice, generally they were more developed and able to communicate in the work place and would have better literacy and numeracy skills because they had to be at a certain level to get on the course.

Q – The Chairman advised that an employee at the Job Centre for 30 years was concerned by the number of NEETs. She said that when they ran a Job Centre, in the past, she and her colleagues would be able to sort job placements out for an individual as they would know all of the local companies and would be able to approach them saying that they had someone you suitable and the company would trust their judgement. The modern day reality was that anyone sent to an interview from the Job Centre the employer was switched off. KATO seem to be picking up NEETs in a smarter way because if they had no money the last thing they need was a job. They need to have their benefits sorted out and once they know where they stood they would be in a better place to move forward.

Ms Jardine advised that Job Centres only engaged with 18+ year olds. She was talking about 16 and 17 year olds as well, that was the NEET's cohort, therefore were

talking about the Connexions Service and the IAG that they received through the Connexion Service and how difficult it was for them with the current youth unemployment and 19 to 24 + year olds graduates coming out unable to be placed in employment as oppose to the NEET cohort who may not have 4 GCSEs at grade C and above.

Q - Which training providers work in partnership with KATO, and what services does it offer?

A – KATO is a membership of 60 training providers and had been in existence for 28 years. KATO's role was to share information amongst training providers from the skills funding Agency, YPLA, and various agencies that it worked with to the Association of Learning Providers, ALP. KATO represented the training providers at various strategic Forums throughout the county. KATO sat on NEET groups such as Careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) to influence and have a voice on what work base learning was on offer for 14+ year olds and interpret and communicate national and regional policy to the network and help to influence that policy. KATO also supported the training providers to work in partnership with the changes in funding that had recently happened. KATO promoted apprenticeships, particularly, to employers and to young people.

Q- How does KATO do that?

A – Through various means. Ms Jardine said that she had just come from the launch of the 100 in 100 Campaign, which had 78 employees present with 100 attendees, promoting the benefits of taking on apprentices and trying to make it an easy process. She felt that the Kent Apprenticeship Strategy was working well in Kent. KATO also provided a collective voice on government policy. It fed into more major networks such as the Association of Employer and Learning Providers (AELP). Ms Jardine gave an example of how KATO was able to influence as follows: -

- There were 5 Networks in the South East Region they all worked together. There had been issues with Foundation Learning with the demise of e2e changing into Foundation Learning there were real gaps with what was left. Mr Easton added that it was about bringing young people closer to the local labour market. Under e2e, KATO was allowed to and funded for placing and arranging work experience placements with employers that would allow for the progression to an apprenticeship when the basic skills came into being. Foundation Learning did not afford that because you could only be paid against guided learning hours, which was face to face delivery ie classroom based activity. KATO also influence a change from the YPLA to allow greater flexibility to the funding so that KATO could get weekly funding instead of the Guided Learning Hours (GLH) funding for an increased population of learners.

Q - Have you had quick shut downs of funding without warning?

A – Only the EMA. The effects of that would not be felt until September as there had been an increase in participation post year 11 and an increased application to the Further Education.

Q – What was the impact in the introduction of the EMA?

A – This would be a bell shaped graph especially for those in financial hardship. There was a gap with no funding available. No introduction into the bursary system not until the next academic year. There were limited funds allocated to that number of students who would benefit

Q – Which group would not get help? Would that group suit attending a college near to where they lived and probably chose the wrong course?

A – Potentially, anecdotally yes – accessibility, affordability may be the deciding factor.

Q - If you had 100 young people that went through your system what percentage were reaching their full potential? How many were doing a job and were reasonably happy?

A – Referring to NEETs in foundation learning approximately 30% were satisfied. This varied as some had aspiration and would travel a good extent. Some with lower aspirations and confidence in themselves would accept the situation and settle with. Therefore 1:3 were satisfied with their lot.

Q – What can KCC do to help or enhance the provision of apprenticeships?

A – There was a great deal of collaboration between KCC and KATO already. The target figures for apprenticeships had already been reached this year in period 9. We are waiting for a breakdown on the impact of the work with employers that KATO had been doing had made in certain districts. KATO had worked in Canterbury, Swale and West Kent. It was better working in districts as KATO was able to target certain groups, the authorities and the federation of small businesses and getting media publicity on board.

KCC can continue with the support and raising awareness on apprenticeships and to be a leading light to employers by increasing opportunities within the authority.

Q - What sort of apprenticeship are you talking about, bricklaying

A – A wide range of apprenticeships such as business administration and accountancy, groundwork and distribution warehousing.

Q – What does the apprenticeship recruitment process involve? What are the challenges for the employer and the employee? How can it be improved?

A – For the employer it was a confusing process. KATO worked closely with the National Apprenticeship Service although the support they were able to offer was reduced because of the cuts in their funding. The Association was only dealing with large businesses those with over 250 employees.

The Chairman advised that the Committee had spoken with the NSA and they advised that they had to use satellite to reach the Small and Medium Employers (SME). There were 85% SME businesses in Kent.

KATO felt that it had it right in Kent and that was why it was seeing their numbers go up.

Q – How are the apprenticeships monitored and controlled? If company A offers training to an apprentice in a certain skill on completion of that apprenticeship what guarantee had company B got that the training in the apprenticeship was up to the standard?

A – An apprenticeship was organised in a triangle with the employer, learner and the training provider. All the rewards are the same covering literacy, numeracy and technical certificate. They were nationally recognised.

Q – What other areas do you work on? Are there things KCC was not effective on, was KCC wasting money?

A – KATO worked closely with Wayne Gough Interim County Manager (Supporting Independence Programme). KCC could apply influence in information advice and

guidance (IAG). KATO found resistance in some secondary education in IAG in the alternative curriculum. They may be A* students but would university be best or a higher apprenticeship suit them better. Influencing in secondary education would be more difficult especially with the reduction of funds to Connexions. Funding did not follow the learner it stayed with the establishment.

Q – Referring to the September guarantee and the fact that many students do not push through the apprenticeship route because they had to wait until July to know about the September guarantee. Was there anything that could be done?

A – Within the Kent Apprenticeship Strategy, KATO was looking to encourage some employers to make that commitment, to have an offer of apprenticeship opportunities for the appropriate time or when young people were leaving school. It was a big ask but this was in the Strategy.

Q - Are there areas where KCC was not being effective?

A – Other areas would be, to identify unknown NEETs which were the hardest to reach and to engage.

They were the grey kids probably, middleclass and could be disaffected. This could be a matter of earlier intervention. There were 2500 known NEETs in Kent.

Q – What age should this kick in?

A – Years 8 and 9 steer options to preferred career pathway.

Q – Do you pick up those who trained and have a degree?

A – Apprenticeship – They had to be employed otherwise there is no funding. A single adult with schools budget it was more difficult for them to provide provision for those with degrees.

Q – What can be done to ensure impartial advice is given as the school could lose the higher achievers to work based learning. We have the September Guarantee for children to move to 6th form look on line to get a guarantee place. Not easy to get apprenticeship have to wait until August and September, where as their friends may have got a place in college. Some school give good advice/guidance. Grammar school tend to give guidance to universities and further education.

Q - Lydia the work experience student present at the meeting was asked what type of advice she was given

A – I was given an appointment in Year 10 at the Careers Office. At that age I did not have a clue of what I wanted to do. Connexions came to our school they asked me what exams I was doing. I felt that it was the wrong age no one knew what they wanted to do.

Q – Where you directed to websites?

A - Year 12 I had a clearer view with the GCSEs I was taking and was just directed to A levels, no one mentioned apprenticeships.

Q – Do you engage with the forces?

A – KATO runs and evening with the forces and run foundation learning with full and open advice. We have new police recruits who come in and engage with young people.

The Chairman suggested that KATO was in the middle fully stretched trying to cover all the gaps.

Ms Jardine advised that 14, 15 and 16 year olds were not being prepared for the work market. They did not have the employability skills required. KATO were running a survey on 3000 employers at present in Swale looking at this issue. There would be an interim report by October.

*Ms Jardine agreed to forward a copy of the interim report to the Committee

Q – Are there any initiatives that you have come across externally, locally or in Europe that would be worth looking at?

A – KATO had recently had a couple of Age Grants that were about incentivising the employer to take on apprentices. The tipping point was the national minimum wage was £2.50 per hour about £5 ½ k per year. Some SME can not stretch that far. If they had an incentive of £1500 the employer could then afford to take on one apprentice. Swale Borough Council was going to support this project that we ran and it worked extremely well by incentivising employers. The Age Grant worked well and would ask KCC to consider.

Q – If KCC had a pot of money that would directly equate to jobs?

A – Yes.

Q – You said that Swale were doing this, are you talking to any other boroughs?

A – Ms Jardine advised that Shepway were thinking about this at the moment but I do not have enough details about that. Medway Council had already looked at it and were planning to launch next month. There was nothing in Maidstone.

Q - What are the difficulties for your providers in facilitating the right training and the right employment?

A – The restriction on funding on pre apprenticeships programmes, funding access to apprenticeships. Some young people are not work ready and not in a position to move straight into an apprenticeship a bridging programme that is delivered by an external provider from schools. Ms Jardine felt that school could not do that job effectively. Mr Easton. This would be 10,000 pre apprenticeships. In England this would be 13.4% of the NEET population that that would fund which was not nearly enough to bridge the gap and allow the transition.

*Ms Jardine agreed to forward a leaflet on KATO to the Committee.

The Chairman and Committee thanked Ms Jardine and Mr Easton for attending the meeting.