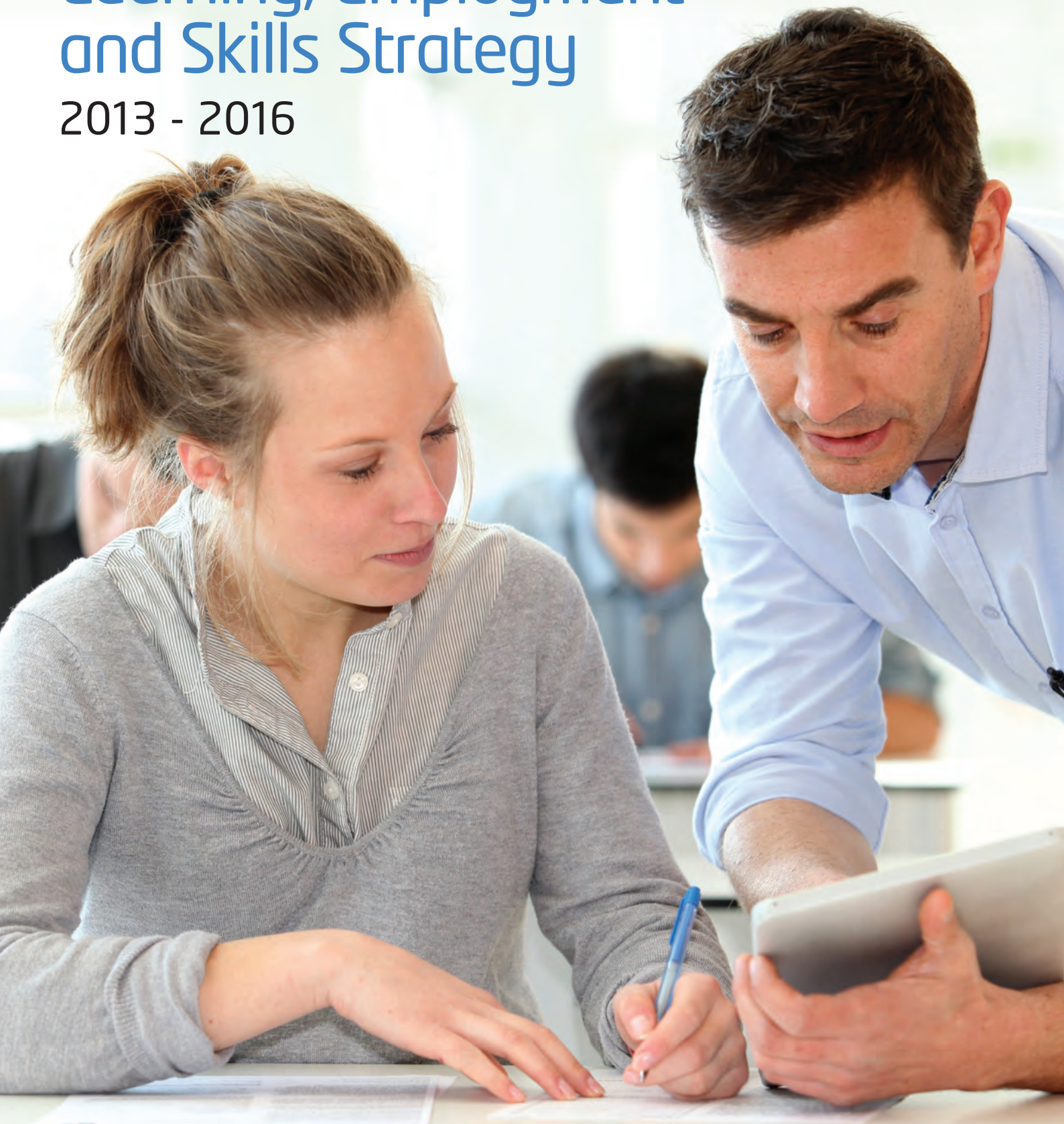


14 - 24

Learning, Employment and Skills Strategy

2013 - 2016



Executive Summary

Our ambition is for all young people in Kent to become better qualified and more employable; to be able to participate and achieve success in education and work based training at least until the age of 18; and to ensure more 18 to 24 year olds can access higher learning or sustained employment that is appropriate to their needs and relevant to the local and national economy.

This strategy is designed to link the world of learning to the world of work more successfully, and to bring about more rapid transformation in young people's skills, qualifications and employability through the following four key areas of focus.

1. Raise Attainment

Attainment at 16 is the single most important factor in securing participation, learning and achievement between the ages of 16 and 19, especially attainment in English and mathematics. And building on this, achieving level 3 qualifications is vitally important in enabling young people to access professional employment opportunities and progress to higher education, for example to university or onto higher apprenticeships.

Where are we now?

61% of Kent's 16 year olds are achieving five A*-C GCSEs, including English and mathematics, which is just above the national average. However, this means that nearly 40% of young people are not achieving this level of attainment which risks limiting their prospects to low skilled, low paid employment and a high risk of unemployment if they do not progress to meaningful learning and training pathways post 16. Furthermore, only 55% of boys are achieving five GCSEs, compared to 63% of girls. For level 3 attainment, Kent achieves below the national average.

Where do we want to be?

In order to give young people the best chance to progress and achieve good outcomes, we want to continue raising the attainment level for GCSEs and to significantly increase the number of 16-19 year olds taking up and achieving level 2 and 3 qualifications so they can access vocational and professional pathways and higher level apprenticeships, thereby widening participation in both academic and vocational education pathways to age 18. Some of our targets for 2016 to achieve this will include:

- Key Stage 4 attainment will be amongst the best for our comparable statistical neighbours and improve to at least 70% of pupils attaining 5 good GCSEs including English and mathematics.
- The number of 16-19 year olds who achieve no improvement in qualifications will decrease to below 5%.
- The achievement gaps for disadvantaged young people aged 16-19, for level 2 and 3 qualifications will be below the national figures.
- Advanced level performance in Kent will be above the national average on all measures.



2. Improve and Extend Vocational Education, Training and Apprenticeships

In order that all 14 to 19 year olds can access and succeed in following an appropriate path of learning, a high quality education and training offer will be developed. This will be well matched to students' and employers' needs, with clear progression to higher levels of qualification and critically, employer involvement in the programmes' design and suitability for the labour market.

Where are we now?

We are building on good developments in recent years, namely the success of the Kent Vocational Programme which has seen the establishment of 29 vocational centres and specialist workshops with over 8000 young people engaged in programmes that offered a wide range of work related qualifications. Kent is bucking regional trends for the number of young people taking up apprenticeships, with increases of 16% for 16-18 year olds and 13%

for 18-24 year olds, despite the current economic climate. KCC's own Kent Apprenticeship scheme already supports about 1500 young people aged 16-19, and increased its intake from 86 starts in 2011 to 113 in 2012.

However, there is much more we can do to build and strengthen the vocational offer for young people. We need to tackle the lack of clear progression to higher vocational qualifications, the mismatch between some of the courses and the needs of local businesses, the limited attention to level 2 literacy and numeracy in some programmes and the lack of flexibility in working arrangements between schools and other providers. Young people are also experiencing barriers which prevent them from accessing apprenticeships, due to a mistaken assertion by providers and employers that there is a minimum level 2 qualification entry requirement. This is consequently denying a large proportion of young people from pursuing a learning pathway that is appropriate and relevant to their needs and aspirations. Tackling this is a key part of the strategy.

We've already started...

...by launching *Kent Jobs for Kent Young People*. This campaign is designed to engage and incentivise employers to take on more young people through apprenticeships, offering grants and support with recruitment to reduce bureaucracy. Over 100 apprenticeships have already been pledged.

Where do we want to be?

We want to increase the take up and completion of apprenticeships, and boost this by proactively working with young people, providers and employers to dispel the myth that there are qualification entry requirements. We will focus on developing more apprenticeships delivered in schools as they form a substantial employer across the county. The range of school based apprenticeships has been expanded and will include opportunities at level 3. Underpinning all of this, employer engagement needs to be greatly improved in order to expand apprenticeship opportunities and to ensure that vocational courses meet the needs of the local economy and can lead more directly to employment in Kent. Some of our targets to achieve this include:

- The uptake of Level 2 and 3 vocational training in skills shortage areas will increase by 10%.
- The KCC Apprenticeship scheme will continue with at least 88 apprentices taken on each year, totalling 400 successful apprenticeships delivered by KCC by 2016.
- We will have established a successful pre-apprenticeship and level 1 programme for 17 year olds who are unable to achieve a level 2 apprenticeship.
- At least half of schools will have provided one or more apprenticeships which have been taken up successfully by young people.

3. Increase Participation and Employment

Participation in education or training for all young people until the age of 18 is a key priority for Kent, and is enshrined in legislation which will fully come into force by 2015, referred to as Raising the Participation Age. This will encompass a range of learning, apprenticeship and employment with training opportunities, and is not just limited to

staying on at school. The successful transition from learning into work is a critical factor, as better qualified and prepared young people will have better chances of securing skilled employment opportunities.

Where are we now?

The participation rate for 16 and 17 year olds in Kent is 88% compared to 93% nationally. Our previous success of reducing the number of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) year on year did not continue into the economic recession, and NEET figures are now increasing. The annual figure currently stands at 6.3%, equating to 2577 16-18 year olds. Youth unemployment is even more challenging. There are 10,000 unemployed 18-24 year olds in Kent (just under 8000 excluding Medway), which is a third of the total unemployed figure. 18-24 year olds have the highest rate of unemployment at 6.5%, which although slightly below the national average, contains five hotspot districts that exceed the national figures: Shepway, Swale, Dover and Gravesham have rates between 8 and 9.7%, whilst Thanet's is 13.8%.

Where do we want to be?

If we are to achieve full participation by 2015, nearly 6000 more young people aged 16-18 will need to be engaged more successfully in education or employment with training over the next three years. We therefore need much more comprehensive education and training provision beyond 16, which offers higher level qualifications with better routes to skilled employment for Kent's young people. This must include better work based learning routes, such as pre-apprenticeship programmes, part time employment with training and both vocational and academic courses with meaningful work experience. The Strategy will focus on developing these options.

We need to significantly reduce youth unemployment and put in place better systems for



local employers and learning providers to work together so that the courses offered meet the needs of local businesses and we can secure the higher levels of qualified young people we need in the key growth sectors of Kent's economy. We will develop Youth Employment and Learning Zones in the five unemployment hotspot areas; identifying the needs and issues of unemployed young people in those areas, working with partners to pool resources to improve training and employment opportunities and provide better information and access to local employers and job opportunities. We will also work with partners to ensure unemployed 18-24 year olds benefit from schemes such as the Youth Contract, which provides extra support through Jobcentre Plus.

Some of our targets to achieve this include:

- There will be a significant impact on unemployment among 18-24 year olds so that current levels reduce by 4000 to below 2008 levels.
- There will be full participation in education and work based training for all 16-18 year olds following year on year reductions in the NEET figures to no more than 1%.
- Youth Employment and Learning Zones in Thanet, Swale, Shepway, Gravesham, and Dover will reduce unemployment for 16 to 24 to below the national average.

We've already started...

...by launching a county-wide awareness campaign for *Raising the Participation Age*, including holding an awareness week for those affected from September 2013 and providing guidance and briefing sessions for school staff. We have also written to pupils and parents, informing them of the changes and how to access *Kentchoices4U*, the country's largest and most used online prospectus that provides information for making post-16 choices about education and training.

4. Target Support for Vulnerable Young People

Although the majority of Kent's young people achieve good educational and employment outcomes, there is a large group of young people who experience challenges and who require additional support in order to enable them to achieve positive outcomes and help them to make a successful transition into adulthood.

Where are we now?

The number of 16-18 year olds who are NEET is rising, and there is over representation from vulnerable and disadvantaged young people who are in the care of the local authority, care leavers, adopted young people, young offenders, teenage parents and refugees and asylum seekers. For another group of young people over represented in our NEETs figures, there is insufficient provision for 16-19 year olds with learning difficulties and disabilities to help them access further learning and achieve independent living and employment. Nearly half of 16 year olds attending Special Schools do not have access to appropriate post 16 education, work based learning or training.

The poor levels of participation and limited progression for these vulnerable groups is fed by low attainment at age 16. Only 12% of children in care and 24% of pupils with special educational needs achieved five good GCSEs in 2012. Disadvantage remains a barrier: only 28% of pupils on Free School Meals gained five good GCSEs, which is well below the national average of 35%, whilst the gap between young people aged 19 from low income backgrounds and their peers in achieving level 3 qualifications stood at 32% in 2012, higher than the national average of 25%.

Where do we want to be?

In order to ensure we give every vulnerable and disadvantaged young person the best chance to access and succeed in education, training and employment opportunities, we will give particular focus to reducing the number of vulnerable young people who become excluded or NEET by improving early intervention, support and pathway planning for those at risk of disengaging. We will improve provision and employment opportunities for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and make sure young people in the care system are ready for the world of work. We will also develop more intensive and integrated programmes of support and provision in areas of Kent with the poorest outcomes and prospects for 14-24 year olds. Some of our targets to achieve this include:

- There will be improved participation, provision and outcomes for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, and all young people with learning difficulties and disabilities aged 16-19 in Special Schools will have access to appropriate provision.
- The number of assisted employment opportunities for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities will increase by 10%.
- The outcomes for 19 year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds will be above the national average and the achievement gap between this group and other students will have reduced by 10% from the 2012 baseline.

We Can't Do It Alone...

Strengthening existing and developing new partnerships with a wide range of providers, agencies and organisations will be crucial in achieving our aims for this Strategy. Kent County Council cannot

We've already started...

...by piloting the *Kent Integrated Adolescent Support Service* in a number of areas across the county. This provides a more coordinated and targeted approach for disadvantaged young people who are most vulnerable to poor outcomes, such as being NEET, permanent exclusion, high rates of absence from school, or engaged in misuse of alcohol and drugs. We have also extended our *Vulnerable Learners Project* into a second phase, to help more vulnerable young people into apprenticeships, such as those with disabilities or young offenders, assisted by KCC by paying their salary for twelve months and providing support to them and their employers throughout the apprenticeship.



accomplish these improvements alone and nor does it expect to. The local authority working in partnership with schools will forge new and wide ranging relationships with FE colleges, work based learning providers and employers. Employers play a pivotal role in these partnerships to enable fit for purpose provision that meets the needs of young people and the local economy. In conjunction with our partners we will establish the Kent Employment, Learning and Skills Partnership Board to oversee and drive the Strategy. At a local level we will develop an effective system of 14-19 partnerships between education and training providers, employers and Jobcentre Plus to deliver coordinated improvements to provision and outcomes.

Young people are also key to our partnership working. We have been listening to their views about priorities and will continue to do so in order to make sure provision meets their needs and the right support and opportunities are available to help them to pursue their preferred education and employment pathways.

The initiatives and strategic priorities set out in the 14-24 Learning, Employment and Skills Strategy represent one of Kent County Council's major goals: to change the life chances and employment prospects of young people and in turn the future prosperity and growth of Kent as one of the best places to live in the UK. Our Strategy is intended to make a significant contribution to improving the local economy and increasing youth employment. Its success will mean life changing benefits for many 16 to 24 year olds, and we look forward to working with existing and new partners to help make a greater difference for Kent's young people.

