



Department
for Education

Top tips for local authorities implementing Raising the Participation Age (RPA)

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1 Introduction

The government has raised the participation age (RPA) in England. A change in the law through the 2008 Education and Skills Act requires all young people to continue in education or training:

- from September 2013, until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17; and
- from summer 2015 this will be until their 18th birthday.

This does not have to mean staying in school, it can be:

- full-time education, e.g. at a school or college;
- an apprenticeship; or
- full-time employment, self-employment and volunteering (over 20 hours a week) combined with part-time education or training.

To support the implementation of this policy the Department for Education funded local authorities (LAs) to lead trials and locally-led delivery projects (LLDPs) over four years, with the Phase 4 projects forming the last phase of work in 2012/13.

An evaluation of the Phase 4 LLDPs was commissioned to gather evidence on new activities and effective practice, as well as provide guidance to assist LAs with planning and preparing for RPA. The evaluation identified some key issues associated with operationalising RPA. These issues were: strategic ownership and partnership delivery; data and tracking; early intervention; the needs of vulnerable groups; and the 17+ agenda. This document presents some top tips arising from the evaluation of the Phase 4 LLDPs for all LAs as they deliver RPA.

Please note, the good practice examples in this document are summarised from the research report from the evaluation and references are provided to the report: DfE-RR308.

2 Strategic ownership and local partnerships

1. Collaborative working is crucial. Established, effective partnerships provide an underpinning to RPA implementation; partners can champion the RPA among local stakeholders that LAs want to bring on board with the agenda.
2. The RPA trials and projects have resulted in tools and practices that are effective in identifying young people 'at risk' of non-participation, and identifying and meeting the support needs of young people in employment. Use of these provides an advanced starting point that will accelerate progress in LAs that have not been involved.
3. Demand for apprenticeships is growing and work-based training routes are the preferred option for some groups. Employer engagement is therefore critical. Collaborating with Local Economic Units can assist LAs to: a) expand their links with employers; b) promote awareness about national and local funding opportunities to support apprenticeships; and c) expand the base and sectors of employers offering opportunities to young people.

Good practice example: Year 11 Progression calendar

Leeds utilised some of the LLDP funding to improve progression routes for young people in off-site learning provision, who were identified as being disproportionately represented in local NEET statistics. Building on existing partnership links, it established a group to share good practice, and produced a progression agreement template and a Year 11 progression calendar. The purpose of the calendar (which is a laminated poster) is to give providers a timetable of key events and activities, thereby enabling them to map, support and track the progression of their learners during the course of Year 11. The poster includes colour coded information relating to progression activities, post-16 provider offers, and collaborative learner-manager actions (tracking). Users can add their own activity to the laminated poster to reflect their individual practice. It supports the LA in obtaining more accurate destination data about a vulnerable group of young people who, historically, are more likely to need support at the end of Year 11, and/or as part of the September Guarantee.

(see evaluation report section 3.1, Box 1, p16)

Good practice example: Harnessing local partnership working

Phase 4 LLDP funding was perceived to be the catalyst to the development of a number of activities for the Isle of Wight which were underpinned by close partnership working. The LA can measure the impact of these interventions through a reduced local NEET population. Additional funding secured from European Social Fund grants and other national and local initiatives will be used to sustain the activities currently supported through LLDP funds, which included: a risk of NEET indicator (RONI) tool; a series of engagement programmes for the NEET group; an outdoor activity programme; a customer services training course and first aid/care courses; and a pre-apprenticeship programme. Funding was also used to support: a

Young Entrepreneurs Programme, developed in conjunction with the local Chamber of Commerce; a Volunteering Programme, run in conjunction with the local Rural Community Council; and a café facility staffed by students with learning disabilities or difficulties.

(see evaluation report section 3.1; Box 2, p16)

Good practice example: Expansion of apprenticeships opportunities

In Gateshead, LLDP funding enabled close collaboration with the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), local training providers including the college, and other local stakeholders to fund a suite of activities to access employers (especially SMEs) who had not traditionally offered apprenticeships and work placements to young people. Strong partnership working enabled key local players to develop and promote a single apprenticeship offer and to adopt a coordinated approach to engaging with employers. These initiatives will continue to be used by the LA in order to maximise local employer engagement. The impact stemming from Phase 4 LLDP funding will be measured through an increase in the number of apprenticeship vacancies that are available locally. Demand for apprenticeships is high among young people.

(see evaluation report section 3.1; Box 3, p22)

3 Data and tracking

1. The key stage 4 destination measure provides a focus for mapping, tracking and data sharing. Risk of NEET indicators (RONI) and early identification tools, along with providing access to historic destination measure data, can leverage the support of local schools, colleges and training providers.
2. Transition data-sharing protocols which provide information on Year 11 destinations data; young people 'at risk' of dropping out of learning; and young people who had dropped out of post-16 provision, have been developed. These should be used and adapted by LAs more generally to increase momentum.
3. When securing the support of local partners in the use of these protocols, emphasise the content (quality), timeliness and security of information to be received, as well as how it will be used to support the needs of the young person.

Good practice example: Identifying and supporting early leavers

Through a collaborative agreement reached at a post-16 Leaders meeting, Wakefield LA had introduced an integrated, electronic system (following a paper-based trial) which collated data on a monthly basis on young people who were either at risk or who had dropped out of learning or training. The system was supported by most schools, colleges and local training providers who pledged to agree to data sharing and helped to design the protocol. The electronic system was reported to be easy to use and had increased the accuracy of data stored in CCIS. Crucially, it had enabled young people to access additional careers guidance, which was delivered by a dedicated team of advisers, at the point of need.

(see evaluation report section 3.2; Box 4, p25)

Good practice example: Establishing cross-boundary data sharing

In order to reduce the number of young people recorded as having an 'unknown destination' Worcestershire had coordinated a partnership forum with surrounding LAs to share information on young people engaged in learning across borders. While LAs have a statutory duty to inform surrounding LAs of cross-boundary learners who drop out of provision, there is no responsibility to provide information on young people who start cross-boundary learning. Worcestershire provided leadership and coordination to the forum, and devised a draft protocol to underpin information sharing which had the potential to significantly improve the tracking of local young people who choose to attend provision 'out of area'.

(see evaluation report section 3.2; Box 5, p25)

4 Leading early interventions

1. The provision of workers to support transitions is identified as effective practice in respect of early intervention. A range of different support worker models had been trialled. A 'low cost, low risk' solution was to extend the employment contract of learning support assistants to include transition support into post-16 destinations.
2. Assigning skilled staff with attributes such as patience, tenacity and resilience, in order to reach out and sustain support to young people, is vital. These staff also need to be capable of developing networks and collaboration among local partners.
3. Maximising the value of existing systems within schools, colleges and training providers is critical in order to avoid duplication of effort, but also to ensure additional support is carefully targeted. Holding schools, colleges and providers to account in respect of the support and intervention they offer is important.

Good practice example: Providing support to make and sustain transitions

In Berkshire, funding was used to provide transition workers (TWs) in 17 schools and five colleges. TWs supported young people for around six months into post-16 learning or training and were funded on the basis of the notional cost of 50 per cent of a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) post. The TWs, in conjunction with school staff, used a RONI tool combined with local knowledge to identify young people for support and the TWs led work to help them make choices about post-16 options. This involved taking young people to visit local colleges, as well as delivering support and coaching. An awareness of peaks and troughs in post-16 drop-out was crucial in order to deliver support during peak times, such as in the winter term.

(see evaluation report section 4.1; Box 6, p32)

Good practice example: Action around the child to support participation

A project focused on family intervention to support young people to participate was established in the Wirral. This was carefully targeted to avoid duplicating the support that schools and local agencies and services offered. Support varied by young people's and family's circumstances. If a key worker or coordinating lead organisation was already in place, Family Support Workers (FSWs) would take a supporting role. In other instances, FSWs provided a coordinating function. The support helped young people make informed decisions to achieve and sustain positive outcomes. While resource intensive, the project was also regarded as delivering a high impact.

(see evaluation report section 4.1; Box 7, p33)

5 Supporting vulnerable groups

1. In designing approaches to support vulnerable groups it is crucial to understand local provision in light of young people's aspirations. Work-based learning at a lower level than an apprenticeship may provide a novel and attractive route to participation.
2. The delivery of impartial IAG is crucial to ensure that young people understand the full range of post-16 options available to them.
3. A support need among vulnerable groups can surround their access to financial support. Young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), care leavers and young parents – and their parents/carers – may require advice and support about how to use financial support to best effect.

Good practice example: Supporting young people with SEND

York prioritised work to support young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). The local education and training offer has been developed to accommodate the ambitions of young people with SEND who wish to develop employability skills. In particular, the LA has encouraged the development of programmes similar to an apprenticeship, through which young people develop vocational and employability skills. They also study qualifications at entry level and level 1 and it is hoped that with traineeship funding, this model will further expand. For those young people with the highest needs a coordinated multi-agency approach has been embedded. Support has also been given to assist young people and families navigate their way through the post-16 education and training offer.

(see evaluation report section 4.2; Box 8, p36)

Good practice example: Providing a transition route for vulnerable learners

Blackburn and Darwen established volunteering to assist young people to re-engage with learning and gain new skills. Initially this was offered to young people who had been NEET for a relatively short period and who were already in contact with advisers who could refer them to it, and was seen as an alternative to mainstream provision because of the experiential learning opportunities it afforded. As the programme becomes embedded, it is anticipated that it will attract a wider group of young people including those who have been NEET for a longer period back into participation. The opportunity to undertake a highly supported programme, experiencing success and achievement in accordance with their own personal strengths had provided sufficient incentive for most young people to engage in activity to enhance their Maths and English. Mentoring support helped young people to consider what they were learning about themselves from their activities which could support their progression.

(see evaluation report section 4.2; Box 9, p37)

6 Retaining 17 year olds in learning and training

1. Young people disengaging at the age of 17 have different characteristics from those identified as at risk of non-participation pre-16. Tools have been developed which are specific to the 17+ agenda and which can provide a starting point for other LAs.
2. The reasons why young people disengage at the age of 17 include wrong choices in respect of courses and institutions, stress and anxiety related to performance, as well as family/social factors. Re-engagement activities should offer alternatives such as apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship work-based training.
3. Challenges are posed in respect of supporting participation until the age of 18. LAs and their partners must become more efficient at tracking and gain a greater insight into the local youth labour market.

Good practice example: Why young people leave post-16 learning and training

Brighton and Hove undertook research to explore the reasons why young people had left post-16 provision, and to compare and contrast the reasons given by young people with those obtained from providers. The research demonstrated that young people had varied and often multiple reasons for disengagement, including: dissatisfaction with course or college; inability to cope with study; stress; financial problems, home-to-learning travel distances/time; lack of careers education and guidance, including having no future career plan; and being asked to leave for behavioural or performance reasons. It was concluded that there was a need for improved careers guidance which could be addressed in partnership by schools, providers and the team providing post-16 careers guidance. Young people who dropped out of learning were contacted by staff for intensive support and this successfully reduced post-16 drop out rates.

(see evaluation report section 4.3; Box 10, p39)

Good practice example: Retaining 17 year olds in learning and training

Data sharing and the use of a RONI tool underpinned activities in Staffordshire. It supported careers guidance staff to deliver services in post-16 providers and through this gained intelligence about early leavers, meaning that support to re-engage them could be rapidly offered. The LA supported this through partnership forums for providers, in order that they could collaborate with it on the 17+ agenda. Embedding data sharing to support the transition from pre-16 to post-16 provision and the identification of those in need of additional support, strengthened Staffordshire's ability to challenge providers about the actions that they would take to retain 'at risk' learners.

(see evaluation report 4.3; Box 11, p40)



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