

Evaluation of the Phase 2 Raising the Participation Age Trials – Final Report

ISOS Partnership

This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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Executive Summary

1. The Education and Skills Act 2008 legislated to increase the age of compulsory participation in education or training to age 18 by 2015 and to the end of the year in which young people turn 17 in 2013. Young people will be able to participate in a way that suits them: for instance in full-time education at school or college, on an Apprenticeship, or part-time if they are also working or volunteering full-time. The Government made clear its commitment to raising the participation age (RPA) in the Spending Review announcement in October 2010 and the White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' published in November 2010.

2. Achieving full participation of young people in education or training until age 18 will require all parts of the education system to play a role. Ultimately, however, it will be local authorities (LAs) that will be responsible for ensuring that young people in their areas participate, and for providing the support young people need to overcome any barriers to learning. Many LAs, with their providers and other local partners, are already planning how they will achieve full participation by 2013/2015. The Phase 2 RPA trials have sought to build on the work undertaken in Phase 1 of the trial, to enhance knowledge and good practice in the implementation of RPA.

3. Phase 1 of the RPA trials ran between September 2009 and March 2010 with 10 LAs and one sub-region involved. Phase 2 of the RPA trials began in April 2010 and ran until March 2011. Four new LAs, Blackpool, Worcestershire, Ealing, Plymouth, and another sub-region, Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire, were chosen to join the 11 Phase 1 areas, who all continued into Phase 2. As in Phase 1 the trial areas in Phase 2 were asked to focus on one of three specific areas during the trial period:

- a. How LAs can work most effectively in securing a **full** Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) offer for young people to support the increase in the participation age;
- b. How LAs can plan and deliver a system, building on the September Guarantee, which effectively picks up those 16 and 17 year olds who disengage with learning through the year and re-engages them in education or training;
- c. The development of an area-wide strategy to enable full participation of all young people in education or training. This model will assess the overall challenges and barriers, and implement solutions at a local level.

4. Isos Partnership were commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) in September 2010 to undertake an evaluation of the Phase 2 trials. The trials were designed to look at how effectively local areas were developing and implementing their approaches to RPA and to capture emerging practice, which could be shared amongst the trials as well as with other LAs. The trials and evaluation process spanned the period preceding the election, the subsequent general election and formation of the coalition Government, and the Spending Review. Whilst it is an inevitable part of the political system in the UK, the short period of stasis followed by policy and funding uncertainty has had an impact on the operation of the trials in this phase.

5. The evaluation team carried out the evaluation by: reviewing the trial areas plans and holding short telephone conversations with the leads for the trial in each area to understand their aims and

objectives for the trials; visiting each of the trial areas at least once during the trial period to interview trial leads, other LA staff, stakeholders and providers. In all, 24 visits were undertaken. The evaluation team produced an interim report in early January 2011 which was shared with the DfE and a final report in April 2011. The team also held a workshop in March 2011 with trial areas to allow them to feed into the report's findings. This final report presents the evidence from the trial areas and views of the evaluation team on the progress made and lessons learnt.

Summary of key findings

Overall progress

- Most of the trial areas have maintained a strong focus and commitment to delivery throughout the trial despite the uncertainty in policy and financial challenges faced.
- Progress was affected by the policy uncertainty between May and October 2010, with slow progress in many areas during this period, and much activity only really starting in October.
- Some areas maintained momentum throughout this period and even where areas were slow to start, significant progress was made by many once policy and funding was confirmed.
- A summary of the evaluation team's judgement of areas' progress during the trial shows that 10 areas made excellent or very good progress and six made mixed or limited progress.
- The evaluation team's judgements show mainly positive assessments of progress for areas new to Phase 2, with four out of five judged to be making very good or excellent progress.
- For areas that continued from Phase 1 into Phase 2, most have made a similar level of progress as they did during Phase 1. There are some exceptions with two of the areas who struggled to make progress during Phase 1 managing to regain momentum in Phase 2 by greater delegation of responsibilities and wider engagement of a range of partners.
- Measuring the specific impact of activity has proved as difficult for the trial areas as it did in Phase 1, given the short timescales involved, the overlapping nature of much of the activity and the fact that many of the young people targeted for support and intervention did not successfully complete or progress from their courses until after the end of the trial.
- Some areas found it helpful to think about measuring impact by asking themselves what percentage of the overall non-participating cohort are being targeted by their trial activity.
- All of the trial areas recognise they need to give more thought to how they measure the impact of different interventions, and use this to prioritise activity within their RPA plan.

Planning for RPA delivery

- Most of the trial areas do not yet have a fully complete plan for delivering RPA by 2013/15. However, a number of trial areas outline plans and the key building blocks are now in place.
- The importance of data and analysing the cohort has been reinforced during Phase 2. Nearly all of the Phase 2 areas have undertaken some form of detailed data analysis to better understand their cohorts, although not all areas have a fully comprehensive picture yet.
- Currently trajectories, where they exist, simply set a straight line between the current level of participation and full participation. More work is needed to estimate the year by year impact of interventions on participation rates.

- Governance has been given less prominence in Phase 2. Some areas made a deliberate change to give greater focus to RPA in governance structures. There is concern in some areas that recent changes to LA structures have made RPA less of a strategic priority.
- One issue that has emerged in areas where the trial has been led by Connexions is difficulty in securing the engagement and commitment from the LA. These areas need to look again at their partnership structure to ensure they have the right working relationships.
- There has been a much greater emphasis on the issue of sustainability during Phase 2. In five of the original Phase 1 areas there has been a change of approach to the leadership and management of the trial in Phase 2, with an overarching trial lead delegating day to day operational responsibility for trial activities to members of their teams.
- The engagement with providers has proved a more difficult issue for many areas in Phase 2. Many areas held back from engaging with providers until the uncertainty over the policy was resolved. Most of the successful examples of engaging providers have come from their involvement in the 14-19 partnership governance arrangements or directly in trial activity.
- The evaluation found that in some areas, activity was limited to a small number of providers and there was no convincing plan for how the lessons of the trial would be rolled out to other providers or how they might be engaged beyond the trial.
- Many of the trial areas believe the engagement of schools will be made more difficult by recent policy changes, for example increased schools autonomy and the introduction of the English Baccalaureate, although areas are encouraged by the post-16 progression measure.
- There has been stronger engagement with special schools during Phase 2 than Phase 1, but areas have found the engagement with Further Education (FE) colleges more challenging. Often this is a result of difficulty in identifying the right person to engage with, but in a quarter of areas they believe it is due to a lack of commitment from some colleges to RPA.

IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance)

- Derby, Ealing, Plymouth and Staffordshire were the trial areas focused on this theme.
- There has been a strong focus on supporting transitions throughout the trials. This includes a greater focus on activity in Key Stage 3 as well as focusing on supporting transition post-16.
- A number of the trial areas have started to map their planned RPA interventions and activity against the key transition points in young people's lives. They have used this as a tool for engaging in conversations with schools as well as a strategic mapping tool for the local area.
- All four of the areas under this theme have developed local strategies for improving IAG. They have often used provider audits, quality marks or best practice guides/workshops to do so, but there are concerns about providers' willingness to engage with these tools in future, given their increased autonomy and reduced local authority resources to support this work.
- Areas have significant concerns about the transition from Connexions including: a potential gap in services before the National Careers Service is fully established; maintenance of the Connexions Client Information Systems (CCIS); and targeted support for the most vulnerable.
- Areas found engaging parents/carers difficult, though a targeted approach has had some success in one trial area. Parent/carer ambassador schemes have also had some success.
- Although over half the trial areas have undertaken analysis of post-16 progression rates for schools, most have been unwilling to challenge schools without a clear national measure.

- Trial areas have been better in Phase 2 at identifying the cohorts who have specific barriers to participation. Teenage parents and learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD) are the two most prominent. The trials identified that more work is needed to align support for the first, and that stronger mentoring can support transition for the second.

Re-engagement

- Barnsley, Blackpool, Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull sub-region, Swindon, Wandsworth and Worcestershire were the trial areas focused on this theme.
- Three of the trials under this theme have developed a more systematic approach to supporting young people at risk of disengagement or who have already disengaged.
- Although there are many similarities in the approach of the trial areas, there have been important differences in their early identification systems, the participation advisor role and use of support panels. This suggests other areas will need to decide their own approach.
- Risk of NEET indicators (RONIs) remain an important mechanism for trial areas. 10 of the trial areas already have a RONI or are developing one. Six areas don't yet have a RONI and are unsure about plans to develop one. More focus is needed to ensure schools use RONIs.
- During the trial over half of the areas have focused on the relationship between Connexions and providers with a focus on improving the pastoral care provided. In one area a weakness identified in providers with poor pastoral care has been systems for monitoring attendance.
- Although local areas often believe they have robust systems in place for the notification of a young person dropping out, evidence from one of the trial areas suggests all areas might benefit from a regular check on whether the systems are actually being used as intended.
- Different approaches have been taken to the development of the 'participation advisor' role, with some seeing it as similar in some aspects to the Connexions personal advisor role and others seeing it alongside that role providing mentoring support to the most vulnerable.
- Trial areas have also used 'support panels' in different ways with some using them to follow up on the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and others as an alternative to a CAF.
- Significant progress has been made in defining when young people might be said to have a 'reasonable excuse' for non-participation. More thought needs to be given to support young people during these times and to identifying when they might be ready to participate again.

Local solutions

- Cumbria, East Sussex, Greater Manchester, Hertfordshire, Lambeth and Newcastle were the trial areas focused on this theme.
- The focus of this theme varied, according to local priorities. Two issues did emerge which were unique and which relate to the issue of how to fill any gaps in provision which an area's provision mapping, data analysis and/or feedback from learners might tell them exist.
- The first involved two trial areas who have developed particularly effective approaches to engaging with employers by utilising the services of partners outside the LA.
- The second was the number of examples of innovative new provision seen in areas and the progress which continues to be made in developing catalogues of alternative provision.

Top tips from the Phase 2 trials for other local areas to consider

Local areas should think about how they can...

- Develop a comprehensive plan for delivery of RPA (see p18).
- Develop their understanding of their cohorts and identify a set of priorities for delivering RPA with expected impact demonstrated through trajectories to 2013 and 2015 (see p20).
- Measure the impact of planned interventions by looking at the different segments of the cohort activity is targeting and quantifying the potential impact of each (see p18 and p24).
- Review own governance and leadership of RPA to ensure they are getting full engagement from the wider LA and other partners, and have maximised opportunities to streamline governance and leadership drawing together youth, IAG, post-16 and schools' arrangements to minimise bureaucracy, ensure coherence, sustainability and efficiencies (see p24).
- Establish stronger links with wider LA governance and employers through local economic partnerships or LA regeneration teams (see p25).
- Engage with young people and parents/carers to ensure young people's voices are reflected in plans for delivering RPA and that the hardest to engage are aware of RPA (see p30).
- Engage with the full range of providers, using the data to agree which providers have issues with post-16 progression and what support they might need/benefit from (see p26 and p32).
- Thought about how to strengthen their engagement with schools and colleges in particular, identifying the right strategic lead for RPA to work with at each institution (see p26).
- Learn from the successful work of some Phase 2 areas in engaging employers during Phase 2 and think about who has the credibility to lead this work in their locality (see p28 and p41).
- Focus on the transitions throughout secondary education and into post-16 education, identify and map all of the universal and targeted support available and identify gaps, overlaps and efficiencies through conversations with providers (see p28).
- Identify particular groups within their own cohorts that will be critical to RPA and map the interventions, support and provision in place for each 'at risk' cohort including all of the LA services and other delivery partners working with them (see p32).
- Approach their work with those at risk of disengagement or who have already disengaged more systematically, including considering what the role of the participation advisor and support panels should be, and how they will define when young people have a reasonable excuse, and how to support those with one (see p34).
- Discuss and debate the need for a RONI, think through the key measures to include in one for their own local area and ensure schools are using it (see p34 and p36).
- Identify provision gaps through mapping, data analysis and/or feedback from learners and decide how best to fill them, learning from the trials experience of engaging with employers for young people in Jobs without Training (JWT) and developing new provision (see p40).
- Develop future delivery models in the context of the changing financial climate and decisions already taken, such as the development of the National Careers Service (see p43).
- Identify other areas facing similar challenges where lessons are likely to be transferable and ensure they are visiting and talking to them to avoid reinventing the wheel (see p44).

Introduction

6. Isos Partnership were commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) in September 2010 to undertake an evaluation of the Phase 2 Raising the Participation Age (RPA) Trials, having previously completed the evaluation of the Phase 1 trials. The evaluation team produced an interim report in early January 2011 which was shared with the DfE. The final report was produced in April 2011. The evaluation team are grateful to both the DfE and participating trial areas for the support they have received in undertaking the evaluation.

Background

7. The Education and Skills Act 2008 legislated to increase the age of compulsory participation in education or training to age 18 by 2015 and to the end of the academic year in which young people turn 17 in 2013. Young people will be able to participate in a way that suits them: for instance in full-time education at school or college, on an Apprenticeship, or part-time if they are also working or volunteering full-time. The Government made clear its commitment to RPA in the Spending Review announcement in October 2010 and the White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' published in November 2010.

8. Achieving full participation of young people in education or training until age 18 will require all parts of the education system to play their part. Ultimately, however, it will be local authorities (LAs) that will be responsible for ensuring that young people in their areas participate and for providing the support young people need to overcome any barriers to learning. Many LAs with their providers and other local partners are already planning how they will achieve full participation by 2013/2015. The Phase 2 RPA trials have sought to build on the work undertaken in Phase 1 of the trial to enhance knowledge and good practice in the implementation of RPA.

9. Phase 1 of the RPA trials ran between September 2009 and March 2010 with 10 LAs and one sub-region involved. Phase 2 of the RPA trials began in April 2010 and ran until March 2011. Four new LAs, Blackpool, Worcestershire, Ealing, Plymouth, and another sub-region, Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire, were chosen to join the 11 Phase 1 areas, who all continued into Phase 2 through a bidding process. The criteria for selecting areas to participate in the trial were based primarily on the quality of the proposals received, and the potential of the trials to test and enhance understanding of what would be needed to deliver RPA. In addition the DfE sought to ensure a geographical spread of areas.

Focus of the trials

10. As in Phase 1, the trial areas in Phase 2 were asked to focus on one of three specific areas during the trial period:

- a. How LAs can work most effectively in securing a **full** IAG offer for young people to support the increase in the participation age;
- b. How LAs can plan and deliver a system, building on the September Guarantee, which effectively picks up those 16 and 17 year olds who disengage with learning through the year and re-engages them in education or training;

- c. The development of an area-wide strategy to enable full participation of all young people in education or training. This model will assess the overall challenges and barriers, and implement solutions at a local level.

11. Trial areas were free to select whichever theme they felt would add most value to their own local plans, although there was often then some discussion with the DfE about the precise focus of their activity. All of the areas continuing from Phase 1 stayed with the same focus that they had during Phase 1, apart from Lambeth who moved from a focus on IAG to a focus on local solutions. The table below shows the specific focus chosen by each area in Phase 2, although, due to the nature of RPA, it has often been the case that areas are testing issues which cut across these strands. For example re-engagement activity often involved the provision of IAG.

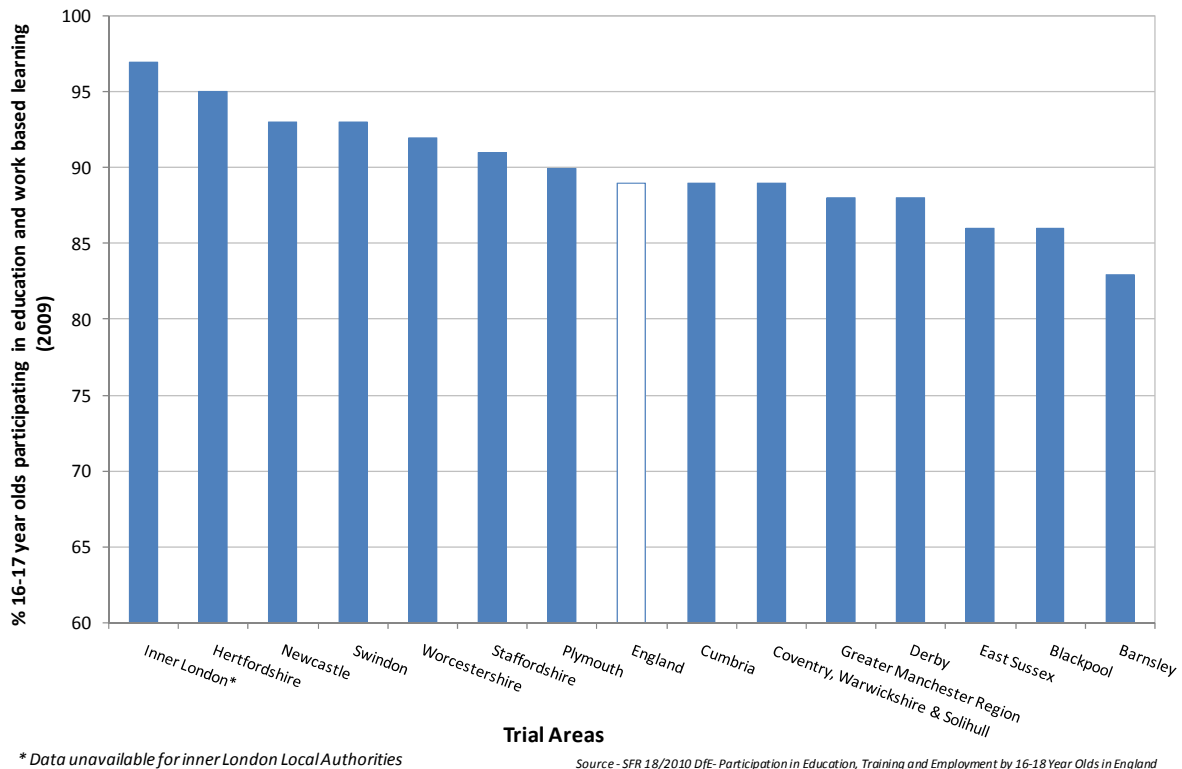
Figure 1.1 Focus of Trial Area Activity in Phase 2

IAG	Re-engagement	Local Solutions
Derby	Barnsley	Cumbria
Ealing	Blackpool	East Sussex
Plymouth	Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull	Greater Manchester
Staffordshire	Swindon	Hertfordshire
	Wandsworth	Lambeth
	Worcestershire	Newcastle

Characteristics of the trial areas

12. Figure 1.2 below shows the participation levels of 16 and 17 year olds in Phase 2 trial areas on the basis of the latest nationally available data from 2009. Note that data for inner London boroughs are not available separately. As the figure below shows, trial areas started from very different places. In Hertfordshire for example they have very high levels of participation, with 95% of their 16 and 17 year olds participating, and when translated into actual numbers, are dealing with relatively small cohorts of non-participating young people. By contrast, an area like Barnsley, with participation levels below 85%, has a non-participating cohort of nearly 500 young people. The challenges of achieving full participation in these different areas vary considerably and require very different solutions.

Figure 1.2: Participation of 16 and 17 year olds in Phase 2 Trial Areas (2009)



13. Another important difference between the trial areas is the mix of local post-16 provision. In some of the trial areas for example, all or nearly all of the schools have school sixth forms and the majority of students stay on at school to complete their post-16 education. In other areas this is not the case with very few school sixth forms, meaning that most young people make a transition to a new provider at age 16 – be that a general FE college, a sixth-form college, or a work-based learning provider. The mix of provision has important implications for the particular challenges that might face an area in delivering RPA – with most students staying on at school, engagement with school sixth forms about their offer and support to young people will be critical, whereas in areas where most young people change provider at age 16, more focus might need to be given to supporting that transition and induction into new provision and engaging with local colleges and work-based learning providers to discuss this.

14. As well as differences in the nature of the provider base, there are also important differences in the socio-economic context of the trial areas, their economic and employer base and local geography, all of which have a bearing on the delivery of RPA. In some of the trial areas for instance there are a large number of major national and local employers who will be critical to engage in the delivery of RPA. In other local areas the employer base is made up almost entirely of small and medium sized enterprises, and these areas therefore have to engage with a much larger number of employers for the purposes of RPA. Geography also has a major bearing in terms of transport distances for young people – often this correlates to the size of the local area in question although this is not always the case with travel times within some inner city boroughs being as great as those in more rural boroughs.

Purpose and objectives of the trials

15. The key purpose of the trials has been for local areas to develop approaches that can support their own and other local areas' preparations for 2013/15. Therefore, a key principle has been identifying and distilling learning, and then sharing approaches and learning across the country. The trials were not designed as pilots to test the immediate cause and effect of different activities against a control group not subject to the same interventions. This would not have been appropriate, considering the nature of RPA (coming into effect nationally in 2013) and the range of activities the areas were undertaking (some of which would not show impact until after the trial period). Given this, and the time period involved, measuring the precise impact of the trials on actual participation rates has not been possible. Instead, the trial areas have sought to learn from and test with their providers which systems, processes and activities they think will be most useful to them going forward and to share this learning with each other and other LAs. This has implications for the evaluation methodology as we shall see below.

16. In addition to trialling activity in their own local areas, Phase 2 areas were also expected to provide support to other LAs that have been identified as having particular challenges in implementing RPA. The National Participation Advisor (NPA) worked closely with these LAs to identify their specific issues and needs and designed a programme of support to help them to address these. Some of the Phase 2 areas were involved in providing this support through a series of Learning Visits. In this way the trials are also designed to test and evaluate the potential support local areas will need going forward to implement RPA, and how this can best be provided by areas sharing their experience and knowledge with one and other. As well as evaluating the activity in each trial area, this evaluation has also looked at the effectiveness of this peer to peer support model as well.

Evaluation methodology

17. As in Phase 1, the nature of the trials has informed the evaluation methodology adopted. The key requirement of the evaluation has been to capture emerging practice, including both successes and barriers, which can be shared amongst the trials as well as with other local authorities. The evaluation team was also asked to test the effectiveness of the support provided to areas facing significant challenges in implementing RPA through a programme of 'Learning Visits'. Whilst, wherever possible, the evaluation team has looked for quantitative evidence of impact, in many cases the evidence from the trials is provided by capturing qualitative information and descriptive examples about what has and hasn't worked. This report attempts to describe the number of trial areas that specific activities relate to or lessons are drawn from, and to give some sense of the number of providers/young people involved and potential scale of the impact.

Setting the baseline

18. Local authorities were required to submit short plans at the start of the trial period setting out their own objectives for the trial and how they propose to achieve them. They were also required to submit bi-monthly updates to DfE on their activities and any issues or risks emerging as well as good practice identified. The starting point for the evaluation was a review of these plans and progress reports. The evaluation team reviewed the plans and reports and had short telephone conversations with the trial leads in each area in early October to discuss their progress and ensure they were clear about what they were trying to achieve through the trial. For many areas, given the uncertainty in

the policy which resulted from the change of government, it was only in this period that they really started to focus on what they planned to deliver during the trial. From the evaluation team's analysis of the plans and these discussions with the trial areas the evaluation team formed initial judgements about the progress being made in each trial area, the likely outputs and products from the trials and the common lessons and issues emerging, which were then tested through our visits and further discussions with trial areas during the remainder of the trial.

Understanding successes and barriers

19. On the basis of this early analysis the evaluation team were able to develop a clear question framework, which has been used during the face to face visits to trial areas. The evaluation team decided to prioritise these visits on the basis of our initial assessment of the progress being made and knowledge about the trial areas from Phase 1. This meant visiting those areas new to Phase 2 as well as a small number of areas from Phase 1 before the end of December 2010, and then visiting the remaining areas from Phase 1 and re-visiting some areas in the period between January and March 2011. In total 24 visits were completed during the evaluation, with eight trial areas receiving two evaluation visits and eight areas receiving one evaluation visit.

20. The visits included discussions with the RPA trial lead, with other LA staff and local stakeholders and in many areas, where it was appropriate to the focus of the trial, conversations with providers. This report summarises the evidence gathered through the visits and conversations with trial areas. It summarises the evaluation team's assessments of the progress made by the trial areas and outlines the key learning from these visits including both successes achieved and issues faced. The evaluation team also asked trial areas for their views on the operation of the trials and have reported their feedback as part of this report.

Completing the evaluation

21. The evaluation team completed the evaluation by participating in a full day workshop in March 2011 with all of the trial areas to test and develop our recommendations and findings and give them a chance to feed in their views about the lessons learned from the trials and implications for national policy. Their feedback and views are captured throughout this report. In addition, the team also attended three of the four Learning Visits which took place in February and March. These visits, in which trial areas shared their practice and lessons learned with other local authorities, were aimed at supporting areas facing challenges in implementing RPA. The areas which came to these Learning Visits had been invited on the basis of their current levels of participation or because they were thought to have particular challenges in implementing RPA, which the trial areas work might help them to address. This report also includes the evaluation team's headline findings on the impact and effectiveness of these Learning Visits.

22. Finally a series of tools and thematic good practice guides have been produced, which capture some of the specific examples of good practice seen in the trial areas in more detail, and which link to the case studies and materials which the trial areas themselves have produced. The tools and good practice guides are introduced in this evaluation report, but published separately as standalone documents, which the evaluation team hope other areas will be able to make use of as they make their own plans for delivery of RPA. Each tool relates to one of the building blocks of the framework for planning for RPA which is introduced in figure 1.4. The full list of the tools is shown below:

- **Tool One: Projecting Participation – Part One: Understanding the cohort.** This tool sets out the approaches which trial areas have taken to analysing their data and identifying current strengths and weaknesses in their understanding of current and future cohorts.
- **Tool Two: Projecting Participation – Part Two: Determining local priorities.** This tool sets out how trial areas have identified their priorities for implementing RPA, set trajectories to 2013/15 and looks at different Governance and Leadership models.
- **Tool Three: Managing Transitions and Tracking.** This tool looks at the work of trial areas in focusing on transitions throughout secondary education and into post-16 education and gives examples of the type of universal and target support provided.
- **Tool Four: Establishing Support Mechanisms.** This tool looks at the work of trial areas in identifying and supporting those young most at-risk of disengaging including: identification of at-risk young people; how support can be provided through Participation Advisors and Support Panels; and identification of 'Reasonable Excuse'.
- **Tool Five: Identifying and Meeting Provision Needs.** This tool looks at how trial areas have analysed their current provision offer to identify gaps and new priorities, and gives examples of the some of the ways in which they have developed new provision.
- **Tool Six: Communicating the RPA Message.** This tool presents the lessons from the trials about how they have communicated messages about RPA to a wide range of stakeholders, and looks at the range of mechanisms they have used to do this.

Context for the Phase 2 trials

23. The Phase 2 trials have taken place during a period of significant change at both national and local level and this has provided an important context for the work of the trial areas. The trials began just before the election in May 2010. As a result of the election, the trials operated during a period of policy uncertainty until the Spending Review in October 2010 and White Paper in November 2010 confirmed the Government's commitment to increase the participation age. The uncertainty in policy resulted in significant delays in trial activity in the period between May and October 2010. The other major challenge the trial areas faced during this period was the significant financial pressures facing all local authorities.

24. Working with this level of uncertainty during the trial has affected different trial areas in different ways. All of the trial areas stressed the need for greater certainty in key policy areas, as well as working through the implications of budget decisions themselves which have now been taken at a local level. They have also highlighted to the evaluation team a number of policy changes and developments which they see as posing a potential risk to the delivery of RPA.

25. As well as highlighting challenges and risks, they also see there are significant opportunities for delivering RPA given the direction of government policy and, in particular, the shift to a more devolved system. It should be noted that given there has been a surge of new Government policies reforming education and training across a broad front, this has been an inevitable period of transition for local areas and the evaluation took place at an early stage of these policies being implemented. Both the challenges and opportunities for RPA identified by the trial areas are shown below.

26. Trial areas identified the following as key challenges to implementing RPA:

- **Reductions in overall LA budgets** for services related to the delivery of RPA are posing significant challenges as to the level of resources that will be available to pay for provision, activities, support, and data/tracking systems to deliver RPA in future.
- **The end of the Connexions Service** and uncertainty about the National Careers Service delivery model have led to questions from some areas about how support will be provided in the period before the new service starts, especially one to one support for the most 'at risk' young people and how the CCIS database can be maintained to the same level.
- **Changes to post-16 funding** - in particular reductions in the unit cost of funding and learner support funding, as well as the success factor weighting in the funding formula, are seen as posing particular challenges for funding provision for the hardest to engage young people and increasing the range of alternative provision on offer.
- **The end of Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAs)** created uncertainty about the level of financial support that will be available for young people in future. This is seen as a particular challenge in rural areas where the money was often used to pay for transport and has come at a time when transport budgets themselves are being cut.
- **A new accountability framework for schools and increased school autonomy**, are seen as raising challenges for partnership working and collaboration between providers, as is the move to measure schools' performance against the English baccalaureate standard which may mean less focus on broadening the range of level 1/foundation provision.
- **The end of local authorities' responsibilities for commissioning post-16 provision** has raised questions about how to ensure that new provision is commissioned and funded when a clear need is identified and how flexibly and quickly provision can be established.

27. Trial areas also identified a number of opportunities for delivery of RPA:

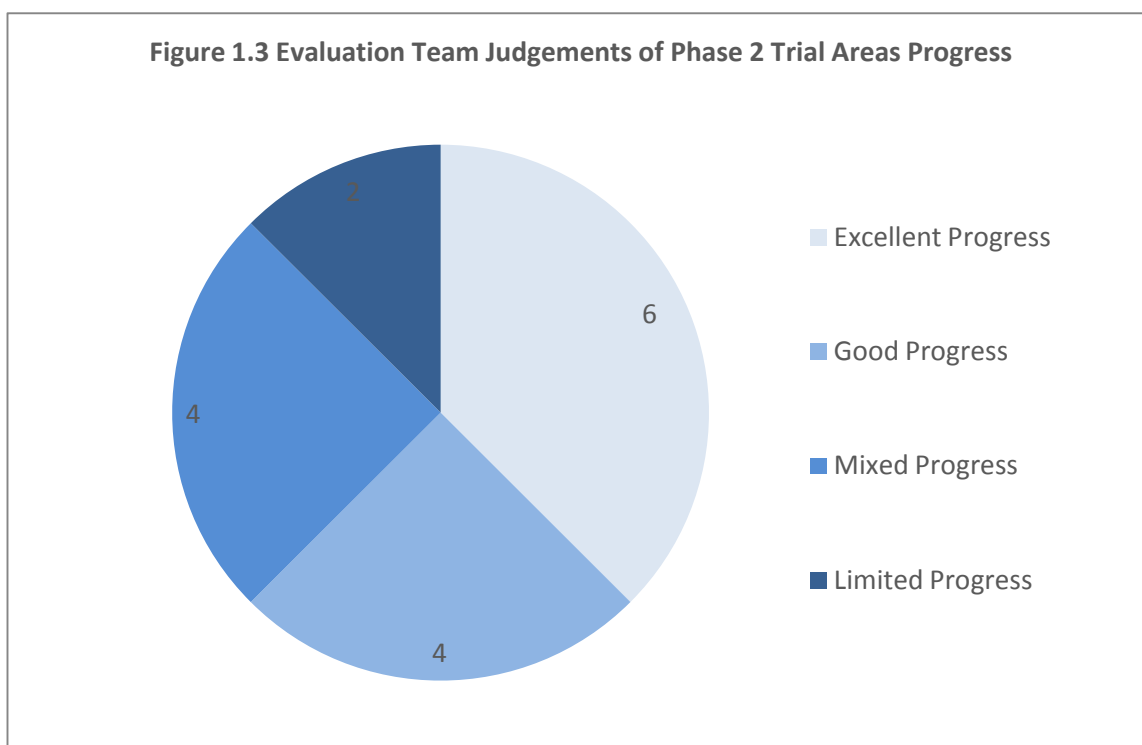
- **The White Paper vision of a new role for LAs** acting as the champion for young people and parents/carers is consistent with how many areas see their role in relation to RPA.
- **The Early Intervention Grant (EIG)** provides an opportunity to better join-up services for the most 'at risk' young people across local areas and a number of the trial areas have already secured EIG funding to continue with activity that was started during the trial.
- **The potential use of pupil premium funding** to support activities for 'at-risk' pupils in KS3 is another opportunity especially given that the target cohort for support is likely to have significant overlap with the at risk of NEET cohorts that are the focus for RPA.
- **Greater emphasis on data and transparency** to challenge providers is seen as being an important step for local authorities to be able to play their new role of champion for young people and parents/carers. They will need more and better data to challenge providers.
- **The focus on destination data and post-16 progression measure** to hold schools to account for what happens to their pupils once they leave is seen as a critical step.
- **The entrance of new providers in the market** such as University Technical Colleges, Studio Schools and Free Schools could be helpful in filling identified provision gaps.

Overall progress

28. Progress in many areas was slow during the period of policy uncertainty between May and October 2010 and most activity only really started after the policy was confirmed in October. However, some areas were able to maintain momentum and, even where areas were slow to start, significant progress, as measured by the judgements of the evaluation team below, has been made by many since October. At the end of the Phase 1 trials the evaluation team gave an assessment of the progress made by each trial area against the following criteria:

- The level of ambition being shown in the trial and impact on current and future cohorts.
- The range and scale of activities being completed and the learning taken from them.
- The engagement with local providers and other stakeholders to 'galvanise the local system'.

29. The evaluation team has again made assessments of the progress being made by local areas throughout the trial. A summary of these assessments at the end of Phase 2 is shown below:



30. One feature of the progress made is the positive assessments of progress made by the areas new to Phase 2, with four out of five of these areas judged by the evaluation team to be making good or excellent progress. There are a number of potential explanations for this – these areas had more time to plan for Phase 2 than areas did at the start of Phase 1, they had clearer guidance from the DfE about what was expected from them and what should be included in their plans, and they had the benefit of learning from the experience of areas in Phase 1 and the products and outputs from Phase 1. Most importantly though, they all started the trial with a clear view of the set of policies and procedures which they expected to be needed to deliver RPA. As a result they applied a more systematic approach to testing these out during the trial.

31. For areas that have continued from Phase 1 into Phase 2 progress has followed a similar pattern to Phase 1 for most. Those areas that made the greatest progress in Phase 1 have continued to make the most progress in Phase 2, whilst those that encountered difficulties or were limited in some way in the scale of their ambition continued to make less progress during Phase 2. However, there are some exceptions to this pattern with two of the areas who struggled to make progress during Phase 1 and who encountered further difficulty at the start of Phase 2, managing to regain momentum in the remainder of the trial. Key to this success has been greater delegation of responsibilities from the trial lead down to other staff and the engagement of a wider range of partners across the LA and beyond.

32. Measuring the specific impact of trial activity has proved as difficult for the trial areas as it did in Phase 1 given the short timescales involved, the overlapping nature of much of the activity and the fact that many of the young people targeted for support and intervention did not successfully complete or progress from their courses until after the end of the trial (due to the length of the trial over a financial year). Nonetheless, in a small number of trial areas they have set themselves some numerical goals for reducing the number of young people not participating over the course of the trial and were on track to achieve these e.g. in Plymouth they achieved their target to secure at least 30 apprenticeship placements for young people in JWT during the course of the trial.

33. Some trial areas have found it helpful to think about measuring impact by asking themselves what percentage of the overall non-participating cohort are being targeted by their trial activity. In Newcastle, for example, they have targeted their work on two cohorts of 30 young people that have been identified in the west and east of the city. These 60 young people represent 10% of the overall NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) cohort in the city. At the end of the trial if Newcastle have been successful in getting half of these young people back on track by Year 9, they could reasonably estimate the impact of these interventions will have been to reduce NEET numbers by 5% by the time this cohort reach post-16 education or training. Doing this type of analysis allows them to build a picture of what further interventions will be needed to target the remainder of the cohort and build a trajectory to 2013 and 2015 as discussed below.

34. All of the trial areas recognise they need to give more thought to how they measure the impact of different interventions, and use this to prioritise activity within their RPA plan. They should also be thinking about tracking the impact of their interventions beyond the end of the trial to measure the ongoing impact of activity that they have started. The evaluation team recommend that at the start of the locally-led delivery projects all areas should ensure they have been as clear as possible about the measurable outcomes and success measures which they could use to demonstrate the impact of their work at the end of March 2012.

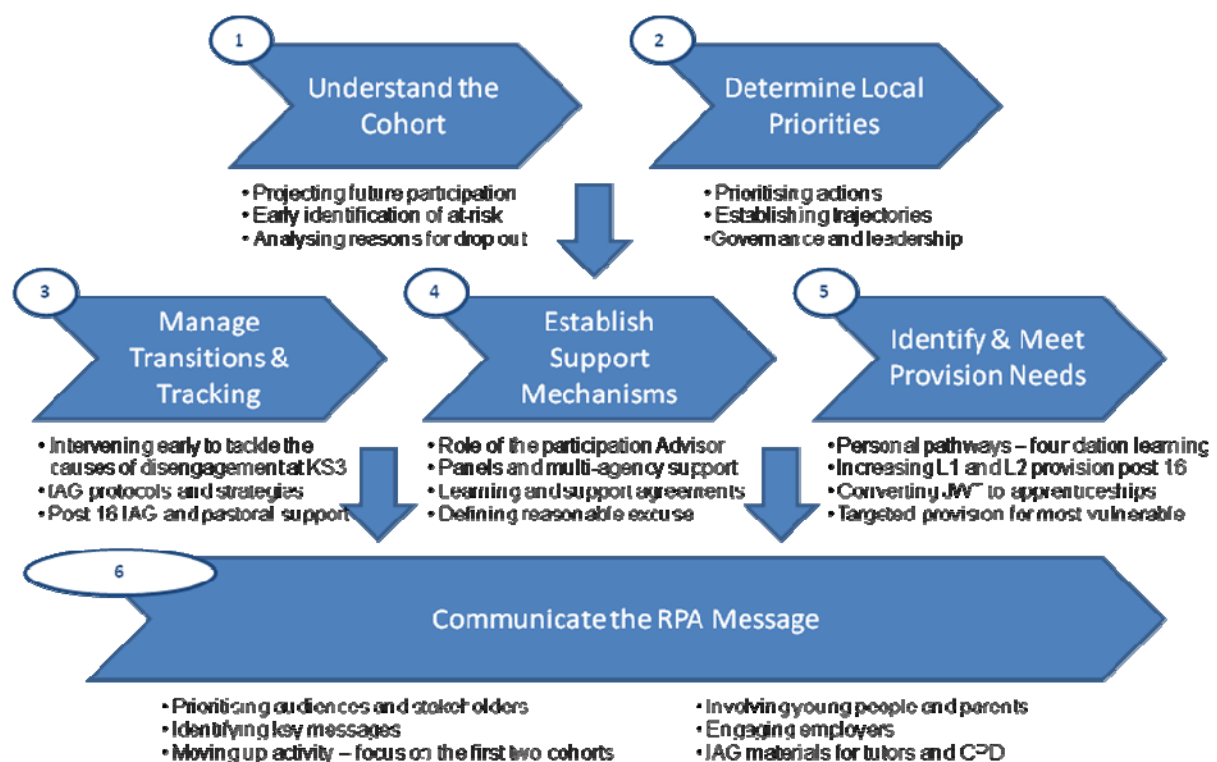
Planning for RPA delivery

35. Although none of the trial areas have yet completed a fully comprehensive plan for delivering RPA, many of them have used the trial as an opportunity to develop their thinking about what an RPA plan should look like and contain. Working with the trial areas, the evaluation team have developed an overall framework for planning for RPA which is shown in Figure 1.4 below. It is based on the steps which trial areas have outlined in the RPA plans which trial areas have started developing themselves. The rest of this evaluation report is based around the key building blocks,

shown in the framework below, and highlights case studies and examples of the most effective practice from the trials and lessons learned. More detail is available in the tools which are published separately alongside this evaluation report.

36. The framework is intended to draw together learning from the trials in a way that will help other areas think about what they might need to do in relation to RPA, and is not a prescriptive check list which all RPA plans must contain. Different areas will have different challenges and priorities in implementing RPA and may find different stages of the framework more useful. RPA plans will therefore look very different. Nor will an RPA plan be static – it will need to be a living document which is used to guide day to day decision making and will need to be refined and updated on a regular basis in light of experience, lessons learnt about what works and what does not.

Figure 1.4 Framework for Planning for Raising Participation:



37. The framework starts at Stage 1 with an analysis of existing and future cohorts of young people to help areas think through their own challenges in delivering RPA. Stage 2 suggests that areas will need to think through their planning for delivering RPA by setting some clear priorities for action and looking at the gaps in their current offer in terms of both provision and support. Findings from the trial areas suggest they will also need to determine the strategic leadership and governance of RPA within the LA, and think about how they maximise impact from limited resources in future. Both these stages of the process are covered by the ‘ten steps to projecting participation’ which are introduced below. Stages 3, 4 and 5 of the framework present the key building blocks of activities which areas will need to think through. They correlate to the trial themes – with the focus on transition corresponding to activity under the IAG theme, the focus on support mechanisms corresponding to the re-engagement theme and the focus on provision being a large part of what the local solutions theme picked up – and so they are discussed with the findings from each theme.

38. Stage 6 of the framework envisages that communicating the RPA message will underpin everything else involved in planning for RPA. Trial areas found they needed to start communicating the RPA message clearly and early to ensure all partners and stakeholders understand what is involved and buy into the plan to deliver RPA. Continuing to communicate the RPA message is seen by the trial areas as an ongoing priority underpinning everything else that a local area does. Areas also need to think about how best to engage with the full range of partners and stakeholders that will be needed to make RPA a success. This includes partners across the LA and outside, education and training providers as well as employers. Again there are some important lessons from how the trials have gone about this for other areas to consider.

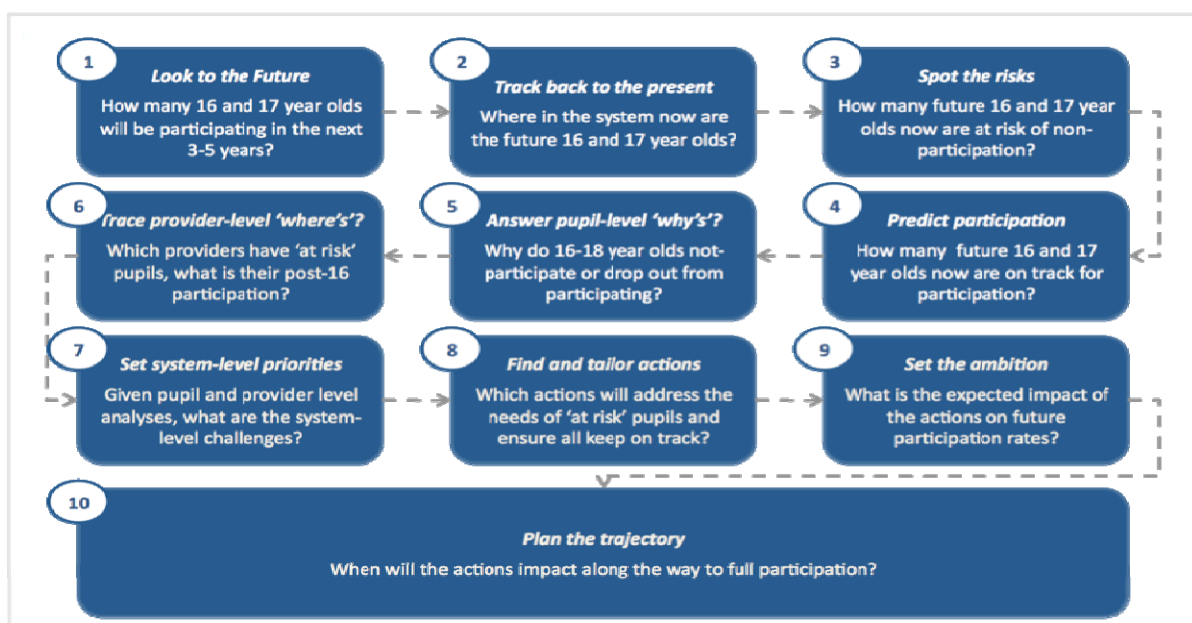
Understanding the cohort

39. One of the most important lessons learned during the Phase 1 trial, was the importance of areas really understanding the cohorts they were dealing with, and taking the time to use the variety of data and evidence available to them, to analyse the different elements of this cohort to understand the challenges and barriers they would face locally in achieving full participation. This conclusion has been reinforced by the experience of trial areas during Phase 2. Nearly all of the trial areas in Phase 2 have undertaken some form of more detailed data analysis to better understand their cohorts. It was a key reason why many of the areas new to Phase 2 made such a strong start to the trial.

40. However, during the evaluation, although the evaluation team identified lots of good individual examples of data analysis which were helping local areas to build a better understanding of their local RPA cohorts, none of the areas had, as yet, developed a fully comprehensive picture of their future RPA cohorts and understood fully the risks of non-participation for each subsequent cohort. So the evaluation team took all of the individual examples and practice which had been seen during the trials and put them together in a series of steps to project participation – see Figure 1.5 below.

Figure 1.5 The ten steps to projecting participation

The ten steps to projecting participation



41. The evaluation team intends that this series of steps can be used by both the trials and other local areas to think about where they already have the data and analysis they need and where they might need to do more work. The first set of steps, steps 1-6 in the diagram above, have a focus on the use of data and analysis. The second set covers steps 7-10 – which are introduced in the Determining Local Priorities and Setting the Ambition and Planning the Trajectory sections below. They focus on how areas can set themselves clear local priorities and establish trajectories to 2013 and 2015. Steps 1-6 and 7-10 are explained in more detail in the published tools ‘Projecting Participation – Part One: Understanding the Cohort’ and ‘Part Two: Determining local priorities’.

42. The 10 steps have been tested with all of the trial areas to test where they feel they are strongest and weakest against each one. Overall the pattern that emerged was that areas felt most confident about the early steps in the process which involve projecting their future populations and making risk assessments of young people’s likelihood of becoming NEET, but least confident about translating this into clear trajectories showing which of the actions and interventions they were proposing to take was going to increase the numbers in each cohort who will go on to participate.

43. In testing the 10 steps, areas have emphasised that whilst they recognise the value of this detailed and comprehensive analysis in better understanding their priorities and challenges, getting this right requires significant upfront investment in making sure they have the information flows and data needed, and will often require the collaboration of partners and providers. In particular, areas are concerned about the challenge of maintaining the CCIS database locally without the resources which have been devoted to this previously by the Connexions Service. Although local authorities have been given a clear responsibility for this going forward, some areas have expressed concerns as to whether they will have the resource and expertise needed to maintain the same level of information as Connexions has been able to provide previously.

44. Some of the trial areas have already taken the 10 steps and commissioned a detailed analysis of their own local data against them. In East Sussex for example they completed this analysis towards the end of the trial to help give them a better picture of their overall trajectory to 2013 and 2015 and what it might mean in numerical terms for different local providers. In Cumbria they completed the headline analysis for each of their five ‘travel to learn areas’ and have sent it to each of the partnerships to discuss further and debate what it means for their own local priorities going forward. In Greater Manchester’s 10 LAs and across London’s 33 boroughs they are debating the potential for this type of analysis to take place across a sub-region or region, especially given the extent of learner movement across their LA boundaries, and both are keen to explore this further in the next phase of locally-led delivery projects.

Determining local priorities

45. Having completed the detailed analysis in steps 1 to 6 of the above, steps 7 to 10 talk about how local areas can set themselves clear area-wide or system-level priorities; identify and tailor actions that will address these priorities; estimate their potential impact to set trajectories to 2013 and 2015; and then track and monitor progress in implementation against these trajectories. Steps 7 and 8 explain the process by which local areas can determine their own local priorities.

46. For many of the trial areas the priorities to focus on emerged from the completion of their initial data analysis. For example Derby, had completed an in-depth analysis of the reasons for young

people dropping out at age 17 in Phase 1, which gave them an ongoing focus on the issues of transition between level 1 and level 2 courses post-16 and drop out from level 3 courses during Phase 2. They were attempting to address these issues with a concerted focus on the quality of post-16 IAG and a new managed moves protocol for anyone leaving a course early. Having implemented these strategies, Derby has subsequently identified that the real priority for them is to address the issue not of early leavers from courses, but what happens to young people who successfully complete a course after one year but who then do not transition on to new provision.

47. In other areas particular cohorts or groups of young people have stood out from the data and cohort analysis as being an obvious priority for delivering RPA. The most frequent group to emerge in Phase 2 has been those who are either pregnant or are looking after children. Four of the trial areas – Blackpool, Ealing, Newcastle and Worcestershire – although very different areas in character and size – all identified this group as one of their top priorities for reducing the number of young people who are NEET and successfully achieving full participation. The other top priority group identified by the Phase 2 trials has been LLDD learners. We shall look at trial areas' strategies for intervention and support for both of these groups in more detail later in this report.

48. One other method of identifying potential priorities for a local area is an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the current provision on offer and the gaps which exist. For example, in a number of the trial areas, an obvious priority emerged from looking at the data and patterns of young people NEET in an area who needed foundation learning or level 1 and 2 courses. In Wandsworth, for example, they identified a number of areas within the borough where no level 1 or 2 provision was on offer despite having high numbers of young people who were NEET without level 2 living in these areas. Having identified this gap they are now working with local training providers and the college to see how it could be filled.

49. Once an area has identified its own local priorities from the analysis of their current and future cohorts and/or by mapping their current provision and identifying any obvious gaps, they will need to decide what action to take to tackle the issues and barriers which they may have identified. The trial areas had done this as part of their proposals for the trial – their decision to focus on one particular theme was informed by their own analysis and evidence. But for other local areas thinking about RPA they will need to do this by identifying priorities across all of the themes and there may be issues which cut across them.

50. There is no hard and fast rule for how best to identify which actions will address the identified local needs and issues. The work of the trials provides other areas with a list of potential actions and interventions that they might think about implementing. Steps 7 and 8 above suggest one mechanism for mapping these potential actions on a matrix of ease of implementation and potential impact. An area will obviously be interested in actions which have high impact, but they are also likely to need a mix of easy and hard to implement actions – or in other words some quick wins and actions which will take longer to bear fruit. The trial areas which have made most progress during Phase 2 had exactly this combination of the two.

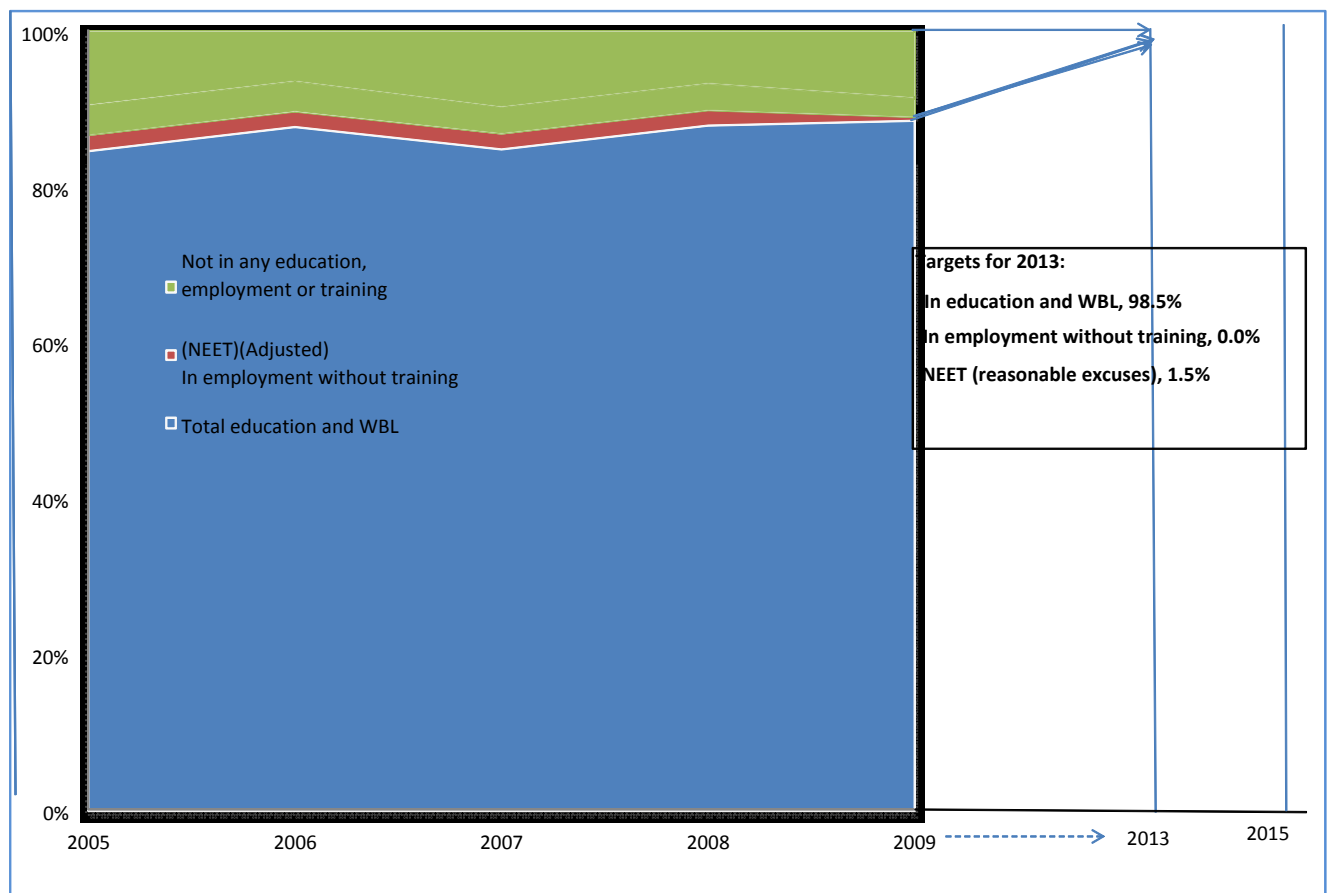
Setting the ambition and planning the trajectory

51. Finally, steps 9 and 10 of the projecting participation process suggest that, at this stage of their planning, areas are likely to need to set their level of ambition for full participation by determining

the numbers of young people they expect to have a 'reasonable excuse' at any one time, form some estimation of the potential impact of their actions and set themselves clear trajectories for 2013 and 2015. This is one of the areas which the trial areas have found hardest, in particular attempting to estimate the impact of different interventions and actions requires them to try and isolate the impact of different cross-cutting initiatives, many of which have had the same target groups.

52. As a result, at the moment most of the trajectories which trial areas have set simply draw a straight line between the current level of participation and their estimate of what full participation will be. For example, in the trajectory below, which one of the areas has set for 16 year old participation by 2013, the area has used a starting assumption that around 1.5% of 16 year olds may have a reasonable excuse not to participate (although they have more work to do to develop when reasonable excuse will apply – see paragraph 112-115). The trajectory predicts that participation will rise from the current level of 85% participation to 98.5% in education and training by 2013.¹ This figure includes full-time or part-time education, WBL or employment with some form of training.

Figure 1.6 Example Trajectory for 16 year old participation by 2013



¹ Note the level of participation that will count as full participation has not been centrally defined. Areas will need to judge for themselves how many young people they expect may have a reasonable excuse at any one time and use this to determine the level of full participation they are expecting to achieve by 2013 and 2015. See paragraph 112-115 in this report for further discussion of how the trial areas have attempted to classify when reasonable excuse might apply to young people.

53. Having set their ambition for 2013 and 2015, the next challenge for local areas in planning their trajectories is to estimate what potential impact interventions and support might have on future numbers of young people participating so they can start to predict by how much they think participation rates will increase year on year. This will tell them what shape trajectory they should be expecting to see – in most cases one would not expect this to be a straight line. If actions are likely to produce a number of quick wins they should be expecting to see a big increase in participation rates quickly, followed by a slower trajectory as they move towards 2013 and 2015 as other actions take time to produce results (for example due to focusing on younger age groups or because they are dealing with the hardest to engage). In other areas, they may already be in this position and therefore expect to have little immediate impact on participation rates with most or all of the impact coming in the period 2013-15.

54. Knowing the expected shape of the trajectory to full participation is important for an area because it allows them to know where they will need to be at different stages of the trajectory to achieve full participation and whether they are on track or not. Setting trajectories in this way allows local areas not only to monitor if they are on track, but to decide what to do if they are not and to think about whether new actions are needed or whether they need to change or refine the implementation of existing actions.

Governance and leadership

55. The Phase 1 evaluation report commented on the effectiveness of different governance arrangements and the importance of having a strong enough focus on RPA in an area's governance structures. On the whole, issues of governance have largely been addressed by areas in Phase 2. Where areas have made a deliberate change in governance structures to give greater prominence to RPA, as they had in Wandsworth for example, this has had a big impact. It has also led to stronger engagement of providers in many areas. In Ealing, for instance, they used the 14-19 partnership as a mechanism for engaging all schools in a debate about RPA implementation and strategy.

56. The key test of governance arrangements remains whether RPA is seen as a significant strategic priority which brings together the range of work across the LA, not just in the traditional 14-19 or post-16 policy responsibilities, but also encompassing much of the other work that sits within school improvement and wider youth services. Although overall governance arrangements had improved significantly during Phase 2, there are some areas where RPA is still seen as too much of a separate activity or strand within 14-19 or where the governance is still composed of too many separate groups, for example, NEETs, IAG, 14-19 and RPA that are all doing a very similar job.

57. There is some evidence from at least two of the trial areas that as hard decisions have had to be made about priorities in LAs, RPA has become less of a strategic priority and more an operational matter. In these cases the level of resource devoted to RPA has been significantly reduced and there are questions about how effectively it will be joined up with other services across the LA in future.

58. The trials have been led by people from different parts of the LA and outside. In Plymouth, East Sussex and Ealing for example, the trial leads were all located within the school improvement service, which had significant advantages in terms of links with schools. In other areas like Swindon and Worcestershire the trial leads have come from the Integrated Youth Services side of the LA. This has significant advantages for joining up with the range of services across the LA that need to be

engaged to implement RPA. In other areas the trial leads have come from a range of different backgrounds – with 14-19 policy responsibility or responsibilities for Alternative Provision – or from outside of the LA often within Connexions.

59. One issue that has emerged is that where the trial has been led by Connexions there has not always been the engagement and commitment from the LA that is needed. In part, this has been caused by the uncertainty during the trial about the future of Connexions, but it also appears that in these areas the reporting arrangements and governance of the trial to the 14-19 partnership have been insufficient to really galvanise the wider LA to take action, and therefore relationships with providers have not always been as strong as needed. These areas will need to look again at their sub-partnership structures and governance to ensure they have the right working relationships and governance at a more operational level. In some trial areas links have also been made with wider LA governance arrangements through the local economic partnership or LA regeneration teams but this is something that all local authorities should be encouraged to think about further.

60. Much greater emphasis has been given to sustaining the impact of activity beyond the life of the trial during Phase 2 than there was during Phase 1. This is undoubtedly, in part, driven by the constraints on resources which local authorities are facing. But it has also been driven by the realisation in many trial areas that the trial and RPA more generally cannot be managed effectively by a single trial lead acting alone or by bringing in a temporary resource from outside of the LA. Whilst this was helpful to a number of areas to get activity under way quickly in Phase 1, many of those areas have taken a very different approach this time with an overarching trial lead delegating day to day operational responsibility for trial activities to members of their teams. It has also involved much greater involvement of partners from across the LA and outside.

Case Study: Newcastle's trial is helping to spread responsibility for implementation of RPA

In Newcastle the trial lead has engaged the local Education Business Partnership to manage the engagement work underway with employers, the LA's LLDD team are leading an individualised budget pilot, assistant heads responsible for Alternative Provision have been engaged to lead activity with the at risk of NEET cohort in Year 9, and the Foundation Learning lead has been engaged to review gaps in provision across the city.

61. In a similar way to the example from Newcastle above, in Greater Manchester the trial lead has stepped back from managing an individual work strand to take a much greater oversight and planning role and ensure all work strands are on track to deliver. The trial lead is also seeking to widen and engage membership of each strand more actively to sustain activity beyond the life of the trial and in case any of the trial leads leave for any reason. Swindon, Plymouth, East Sussex and Cumbria are also areas who have deliberately shifted their management of the trial in a similar way.

62. In terms of assessing the sustainability of the activity undertaken during the trials, there are many examples of where activity undertaken during the trial has already helped to clarify and establish processes and systems that will last well beyond the trial. For example, in Ealing their work on data and analysis of their cohort has helped to establish more robust analysis of the NEET cohort,

which will now be embedded through their 14-19 governance structures. In Worcestershire the thinking that has been done on the role of the participation advisors, support panels and learning and support agreements, all has the potential to lead to longer lasting systems and processes beyond the trial. In other areas the sustainability of the trial will be demonstrated by the evidence base about what priorities and interventions should receive greatest support in future.

Communicating the RPA message

63. Trial areas have communicated widely during the trials with the full range of stakeholders – young people, parents/carers, providers, employers, LA staff and councillors, voluntary bodies, school and college governors – and using a variety of different means including; workshops; existing websites and information services; using champions amongst young people themselves, their parents/carers, other LA staff, employers and others. As part of the focus on improving the quality of IAG for young people the trial areas have all developed their own materials and clear messages aimed at dispelling some of the myths that still exist around RPA such as ‘RPA means you have to stay on at school’, ‘RPA makes it much more likely my school will get a new sixth form’ or ‘young people will get locked up if they don’t stay on in future’. Whilst other local areas will want to think about and plan their own local communication strategies, all of the communications materials and resources which the RPA trials have produced will be available to other local areas to help them.

Engagement of providers

64. The Phase 1 evaluation report emphasised the importance of using the trials as a means of engaging with a wide range of providers to galvanise the local system around the ambition of raising participation. This has proved more difficult in many respects during Phase 2 for many trial areas. Not surprisingly, given the areas’ uncertainty over whether RPA was going to be government policy or not, many areas were reluctant to communicate with providers or to push on with messages about RPA until the policy position was clear. As a result the engagement with providers was often limited in the period between May and October 2010 and often related only to those providers directly engaged in trial activity.

65. Despite the challenges faced in engaging providers in this period, there were some successful examples of their involvement in the 14-19 partnership and governance arrangements. A number of areas – Plymouth, Ealing, Wandsworth, Hertfordshire and Cumbria for example – have taken steps to increase provider engagement and representation in their governance arrangements and this seems to have been successful in raising awareness of, and engagement with, RPA.

66. In areas where providers are directly involved and engaged with trial activity they are very well engaged and committed to implementing activity. One concern which the evaluation team had about some areas is that trial activity has been limited to a very small number of providers and there is as yet no convincing plan for how the lessons of the trial will be rolled out to other providers or how they might be engaged in taking action forward beyond the trial. Where some areas have tried to do this the response from providers not directly involved in the trial has been disappointing so far.

67. Some trials – for instance Lambeth and Hertfordshire – have held conferences to which they have invited all of their providers and they have had a good attendance. A number of providers were also engaged in other areas of the country through the Learning Visits process. One lesson from

these events was a need to think more carefully about how to present the messages and lessons from the trials to a provider audience. There is a need to develop a stronger narrative about what it is exactly that providers need to do or do differently for RPA – as well as helping them to understand the bigger strategic picture LA-wide.

68. The Phase 1 evaluation commented on the challenges of engaging schools in the work to implement RPA given the many other pressures and challenges facing them. Many of the trial areas feel this challenge has been made more difficult by recent policy changes – the opportunity for many of the most successful schools to become Academies and the greater autonomy for all schools envisaged in the White Paper have raised question marks in many of the trial areas over schools' ongoing willingness to engage collaboratively on RPA. However, areas are encouraged by the messages about accountability measures for schools and the focus on post-16 progression and achievement in the White Paper. They are keen to understand in detail how this will work and when it will be implemented. The development of RONIs has already proved a useful tool for engaging some schools in thinking harder about what happens to their cohort post-16 and one proxy measure of schools engagement with the RPA agenda going forward would be for local areas to monitor how many of them are actively using a RONI of some form.

69. There has been a noticeably stronger engagement with Special Schools in many areas during Phase 2 than there was during Phase 1. In part this has come from the focus on the LLDD group of post-16 learners as one of the most critical groups to better engage to deliver RPA. The report will look later at the specific activity that has been trialled to target and support this group, but one theme which has emerged from the work is that historically, in many areas, there has been insufficient focus on the post-16 progression rates of special schools, many of whom are often only 11-16 schools. In a number of these special schools in trial areas it was their own realisation that many of their young people were not going on to succeed when they left which had first raised the issue of how better to support their post-16 progression. And it had also highlighted the fact that often the special school did not have sufficiently strong relationships with the post-16 providers where their learners would be going.

70. The other groups of providers critical to successfully implementing RPA – colleges and work-based learning providers – have typically been seen as more likely to be engaged with, and supportive of RPA. In fact a number of trial areas in Phase 2 have commented on the challenge of engaging with their FE and sixth form colleges whom they had expected to be more engaged with the issue of how to ensure the young people on their roll successfully complete and progress. They have identified a number of barriers to greater college engagement – of which, the most frequently mentioned is the disincentive provided by some elements of the funding system which are seen to discourage them from accepting or retaining certain types of learners. In addition many of the trial areas have commented that they have found it very difficult to identify and engage with the right level of person within the college – most engagement to date has been at an operational rather than strategic level and this makes it difficult to co-ordinate activity across what are typically very large organisations. Overall they believe that one of the biggest challenges to be overcome with some colleges is a greater sense of responsibility for what happens to their young people when they leave. They believe this is a message that needs to be given at a national level by government and sector organisations such as the Association of Colleges (AoC).

Engagement of employers

71. Employers are also critical to successfully implementing RPA and a number of trial areas have made good progress during Phase 2 in engaging with this group. In Plymouth, for example, their focus and work with the JWT cohort has led to the successful engagement of a number of employers in offering Apprenticeship placements. In Hertfordshire they have also had significant success with targeting big employers to offer a greater number of apprenticeships working with their local economic partnership and the National Apprenticeship Service. A number of areas have successfully engaged employers through their governance structures as well with both East Sussex and Cumbria successfully engaging them through their local Chambers of Commerce. And in Newcastle the local Education Business Partnership has successfully taken the lead in producing a range of excellent materials for communicating with local employers about RPA.

72. The trial areas have taken different approaches to who is best placed to lead the work of engaging employers. Whilst some have found that having an ex-head lead the engagement helps with their credibility with employers, others have opted for bodies that already have credibility with employers and are able to take the basic RPA message and translate it simply and convincingly for employers. What is clear from the experience of the trial is that whoever does this job the role requires careful planning and cannot simply be led by someone who does not have the time to build up relationships.

Findings from the trial specific themes

IAG and supporting transitions

A focus on supporting transitions

73. The issue of transitions throughout the secondary phase of education and into post-16 learning has been given a lot more attention in Phase 2. In particular there has been a lot more activity focused on the KS3 age group as well as a focus on supporting transition between pre- and post-16 provision. In part this is because areas were encouraged to focus on this theme by the DfE, but it is also the result of areas' own analysis and engagement with schools and other providers which have identified transition as a key issue. A number of areas have commented on the level of attention given to primary-to-secondary school transition issues in the past, and believe the same attention now needs to be given to transitions at other key points in young people's education. A number of the trial areas have started to map their planned RPA interventions and activity against the key transition points in young people's lives – see the case study from Ealing below.

74. Staffordshire adopted a similar approach to Ealing in working with a small number of their secondary and primary schools to map their own activity. They have produced a 'Supporting Choices' booklet which identifies the range of support that should be available to young people at each age group from their school and from other agencies. They think this could be used not only in conversations with schools but also with parents/carers to set expectations for what support young people should be receiving or should be able to ask for if they are facing difficulties. They have also used it to map the overlaps with activity under other initiatives like 'AimHigher' which is helpful as areas look to prioritise what activity to maintain as central funding is withdrawn for these programmes.

Case Study: Ealing's mapping of activity to support transitions and engagement of young people

Ealing have developed the tool which is shown in Figure 1.7 below as a way of engaging schools in a conversation about what activities they already had in place for their KS3 cohort and where there might be gaps. They asked schools to map how they identify and monitor cohorts of young people who needed additional support, what support they put in place in terms of curriculum, IAG and personal support and whether it was delivered on a targeted or universal basis. It might also be used as a way of identifying the support for specific vulnerable groups who had been identified as a priority by an area's data analysis. Ealing have found this such a productive conversation with the schools they trialled it with that they now intend to roll this out across the borough to have conversations with all schools about their targeted and universal support. They have also begun to use the tool as a mechanism for mapping the range of support on offer at a LA level as well so they can begin to build a more strategic picture of all of the different support in place to support transitions. This can then help them to identify gaps, priorities and overlaps in the support being provided. For example, whilst they have identified a wide range of support activity which takes place in Year 7, there seems to be much less happening at Years 8 and 9.

Figure 1.7 Ealing's approach to tackling disengagement through a whole school approach

Activity	Year 6 7 Transition	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pass Survey Transition Plan SEN info Tutor meetings Early transfer forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CATS tests Attendance SEN reviews Behaviour Att/Progress CAF panel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connexions Screening 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progression steps not in place No applications made 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KS4 results
Monitoring		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress tracking Annual Review Social service reports 					
Universal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bridging project Taster Days Transition Units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WRL activities Activities week Drop down day Extra curricular activities 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early KS4 Start for all or some subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Off-site voc. Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Key Stage 5 start 	
IAG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Induction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Induction Parents events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mini Options Process CEIAG events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Options Process 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Options fair Connexions Interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sept Guarantee
Personal Support		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tutor system Vertical tutor group system 					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer Bridging Courses
Targeted		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intensive num & lit support Inclusion Unit At risk group 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted extended work exp Off-site engagement programme 		
IAG		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business Mentoring 					
Personal Support		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning Mentors Ed Psych Home visits ECM Panel 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cnxs Support 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sept Guarantee

75. In another trial area there was also an interesting debate about how schools might choose to use the additional pupil premium funding to support their at risk cohorts and whether there was the potential for this to be joined to activity which they might want to see from an RPA perspective. Obviously this would depend on the extent of overlap between the two cohorts but one might reasonably expect those pupils receiving the pupil premium to have a higher risk of non-participation given what we know about the link between socio-economic status and ongoing participation in education. There would also need to be a debate about whether this funding is best used individually to provide greater one to one support to young people or whether pooling the funding might allow for alternative support mechanisms or provision to be put in place.

Implementation of local IAG strategies

76. As part of looking at how they best support young people to move through the system a number of trial areas have had a focus on improving the overall quality of IAG amongst providers or targeted individual providers with poor post-16 progression or specific groups or cohorts whom the data has shown to be in need of additional advice and guidance. One of the most effective levers available to local areas in this work has been the use of individual provider audits or quality mark assessments to enable them to assess the quality of IAG provision amongst their providers, and to decide where support is most needed. Derby, Ealing, Lambeth and Staffordshire have all made use of these audits and have produced overall assessments of each provider's strengths and weaknesses as well as identifying common issues which all need to work on together. The challenge now is to ensure all providers engage with the issues or concerns which have been raised.

77. One of the biggest challenges in the successful implementation of local IAG strategies going forward is seen to be the ongoing engagement of providers with this work once they take on responsibility themselves in delivering their duty for impartial careers education. Many areas are concerned that providers will no longer engage in future in quality assurance or audit processes and it will be difficult for them to make an accurate assessment of the quality of IAG being offered. More thought will be needed here as to how areas use the data about progression in future to raise concerns or issues about the IAG being provided to young people. The other major challenge identified to the successful implementation of area wide IAG strategies is the transition from the Connexions service to the National Careers Service.

78. The issues with the transition from Connexions which are causing most concern are: the potential gap in services that may exist between the ending of the Connexions service and the start of a new National Careers Service; the potential lack of resource for tracking and recording the destinations of young people and what happens to them when they drop out despite the requirements on LAs to maintain the local CCIS database; and the intensive targeted support which is required by young people most in need. Some areas have already started to address these issues and concerns during the trial. In Swindon, for example, they had already taken the decision to end the Connexions service and are now debating how best they integrate this resource with the resources for wider integrated youth support.

Delivery of IAG to parents/carers and families

79. Trial areas have found the engagement with parents/carers a particular challenge during the trials. A number of different approaches have been tried – two approaches in particular stand out as

having had some successes. In Lambeth they have trained a small group of ten Parent/Carer Ambassadors to speak to other parent/carer groups about the implications of RPA for their children. Lambeth recruited these Parent/Carer Ambassadors from local schools, brought them into the borough for information sessions on RPA and how they might be able to answer questions that parents/carers may have about RPA and then have sent them out to talk to groups of parents/carers in other schools. Lambeth are now planning to train more Parent/Carer Ambassadors.

Case Study: Engagement with parents/carers in Plymouth

Plymouth approach to engaging parents/carers was both universal and targeted. They produced a leaflet with simple basic factual information for parents/carers – from parents'/carers' surveys they knew this was what parents/carers wanted. And they used parent/carer forums to help design the material and get the language right. The leaflet has been distributed to parents/carers through schools and partner agencies. Other work has been more targeted at particular groups of hard to engage parents/carers through Parent Support Advisers in schools. For example in one school an options event was held specifically for parents/carers of pupils with English as an additional language, in advance of the normal Year 9 options evening. The event was tailored to address specific barriers around language, the system, esteem and aspiration, culture of work versus education. Parents/carers were invited into the school personally with their children. Although relatively small numbers attended, those that did were very positive and more likely to now engage with mainstream parents'/carers' and options evenings at the school.

80. There has been an ongoing debate during the trials as to how much priority communication with parents and families needs to be given. Some areas have concluded that a better mechanism for engaging with parents/carers is to expose them to different types of provision and/or re-engagement activity that their own children might be involved with, rather than simply trying to explain the implications of RPA or communicate in detail with them. Making basic factual information available to all and providing more focused targeted support to those that need it most such as parents/carers with EAL seems to be the most successful approach emerging from the trials.

IAG for the first two cohorts affected by RPA

81. As noted above, as part of the work on transitions there has been a much stronger focus on the younger cohorts in Key Stage 3 in the Phase 2 trials than there was during Phase 1. It has included a mix of different activity across all year groups from Year 6 to Year 9 which includes the first two cohorts of young people to be affected by RPA. However, there has perhaps been less specific focus or 'Moving Up' activity – activity directed specifically at the first two cohorts to be affected by the RPA legislation - in Phase 2, in part because many areas – particularly those new to the trials – were concerned about giving messages to young people, schools and others at a time of such policy uncertainty.

82. However, a number of areas have produced specific Moving Up materials and activities. These include, for example, a DVD produced by young people for other young people in Wandsworth, a wide bank of materials produced by four of the LAs in the Greater Manchester sub-region and now shared widely across all 10 LAs and a widening participation conference in Hertfordshire which included a focus on RPA.

Raising expectations on providers where post-16 progression is not excellent

83. It was noted in the Phase 1 evaluation report the success which some areas had had by making data about post-16 progression more transparent, and challenging those providers whose progression wasn't good enough. This has continued in Phase 2 – with over half the trial areas having undertaken this type of analysis - although there has been less evidence of areas using this to challenge their providers than might have been expected – with many areas commenting that they still find this very difficult with some providers and they are waiting for a national progression measure to be published before proceeding locally.

84. One example of an area that has had some success on this issue in Phase 2 is Lambeth, who commissioned an external report into their providers' post-16 progression rates and were surprised by the results. The report identified a small number of providers whose progression post-16 was less than excellent. Some of these the LA would have expected based on their pre-16 levels of attainment, but others caused a surprise to the LA because they would not have predicted this based on pre-16 attainment. They are now working together with these schools to review and improve the quality of advice and support being given to young people. Again this demonstrates the importance of understanding the data and using it to challenge providers whose progression is not good enough. It also shows that these will not always be the providers one might expect according to pre-16 attainment which is why areas need to focus on post-16 progression rates separately.

85. Another example is given by the work Plymouth are undertaking to look not just at which providers produce the highest number of NEETs at age 16, but also at how many might start in provision at age 16, subsequently drop out and go on to become NEET by ages 17 and 18. Other areas have commented that they have developed or are developing a similar approach. In some cases the results are similar, for instance it's the same providers who produce the most NEETs at age 16 who produce the most at age 17. But in other areas this has not been the case and a number of schools who would previously have claimed to produce no or few NEETs are actually producing many more when you look at the picture at age 17 and age 18. This is obviously important in terms of the challenge that local areas then need to highlight to these providers and in terms of thinking about the support that needs to be provided.

A focus on key groups who may have specific barriers to participation

86. As noted above, this has been a much greater focus of the trials during Phase 2 than Phase 1, in part because trial areas were asked specifically to consider this issue, but in many cases because it has come from a much more in depth assessment and analysis of local cohorts and the needs of specific groups. As also noted above, the most frequent group to emerge from this analysis in Phase 2 has been those who are either pregnant or are looking after their children, with Blackpool, Ealing, Newcastle and Worcestershire all identifying this group as one of their top priorities for reducing NEET young people and successfully achieving full participation.

87. Given the priority attached to this group of young people in these areas it has been noticeable how little joint thinking or work seems to have taken place previously between teams leading 14-19 activity and the teenage pregnancy strategies in these local areas. As decisions are taken about how to prioritise spending within the early intervention grant funding local areas receive, an obvious priority for these trial areas will be to focus on how they get more impact from their joint efforts to

reduce teenage pregnancy and increase participation. For many other areas it is also likely to be the case that reducing teenage pregnancy – or better dealing with the consequences of it by keeping young women engaged in some form of education and training – is likely to be a key strategy for raising participation.

88. The other main group with a specific set of needs, which has emerged in a number of trial areas, are the LLDD group. There have been a number of different approaches to tackling the challenges of participation for this group of young people. One approach has been taken by Newcastle’s trial which has extended an existing pilot of individualised budgets for these young people to put an even greater emphasis on their participation in some form of education and training. Undertaking this activity made them realise they had a gap in their provision for supporting this group of young people to engage with education and training and they therefore commissioned a new provider to provide specialist additional support in partnership with Connexions.

89. The pilot has already produced a number of case studies, which will be written up as examples to other students and staff in future. It is clear that the individualised budget concept and approach might be applicable for other types of young people who need additional or targeted support. It also reinforces the importance of these young people not simply being placed in a category of ‘reasonable excuse’ and allowed not to participate in some form of education and training just because they have such severe needs. The pilot has encouraged the LA and its partners to constantly ask the question, ‘what would it take for these young people to participate in – or be on a pathway to participating in – some form of education and training?’

Case Study: Transition Mentoring for LLDD young people in Derby and Plymouth

Derby and Plymouth both appointed new ‘transition mentors’ to work alongside LLDD young people during their last months of education at school and in their first few months of education in a new post-16 provider – often a college. The transition mentor engaged in a range of activities with the young person including home visits if there were attendance issues, meetings to discuss progress and options with their parents/carers, many of whom may also have learning difficulties or disabilities, and liaising with connexions Personal Advisers. In both areas this new role has been particularly effective at supporting LLDD learners in managing the post-16 transition – there was evidence for this from the post-16 progression rates of these learners improving significantly on equivalent rates in recent years. In Plymouth the evidence of impact has been so strong they have decided to continue funding the posts for a two year period through the early intervention grant. The key test will also be whether providers, especially colleges, invest in this support in future.

90. The role of ‘transition mentor’ in the above case study was seen as effective because it provided some form of continuity for young people who may struggle to cope with change. There are many initiatives which already try to help LLDD learners manage the transition to colleges – many colleges host open weeks and days before these learners come to help familiarise learners with their new surroundings. Colleges will themselves offer pastoral support and mentoring for such learners once they get there. The key difference in the model above seems to be that the learners know and trust the ‘transition mentor’ because they have worked with them pre-16 as well and they can help them adjust to a very different and new post-16 culture – one transition mentor told the story of a young person who said to them college is very different from school – ‘when I get annoyed and get up and just leave the classroom no one bothers to come and find me and take me back’. The transition

mentors also helped to improve the flow of information from schools to college tutors about these young people, and particularly in the case of special schools seem to have strengthened relationships with colleges.

Re-engagement of 16 and 17 year olds

A common process for those at risk of disengagement

91. The starting point for a number of the trials under this theme has been to develop a much more systematic approach to their work with those at risk of disengagement or who have already disengaged. In particular Swindon's eight step model and six week process of re-engagement, and Worcestershire's staged approach, which is shown in Figure 1.8 below, provide two excellent examples of the type of thinking which local areas will need to do in relation to how to support disengaged young people to deliver RPA.

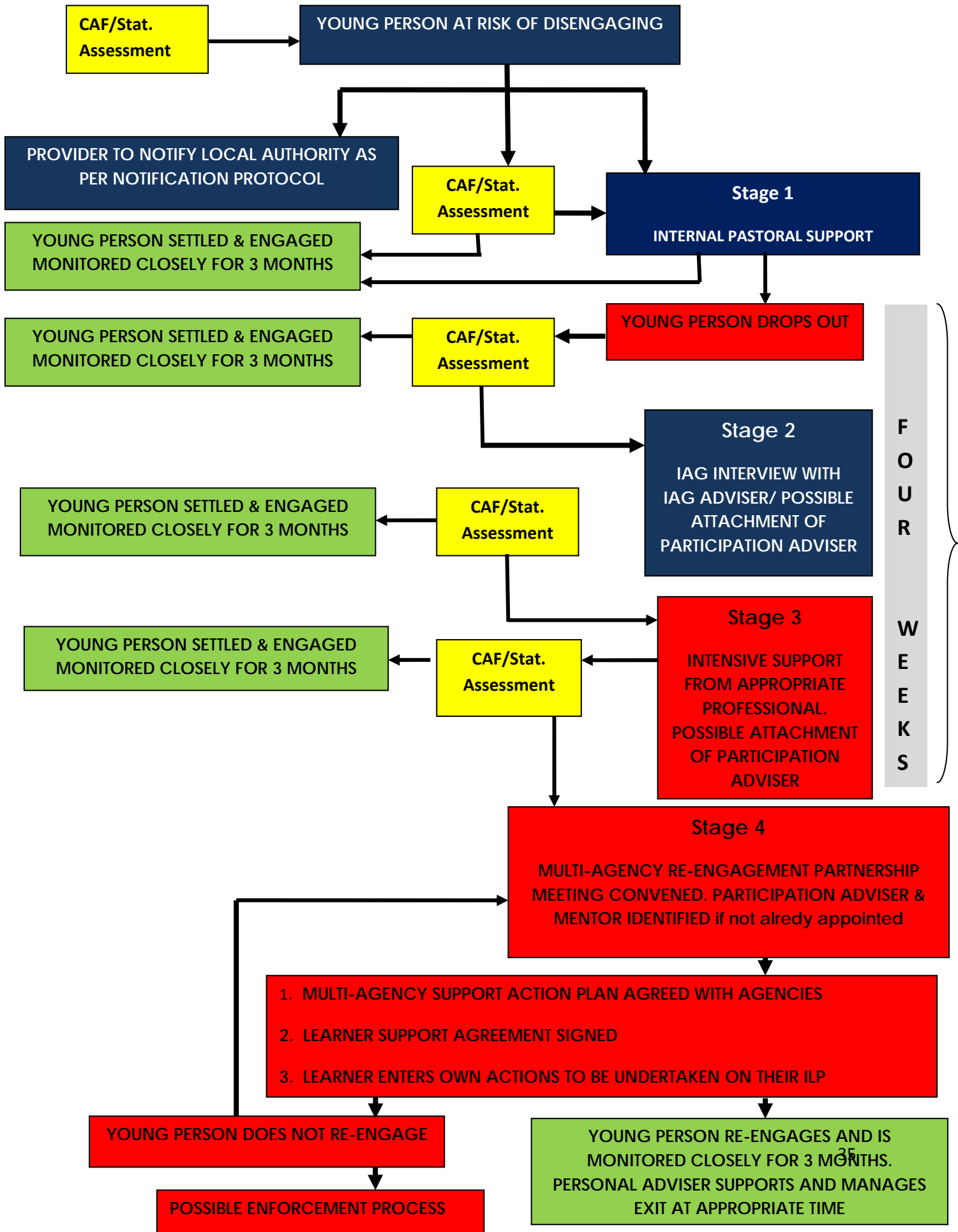
92. What both of these models (and work in other trial areas) have in common is a sequence of stages to the support offered to young people. This process starts with the identification of need – through early identification in a RONI or from providers' own pastoral care systems. It then proceeds to the first stage of intervention in which the young person might be allocated a participation advisor to help them stay in, or support them back into, education or training. Next it moves into a more intensive level of support in which an area may convene some form of panel to try and better join up support across a range of services or test whether the support that has been allocated is working to re-engage young people in education or training. Finally it considers the processes by which the notification from a provider of a young person wanting to drop out works and how to determine if young people have a reasonable excuse not to participate.

93. Although there are many similarities in the approach of the trial areas to this issue, there have been important nuances and differences in their specific strategies for developing early identification systems, the role of the participation advisor and the role of panels which will be discussed in this section of the report. This suggests that although there may be a fairly common overall process for managing this group of learners there will need to be a locally determined approach to the precise mechanisms which areas choose to use.

Early identification of young people at risk of not participating

94. The Phase 1 evaluation report commented on the importance of the work that had been undertaken to develop Risk of NEET indicators (RONIs), and the systematic approach to early identification of young people at-risk of not participating has remained a critical step during Phase 2. This can be measured by the fact that over half of the trial areas already have a RONI or are developing one (five areas have one already and five are in the process of developing one, while six areas don't yet have a RONI or the evaluation team was unsure about their plans to develop one). There have been questions raised during Phase 2 from both the trials and areas outside of the trials about whether a RONI is as important as first thought. The view of the evaluation team is that it remains absolutely critical because it enables areas to focus on asking the right questions and focusing on the right issues. That is why it is one of the key steps in our own data tool which we introduced earlier in this report. Our own view is that the debate over RONIs needs to focus on the question of which indicators to use rather than whether there should be such a measure at all.

Figure 1.8 Worcestershire’s model of support for young people at risk of disengaging



95. Equally however the evaluations team's view is that there should not be a single universal model of a RONI to be applied consistently and uniformly across all LAs. The indicators which areas choose to identify their at-risk of NEET young people will need to be tailored to their own particular circumstances. For example, in an area with a very high number of young people achieving Level 2 by age 16, using achievement at age 16 as a key indicator is unlikely to help identify which young people are most at-risk of dropping out. In contrast, in an area with lower overall rates of attainment, attainment at age 16 may indeed be a very good predictor of the likelihood of non-participation.

96. Whilst it is clearly important that areas spend some time debating the precise indicators that should make up their own RONIs and ideally engage the providers who will use these indicators in that debate, the evaluation team has some concerns that there is too much duplication in the work being undertaken by areas at present to develop their own RONIs and that greater progress would be made by adapting and learning from those RONIs which are already in existence. For example, it seems clear that in all areas attendance is going to be one of the key indicators that will be used to predict non-participation and what needs to be decided is precisely which measure of attendance is to be used.

97. The other important point to make in relation to RONIs is that it is clearly not enough to just have developed a RONI – if areas are going to use it to focus their support and determine priorities then schools will actually have to start using it actively as well. Those areas such as East Sussex who developed their approach to the RONI collaboratively with their schools have made most progress in this respect. And the evaluation team think it would be sensible for other areas that have already developed RONIs, or who are now in the process of doing so, to be tracking and monitoring their use by schools. Areas might even consider reporting on this at their own governance boards as one measure of whether they are on track.

Provider pastoral systems

98. In both Swindon's and Worcestershire's models of support for young people at-risk of disengagement it is important to note that a critical first step in the process should be the providers own pastoral care and support. For many young people, if this is delivered effectively, this should be the only form of support they need to receive to keep them engaged in education and training. It should also be a key mechanism for identifying whether a young person is seriously at-risk of dropping out or not.

99. A number of areas have focused through the trial on the relationship between Connexions services and local providers and trying to improve the transition mentoring and pastoral support that is delivered to young people who are at-risk of dropping out. In areas like the Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull sub-region and Barnsley this has focused on work with local colleges as they are the key post-16 provider. In the Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull sub-region this work with colleges has been informed by analysis of a withdrawer's survey which captures the key reasons why young people drop out. They are identifying a lot of young people who have simply opted for the wrong course through this survey but think that this is difficult to predict accurately other than by close monitoring of attendance data.

100. Other areas have also undertaken assessments of good and bad practice in providers' pastoral care systems. Worcestershire, for example, identified that one of the most common weaknesses in providers who didn't provide good pastoral care was a lack of systems and processes for collecting and analysing attendance data. This was because it prevented them from identifying the young people most at-risk of dropping out and targeting their support in an appropriate way. And other areas have also identified the analysis of attendance data as critical to targeting pastoral support effectively in both colleges and schools. That is why it features as a key measure in many RONIs.

Notification of drop out

101. The importance of providers notifying someone when a young person drops out has always been clear to the successful implementation of RPA and is a requirement through the Education and Skills Act 2008. Many areas felt they have the systems and process in place to ensure this happens. In Worcestershire, however, a simple check by the LA on the process and system for notification revealed that it wasn't actually working in spite of a clear agreement being in place between Connexions and providers about what should happen when a young person drops out. This suggests that all areas might benefit from a regular check on whether the established systems and processes are actually being used as intended – for example it would be relatively simple to track young people who are identified subsequently as having dropped out but who the LA weren't notified about to find out which provider hadn't provided the notification.

Case Study: Derby's Post-16 Managed Moves Protocols

Derby is trialling an alternative to the process of providers simply notifying Connexions or the LA when a young person drops out. This system – known as a managed moves protocol – builds on the arrangements already in place pre-16 where a student cannot be excluded from a school until an alternative suitable placement has been found. It requires a provider to notify the Connexions service when a young person is at-risk of dropping out so an alternative placement can be found, and the young person remains on roll at that institution until this transfer happens. Providers in Derby are positive about the benefits of the new system, saying it had helped them to become more aware of the other provision available in the city. It also helped them to think about whether other provision may be more appropriate for a young person who is on the brink of dropping out.

Developing learning and support agreements

102. The other principal mechanism which was envisaged to share information between providers about young people transitioning pre- to post-16 or between post-16 provision are Learning Support Agreements (LSAs). There has been less thought given to the development of LSAs than some of the other themes in this strand with only two areas really undertaking any work in this area – Coventry and Worcestershire.

103. In Worcestershire they have adopted a small pilot within their trial, which fits into a wider trial to test the interoperability of pre- and post-16 data systems. The focus of this work is to test what information and format will be most usable to post-16 providers and how this can best be captured. They are also clear that a critical role will need to be played by the alternative provision managers in schools who have the mentoring conversation with the young person and will need to make

judgements about what outcomes and information to record. And a critical issue to explore will be around the sensitivity of this data and the willingness of the young person to have this information shared with post-16 providers, for instance if it could then be used to deny them a place at college.

104. In Coventry the LSA is a simple one-page document that agrees the actions the young person and participation adviser will take. They have had to do some thinking to get the fit right as there could have been three overlapping plans – a Connexions one, college and now RPA. They are seeing the LSA as the glue that brings everything together and that it is targeted at the most vulnerable (often who may not have a ‘plan’ via any other route like the college). Connexions personal advisors (seconded as participation advisers) take lead responsibility for the LSA as they have the IAG skills, more generic youth work skills and can link across to CAF and other services.

Approaches to the participation advisor role

105. The first stage of support once a young person has been identified at-risk of disengaging or in need of engagement that was identified in the Swindon and Worcestershire model was the support that might come from a participation advisor – envisaged as a dedicated person focused on the issue of how best to support a young person to participate in education or training. In the thinking that had been done before the start of the trial there was no clear view as to who this person should be or where they should come from – whether it should be a new post or be an existing role with expanded responsibilities.

106. A number of the trial areas under this theme have therefore been developing their thinking about the potential role a participation advisor might play in future and how this might fit with a changed role for personal advisors in future. Different approaches have been taken by different areas – in Swindon, for example, they are seeing the participation advisor role as similar in some ways to the role of the Connexions personal advisor and are clear that it will be performed by whoever is best placed to co-ordinate support according to the particular needs the young person presents. This will be resourced through their current integrated youth support structures.

107. In Worcestershire on the other hand they are seeing the Participation Advisor role as complementary to that of the Connexions Personal Advisor and being used to provide additional intensive support that might be needed if and when a young person reaches the most intensive level of need. They have produced a job description for the participation advisor role and have attempted to quantify the amount of time that would be needed to be spent with each individual young person on the basis of an existing programme to provide intensive support to NEET young people.

108. One issue that has emerged with this model for the participation advisor is the level of resources required to provide this level of support. Worcestershire have started to explore, with the voluntary sector, whether they might be able to provide some of this resource and support but have come up against a number of barriers to their greater involvement. First, many volunteers have fixed commitments and time available to provide support and this is unlikely to match the specific needs of young people who might need this support provided at other times. Second, it will require significant training and development to ensure all of the volunteers are capable of providing an appropriate support offer to young people which means that it is likely to be as expensive a solution as using in house staff. As a result Worcestershire are now exploring whether they could split the

role of Participation Advisor – with the Connexions Personal Advisor playing the formal support role and voluntary providers providing more informal mentoring support.

Creation of support panels and use of the CAF

109. The second stage of support envisioned in Swindon and Worcestershire’s model of support for young people is the creation of some form of a support panel – which brings together a range of different services to discuss the support needs of the young person in question and focuses on the issue of how best to engage or re-engage them in education or training. Again there have been very different approaches to the use of support panels and their fit with the use of the CAF.

110. In Swindon for example they have designed the support panels as the next stage in an ongoing process which includes a prior CAF assessment and panel. The support panel’s role is then to check on the conclusions of the CAF panel and ensure the actions that have been recommended are being implemented or to address any additional barriers which are now being faced. In Barnsley the CAF is also integrated and is shared with the panel although the panel actually takes place on the school site and has a much greater provision focus than a typical CAF panel would. Barnsley felt they have had greater impact with the use of panels to date pre-16 rather than post-16.

111. In Worcestershire, on the other hand, they have identified the need for support panels to take place when young people have not been subject to a CAF assessment or panel but when a similar multi-disciplinary approach is judged to be necessary. This is the most intensive element in a series of stages of support to young people who have dropped out, with support from a personal advisor and the attachment of a participation advisor being tried first, and the personal advisor convening a multi-agency meeting as and when necessary. In Wandsworth, in contrast, they have decided to use their existing CAF panels as a mechanism for engaging in discussions about individual young people but have decided there is no need for either a further stage in the process or an alternative route for young people who are not subject to a CAF assessment.

Identification of reasonable excuse

112. The final issue which areas have been considering under this theme is one of the most important and will need to be decided on by other areas at the very start of their planning for RPA because it determines what level of participation they should be aiming for. That is the definition of a ‘reasonable excuse’ for not participating and typically how many young people in an area might be expected to have a ‘reasonable excuse’ at any one time. As important, given the moral purpose which lies behind RPA, is also the question of how best an area can continue to support and engage with young people who might have a reasonable excuse at a certain time so that ultimately, when they are ready and able to do so, they might be re-engaged in education and training as quickly as possible.

113. There has been a lot of work and thinking about the concept of reasonable excuse undertaken by the trial areas to date. Blackpool made some early progress in defining the different categories of young people they expect might fit this definition and they produced this list after extensive consultation with providers and other stakeholders. But they still have more work to do to define the length of time they would expect a young person in any of these categories to have a reasonable excuse for and how they would identify when a reasonable excuse no longer applies.

114. Other areas have been more cautious about developing the use of a reasonable excuse because they are concerned about the expectation this sets about these young people not having to do everything possible to find a way of engaging with education and training. For example, two groups were identified earlier in this report that many areas had identified would be a priority for them to increase participation – teenage parents and learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. Many young people in these groups might be seen to have a ‘reasonable excuse’ not to participate on the surface but, with the right provision and further support, advice and guidance, many can make a much quicker return to some form of education and training than would otherwise be expected.

Case Study: Reasonable excuse in Worcestershire

In Worcestershire they have concluded there are only two groups of young people within the seven categories they initially identified who they would typically expect to have a reasonable excuse for some amount of time. The first is the group of young people who are homeless and either sleeping on the streets or ‘sofa surfing’ because they believe the first priority must be to find these young people stable accommodation, and then they can successfully participate again. The second group is those young people who are terminally ill, who they judge should be allowed to choose for themselves whether they continue participating or not. For all of the other categories – teen parents, those with cultural barriers, other medical or mental health issues, substance abuse and young carers they think there should be no automatic assumption that these issues should stop someone from participating and it will need to be considered on a case by case basis. They are therefore expecting the numbers having a reasonable excuse to be very small.

115. Further work will be needed both at a local and national level to debate not just when ‘reasonable excuse’ might apply, but also to be absolutely clear what level of constraints have to be in place for these young people not to be capable of participating. Areas will also need to think through the processes and systems that will be needed to a) help remove these constraints and b) know when they have been removed and when the expectation of participation in education and training should be in place again. Otherwise there is a real risk that once a young person is said to have a reasonable excuse they will be allowed to stay there indefinitely and be forgotten about even if their barriers to participation have been removed.

Local solutions

116. The focus of this theme of trial activity was much less specific than the other two areas of work and areas were encouraged to focus on a range of issues that they felt were critical to their own local delivery. As such, much of the evidence from trial areas under this theme has already been captured elsewhere in the report. But two specific issues did emerge which were unique to these trial areas and which relate to the third building block of activity which was identified as key to planning for RPA in the overarching framework at the start of this report. Both of these issues relate to provision – and, specifically, how to fill any gaps in provision which an area’s provision mapping, data analysis and/or feedback from learners might tell them exist.

Engaging employers in RPA delivery including for the JWT cohort

117. The first of these issues relates to the cohort of young people who are in JWT who areas want to engage in Apprenticeships or other forms of training alongside employment options. Engaging with employers is critical to meeting the needs of this cohort and there has been lots of effective practice in working with employers during Phase 2. Two different examples particularly stand out as exemplars which other areas should be able to learn from.

Case Study: Converting young people in Jobs Without Training into Apprenticeships in Plymouth

This work built on work previously undertaken as part of the Learning Agreement Pilot for JWT conversion to Apprenticeships. The focus is on micro business – 80% of businesses are small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Plymouth. They have used a private company who work with SMEs – Enterprise Plymouth Ltd (EPL) – as they needed people who understand micro businesses and the barriers to them taking on young people. Enterprise Plymouth help SMEs get insurance, protocols (contracts) in place as well as getting the culture and attitude of employers right for engaging young people. The process of placing a young person involves a three monthly review cycle involving Connexions with the young person and the employer with EPL to check everything is working. They have used CCIS to help target the work by sector, demand and identifying those employers who previously took on young people in jobs with or without training. Key to their success is that it has been employer led with strong business engagement. EPL are credible with employers and are major influencers through their contacts and networks.

Case Study: Engaging employers in delivering RPA in Newcastle

The second example is the work which Newcastle has undertaken through their trial to produce a range of materials and information for employers. This work has been led by the local Education Business Partnership (EBP) who, as a private charity, have been commissioned by the LA to undertake this on their behalf. The big advantage of using the EBP is that they already have the contacts and networks to disseminate the information about RPA to employers. They have also helped to design a powerful leaflet specifically targeted at employers, which has taken the RPA message and simplified it into language that they know employers will engage with and respond to.

118. In both of the case studies above, the common feature is the use of a third party with credibility with employers and the level of thought and planning that has gone into the engagement with employers. Whilst LAs or their partners may feel they have the capacity to manage this type of engagement with employers themselves it is vital that if they do so they plan it in detail and test the appropriateness of their messages and information with employer contacts first.

Developing new provision and expanding existing opportunities

119. The second type of example of how areas have attempted to fill provision gaps has been through the development of new and innovative models of provision. In Wandsworth, for example, they have worked closely with an outstanding special school to develop creative and innovative examples of apprenticeships where the young person gets their first contract on completion in the school (business support in the office, catering in canteen, estate management, etc). These young people then also act as role models for future cohorts of young people in the school.

120. In other areas progress has continued to be made in pulling together the range of existing provision that is already out there into an easily accessible catalogue which both young people and their advisers can access to determine what provision might be most appropriate. Newcastle and Hertfordshire have both continued to make progress in developing these Alternative Provision catalogues. In many cases this has been strengthened and helped by the development of Foundation Learning and will now need to be able to fit with its successor.

121. One issue, which several trial areas raised with the evaluation team, is the ongoing difficulty they find in commissioning suitable new provision when it is needed. Many were feeling more optimistic that this would be made easier by local authorities having responsibility for commissioning themselves but, with the YPLA (Young People's Learning Agency) retaining responsibility for commissioning all post-16 provision, areas are doubtful about how they will ensure they get the right sort of new, flexible local offers in place. The issue is also a local one with at least two of the trial areas struggling to persuade existing successful providers to expand their provision into areas with obvious identified need.

122. Local areas also need to do more to link their own analysis of their future cohorts to the question of whether they have sufficient provision of the right type and in the right place as suggested earlier in this report in the data tool. Although some areas have completed this sort of detailed provision mapping – often as part of their own commissioning plans – others have not and it is a critical step in the process of ensuring that areas have thought through any provision gaps which they face now, or will face in the future, given the expected changes in the RPA cohorts coming through. In some LAs even where this analysis has taken place it has been carried out by the team responsible for places planning and has been insufficiently joined up with the planning for delivery of RPA.

123. A number of areas have also identified issues with learners falling between different levels of qualifications – for example those that already have a level 2 but who are not ready yet for a full level 3. Quite often areas are seeing these young people progress into partial level 3 courses – by studying say two AS levels – but with no obvious progression route onto a full level 3 course many of these learners will then subsequently drop out either before or after they have completed their first year of study. Some areas are keen therefore to develop more appropriate bridging courses which help learners make an appropriate transition. One example is Derby's development of an Apprenticeship bridging course which is aimed at learners staying on in school in the first year of their sixth form completing level 2 and level 3 units of work before progressing to a full level 3 Apprenticeship in their second year when they have demonstrated their readiness.

Sub-regional approaches to delivery of RPA

124. Two of the trial areas have taken a sub-regional approach to delivery of RPA, with 10 local authorities in Greater Manchester working together and three local authorities in Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull doing the same. There have been both advantages and challenges to making the sub-regional approach work. In Greater Manchester for example they have been able to deliver significantly more IAG activity for young people by working across the 10 authorities than they would have been able to do by local authorities working alone. But they have also found that making the sub-regional approach work requires a very high level of communication between the local authorities involved. They are keen as they move forward with delivery of RPA to explore the benefits of sub-regional working in other areas, for example, by looking at a sub-regional approach to analysis of their cohorts across all 10 local authorities to see what common issues might emerge.

Conclusion and recommendations

Preparing for the future

125. As noted at the start of this report the trials have taken place during a period of significant policy change and financial pressure. Many of the trial areas have used the trial as an opportunity to address the question of how RPA will be delivered under very different arrangements and with significant resource pressures in future. For example, in Worcestershire RPA has been brought together with the wider range of youth and other services under a broad 'Widening Participation' heading, in Plymouth the trial was already being managed through the assistant directors for school improvement and RPA is seen as a core element of the local authorities future work with schools, and in Swindon decisions had already been taken to end the Connexions service and bring together the range of support that will be needed for RPA through their own integrated youth support model.

126. The ongoing challenge for the trial areas – and for other local areas – will be to continue to test and future-proof the elements of the delivery model which they had previously envisaged were needed for RPA. Areas recognise that the same scale and level of resources are unlikely to be available to support their work. This increases the need to be even clearer about areas' priorities, to target resources more carefully and to be clear what impact different interventions are having. This report has indicated a number of ways in which areas might attempt to do this, and there are clearly opportunities for areas to deliver RPA whilst achieving the efficiencies required.

127. At the same time local areas will need to be open to how they might need to be organised differently and to work with providers even more to achieve their ambitions for 2013 and 2015. More emphasis is going to need to come from providers leading activity themselves which means the role of the LA will need to change – in the words of one of the trial leads 'we will have to become an even stronger champion for parents and young people'.

128. Given the challenges which local areas are likely to face, the opportunity to continue testing elements of RPA planning through the next phase of locally led delivery projects provides an important opportunity. The report comments below on the operation of the Phase 2 trials and learning visits model which have lessons for the approach that might be taken in the next phase.

Perhaps the most important conclusion is that it is vital that local areas – facilitated by the DfE – continue to share their lessons and learning about how to deliver RPA. This has been a much stronger feature of Phase 2 than Phase 1 and has had a significant impact on the progress made by a number of areas.

129. In the view of the evaluation team, it is also important that after two years of the RPA trials the next phase of locally led delivery projects does more to pull together the range of learning that has taken place and ensures all of the areas involved end the next phase having developed sufficiently comprehensive plans for delivering RPA in 2013 in the first instance. This should be the overriding priority for the next phase given that by the time the locally led projects conclude, there will be less than six months until the first cohort to be affected by RPA enter their last year of school.

Operation of the trials

130. Feedback on the operation of the trials has almost exclusively been positive in Phase 2 and those areas that were part of Phase 1 have commented how the organisation and management of the trials has improved significantly. Areas have particularly welcomed the approach of workshops and learning sets in which they get the chance to discuss and debate with other areas and to hear the latest practice. There are mixed views as to whether areas prefer the learning sets in which they get a chance to focus mainly on the issues within their own strand, or the wider workshops when they get a chance to hear from other trial areas. Some feel these workshops are not always as relevant to their own trial activity as the learning sets.

131. As noted above there has been much greater sharing of learning and experiences between trial areas in Phase 2 than Phase 1 with the learning sets and the National Participation Advisor playing an important role, as well as the involvement of some areas in the learning visits process. But areas could still be more proactive themselves in identifying other areas facing similar challenges to themselves or trialling similar approaches in order to share and learn from each other what is working and what is not and to avoid simply reinventing the wheel.

132. The only significant challenge from the trial areas to the DfE has been the ongoing uncertainty around the direction of policy and the communication about this from the DfE. Whilst areas recognise that the DfE cannot communicate until decisions have been made, more frequent updates would be welcomed and sometimes more urgent communication is needed to stop myths developing. For example, some areas had interpreted the Spending Review announcement to mean that the requirement for 16 year olds to stay on in 2013 was no longer part of the RPA policy. The regular newsletters are welcomed by trial areas and most feel they can pick up the phone direct to the DfE when needed. All of the areas welcomed the increased support and advice from the National Participation Advisor in Phase 2.

Feedback on the Learning Visits Model

133. The DfE and the National Participation Advisor held four learning visits during the trial period in February and March 2011 in which local areas outside of the trial were invited to participate. Areas were invited on the basis of their current levels of participation or because they were thought to have particular challenges to implementing RPA and would therefore benefit from hearing about the

work of the trials. On average two or three local authorities attended each of the learning visits, along with local representatives from other stakeholders and providers.

134. The format of the learning visit was similar in each case with detailed presentations from different trial areas followed by activities for the areas to complete and some time at the end of the day to reflect on the implications for their own planning. The evaluation team attended three of the four visits. Areas were also offered a follow up visit from the national participation advisor, which some had taken up at the time this report was written.

135. Overall the learning visits model was a powerful way of sharing the lessons from the trials. It was clear that the other local areas attending learnt a lot from hearing from the trial areas and the evaluation sheets completed by attendees confirmed a largely positive impression of the work of the trials and that attendees had found the day helpful in aiding them to think about their own planning for RPA. The trial areas participating also benefitted by telling their own story – it helped them to clarify their own successes but also told them what more they needed to do – and they also benefitted from hearing from the other trial areas involved.

136. In the view of the evaluation team the balance of the programme wasn't quite right with too much time spent presenting information from the trials and too little time for the areas to reflect and consider the implications for their own RPA planning. In part this was deliberate because there was an opportunity to follow up on the event afterwards to discuss the implications for each LA involved, but it was a significant time commitment to ask local areas to attend for a day and not to get into any detailed planning for their own area.

137. The programme was also very focused on what LAs will need to do to deliver RPA with less clarity about the messages for providers who attended. This was a good challenge to the trial areas as well as the DfE about whether the narrative about what RPA means for individual schools, colleges and work based learning providers is clear enough. There was also some push back from participating local areas that although the activity in the trials sounded very positive they couldn't see any way in which it could be implemented in their own local areas given the resource pressures they were facing, and the trials needed a stronger story to tell about future delivery models in answer to this.

Recommendations

138. At the end of the Phase 1 evaluation report the evaluation team developed a list of 10 top tips for trial areas and other LAs to think about as they move forward with implementation of RPA. Many of these still apply and local areas should test themselves against this original list to ensure they have considered each of them fully. In addition this list has been developed further to take account of the lessons from Phase 2, and the list presented below is a combined view from the trial areas and the evaluation team.

Top tips from the Phase 2 trials for other local areas to consider

Local areas should think about how they can...

- Develop a comprehensive plan for delivery of RPA (see p18).
- Develop their understanding of their cohorts and identify a set of priorities for delivering RPA with expected impact demonstrated through trajectories to 2013 and 2015 (see p20).
- Measure the impact of planned interventions by looking at the different segments of the cohort activity is targeting and quantifying the potential impact of each (see p18 and p24).
- Review own governance and leadership of RPA to ensure they are getting full engagement from the wider LA and other partners, and have maximised opportunities to streamline governance and leadership drawing together youth, IAG, post-16 and schools' arrangements to minimise bureaucracy, ensure coherence, sustainability and efficiencies (see p24).
- Establish stronger links with wider LA governance and employers through local economic partnerships or LA regeneration teams (see p25).
- Engage with young people and parents/carers to ensure young people's voices are reflected in plans for delivering RPA and that the hardest to engage are aware of RPA (see p30).
- Engage with the full range of providers, using the data to agree which providers have issues with post-16 progression and what support they might need/benefit from (see p26 and p32).
- Thought about how to strengthen their engagement with schools and colleges in particular, identifying the right strategic lead for RPA to work with at each institution (see p26).
- Learn from the successful work of some Phase 2 areas in engaging employers during Phase 2 and think about who has the credibility to lead this work in their locality (see p28 and p41).
- Focus on the transitions throughout secondary education and into post-16 education, identify and map all of the universal and targeted support available and identify gaps, overlaps and efficiencies through conversations with providers (see p28).
- Identify particular groups within their own cohorts that will be critical to RPA and map the interventions, support and provision in place for each 'at risk' cohort including all of the LA services and other delivery partners working with them (see p32).
- Approach their work with those at risk of disengagement or who have already disengaged more systematically, including considering what the role of the participation advisor and support panels should be, and how they will define when young people have a reasonable excuse, and how to support those with one (see p34).
- Discuss and debate the need for a RONI, think through the key measures to include in one for their own local area and ensure schools are using it (see p34 and p36).
- Identify provision gaps through mapping, data analysis and/or feedback from learners and decide how best to fill them, learning from the trials experience of engaging with employers for young people in Jobs without Training (JWT) and developing new provision (see p40).
- Develop future delivery models in the context of the changing financial climate and decisions already taken, such as the development of the National Careers Service (see p43).
- Identify other areas facing similar challenges where lessons are likely to be transferable and ensure they are visiting and talking to them to avoid reinventing the wheel (see p44).

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