

## **Youth employment and skills update**

### **Purpose**

For discussion and direction on the development of a youth participation policy.

### **Summary**

The youth participation policy work is jointly developed by City Regions, People and Places and Children and Young People Boards to ensure read-across.

This paper provides an update on the development of a youth participation and employment and skills policy relating to young people.

### **Recommendation**

That the Board note the report and consider the following to provide comments/steer:

1. Update and plans for progressing this policy.
2. Councils statutory responsibilities discussion paper Annex A
3. T Levels discussion paper Annex B.

### **Action**

Officers to progress in line with Members' comments/steer.

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## **Improving youth participation**

### **Background**

1. Councils, alongside their role in helping economies to thrive, have several statutory duties relating to youth participation; to ensure all young people up to the age of 18 (25 for those with learning difficulties) participate in education or training. Despite having these responsibilities, councils have very few formal levers over commissioning or coordination of provision to meet them, resulting in a centralised and fragmented system.
2. In September 2020, the Board approved the publication of the improving youth participation report, which concluded our initial youth work, started last year. The report set out our vision and recommendations, providing us with the narrative and framework on which to base our discussions with government, parliamentarians, stakeholders and the sector.
3. This paper provides an update on how our ambition for young people is being progressed along with the wider youth employment and skills policy work.
4. The continued presence of COVID-19 and further national/regional restrictions has meant that young people, and those facing disadvantage, will be disproportionately impacted; therefore, it is important that the focus on this work remains a priority to ensure that relevant support is in place for these groups.

### *Youth participation campaign*

5. The report [Re-thinking youth participation for the present and next generation: education to employment](#) was launched early October 2020 with a [press release](#) calling for COBRA-style action to save the 'lost generation' of young people. The publication received good traction. A number of stakeholders, including the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), Employment Related Services Association (ERSA), Social Mobility Foundation and Youth Employment UK, have shown a particular interest in the contents and recommendations of the report. Consequently, the LGA was invited to present the report to the [Youth Employment Group](#) (YEG), which has over 170 member organisations. The LGA has also took part in an ASCL roundtable event in November 2020 to discuss the challenges and improvements to the system for supporting young people from education to employment. Therefore, **our youth ambition has reached a broad range of stakeholders and further work is in train to ensure better stakeholder alignment with the LGA position.**
6. To sustain the momentum on our youth campaign and shine a light on the work more widely, we are publishing a series of First articles from Autumn 2020 to Spring 2021. **The introductory feature appeared with a by-line from the Chairs of the three boards** (CYP, P&P and CRB), demonstrating the importance of a joined-up education and employment and skills policy. The [feature](#) (First November 2020 p11) highlighted the plight of young people and the job crisis. It set out the reports recommendation, including LGA's calls for a youth, employment and skills taskforce and a youth minister. The next article, a case study on Derbyshire County Council's 'I-Step up Re-engagement Programme', will be published in the New Year edition.

This case study also featured in our youth report to demonstrate how the Council has developed a programme to improve youth participation. The initiative addresses a gap in transition support and provides the wraparound provision for young people.

7. We are working with colleagues in the media team to make the most of any future influencing opportunities.
8. The LGA Chairman wrote to several Ministers about the report, including Mims Davies, Minister of State for Employment, DWP; Gillian Keegan, Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, DfE; Luke Hall, Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government, MHCLG. The Chairman has received a response from Mims Davies. Separately, the LGA initiated and organised a roundtable session in December with the Minister for Employment and P&P and CR Lead Members to discuss how local government could support DWP COVID-19 related employment support schemes. We are also exploring an APPG on Youth Employment with parliamentarians in the Spring. **A member steer is welcome on how best to progress our youth ambitions further with relevant Ministers.**

#### *Collaboration with other organisations*

9. Maintaining relationships with other organisations has been important to ensure the LGA youth ambition is embedded across the employment and skills sector. The LGA has continued to work closely with a broad range of stakeholders on this agenda, including:
  - 9.1. The Learning and Work Institute's (LWI) commission on education and employment opportunities for young people ([Youth Commission](#)). **The Commission will publish its final report in the New Year with a suite of recommendations for skills and participation.**
  - 9.2. YEG and its founding organisations [Impetus](#), [Youth Futures Foundation](#), [Youth Employment UK](#), [the Institute for Employment Studies](#) and [The Prince's Trust](#). The YEG recommendations [report](#), launched in September 2020, has some alignment with the LGA youth report.
10. We will continue to explore further opportunities to engage with influential research and policy development.

#### *Councils statutory responsibilities*

11. To enhance our youth participation work, we will be developing our policy relating to councils statutory responsibilities for young people and those not in education, employment or training (NEET). **We have drafted an initial discussion paper (Annex A) highlighting the current issues and challenges. The aim is to develop this further through discussion with the sector and stakeholders to form a policy position; inform the improvement project (see below for details) and dialogue with DfE officials. Members are invited to comment on it and provide a steer on further issues/challenges that should be included. Officers will amend its scope accordingly. Members can also provide comments by 31 January 2021 to [bushra.jamil@local.gov.uk](mailto:bushra.jamil@local.gov.uk).**

*Young People and NEETs*

12. The [data release](#) in November 2020 was expected to show the number of NEETs rising but in fact **there was a slight drop from 765,000 to 757,000 young people (aged 16 to 24 years) in the UK who were NEET** in July to September 2020. A possible reason for this is that many young people, in response to COVID-19, have entered full time education, or are protected by the job retention scheme. **It is expected that there will be a sharp rise in young people who are NEET after the job retention scheme ends** and a fall in those in full time education, with a decrease in retention after the first term.
13. The next official ONS NEET UK data will be released in March 2021 and the DfE participation in education, employment and training for 2020 annual data release will not be until June 2021. However, we are working with the Department to see if any early unofficial data can be shared with the LGA. It is anticipated that these figures will show the real impact of COVID-19 on young people's education and employment opportunities and will be useful to develop appropriate support programmes.
14. Following the Ministerial roundtable in September 2020, Gillian Keegan MP, Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, the Department for Education (DfE) was invited to the People and Places board. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, the Minister was unable to attend. However, the **Minister is keen to engage with the LGA and council representatives to learn about issues young people are facing and how that can result in becoming NEET, and solutions to address these.** The LGA and council/combined authority representatives have continued to maintain dialogue on young people and NEETs through regular meetings with officials. The first meeting took place in September 2020 and the discussion focussed on appropriate careers advice and guidance, relevance and sufficiency of provision and funding. The next meeting is scheduled to take place in January 2021.

*Improvement work*

15. Improving youth participation in education, employment and training (EET) as part of their statutory duties is key for councils. The COVID-19 crisis has had an adverse effect on young peoples' ability to transition into education or employment effectively. Therefore, the improvement support budget has been allocated to better understand the barriers/challenges for councils in fulfilling their statutory duties for young people, for instance, in relation to NEETs and to explore solutions. We commissioned a project in November 2020 and the successful bidder is York Consulting. **The project aims to support the sector (eight areas) through action learning to support the sector to deliver effective support for NEETs and those at risk of becoming NEET.** A report with case studies will capture the learning and a subsequent online resource will support councils to commission and deliver services and an enhanced offer for young people. We have had a good response from areas interested to be involved in the project. Twelve areas will be taking part in the discussions at an initial workshop in January 2021. **The report will be presented to the board at the March 2021 meeting.**

*A coherent offer of all post-16 options*

16. The increased focus on apprenticeships and the roll-out of technical levels (T Levels) provides young people with more options for their career pathways. Having greater choice is positive, but it is vital for young people to have a coherent picture of all available pathways and how they relate to the world of work or further learning. This is essential to improve participation in education and training, particularly for disadvantaged young people or those with special educational needs and disability SEND or complex needs.
17. To progress our post-16 policy work and to support councils and combined authorities plan for a post-16 local offer, so young people have a coherent picture of locally available options, we have developed a **T Levels discussion paper (Annex B)**. **This paper sets out the guiding principles for making T Levels implementation a success for young people, employers and the economy.**
- 18. Members are invited to provide comments and a steer on the issues and guiding principles: a) are there any further issues that should be included? b) are the guiding principles, right? c) is there any further intel from local areas?**
19. **Members can also provide comments by 31 January 2021 to [bushra.jamil@local.gov.uk](mailto:bushra.jamil@local.gov.uk)**

*Post-16 SEND*

20. Last month the LGA published a [report](#) on planning, commissioning, funding and supporting post-16 high needs students. The report was commissioned by the LGA children and young people's (CYP) team along with the Association of Colleges (AoC) and Natspec. (The CYP board has an interest in this issue and responsibility for those with SEND or complex needs.) The purpose of the review was to provide a better understanding of how local authorities and providers can work together to manage an increased demand for support for high needs students with limited resources. **The findings of the report conclude that the system is overly complicated**, resulting in young people, their parents, councils and colleges facing challenges which have a detrimental impact on those students in further education with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). **It also suggests that a more radical re-working of the whole system** is required, including changes to the funding model so that councils can plan provision more effectively for young people within their local area. Key findings and recommendations from the fieldwork include:
- 20.1. Strategic planning - Each local authority should take a strategic view of emerging needs for post-16 provision and the providers best placed to meet these and develop its provision accordingly in anticipation of identified future needs.
- 20.2. Development of new provision – Through improved strategic planning, identified areas where new provision is needed, local authorities should play a more active, innovative and creative role with providers, existing and new, in the development of that provision.

20.3. Transitions into post-16 provision - Securing better transitions between life stages and settings, including from secondary to further education should be a key focus.

**21. Members are invited to give their view and steer on how post-16 employment and skills and SEND policy should be developed.**

### **Employment and skills update**

22. The [latest ONS labour market statistics](#) (UK) released in November 2020, show a fall in youth employment, with **youth unemployment level now at 14.6 per cent compared to 4.8 per cent of all age groups**. Though it is a varied picture across England, as the effects of the pandemic is felt differently in different parts of the country. The Centre for Cities have developed a useful tool [UK unemployment tracker](#) that show how the Coronavirus pandemic is affecting unemployment, including youth unemployment, in large cities and towns. This highlights that local solutions are needed to tackle local youth unemployment challenges. **Members are invited to highlight any specific issues/challenges contributing to youth unemployment in their localities.**

### *Enhanced Youth Offer*

23. In view of rising youth unemployment, the LGA have maintained a dialogue with DWP officials to influence the planning, coordination and delivery of initiatives for young people, along with other measures. The DWP enhanced youth offer commenced in September 2020. Essentially, the youth offer has three elements:

23.1. **Youth Employment Programme**, a 13-week programme with referral to the most appropriate support: a traineeship, work experience, mentoring circles, careers advice, Kickstart or an apprenticeship.

23.2. **Youth Hubs** provides young people access to up to six months of wider support to meet any skills gaps to bring them closer to the labour market. These are co-located and co-delivered with local partners, including local government. **The programme aims to deliver a hundred new Hubs**. These are being rolled out nationally and where this is not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions a virtual service is currently being offered. **Many of the key elements of the Hubs (for example, collaborative culture, data sharing) resemble previously 'trialed and tested' local models**, including Suffolk County Council's MyGo and Liverpool City Region Youth Employment Gateway. At DWP's request, many local authorities have been asked to find suitable physical premises to host Youth Hubs locally and act as accountable bodies. The sector backs more targeted support for young people, but new physical centres are not always necessary, and in some cases are hard to find and require investment.

23.3. Our youth report called for an integrated youth employment and skills service with local government having a central role. **It is vital that councils/combined authorities are able to influence the planning and delivery of Youth Hubs in local areas.**

23.4. **Youth Employability Coaches** focus on young people who have significant complex needs and barriers and offer flexible support to help them move into and sustain employment.

24. **The Kickstart Scheme**, Government's £2 billion work placement programme for young people started in November 2020. DWP reports the scheme is progressing well and **by mid-November a total of 4,783 applications, covering 23,934 vacancies had been approved for funding.**

25. Councils and combined authorities are working hard to encourage local businesses to participate in the scheme, as well as offering opportunities themselves; for instance [Leicester City Council](#) have created 70 Kickstart placements as part of its economic recovery plan; Suffolk County Council have provided 42 placements and Norfolk County Council 72 respectively.

#### *Apprenticeships*

26. **Apprenticeship starts (October 2020) showed that starts had halved during lockdown.** The proportion of starts by age group was: 16-18: 23.7 per cent (75,500); 19-24: 29.5 per cent (94,200); 25 and over: 46.8 per cent (149,300). The Government's employer incentives to recruit more apprentices are welcome along with the support for those who have been made redundant. Unfortunately, **more young apprentices will become unemployed in the New Year, especially in the leisure and hospitality sectors, as the furlough scheme unwinds.**

#### *Parliamentary Committee Inquiries*

27. The House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee published its inquiry into Employment and COVID-19 [report](#) last month. The LGA submitted written evidence earlier in the year. **The report has been positive about our work, particularly the green jobs research and that more programmes and resources should be devolved to local areas.**

28. A new House of Lords Special Inquiry Committee was [announced](#) (December 2020) to consider youth unemployment, education and skills. Its scope is wide ranging and will include risk associated with high levels of unemployment, under-employment and insecure employment, challenges posed by COVID-19 and Brexit. It is expected that once the Committee's members are appointed a formal inquiry will be launched in the New Year. **Members are invited to give their views on this and provide an early steer on the direction we should take in any LGA submission.**

29. **Members are asked to consider, comment and provide a steer on:**

- **how best to progress our youth ambitions further with relevant Ministers (para 8)**
- **Councils statutory duties discussion paper (Annex A) – further issues/challenges to be included (para 11)**
- **T Levels discussion paper (Annex B) – further issues and guiding principles for implementation to be included (para 17-19)**

- how post-16 employment and skills and SEND policy should be developed (para 20-21)
- the direction we should take in any LGA submission for the potential House of Lords Special Inquiry Committee on youth unemployment, education and skills (para 28).

#### **Next steps**

- Following the Board's considerations and comments on the contents of this paper, officers will provide regular updates on the development of this policy/ activities at future boards meetings.

#### **Financial implications**

To be covered through the existing Budget.

#### **Implications for Wales**

Skills and employment are devolved matters. The LGA liaises with WLGA colleagues.

### **ANNEX A**

#### **Councils statutory duties issues/challenges**

##### ***Appropriate provision***

It is challenging at the moment to keep young people in full time education. There is a growing number of young people with complex needs that require a significant level of support. Councils have to ensure that the breadth of support needed by all learners is effectively commissioned.

The challenge is that current provision is quite rigid and not flexible to meet the specific needs of different learners. The structure of learning, for example, the traditional year-long programmes, are not suitable for many students. The programmes need to be shorter, flexible and include employability skills.

A tailored programme that delivers employability resilience with short stepping-stones for progression is required; a number of local initiatives provide such support. For those who are NEET, care leavers and hard to reach groups with complex needs, a pre-offer is needed that responds to their specific needs, as the mainstream provision is often not suitable for these particular groups.

Councils are able to offer an enhanced service by connecting with other local services to provide the necessary wider support that is vital to secure and sustain education, employment and training opportunities.

##### ***Sufficiency of provision***

Some areas have lost some good specialist providers over the last couple of years, resulting in gaps in provision in the area. There is an assumption by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) that FE colleges will be able to plug the gaps with the right provision but this has not been the case.

Councils have statutory duties around sufficiency of provision but feel they are being hindered in this area as they have very little control over ESFA budget and therefore, unable to direct provision where it is needed.

There is a significant risk of more young people becoming NEET as more students are dropping out of year 12 and first year of college. Also, in some areas there has been a drop in apprenticeships which correlates with a drop in provision.

### ***Careers, advice and guidance***

The careers landscape is complex and fragmented and young people are often not getting the level of service required. A coherent offer of all the options is needed. Year 12 drop-out is an issue and there is an opportunity to address this challenge with the emerging FE White Paper by incorporating a careers element as part of FE reforms.

School leavers in the post-16 transition period are required to seek any careers advice and guidance from the education institution they previously attended. This is a real issue for students that were not fully engaged with the school whilst in education and therefore as a result risk becoming NEET.

### ***Funding***

A number of initiatives that provide the wider support to young people are funded through European Social Fund (ESF) and there is concern that much of this provision will be lost when the current European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) programme ends. This needs to be urgently addressed.

## **ANNEX B**

### **T Levels: making implementation a success for young people, employers and the economy**

#### **Background**

The [Sainsbury Report](#) (2016) recommended a new system consisting of a technical education option alongside an academic option for students aged 16 -19. The Government committed to these recommendations and published the [Post 16 Skills Plan](#). In 2017 the Government launched a new set of technical qualifications (T Levels) aimed at establishing parity between academic and technical routes, and to meet the current and future skills needs.

[T Levels](#) are a two year technical programme at level 3 and above for 16-19 year olds. The course provides a mixture of study and industry placement (approximately 45 days) in a chosen industry or occupation; supported by relevant Maths, English and digital skills.

These qualifications are being offered alongside apprenticeships, providing another route to a technical qualification, with the same set of employer- designed standards, approved and managed by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

T Levels are part of the Government's broader skills agenda that aim to meet needs of local employers and the economy.

## **The importance of a good quality technical skills offer**

The traditional academic route is not appropriate for many post-16 students. Having alternative choice is vital for young people to ensure the right levels of skills and participation. Apprenticeships give young people the opportunity to combine earning whilst learning. T Levels are the other side of the same coin that offers learning with practical experience through an industry placement.

## **The current state of play**

The introduction of the first three T Levels (Digital, Construction and Education and Childcare route) started last year (September 2020) at selected colleges, schools and other providers across England. A further seven T Levels will be available in September 2021 with the remaining courses starting in either 2022 or 2023. There will be a total of 24 T Levels in 11 routes by 2023.

## **COVID-19 impacting T Levels implementation**

COVID-19 crisis has impacted both the supply and demand side of T Levels implementation. Students with lockdown restrictions and remote learning have missed out on key opportunities to gain information, advice and guidance on available vocational options, including T Levels. This has impacted recruitment of students for the September 2020 start as numbers are below targets: Digital 76 per cent and Education and Childcare 92 per cent; and surprising Construction 121 per cent against target respectively. Many providers have launched their own recruitment campaigns to secure viable numbers for courses. Employer recruitment for Industry Placements has also struggled, particularly with the Education and Childcare and Digital T Levels.

## **LGA Workforce team update**

The LGA recognises that T Levels are pivotal for councils and employers for addressing skills shortages/gaps and to develop a pipeline of a skilled workforce. The LGA workforce team secured DfE funding to deliver a pilot programme to promote T Levels industry placements within councils and also capture and share best practice on what works well and not so well in the sector.

It has launched the pilot programme with a media campaign (December 2020) that is aligned with the DfE T Levels national campaign. To raise awareness and promote a positive message in the sector there was a T Levels [feature](#) in the First magazine. The LGA campaign key messages include:

- promoting councils as career destinations for young people and developing the future workforce through a Technical Level skills pathway.
- LGA is working with and supporting councils to provide at least one T Level placement from September 2021.
- Sharing and learning from T Levels Industry Placements in councils; what works, what needs to be improved.

The workforce team has set up a sector focus group to inform and support its T Levels campaign. The initial feedback from the workforce focus group activities highlighted it was

important to focus on three key areas: local political support; the role of the line manager and to provide one young person with an opportunity with a clear 'pathway'.

The LGA has engaged with our member authorities, in particular, areas where 2020 T Levels are being rolled-out to gather intel and inform policy. The workforce and policy teams are developing positions and supporting the sector as both councils as employers and economic development leads. This paper was developed on the back of those discussions and we will continue our work with the sector to enhance our policy position as T Levels are rolled out across England.

This paper sets out below what we would see as the **guiding principles** to ensure success of T Levels implementation for young people, employers and the economy.

### **Principle 1: School leaders and teachers should have greater awareness of T Levels**

It is important for school leaders and teachers to have detailed knowledge of T Levels; as they can play pivotal role in raising careers awareness, both in their interactions with students as teachers and in pastoral roles, and also through their engagement with parents.

Although the [Next Level awareness raising campaign](#) is welcomed, recent evidence from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) survey suggests that further work is needed to inform schools about T Levels. T Levels information gaps include course content, structure and assessment; target students; level of credibility with employers; entry requirements and identifying suitable pupils; local availability and institutions and progression routes.

Councils have existing relationships with schools and colleges in their areas and can support greater awareness as a trusted partner due to their impartiality but need resources to do this.

### **Principle 2: Students should have careers education and guidance on T Levels options**

Good quality careers education, independent and impartial advice and guidance on T Levels should be available for students throughout their education, in particular, at key transition points of making important decisions, for instance: at 16 when taking key decision about KS5 routes and subjects, or vocational pathways. Students need clear information about course content, structure and assessment, progression routes to higher education, T Levels available.

The Youth Employment UK [Youth Voice Census](#) found that a T Levels option was only explored with 6 per cent of young people in the survey.

### **Principle 3: T Levels should be part of the coherent post-16 local offer**

It is positive that young people have greater choice with a range of options (A levels, T Levels, Traineeships, Apprenticeships) to pursue their chosen career but this also creates a confusing picture. Young people need to have clear information on all options to make informed decisions on the best route for their career.

Councils are best placed to have a lead role in planning for a post-16 local offer given their statutory duties for young people. It is fundamental for young people to have a coherent offer of locally available options, including T Levels.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) has created a website for students, Greater Manchester Apprenticeship and Careers Service ([GMACS](#)) which is populated with T Levels information for students and parents. GMCA have also created visual occupational maps for Construction and Digital as part of the Oldham Opportunity Area project to make technical education attractive.

#### **Principle 4: T Levels offer should be differentiated from other initiatives**

Employers are currently being bombarded with a plethora of government initiatives (T Levels, Traineeships, Apprenticeships) and there is a risk the T Levels messaging may get 'lost in the noise' as employers focus on the challenges currently facing them.

T Levels as well as providing very useful knowledge and experience for a student about a particular industry can also provide employers with a pipeline of skilled workers for the future. Consequently, there should be clear information on the merits of T Levels for employers as opposed to other initiatives.

Councils work with providers to ensure that local employers have the skills to meet their business needs, focussing on bringing the supply and demand sides of the labour market more closely together to improve the offer.

#### **Principle 5: Employers should be incentivised to support Industry Placements**

The challenge of delivering Industry Placements for T Levels on a national scale is immense. Many employers want to support T Levels but struggle, particularly SMEs, with the additional costs associated with providing a placement. Therefore, employers need to be incentivised with flexible funding for supervisory and other associated costs to offer more placements.

Local government has a vast range of different and diverse professions and can therefore provide a broad range of opportunities. It has the infrastructure to embrace the T Levels agenda as part of its wider workforce offer (Apprenticeships, Traineeships, Kickstart Scheme) and wants to support Industry Placements but it needs the resources to develop a comprehensive offer that meets the needs of individual, particularly for SEND and disadvantaged groups.