



Pathways For All Summary

Review of education
and training provision
for young people aged
16-19 in Kent

April 2022

Foreword

We are pleased to introduce this Report into our major Review of 16-19 provision within the county of Kent.

As we begin to emerge from a period of considerable pandemic-related turbulence, Kent remains committed to improving the options and life chances of all young people. Our young people have been particularly hard hit and, as they embark on their post-16 study and employment, we want to ensure they are as well-prepared as possible to survive and thrive in the world.

Kent's 16-19 education system is diverse and complex. It includes selective, non-selective and special schools, colleges, apprenticeships and independent training providers. The offer includes the new T-Levels alongside the standard range of qualifications, and we are a world leader in delivering the International Baccalaureate. This wide offer and the range of providers creates both challenges and opportunities.

Nationally, this is a time of change. Qualification reforms will affect the way education is delivered. A skills white paper increases the role of employers in Further Education. A new education white paper aims to improve quality in schools. At the same time, there has been a gradual erosion of the co-ordination of post-16 education.

Kent County Council values education and there is strong political commitment to driving improvement. In support of this, we asked the whole 16-19 sector – grammar, high schools and special schools, further education colleges; apprenticeship and other providers, pupils and students, parents, KCC and other strategic and operational partners – to engage in developing and delivering this Review. We are extremely grateful for the positive response and for all the valuable contributions our colleagues have made. The thoroughness of the process gives the Council confidence that the findings and recommendations contained in this Report identify the issues we need to address and provide appropriate ways for us to respond.

This Report makes clear that we need to:

- Make a concerted effort to improve the outcomes for young people from our post-16 provision
- Raise young people's aspirations through more effective careers education, information, advice and guidance
- Ensure that those who influence young people are informed about the options available to them, and more understanding and supportive of the choices young people make
- Enable a wider range of provision to be locally accessible
- Improve provision below Level 2 and provide good pathways into further learning at higher levels
- Support young people's mental health
- Take the opportunity to learn lessons from the pandemic.

However, Kent is a diverse county. One size will not fit all, and no organisation has the statutory powers or resources to produce the necessary changes on its own. It is only by working together that we will make progress. Collaboration, locally and cross-county, must therefore be at the heart of what we do.

With this in mind, our first step is to establish a Strategic Post-16 Board to take the Report's recommendations and other necessary actions forward and provide overall direction to post-16 provision in the County. This collaborative, sector-driven approach depends on your contribution. We will therefore be asking representative groups and other key partners for their active participation on the Board and involvement in next steps.

We look forward to working in partnership with you all in implementing the recommendations of this valuable Report.

Roger Gough

Leader, Kent County Council

Shellina Prendergast

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

Kent County Council's [KCC's] 2021-25 Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent requires its Children, Young People & Education Directorate to lead a review of post-16 education within Kent¹. The vision for the Review was that it should improve the options and life chances of young people in Kent by:

- Providing better education, skills and training opportunities for all Kent's young people
- Enabling KCC to develop a clear understanding of the issues and the barriers to participation and progression
- Allowing KCC to understand, support and provide direction to the post-16 sector in the county.

Specifically, the purpose of the Review is to:

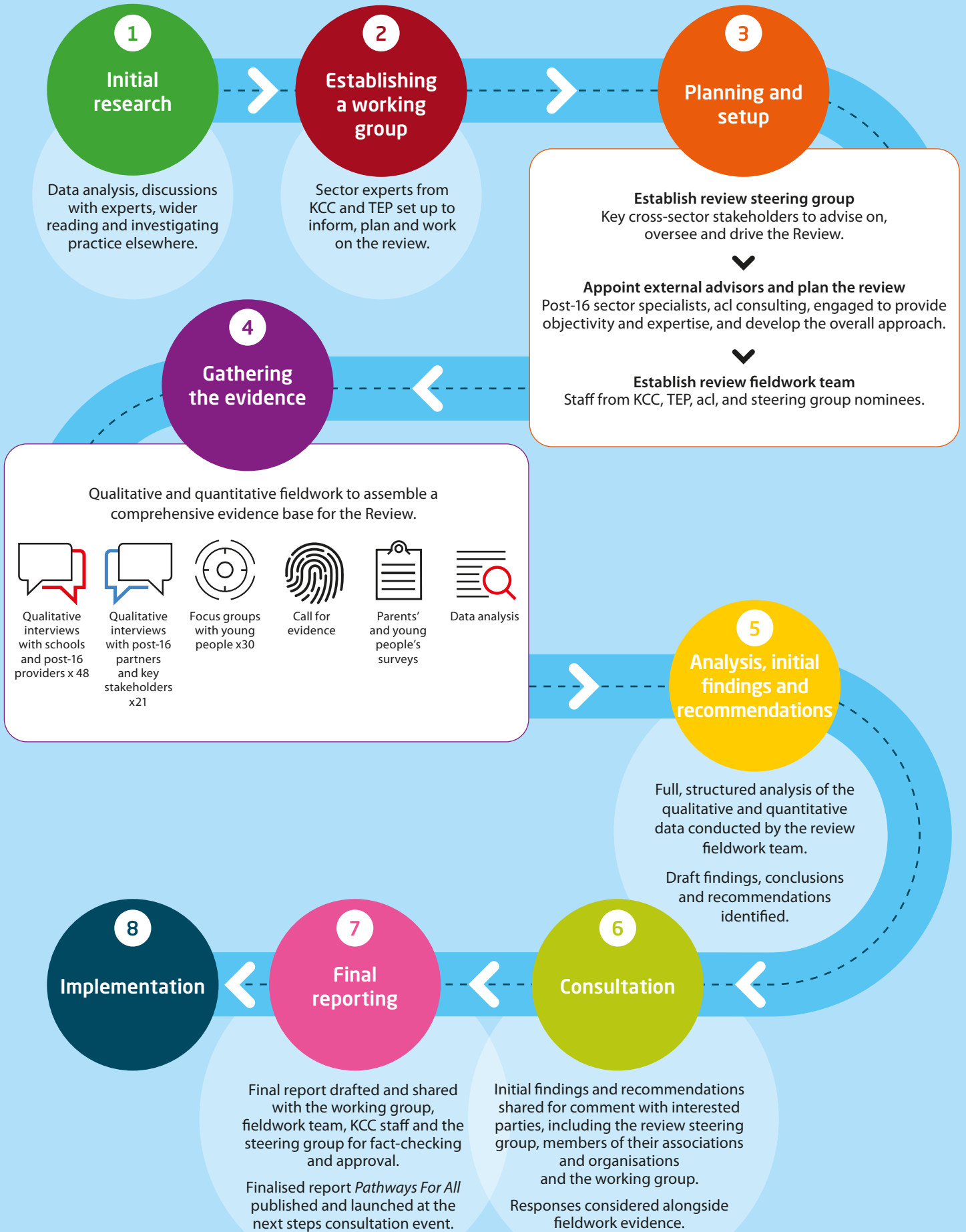
- Hold a mirror up to 16-19 education in Kent by developing a deeper understanding of the sector

- Identify key far-reaching and systemic issues, and particular areas of under achievement or need in the post-16 sector
- Identify, explore and understand good practice in the sector to encourage its wider take-up
- Identify the gaps, issues and barriers that need to be, and can reasonably be, addressed by the sector
- Be a platform for KCC and its key partners to develop strategic leadership in the Kent post-16 system
- Provide advocacy for young people in the 16-19 sector
- Develop a sector-wide collaborative approach to driving success in the post-16 system
- Ensure that young people in post-16 education and training in Kent are well prepared to deal with the challenges caused by Covid-19.



1. See <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s101472/Kent%20Commissioning%20Plan.pdf>, paragraph 3.9, page 11.

The 16-19 Review: process



2. Approach

The Review was overseen by a Review Steering Group, comprising provider representatives and others with an interest in post-16 provision in the County. A Review Working Group drawn from colleagues directly involved in post-16 delivery in KCC and The Education People [TEP] provided valuable additional operational input. An external expert (acl consulting) was appointed to add objectivity, insight and rigour.

The Review was carried out, largely during calendar year 2021, by a research team drawn from KCC, TEP, acl, and Steering Group member-proposed secondees. It included:

- A detailed analysis of local and national data on KS5 outcomes (supported by the Analytics team in KCC Strategic Commissioning)
- Fieldwork interviews with 16-19 providers across Kent, plus pre-16 providers (48 providers equalling 25% of the sector) and 21 other stakeholders and key players
- 30 small focus groups with young people across 22 providers
- Contributions from other interested parties following a widely-publicised call for evidence
- Online surveys of parents and young people
- A soft consultation on the emerging findings was held during autumn 2021. This report was finalised in early 2022.

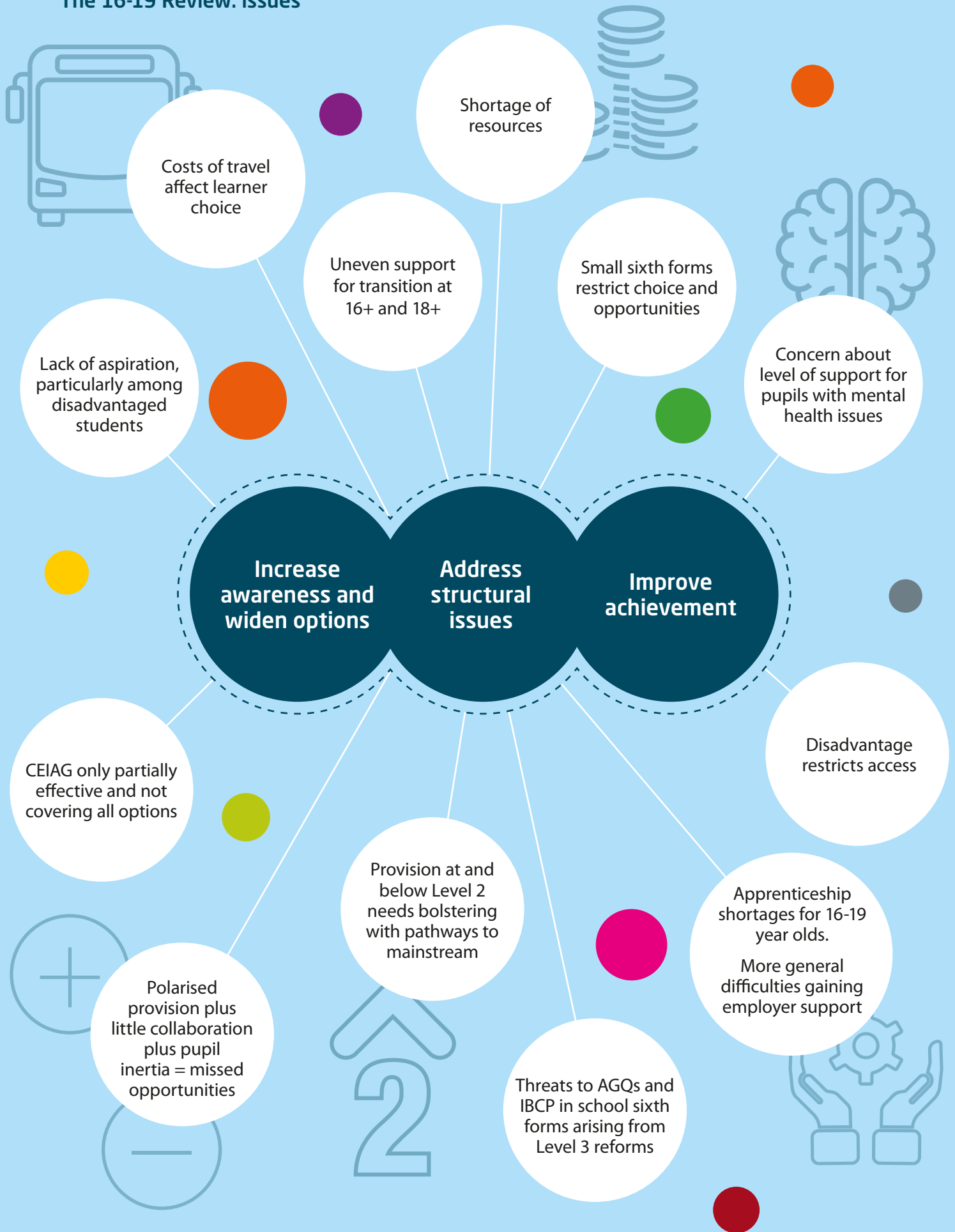


Structuring the data

To structure the data collection, fieldwork interview schedules were designed around a notional 'journey' taken by a young person before and during their time in 16-19 education. These interviews covered:

- The post-16 offer
- Location, access to, and structure of the current 16-19 offer
- Equal opportunities
- Pre-Year 12 decision-making
- Transition into post-16 provision
- Delivery of post-16 provision
- Outcomes from post-16 provision
- Post-Year 13 decision-making and transition on from post-16 provision
- Future viability of provision
- Collaboration between post-16 providers
- The impact of Covid-19.

The 16-19 Review: issues



3. Principal findings

This Section sets out the principal findings from the fieldwork following the structure outlined in Section 2.

For full details of the findings, please refer to Section 3 in the main Report.

The offer

The key points regarding the offer made to young people relate to:

- ‘Pupil inertia’ – the marked tendency for young people to remain at their current school and transfer into its sixth form at 16, rather than fully consider other choices
- Level 3 qualifications reform
- Alternative 16-19 provision.

Pupil inertia means that:

- Kent schools effectively continue to represent different systems (high school, grammar school) post-16, as they have done pre-16
- Many pupils’ choice at 16+ is constrained by what their school offers, in terms of qualifications (principally A levels, Advanced General Qualifications [AGQs] and the International Baccalaureate Diploma and Career-related programmes [IBDP and IBCP]) and individual subjects
- Where pupil inertia is widespread, other provision (particularly general further education colleges [GFECs]) becomes the default destination for those who have concluded, or been advised, they are not academically able enough to transfer to their school’s sixth form.

Pupil inertia would matter less if providers collaborated to broaden the curriculum available locally. Evidence suggests there is very little of this collaboration currently taking place.

Regarding the Level 3 reforms (i.e. the roll out of T Levels and the related withdrawal of Education & Skills Funding Agency [ESFA] funding for the equivalent AGQs) non-selective schools in particular are increasingly concerned about the risks to their post-16 offer:

- Specifically – to the future of the qualifications they currently run (principally the IBCP and BTECs)
- More generally – will their remaining post-16 provision be viable in a ‘post-qualifications reform’ world?

The qualifications reforms, as currently proposed, risk non-work-based 16-19 provision becoming more polarised. Grammar schools might specialise in academic study, while GFECs and work-based providers focus more on T Levels and other technical/vocational subjects; and high school sixth forms’ role becomes less defined. In this scenario, a valuable progression route into higher levels of learning for many of Kent’s young people may be lost.

Historically, Kent has had quite a wide range of provision for vulnerable learners for whom school sixth form or college is not appropriate. Since 2018/19, this has largely collapsed, making it extremely difficult to retain or attract young people whose needs were not met in pre-16 education. This creates significant knock-on implications for those at risk of finding themselves not in education, employment or training [NEET].

Details of the Review’s major recommendations to address these issues are in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- **4.2 Raising young people’s aspirations through better careers education, information, advice and guidance [CEIAG]**
- **4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision**
- **4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.**

Related subsidiary recommendations are in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.1).

Location, access, and structure

Since the Learning and Skills Council [LSC] closed in 2010, there has been no one central controlling or coordinating function with responsibility for post-16 provision². This means that what is on offer and where depends on individual providers' decisions. While all areas of Kent currently have fairly straightforward access to A levels, other 16+ provision is more patchy.

There are two broad approaches to addressing this issue:

- Attempting to resolve 'gaps' through local collaboration, building on the (few) existing examples in the county
- Minimising travel, and providing financial support where possible if it is unavoidable.

Travel and the associated costs affects many young people's choice of post-16 destination, and may dissuade some from taking part in education or training entirely. This is despite KCC's support (which is generous compared to many local authorities [LAs]) and bursary funds from individual providers.

KCC's scope to address market failures in the provision of transport (e.g. by subsidising non-commercial routes or services) is restricted both by government funding and by operators' cost and other pressures that threaten route and service viability.

Details of the Review's major recommendations that address these issues are in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- **4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision**
- **4.4 Improving [access to] provision below Level 2**
- **4.6 Improving access to provision**
- **4.7 Learning from lockdown – in particular by creating opportunities for more blended approaches to learning.**

2. It is important to note that the LSC did not have responsibility for schools-based post-16 provision, which remained with local authorities at that time. Since the *Academies Act 2010*, the number of secondary schools for which local authorities have responsibility has reduced considerably – across all phases, only 203 schools nationally were academies in 2010; by 2021-22 almost four-in-five secondary schools had become academies.

Equal opportunities

Although the fieldwork raised few equal opportunities concerns directly, others nevertheless arise.

Students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds may not have access to the full range of post-16 opportunities available, and be discouraged from taking advantage of those that are. The main factors are pressures to work, and transport costs (as above); there may also be a lack of awareness.

Students with additional needs may find it difficult to access appropriate post-16 provision due to a shortfall in programmes at Level 2 and below, within both GFECs and 'alternative' 16-19 providers.

It has also been suggested that placements for these students – particularly those with an education and health care plan [EHCP] – place too much emphasis on securing provision that meets their educational and other needs, rather than their aspirations for a future career or lifestyle.

There is insufficient capacity to provide English for Speakers of Other Languages [ESOL] programmes. This lack of capacity disadvantages learners who are not proficient in spoken and written English

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- **4.1 Improving outcomes**
- **4.2 Raising young people's aspirations through better CEIAG**
- **4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.**

Subsidiary recommendations concerning the aspirations of young people with a special educational need and/or disability [SEND] and ESOL provision are in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.3)³.

3. This Review has taken into account where relevant, but has been careful not to overlap with, the implementation of the Council's Written Statement of Action on SEND following the Ofsted SEND Inspection of 2018.

Pre-Year 12 decision-making

The review found that a hierarchy of post-16 options effectively exists in Kent:

- Schools-based routes are preferred to all other options
- Grammar schools are preferred to high schools
- There is no clear distinction drawn between technical/vocational routes ‘followed at a GFEC’ and ‘in the work-place’, generally via an apprenticeship.

This hierarchy has an impact on young people’s choices at 16, particularly as the fieldwork highlighted concerns about the lack of access to impartial CEIAG which would inform a young person’s choice of options. There were a number of dimensions to this.

For pre-Year 12 students, there are linked concerns around schools keeping ‘their own’ students post-16, enabled by the lack of CEIAG on the full range of options available. Within these general concerns, the lack of information on employment and the jobs market, and in particular about apprenticeships, were regularly raised.

The lack of good CEIAG in schools meant young people were overly reliant on and influenced by the opinions of parents, non-CEIAG specialist teaching staff, peers, friends and family when deciding where to go post-16.

Determining what to do next is even more challenging for young people who are electively home educated (EHE), in the youth justice system, or ‘non-permanently’ excluded from school, since they have little or no access to CEIAG.

Young people also need to be confident in their ability to choose pathways outside school. Staff need to assure them a decision to do so is equally ‘valid’ and encourage those around them to support their stated preference.

All providers (including GFECs and work-based providers) need access to young people in schools in order to be able to give them the information they need to make their choices. Young people need

careers-related input early and throughout their time at school, highlighting opportunities, raising aspirations and explaining what they need to do to realise them. (None of this exceeds the requirements of the Provider Access Duty, statutory guidance relating to CEIAG, and the Gatsby Benchmarks for Good Career Guidance.)

Details of the Review’s major recommendations that address these issues will be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- **4.1 Improving outcomes**
- **4.2 Raising young people’s aspirations through better CEIAG**
- **4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision**
- **4.5 Further supporting the mental health of learners.**

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations will be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.4).

Transition into post-16 provision

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the support available for young people making the transition from pre- to post-16 learning.

Where their school has a sixth form, and they achieve the necessary grades, most young people will stay on post-16 in their existing school, and the transition process generally works well.

In contrast, the transition from a school to anywhere other than its own sixth form, and in particular into work, was often felt to be poorly supported. Young people and their prospective post-16 providers were largely left to ‘make the best of it’.

Nevertheless, most providers reported relatively few cases of young people becoming so dissatisfied with their choice that they switch provider or become NEET. Where this does happen, young people need support early in the Autumn Term to transfer to, and hopefully remain in, a more suitable alternative: a later decision may be difficult to accommodate.

Details of the Review’s major recommendations that address these issues will be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

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- **4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision**
- **4.4 Improving provision below Level 2**
- **4.5 Further supporting the mental health of learners**
- **4.7 Learning from lockdown.**

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations will be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.5).

Delivery

The major focus of the fieldwork here was on the factors directly affecting the delivery of Kent’s 16-19 offer; the availability of resources and the mental health of young people were regularly highlighted.

Despite recent increases in the base rate and other elements of the funding model, the Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS] calculates that between 2010-11 and 2020-21 there was a real terms reduction in income per student of 15% for GFECs and 28% for school sixth forms. As a result, post-16 provision is being constrained by limits on investment in buildings, equipment and/or staff.

It is also proving increasingly difficult to find employers willing to deliver work-related elements of young people’s learning programmes. The Covid pandemic has had an immediate and detrimental impact on apprenticeships.

For alternative 16-19 providers, resourcing-related issues are further complicated by their young people’s more complex needs. For those receiving ESFA funding, the lagged funding model and more general contractual uncertainties have made it difficult to plan provision and recruit staff.

Student mental health issues and the lack of resources to address them have become ubiquitous concerns for schools and colleges (less so for young people on apprenticeships).

Details of the Review’s major recommendations that address these issues will be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- **4.1 Improving outcomes**
- **4.5 Further supporting the mental health of learners.**

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations will be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.6).

Outcomes

Both quantitative data (from national and local statistics) and qualitative data (from interviews) were used to assess outcomes from 16-19 study.

The quantitative data indicates, inter alia, that at 18:

- In Kent, progression to ‘positive’ destinations (higher or further education, apprenticeships, and employment) at the end of Key Stage 5 is in line with, or better than, national averages for those with a Level 3 or Level 2 qualification
- Kent is less successful in terms of progression to positive destinations for those not yet qualified at Level 2
- Kent students from (broadly) non-disadvantaged backgrounds seem to achieve at and progress from Key Stage 5 as well as their peers elsewhere in the country: those from disadvantaged backgrounds do not.

In particular ...

- The gap between progression rates to the most selective higher education institutions [HEIs] for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students appears to be wider in Kent than nationally

- There is a relatively small gap nationally between progression to all HEIs by disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students (46% to 51%)⁴. In every Kent district, the gap is greater than this – and in some cases, substantially.

Overall, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds appear to make even less progress than their non-disadvantaged peers when the data for Kent is compared to the national average: this raises questions about their access to grammar schools.

Qualitative findings from the fieldwork interviews suggest that:

- Young people can lack the necessary aspiration and ambition to realise their full potential – they do not ‘believe in themselves’
- ‘Basic’ jobs (those without much training or progression potential) are relatively easy to find in Kent. Many students are attracted to them (or even encouraged to take them up) by the prospect of earning money now, rather than investing for their future
- Young people who feel A levels and higher education are not for them may become demotivated if they are not aware of possible alternatives
- Those considering higher education often looked only at institutions in Kent.

Details of the Review’s major recommendations that address these issues will be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- **4.1 Improving outcomes**
- **4.2 Raising young people’s aspirations through better CEIAG**
- **4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision**
- **4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.**

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations will be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.7).

Post-Year 13 decision making and transition

The fieldwork found that most work-based and alternative 16-19 providers have a strong focus on transitional support. Providers often described a structured process, beginning in the final year of the young person’s current programme, to identify their intended next step and put the necessary support in place. During the pandemic, providers worked with employers to identify ways of keeping young people engaged, and ideally progressing, in their workplaces.

Work-based and alternative 16-19 providers in particular leave their doors open to their leavers after they have moved on. Some actively check on their progress and provide further support where it would be helpful.

Similarly, GFECs emphasise positive outcomes and destinations, allocating staff from early in a student’s study programme to ensure the post-18 transition runs smoothly. This includes working with non-completers, and with students after they have technically left.

For schools, approximately half the cohort progresses to higher education after Key Stage 5. There is a range of support for those wishing to pursue this route.

For those progressing to destinations other than higher education, feedback suggests that the availability and quality of support and information on these options was less satisfactory.

Students at both selective and non-selective schools were concerned that progression to HE seemed to be ‘the only valued route’, with little information available on alternatives. But within the current cohort, there is growing interest in post-Year 13 apprenticeships, and a desire for more information on the wider apprenticeship offer, particularly the options for progression at higher (post-Level 3) levels.

Schools offer post-transition support, but this seems to be less frequently and proactively than is the case for work-based and alternative 16-19 providers and GFECs.

4. These statistics refer specifically to destinations of students that remain in education to the end of Key Stage 5. Fewer disadvantaged than non-disadvantaged students do so, therefore the overall cohort participation in HE is lower than the figures quoted.

The role of influencers (principally parents and friends) on decisions about what to do next is also a factor. Where it was mentioned, it was mainly in a negative (options limiting) way, rather than an encouragement to ‘try to ...’.

Details of the Review’s major recommendations that address these issues will be found in sub-section 4.2 of this Executive Summary (**4.2 Raising young people’s aspirations through better CEIAG**). In addition, related subsidiary recommendations will be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.8).

Future viability of provision

As well as reviewing Kent’s existing 16+ education and training provision, the Review also considered its viability and how it may need to change in the future.

Many Kent sixth forms are small. Government regulations state that any new academy sixth form should have a minimum of 200 students: eight of Kent’s 32 grammar school and 38 of its 55 high school sixth forms do not meet this criterion.

There is no compelling evidence that students in smaller sixth forms do less well in terms of ‘added value’ between their GCSE grades and their concluding Level 3 ‘score’. However, the more limited provision is a cause for concern, especially since it appears that young people tend to choose their post-16 options based on what is available in their current school’s sixth form. There are also revenue and capital costs associated with every small class.

A substantial proportion of the programmes on offer are AGQs – principally BTECs, which may also form part of the IBCP. At the time of writing (Spring 2022), the government intends progressively to withdraw funding for many AGQs as the related T Levels are introduced. This will effectively make it impossible for providers to continue offering these qualifications.

Kent’s GFECs are large enough and have the necessary employer links across a range of provision to make T Levels a viable proposition; most if not all of its school sixth forms – mainly high schools – currently offering BTECs are not. If AGQs are non-funded, perhaps half of these sixth forms could become unviable. Qualifications reform at Level 3 is therefore a direct threat to them. What happens to a significant proportion of young people currently opting for AGQs at 16 is equally unclear.

For work-based options, the number of young people starting an apprenticeship at 16 has fallen as more stay on at school or enter college. Yet the number and range of employment choices for young people is greater now than 18 months ago. What the new ‘steady state’ position will be remains to be seen: there is a continuing and probably increasing shortage of apprenticeships for progression at the higher levels.

Details of the Review’s major recommendations that address these issues will be found in sub-section 4.3 of this Executive Summary (**4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision**). In addition, related subsidiary recommendations will be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.9).

Collaboration

Making progress on many of this Review’s recommendations will depend on effective collaboration between 16-19 providers in Kent.

There are examples of such collaboration, particularly within a multi academy trust (MAT), but also between non-MAT schools and GFECs, work-based and alternative providers. These generally cover the post-16 offer, but also exist in other areas (e.g. work to address NEET issues; staff recruitment, training, and development; IAG-related networks; post-18 progression options, including work with HEIs).

Whether through pressures in the system, or a need to collaborate to address an identified shared issue, there is a willingness to contemplate more collaborative working.

However, a number of barriers remain:

- Practicalities – distance, transport and travel time between providers, and other logistical issues; timetabling; resources; and responsibility for the young person, specifically ownership of the provision’s overall adequacy and quality (including under Ofsted inspection)
- The geography and structure of education in Kent
- Competition between providers, though this is not as pervasive a concern as might be assumed
- The evolving context at both local and national level, which can prevent new and undermine existing arrangements, especially for smaller providers in general, and alternative 16-19 providers in particular.

Details of the Review’s major recommendations that address these issues will be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- **4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision**
- **4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.**

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations will be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.10).

The impact of Covid-19

The Review began during the summer term of 2020; fieldwork continued until the end of the summer term of 2021. Throughout this period, young people’s learning, work experience and progression were seriously disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. There is every indication that disruption will continue in 2021-22.

While more young people in Kent achieving higher results is clearly welcome, interviewees were concerned about grade inflation. In particular, they worried it would encourage (or enable) young people to pursue schools-based post-16 options that, under normal circumstances, might not have been open to them. As a result they may not cope.

There were also concerns about fewer work-based opportunities in the short- to medium-term. Sectors popular with young people considering

apprenticeships were particularly badly affected by the pandemic and may take longer to recover.

While relatively few young people had their apprenticeship terminated during the pandemic, many were furloughed or worked from home. At best, their experience will have been dramatically different, and their progress significantly slowed. At worst, their employment may have ceased after the return to work, with the chances of continuing their programme elsewhere also likely to be severely reduced.

The potential negative impact of grade inflation and a lack of work-based opportunities has been further complicated by:

- Difficulties in seeing what was available elsewhere: virtual visits can only show so much
- A general sense that in uncertain circumstances it was better to ‘stick with what you know’.

Overall, there is concern that for whatever reason some young people will have made the ‘wrong’ post-16 choice. Although fewer became NEET after their GCSE results in September, more may find themselves unable to cope and/or drop out at a later date, in which case the problem is being postponed rather than prevented.

The pandemic has required providers to consider new ways of working. Many work-based and alternative 16-19 providers and GFECs have moved substantially towards more ‘blended’ learning; schools much less so.

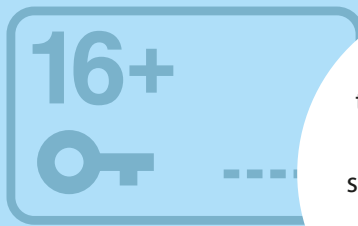
There is a concern that these more blended approaches will be seen as a temporary aberration: this is potentially a missed opportunity. Not all young people were happy in school pre-Covid: a schools-led offer delivered in a different way may be worth retaining and developing, particularly with EHE on the increase.

Details of the Review’s major recommendations that address these issues will be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- **4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision**
- **4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.**

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations will be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.11).

The 16-19 Review: recommendations



4.1 Improve outcomes through:

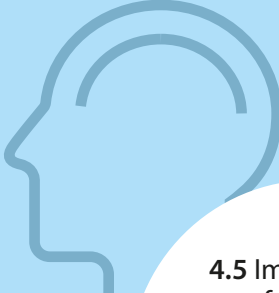
- Establishing a comprehensive benchmarking programme
- Promoting the adoption of a life skills curriculum

4.4 Enhance provision below Level 2:

- Put provision on a more stable footing
- Address the NEET issue
- Provide for progression

4.6 Improve Access to post-16 provision:

- Prioritise travel support to those who most need it to:
- Lobby government to support post -16 travel.



4.5 Improve early support for students with mental health issues to:

- Promote well-being
- Remove a barrier to achievement and progression

4.2 Raise young people's aspirations through:

- promoting a model CEIAG curriculum.
- Ensuring all young people are supported to consider a range of options

4.7 Learn from lockdown to:

- Improve support for remote learning
- Retain more young people in some form of learning



4.3 Develop a comprehensive local offer, implemented via collaboration, to:

- Widen what is available
- Enable young people to exercise their choice



4. Principal recommendations

This report makes eight principal recommendations:

- **4.1** *Make a concerted effort to improve outcomes from 16+ provision*
- **4.2** *In parallel, raise young people's aspirations through more effective CEIAG. Once raised, these aspirations need to be actively supported, including by those with an influence over what young people decide to do post-16. By proxy this means ensuring those who influence young people are themselves properly informed*
- **4.3** *Develop an 'area offer' to support the current network of sixth forms, many of them very small by national standards. This should cover all providers (specifically including GFECs, other organisations providing vocational learning and alternative 16-19 providers) and will require collaboration between all concerned.*
- **4.4** *Improve the provision available below Level 2*
- **4.5** *Take further steps to support young people's mental health*
- **4.6** *Improve and enable access to provision*
- **4.7** *Take the opportunity to learn lessons from the Covid-19 lockdowns, and not simply assume everything should or will return to 'normal'*
- **4.8** *Create a 16+ Strategic Leadership Board to ensure all involved parties collaborate to deliver these recommendations, and to oversee the sector's future strategic development.*

These recommendations are explored in more detail in the following paragraphs. For a fuller description of what each recommendation would involve, and a summary of relevant practice that might be built upon, please refer to the corresponding paragraphs of Section 4 of the report (for example paragraphs numbered 4.1:1 and following in the main report for recommendation 4.1).

4.1 Improving outcomes

Clearly, all provision should be designed to give young people the best possible outcomes, in terms of attainment, progression, destinations and life skills.

Therefore, the Review proposes:

- Establishing a comprehensive benchmarking programme. This will allow individual providers to compare their outcomes with those of their peers, both within Kent and with Kent's 'statistical neighbours', using the wealth of data routinely collected at County and national level
- Encouraging schools and other providers to adopt a life skills curriculum (either new or existing), to give young people the skills they need to achieve their goals post-16 and post-18.

4.2 Raising young people's aspiration through better CEIAG

For various reasons, CEIAG is not always fully effective. This means some young people are not aware of their full range of post-16 opportunities and cannot fully consider the alternatives open to them. They may then end up with the 'wrong' provision and miss out on greater benefits they could have gained elsewhere.

It is therefore proposed to:

- Develop a model CEIAG curriculum, customisable by all pre-16 and post-16 settings, to address observed gaps
- Actively encourage young people to consider their full range of post-16 options, including those outside their current school or immediate geographical area
- Support young people to achieve in post-16 employment or further education, and in their subsequent progress into work or higher education.

In addition, specific strategies should also be developed for:

- Parents, to ensure they have at least a working knowledge of the full range of post-16 destinations and what they can lead to, and that they understand that ‘staying in school’ is not the only option
- Teachers (including but not limited to those with CEIAG responsibilities), to ensure they are familiar with destinations other than school sixth forms and the progression opportunities these provide, and can support young people who wish to consider options beyond their pre-16 school.

4.3 Implementing an ‘area offer’ of 16+ provision

A strong, varied post-16 offer for young people in Kent requires a comprehensive, effective range of provision to be locally available to all.

Kent must therefore find ways to increase the ‘virtual’ size of sixth forms and address the impact of Level 3 reforms (even if delayed): this must involve genuine, practical collaboration between neighbouring sixth forms and other providers, amounting to an ‘area offer’.

‘Mixed programmes’ combining A levels and vocational qualifications have proved highly attractive, particularly to high school students. This flexibility needs to be retained and, through closer work with GFECs, improved wherever possible.

It is therefore suggested there is a need to:

- Set out, and consult upon, what the comprehensive local post-16 ‘area offer’ should include as a minimum
- Encourage schools with sixth forms, local GFEC(s) and work-based and other learning providers to construct their own ‘area offer’. This should combine academic (A level) and vocational programmes to replace qualifications set to be discontinued
- Encourage the strong collaboration required to deliver this offer, based on specific local circumstances and needs
- Progressively review all collaborations to ensure they are delivering strong, effective and truly comprehensive area offers
- Continue to lobby Government to moderate the impact of vocational qualification reforms, and ensure adequate provision at Level 3 for those whose Level 2 attainment does not allow progression to T or A levels.

4.4 Improving provision below Level 2

Ways must be found to support further growth and development in provision below Level 2 to stem – and indeed reverse – the current decline. In particular, programmes offered by alternative 16-19 providers need to be put on a stable footing, with guaranteed long-term formula funding, rather than relying (as at present) on short-term funding from multiple sources.

It is therefore recommended that KCC:

- Identifies how ESFA can support developments in this area by guaranteeing funding
- Lobbies ESFA to extend the programmes it can fund if the current range is insufficient, particularly by supporting work-based and alternative providers
- Investigates options for an ‘umbrella’ administrative organisation that would enable more providers to offer programmes for this group of young people: this has worked well elsewhere in the country
- Supports new providers wishing to enter the market, whether as part of an ‘umbrella’ group or in their own right, and lobbies ESFA to facilitate this
- Encourages GFECs in particular to continue offering a range of qualifications at Entry Levels and Level 1, and to develop return pathways for young people attending other providers, recognising that not all young people are immediately ready for a college environment at 16+
- Supports all providers in developing progression routes for successful completers into further vocational or other learning or employment.

4.5 Further supporting learners' mental health

The fieldwork for this project raised consistent and increasing concerns about young people's mental health and the impact on their learning, particularly in non-work-based provision. The two priorities are:

- Identifying and providing appropriate support for young people with mental health issues, including those not in mainstream settings
- Reviewing and modifying teaching styles to reflect a student population where mental health issues are increasingly common.

It is therefore suggested there is a need to:

- Identify and share the best evidence-based teaching practice that supports learning in a mental health-friendly way for all students
- Draw up and implement a clear, county-wide framework for emotional wellbeing approaches and services, supported by staff development as required, to identify mental health concerns early, then intervene and support young people appropriately
- Support better two-way communication to ensure Education colleagues are aware of the full range of support available, and NHS and other services understand the extent of mental health issues within the 16-19 sector
- Ensure providers can offer 'frontline' mental health support to individual young people where appropriate and proportionate
- Consider further investment in a 'second line' support service where within-institution support (however enhanced) may be insufficient but a referral to NHS children and young people's mental health services may not be entirely necessary.

4.6 Improving access to provision

In a large, partly rural, county like Kent some young people will have to travel a reasonable distance to their chosen provision. Those who choose to 'commute' incur time and financial costs; in practice, this restricts the range of options open to many.

With providers' and KCC's budgets for support increasingly tight, there is a need to:

- Prioritise support for those whose choice of post-16 destination depends on financial assistance with travel
- Ensure student travel arrangements are designed around the local collaborative 'area offer' recommended above, including travel between providers where required and for vocational education more widely
- Continue to lobby Government to support travel for post-16 education, training and employment as it does to school pre-16.

4.7 Learning from lockdown

The pandemic and its associated lockdowns obliged providers to consider new ways of working, including 'blended learning' and other technology-based approaches that might have taken far longer to introduce incrementally. Some young people, especially the harder-to-reach, have found these arrangements particularly helpful. There is a danger that providers will rush to return to pre-pandemic delivery modes, and that lessons learnt and opportunities created will rapidly be lost.

It is proposed to:

- Identify lessons from lockdown while the knowledge is still fresh in people's minds
- Develop a minimum standard of requirements for home-based learning, including software, hardware and broadband access, to guide 16+ providers and their students when implementing blended learning approaches

- Agree circumstances in which students might be given a ‘right to request’ remote or more blended learning (e.g. illness, challenging personal circumstances), establish protocols to encourage students to make appropriate requests, and ensure that they will be appropriately supported
- Track students’ use of remote learning to see whether blended learning does in fact meet the needs and address the issues identified, without compromising young people’s mental health and confidence. If it does, how might it be developed further; if not, how it can be adapted to provide a workable solution?

4.8 Improving strategic leadership at 16+

Responsibility for post-16 provision is fragmented across a number of organisations and agencies. There are a number of local coordinating groups and initiatives, but no one forum or facilitating team that can raise issues, work collaboratively and make real progress for the entire system.

It is proposed that:

- A 16+ Strategic Board be formed. This will take forward the recommendations of this current review, then have strategic oversight of coordinating and developing 16+ provision throughout Kent
- This Board will have a small secretariat, headed by a principal officer, with funding to promote its activities and ensure work streams are owned and taken forward.

Setting up ‘sub-area Boards’ for different regions of the county may also be useful to support taking the work forward at a local level.



Conclusion

A major review - and a major opportunity

As the scale and scope of this Summary makes clear, KCC's Review of 16-19 provision has been a huge undertaking. The Steering Group is extremely grateful to all who contributed.

The picture that has emerged is complex. There is a significant range of provision on offer in Kent, from an equally diverse range of providers – very few (and arguably none) within the Council's direct sphere of control. The Review has also taken place in the context of further planned major changes, particularly to the post-16 vocational landscape: though possibly postponed, these seem unlikely to be abandoned entirely.

Nevertheless, the Review indicates a shared view of many of the issues that need to be addressed. There is a clear willingness to look afresh at post-16 provision and collaborate on improving the offer, and in this way to deliver on the Kent Pledge ("Making Kent a county that works for all children") for all 16-19 year olds.

Few, if any, of the Review's recommendations can be introduced by fiat. Even if this were possible, it would be neither desirable, nor in the spirit of the Review. Implementing the Report's recommendations will require discussion, persuasion and negotiation, and even then actions that may be challenging to implement or maintain.

Yet within such a collaborative framework, all the Report's recommendations can be implemented. Individually and collectively, they will make a significant difference to the life chances of Kent's young people. This Report therefore represents a major opportunity for step change in 16-19 provision in the county. We commend it to all interested parties.

Further information

This Summary and the full Report, which provides a full analysis of the Review findings and further details about the recommendations as well as some examples of relevant practice that show how parts of the county are responding to various issues raised by the Review, can be accessed electronically at <https://www.kelsi.org.uk/kent-16-to-19-review>

For further information, please contact Kent County Council's Education Lead Adviser, **Michelle Stanley**, via email at kent16-19review@kent.gov.uk



