

## Post 16 provision in schools and colleges

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### 1. Summary

- 1.1 A number of factors, both local and national are impacting on post 16 provision in the county, this includes schools with sixth forms, colleges and private training providers. A combination of falling demographics, funding issues and curriculum changes means that ensuring appropriate and accessible post 16 education and training provision in Shropshire is becoming a real challenge.
- 1.2 All Local Authorities have duties to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education and training beyond the age of 16, i.e. to secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people aged 16-19 (and up to age 25 with SEND) and promote and track the effective participation in education and training of 16 and 17 year olds.
- 1.3 This report aims to highlight the context and issues for post 16 provision.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Scrutiny is asked to note the details given in the update and pay regard to the post 16 area review process which will be instigated in January 2016 across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, Herefordshire and North Worcestershire

## **REPORT**

### **3. Background**

3.1 There are a range of post 16 providers in Shropshire: schools with sixth forms, colleges, specialist colleges and private training providers. There are eight 11-18 schools, six of which are academies, and two that are LA maintained (The Grove School and Thomas Adams School) and one special school (Severndale School). There are five colleges in Shropshire one of which specialises in provision for young people with severe disabilities (Derwen College), and a range of private training providers offering mainly apprenticeship programmes.

3.2 In terms of size and curriculum offer, 11-18 schools have in the past primarily offered a level 3 academic curriculum (A levels) but some are diversifying with additional vocational programmes at level 2 or 3, with the colleges offering both academic and vocational programmes at levels 1, 2 and 3. Training providers offer apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3, with some offering higher level apprenticeships that are equivalent to foundation degree level. Sixth forms in schools vary in size, ranging from circa 55-320 students. The two largest sixth forms are at Thomas Adams and Idsall schools, circa 320 and 230 respectively. Colleges recruit larger numbers of 16-18 year olds, ranging from circa 965 to 1670. (Figures based on EFA MI and data reports, July 2015). Approximately 70% of the 16-18 cohort access level 3 provision.

3.3 The numbers of year 11 leavers attending colleges outside of Shropshire remains fairly static at 21% of the cohort (destinations data 2014). However, numbers are increasing to South Cheshire and Reaseheath Colleges, and decreasing to New College Telford, TCAT and Hereford Sixth Form College. The travel to learn patterns of school leavers over time have remained fairly consistent, with the majority remaining in education within the county. (See appendix A: Travel to learn patterns-education)

3.4 Those 16 and 17 year olds that participate in education and training exceed the national and west midlands averages. Figures released by DfE for June 2015 show 91.7% were participating compared to 89.5% for England and 89.3% for the West midlands. Of that 91.7%, 82.4% were in full time education, 5.9% in an apprenticeship, and 3.2% in work based learning or employment.

3.5 Ofsted grades for post 16 providers reflect the quality of our post 16 provision as being just in line with the national average. With changes to the Ofsted framework, schools with sixth forms now have a separate sixth form grade, with over half of the school sixth forms graded as good (under the old and new Ofsted framework). Three out of the four FE colleges are graded as good, along with Derwen College. County Training, one of the largest training providers, is also graded as good.

3.6 Funding for education and training provision for 16-19 year olds and those aged 19-25 with an EHC plan is provided to schools, colleges and training providers by the Education Funding Agency (EFA). In 2012/13 the funding formula for 16-18 year olds was changed, and from 2013/14 the formula was replaced by funding per student, rather than funding the qualifications taken, with the aim of simplifying the funding methodology. Funding is provided on a lagged number approach, i.e. based on the number of students participating in the previous year, with a basic funding rate per student per academic year to fund a study programme regardless of the type of institution. There are a number of other factors that are included in the funding rate: a retention factor, programme cost weighting, disadvantage and/or disabilities allocation and an area cost allowance (where it is known costs of delivery are higher in some areas than others). Therefore the funding per student will vary, but as guide, most full time students will attract approximately £4,000 of funding per year.

3.7 A number of government policy initiatives have been developed and implemented which all post 16 providers have had to respond to, namely:

- Changes to the curriculum following the Wolf review of post 16 qualifications, and the introduction of the study programme
- Changes to A levels and BTEC qualifications, and a reduction in the number of vocational qualifications recognised in performance tables
- Extending the requirement for all young people to participate in education or training up to the age of 18 (RPA)
- Review of the apprenticeship system, both in terms of curriculum and standards and funding, with a recent expectation of increasing the number of apprenticeships by 3 million in the lifetime of the parliament.
- Funding reforms and budget reductions for the post 16 sector
- Post 16 area reviews ( further detail in section 5)

#### **4. Issues facing the post 16 sector and young people in Shropshire**

4.1 The post 16 education and training sector operate in a free market economy, which can be potentially difficult to manage in a rural, sparsely populated area such as Shropshire. A mix of high quality learning provision that is accessible is crucial to maintain high levels of participation. This is important given the rural nature of the county and the cost and provision of public transport.

4.2 There is a demographic decline in the county, with pupil numbers reducing (8.2% in secondary school year 11 students over the next five years) which bucks the national trend of growth. However, this decline is not evenly spread and varies by local area. (See appendix B).

4.3 Funding constraints and reducing budgets have resulted in some courses not being offered due to unviable student recruitment, or a redesign of the curriculum offer in order to provide better value for money, which can result in a more limited choice for students. All providers have to consider if the programmes being offered provide value for money and can be afforded financially. Nationally, it is acknowledged, that a school sixth form would

require at least 250 students to be viable, Shropshire only has two school sixth forms that recruit at that level.

4.4 The curriculum and provision mix has changed over a number of years. Providers have altered recruitment policies in response to changes in qualifications, particularly A levels, with a higher GCSE grade entry profile required for certain subjects. This can influence student choice, with students requiring a particular mix of subjects/qualifications having a more limited choice.

4.5 Impartial information advice and guidance is crucial to assist young people's choices and needs. The majority of Shropshire secondary schools purchase the Councils careers, information, advice and guidance service (IAG service) in order to fulfil their statutory duty. Student demand and provision supply can alter over time, often affected by local factors, for example, transport provision, word of mouth and parental preference. This can make forward planning problematic.

4.6 The issues described above are interrelated. It is evident that a mix of provision is required for young people, and in different locations, but it is equally apparent that post 16 providers are increasingly under financial pressure, with some offering provision that is financially unviable.

## **5. How the sector and partners are responding to the issues**

5.1 As a local authority we are committed to challenging and supporting all post 16 providers in the county. The school improvement team and the post 16 team have been working with schools on aspects of the curriculum, student recruitment and retention and finance. The schools have access to a financial modelling tool which allows them to model and predict the funding based on student numbers. Local authority officers have undertaken school sixth form reviews in a number of schools. School sixth forms are encouraged to work collaboratively to provide a curriculum suitable for local needs.

5.2 The Shropshire Learning Network (SLN) is a network of Shropshire 14-19 providers, with memberships across the schools, colleges and training providers, along with local authority officers and an independent chair. This type of network is not necessarily replicated in other local authorities. The membership have raised concerns around post 16 sustainability and produced an information paper in the summer of this year to highlight their concerns and how they may impact on young people in the county. The paper has been used to inform governing bodies and key partners, including relevant elected members within the council. (See appendix C)

5.3 Local authority officers have regular meetings with the regional schools commissioner (RSC), and have highlighted the concerns about sustainability within the sector. The RSC acknowledges the issues, suggesting the need for greater collaboration between the 11-18 schools and other providers. Given the issues across the post 16 sector any age expansion proposals put forward by a school would have to demonstrate a strong and robust case of sustained

need. The RSC office will continue to work with the local authority on government initiatives.

5.4 Within the college sector institutional changes will become more evident over time. Ludlow Sixth Form College successfully merged with Herefordshire College of Arts and Technology to become Herefordshire and Ludlow College in 2013. Other local colleges are proactively exploring collaborative models with the aim of establishing a more sustainable provider base. Discussions between Shrewsbury College, Shrewsbury Sixth Form College and New College Telford have resulted in a proposal for the three colleges to merge, with the intention of completing the merger arrangements by September 2016. A press release issued in mid-November outlined the rationale for the proposal – extract below:

‘Staff at all colleges have been informed of the possibility, which has come about after all three colleges felt that federation, whilst still an available option, would be difficult to achieve and have limited opportunities to improve financial performance’

‘In a joint statement, the Principals of all three Colleges, Martin Ward (SSFC), Fiona O'Brien (NCT) and Steve Wain, (Shrewsbury College), said: "We are seeking to create a new college structure for Shropshire which allows each college to continue to specialise and improve. Each college offers a distinctive curriculum in separate locations and we believe that this merger proposal is the best way for us to maintain the quality of education when the post 16 sector is facing continuing financial pressure.’

5.5 As a consequence of the financial status of some post 16 providers across the country, the government have launched a programme of post 16 area reviews due to the financial and viability concerns raised by the funding agencies and the department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The initiative is supported by the DFE and the two funding agencies, the EFA and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). The area reviews will focus on the FE and sixth form college sector primarily, but will also consider the wider post 16 provision in an area.

5.6 The purpose of the reviews will be to:

- Ensure an offer that meets local learner and employer needs and provides access to high quality and relevant education and training for all
- The right balance of provision, including greater specialisation and higher level technical skills
- Support economic development and the drive for increasing productivity
- Create sustainable institutions i.e. fewer, larger, more resilient and efficient providers

Although schools will not be individually assessed and engaged at the same level as the colleges there will be a need to consider whether the present post

16 provision in schools is meeting the needs of learners and supporting progression to HE and employment.

5.7 There is an expectation that the RSC office and local authorities will provide data and narrative on the schools provision in the area. This will support the work on college options assessment and developing recommendations in the context of the total provision picture. Each review will be led by a local area review steering group, with the local authority having representation on the group. The review will cover a 4-5 month period, culminating in a set of recommendations for governing bodies to consider.

5.8 The first wave of reviews is already underway in Birmingham and Solihull, Greater Manchester, and Sheffield City region. Wave two areas are Tees valley, Solent and West Yorkshire. Wave three – to begin in January 2016 includes Shropshire. The area review will cover Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, Herefordshire and (North) Worcestershire. This reflects the Marches LEP area along with the significant travel to learn patterns across the region.

5.9 Leading up to the start of the review the local authority will compile an evidence base which will feed into other evidence provided by the EFA , SFA, Ofsted, RSC office, and college providers. We will be proactive in our approach to the review and include schools in the wider discussions that will occur outside of the steering group meetings. A SLN network meeting scheduled for February 11<sup>th</sup> will focus on the review. The outcomes and recommendations of the review should be completed by May 2016.

### **3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

(NB this will include the following: Risk Management, Human Rights, Equalities, Community, Environmental consequences and other Consultation)

There are a number of risks associated with the area review process, particularly regarding the response of governing bodies to the recommendations, as it is for individual governing bodies of the colleges to respond, agree and implement any of the recommendations put forward.

There are also opportunities for the area to shape a post 16 sector that is able to respond to changes in funding, demography, curriculum, and future economic growth and skills requirements, whilst ensuring appropriate, accessible and sustainable provision for learners.

### **4. Financial Implications**

There will be future financial implications for the sector given the context explained in the paper. Whilst the comprehensive spending review in

November outlined no change to the 16-19 national funding rate per learner it does not take into account the increased costs associated with national insurance contributions and additional pension or salary contributions.

## **5. Additional Information –N/A – see appendices**

<b>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</b>
See attached appendices
<b>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</b> Cllr Ann Harley
<b>Local Member</b> All
<b>Appendices</b> A-Travel to Learn summary 2010-2014 B- year 11 pupil number/demographic data projections C- SLN information paper on post 16 sustainability