



Department
for Education

Kent and Medway Area Review

Final Report

August 2017

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Background

In July 2015, the government announced a rolling programme of around 40 local area reviews, to be completed by March 2017, covering all general further education and sixth-form colleges in England.

The reviews are designed to ensure that colleges are financially stable into the longer-term, that they are run efficiently, and are well-positioned to meet the present and future needs of individual students and the demands of employers. Students in colleges have high expectations about standards of teaching and learning and the extent to which their learning prepares them to progress further, to higher education or directly into employment.

The local steering group was chaired by the Further Education Commissioner. The steering group met on 4 occasions between December 2016 and March 2017 and additional informal meetings also took place to consider and develop options in greater detail. Membership of the steering group comprised each college's chair of governors and principal, representatives from Kent County Council, Medway Council, South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), the Regional Schools Commissioner, and representatives from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), the Education Funding Agency (EFA), and the Department for Education (DfE). Kent County Council Community Learning and Skills (KCCCLS) opted to join the Kent area review as a full participant due to their significant delivery across the area and this was agreed by the steering group.

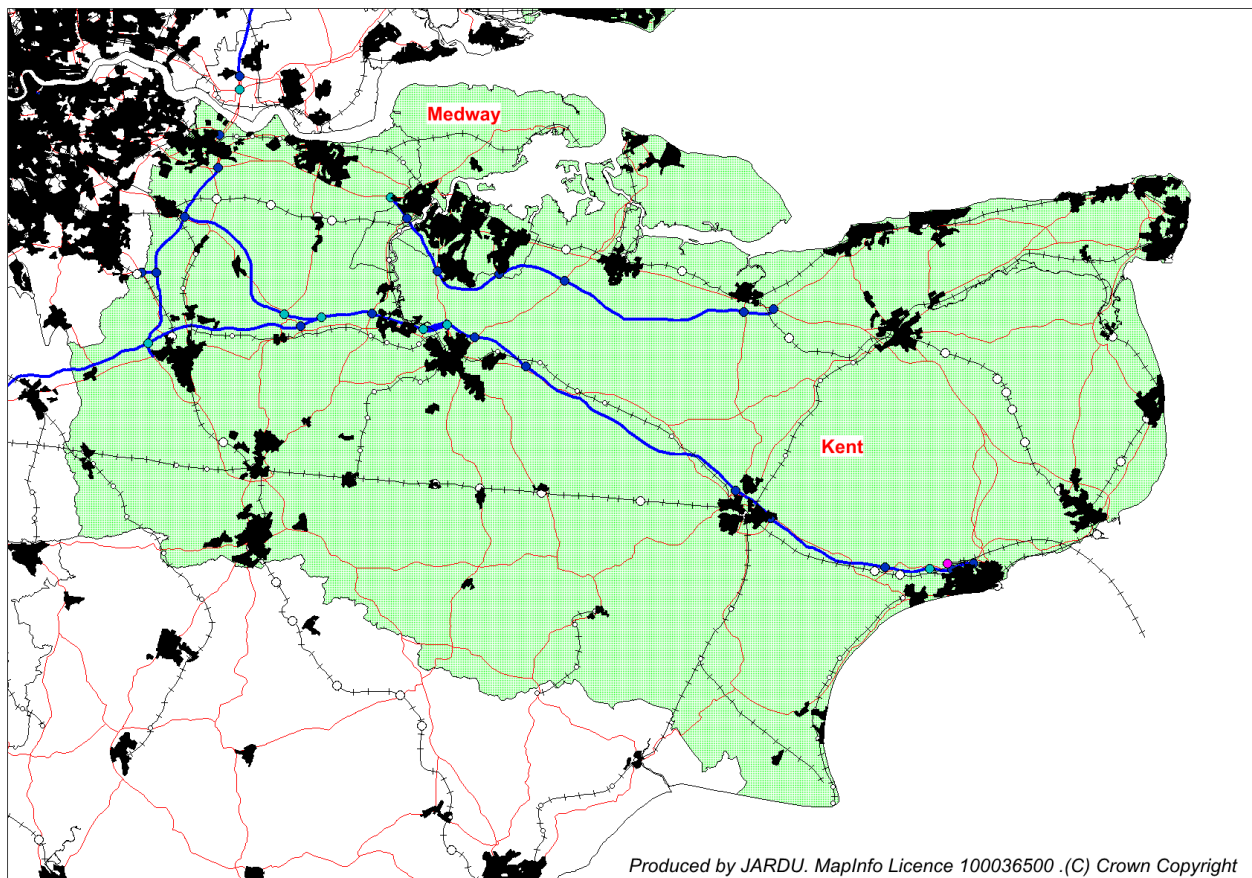
Visits to colleges and support throughout the process were provided by staff from the Further Education and Sixth- Form College Commissioners' teams. The Joint Area Review Delivery Unit (JARDU) provided the project management, administrative support and developed supporting materials and papers used by the steering group. JARDU also led on consultations with local stakeholders.

The needs of the Kent and Medway area

Demographics and the economy

The Kent and Medway area review covers the geographical area comprising the 13 Kent County Council districts of Ashford, Canterbury, Dartford, Dover, Gravesham, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Shepway, Swale, Thanet, Tonbridge and Malling, and Tunbridge Wells, plus the unitary authority of Medway Council. The review area has a total population of 1,801,200.

The area is illustrated on the map below:



The table overleaf provides a snapshot of key demographic and economic data¹, which has acted as a starting point for this review.

¹ ONS Local Authority Profiles – see data annex – Local socio-economic data. Please note that ONS update the data set on a regular basis and that the data included relates to the point at which the report was written.

	Kent	Medway	Great Britain
Total population (2016)	1,524,700	276,500	63,258,400
Population aged 16 to 64	61.2%	64.3%	63.3%
% with higher education qualifications ²	36.9%	30.3%	38.2%
Those formally qualified to level 2+	73.1%	73.2%	74.3%
Gross weekly pay £ of residents	553.3	566.1	541.0
Gross weekly pay £ by workplace	517.5	522.2	540.2
Out-of-work benefit claimants	1.7%	2.0%	2.0%
% of main benefit claimants	7.5%	8.5%	8.6
Jobs density ³	0.78	0.57	0.83
Total workplace units:			Average for the South East
Micro ⁴	84.6	84.6	85.2
Small	12.6	12.2	12.0
Medium	2.4	2.8	2.4
Large	0.3	0.3	0.4

² Percentages relate to those aged 16 to 64

³ Job density relates to the level of jobs per resident aged 16-64. For example, a job density of 1.0 would mean that there is one job for every resident aged 16-64. The job density for Kent as a whole is 0.78, which is slightly below the national average, but the job density for Medway as a whole is 0.57, which is below the national average.

⁴ Micro-businesses have a total of 1 to 9 workers; small businesses have 10 to 49 workers; medium have 50 to 249; large have 250+ (2016 data).

The key points to note are:

- the proportion of residents with higher education qualifications is below the national average in Kent and significantly below in Medway (-7.9 percentage points)
- the proportion of those qualified to level 2 in Kent and Medway is a little below the national average
- gross weekly pay for residents is above the national rate across both Kent and Medway, but particularly so in Medway. If earnings are viewed by workplace however, these are lower in both areas than the national rate, implying that many residents travel out of area for work
- the percentage of benefit claimants is just below the national figure for Kent and around the national average for Medway
- job density is below the national average in Kent, but significantly below in Medway
- the profile of business sizes broadly reflects the national picture.

Patterns of employment and future growth

Within these sectors, Kent and Medway Skills Commission (KMEP) and the SELEP have produced forecasts⁵ for future growth (table below) for the period 2013 to 2022:

Sector	Employees	% Employment	% change 2013-2022	Volume change 2013-2022
Agriculture and horticulture	12,000	2%	-3%	-<400
Manufacturing	35,200	6%	-10%	-<3,500
Construction	35,300	6%	17%	+5,800
Tourism and hospitality	42,300	8%	12%	+5,300
Finance and business services	32,100	6%	13%	+4,300
Health and social care	72,700	13%	3%	+2,000
Life sciences	4,000	1%	6%	+200
Digital media	20,500	4%	16%	+3,300
Arts and creative	2,800	1%	8%	+200

⁵ [The Kent and Medway Workforce Skills Evidence Base](#)

Sector	Employees	% Employment	% change 2013-2022	Volume change 2013-2022
Logistics	27,500	5%	10%	+2,700
Retail	71,800	13%	3%	+1,800
Energy and utilities	6,500	1%	11%	+700
Total	362,700	63%	6%	+31,500

As this table demonstrates, there are declines expected in jobs in the agriculture and horticulture sector and in manufacturing, but the significant growth areas are likely to be in construction and the service sectors. The key priority sectors for the economic success of the region are identified by the LEP in the next section of the report.

The Kent and Medway Skills Evidence Base identifies a significant need for higher level skills and specific vocational skills across the area. As of December 2016, the highest vacancy numbers by job title across Kent and Medway were: sales executive; registered nurse; teacher's assistant; quantity surveyor; assistant manager; primary school teacher; business development executive; auxiliary nurse; account manager; and receptionist.

For the same period the Evidence Base also identified specialised skills in demand including: customer service; Microsoft Excel; teaching; sales; business management; Microsoft Office; contract management; repair; project management; and product sales.

The top certifications sought by employers recruiting staff reflect the priority sectors:

- Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) Card
- Accountant (Qualified)
- HGV Licence / Category C / C+E Licence
- Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registration
- Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) Registration
- Registered General Nurse (RGN)
- Digital Tachograph Driver Smart Card
- Social Worker (Qualified)
- Forklift Truck
- Construction Plant Competence Scheme (CPCS) Card
- Physiotherapist (registered)
- Food Safety Certificate
- Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA).

Major developments⁶ for the area provide further evidence for the projected growth of these sectors, including:

- Lower Thames Crossing (confirmed April 2017) – up to 25,000 new jobs
- housing dwelling projections of over 150,000
- Ebbsfleet Garden City – up to 30,000 new jobs
- Discovery Park (Sandwich) – up to 3,000 new jobs
- Elwick Place Development (Ashford) – leisure and hospitality jobs by 2018
- town centre regeneration (i.e. Sittingbourne, Tonbridge, Ashford) hotels, cinemas and shops
- London Paramount Entertainment Resort (North Kent) – up to 8,500 direct, 6,300 during peak on site construction, 15,700 indirect jobs through supply chain and growth
- Otterpool Park Garden Town – 12,000 new homes and up to 85 hectares of commercial land
- North Kent Enterprise Zone (including Kent Medical Campus) – up to 9,000 jobs by 2025/26
- Swale Eurolink (Sittingbourne) – expansion of one of Kent’s largest business areas (6,500 jobs).

LEP priorities

The economy of Kent and Medway has been transformed over the last 20 years as global economic change has led to much of the county’s traditional industry being eroded. However, the county’s economy is rapidly changing, increasingly dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises with a resilient and diverse economic base⁷ and the South East LEP (SELEP)’s Growth Deal for Kent and Medway identifies key sectors for development:

- life sciences, focused on Discovery Park and Kent Science Park near Sittingbourne; and opportunities emerging at the new Maidstone Medical Campus
- creative and media, focused on the 85% sector growth of the last decade particularly in Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone and coastal East Kent
- low carbon, focused on renewable energy, energy efficiency, and carbon reduction technologies underpinned by Kent’s coast being designated as a centre for offshore renewable engineering
- land based, focused on horticulture with two thirds of the national top fruit production in the area and intensive growth opportunities, including at East Malling Research

⁶ [Ebbsfleet Garden City](#); [Elwick Place Development](#); [London Paramount Entertainment Resort](#); [Ottapool Park Garden Town](#);

⁷ [Kent and Medway Growth Deal](#)

- manufacturing, focused on Medway and Swale and major businesses such as BAE Systems and Delphi
- construction, focused on the major developments across Kent and Medway and new opportunities with sustainable construction technologies
- tourism and leisure, focused on coastal, historic and rural Kent, reinforced with major new attractions including the Paramount development in North Kent
- higher education, focused on the large university cluster at Canterbury, the growing presence in Medway and increasingly strong links with business.

The Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) is a federated board of SELEP and is responsible for the delivery of the objectives set out in the Kent and Medway Growth Plan: *Unlocking the Potential: Going for Growth*. KMEP's subgroup, The Kent and Medway Skills Commission⁸, has identified sectors from their growth deal and growth plan which are key to the area and they have identified these sectors as 'guilds'. These guilds are:

- agriculture
- manufacturing and engineering
- construction
- tourism and hospitality
- finance and business services
- health and social care
- life science
- digital and creative.

There is also an increasing focus on transport and logistics. Development of specific, higher and degree level skills is key to addressing the needs across these areas.

The LEP has invested £22 million of skills capital across the South East LEP area (which also covers Greater Essex and East Sussex), aligned to identified economic growth needs including construction, health and care, manufacturing, digital, media, transport, logistics and retail. The capital investments made to date in the Kent and Medway review area include:

- a construction extension at the Swale Campus of Canterbury College
- an extension to construction facilities in Folkestone at East Kent College
- the development of Court Lane Horticultural Nurseries and Foundation Learning at Princess Christian's Farm Campus at Hadlow College
- the development of Ashford campus and specialist equipment at West Kent and Ashford College
- a health science laboratory at Mid Kent College

⁸ [Kent and Medway Skills Commission](#)

- an engineering skills growth hub at Mid Kent College
- development of a transport and logistics skills hub at Mid Kent College
- developing North Kent Dealership Centre, and Thameside Jetty at North Kent College.

Feedback from LEPs, employers, local authorities, students and staff

Feedback from the LEP, local authorities and district councils, other colleges, learning providers and employers who were consulted during the area review process drew attention to a number of issues and suggestions for the area review to consider.

- Kent County Council, Medway Council and South East LEP want to see the further education sector continue to respond to local vacancies and needs resulting from growth, through continued partnerships with schools, universities, employers and local authorities
- to respond to growth by providing more technical, industry relevant higher level skills and to align apprenticeship delivery to Kent and Medway identified sector guilds
- explore innovative solutions to barriers, including colleges sharing staff sourced from industry, either on loan or seconded
- growth in the adult training sector, particularly with regard to upskilling or retraining adults for sectors facing skills shortages
- the LEP, Kent and Medway Skills Commission and local authorities proposed an ‘Annual Conversation’ with employers to review and drive provision
- the need to improve progression to higher level technical programmes, including higher and degree level apprenticeships as an alternative pathway to higher education
- the need to improve information, advice and guidance, including clear progression pathways from post-16 study through to employment – and this includes apprenticeship programmes and students requiring special educational provision - to ensure that students and parents are fully informed about the range of options available to them post-16, including those available through the further education sector
- greater partnership working, such as Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council’s Local Strategic Partnership and the West Kent Partnership, which focus on improving communication between schools and colleges
- address the gap in further and higher education provision in the Swale Borough Council area. The Council identified an unmet need for technical and scientific skills, and submitted a proposal to develop a Centre for Growth in Sittingbourne. This central location also benefits from good public transport links to the Isle of Sheppey and Faversham

- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council identified their concern about the reduced amount of further education provision available to their residents locally and the increased need for them to travel
- the need to develop networks including employers and the third sector to ensure strategic and operational priorities are discussed and provision is aligned to both local and wider priorities
- neighbouring colleges to the area review reported a substantial travel to learn movement arising from the range of available transport links, for example, Bexley Council noted that, as of August 2016, 16.7% of the total Bexley 'in education' population travelled to Kent for post-16 provision. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council also noted its experience of high levels of commuting in and out of their areas.

The LEP, Kent and Medway Skills Commission and local authority have developed a vision to address skills within the area is as follows:

The vision for Kent and Medway is to continue to build a productive, responsive and inclusive skills system that delivers growth for local people and employers and is established as a national exemplar. This will enable the ambition as reflected by local employers and sector guilds for an aspirational local skills system. Delivery needs to focus on the priority sectors as set out to meet significant current and future need. The approach needs to be holistic, working with schools and higher education to ensure join up and new entrants to sectors particularly via apprenticeships. This vision will be achieved through:

- raising the profile and access to vocational, professional, technical and workplace training through the employer guilds
- delivering economic dividend through increased skills-led productivity and reduced pressure on benefits
- ensuring that local businesses have access to the skilled workers and entrepreneurs they need in the sectors that will drive future economic growth and job creation
- securing a supply chain of talent and skills over the short, medium and longer-term
- enabling more people to make wage and career progression, including take up of entry level jobs for those with limited qualifications or who are economically inactive
- achieving a significant increase in advanced and higher level skills take up and attainment, particularly through significant increases in apprenticeships
- supporting training and re-training of adults to industry relevant skills
- continued sharing of reliable labour market intelligence
- developing an online careers education, information, advice and guidance framework for all Kent and Medway schools
- increasing the number of apprenticeships particularly aligned to employer guilds
- developing a new model to inform age 14-24 pathways across Kent and Medway and achieve join up with providers, further education colleges and schools
- reducing unemployment among young people

- developing clear age 16 to 24 pathways into employment for vulnerable and learners with special education needs and disabilities (SEND)
- ensure that community and adult learning is focused on the needs of the economy.

Employers confirmed a breadth of involvement with local training providers, schools and colleges and that they were generally responsive, particularly in delivering apprenticeships or work experience placements.

Opportunities proposed by employers included providing improved flexibility from colleges to offer in-house assessments, as the requirement for apprentices to travel to college sites for assessments is costly for the apprentice and disruptive for the employer.

Employers also identified gaps in provision related to construction: including surveying, asset management, property maintenance, and trades such as gas and plumbing engineering); and professional services: such as information and communications technology (ICT), accountancy, human resource and facilities management. There is also an increased demand for language skills to complement functional skills in accounts, finance, sales and marketing, and customer care.

In addition to having a basic level of English, maths and ICT skills, employers noted that the attributes they looked for from an apprentice are: a willingness to learn with enthusiasm, motivation and values, behaviours and a work ethic that aligns with their company ethos. A key attribute they looked for from colleges and training providers was a willingness to develop new areas of qualifications and understand the needs of the employer's market and provide solutions that will make a difference.

Schools responding to the area review consultation focused on the need to continue to maintain secondary schools' sixth-forms to offer an academic choice and progression for those students who are not in the grammar school system and who also are not pursuing a route through further education colleges. Schools also identified a need to improve progression pathways from post-16 schools provision to higher apprenticeships and employment and a need to increase the quality of provision of higher (level 4 and 5) apprenticeships.

One sixth-form special school reported the role schools play in transition or progression for those with severe learning difficulties (SLD) or profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). The school noted its concern that choice of post-16 provision is lacking for vulnerable students and that access to support is unclear.

One university raised their concern that colleges are reducing choice at level 3 due to their withdrawal of A level provision, resulting in an increase in students enrolling on BTEC programmes available only in a limited range of academic subject areas, reducing the likelihood of progression to higher education. The university also noted the need to exploit technology for distance and online learning in further and higher education to improve the scope for specialisation. They suggested developing closer links between all providers to

expand choice and flexibility. These approaches would strengthen a student's ability to follow specific modules at a local college whilst also accessing others either online or through other providers. The steering group recognised the need to develop innovation in technology and extend collaboration, however they felt that the demand for technical subjects alongside the more academic routes was an important one to develop including through to higher level skills.

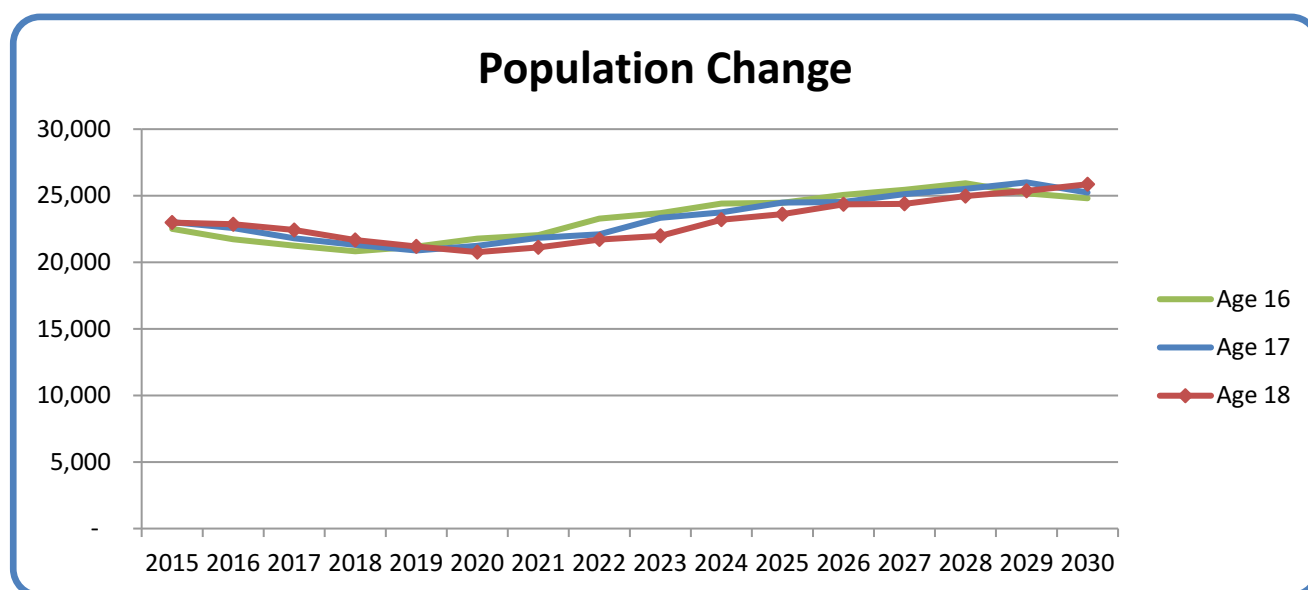
For each area review the National Union of Students submitted a report on the views of students which was considered by the steering group. Where the NUS submitted a report these are available on [NUS connect](#).

The colleges taking part in the review took primary responsibility for ensuring that their staff and union representatives had an opportunity to provide input throughout the review, which the steering group took into account. The Further Education Commissioner held meetings with staff union representatives prior to some of the steering group meetings to enable them to feed their views into the review.

The quantity and quality of current provision

The steering group considered information provided by each local authority about population projections, focusing on the changes in the number and needs of young people aged 16+.

The following chart⁹ shows the expected change in the number of young people in the review area. Across the Kent and Medway area, the numbers of young people aged 16 to 18 was 67,159 (in 2016). All ages (16-18) show a continuing decline of 7% from 2015 to 2020, when the population starts to increase, with growth of about 20% between 2020 and 2030.



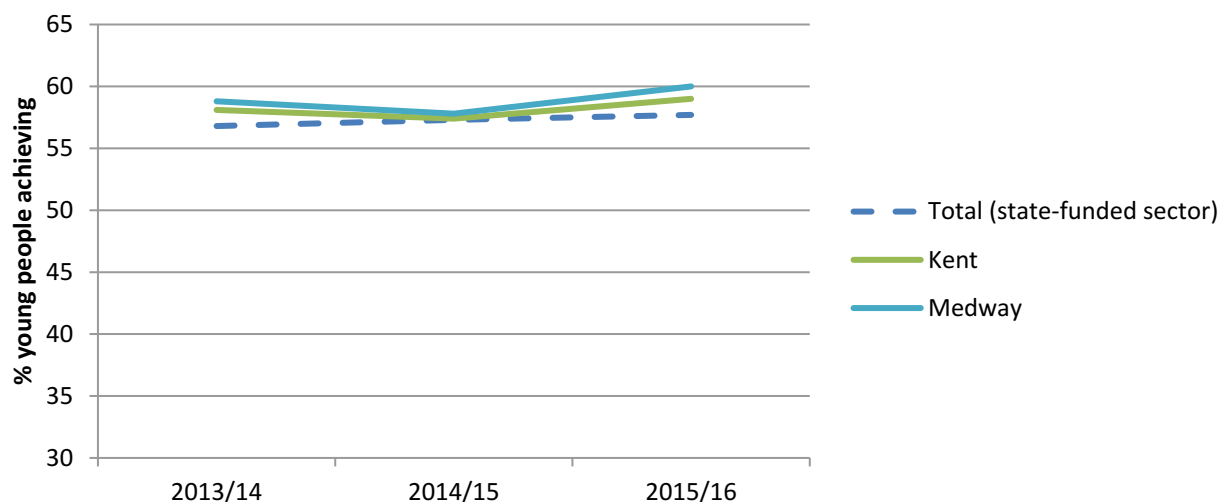
Performance of schools at Key Stage 4

The recent trend in GCSE pass rates for 16 year old school pupils completing year 11 across the 2 local authorities is illustrated overleaf¹⁰.

⁹ ONS sub-national population projections – see data annex: Population projections

¹⁰ School Key Stage 4 results – see data annex. Local authority and total (state-funded sector) figures covering achievements in state-funded schools only.

Five GCSEs A*-C including English and Maths



GCSE results in Kent and Medway are slightly above the national average and have been above for the last 5 years. The results in both areas increased in 2015/16 compared to the previous year ¹¹.

Schools with sixth-forms

Area reviews of post-16 education and training institutions are predominantly focused on general further education and sixth-form colleges in order to ensure there is a high quality and financially resilient set of colleges in each area of England. Schools with sixth-forms have the opportunity to seek to opt in to a review if the local steering group agrees.

The underpinning analysis for the review included current post-16 provision in the area made by schools with sixth-forms. Regional Schools Commissioners and local authorities have had the opportunity to identify any issues with school sixth-form provision, and feed these into the review. Regional Schools Commissioners take account of the analysis from area reviews in any decisions they make about future provision.

There are currently 108 funded mainstream schools with sixth-forms in the review area, including 26 local authority maintained schools, 80 academies and 2 university technical colleges (2016 to 2017 academic year). The Kent and Medway area has a selective school system with one of the highest numbers of grammar schools in the country. Most school pupils in the age range 16 to 18 are enrolled on A level courses. In addition to the mainstream schools, there are 3 academy special schools, 15 maintained special schools, 2

¹¹ In 2013 to 2014, a change in how the GCSE performance of schools was defined led to a drop in the overall numbers of young people achieving 5 GCSEs A*-C including maths and English.

non-maintained special schools, 1 specialist free school and 1 specialist post- 6 institution, all of which have post-16 students.

Overall funded student numbers in academy and mainstream school sixth-forms decreased by 752 (-3.1%) in the 3 years 2014 to 2015 to 2016 to 2017 with a total of 23,534 young people funded in a mainstream sixth-form setting in 2016 to 2017. School sixth-forms in the area vary in size but, using as a guide, for illustration purposes only, the application threshold of 200 for new school sixth-forms in academies, there are 53 school sixth-forms (including local authority maintained and academies but excluding special schools) that were funded below that figure in 2016 to 2017. The majority of schools with sixth-forms were graded by Ofsted as good or better.

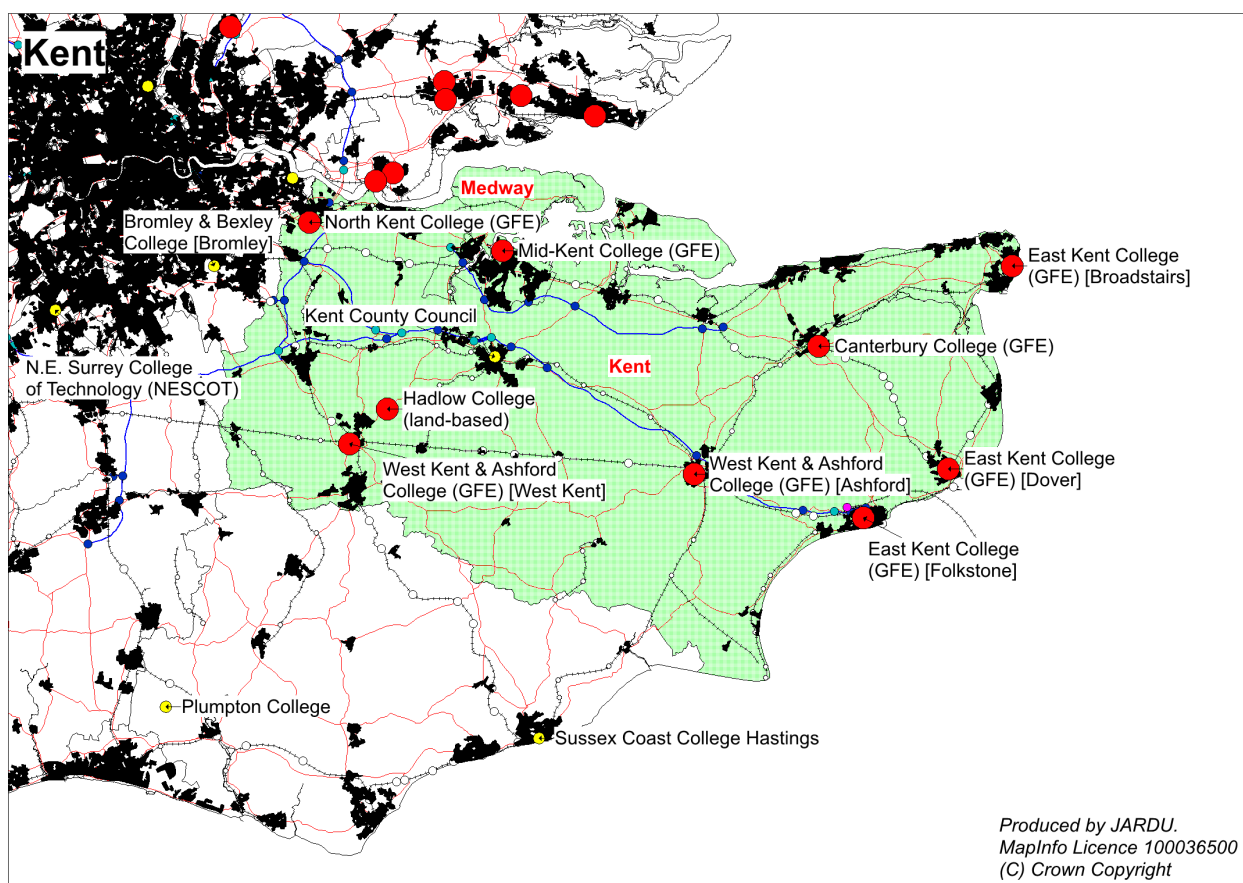
The further education colleges and local authority provision

Six colleges (5 general further education colleges and 1 specialist land based college) and 1 local authority provider participated in this review:

- North Kent College
- Mid Kent College
- Hadlow College (specialist land based)
- West Kent and Ashford College
- Canterbury College
- East Kent College.
- Kent County Council Community Learning and Skills (KCCCLS).

Kent County Council Community Learning and Skills requested to be part of the review as they have significant provision including apprenticeships across the review Area, the Steering Group welcomed the inclusion of KCCCLS in the review.

The location of these colleges is shown on the map overleaf, which also shows colleges in neighbouring areas that deliver significant provision in Kent and Medway:



Part of the area review process involved a visit to each college and the local authority provider by specialist further education college advisers who report to the Further Education Commissioner. The advisers met with governors, senior managers and staff, and reviewed a wide range of documents and data relating to each college's or provider's current range and quality of provision, their track record in attracting students, and their overall financial health. Through a data sharing protocol between members of the steering group, the information from each of these visits was shared with colleges and has informed the evidence base to the steering group for this review.

The current offer in the colleges

Only one of the colleges in the area, West Kent and Ashford College, offers A levels. These are mainly in languages, literature and culture; media and communications; law and legal services; science; sociology; and social policy.

The colleges and KCCCLS in Kent and Medway jointly offer a broad range of vocational and technical provision across all sector subject areas. All of them offer provision to 16 to 19 year olds students in health, public services and care and preparation for life and work. They also all offer adult learning programmes in health, public services and care, science and mathematics, retail and commercial enterprise, leisure, travel and tourism, languages, literature and culture, education and training, preparation for life and work, and arts, media and publishing.

Each of the colleges and KCCCLS, offers some provision at level 4+. They also offer apprenticeships. A limited number of higher apprenticeships are offered in business, management and law, ICT, engineering and manufacturing technologies and health, public services and care. All offer apprenticeships in business, administration and law, engineering and manufacturing technologies. Limited apprenticeships are delivered in leisure travel and tourism, with no apprenticeships delivered in arts, media and publishing.

Hadlow College, as a specialist land based college, offers learning offers provision across the land based subjects and a number of vocational and technical subject areas.

Quality of provision and financial sustainability of colleges

The following table provides a summary of the size and quality in each of the colleges and KCCCLS:

College	Most recent overall Ofsted grade ¹²	EFA allocations (2016 to 17) ¹³	SFA allocations (2015 to 16) ¹⁴	Total college income (2014 to 2015) 000s ¹⁵
North Kent College	Good (February 2014)	£14,804,645	£4,228,250	£28,453
Mid Kent College	Requires Improvement (January 2017)	£22,194,082	£4,416,009	£51,648
West Kent and Ashford College	Requires Improvement (February 2017)	£13,612,896	£4,798,712	£25,391
Hadlow College	Outstanding (June 2010)	£7,338,969	£1,841,276	£21,527
Canterbury College	Good (February 2017)	£19,860,328	£4,762,017	£33,939

12 Ofsted – see data annex: College inspection reports

13 EFA allocations – see data annex: 16 to 19 funding [NB: North Kent College is listed on the published data as North West Kent College of Technology]

14 SFA allocations – see data annex: Adult funding

15 College accounts academic year 2014 to 2015 data – see data annex: College accounts. Figures shown in 1000s]

College	Most recent overall Ofsted grade ¹²	EFA allocations (2016 to 17) ¹³	SFA allocations (2015 to 16) ¹⁴	Total college income (2014 to 2015) 000s ¹⁵
East Kent College	Good (January 2017)	£12,718,697	£5,988,198	£24,733
KCCCLS	Good (June 2016)	£866,761	£9,940,140	¹⁶ £14,189

Where a college was subject to a financial notice of concern or a financial notice to improve this was a factor which was taken into account in the assessment of options for structural change in the review. West Kent and Ashford College were subject to a financial notice of concern issued by the Skills Funding Agency on 1 August 2014 to the predecessor organisation, South and West Kent College. The college has now met the conditions of the notice, which will lead to it being lifted. Canterbury College is also subject to a financial notice of concern issued by the Skills Funding Agency.

Overall, the condition of college buildings is generally good. Some colleges have higher average space per student than others, but this does not necessarily indicate being over-spaced. Each college has unique circumstances and constraints regarding estates. The area review has highlighted some instances where rationalisation or further investment might be considered further during implementation.

Higher education in further education

Progression of young people to higher education across Kent and Medway is variable. Data published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)¹⁷ shows that the proportion of young people who progressed into higher education (HE) by age 19 during the 2005-06 to 2010-11 academic years in Kent was 33.5%, for Medway it was 27.0% which compares to the average for England of 34.7%¹⁸.

The universities of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church, Greenwich and the University for the Creative Arts offer the majority of higher education in the area review.

¹⁶ The KCCCLS total income is provided by KCCCLS as not published in the same way as college funding.

¹⁷ HEFCE POLAR 3 – see data annex: Higher education progression

¹⁸ Derived from HEFCE POLAR3 – see data annex: Higher education progression

The 5 further education colleges deliver some directly funded higher education programmes as well as sub-contracted provision with the largest numbers of students studying in 2014-15 academic year at Mid Kent College followed by Canterbury College. In the same academic year, the majority of sub-contracted higher education provision in the colleges was delivered at Hadlow, East Kent College and West Kent and Ashford College.

Canterbury College, Mid Kent College and West Kent and Ashford College have formal partnerships with The University of Kent. A number of the colleges in the area collaborate with The University of Kent through partnerships including East Kent College through the Kent and Medway Progression Federation and North Kent College and Hadlow College through the National Collaborative Outreach Project.

Provision for students with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and high needs

In 2016 to 2017, the EFA funded 1,548 post-16 places across the Kent and Medway area in colleges, local authority maintained and academy schools, special schools and specialist post-16 institutions¹⁹. Colleges delivered 871 funded places between them. The colleges delivering the highest numbers of funded places are East Kent and West Kent and Ashford Colleges.

During the area review Kent County Council (KCC) identified that the colleges in their area support a large proportion of the learning for SEND/high needs learners. KCC's *Strategy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities 2013-2016*²⁰ includes proposals for the development and delivery of quality vocational programmes in the post-16 offer.

Medway Council reported that their residents who required high needs provision for visual and hearing impairment tended to attend Mid Kent College's Medway campus and those with hearing impairment choose to attend West Kent and Ashford College. Medway Council's *SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2016-2020*²¹ proposes a review early in 2017 of the way in which 'element 3' funding is determined according to need to ensure mainstream schools and colleges have adequate resources to make good provision for children and young people with SEND.

The steering group concluded that the development of a strategic oversight group should review current provision and explore how the provision could be improved through revision to planning and delivery.

¹⁹ EFA Allocations – see data annex: 16 to 19 funding: High needs

²⁰ [Strategy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities 2013-2016](#)

²¹ [Medway Council's SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2016-2020](#)

The steering group recognised the need for a review of the strategic approach to the planning of special needs provision across the area and acknowledged that structural changes taking place as a result of the review should not disadvantage post-16 students with SEND or high needs. The steering group resolved to establish a strategic group to address the issues raised, through a recommendation from this review

Apprenticeships and apprenticeship providers

In 2014 to 2015, 7,020 apprenticeships were delivered by providers in the review area, 4,000 were delivered by the colleges and KCCCLS and 3,020 were delivered by other training providers.²²

Overall, the most popular frameworks in 2015 to 2016 were health, public services and care, business, administration and law and retail and commercial enterprise.

The steering group recognised the need to ensure provision of, and progression to, higher level apprenticeships beyond level 3 and to ensure that future skills demands and priority areas will be met, through reviewing the availability and appropriateness of the current apprenticeship offer.

The pattern of delivery may change in 2017, with the introduction of the apprenticeship levy²³.

Land based provision

Landex, the sector organisation that represents a significant number of colleges which deliver land based provision, has prepared a report for steering groups on the mix and balance of land based provision across the country, the key deliverers of this and the importance of that provision to the sector and the economic development of the country.

The strategic importance of the industry environmentally to food and water security in the future is set out. The land based and agri-tech industries have an ageing workforce and an increasing need for workers who can apply scientific and technological skills in a land based environment. And, while agriculture and land based engineering have relatively small provider bases compared to their significance to the industries they serve, there may be risk with loss of provision in either area.

²² Numbers of apprenticeships by provider and LA – see data annex: Apprenticeships

²³ 'Apprenticeship levy and how it will work' on gov.uk

Nationally, apprenticeships in the land based sector have been slow to grow and there is a low rate of progression to level 4 and above among students who go into employment in the sector after completing a level 2 or level 3 programme.

The Kent and Medway area is served by Hadlow College where the largest areas of land based provision offered are agriculture, horticulture and forestry, animal care and veterinary science, environmental conservation, with a significant offer for classroom-based technical courses. While the college also offers apprenticeships, the numbers here are lower, following the national pattern.

The need for change

Area reviews are intended to ensure that the further education sector has a strong and sustainable future – in terms of efficiency of operation, quality of provision, and the responsiveness of courses to the needs of individuals and employers.

The key areas for change

The key issues in relation to this review, and deliberated during steering group meetings, were:

- ensuring the mix and balance of provision, including apprenticeship and adult re-training, meets the future skills needs and priority sectors for the area
- to grow apprenticeships to contribute to the government's target of 3 million by 2020
- to provide more opportunities for higher and degree level apprenticeships to meet the current and future needs of employers and to resolve issues of skills gaps and the increasing demand for high level skills
- a need to establish a strategic oversight group to better plan the provision for high needs learners and the provision they require
- ensure pupils at age 16 and their parents are fully informed about the full range of options available to them post-16
- improve progression pathways from post-16 apprenticeships to employment and improve the quality of provision of higher, level 4 and 5, apprenticeships
- ensuring the financial viability of FE provision and the local offer in the Kent and Medway area

Initial options raised during visits to colleges

During their visits, advisers reported that all colleges had given considerable thought to potential strategic options in advance of the review. In some cases, this meant informal discussions with neighbouring colleges and stakeholders to canvas views and to assess the potential level of support for change.

The types of options discussed were:

- formal structural change (mergers or federations) to improve financial viability, address quality issues, and retain a good choice of subjects and options for students were considered by Canterbury College and East Kent College
- the potential for collaboration to reduce costs and to share services and rationalise provision to meet employers' needs were considered by Mid Kent College and North Kent College
- discussion between colleges about the case for specialisation and the effectiveness of geographical spread across the area

- the case for remaining stand-alone where a college could demonstrate long-term financial sustainability and sustained student numbers. This was the preferred option for most of the colleges.

Criteria for evaluating options and use of sector benchmarks

Assessment criteria

In each area review, 4 nationally-agreed criteria are used for the process of assessment. These are:

- meets the needs of current and future students and employers
- is feasible and generates financial sustainability
- raises quality and relevance of provision, including better outcomes
- achieves appropriate specialisation

FE sector benchmarks

To support rigorous assessment of proposals, particularly options leading to major structural change, DfE have developed a series of sector 'quality and financial indicators and related criteria'.

Financial benchmarks relate to delivering operating surpluses of 3% to 5%, ensuring borrowings stay below 40% of annual income (the maximum threshold set for affordability), staff costs of no more than 65% of total income (FE sector average) and a current ratio greater than 1. Financial plans were assessed for each option, including colleges seeking to stand-alone, prior to consideration by the local steering group.

A number of other indicators are also taken into account by the steering group. These relate to the impact of proposed changes on quality of provision, on teaching efficiency, and how they actively support growth in apprenticeships and work at levels 4 and 5. Within proposals, overall levels of provision for high needs students should be maintained. New strategic plans need to be supported by LEPs and local authorities. Colleges may also need to review their senior staffing and their governance to ensure that they have the required skills, and the capacity to implement rapid change.

The assessment of options indicated that, based on the information available to the area review steering group, the colleges would move towards the benchmarks and indicators through successful implementation of options, and that the protected characteristics groups, including high needs students, would retain at least equal access to learning.

More detail about these benchmarks is contained in area review guidance Annex F²⁴ (revised March 2016).

²⁴ [Reviewing post-16 education and training institutions: updated guidance on area reviews Annex F, Pages 49-53](#)

Recommendations agreed by the steering group

Nine recommendations were agreed by the steering group at their meeting in March 2017. These were:

- Canterbury College and East Kent College to merge
- Hadlow College to remain a stand-alone institution subject to an evaluation by the FE Commissioner
- West Kent and Ashford College to remain a stand-alone institution subject to an evaluation by the Further Education Commissioner
- Mid Kent College to remain a stand-alone institution
- North Kent College to remain a stand-alone institution
- Kent County Council Community Learning and Skills to review, rationalise and align the curriculum delivery
- Kent County Council and Medway Council to lead collaborative initiatives to improve the effectiveness of transition arrangements between schools and colleges
- Kent County Council and Medway Council to establish a strategic planning forum for Kent and Medway to meet the SEND and high needs demand.
- Kent Further Education (KFE) to establish a strategic forum to deliver the recommendations from the area review and have oversight of skills provision in the area.

Each of these options is now outlined in more detail:

Canterbury College and East Kent Colleges

Canterbury and East Kent Colleges to merge to form a single corporation, the East Kent College Group (EKCG) through a Type B merger. Canterbury Corporation will dissolve and East Kent Corporation will take on the assets and liabilities. The merger will ideally be completed for August 2017, but certainly no later than 31 December 2017. If the merger does not go ahead, East Kent College will stand-alone and seek collaboration with other organisations. The assessment of the Canterbury College financial plans indicates that stand-alone is not a sustainable option. Further partnership opportunities with KCC, Mid Kent College and SELEP should be explored to develop appropriate delivery for the Swale area.

- in terms of meeting current and future needs, strategic goals have been established to enable the new institution to meet the needs of young people, employers, communities and LEP and local authority priorities by being highly responsive to communities; provide exceptional learning; and enable outstanding student progress and achievement. Existing work with universities through Canterbury College will be extended across the areas covered by the two colleges.
- with regard to financial sustainability, the combined forecast shows a strong financial position which meets all the benchmarks from 2017/18 onwards. However, key to the

plan is an initial requirement for support to strengthen the combined colleges solvency and reduce the above benchmark debt levels. Individually, the colleges do not achieve the benchmarks as quickly as the merged college forecasts to do.

- in respect of quality of provision, both colleges recently underwent inspections by Ofsted and were both judged as good. Both colleges have seen an improvement in student achievement rates since 2015/16. The leadership teams have experience of improving quality and the merged organisation has a development strategy with a clear focus on improving student achievement and progression.
- the merged college's specialisms will include significant high needs provision in which both existing colleges have extensive experience. The institution will also have a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) focus. East Kent College operates a hotel to support hospitality and catering provision.

Hadlow College

Hadlow College to remain a stand-alone institution subject to the completion, by 30 June 2017, of an evaluation by the Further Education Commissioner to confirm the legal status of the relationship between Hadlow College and West Kent and Ashford College. The rationale for the Further Education Commissioner's evaluation is detailed under the West Kent and Ashford College section below.

- in terms of meeting current and future needs, Hadlow is a land based specialist college providing a broad offer from entry to degree level, the latter in partnership with the University of Greenwich. The college has good local connections with employers and local authorities.
- with regard to financial sustainability, the college currently achieves the financial benchmarks, with the exception of operating performance, which is forecast to be achieved from 2017/18 onwards. The college forecasts to maintain a strong financial position throughout the forecast period.
- in respect of quality of provision, Ofsted judged the college to be outstanding in 2010. Overall achievement rates remained consistent to 2015/16, although apprenticeships declined slightly.
- as a specialist land based college, the specialisms include agriculture, horticulture, fruit and food and drink, delivering provision for industrial and niche areas seen as critical to the local economy by the LEP and local authority. Hadlow College has campuses for land based provision in both Kent and South London.

West Kent and Ashford College

West Kent and Ashford College to remain a stand-alone institution subject to the completion, by 30 June 2017, of an evaluation by the Further Education Commissioner to confirm the financial sustainability of the college and the legal status of the relationship between Hadlow College and West Kent and Ashford College. The County Council will work

with West Kent and Ashford College to explore opportunities to maximise the benefit of the new campus in developing academic and technical provision in Ashford to address the current and future needs of the community and employers.

- Hadlow College took over the leadership and management of 3 campuses of the former South and West Kent College (trading as K College) and the new institution formed was called West Kent and Ashford College. The principal and deputy principal of Hadlow College took on senior leadership roles at West Kent and Ashford College. The 2 colleges are separate legal entities and currently have separate corporations, Ofsted inspections, and accounts, although there are a number of members common to both corporations and the 2 colleges share search, audit and finance committees. The Further Education Commissioner will evaluate the relationship between the two colleges to confirm Ashford and West Kent College's financial sustainability and to ensure that current governance arrangements meet further education requirements.
- in terms of meeting current and future needs, the college delivers all sector subject areas across two sites. The new campus is opening an Ashford centre for the 2017/18 academic year. The college has undergone a comprehensive curriculum review to align its provision with local need and priorities.
- With regard to financial sustainability, the college is forecasting to achieve the benchmarks with the exception of debt, which is currently above benchmark but forecast to reduce by 2019/20. Delivering cost savings, achieving growth in learner numbers and disposing of assets are critical in realising the forecast. The financial planning assumptions will be reviewed and discussed with the college by the Further Education Commissioner team during the planned evaluation work.
- in respect of quality of provision, the college was recently inspected and judged to be requires improvement. This is an improvement on the inadequate inspection grade inherited from the previous organisation. To 2015/16 overall achievement rates have improved, but from a low starting point. The college is working to improve them further and has established a plan to improve the quality of provision.
- the college has worked with local employers over the last 2 years to gain their support and commitment to the college, to rectify the poor reputation of the predecessor organisation, and to ensure support for the new campus development in Ashford. It has undertaken a curriculum review to ensure tht current specialisms are appropriate for the community it serves.

Mid Kent College

Mid Kent College to remain a stand-alone institution and continue to improve quality of provision for all learners. The college's collaboration with North Kent College, particularly in relation to apprenticeships, is to continue. Further partnership opportunities with Kent County Council, Canterbury College and SELEP should be explored to develop appropriate delivery for the Swale area in terms of meeting current and future needs.

- in terms of meeting current and future needs, the college is looking to work with local schools to ensure appropriate post-16 routes are available. The college is working with local universities to increase its level 4 provision. SELEP is providing funding support for new equipment to support provision for LEP priority areas. The college's partnership with North Kent College (Skills Hub – Kent and Medway) aims to avoid duplication of apprenticeship delivery and maximise opportunities to meet local employer needs. The college plans to work with Canterbury College to develop local provision for the local Swale area, which was identified through the area review as having a shortfall in the skills offer.
- with regard to financial sustainability, the college currently meets all of the benchmarks and forecasts to continue achieving the benchmarks throughout the forecast to 2019/20.
- in respect of quality of provision, the college is currently rated as requires improvement by Ofsted. The college recognises the need to improve quality, has an improvement plan and has taken steps to develop quality for all learners.
- the college's focus is to grow apprenticeship provision in priority areas of local need.
- the college is specialising in technical education to align to local and regional economic skills needs 3 key areas: construction and engineering (including levels 1-6 skills training to the Royal Engineers); digital and professional skills (including health, management, and media); the visitor and service economy.

North Kent College

North Kent College to remain stand-alone institution. The college's collaboration with Mid Kent College particularly in relation to apprenticeships will continue.

- in terms of meeting current and future needs, the college offers provision at all levels from entry to level 4+ and programmes for young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). There are progression routes into higher level skills and higher education in partnership with the University of Greenwich. Due to its geographical location south east of London, the college also addresses the priorities for a number of local authorities and LEPs including Kent, London and the Thames Gateway. Their partnership with Mid Kent College (Skills Hub – Kent and Medway) aims to avoid duplication of apprenticeship delivery and maximise opportunities to meet local employer needs.
- with regard to financial sustainability, the college currently achieves the majority of benchmarks. While borrowing is initially above benchmark, this benchmark will be achieved as repayments are made. The college operating surplus, while positive throughout the forecast, fails to fully achieve the benchmark during the forecasting period.
- in respect of quality of provision, the college is judged as being good by Ofsted. There was an improving trend in overall achievement rates to 2015/16.

- the college has recently rationalised its curriculum to focus on those areas that were higher performing and had good progression routes to higher levels and employment. The college continues to develop and grow specialisms meeting local need and LEP and local authority priorities.

Kent County Council Community Learning and Skills

Kent County Council Community Learning and Skills to work with colleges and the LEP to review and rationalise the curriculum delivery and align with LEP priorities. This will include apprenticeships, so as to provide learners with the greatest opportunity to achieve. They will identify clear and appropriate progression routes for its learners at all levels and continue to improve achievement in all areas. Further partnership opportunities with Canterbury College, Mid Kent College and SELEP should be explored to develop appropriate delivery for the Swale area.

- in terms of meeting current and future needs, KCCCLS are seeking to better align their provision with that delivered by other providers and the needs and priorities of the local areas, and improve progression to higher levels.
- with regard to financial sustainability, the KCCCLS operation falls under the financial umbrella of Kent County Council and local authorities are not subject to assessment or the college financial benchmarks.
- in respect of quality of provision, KCC are judged good by Ofsted and will continue to improve quality to ensure all learners have good or better provision.
- the specialisms will focus on where there are gaps in provision that need addressing to meet the LEP priorities that are not met by other providers.

Kent and Medway collaboration to improve transition

Kent County Council and Medway Council to lead collaborative initiatives to improve the effectiveness of transition arrangements between schools and colleges, including continuing to monitor learners who drop out from education up to the age of 18.

- where drop out is a result of poor transition, the council, with support of the Regional Schools Commissioner where appropriate, will facilitate improving arrangements between the institutions.
- where there are large numbers of learners who are transitioning from one institution to another, by school or college, and transition arrangements could be improved, the local authority will liaise with the school and promote communication and meetings between both institutions to improve transition.

Kent and Medway to establish SEND planning group

Establish a strategic planning forum for Kent and Medway to address the SEND and high needs demand. The colleges and the local authorities will establish a Kent and Medway area-wide forum for SEND and high needs to promote better strategic planning and increased coherence of the local offer. The forum will initially consider:

- improved forward planning to meet demand.
- capital and funding implications, to maximise efficiency of provision.
- how to ensure that strategic changes locally do not have a negative impact on 16+ SEND learners.

Kent Further Education (KFE) strategic forum

The group of further education colleges in Kent have formed a cooperative group called KFE. KFE will establish a strategic forum to deliver the recommendations from the area review and have oversight of skills provision in the area.

- the strategic forum to be formed is to include the LEP, the local authorities, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the colleges to enable strategic dialogue on skills provision, employer needs and meeting the LEP priorities.
- the forum will monitor and support the delivery of the area review recommendations.

Conclusions from this review

The purpose of area reviews is to put colleges on a stronger financial footing whilst also enabling them to better meet the economic and educational needs of students and employers for the long term.

Throughout the review, colleges have worked closely with their LEP, local authorities and the review team, sharing detailed information about their performance and processes. Each local steering group member has been in a position to offer ideas for change, and make comments and assessments about others' proposals and plans for their area. The review team is grateful for the positive approach taken by all the local stakeholders involved in the review.

The issues arising from the area review, summarised in 'The need for change', will be addressed through:

- the merger of Canterbury College and East Kent College, which will bring greater financial resilience, improved quality and the ability to develop a more competitive approach to apprenticeship delivery
- the collaboration between Mid Kent College and North Kent College, and the renewed focus of all of the colleges on improving the mix and balance of provision to address the LEP and local authorities' priorities, matched closely to learner and employer needs
- the Canterbury College, Mid Kent College and KCCCLS collaboration to plan and deliver skills provision to address the need for local provision identified in Swale
- the plans for Kent County Council Community Learning and Skills (KCCCLS) to review provision and better align this with the college offer. This will develop progression routes and meet learner and employer needs. It will also ensure the apprenticeship provision meets the future skills needs and priorities of the area
- the establishment of the strategic planning forum for Kent and Medway will aim to develop SEND and high needs provision to better meet the needs of learners
- Kent County Council and Medway Council leading the collaborative initiative to improve the effectiveness of transition arrangements between schools and colleges. This will ensure communication is effective between organisations and pupils and their parents are informed as well as improve the effectiveness of transition arrangements between schools and colleges, and monitoring of learners up to 18 years old who drop out from education.

Next steps

The agreed recommendations will now be taken forward through recognised structural change processes, including due diligence and consultation.

Proposals for merger, sixth-form college conversion to academies, or ministerial approval, for example of a change in name, will now need intensive work by all parties involved to realise the benefits identified. Colleges will want to give consideration to making timely applications for support from the [Restructuring Facility](#), where they can demonstrate that the changes cannot be funded through other sources. Colleges exploring academy conversion will be subject to the application process and agreement by the Sixth Form College Commissioner and the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Primary responsibility for implementation of recommendations relating to individual colleges rests with those institutions. However, it will be important to understand how progress is going in the round in each area and each set of area review recommendations will be formally monitored at both national and local levels. As the [guidance](#) produced for LEPs and local authorities sets out all those involved in the local steering group will be expected to play their full part in ensuring that changes happen within the timescale agreed. In this context, LEPs and local authorities are expected to retain their focus on driving changes, and assessing how implementation of recommendations is contributing to local economic performance. The EFA and SFA, with oversight from the Further Education Commissioner and Sixth Form College Commissioner, will also be monitoring progress across all areas.

A national evaluation of the area review process will be undertaken to assess the benefits brought about through implementation of options. It will include quantitative measures relating to the economy, to educational performance, to progression, to other measures of quality, and to financial sustainability. This analysis will also take account of the views of colleges, local authorities, LEPs, students and employers about how well colleges are responding to the challenges of helping address local skills gaps and shortages, and the education and training needs of individuals.



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