



Pathways For All

Review of education
and training provision
for young people aged
16-19 in Kent

April 2022



Kent County Council

Children, Young People & Education Directorate

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16 to 19 in Kent

Report

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Further information

This Report and a separate executive summary, as well as some examples of relevant practice that show how parts of the county are responding to various issues raised by the Review, can be accessed electronically on [Kelsi](#).

For further information, please contact Kent County Council's Education Lead Adviser, Michelle Stanley, via email at kent16-19review@kent.gov.uk.

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Foreword

We are pleased to introduce this Report into our major Review of 16-19 provision within the county of Kent.

As we begin to emerge from a period of considerable pandemic-related turbulence, Kent remains committed to improving the options and life chances of all young people. Our young people have been particularly hard hit and, as they embark on their post-16 study and employment, we want to ensure they are as well-prepared as possible to survive and thrive in the world.

Kent's 16-19 education system is diverse and complex. It includes selective, non-selective and special schools, colleges, apprenticeships and independent training providers. The offer includes the new T-Levels alongside the standard range of qualifications, and we are a world leader in delivering the International Baccalaureate. This wide offer and the range of providers creates both challenges and opportunities.

Nationally, this is a time of change. Qualification reforms will affect the way education is delivered. A skills white paper increases the role of employers in Further Education. A new education white paper aims to improve quality in schools. At the same time, there has been a gradual erosion of the co-ordination of post-16 education.

Kent County Council values education and there is strong political commitment to driving improvement. In support of this, we asked the whole 16-19 sector – grammar, high schools and special schools, further education colleges; apprenticeship and other providers, pupils and students, parents, KCC and other strategic and operational partners – to engage in developing and delivering this Review. We are extremely grateful for the positive response and for all the valuable contributions our colleagues have made. The thoroughness of the process gives the Council confidence that the findings and recommendations contained in this Report identify the issues we need to address and provide appropriate ways for us to respond.

This Report makes clear that we need to:

- Make a concerted effort to improve the outcomes for young people from our post-16 provision
- Raise young people's aspirations through more effective careers education, information, advice and guidance
- Ensure that those who influence young people are informed about the options available to them, and more understanding and supportive of the choices young people make
- Enable a wider range of provision to be locally accessible
- Improve provision below Level 2 and provide good pathways into further learning at higher levels

- Support young people's mental health
- Take the opportunity to learn lessons from the pandemic.

However, Kent is a diverse county. One size will not fit all, and no organisation has the statutory powers or resources to produce the necessary changes on its own. It is only by working together that we will make progress. Collaboration, locally and cross-county, must therefore be at the heart of what we do.

With this in mind, our first step is to establish a Strategic Post-16 Board to take the Report's recommendations and other necessary actions forward and provide overall direction to post-16 provision in the County. This collaborative, sector-driven approach depends on your contribution. We will therefore be asking representative groups and other key partners for their active participation on the Board and involvement in next steps.

We look forward to working in partnership with you all in implementing the recommendations of this valuable Report.

Roger Gough Leader, Kent County Council

Shellina Prendergast Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Executive summary

1 Introduction

E1:1 Kent County Council's [KCC's] 2021-25 Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent requires its Children, Young People & Education Directorate to lead a review of post-16 education within Kent¹. The vision for the Review was that it should improve the options and life chances of young people in Kent by:

- Providing better education, skills and training opportunities for all Kent's young people
- Enabling KCC to develop a clear understanding of the issues and the barriers to participation and progression
- Allowing KCC to understand, support and provide direction to the post-16 sector in the county.

E1:2 Specifically, the purpose of the Review is to:

- Hold a mirror up to 16-19 education in Kent by developing a deeper understanding of the sector
- Identify key far-reaching and systemic issues, and particular areas of under achievement or need in the post-16 sector
- Identify, explore and understand good practice in the sector to encourage its wider take-up
- Identify the gaps, issues and barriers that need to be, and can reasonably be, addressed by the sector
- Be a platform for KCC and its key partners to develop strategic leadership in the Kent post-16 system
- Provide advocacy for young people in the 16-19 sector
- Develop a sector-wide collaborative approach to driving success in the post-16 system
- Ensure that young people in post-16 education and training in Kent are well prepared to deal with the challenges caused by Covid-19.

2 Approach

E2:1 The Review was overseen by a Review Steering Group, comprising provider representatives and others with an interest in post-16 provision in the County.

¹ See <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s101472/Kent%20Commissioning%20Plan.pdf> , paragraph 3.9, page 11.

A Review Working Group drawn from colleagues directly involved in post-16 delivery in KCC and The Education People [TEP] provided valuable additional operational input. An external expert (acl consulting) was appointed to add objectivity, insight, and rigour.

E2:2 The Review was carried out, largely during calendar year 2021, by a research team drawn from KCC, TEP, acl, and Steering Group member-proposed secondees. It included:

- A detailed analysis of local and national data on Key Stage 5 outcomes (supported by the Analytics team in KCC Strategic Commissioning)
- Fieldwork interviews with 16-19 providers across Kent, plus pre-16 providers (48 providers equalling 25% of the sector) and 21 other stakeholders and key players
- 30 small focus groups with young people across 22 providers
- Contributions from other interested parties following a widely-publicised call for evidence
- Online surveys of parents and young people
- A soft consultation on the emerging findings was held during autumn 2021. This report was finalised in early 2022.

Structuring the data

E2:3 To structure the data collection, fieldwork interview schedules were designed around a notional 'journey' taken by a young person before and during their time in 16-19 education. These interviews covered:

- The post-16 offer
- Location, access to, and structure of the current 16-19 offer
- Equal opportunities
- Pre-Year 12 decision-making
- Transition into post-16 provision
- Delivery of post-16 provision
- Outcomes from post-16 provision
- Post-Year 13 decision-making and transition on from post-16 provision
- Future viability of provision
- Collaboration between post-16 providers
- The impact of Covid-19.

3 Principal findings

E3:1 This section sets out the principal findings from the fieldwork following the structure outlined in Section 2.

E3:2 For full details of the findings, please refer to Section 3 in the main Report.

The offer

E3:3 The key points regarding the offer made to young people relate to:

- ‘Pupil inertia’ - the marked tendency for young people to remain at their current school and transfer into its sixth form at 16, rather than fully consider other choices
- Level 3 qualifications reform
- Alternative 16-19 provision.

E3:4 Pupil inertia means that:

- Kent schools effectively continue to represent different systems (high school, grammar school) post-16, as they have done pre-16
- Many pupils’ choice at 16+ is constrained by what their school offers, in terms of qualifications (principally A levels, Advanced General Qualifications [AGQs] and the International Baccalaureate Diploma and Career-related programmes [IBDP and IBCP]) and individual subjects
- Where pupil inertia is widespread, other provision (particularly general further education colleges [GFECs]) becomes the default destination for those who have concluded, or been advised, they are not academically able enough to transfer to their school’s sixth form.

E3:5 Pupil inertia would matter less if providers collaborated to broaden the curriculum available locally. Evidence suggests there is very little of this collaboration currently taking place.

E3:6 Regarding the Level 3 reforms (i.e. the roll out of T Levels and the related withdrawal of Education & Skills Funding Agency [ESFA] funding for the equivalent AGQs) non-selective schools in particular are increasingly concerned about the risks to their post-16 offer:

- Specifically – to the future of the qualifications they currently run (principally the IBCP and BTECs)
- More generally – will their remaining post-16 provision be viable in a ‘post-qualifications reform’ world?

E3:7 The qualifications reforms, as currently proposed, risk non-work-based 16-19 provision becoming more polarised. Grammar schools might specialise in academic study, while GFECs and work-based providers focus more on T Levels and other technical/vocational subjects; and high school sixth forms’ role becomes less defined.

In this scenario, a valuable progression route into higher levels of learning for many of Kent's young people may be lost.

E3:8 Historically, Kent has had quite a wide range of provision for vulnerable learners for whom school sixth form or college is not appropriate. Since 2018/19, this has largely collapsed, making it extremely difficult to retain or attract young people whose needs were not met in pre-16 education. This creates significant knock-on implications for those at risk of finding themselves not in education, employment or training [NEET].

E3:9 Details of the Review's major recommendations that address these issues can be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- 4.2 Raising young people's aspirations through better careers education, information, advice and guidance [CEIAG]
- 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
- 4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations can be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.1).

Location, access, and structure

E3:10 Since the Learning and Skills Council [LSC] closed in 2010, there has been no one central controlling or coordinating function with responsibility for post-16 provision². This means that what is on offer and where depends on individual providers' decisions. While all areas of Kent currently have fairly straightforward access to A levels, other 16+ provision is more patchy.

E3:11 There are two broad approaches to addressing this issue:

- Attempting to resolve 'gaps' through local collaboration, building on the (few) existing examples in the county
- Minimising travel, and providing financial support where possible if it is unavoidable.

E3:12 Travel and the associated costs affects many young people's choice of post-16 destination, and may dissuade some from taking part in education or training entirely. This is despite KCC's support (which is generous compared to many local authorities [LAs]) and bursary funds from individual providers.

² It is important to note that the LSC did not have responsibility for schools-based post-16 provision, which remained with local authorities at that time. Since the **Academies Act 2010**, the number of secondary schools for which local authorities have responsibility has reduced considerably – across all phases, only 203 schools nationally were academies in 2010; by 2021-22 almost four-in-five secondary schools had become academies.

- E3:13** KCC's scope to address market failures in the provision of transport (e.g. by subsidising non-commercial routes or services) is restricted both by government funding and by operators' cost and other pressures that threaten route and service viability.
- E3:14** Details of the Review's major recommendations that address these issues can be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:
- 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
 - 4.4 Improving [access to] provision below Level 2
 - 4.6 Improving access to provision
 - 4.7 Learning from lockdown – in particular by creating opportunities for more blended approaches to learning.

Equal opportunities

- E3:15** Although the fieldwork raised few equal opportunities concerns directly, others nevertheless arise.
- E3:16** Students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds may not have access to the full range of post-16 opportunities available, and be discouraged from taking advantage of those that are. The main factors are pressures to work, and transport costs (as above); there may also be a lack of awareness.
- E3:17** Students with additional needs may find it difficult to access appropriate post-16 provision due to a shortfall in programmes at Level 2 and below, within both GFECs and 'alternative' 16-19 providers.
- E3:18** It has also been suggested that placements for these students – particularly those with an education and health care plan [EHCP] – place too much emphasis on securing provision that meets their educational and other needs, rather than their aspirations for a future career or lifestyle.
- E3:19** There is insufficient capacity to provide English for Speakers of Other Languages [ESOL] programmes. This lack of capacity disadvantages learners who are not proficient in spoken and written English.
- E3:20** Details of the Review's major recommendations that address these issues can be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:
- 4.1 Improving outcomes
 - 4.2 Raising young people's aspirations through better CEIAG
 - 4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations concerning the aspirations of young people with a special educational need and/or disability [SEND] and ESOL provision can be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.3)³.

Pre-Year 12 decision-making

E3:21 The review found that a hierarchy of post-16 options effectively exists in Kent:

- Schools-based routes are preferred to all other options
- Grammar schools are preferred to high schools
- There is no clear distinction drawn between technical/vocational routes 'followed at a GFEC' and 'in the work-place', generally via an apprenticeship.

E3:22 This hierarchy has an impact on young people's choices at 16, particularly as the fieldwork highlighted concerns about the lack of access to impartial CEIAG which would inform a young person's choice of options. There were a number of dimensions to this.

E3:23 For pre-Year 12 students, there are linked concerns around schools keeping 'their own' students post-16, enabled by the lack of CEIAG on the full range of options available. Within these general concerns, the lack of information on employment and the jobs market, and in particular about apprenticeships, were regularly raised.

E3:24 The lack of good CEIAG in schools meant young people were overly reliant on and influenced by the opinions of parents, non-CEIAG specialist teaching staff, peers, friends and family when deciding where to go post-16.

E3:25 Determining what to do next is even more challenging for young people who are electively home educated (EHE), in the youth justice system, or 'non-permanently' excluded from school, since they have little or no access to CEIAG.

E3:26 Young people also need to be confident in their ability to choose pathways outside school. Staff need to assure them a decision to do so is equally 'valid' and encourage those around them to support their stated preference.

All providers (including GFECs and work-based providers) need access to young people in schools in order to be able to give them the information they need to make their choices. Young people need careers-related input early and throughout their time at school, highlighting opportunities, raising aspirations and explaining what they need to do to realise them. (None of this exceeds the requirements of the Provider Access Duty, statutory guidance relating to CEIAG, and the Gatsby Benchmarks for Good Career Guidance.)

³ This Review has taken into account where relevant, but has been careful not to overlap with, the implementation of the Council's Written Statement of Action on SEND following the Ofsted SEND Inspection of 2018.

E3:27 Details of the Review’s major recommendations that address these issues can be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- 4.1 Improving outcomes
- 4.2 Raising young people’s aspirations through better CEIAG
- 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
- 4.5 Further supporting the mental health of learners.

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations can be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.4).

Transition into post-16 provision

E3:28 Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the support available for young people making the transition from pre- to post-16 learning.

E3:29 Where their school has a sixth form, and they achieve the necessary grades, most young people will stay on post-16 in their existing school, and the transition process generally works well

E3:30 In contrast, the transition from a school to anywhere other than its own sixth form, and in particular into work, was often felt to be poorly supported. Young people and their prospective post-16 providers were largely left to ‘make the best of it’.

E3:31 Nevertheless, most providers reported relatively few cases of young people becoming so dissatisfied with their choice that they switch provider or become NEET. Where this does happen, young people need support early in the Autumn Term to transfer to, and hopefully remain in, a more suitable alternative: a later decision may be difficult to accommodate.

E3:32 Details of the Review’s major recommendations that address these issues can be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- 4.1 Improving outcomes
- 4.2 Raising young people’s aspirations through better CEIAG
- 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
- 4.4 Improving provision below Level 2
- 4.5 Further supporting the mental health of learners
- 4.7 Learning from lockdown.

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations can be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.5).

Delivery

- E3:33** The major focus of the fieldwork here was on the factors directly affecting the delivery of Kent's 16-19 offer; the availability of resources and the mental health of young people were regularly highlighted.
- E3:34** Despite recent increases in the base rate and other elements of the funding model, the Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS] calculates that between 2010-11 and 2020-21 there was a real terms reduction in income per student of 15% for GFECs and 28% for school sixth forms. As a result, post-16 provision is being constrained by limits on investment in buildings, equipment, and/or staff.
- E3:35** It is also proving increasingly difficult to find employers willing to deliver work-related elements of young people's learning programmes. The Covid pandemic has had an immediate and detrimental impact on apprenticeships.
- E3:36** For alternative 16-19 providers, resourcing-related issues are further complicated by their young people's more complex needs. For those receiving ESFA funding, the lagged funding model and more general contractual uncertainties have made it difficult to plan provision and recruit staff.
- E3:37** Student mental health issues and the lack of resources to address them have become ubiquitous concerns for schools and colleges (less so for young people on apprenticeships).
- E3:38** Details of the Review's major recommendations that address these issues can be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:
- 4.1 Improving outcomes
 - 4.5 Further supporting the mental health of learners.

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations can be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.6).

Outcomes

- E3:39** Both quantitative data (from national and local statistics) and qualitative data (from interviews) were used to assess outcomes from 16-19 study.
- E3:40** The quantitative data indicates, *inter alia*, that at 18:
- In Kent, progression to 'positive' destinations (higher or further education, apprenticeships, and employment) at the end of Key Stage 5 is in line with, or better than, national averages for those with a Level 3 or Level 2 qualification
 - Kent is less successful in terms of progression to positive destinations for those not yet qualified at Level 2

- Kent students from (broadly) non-disadvantaged backgrounds seem to achieve at and progress from Key Stage 5 as well as their peers elsewhere in the country: those from disadvantaged backgrounds do not.

In particular ...

- The gap between progression rates to the most selective higher education institutions [HEIs] for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students appears to be wider in Kent than nationally
- There is a relatively small gap nationally between progression to all HEIs by disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students (46% to 51%)⁴. In every Kent district, the gap is greater than this – in some cases, substantially.

E3:41 Overall, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds appear to make even less progress than their non-disadvantaged peers when the data for Kent is compared to the national average: this raises questions about their access to grammar schools.

E3:42 Qualitative findings from the fieldwork interviews suggest that:

- Young people can lack the necessary aspiration and ambition to realise their full potential – they do not ‘believe in themselves’
- ‘Basic’ jobs (those without much training or progression potential) are relatively easy to find in Kent. Many students are attracted to them (or even encouraged to take them up) by the prospect of earning money now, rather than investing for their future
- Young people who feel A levels and higher education are not for them may become demotivated if they are not aware of possible alternatives
- Those considering higher education often looked only at institutions in Kent.

E3:43 Details of the Review’s major recommendations that address these issues can be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- 4.1 Improving outcomes
- 4.2 Raising young people’s aspirations through better CEIAG
- 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
- 4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations can be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.7).

⁴ These statistics refer specifically to destinations of students that remain in education to the end of Key Stage 5. Fewer disadvantaged than non-disadvantaged students do so, therefore the *overall cohort* participation in HE is lower than the figures quoted.

Post-Year 13 decision making and transition

- E3:44** The fieldwork found that most work-based and alternative 16-19 providers have a strong focus on transitional support. Providers often described a structured process, beginning in the final year of the young person's current programme, to identify their intended next step and put the necessary support in place. During the pandemic, providers worked with employers to identify ways of keeping young people engaged, and ideally progressing, in their workplaces.
- E3:45** Work-based and alternative 16-19 providers in particular leave their doors open to their leavers after they have moved on. Some actively check on their progress and provide further support where it would be helpful.
- E3:46** Similarly, GFECs emphasise positive outcomes and destinations, allocating staff from early in a student's study programme to ensure the post-18 transition runs smoothly. This includes working with non-completers, and with students after they have technically left.
- E3:47** For schools, approximately half the cohort progresses to higher education after Key Stage 5. There is a range of support for those wishing to pursue this route.
- E3:48** For those progressing to destinations other than higher education, feedback suggests that the availability and quality of support and information on these options was less satisfactory.
- E3:49** Students at both selective and non-selective schools were concerned that progression to HE seemed to be 'the only valued route', with little information available on alternatives. But within the current cohort, there is growing interest in post-Year 13 apprenticeships, and a desire for more information on the wider apprenticeship offer, particularly the options for progression at higher (post-Level 3) levels.
- E3:50** Schools offer post-transition support, but this seems to be less frequently and proactively than is the case for work-based and alternative 16-19 providers and GFECs.
- E3:51** The role of influencers (principally parents and friends) on decisions about what to do next is also a factor. Where it was mentioned, it was mainly in a negative (options limiting) way, rather than an encouragement to 'try to ...'.
- E3:52** Details of the Review's major recommendations that address these issues can be found in sub-section 4.2 of this Executive Summary ("Raising young people's aspirations through better CEIAG"). In addition, related subsidiary recommendations can be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.8).

Future viability of provision

- E3:53** As well as reviewing Kent's existing 16+ education and training provision, the Review also considered its viability and how it may need to change in the future.

- E3:54** Many Kent sixth forms are small. Government regulations state that any new academy sixth form should have a minimum of 200 students: eight of Kent's 32 grammar schools and 38 of its 55 high school sixth forms do not meet this criterion.
- E3:55** There is no compelling evidence that students in smaller sixth forms do less well in terms of 'added value' between their GCSE grades and their concluding Level 3 'score'. However, the more limited provision is a cause for concern, especially since it appears that young people tend to choose their post-16 options based on what is available in their current school's sixth form. There are also revenue and capital costs associated with every small class.
- E3:56** A substantial proportion of the programmes on offer are AGQs – principally BTECs, which may also form part of the IBCP. At the time of writing (Spring 2022), the government intends progressively to withdraw funding for many AGQs as the related T Levels are introduced. This will effectively make it impossible for providers to continue offering these qualifications.
- E3:57** Kent's GFECs are large enough and have the necessary employer links across a range of provision to make T Levels a viable proposition; most if not all of its school sixth forms – mainly high schools – currently offering BTECs are not. If AGQs are non-funded, perhaps half of these sixth forms could become unviable. Qualifications reform at Level 3 is therefore a direct threat to them. What happens to a significant proportion of young people currently opting for AGQs at 16 is equally unclear.
- E3:58** For work-based options, the number of young people starting an apprenticeship at 16 has fallen as more stay on at school or enter college. Yet the number and range of employment choices for young people is greater now than 18 months ago. What the new 'steady state' position will be remains to be seen: there is a continuing and probably increasing shortage of apprenticeships for progression at the higher levels.
- E3:59** Details of the Review's major recommendations that address these issues can be found in sub-section 4.3 of this Executive Summary ("Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision"). In addition, related subsidiary recommendations can be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.9).

Collaboration

- E3:60** Making progress on many of this Review's recommendations will depend on effective collaboration between 16-19 providers in Kent.
- E3:61** There are examples of such collaboration, particularly within a multi academy trust (MAT), but also between non-MAT schools and GFECs, work-based and alternative providers. These generally cover the post-16 offer, but also exist in other areas (e.g. work to address NEET issues; staff recruitment, training, and development; IAG-related networks; post-18 progression options, including work with HEIs).
- E3:62** Whether through pressures in the system, or a need to collaborate to address an identified shared issue, there is a willingness to contemplate more collaborative working.

E3:63 However, a number of barriers remain:

- Practicalities – distance, transport and travel time between providers, and other logistical issues; timetabling; resources; and responsibility for the young person, specifically ownership of the provision’s overall adequacy and quality (including under Ofsted inspection)
- The geography and structure of education in Kent
- Competition between providers, though this is not as pervasive a concern as might be assumed
- The evolving context at both local and national level, which can prevent new and undermine existing arrangements, especially for smaller providers in general, and alternative 16-19 providers in particular.

E3:64 Details of the Review’s major recommendations that address these issues can be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
- 4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations can be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.10).

The impact of Covid-19

E3:65 The Review began during the summer term of 2020; fieldwork continued until the end of the summer term of 2021. Throughout this period, young people’s learning, work experience and progression were seriously disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. There is every indication that disruption will continue in 2021-22.

E3:66 While more young people in Kent achieving higher results is clearly welcome, interviewees were concerned about grade inflation. In particular, they worried it would encourage (or enable) young people to pursue schools-based post-16 options that, under normal circumstances, might not have been open to them. As a result they may not cope.

E3:67 There were also concerns about fewer work-based opportunities in the short- to medium-term. Sectors popular with young people considering apprenticeships were particularly badly affected by the pandemic and may take longer to recover.

E3:68 While relatively few young people had their apprenticeship terminated during the pandemic, many were furloughed or worked from home. At best, their experience will have been dramatically different, and their progress significantly slowed. At worst, their employment may have ceased after the return to work, with the chances of continuing their programme elsewhere also likely to be severely reduced.

E3:69 The potential negative impact of grade inflation and a lack of work-based opportunities has been further complicated by:

- Difficulties in seeing what was available elsewhere: virtual visits can only show so much
- A general sense that in uncertain circumstances it was better to 'stick with what you know'.

E3:70 Overall, there is concern that for whatever reason some young people will have made the 'wrong' post-16 choice. Although fewer became NEET after their GCSE results in September, more may find themselves unable to cope and/or drop out at a later date, in which case the problem is being postponed rather than prevented.

E3:71 The pandemic has required providers to consider new ways of working. Many work-based and alternative 16-19 providers and GFECs have moved substantially towards more 'blended' learning; schools much less so.

E3:72 There is a concern that these more blended approaches will be seen as a temporary aberration: this is potentially a missed opportunity. Not all young people were happy in school pre-Covid: a schools-led offer delivered in a different way may be worth retaining and developing, particularly with EHE on the increase.

E3:73 Details of the Review's major recommendations that address these issues can be found in the following sub-sections of this Executive Summary:

- 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
- 4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.

In addition, related subsidiary recommendations can be found in Section 5 of the main report (paragraphs numbered 5.11).

4 Principal Recommendations

E4:1 This report makes eight principal recommendations:

- 4.1 Make a concerted effort to improve outcomes from 16+ provision
- 4.2 In parallel, raise young people's aspirations through more effective CEIAG. Once raised, these aspirations need to be actively supported, including by those with an influence over what young people decide to do post-16. By proxy this means ensuring those who influence young people are themselves properly informed
- 4.3 Develop an 'area offer' to support the current network of sixth forms, many of them very small by national standards. This should cover all providers (specifically including GFECs, other organisations providing vocational learning and alternative 16-19 providers) and will require collaboration between all concerned
- 4.4 Improve the provision available below Level 2
- 4.5 Take further steps to support young people's mental health

- 4.6 Improve and enable access to provision
- 4.7 Take the opportunity to learn lessons from the Covid-19 lockdowns, and not simply assume everything should or will return to 'normal'
- 4.8 Create a 16+ Strategic Leadership Board to ensure all involved parties collaborate to deliver these recommendations, and to oversee the sector's future strategic development.

E4:2 These recommendations are explored in more detail in the following paragraphs. For a fuller description of what each recommendation would involve, and a summary of relevant practice that might be built upon, please refer to the corresponding paragraphs of Section 4 of the report (for example paragraphs numbered 4.1:1 and following in the main report for recommendation 4.1).

4.1 Improving Outcomes

E4:3 Clearly all provision should be designed to give young people the best possible outcomes, in terms of attainment, progression, destinations, and life skills.

E4:4 Therefore, the Review proposes:

- Establishing a comprehensive benchmarking programme. This will allow individual providers to compare their outcomes with those of their peers, both within Kent and with Kent's 'statistical neighbours', using the wealth of data routinely collected at County and national level
- Encouraging schools and other providers to adopt a life skills curriculum (either new or existing), to give young people the skills they need to achieve their goals post-16 and post-18.

4.2 Raising young people's aspirations through better CEIAG

E4:5 For various reasons, CEIAG is not always fully effective. This means some young people are not aware of their full range of post-16 opportunities and cannot fully consider the alternatives open to them. They may then end up with the 'wrong' provision and miss out on greater benefits they could have gained elsewhere.

E4:6 It is therefore proposed to:

- Develop a model CEIAG curriculum, customisable by all pre-16 and post-16 settings, to address observed gaps
- Actively encourage young people to consider their full range of post-16 options, including those outside their current school or immediate geographical area
- Support young people to achieve in post-16 employment or further education, and in their subsequent progress into work or higher education.

E4:7 In addition, specific strategies should also be developed for:

- Parents, to ensure they have at least a working knowledge of the full range of post-16 destinations and what they can lead to, and that they understand that 'staying in school' is not the only option
- Teachers (including but not limited to those with CEIAG responsibilities), to ensure they are familiar with destinations other than school sixth forms and the progression opportunities these provide, and can support young people who wish to consider options beyond their pre-16 school.

4.3 Implementing an "area offer" of 16+ provision

E4:8 A strong, varied post-16 offer for young people in Kent requires a comprehensive, effective range of provision to be locally available to all.

E4:9 Kent must therefore find ways to increase the 'virtual' size of sixth forms and address the impact of Level 3 reforms (even if delayed): this must involve genuine, practical collaboration between neighbouring sixth forms and other providers, amounting to an 'area offer'.

E4:10 'Mixed programmes' combining A levels and vocational qualifications have proved highly attractive, particularly to high school students. This flexibility needs to be retained and, through closer work with GFECs, improved wherever possible.

E4:11 It is therefore suggested there is a need to:

- Set out, and consult upon, what the comprehensive local post-16 'area offer' should include as a minimum
- Encourage schools with sixth forms, local GFEC(s) and work-based and other learning providers to construct their own 'area offer'. This should combine academic (A level) and vocational programmes to replace qualifications set to be discontinued
- Encourage the strong collaboration required to deliver this offer, based on specific local circumstances and needs
- Progressively review all collaborations to ensure they are delivering strong, effective and truly comprehensive area offers
- Continue to lobby Government to moderate the impact of vocational qualification reforms, and ensure adequate provision at Level 3 for those whose Level 2 attainment does not allow progression to T or A levels.

4.4 Improving provision below Level 2

E4:12 Ways must be found to support further growth and development in provision below Level 2 to stem – and indeed reverse – the current decline. In particular, programmes offered by alternative 16-19 providers need to be put on a stable footing, with guaranteed long-term formula funding, rather than relying (as at present) on short-term funding from multiple sources.

E4:13 It is therefore recommended that KCC:

- Identifies how ESFA can support developments in this area by guaranteeing funding
- Lobbies ESFA to extend the programmes it can fund if the current range is insufficient, particularly by supporting work-based and alternative providers
- Investigates options for an 'umbrella' administrative organisation that would enable more providers to offer programmes for this group of young people: this has worked well elsewhere in the country
- Supports new providers wishing to enter the market, whether as part of an 'umbrella' group or in their own right, and lobbies ESFA to facilitate this
- Encourages GFECs in particular to continue offering a range of qualifications at Entry Levels and Level 1, and to develop return pathways for young people attending other providers, recognising that not all young people are immediately ready for a college environment at 16+
- Supports all providers in developing progression routes for successful completers into further vocational or other learning or employment.

4.5 Further supporting learners' mental health

E4:14 The fieldwork for this project raised consistent and increasing concerns about young people's mental health and the impact on their learning, particularly in non-work-based provision. The two priorities are:

- Identifying and providing appropriate support for young people with mental health issues, including those not in mainstream settings
- Reviewing and modifying teaching styles to reflect a student population where mental health issues are increasingly common.

E4:15 It is therefore suggested there is a need to:

- Identify and share the best evidence-based teaching practice that supports learning in a mental health-friendly way for all students
- Draw up and implement a clear, county-wide framework for emotional wellbeing approaches and services, supported by staff development as required, to identify mental health concerns early, then intervene and support young people appropriately
- Support better two-way communication to ensure Education colleagues are aware of the full range of support available, and NHS and other services understand the extent of mental health issues within the 16-19 sector
- Ensure providers can offer 'frontline' mental health support to individual young people where appropriate and proportionate
- Consider further investment in a 'second line' support service where within-institution support (however enhanced) may be insufficient but a referral to NHS children and young people's mental health services may not be entirely necessary.

4.6 Improving access to provision

E4:16 In a large, partly rural, county like Kent some young people will have to travel a reasonable distance to their chosen provision. Those who choose to ‘commute’ incur time and financial costs; in practice, this restricts the range of options open to many.

E4:17 With providers’ and KCC’s budgets for support increasingly tight, there is a need to:

- Prioritise support for those whose choice of post-16 destination depends on financial assistance with travel
- Ensure student travel arrangements are designed around the local collaborative ‘area offer’ recommended above, including travel between providers where required and for vocational education more widely
- Continue to lobby Government to support travel for post-16 education, training and employment as it does to school pre-16.

4.7 Learning from lockdown

E4:18 The pandemic and its associated lockdowns obliged providers to consider new ways of working, including ‘blended learning’ and other technology-based approaches that might have taken far longer to introduce incrementally. Some young people, especially the harder-to-reach, have found these arrangements particularly helpful. There is a danger that providers will rush to return to pre-pandemic delivery modes, and that lessons learnt and opportunities created will rapidly be lost.

E4:19 It is proposed to:

- Identify lessons from lockdown while the knowledge is still fresh in people’s minds
- Develop a minimum standard of requirements for home-based learning, including software, hardware and broadband access, to guide 16+ providers and their students when implementing blended learning approaches
- Agree circumstances in which students might be given a ‘right to request’ remote or more blended learning (e.g. illness, challenging personal circumstances), establish protocols to encourage students to make appropriate requests, and ensure that they will be appropriately supported
- Track students’ use of remote learning to see whether blended learning does in fact meet the needs and address the issues identified, without compromising young people’s mental health and confidence. If it does, how might it be developed further; if not, how it can be adapted to provide a workable solution?

4.8 Improving strategic leadership at 16+

E4:20 Responsibility for post-16 provision is fragmented across a number of organisations and agencies. There are a number of local coordinating groups and initiatives, but no one forum or facilitating team that can raise issues, work collaboratively and make real progress for the entire system.

E4:21 It is proposed that:

- A 16+ Strategic Board be formed. This will take forward the recommendations of this current review, then have strategic oversight of coordinating and developing 16+ provision throughout Kent
- This Board will have a small secretariat, headed by a principal officer, with funding to promote its activities and ensure work streams are owned and taken forward.

E4:22 Setting up 'sub-area Boards' for different regions of the county may also be useful to support taking the work forward at a local level.

1 Background

Introduction

- 1.0:1 Kent County Council's [KCC's] Strategic Delivery Plan required its Children, Young People & Education Directorate [CYPE] to lead a review of post-16 education within Kent.
- 1.0:2 The Review also links to the Kent Strategic Delivery Plan and the Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision⁵.

Overall aims of/vision for the Review

- 1.0:3 The vision/aim for the Review was that it should improve the options and life chances of young people in Kent by:
- Enabling KCC to develop a clear understanding of the issues and the barriers to participation and progression
 - Allowing KCC to understand, support, and provide direction to the post-16 sector in the county
 - Providing better education, skills, and training opportunities for Kent's young people.

Purpose, scope and coverage of the Review

- 1.0:4 The purpose of the Review was to:
- Hold a mirror up to 16-19 education in Kent by developing a deeper understanding of the sector
 - Identify key far-reaching and systemic issues, and particular areas of under-achievement or need in the post-16 sector
 - Identify, explore and understand good practice in the sector in order to encourage its wider take-up
 - Identify the gaps, issues and barriers that need to, and can reasonably, be addressed by the sector

⁵ See <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/corporate-policies/strategic-delivery-plan> and <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/education-provision/education-provision-plan> respectively.

- Be a platform for KCC, with the support of The Education People [TEP],⁶ to develop strategic leadership in the Kent post-16 system
- Provide advocacy for young people in the 16-19 sector
- Develop a sector-wide collaborative approach to driving success in the post-16 system
- Ensure that young people in post-16 education and training in Kent are well prepared to deal with the challenges caused by Covid-19.

1.0:5 The Review was to cover all types of provider and provision for young people aged 16 to 19, and be evidence-based. It was to draw upon a wide range of data and other evidence sources, including in particular feedback from discussions with providers and young people, to create an accurate and complete picture of key issues, their inter-relatedness, and their wider consequences.

Delivery of the Review

1.0:6 The Review was overseen by a Review Steering Group, comprised of provider representatives and others with an interest in post-16 provision. In addition a Review Working Group drawn from colleagues directly involved in post-16 delivery provided valuable operational input (see Annex 1 for membership lists).

1.0:7 Following a competitive tender, an external expert (acl consulting) was appointed by the Steering Group in October 2020 to provide objectivity, insight and rigour to the Review, and to offer oversight and management support to the Review process.

1.0:8 The Review was carried out by a research team drawn from KCC, TEP, acl, and Steering Group member-proposed secondees. In broad terms:

- An initial assessment of the issues and review of the data was carried out by the Review Working Group prior to the first meeting of the Steering Group and the appointment of acl
- Preparatory and planning activity for the fieldwork took place between November 2020 and March 2021
- Fieldwork and further work on the data took place between March and July 2021
- An analysis of the findings from the data and all aspects of the fieldwork took place in August and September that year
- Initial findings were shared with key staff and members at KCC, and the Review Steering and Working groups in September and October 2021

⁶ TEP is KCC's contractor for aspects of its work with the education sector; it provides support services for the full age range from early years to young adults to improve learning, wellbeing and children's development in Kent.

- A soft consultation on the draft Recommendations took place with the post-16 sector and all other relevant parties in November 2021
 - The Review report was prepared between December 2021 and January 2022, reviewed by KCC and the Review Steering Group in February 2022, and finalised in March 2022.
- 1.0:9 To provide an evidence base, the Review used data from existing sources in combination with surveys, interviews and focus group discussions held specifically for the Review with providers, young people, and others with an interest in the sector. Further details of the approach used to complete the Review are included in Section 2.
- 1.0:10 The Steering Group and project team are most grateful to all the colleagues in Kent who devoted time and energy to supporting the Review.

2 Approach

Introduction

- 2.0:1 An extensive programme of fieldwork, supplemented by data analysis, was used to inform the Review. The key elements were as follows:
- A qualitative interview programme with post-16 providers and their young people
 - Other, primarily qualitative, elements to the fieldwork – principally interviews with other, non-provider-based, individuals
 - Analysis of quantitative data, both local and national
 - An online survey of young people, parents, education professionals and others.
- 2.0:2 These three key elements provide the structure for the bulk of this Section, which then concludes with a brief comment on reporting.
- 2.0:3 A generic “call for evidence” was used as part of the initial launch of the project, and subsequent surveys of parents and young people used to explore key issues. A consultation on the emerging findings and recommendations was also run during the reporting phase. These elements are described in more detail below.

Qualitative fieldwork with providers and young people

- 2.0:4 Fieldwork with providers and young people comprised the bulk of the qualitative element of primary research for the Review.

Overall approach

- 2.0:5 The approach was based on focus groups with young people and semi-structured interviews with a range of staff in a sample of organisations from each part of the post-16 sector in Kent.
- 2.0:6 Given Covid 19, these interviews and focus groups were all conducted remotely (via Zoom, Teams etc.).
- 2.0:7 Each discussion was guided by a checklist of issues. Each checklist used a young person’s journey – from pre-16 school, into and through post-16 provision, and onto whatever comes next – to provide a structure for the bulk of the discussion. Other issues covered included: providers’ plans for the future development of their offer; opportunities for/experience of collaboration between providers; the impact of Covid-

19 (on provision and on young people's decision-making); and equality of opportunity, in terms of access to the available offer(s)⁷.

- 2.0:8 Because the issues to discuss differed as between pre- and post-16 young people, in schools both the experiences of young people in years 10 and 11 and those in years 12 and 13 were covered.
- 2.0:9 Each interviewee was emailed a copy of the relevant checklist by their interviewer in good time in advance of their interview.

16 to 19 providers

- 2.0:10 All post-16 providers were given the opportunity to contribute to the Review (see *Call for evidence* and *Soft consultation* below); only a sample were interviewed.
- 2.0:11 acl identified a list of interviewees as follows:
- Schools: a total of 28 schools (broadly 2 for each of Kent's 12 districts, plus four 11-16-only schools). The selection was informed by: Ofsted grade; size; intake (mixed, boys only, and girls only); type (selective/non-selective; academies/LA-controlled etc.)
 - GFECs: interviews in each of the 3 GFEC groups, which together now cover the whole county; these were with a range of staff to reflect the breadth of post-16 (class-based technical/vocational provision; apprenticeships; alternative 16-19 provision etc.), and potentially pre-16, provision each offers
 - Work-based (Apprenticeship) and alternative 16-19 providers: a total of 12 to give sufficient coverage of the range of providers active, and work-related/based opportunities available to young people, within Kent
 - Special schools with sixth forms and SPIs: 3 were interviewed, selected principally to ensure reasonable geographical coverage of the county
 - PRUs – 2.
- 2.0:12 In total, interviews were conducted at 48 providers, representing c. 25% of the total number of organisations involved in delivering learning to the 16 to 19 age group. The actual number of interviews was considerably more than this as often more than one person was spoken to – for example, as implied above, in 11 to 18 schools staff with pre- and post-16 responsibilities were spoken to, generally separately.

⁷ There were five versions of the checklist: for all 16 to 19 providers, regardless of type; for 11-18 schools regarding relevant elements of provision for their 11-16 pupils; for 11-16 only schools (i.e. those schools without their own sixth form); for young people (separate lists of questions for years 10 & 11 pupils and Year 12 students); and for other interviewees, including Steering Group members and KCC and TEP staff. An example of the checklists used is included at Annex 2.

Young people

2.0:13 TEP's team of engagement officers ran focus groups with young people at a number of providers – a total of 30 groups across 22 providers. The engagement officers are particularly well-connected with careers-focussed staff in schools and other providers, and as such are well-placed to secure the input of young people into the Review.

Other interviewees

2.0:14 A further 21 interviews and informal discussions were held with representative bodies, individuals with a particular involvement in post-16 provision, etc. during the life of the project. In some instances these discussions formed part of existing programmes of meetings and consultations already in place; others were separately arranged.

Method

2.0:15 The majority of the fieldwork interviews and focus groups took place during the Summer Term of 2021.

2.0:16 Typically, each interview/focus group lasted for between an hour and an hour-and-a-half. Unless otherwise explicitly agreed, interviews were conducted on the basis that all comments made were non-attributable in any report, presentation etc. that might arise from the research.

2.0:17 As previously noted, the discussions were semi-structured – this means that (unless the interviewee would prefer a more structured approach) the checklist was used as a guide, rather than the questions being followed in sequence with each consciously 'ticked off' before moving to the next. This approach allows the interviewee to determine the way the discussion proceeds, whilst the interviewer retains control over the overall structure and pace.

2.0:18 Hand-written interview notes were taken during the course of each discussion; these were supplemented by information from research conducted either before or after the discussion.

2.0:19 After each interview, the person conducting the interview wrote up their notes (from the interview, and from any other research) using a proforma based on the checklist – the proforma ensured that the information was presented in a uniform manner which helped with subsequent analysis and reporting. A sample proforma is at Annex 2 to this Report.

Analysis

2.0:20 A shared facility with Microsoft SharePoint was set up to act as a repository for Review-related files, including all fieldwork notes. Once all the fieldwork was

completed, the notes were analysed in order to draw out the key points using an **emerging themes** approach⁸.

2.0:21 Each member of the Review research team was then asked to conduct the analysis for a particular type (or types) of interview (all work-based providers; all non-selective schools etc.); the full set of these analyses were then shared across and reviewed by each member of the research team. The research team then held a two-day workshop to review the findings from the fieldwork and, on the basis of these, develop a list of key issues and areas for action.

Other fieldwork

Parents' survey

2.0:22 TEP's annual communication to Year 11 parents, sent out in March 2021, was used to promote a web-based survey of parents' views of 16 to 19 provision: the survey was hosted on KCC's website.

2.0:23 The survey asked about:

- Parental involvement in their child's choice of what to do after Year 11
- The information that was available on the various options
- Parents' views on the advice and guidance that their child received in order to help them make their post-16 choice
- Their child's most likely post-16 destination, and whether they were "happy" that it was their best option.

2.0:24 The survey was open for the summer term; a total of 35 responses were received. A considerable proportion appeared to be from the parents of young people with a special educational need and/or disability [SEND]: this is itself significant.

Young people's survey

2.0:25 A young people's survey ran from July to mid-August 2021; again it was web-based, and hosted on KCC's website. The link was widely shared through traditional and social media.

2.0:26 The survey was targeted at young people in Year 12 (or at an equivalent stage in apprenticeship or employment) and asked for their views on:

⁸ In essence reviewing all the available data (here the full set of notes) for common themes or patterns, in this case in an **inductive** rather than **deductive** manner (i.e. driven by the data and what it is saying, rather than having a pre-existing theory or concept that provides a framework within which to interpret/'slot' the findings).

- The extent to which the choice as to what to do next after the end of Year 11 was theirs, and the influence that others had on it
- The information, advice, and guidance they had on the various post-16 options available, and whether this was sufficient for them to make a fully informed choice of what they would do next
- Travelling to learn (or work), and whether this had had an impact on what they decided to do post-16
- Whether they were “happy” with what they had decided to do and, if not, what they would prefer to be doing.

2.0:27 During the time the survey was open a total of 88 responses were received. The typical respondent was a pupil at a non-selective high school pre-16, who was now at (or planning to go to) some form of non-schools-based provision post-16. Anticipating the content of Section 3.4, pre-16 they would have liked information on non-schools-based post-16 provision through their school, but in practice had had little or no access to such information. This profile of respondents should be borne in mind when the survey of young people is referred to in Section 3.

Call for evidence

2.0:28 Alongside the survey of young people, a more general ‘call for evidence’ was issued: this gave all organisations involved in the provision of 16 to 19 learning opportunities, their staff, and indeed anyone else with an interest in the subject, a chance to contribute to the Review. The Call was publicised by Steering Group members (to their ‘memberships’), and more generally by KCC. A range of responses was received.

Soft consultation

2.0:29 Following the research team workshop in September 2021, key findings, conclusions, and recommendations of areas for action identified by the Review were shared with key Councillors and KCC staff, and the Review Steering and Working groups.

2.0:30 The proposals were then summarised and put out to the sector for consultation and comment. The consultation ran from the beginning of November to mid-December 2021. A total of 33 responses were received from sector bodies, individuals involved in the sector, and other interested parties.

Analysis

2.0:31 ‘Other interviews’ were analysed in the same way as post-16 provider interviews.

2.0:32 The responses to the surveys and soft consultations were then analysed to facilitate the identification of common issues, themes etc.. A summary of the responses can be seen in the Recommendations sections (4 and 5).

Quantitative data and analysis

- 2.0:33 Kent County Council has a highly skilled and active Analytics team within its Strategic Commissioning division. At an early stage in the Review this team prepared a detailed Data Library that was subsequently updated on an ongoing basis during the life of the project.
- 2.0:34 The Data Library contains 53 separate tables and figures analysing data with relevance to 16-19 provision, and draws upon both Department for Education [DfE] and Kent County Council internal sources. In particular, extensive use was made of the DfE's Local Authority Interactive Tool [LAIT], its Key Stage 5 destination measures 2016 to 2017, and its 16-18 Student Destinations 2018/2019 survey, alongside a detailed cohort analysis of KCC Key Stage 4 pupils from 2016/2017 to 2018/2019.
- 2.0:35 A further seventeen cross-analyses were carried out by the review team and many of the outcomes from these analyses have been specifically included as graphs and figures in this Report.

Reporting

- 2.0:36 The Review final report was prepared by the project team in early 2022. Comments from Review Steering Group members were invited in February 2022. The report was finalised for publication in March 2022.

3 Findings

Introduction

- 3.0:1** The following sections (3.1 to 3.11) present the key findings to emerge from the fieldwork and analysis of data. The structure follows that used for the fieldwork interviews – i.e.:
- 3.1 The offer – provision that is currently available in Kent for 16- to 19-year-olds
 - 3.2 Location, access, and structure
 - 3.3 Equal opportunities
 - 3.4 Pre-Year 12 decision-making – the process through which young people decide what they want to do post-16
 - 3.5 Transition into post-16 provision – the process of moving from a school environment in Year 11 into post-16 provision
 - 3.6 Delivery – issues affecting the delivery of Kent's 16-19 offer, and the factors that inform or constrain it
 - 3.7 Outcomes – outcomes from post-16 education and training
 - 3.8 Post-Year 13 decision making and transition – the support young people receive from their provider when deciding, and making the transition to, what comes next
 - 3.9 Future viability of provision – how post-16 provision may change in future
 - 3.10 Collaboration – the extent to which providers are already collaborating to deliver post-16 provision, and the potential to do more of this in future
 - 3.11 The impact of Covid-19 – the impact of the pandemic, both immediate and longer term, on post-16 learning.
- 3.0:2** The first four of these subsections cover aspects that determine how accessible provision is to young people; the remaining seven discuss various aspects of the provision itself.
- 3.0:3** Inevitably there is some overlap – for example 3.1 contains some comments on pre-Year 12 decision-making, outcomes, collaboration, and the future viability of provision. However, the vast majority of the findings relating to each of these areas have been presented in their designated subsection (collaboration in 3.10 for instance), and are only referred to elsewhere (e.g. in the case of collaboration in 3.1) where this is strictly necessary for the narrative of that particular subsection.

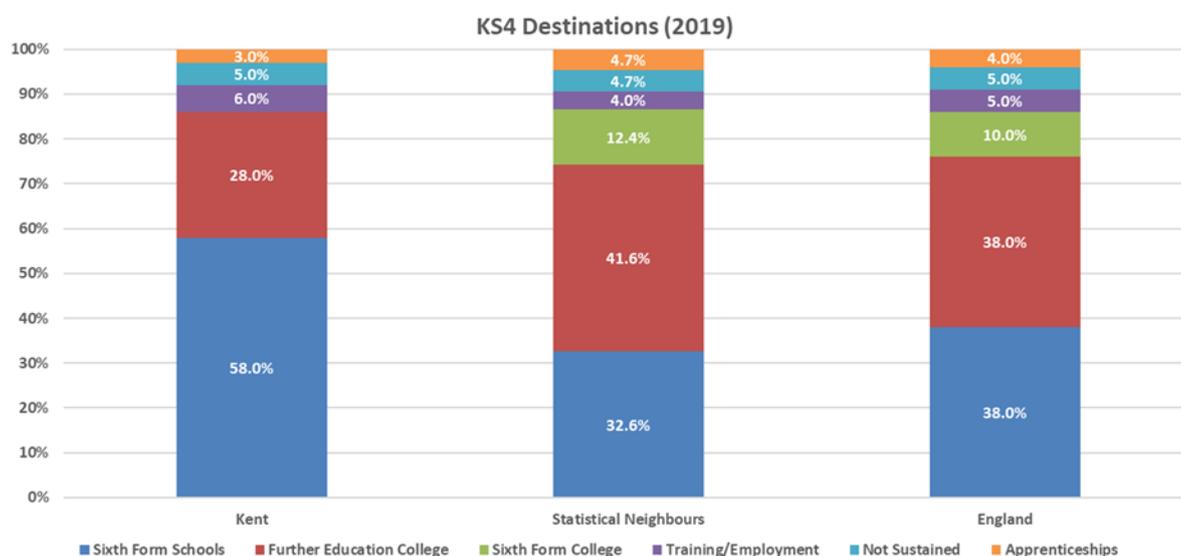
3.1 The 16-19 offer

Introduction

- 3.1:1 This Section focusses on the provision that is available to 16- to 19-year-olds. In Kent the offer is – as might be expected – largely segmented by type of provider, though with a degree of overlap, principally in relation to Level 3 qualifications other than A levels. Segmentation of the post-16 market is a feature of the English system, though more clear cut in Kent than some other LAs – in particular there is only one GFEC in Kent currently offering A levels (though one further GFEC intends to from September 2022).
- 3.1:2 This section therefore uses type of provider (school sixth forms – selective and non-selective; GFECs; work-based providers etc.) rather than type of provision (A levels; their IB and vocational/technical equivalents at Level 3; apprenticeships etc.) to frame the discussion. It describes the existing provision on offer and notes some of the issues this raises.
- 3.1:3 It also considers the impact of relevant current changes to the post-16 landscape – T Levels and Local Skills Improvement Plans [LSIPs] – though these are covered in more detail in Section 3.9.
- 3.1:4 Existing provision is considered first (to paragraph 3.1:34). The findings from the fieldwork start at paragraph 3.1:35.

Existing provision

- 3.1:5 Latest pre-pandemic figures for known destinations at 16+ in Kent are shown in the graph below, together with comparisons for Kent’s statistical neighbours and for England as a whole.



- 3.1:6 It should be stressed that these are “known” destinations only and (for instance) may understate the proportion of NEET pupils.
- 3.1:7 The graph has a number of features of interest. First, it is significant that (notwithstanding the publicity they have received) apprenticeships make a very limited contribution to provision at age 16 both in Kent and indeed nationally. Even nationally, only one in twenty young people proceed to an apprenticeship at 16+ and in Kent the figure is only one in 33.
- 3.1:8 To anticipate, Section 3.7 notes that the proportion of 18+ students proceeding to an apprenticeship is 7.8% (Kent) and 9.2% (nationally). It appears that the predominant route into apprenticeships, in Kent as elsewhere, is at 18+ rather than at 16+: this may come as a surprise, and was not perhaps what was anticipated when the apprenticeship route was revived during the early years of this century. However, since 2006-07 apprenticeships have increasingly become a programme for older rather than younger workers overall – to the extent that, in 2019-20, 47% of starts were by adults aged over 25, and young people aged under 19 accounted for only 24%⁹.
- 3.1:9 Secondly, it is immediately clear that the proportion of young people in Kent staying in school sixth forms is very much higher than the proportion either in the county’s statistical neighbours or indeed in England (58.0% as compared to 32.6% and 38.0% respectively – or 45% and 48% if sixth form colleges, which some areas have but Kent does not, are included). Again to anticipate, paragraph 3.1:49 points out that the contrast between average GCSE grades of students proceeding to GFECs as opposed to school sixth forms is stark. Assuming a normal distribution of GCSE attainment, it is likely from the graphs above that the proportion of more able students progressing to GFECs in Kent is lower than elsewhere.

Grammar School Sixth Forms

- 3.1:10 As might be expected, all grammar schools in Kent have sixth forms, and most of these sixth forms are of a viable size¹⁰. Taking 200 as a criterion of viability, a quarter (8 of the 32) Kent grammar schools do not meet it. The smallest grammar school sixth form in Kent has around 70 pupils.

⁹ There is a useful summary of apprenticeship-related statistics in a House of Commons Briefing Paper (Apprenticeship Statistics. No.06113. 30th March 2021). See <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06113/SN06113.pdf>

¹⁰ Although Government does not lay down minimum sizes for school sixth forms, statutory guidance on adding a sixth form to an existing academy states as a criterion that it should have at least 200 students. See Making significant changes to an open academy and closure by mutual agreement, page 18. DfE. 2018. DFE-00315-2018 (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/847451/Significant_change_and_academy_closure_151119.pdf).

- 3.1:11 As might also be expected, all grammar schools, apart from one that only offers the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme [IBDP]¹¹, offer an A level curriculum post-16. If a list of what might be regarded as “standard A levels” is used as a proxy for coverage of a reasonable range of subjects¹², then all grammar schools offer this list and many offer more (additional languages, Further Mathematics, etc.).
- 3.1:12 In addition, however, many grammar schools offer a small number of BTEC Nationals (previously BTEC National Diplomas and Certificates¹³). Their motivation for doing so, as described in interview, is either to allow students to follow a mixed academic and vocational curriculum or because the schools concerned do not believe that general FE colleges [GFECs] in Kent – where these qualifications are more usually found – offer these qualifications in a way that meets the needs of their pupils¹⁴. Travel may also be an issue when the nearest GFEC campus is some distance away. (This point is referred to again in Section 3.2.)
- 3.1:13 Grammar schools do not, in general, offer Level 2 or lower provision; there is a very small number of “repeat” GCSEs on offer, for instance.
- 3.1:14 A number of grammar schools also offer other Applied General Qualifications [AGQs].

High School Sixth Forms

- 3.1:15 The vast majority of high (non-selective) schools in Kent have sixth forms: 55 do while only 5 do not.
- 3.1:16 Here the provision offered is generally significantly different to what is available in grammar school sixth forms in two important respects:
- Many more of these high school sixth forms are “small” – almost 70% (38 out of the 55) probably have less than 200 sixth formers
 - Most offer a limited range of 16+ qualifications: only a quarter (14 of the 55) offer all the “standard” A levels identified above.

¹¹ Two grammar schools offer IB-related qualifications alongside other Level 3 qualifications.

¹² Art (or equivalent Design A level), Biology, Chemistry, English (any), French (or another language), Geography, History, Mathematics, Physics.

¹³ Formally BTEC stands for the Business and Technology Education Council, the body which first governed these qualifications. BTEC is now one of the incorporated examination boards of Edexcel (now part of the Pearson plc); it retains the BTEC acronym for some of its qualifications, in part because it has good brand recognition.

¹⁴ There are four grammar schools in Kent that offer three or more BTECs, including a school with one of the smallest sixth forms and a school with one of the largest; others offer one or two.

- 3.1:17 What these sixth forms do offer is a further range of BTEC National and other advanced general [vocational] qualifications (AGQs), including qualifications at Level 2, that closely parallel the qualifications to be found in GFECs. Again the high school concerned may believe it can offer these qualifications in a “more suitable manner” for its pupils, or travel issues may be involved.
- 3.1:18 Relatively few high schools offer “GCSE repeats”¹⁵.
- 3.1:19 The International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme [IBCP] is offered by 20 high schools: this will have an impact on their capacity to offer a fuller range of A levels (or indeed any at all – for some if not all schools the decision is between the IBCP and A levels, rather than offering both).
- 3.1:20 It is not part of the Review brief to review the use of IB qualifications, either at Diploma level – more often found in grammar schools – or at Career-related level – more often found in high schools as already noted. It is worth pointing out that IB qualifications are not particularly common nationally, and that they are far more common in Kent than they are in the country as a whole¹⁶. IB qualifications are, of course, acceptable for entry to higher education on the UCAS “points” system and also accepted by most higher education institutions that do not operate a points system.
- 3.1:21 It is fair to say, however, that many commentators regard the achievement of a particular “points” level through IB qualifications as requiring more sustained effort from a young person than achieving the equivalent through A levels. This is particularly true where a young person appears to have greater “natural ability” at some groups of subjects (e.g. STEM, arts, social sciences, creative) than others. This is because the IB deliberately requires a much broader field of study and is indeed seen as providing an alternative to the early specialism that A levels permit.
- 3.1:22 It is also worth pointing out in this context that (as is argued below) many students in 11-18 schools display a preference for remaining in their own school sixth form wherever possible rather than transferring to another school or college at 16+. Thus it could be argued that by choosing to offer IB qualifications *rather than* A levels – or indeed vice versa – a school is significantly influencing the choice of post-16 programme that its 16+ students subsequently make.

¹⁵ There is a pie chart at 3.9:15 that may be of interest in this context.

¹⁶ In March 2021, there were 130 IB World Schools in the UK (60% of these were in the independent sector), offering either the IBDP or IBCP. (Data is quoted in the March 2021 edition of *The Week*.) Kent has 21 of these 130 schools, or around 27% of the non-independent schools listed.

General FE Colleges

- 3.1:23 There are three GFEC groups operating in Kent, currently with a total of 12 main campuses covering most major towns and cities across the county¹⁷. One (Mid-Kent College) has a campus in Medway (a separate local authority) as well as its campuses in Kent county.
- 3.1:24 The 16+ offer in colleges would take too long to describe in detail, but focusses largely on Level 2 and Level 3 provision in technical and vocational subjects. At the time of writing, one college in Kent offers A levels as already noted; the offer does not include three of the “standard” A levels (geography, physics, and a modern foreign language)¹⁸. Another – East Kent College Group [EKC Group] – has plans to introduce a fuller range of A levels for 16- to 19-year-olds in September 2022.
- 3.1:25 Colleges also offer a small range of Level 1 vocational programmes for those whose prior qualifications do not allow them to begin at Level 2. As might be expected, students are encouraged to progress from Level 1 to Level 2, and indeed from Level 2 to Level 3, if they have the ability and ambition to do so. Arguably, however, the range of Level 1 (and below) programmes on offer is not sufficiently large to provide this route in all vocational areas.

Special schools with sixth forms; independent specialist providers

- 3.1:26 There is also a range of special schools in Kent for young people assessed as having “High Needs” that cannot be met in mainstream provision¹⁹; many of these also have sixth forms. Often a young person in these schools pre-16 will remain in the school for sixth form provision and then look to transfer to a GFEC at age 19 (young people cannot remain “in school” beyond this). There is also the option for these schools to sponsor their own independent specialist provider [ISP] to provide college-style education for post-19-year-olds (potentially up to the age of 25), and a number in Kent have done this.
- 3.1:27 The County Council also places a number of students with EHCPs in other ISPs. These may be based in Kent or elsewhere.
- 3.1:28 It is worth noting – though arguably outside the strict scope of this study – that the proportion of young people in Kent with an EHCP is higher than the national average, particularly in the eastern part of the County (Swale and Thanet especially). This is

¹⁷ The precise definition of “campus” may vary, so this number may not be exact.

¹⁸ The GFEC concerned is in fact planning to remove A levels from one of its campuses in autumn 2022.

¹⁹ These young people will already have, or be in the process of being assessed for, an Education, Health and Care plan [EHCP] which, broadly, identifies their difficulties and disabilities and how these should be met in an educational setting.

not necessarily bad in itself – holding an EHCP conveys significant benefits and entitlements to the young person concerned – but does provide a challenge for the KCC staff involved²⁰.

- 3.1:29 Placements may be on a daytime only basis (the young person is transported to and from their provision each day) or residential (the young person stays on-site for the week and travels home at weekends, or they are full-time residents, usually only in term time and travelling home for holidays).

Apprenticeship providers

- 3.1:30 There is a range of apprenticeship opportunities available to young people in Kent: for 16- to-19-year-olds these will largely be at Levels 2 and 3. The GFECs combined are the largest Apprenticeship provider in the County, covering a wide range of industries and occupations; most independent providers tend to focus on a narrower range of sectors/occupations.
- 3.1:31 In November 2021, Kent Choices (the online system that allows young people to search the full range of 16+ opportunities) was listing over a hundred such opportunities. It is fair to say that at the moment opportunities in hospitality seem to dominate the Level 2 offer, and Kent shares in the national shortage of higher-level apprenticeships – the database listed just four Level 4 apprenticeships, and only two degree apprenticeships (both in construction) that young people might progress to from Level 3.
- 3.1:32 A relatively small proportion of young people proceed to apprenticeships, as already noted.

Other (“Alternative”) 16 to 19 providers

- 3.1:33 Finally, there are 25 alternative 16-19 providers²¹ offering learning opportunities to students for whom, for whatever reason, school sixth forms, colleges and apprenticeship providers may not seem appropriate. Mostly these offer vocationally based education with an emphasis on (re-)engaging and retaining the young person.

²⁰ It is a little simplistic to conclude that a high proportion of EHCPs implies a high level of High Needs block spending, and that therefore restricting the number of EHCPs issued (in some unspecified way) will reduce this expenditure. If the assessment process that underlies an EHCP leads to a certain level of support for an individual young person then it is reasonable to assume that the young person would be entitled to that level of support through a properly functioning High Needs assessment system even in the absence of the formal EHCP assessment process concerned.

²¹ In this report, the term “alternative 16-19 providers” specifically excludes PRUs (some of whom will also refer to themselves as “Alternative Provision” – for example Maidstone and Malling Alternative Provision) and also excludes other organisations that solely provide alternatives to school attendance for pupils of statutory school age.

Young people sometimes progress from these providers into mainstream GFECs, others go into employment; some will become NEET.

- 3.1:34 The number of alternative 16-19 providers in Kent has reduced significantly in recent years, from a high of 59 a few years ago.

Issues from the fieldwork

School sixth form constraining choice at 16+²²

- 3.1:35 In theory, students approaching 16 have the option to access the full range of provision – grammar schools, high schools, colleges, etc. – and can use the online system Kent Choices to review the options open to them and create a shortlist to investigate further²³.
- 3.1:36 In practice, providing that they achieve the grades, there is a marked tendency for young people to remain at their current school and transfer into its sixth form unless they really believe it is unsuitable for them or they are determined that they want to move elsewhere (or the school has nothing it can offer them).
- 3.1:37 Where transfers between (for example) selective and non-selective schools occur at sixth form level, they appear to be driven more by average grade attainment at GCSE, and a desire to go to the grammar school if results are better than expected, than by students exercising a curriculum choice.
- 3.1:38 The graph below (based on pre-pandemic data)²⁴ shows the limited extent to which students are likely to move between selective and non-selective schools based on their GCSE results. (Progression to college is not shown.)

²² The process through which young people determine their post-16 destination is reviewed in detail in Section 3.4.

²³ See www.kentprospectus.co.uk for details. The database can be searched simply by entering a Kent postcode. There has, incidentally, been some criticism of Kent Choices in terms of its user-friendliness and the ease with which choices can be made using the platform. Evaluation of Kent Choices was not part of this project, but the use of the platform might be worth reviewing, taking into account the experiences of a sample of users. The slightly contradictory message sent to young people *re* the importance of CEIAG and identifying what they want to do next, on the one hand, and the requirement to identify three pathways they might want to follow on Kent Choices was commented on ('You want to do X, but put down Y and Z too.').

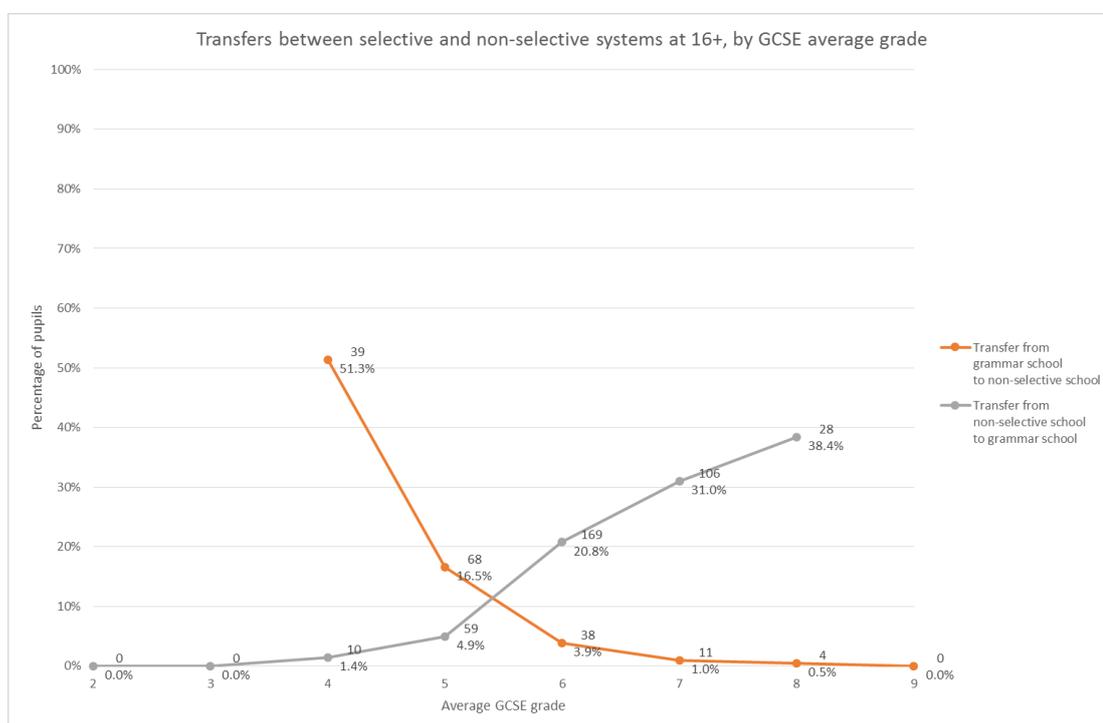
²⁴ In general the data used in this report is based on the last pre-pandemic year. There is evidence that Covid-19 related lockdowns, and changes to GCSE and A level assessment during school closures, may have distorted patterns of choice.

3.1:39 Overall, little transfer takes place between selective and non-selective schools at 16+ at all:

- 160 out of 3,538 Year 11 grammar school pupils (4.5%) transfer to non-selective schools
- 372 out of 3,288 Year 11 (11.3%) move from non-selectives to grammars.

3.1:40 Effectively the schools continue to represent different systems post-16, as they have done pre-16.

3.1:41 Of particular interest is the contrast between selective and non-selective school students who achieve average GCSE grade 6. The graph shows that very few of the pupils who achieve this average grade in a grammar school leave it (only 4%). On the other hand, of the 808 pupils who achieve this average grade in a non-selective school, only 20% transfer to grammar schools. It is also interesting that grammar schools retain 84% of their pupils with an average GCSE grade of 5 (and almost half of those whose average GCSE grade is a 4), and accept almost no one with these average grades into their sixth forms from high schools.



3.1:42 One might imagine that if a grammar school, possibly with a wider range of A levels on offer, is able to provide opportunities for the vast majority of its pupils that achieve average grade 6 at GCSE then many pupils from neighbouring non-selective schools who achieve the same average grade might want to transfer in too. But the figures suggest this is not the case. Of course capacity is not infinite, and the ability of grammar schools to make offers to pupils of other schools may be limited.

3.1:43 The impact of this is that for many pupils their choice of what to do at 16+ is in practice constrained by what their current school (grammar or non-selective) decides to offer. High school pupils who could reasonably tackle, for instance, three STEM A

levels may not therefore do so simply because their school does not offer all of them, and a local [grammar school] alternative that does offer STEM A levels will not admit them. Or possibly they never consider applying.

- 3.1:44 Where transfers do occur, some non-selective schools made reference to the difficulties that this potentially caused them.

Young people can change their minds on results days, so we have no firm idea about numbers until after the start of Autumn Term, making planning, timetabling and staffing very challenging. The selective system adds to this – there is no guarantee that [our best] students will stay with us and, because of late decisions, we can offer no certainty as to whether we will be able to run certain courses until after the start of term. For those who do want to go to our sixth form, what this can mean is that, very late in the day, they may end up having to look for another school (if they really want to do the course) or to pick something with us that was not their first choice (if they want to stay with us). (11 to 18 non-selective)

- 3.1:45 Pupil inertia has a further effect. If a school offers the IBDP or IBCP (as mentioned above) post-16 then it seems probable that pupils who would not otherwise have “chosen” an IB programme are more likely to do it simply because it is what their own institution offers²⁵. Thus the pupil inertia factor means that – whatever may be available on Kent Choices – decisions taken by a school over who it is able to admit in addition to its own Year 11 pupils, and in respect of its post-16 offer, both in relation to subjects and to the broad type(s) of qualification, will greatly affect the options considered, and choices made, by young people.

Collaboration between post-16 providers

- 3.1:46 It is fair to note that there is very limited collaboration over the curriculum offer between providers. Such collaboration as exists is largely between schools in the same MAT (which may not be close together geographically). Were providers (particularly grammar schools, high schools and GFECs) to be more collaborative, some of the above difficulties might be reduced or eliminated.
- 3.1:47 Collaboration is discussed in more detail in Section 3.11. However, there is good practice in some areas of the county, both across and within different parts of the sector, which weakens the case of those that argue that greater collaboration cannot, or should not, be prioritised.

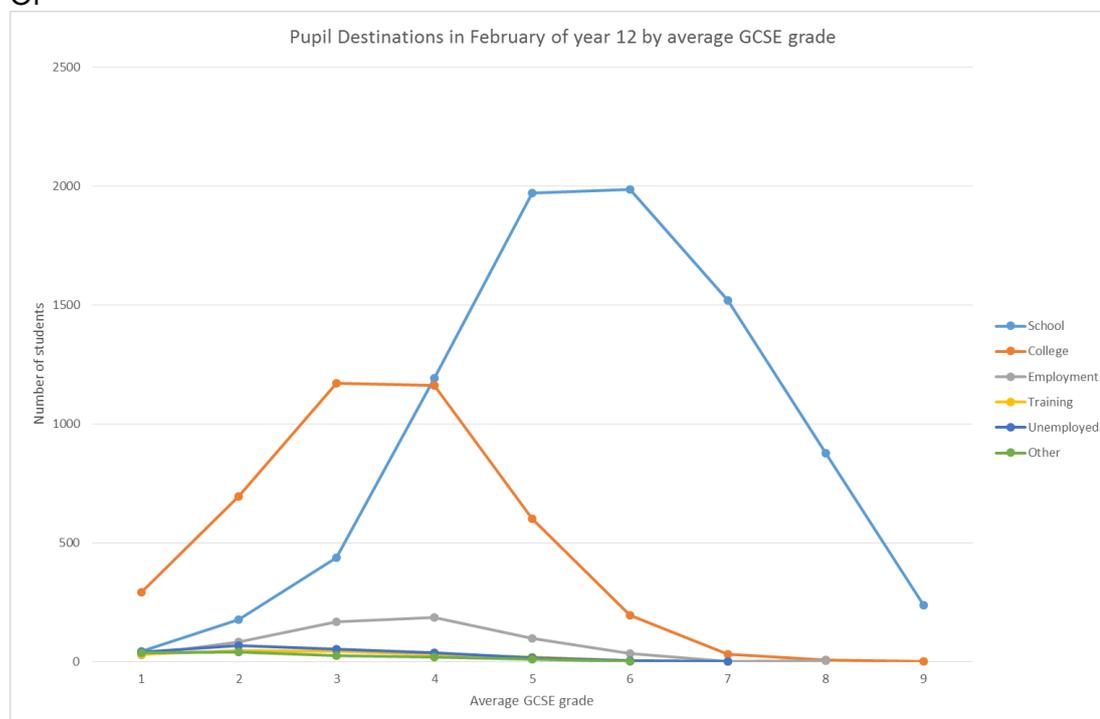
²⁵ Evidence of this can only be statistical, not of course based on individual cases.

The role of GFECs

3.1:48 As already noted, Kent's GFECs at present²⁶ have a very limited offer at A level; their principal post-16 offer is a range of vocational qualifications at Level 3, and at Levels 1 and 2.

3.1:49 As the graph below shows, the majority of young people attending GFECs have relatively low GCSE results.

Of



Average GCSE Grade	School	College	Apprenticeship	Employment	Training	Unemployment	Other
1	45	291	29	32	39	38	17
2	177	695	84	46	69	40	22
3	436	1171	168	45	54	25	35
4	1191	1161	187	30	37	18	49
5	1971	601	98	19	17	11	34
6	1987	196	34	4	3	1	23
7	1520	31	1	1	2	No Data	18
8	878	7	4	0	0	No Data	9
9	236	2	0	0	0	No Data	1

²⁶ Note that EKC Group's proposed "sixth form college" offer is pending.

- 3.1:50 Equivalent data for Kent's statistical neighbours and for England as a whole is not readily available (the analysis above came from KCC's own database) but the graphic and discussion at paragraph 3.1:5 re Key Stage 4 destinations for 2019 would suggest that the disparity in average GCSE grades at entry is more marked in Kent than elsewhere.
- 3.1:51 In particular, a first challenge for many young people attending GFECs is to retake their English and Mathematics GCSEs (or, less often, to take a new, equivalent course) in order to attain the Level 2 qualification grade in these subjects that they need in order to achieve a full Level 3. Most young people who retake GCSE English and Mathematics in GFECs – not just in Kent, but nationally – are unsuccessful in this aim. (See Section 3.7 below.)

Schools clearly need help with maths/English for a significant proportion of their pupils – this is not a problem that is going away, if anything it is getting worse, and hampering young people's progress. We would much prefer to engage with them earlier on this. (GFEC)

- 3.1:52 There is a limit, it is said, to what can be done in English and maths in a year in college, despite intensive tuition. However it may simply be the case that GCSEs in these subjects are not designed as a qualification "for everyone" despite Government hoping that this might be so. (See paragraph 3.7:47.). Certainly functional skills appears to be a good alternative in apprenticeships. The key point to draw from the graph is that (except for a handful of students) GFECs do not seem at present to be providing a substantial alternative vocational-based route for more able students who would be either capable of following an A level course but prefer the idea of a vocationally-based education, or would prefer to do A levels but not in a school-based environment.
- 3.1:53 T Levels, of course, are meant to provide just this opportunity for more able students to progress through a vocational route. How these students will choose between A levels and T Levels, and between T Levels at school (if available) and at college, remains to be seen²⁷.
- 3.1:54 Currently, therefore, the data suggests that a GFEC seems to be the default destination for those who have concluded, or been advised, that they are not academically able enough to remain in school sixth forms. (This point is explored further in Section 3.4.)

²⁷ T Levels will be a huge challenge for schools to deliver. At least 45 days work experience will be required, and it is not clear that schools will have the required networks with employers to be able to deliver this. Moreover it is not yet clear to what extent higher education institutions will recognise T Levels as entry criteria for some or all programmes.

- 3.1:55 As noted, however, EKC Group has announced its intention to open “EKC Sixth Form College” at its Canterbury campus in September 2022, offering an A level-led programme in a college environment for 16- to-19-year-olds²⁸. The proposed offer is broad-based, and includes 23 subjects at A level, including all but a modern foreign language from the “standard offer” described above. This development will offer an alternative for more academically able students who do not wish to study in a school environment post-16.
- 3.1:56 Although GFECs do offer a small number of programmes at Level 1 it was reported in interviews that this was not regarded as a core function for all of them. Nor, it was suggested to us, was there much enthusiasm for Entry Level programmes which can in turn lead to Level 1 progression. (This is also largely confirmed by the graph above.)
- 3.1:57 This in turn may explain why a number of special schools are creating their own SPIs to provide a post-school destination for 19+ students at Entry 3 or below, as previously noted. In turn these SPIs may in due course provide a pathway into vocational programmes at a higher level in GFECs for some learners.
- 3.1:58 There is, and has been since study programmes²⁹ were introduced in September 2013, an opportunity for schools to grow their sixth forms by making provision at L1/L2 (either alone or in partnerships with other providers). This could become the basis of a “transition year 12” to other provision, in future including T Levels, in years 13 and 14. There is a growing awareness of the possibilities this opens up but very limited actual takeup of this opportunity so far.
- 3.1:59 A small but significant consequence of GFECs’ current ‘limited A levels’ position, as just described, can be found in progression from PRUs. By no means all pupils referred to a PRU for the closing stages of their pre-16 career are struggling academically: indeed in some cases they are academically very able once their behavioural problems have been addressed. Yet understandably they are not particularly keen to go to a school sixth form once they turn 16, and equally understandably not many school sixth forms are keen to take them³⁰.

²⁸ It is not immediately relevant to this Review, but there are at present no opportunities for adults to study for A levels in Kent should they seek to return to learning.

²⁹ Study programmes are built around the needs of individual students; almost every post-16 student will have one (students following a T Level are a specific exception). Study programmes must have a core aim – typically qualification(s)-based, academic or technical/vocational plus English and/or maths where the young person has not yet achieved a GCSE grade 4, or preparation for employment – and should include work experience and other non-qualification-related activities to complement the other elements of the programme and support the young person’s progression (to further or higher education or into employment). See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-study-programmes-guide-for-providers/16-to-19-study-programmes-guidance-2021-to-2022-academic-year>

³⁰ There is at least one exception to this: a school that has close relationships with its local PRU aimed at smoothing the transition to its sixth form wherever appropriate.

3.1:60 In practice, therefore, almost all progression from PRUs is into the GFEC sector, limiting the options open to former PRU pupils even when they have made every effort to overcome their behavioural difficulties, make a new start and be entirely suitable for A levels – just not in a school environment. (EKC Group’s sixth form at Canterbury will make this option potentially available to such students in the east of the County.)

The impact of “qualifications reform” on the offer³¹

3.1:61 Kent colleges are investing massively in preparation for T Levels, which are both technical/vocational qualifications in their own right and also being marketed as preparation for higher education.

3.1:62 Schools – particularly non-selective schools – are becoming increasingly concerned at the risk the reforms pose to their post-16 offer:

- Specifically – to the future of the IBCP and the BTECs they currently run
- More generally – will their remaining post-16 provision be viable in a “post-qualifications reform” world?

3.1:63 As T Levels are rolled out – and funding is progressively withdrawn from “equivalent” BTECs and similar qualifications at Level 3³² – the position of High School sixth forms, and in particular of the vocational offer that many of them make and that a significant proportion of 16 year olds in Kent currently opt for, looks increasingly vulnerable in the medium term.

3.1:64 Given the current direction of travel, a scenario where the needs of all students at Level 2 or above are met by grammar school sixth forms on the one hand [for the ‘academic’] and GFECs on the other [for the more technical/vocational] seems possible if not indeed likely: this would leave High School sixth forms greatly exposed.

3.1:65 It also raises the question of what happens with those who are not ready at age 16 for a Level 2 or Level 3 programme. In future what provision will be available for them? This is considered in more detail in the following sub-section.

3.1:66 Quite apart from its impact on provision, the qualifications reforms as currently proposed risk closing off a valuable progression route into higher levels of learning for many of Kent’s young people: nationally, in 2020 almost one in five students

³¹ Qualifications reform is covered in more detail in Section 3.9.

³² Speaking to the House of Commons on 15th November 2021, Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi announced that plans to remove funding for most BTECs, and other AGQs, will be delayed for a year – i.e. until 2024 – and that “it is quite likely we will see many BTECs and other similar applied general style qualifications continuing to play an important role in 16-19 education, for the foreseeable future”. (Their ultimate defunding still remains Government policy.)

accepted into university at age 18 had a BTEC qualification (9.7% BTEC(s) only; a further 7.9% a combination of a BTEC and A level(s), and 1% an IB, a proportion of which will be IBCP)³³.

The collapse of “alternative” 16-19 provision

3.1:67 For young people for whom neither schools nor GFECs are immediately suitable there is, as already mentioned, a range of alternative provision offered to vulnerable 16-19 year old learners.

3.1:68 Kent has historically had quite a wide range of provision for vulnerable learners for whom school sixth form or college is not appropriate: this provision was largely funded by ESFA subcontracts from colleges/other large providers or funded by the European Social Fund [ESF]. Since 2018/19 there has been a near collapse of this provision (from 42 providers in 2018-19 to 25 in 2020-21). The number of places offered by the remaining providers almost halved between 2018-19 and 2019-20.

There is a real and increasing shortage of provision for young people who do not fit neatly into the “school”, “college” or “apprenticeship” categories. These young people may have had difficulties at school, and are likely to struggle with literacy and numeracy: this of itself bars them from many routes. (Work-based provider)

3.1:69 The situation is actually worse than the data suggests as many of the providers are very small, their offer is not available across the county and/or all year round, and many work in niche subject areas. And in many cases the offer has only been maintained by an increase in online delivery during the pandemic. In the right circumstances some young people will respond well to this; however online or blended learning requires careful introduction by the provider, with appropriate support at the right time.

3.1:70 There are various explanations for the decline in this provision:

- Subcontracting – most providers have reduced the number of subcontracts they offer for quality and financial reasons. ESFA has also further tightened its rules on subcontracting: this has left some subcontracted providers with no access to funding and therefore no means to offer provision
- Change of college focus – following government policy, some colleges have shifted their offers towards more able students; entry requirements for many low-level courses have also been raised
- Level of need – students are presenting with much higher levels of additional learning need; providers are often unable to access to sufficient funding on a

³³ Data from the UCAS Undergraduate Sector-Level End Of Cycle Data Resources 2020 – available at <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-reports/2020-end-cycle-report>.

timely basis (or at all) to meet these needs, and cannot carry the associated costs in the hope that funding will be forthcoming at some point

- Rising costs of delivery – providers are unable to access capital funds, or any other financial support, for premises and equipment; revenue funding is simply insufficient to fill the gap
- Staff recruitment – providers report difficulties in recruiting staff due to the longevity of provision being uncertain and more attractive pay being on offer elsewhere
- ESF – the last substantial round (which brought in £6m for Kent) came to an end in March 2019; the next, and last, ESF contract was for only £860,000 – and this was for the whole South East Local Enterprise Partnership [SELEP] area over the period to the end of 2020. Subsequently SELEP released a further £2m – this for the whole LEP for the period to 2023; Kent’s share is likely to be just over £1m, and will not be as easy for some providers to access as 50:50 “match” funding is required.

3.1:71 The decline in, and imminent disappearance of, ESF, coupled with the UK Government’s proposed replacement programme (the UK Shared Prosperity Fund [UKSPF]) being less generous³⁴ and difficulties in accessing ESFA funding, have therefore created uncertainties over the future of this provision. When these are combined with increased costs and more young people coming forward with more complex needs, the decision of providers to withdraw from the market is understandable.

3.1:72 KCC and TEP have been working with the ESFA to try and initiate a gap filling process³⁵; to date this has been unsuccessful. The ESFA has acknowledged the need but has not been able to provide additional funding in support. A further complication is that there have been a number of requests for in-year growth funding to reflect more young people remaining in post-16 provision than has historically been the case; until these have been resolved, the ESFA is not able to take the gap filling process forward.

3.1:73 More positively, however, it is noted that the DfE does now have concerns *re* the availability of alternative 16-19 provision and is investigating how more of it can be supported.

3.1:74 Whilst these recent developments are encouraging, for the moment the loss of the means through which to retain (or to attract back) young people who have not had

³⁴ UKSPF spending will “ramp up to around £1.5bn a year” and “at least match current receipts from EU structural funds.” In the last seven-year EU Multi-annual Financial Framework (2014-20) the UK as a whole was allocated £9.4bn in structural funds (the European Regional Development Fund [ERDF] and the ESF): this was supplemented by an additional £7.2bn in domestic ‘match funding’. For more details see <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/structural-funds>.

³⁵ See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-market-entry>.

their needs met in education pre-16 has serious consequences. The pandemic has, to some extent, masked the impact of this. However, as more normal times return, the knock-on implications of the loss of this provision for those of Kent's young people who are not yet ready for a mainstream option, but could be offered a pathway to one via alternative 16-19 provision, are potentially significant – any missteps will be reflected in the NEET statistics.

We work with young people who are unable to access sixth form, college, or work-based provision at 16. We are seeing increasing numbers, including young people who have been home educated and, at 16, now seem lost. Currently we are unable to meet demand – we have a hundred 16-19 year olds on our waiting list. What we are able to offer is entirely dependent on what we can get funded for; we have to adapt what we do to secure it as best we can. Previously we have had sub-contracts from colleges, but these no longer seem to be available so we are currently seeking an ESFA study programme contract, to provide more reliable and consistent funding, and drawing on funding for traineeships in the meantime. (Alternative 16-19 provider)

This year, if funding does not come through, our numbers may be 75% down on pre-Covid levels – and we were not meeting demand for our programmes before the pandemic. We are now running programmes in the hope that the funding will come through: this is not sustainable. (Alternative 16-19 provider)

Changes in apprenticeships

3.1:75 Since April 2017, two major changes to apprenticeships have been made:

- The Apprenticeship Levy. The introduction of the Levy in April 2017 was a major change in how apprenticeships are funded, with large organisations effectively substantially paying for the system through a charge on their annual pay costs (currently set at 0.5% of all payments to employees that are subject to employer Class 1 secondary National Insurance contributions)³⁶
- The replacement of frameworks with standards. From 1 August 2020 all new apprentices have had to start on the relevant apprenticeship standard. (In essence, standards place the emphasis on an End Point Assessment, designed to demonstrate that the apprentice has the skills to carry out their job, rather than continuous assessment of competences throughout the apprenticeship.)

3.1:76 One effect of the introduction of Apprenticeship standards has been to widen the offer – what was previously largely a work-based qualification for younger employees at Levels 2 and 3 is now an opportunity for people to do apprenticeships from Level 2 through to Level 8, and at any stage of their career. When combined with the Levy, this means that employers have been able to use apprenticeships in areas of the

³⁶ For smaller employers, the Government pays for the bulk of the Apprenticeship – employers currently pay no more than 10% of the costs of training and assessment.

business that have previously lacked training, and/or can use the Levy as a source of funding for qualifications that were previously not available as part of an Apprenticeship.

The ability of [existing] adult employees to take an Apprenticeship, and of these to be funded by the Apprenticeship Levy, has had a knock-on effect in terms of the opportunities available to young people. (Work-based provider)

- 3.1:77 There are, at the time of writing, 167 standards at Level 2 and 601 standards at Level 3 and above. Some providers are concerned that this imbalance has created a barrier which has prevent some young people taking up apprenticeships – in particular those who may have struggled at school and do not have the immediate prospect of being able to access one at Level 3 have seen the offer that would open doors (i.e. a more generic Level 2 Apprenticeship, such as Business Administration) reduce or disappear once frameworks started to close and replacement Standards did not materialise.
- 3.1:78 Furthermore, some of the new Level 3 standards require the prospective apprentice to have maths and English qualifications at Level 2 (i.e. for most, GCSEs) before they start. Even for those that do not have this as a pre-start requirement, to enable full funding to be drawn down the apprentice has to complete maths and English qualifications at Level 2 as part of their Apprenticeship: this makes some providers reluctant to take on those young people leaving school without them. The risk is that, in practice, these requirements will also restrict access, particularly at Level 3.
- 3.1:79 The data does indeed suggest that there have been significant changes in those starting an Apprenticeship in Kent at Levels 2, 3, 4 and 5. Looking at the period 2014-15, when there were just over 11,000 starts, to 2020-21, when there were just under 8,000:
- The proportion of starts that are at Level 2 has fallen from 61% to 26%; Level 3 starts have increased from 36% to 46%; and starts at Levels 4 and 5 have grown from almost nothing (4%) to 28% (more than the number of starts at Level 2)
 - Whilst the proportion of Level 2 and 3 apprenticeships by age band has remained constant – so, for example, 30% of Level 2 starts in 2014-15 were aged under 19; the equivalent percentage for 2020-21 is 33% – the total number of starts by under-19s has almost halved (from 2,760 to 1,410). Looked at another way, the **proportion** of starts these figures represent has dropped from 25% to 18% with a concurrent increase for the over-25s (from 44% to 53% over the period).
- 3.1:80 The shifts are particularly marked after the April 2017 changes; whilst there is almost certainly a Covid-effect in 2020-21, the data for 2019-20 is not much better – e.g. a

total of 1,670 starts by under-19s³⁷. For some sectors, T Levels may accelerate the effects reported above.

Apprenticeships [and Level 3 provision post-16 more generally] are now mostly there for those who have been served well by the system to date – i.e. have good GCSEs, including maths and English. The opportunities for those that don't are not really there – and certainly are not geographically spread, in the required numbers, and of the required quality. (Work-based provider)

General concerns over work readiness

- 3.1:81 Interviewees from an employment background expressed a general concern that young people were not necessarily well enough prepared for employment: lacking in work skills, not appreciating the responsibilities of being an employee rather than a student, etc.
- 3.1:82 It is fair to say that employers at all levels regularly state this opinion about new employees, from those coming from alternative 16-19 providers through to new university graduates. And some expectations that employers have of their latest “new hires” may not be reasonable. But there is probably enough in Kent employers’ views to make it worth revisiting the work preparation learning that young people receive, and perhaps putting it on a more structured footing.
- 3.1:83 A particularly good source of this learning is of course the work placement. However Kent schools and other providers report increasing difficulty in sourcing sufficient meaningful work placements to meet current demand, particularly as (for the majority of placements) no fee can be offered. The pandemic has had an immediate – though hopefully short-lived – impact here. It will be interesting to see how quickly the position is recovered, and what impact the introduction of T Levels, with their demand for much greater and more structured work placement provision, will have. (It is also one reason why Level 2 apprenticeships for 16- to-18-year-olds are important.)

Use of local labour market information to inform vocational provision

- 3.1:84 It is a long-established principle that local labour market information [LLMI] should be drawn regularly in order to ensure that vocational provision in particular meets the needs of local employment markets.
- 3.1:85 GFECs and apprenticeship providers claim to do this as a matter of course. However it is less clear that schools – in this context, particularly those that offer vocational qualifications – are as systematic. These schools could argue that they are providing these qualifications as much as a stepping stone to further advanced study as in order to meet local employment needs directly. However schools’

³⁷ The data quoted here is from DfE’s Apprenticeships and traineeships statistical data set. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships>

vocational programme planning is even so perhaps not benefiting from local labour market intelligence as much as it might.

- 3.1:86 There are however some examples of schools making effective use of LLMI – which suggests that they are not structurally prevented from accessing the data in order to do so.
- 3.1:87 The *Levelling Up White Paper* may help here; it includes proposals for a new unit to be set up to provide data and other information about local areas. In addition, the Careers and Enterprise Company will be in a position to help by working to make LLMI more available to schools and other users.

Provision for young people not in education, employment, or training

- 3.1:88 NEET support sits in the School Improvement, Secondary, Special and PRU / Skills & Employability Service within The Education People [TEP]. There are three elements to the service:
- Preventative measures
 - NEET support service
 - Tracking.

Preventative measures

- 3.1:89 Engagement officers work as part of area-based teams to increase the number of young people who are participating in education, training or employment with training post-16.
- 3.1:90 The role involves building effective relationships with education providers, employers, training providers and KCC services such that they have a positive impact on young peoples' transition and destination.
- 3.1:91 Of particular relevance to the Review, their role includes:
- Working with schools to identify young people in Year 11 who are at risk of becoming NEET post-16, producing an action plan to enable the successful transition of these students into post-16 education, and tracking their progress and providing support to help them make the move to post-16 employment, education or training
 - More generally, working with schools and colleges to support the transition of students from Year 11 into post-16 employment, education or training
 - Promoting and supporting the post 16-offer in each district, including through the delivery of engagement activities to students (e.g. information sessions, guidance, and presentations to assemblies on post-16 options)
 - Working with schools, colleges, young people and their parents/carers, and employers, on the promotion of apprenticeships as a post-16 destination.

NEET Support Service

- 3.1:92 A team of qualified advisors works with those who become NEET. They offer mentoring, guidance and intensive support where necessary to support these young people to re-engage with education or employment as appropriate.

Tracking

- 3.1:93 A team of Young People's Progression Officers [YPPOs] tracks young people and refers those who become NEET to the NEET Support Service.
- 3.1:94 Clearly the extent to which the NEET Support Service and YPPOs can successfully undertake their roles depends upon young people's contact details being up to date, and education providers promptly identifying and reporting when a young person leaves their institution to the teams as soon as possible. Where this does not happen, tracking and helping the young people concerned becomes a more complicated task, with the chances of positive outcomes being achieved consequently reduced.

Relevant forthcoming changes: the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill

- 3.1:95 The Skills and Post-16 Education Bill was published on 18 May 2021. At the end of February 2022, the Bill had been through first and second readings, committee and report stages, and third readings in both houses of parliament (Lords and Commons), and was in its final stages (consideration of amendments before Royal Assent).

T Levels

- 3.1:96 The introduction of T Levels is possibly the greatest single change affecting post-16 provision. Their impact is not limited just to the introduction of a new qualification, but also (as noted above) to the proposal that current vocational qualifications, including BTEC Nationals, will be "de-funded" as equivalent T Levels are introduced.
- 3.1:97 It is not self-evident that schools, in particular, will be in a good position to offer T Levels, given the new requirements for considerable employer involvement and, in some instances, for specialist accommodation and equipment. Interviewees suggested that there is a marked contrast between GFECs' and schools' responses to T Levels – colleges are "forging ahead" (a full mapping of their introduction across Kent's colleges is expected by mid-2022) while schools seem uncertain as to what their role could be.
- 3.1:98 Certainly there is a concern that if those school sixth forms that currently offer BTEC Nationals indeed cannot substitute T Levels in their place, and their current offering is deemed to be equivalent and therefore de-funded, progressively this will reduce the provision they offer and result in the viability of these sixth forms being called into question. The introduction of T Levels is discussed in detail in Section 3.9.

Local Skills Improvement Plans

- 3.1:99** If passed into law, the Bill will give a statutory footing to LSIPs, which “will be employer-led and will set out the key changes needed in a local area to make technical education and training more responsive to employers’ skills needs”³⁸. Kent is already making progress with LSIPs (it is a “joint Trailblazer and Development Fund pilot area”) and this statutory basis will help speed up progress further.
- 3.1:100** Moreover, the Bill will place a statutory duty on all colleges and similar designated institutions to keep their provision under review to ensure the newly identified needs from LSIPs are being met. As implied above, there has been some suggestion (not by any means only in Kent) that under the current regime colleges are free to choose which aspects of local vocational education demand they are prepared to meet and which not: this can leave “holes” in the provision available where all recognise the need for a particular vocational programme or level but as it happens no local providers are keen to meet it. Under this new duty, it is suggested that providers will be obliged to satisfy themselves that these “holes” are not occurring, or take action (perhaps mutually agreed or through collaboration with other providers) if they are.
- 3.1:101** In general, better use of local labour market intelligence will follow.
- 3.1:102** Interestingly, the proposed legislation appears to cover general FE colleges and sixth form colleges (and a few other “designated institutions”) but not schools with sixth forms (which are not mentioned in the documentation). Hopefully those schools that, as in Kent, provide some vocational education will also be encouraged to participate in the reforms concerned.

Conclusion

- 3.1:103** The key points to highlight from this Section relate to: “pupil inertia” (i.e. the marked tendency for young people to remain at their current school and transfer into its sixth form at 16, rather than fully consider other choices); Level 3 qualifications reform; and alternative 16-19 provision.
- 3.1:104** Pupil inertia means that:
- Effectively Kent schools continue to represent different systems post-16, as they have done pre-16
 - For many pupils, their choice of what to do at 16+ is in practice constrained by what their individual school decides to offer, in relation both to the broad type(s) of qualification (principally A levels, Advanced General Qualifications [AGQs],

³⁸ Skills and Post-16 Education Bill – policy summary notes”. DfE. November 2021. See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1035459/Skills_and_Post-16_Education_Bill_November_2021_policy_notes.pdf

and the International Baccalaureate Diploma and Careers programmes [IBDP and IBCP]) and to the individual subjects themselves

- In a situation where pupil inertia is widespread, other provision (in particular GFECs) becomes the default destination for those who have concluded, or been advised, that they are not academically able enough to transfer to their school's sixth form, rather than a valued and valid positive choice in its own right.

3.1:105 Pupil inertia would matter less if there was collaboration over the curriculum offer between providers – the evidence suggests that currently there is very little of this taking place.

3.1:106 With regard to the Level 3 reforms (i.e. the roll-out of T Levels and the related withdrawal of ESFA funding for the equivalent BTECs and other AGQs), non-selective schools in particular are increasingly concerned at the risks posed to their post-16 offer:

- Specifically – what will be the future of the qualifications they currently run (principally the IBCP and BTECs)?
- More generally – will their remaining post-16 provision be viable in a “post-qualifications reform” world?
- For their pupils – what options will be open in the future for the sort of young person who is currently able to achieve and progress via AGQs, taken either in combination with A levels or on a standalone basis?

3.1:107 Given the current direction of travel, there is a danger of slipping into a greater polarisation of non-work-based 16-19 provision than exists at present. Specifically, grammar schools might come to specialise exclusively on academic study while GFECs specialise exclusively on T Levels and other technical/vocational study, and the role of high school sixth forms in turn becomes less defined. Under this scenario – which the qualifications reforms as currently proposed may encourage – a valuable progression route into higher levels of learning for many of Kent's young people may be lost.

3.1:108 Finally, while Kent has historically had quite a wide range of provision for vulnerable learners for whom school sixth form or college is not appropriate, since 2018/19 it has seen a near collapse: this has resulted in a consequent loss of the means through which to retain (or to attract back) young people who have not had their needs met in education pre-16. The knock-on implications for those at risk of finding themselves NEET are potentially significant.

3.1:109 Section 4 describes how the major recommendations that have emerged from the Review will seek to address these issues; specifically in sub-sections:

- 4.2 Raising young people's aspirations through better CEIAG
- 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
- 4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.

Related subsidiary recommendations are in Section 5 (paragraphs numbered 5.1).

3.2 Location, access and structure

Introduction

- 3.2:1 Section 3.1 reviewed the 16-19 offer in Kent as a single whole. In fact, of course, the offer is based on providers that have geographical locations throughout Kent and it does not automatically follow that all possible choices at 16+ are equally available to young people living in every location.
- 3.2:2 In fact, this is self-evidently not the case. Notwithstanding the limited control over the sector exercised by ESFA as the funding body, it is essentially up to individual providers to decide what they offer and where. Following the closure of the Learning and Skills Council [LSC] in 2010, there is no one central controlling or even coordinating function that might attempt to ensure an equal spread of providers and equal range of offers everywhere. “Market forces” may mean that new providers will set up, or providers will expand, only when they detect a local shortage of opportunities that they believe they can meet.
- 3.2:3 Local authorities [LAs] have statutory duties relating to participation – in particular, to secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people aged 16 to 19 (up to age 25 for those with an EHCP). To fulfil this, LAs need to have a strategic overview of the provision available in their area, and to identify and resolve gaps in provision. But beyond this, there is no statutory or other body that can intervene to fill any gaps. Nor is it clear what statutory or other powers LAs have to enable them to discharge this function.
- 3.2:4 The relative affluence, or otherwise, of different areas in Kent plays a factor. As is true nationally – and notwithstanding steps now being taken everywhere in the country to widen participation in advanced further and higher education – it remains the case that a higher proportion of young people in affluent areas follow the path through A levels to higher education and beyond. Paradoxically, therefore, these affluent areas typically have less 16+ provision at Level 2 or below, and certainly very little “alternative” 16-19 provision as defined in Section 3.1. Conversely, an area where there is significant economic deprivation may have a fuller range of 16+ opportunities available, though if these areas are geographically isolated this will have an impact on what is on offer.
- 3.2:5 Moreover, while A level provision is more or less viable in any reasonably populated location³⁹ vocational and technical education tends to require more substantial facilities and more investment. Again, in a more isolated or rural area this may mean such resource-heavy provision is more likely to be further away.

³⁹ Comments about the small size of sixth forms in Section 3.1 notwithstanding. Most small sixth forms in Kent are very close to other sixth forms, which may themselves be small. There are few if any instances where a small sixth form is the only sixth form covering a particular town or local area: clearly such sixth forms can make a case for being protected.

- 3.2:6 Thus while all areas of the county have more or less straightforward access to A level education the provision of other 16+ opportunities is more patchy.
- 3.2:7 In particular, and within the context of a general shortage of alternative 16-19 providers (see Section 3.1), some areas of the county are in particularly short supply for this provision, with long waiting lists for a significant proportion of young people⁴⁰. Without seeking to stereotype, one may fairly conclude that the consequences of a young person experiencing a long delay before they can access a placement at an alternative 16-19 provider will probably be more serious than for one waiting for some other kind of provision to come on stream⁴¹.

Issues from the fieldwork

- 3.2:8 Two approaches to addressing the issues highlighted above were raised during the fieldwork interview programme for the Review:
- Attempting to resolve local “gaps” through collaboration at the local level, perhaps working towards some form of “minimum local offer”⁴²
 - Ensuring that when students need to travel – perhaps significant distances – to reach their chosen 16+ provision they are helped to do so.

A “local offer”

- 3.2:9 Despite there being no formal mechanism through which 16+ providers can coordinate what they provide, there is evidence that in some areas of the county providers are working together to ensure that a wider range of provision is available locally and made accessible to young people.
- 3.2:10 Collaborative activities are covered in Section 3.10, and in the recommendations (Section 4.3 in particular). The general point here is that what one area can do in practice, any area can presumably do in theory. If some parts of the county can collaborate towards providing a minimum guaranteed local offer, others can too.
- 3.2:11 However, currently the general approach in Kent (and elsewhere) is more likely to be based on suspicion and competition rather than collaboration between providers. Competition may, at least in theory, lead to a wider offer as providers identify, and fill, spaces left in the current provision map, but equally can lead to undue focus on those programmes likely to generate a surplus and underinvestment by providers in

⁴⁰ See, for example, **Children face 'agonising' waits for mental health care**. BBC News website, 21 September 2021. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-58565067>

⁴¹ Whilst their choices may be restricted, students hoping to start A level programmes are not usually kept waiting.

⁴² Small and specialist provision cannot, of course, be provided everywhere.

the less popular or more expensive forms of provision, including those that seek to (re)engage those young people who are the hardest to help.

- 3.2:12 Indeed it is a paradox of the current system that those seeking to work with the most challenging young people in Kent (and elsewhere) have least certainty over their continued access to funding year-on-year: as noted in 3.1, this has consequences for the post-16 provision that is available for these young people, and how far they have to travel to access it, with on-going implications for their life chances.

Transport

- 3.2:13 An alternative (or ideally complementary) approach to ensuring a locally-based minimum offer is to provide support for young people to travel to follow the programme they wish.
- 3.2:14 It is a well-known paradox that the 16-19 provision that is generally assumed to attract the most motivated and probably highest achieving students – namely A levels – is usually the most local and easiest to get to. The majority of A level students do not face a long commute: indeed they may very well be able to walk or travel a short journey on the bus with friends⁴³. Students determined to study a combination of A levels not on offer locally and those following a vocational or technical programme, whether at a GFEC or through an apprenticeship, may not be so lucky. In particular, it may be the most vulnerable that have to travel the furthest.

Most students can walk to college, or take one local bus. Canterbury is also possible. Beyond that, students are reluctant to take on the travelling and may therefore consciously or unconsciously not choose something that is not on offer locally. (PRU)

There is a strong preference among students not to travel any great distance for 16+ provision if they can avoid it. Students, unless they are highly motivated, start by considering the options locally. Any additional provision would need to be available locally to have any impact on young people's choices. (11 to 16 school)

- 3.2:15 For such students, there are two obvious things that can be done:
- Reduce the need to travel
 - Provide financial support for those who have no option but to travel.

⁴³ There are, of course, exceptions in the most rural areas, or for students who follow through with an unusual choice of A levels. However, as already noted, most A level students choose their A levels from the range available at their closest or existing school: see Section 3.1 above.

Reducing the need to travel

- 3.2:16** It may help if the provision concerned is offered during a shorter week. Many GFECs offer “full time” programmes that in fact only involve college attendance for up to three longish days. This at least reduces the number of days that some vocational students need to travel. (It will, of course, not help the apprentice or the ‘non-standard A levels’ student.)
- 3.2:17** Emerging anecdotal evidence from the pandemic, and the associated lockdown, is showing that adult employees find “commuting” disproportionately less demanding if they only have to travel three or four days per week, and it is very likely that students would say the same. Options for “distance” and “blended” learning were developed by many providers during the pandemic, and there should be scope for continuing these in future, reducing the need for on-site attendance. This issue is covered in more detail in Section 3.11 below.
- 3.2:18** Finally, the social issues raised when young people travel outside their “home patch” for education, training, or employment should not be underestimated. Arguably Kent does not suffer from the gang-related “postcode wars” as badly as London or some other major cities, but provider staff need to keep in their minds that a young person from one community may regard his or her peers in another community as potentially “hostile” and not wish to study there.

Addressing the cost of travel⁴⁴

- 3.2:19** Young people under 16 are statutorily entitled to free travel to the nearest appropriate education provider that can meet their needs, providing it is more than a certain minimum distance away; there is no similar entitlement for 16+ students⁴⁵.
- 3.2:20** What 16+ students in Kent can do is buy a “16+ Travel Saver”, at an annual cost of £420 (£430 if paid in instalments)^{46 47}. Thereafter the student concerned is entitled to free travel on any Kent service bus at any time (including evenings, weekends, holidays)⁴⁸. “Student” here includes those attending school, college, other learning

⁴⁴ This is, of course, a substantial simplification. There is no space here to discuss either the full statutory regulations or Kent County Council’s approach to them in detail. KCC’s current policy for 16-19 transport is on its website at <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/transport-and-highways-policies/post-16-transport-policies>

⁴⁵ If a student over 16 has special needs, and cannot use public transport, then transport to their learning location (i.e. that named in their EHCP, if they have one) is usually provided free of charge. If the student is able to use public transport then this is not provided free.

⁴⁶ The Travel Saver is a “subsidised product”, that is to say the Council pays the bus companies concerned (through a no doubt complex formula) a greater sum than its sale of the passes yields.

⁴⁷ KCC has raised the cost of the Kent Travel Saver by 21% for the 2022-23 school year.

⁴⁸ There are a few exceptions, including supplements for travel between Appledore and Ashford.

provider, apprenticeship provider or even a job, as long as the individual lives in Kent and is aged between 16 and 19.

- 3.2:21 It is said that the Travel Saver “will save you around 50% of what you might pay if you bought an annual season ticket from a bus operator”⁴⁹. No doubt this is a verifiable statement, but of course the actual saving *over paying daily fares* will depend on what the fare actually is and on how many days the student expects to travel. This is particularly relevant when a student is only attending three days a week or where the journey is short. However, even on the basis of a three-day, thirty-six week year, any student facing a return ticket costing more than £3.89 daily will receive some saving.
- 3.2:22 Students, or their families, who would still find the fee of £420 (or £430) difficult can apply to their provider for financial support. Providers receive designated funding to run a 16-19 Bursary scheme on the Government’s behalf. The Council offers advice to providers on the extent to which this should be used to subsidise the Travel Saver⁵⁰ but in the end the decision is up to the provider themselves.
- 3.2:23 An important issue is that while prospective students can ask any provider for details of whether they would be *likely* to qualify for a subsidy towards a Travel Saver bus pass, only *registered* students can actually apply for the subsidy concerned. Students therefore need to enrol with a provider before they can be sure of assistance, rather than the other way round.
- 3.2:24 Students who use the train to travel to school, college, other provision, or work do not receive any support directly from the Council, but can of course buy the publicly available 16-17 Saver Railcard from the rail travel operators’ network. The Railcard reduces the adult fare for most tickets (including season tickets) by 50%. It is not explicitly stated whether providers can use 16-19 Bursary funds to help a student meet the costs of rail travel, but it is hoped that applications from students for assistance would be considered sympathetically. There is no cost to the Council for the Railcard.
- 3.2:25 Finally, some parts of the county operate a “Wheels to Work” scheme whereby students can obtain a moped for £121.33 per month (including servicing).
- 3.2:26 In summary, therefore, the cost of travel to 16+ provision for young people in Kent can be substantial. Even when full advantage is taken of the 16-19 Bursary the potential minimum cost of c. £17 per month (assuming the provider does in fact use its Bursary Fund to discount the cost by half), will still be seen as significant by many families, especially those with more than one 16-19 year old, and particularly in the

⁴⁹ <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/school-transport/16-travel-saver>

⁵⁰ See <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/school-transport/16-travel-saver/cost-of-kcc-16-travel-saver>. The suggestion is that **any** student, even the poorest, should still pay £200.

context of an anticipated “cost of living crisis” that will hit during 2022 and potentially extend into 2023 and beyond.

Loss of bus services and routes

- 3.2:27 It is important to note that bus services are provided by commercial operators and that, as such, ultimately routes need to be financially viable if they are to run. Where passenger volumes are not sufficient, KCC can provide subsidies to the operator to ensure that the service continues to run; there are currently 54 subsidised services under threat as funding pressures force KCC to make savings in the cost of these subsidies (up to £3.3m). It is almost inevitable that the loss of some of these routes will restrict the ability of some young people to access post-16 learning and work-based opportunities.
- 3.2:28 Furthermore, where services are provided by operators on a commercial basis it seems likely that the impact on the transport sector of Covid (in particular the increase in remote working), driver shortages, fuel price increases, and higher levels of inflation more generally, will all affect the viability of the non-subsidised services – particularly when these factors are combined with reduced passenger numbers. Since the beginning of the pandemic, operator data suggests that bus use in Kent in the off-peak period has declined by about half; the position is slightly better at peak times, but numbers are still down by a third on pre-pandemic levels.
- 3.2:29 At the end of February operators gave notice on 20 services that would be cut at the beginning of the new financial year. The extension of the Bus Recovery Grant (to October 2022) may save some of these, and prevent further cuts to services, in the short term. However, there is little to suggest that the overall direction of travel – i.e. towards reduced services at some point in the short- to medium-term – has changed.

Travel inconvenience and cost as a disincentive

- 3.2:30 It is relatively easy, in many parts of Kent, for young people to obtain a “basic job” local to them, even if only seasonally, at minimum wage. Covid notwithstanding, there is at present no particular shortage of these jobs in many areas. Thus young people wondering whether to take a job or whether to stay in education may already be considering whether they can sacrifice the contribution to the household income (or indeed their own wish to earn money) that a basic job would yield in the hope that – with training – they could get a better and more fulfilling and rewarding job later.
- 3.2:31 Having to find some money to travel to the education provider is also another weight on the side of the scale that leans towards getting a local “basic job” now, or at the very least restricting one’s choice to local post-16 provision.

Many of the sixth form have jobs – often they have to support themselves and their study. It may also partly explain the desire to do further education very local to where they live. (11 to 18 selective school)

- 3.2:32 So, for that matter, is the travel time involved – though for young people motivated to find work this may be less of a factor.

What is available Apprenticeship-wise very much depends on where you live; there is considerable variation across the county. However, young people seem willing to travel reasonable distances to access apprenticeships, and to get to any off-the-job elements required. (Very similar comments made by a GFEC and a work-based provider)

On the other hand:

Low wages for apprentices, when combined with the costs of getting to work, and to college or to the provider for off-the-job elements, can be problematical for some young people. (Work-based provider)

- 3.2:33 It goes without saying that the balance that needs to be struck between earning some money now and actually paying out significant sums to continue to participate in education or training, with the hope of being able to earn more in the future, is more critical in low-income families than in those where travel-to-learn costs are not really an issue.
- 3.2:34 Thus in summary there can be little doubt that having to pay even £200 per student to travel to a place of learning is a disincentive that weighs disproportionately on poorer families, and also on families whose 16- to 19-year-olds are considering remote vocational rather than local A level education. It may:
- Dissuade them from participating in education or training post-16 entirely
 - Persuade them to follow what is, for them, not their first-choice post-16 destination.
- 3.2:35 Either way, the probability is that there will be consequences both in terms of what they achieve and progress on to (if they stay in some form of education or training) and for their life chances (whether or not they 'leave' at 16).

A point of principle

- 3.2:36 Underlying the travel-related issues, there is a point of principle to consider. Under the Raising of the Participation Age [RPA] regulations introduced in 2013, young people are required to stay in education or training (including employment with training) until at least their 18th birthday. ("Basic jobs" as described above almost certainly would not count.) Technically, therefore, a young person who is not doing any of these things between the ages of 16 and 18 is in breach of the law.
- 3.2:37 They are unlikely to be prosecuted. However, the fact remains that it is a legal duty that young people between 16 and 18 make themselves available for education or training⁵¹. In imposing a legal duty on parents to send their pre-16 children to school,

⁵¹ See

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/561546/Participation-of-young-people-in-education-employment-or-training.pdf

the state defrays any reasonable costs they may incur in meeting this duty, including free school transport (not means tested in any way) if the journey is more than a set distance. It is anomalous that a similar provision does not apply to 16–19-year-olds. Moreover it is an anomaly that has consequences, as discussed above.

3.2:38 There may be little that KCC can do directly about this point, particularly given the constraints on local government funding. But continuing to lobby for additional resource nationally for 16+ transport is worth doing: this point is developed further as a major recommendation in Section 4.

Conclusion

3.2:39 Since the closure of the LSC in 2010, there has been no one central controlling or coordinating function with responsibility for even part of post-16 provision; in these circumstances, an area's post-16 offer is based on individual providers' decisions on what they offer and where. Currently, while all areas of the county have more or less straightforward access to A levels, the provision of other 16+ opportunities (including provision at and below Level 2) is more patchy.

3.2:40 There are two broad approaches to addressing this issue:

- Attempting to resolve “gaps” through collaboration at the local level. Whilst there are some areas of the county where providers are working together to ensure that a wider range of provision is available locally, these examples are few and far between
- Ensuring that when young people do need to travel, the number of occasions on which they are required to do so is kept to a minimum, and that when there is no alternative then some financial support is made available.

3.2:41 Even when the requirement to travel is reduced, and full advantage is taken of the support available from KCC (which has been generous in its support for post-16 travel when compared to many LAs), and individual providers' bursary support funds, having to travel to a place of work or learning (and incurring the associated costs) is a disincentive that can affect a young person's choice of post-16 destination; it may dissuade some from participating in education or training post-16 entirely.

3.2:42 The ability of KCC to take action to address transport market failures (e.g. through subsidising non-commercial routes or services) is restricted by Government funding, on the one hand, and cost and other pressures faced by operators which threaten the viability of routes and services, on the other.

3.2:43 Section 4 describes how the major recommendations that have emerged from the Review will seek to address these issues, specifically in sub-sections:

- 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
- 4.4 Improving [access to] provision below Level 2
- 4.6 Improving access by support for travel

- 4.7 Learning from lockdown – in particular by creating opportunities for more blended approaches to learning.

3.3 Equal opportunities

Introduction

- 3.3:1 Very few equal opportunities issues were raised during the fieldwork. This should not be taken, of course, to mean that interviewees were giving virtually the entire 16-19 sector in Kent a “clean bill of health” in equal opportunities terms.
- 3.3:2 There have been many recent reports in the press about culture issues in schools – in particular how relationships between young men and young women can develop toxic aspects, based in part but not wholly on misuse of social media – and it would be surprising if any county in England could say it and its schools/colleges were entirely free from any manifestation of these issues. Clearly ongoing vigilance is required of everyone.
- 3.3:3 Similar comments could be made about the impact of ethnicity on relationships between young people, or for that matter on the take-up of opportunities notionally available to all. Again it is unlikely that any county could ever believe itself entirely free of any issues in this regard; again ongoing vigilance is a necessity.
- 3.3:4 Technically, this Review can only comment on what has been reported – it being understood that interviewees and other respondents had every opportunity to make such report. But it is at least arguable that KCC has further progress to make in engaging children, young people and families from the full range of communities. Moreover if there is such a lack of engagement then it would be reflected in some communities’ reluctance to engage with the consultation and other exercises that underpin Reports such as this one.

Issues from the fieldwork

The impact of economic disadvantage

- 3.3:5 There is a real concern that students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds may be discouraged from taking advantage of the full range of post-16 opportunities available. The main factors here – pressures to work, and the cost of transport to any post-16 opportunity beyond easy travelling distance of the student’s home – have already been discussed in Section 3.2.

Finances in general are an issue for young people. The loss of EMA and support for travel and other costs of access have had an impact. And the minimum wage for an

apprentice is very low⁵². If you are economically disadvantaged, your options will be more limited. (Work-based provider)

- 3.3:6 More subtly, students may not even learn about opportunities available to them some distance away – even in circumstances where they might well receive a travel bursary to take them up – because they do not usually travel much outside their home area, regard other parts of Kent as “different”, or are simply not told about them (again see Section 3.2).
- 3.3:7 School and other providers’ staff may be surprised at how little their more disadvantaged students know about areas of Kent other than their own. More subtly, they may need to encourage their young people to see themselves as members of “a Kent community” and not just of the close-knit local community in which they have been brought up.

Students with additional needs

- 3.3:8 In general, providers did not raise concerns over the inclusion of students with additional needs (whether supported by EHCPs or not) in the programmes they offer. Nor did students themselves draw attention to this issue.
- 3.3:9 “Inclusion” does in any case have a slightly different meaning in post-16 provision, where the choice of programme to be followed often determines the choice of provider. Arguably it takes two aspects. The first is to ensure that a young person who has the ability to follow and to profit from a particular course of learning is able to do so, and not prevented due to any disability or difficulty. The second is to ensure that a wide enough range of programmes is on offer within the 16-19 system as a whole so that any learner who wishes to continue to study or train is able to identify a suitable programme.
- 3.3:10 The fact that no concerns were raised about the first of these does not of course mean that further progress in including young people with difficulties or disabilities on existing programmes could not be made, but it is fair to say that most providers interviewed appeared entirely aware of their responsibilities in this regard.
- 3.3:11 The second issue – ensuring that there is a wide enough range of programmes at different levels available – is perhaps not so well addressed. In particular, reservations about the range of programmes below Level 2, including those available from “alternative” 16-19 providers, have already been addressed above in paragraph 3.1:67 and following. This is an area of weakness which, as argued there, needs to be addressed.

⁵² From April 2022, the minimum wage for an apprentice is £4.81 per hour for those aged 16 to 18 (or 19 in some cases), rising through various age-related scale points to the full National Living Wage (£9.50) for those aged 23 and over.

- 3.3:12 Many High Needs young people receive support from KCC through being “placed” in specialist provision. Some interviewees detected a tendency not to follow through by KCC once provision has been made for young people with additional needs, whether captured in an EHCP or not. The effort required to identify appropriate placements for the large numbers of young people presenting with additional needs (at 16+ and indeed in general) is undoubtedly considerable, but the suggestion was made that when an officer had identified an “appropriate placement” the task was done.
- 3.3:13 The (perhaps radical) suggestion was made that it might be better to start thinking about the young person’s *aspiration* – i.e. to work in creative arts, in hospitality, in construction or whatever – before their *additional need* is taken into account. It is of course important to secure provision that meets the young person’s additional needs. But arguably one should start with what the young person wants to do, and only then explore ways in which this can be facilitated through additional support, an appropriate placement etc.. This may seem obvious when clearly stated but still represents quite a change from present practice.
- 3.3:14 Parents can also be a heavy influence here – for entirely understandable reasons, they may favour shorter term choices that offer their child maximum security and protection, rather than something that is more in line with their child’s capabilities and longer term aspirations.

English for speakers of other languages [ESOL] issues

- 3.3:15 Due to its geographical location, Kent has received a large number of young people into the county whose English communication is very limited. Many of these are, or soon will be, eligible for 16-19 education but not so young that their acquisition of English can be left to happen naturally (through the early years of primary school, for instance).
- 3.3:16 Instead, specific ESOL provision must be made, and the signs are that the capacity to provide this service is rapidly becoming exhausted. There is a danger that provision will run out, and that as a result some young people’s inclusion in 16-19 education and subsequently into society will be held back.
- 3.3:17 Paradoxically, the shortage is greater in west Kent: most provision is concentrated in east Kent, for obvious reasons, and as a result those young people requiring ESOL provision in the west (not a large group, but still significant) may not have their needs met.

Conclusion

- 3.3:18 Section 4 describes how the major recommendations that have emerged from the Review will seek to address these issues; specifically in sub-sections:
- 4.1 Improving outcomes
 - 4.2 Raising young people’s aspirations through better CEIAG

- 4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.

Related subsidiary recommendations are in Section 5 (paragraphs numbered 5.3).

3.4 Pre-Year 12 decision making

Introduction

- 3.4:1 High quality careers education, information, advice, and guidance [CEIAG] is important to young people's futures. In the context of this Review, it has an impact when young people are determining:
- What to do after Year 11
 - Where to progress to after Year 13 (or the equivalent in a non-school setting).
- 3.4:2 This section is focussed on the findings from the fieldwork as they relate to the transition from Year 11 into post-16 provision (where to progress to after Year 13 is covered in Section 3.8); it covers:
- The extent to which young people have access to impartial CEIAG
 - The structure of education in Kent, and how it affects the CEIAG young people receive
 - Whether CEIAG starts sufficiently early pre-16
 - The main influencers over young people's decisions on what to do post-16.
- 3.4:3 However, before the findings from the fieldwork are considered, it is important to outline the current CEIAG context. Since this is an area with which some readers may not be familiar, a reasonably detailed description is included – the review of findings from the fieldwork starts at paragraph 3.4:28.

Context

Raising the Participation Age [RPA]

- 3.4:4 As already noted, the Education and Skills Act 2008 legislated to raise the age of compulsory participation in education or training in England to at least 18. Regulations to this effect were implemented in 2013. Young people who started Year 11 in or after the 2013-14 academic year have been required to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday.
- 3.4:5 The requirement can be met in a range of ways: through full-time study in a school, college, or training provider; by taking an apprenticeship, traineeship or supported internship; or in work or volunteering (20 hours or more per week) where this is combined with part-time accredited study.
- 3.4:6 Pre-16, there is a related requirement that schools make sure that pupils are clear about RPA and what it means for them – in particular that they do not have to stay in school and that there are other options available. To enable them to decide what to do, pupils should have opportunities throughout their school life for meaningful experiences with a range of education and training providers.

Statutory guidance for CEIAG

- 3.4:7 Statutory guidance from DfE for CEIAG was most recently issued in July 2021⁵³ under Section 45A of the Education Act 1997⁵⁴. Maintained schools and academies (but not free schools) in England must have regard to it when carrying out their CEIAG duties, and in particular must:
- Ensure that there is an opportunity for a range of providers to access pupils to inform them about technical education and apprenticeships
 - Provide pupils with independent careers guidance.
- 3.4:8 Whilst the guidance only applies to certain types of school, DfE encourages all providers of education and training to follow it. Providing students with independent careers guidance is also a funding-related requirement for GFECs and sixth form colleges (but not for school sixth forms).

Recent legislation

- 3.4:9 In 2018, DfE introduced a legal duty, officially known as the Provider Access Duty but often referred to as the ‘Baker Clause’, which requires all maintained schools and academies to ensure that there is an opportunity for a range of education and training providers to access all pupils and students from Year 8 to Year 13 for the purpose of informing them about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. The idea is that this will allow every student to build up a fuller picture of the options available to them at 16, and to consider how these might suit their skills, interests, and aptitudes, leading to better-informed choices at the key transition points and reduced rates of drop-out from post-16 destinations. Ultimately this should mean that young people are better matched to a post-16 route of their choice, meaning that fewer young people become NEET.
- 3.4:10 For the purposes of this Review, key requirements of the Provider Access Duty for in scope schools include that they:
- Act impartially, not showing bias towards any route
 - Put in place a range of opportunities for providers of technical education and apprenticeships to talk to all year 8 to 13 pupils about their education or training offer

⁵³ Careers guidance and access for education and training providers: Statutory guidance for schools and guidance for further education colleges and sixth form colleges. DfE. July 2021. See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1002972/Careers_statutory_guidance.pdf.

⁵⁴ Broadly this requires those responsible for discharging duties in relation to schools in England to have regard to any guidance given “from time to time” by the Secretary of State for Education.

- Ensure that all pupils are aware of the benefits of apprenticeships, and other approved technical education qualifications (including T Levels), so they can consider them, alongside academic options, when making decisions about their next steps.

3.4:11 Also relevant in this context, in the 2021 Skills for Jobs white paper⁵⁵ the Department announced plans to strengthen the statutory requirements relating to CEIAG and to create a clear minimum standard for compliance. Subject to the outcome of a consultation on policy proposals, the necessary legislation should be introduced in 2022.

Gatsby Benchmarks

3.4:12 Whilst not a legal requirement, the statutory guidance states that every school should aim to meet the **Gatsby Benchmarks for Good Career Guidance**. Published in 2014, the benchmarks were adopted as the underpinning framework for the DfE's Careers Strategy for Schools in 2017⁵⁶. A modified version similarly describes benchmarks for the CEIAG needs of young people in GFECs⁵⁷.

3.4:13 The benchmarks outline the important elements of a robust career guidance programme, and provide a framework for schools and GFECs to develop their careers programmes in line with the legal requirements to provide independent careers guidance, and to enable access to young people by other types of provider.

Careers-related infrastructure

3.4:14 The infrastructure through which CEIAG is delivered has changed considerably this century. Importantly, the notion of a central body responsible for CEIAG delivery, which previously existed with the Connexions Service, has now largely been replaced with responsibility for delivery transferred to providers, and only strategic direction and more localised support for and facilitation of CEIAG now being provided centrally.

⁵⁵ Skills for jobs: lifelong learning for opportunity and growth. DfE. January 2021. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-for-jobs-lifelong-learning-for-opportunity-and-growth>.

⁵⁶ Careers strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talents December 2017. DFE-00310-2017. See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664319/Careers_strategy.pdf

⁵⁷ There are 8 benchmarks in total: a stable careers programme; learning from career and labour market information; addressing the needs of each pupil; linking curriculum learning to careers; encounters with employers and employees; experiences of workplaces; encounters with further and higher education; and personal guidance. See <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/good-career-guidance-handbook-digital.pdf> and <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/final-0099-gcg-college-booklet-a5-4pp-rgb-aw1.pdf>.

3.4:15 The most important elements of the current CEIAG infrastructure are described in the following paragraphs.

The Careers & Enterprise Company [CEC]

3.4:16 The CEC is the Government's main partner for supporting schools and colleges to deliver CEIAG in England; it does this primarily through:

- The CEC Network – this comprises: Enterprise Coordinators, who work with groups of around 20 schools or colleges to provide information, support, and advice on CEIAG; and Enterprise Advisers, who are senior business volunteers from local companies that work closely with these schools and colleges to develop their approach to CEIAG, particularly in respect of Gatsby benchmarks 5 and 6 (encounters with employers and employees, and experiences of workplaces respectively)
- Careers Hubs – each Hub has a dedicated Hub Lead responsible for bringing together a group of secondary schools and colleges with partners in the business, public, education, and voluntary sectors in order to deliver all the Gatsby Benchmarks.

3.4:17 In 2017, KCC's Skills and Employability Service and the West Kent Partnership were awarded part-funding from the CEC for an Enterprise Coordinator to develop a second CEC Network, focussed in the west of the county.

3.4:18 TEP and the CEC jointly appointed a "Strategic Careers Hub Lead" for the Kent Hub in mid-2021 and the Hub became operational in October of that year.

The National Careers Service [NCS]

3.4:19 The NCS provides free impartial information, advice, and guidance on education, training, and work to anyone aged 13 years and over through a website, telephone helpline and web chat service. Advisers support young people to make informed choices by providing insights into the different routes available to them, supplementing the support available to students through school or college, particularly outside of term time and after exam results (often a critical time for securing a successful destination for school and college leavers).

Careers leaders

3.4:20 Schools and colleges are required to appoint a designated careers leader to plan and deliver their CEIAG programme; they should have commitment and backing from the school or college's senior leadership, including protected time, to enable them to carry out the role effectively. A Governor should also be given formal oversight responsibility for CEIAG.

3.4:21 Once agreed, the CEIAG programme has to be published on the school or college website.

Role of Ofsted

3.4:22 The education inspection framework covers CEIAG within schools. Inspectors are to expect that a good school will: prepare all its learners for future success in education, employment, or training; provide unbiased information about each; and offer meaningful opportunities for encounters with the world of work. Inspectors are specifically required to:

- Assess the quality of CEIAG, and how well it assists pupils and students in deciding on their next steps, as part of the assessment of the personal development offer
- Report where a school falls short of the requirements of the Provider Access Duty, and consider whether and how this affects a school's inspection grade.

3.4:23 Ofsted is similarly legally required to comment in inspection reports on the CEIAG offered by colleges to students, and will inspect and comment in its reports on the CEIAG offered by all other forms of further education and skills providers.

Local authorities

3.4:24 LAs have a range of relevant/related statutory duties, in particular to:

- Ensure that all Year 11 pupils have an offer of learning post-16, in either full-time education in school sixth forms or colleges, on an apprenticeship or traineeship, or in employment combined with part-time education or training (the "September Guarantee")
- Encourage and assist young people to participate in post-16 education, and ensure that there is sufficient provision to enable them to do so
- Track the post-16 destinations of young people. (Providers are similarly under a statutory duty to provide the necessary information to their LA in order for them to be able to deliver this duty)
- Work with schools (and other providers) to identify young people who are, or who are at risk of becoming, NEET, and develop support and provision for them. (Again, providers are similarly under a statutory duty to provide the necessary information to their LA in order for them to be able to deliver this duty)
- Work with schools, careers advisers, and alternative and other post-16 providers to provide support and advice to young people outside mainstream provision that will take them into [mainstream] post-16 education or training, and then into employment.

Standards

3.4:25 All post-16 providers can gain formal accreditation of their careers programme through a national quality award for CEIAG, the Quality in Careers Standard. All state-funded secondary schools and further education colleges are "strongly

recommended” by the DfE in its Statutory Guidance to “work towards, achieve, and maintain” the Standard as part of their careers strategy⁵⁸.

- 3.4:26 The Standard is fully aligned with the *Gatsby Benchmarks for Good Career Guidance* just referred to and complies with the DfE’s Statutory Guidance. In effect, if an organisation has the Standard this means that it has been able to demonstrate, to the satisfaction of an independent assessor, that it is doing what is required of it CEIAG-wise.
- 3.4:27 Additionally, colleges are required to hold the ‘matrix Standard’ if they are in receipt of ESFA funding from the adult education budget⁵⁹. The elements of the standard are sufficiently generic to be relevant to all GFEC CEIAG services in practice, and most colleges if not all will therefore apply them to their provision across the board.

Issues from the fieldwork

- 3.4:28 The broad theme to emerge from the fieldwork was concern at the lack of access to impartial CEIAG. There were a number of dimensions to this which are explored in the following paragraphs.

Young people not in school pre-16

- 3.4:29 Both KCC and alternative 16-19 provider interviewees report that there is a group of young people who are largely detached from formal school-based education and therefore have no – or very limited – access to any CEIAG. This includes, obviously, those electively home educated [EHE]⁶⁰, and those in the youth justice system.
- 3.4:30 Less obviously, it also includes those excluded from their school in a range of “non-permanent” ways:
- Off-rolling – removing a pupil from the school roll without formally and permanently excluding them (or encouraging a parent to remove their child from the school roll), when the removal appears to be primarily in the interests of the school rather than in the best interests of the pupil. It has sometimes been suggested that this is to ‘game’ the school performance system, or to

⁵⁸ See <https://www.qualityincareers.org.uk/what-is-the-quality-in-careers-standard/>.

⁵⁹ The matrix Standard is owned by the DfE and was launched in 2002. It is a quality standard for organisations that deliver information, advice and/or guidance to clients either as their sole purpose or as part of their wider service offer. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-matrix-standard>.

⁶⁰ At least 0.5% of children of statutory school age in England are believed to be home educated, and the number was increasing by around 20% per year (before the impact of the pandemic). See the House of Commons research briefing paper at <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05108/SN05108.pdf>.

relieve financial pressures on a school (by removing the more behaviourally challenging young people from the roll)

- Fixed period exclusions – removing a young person from school for a limited period (up to a maximum of 45 school days in a school year – there are c.190 days in an English state school year). For exclusions of more than five days, the school must find some alternative form of provision for the young person, often (subject to availability) a place in a PRU
- Reduced timetables – pupils of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education. In very exceptional circumstances there may be a need for a pupil to be placed on a temporary part-time timetable to meet their individual needs. Concerns were raised that this is sometimes over-used.

3.4:31 Nationally, the rate of fixed period exclusions in English secondary schools in 2018-19, the most recent academic year for which DfE has produced data, is 1,075 pupils per 10,000 (i.e. just over 10% of pupils); for Kent the figure is slightly less than this (c. 9%)⁶¹. Fixed period exclusions have to be recorded on the School Census; however data for off-rolling and reduced timetables is not routinely kept.

3.4:32 For the purposes of the Review, the key point is that a significant proportion of the school population experiences reduced, or no, access to a normal school timetable. Whilst some support for the academic curriculum may be maintained for these pupils, the probability is that non-academic inputs, including access to CEIAG, are likely to be non-existent. Arguably, this is a group of young people particularly in need of good CEIAG: without a proper exploration of their options and a considered choice of what they should do next, the risk of these young people being NEET either at 16, or shortly thereafter, is substantially increased.

There has been an increase in home education and young people being taken off the school roll – our experience is that many of this group are ‘far behind’ in terms of their education and have not had any input post-16 options-wise. (Alternative provider)

3.4:33 Indeed, there is a view that a period of being NEET post-16 is currently almost inevitable for many of those disengaged from education pre-16. Work-based and alternative 16-19 providers reported that they were seeing increasing numbers of young people who had left formal education at 16, and had a period of time “off the radar” (i.e. NEET) before reappearing as an apprentice or a starter at their provision. Clearly the challenge is to by-pass the NEET stage in this process, not least because not every young person entering it will re-emerge from it in some form of education, training, or employment.

3.4:34 In this regard, there is some interesting practice in Thanet, which centres around the district as a whole (schools and EKC Group) owning the NEETs issue collectively at headteacher/principal level. Briefly:

⁶¹ See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england/2018-19>.

- In Year 10 each school produces a list of those pupils they consider to be at risk of becoming NEET
- Alongside their GCSEs, this group are offered a series of college-related/based sessions (2 to 3 days per term through Years 10 and 11) to familiarise them with GFECs as an option, and to offer taster sessions in vocational areas of interest. (There are plans for these interventions to start in Year 9.)

3.4:35 This collaborative, joined-up approach with collective responsibility for young people's wellbeing at its heart has had a significant impact. The NEET position at every Thanet school has improved; overall Thanet is now ninth of the twelve districts, rather than the worst performing district, in this regard. The approach is explored in more detail in the "relevant practice" document being written which will sit alongside this report. (See paragraph 4.0:4.)

Young people in school pre-16

3.4:36 For those young people in school pre-16, two concerns were regularly raised during the Review:

- The extent to which schools kept "their own" students post-16
- The lack of access to comprehensive CEIAG on the **full** range of options available to them post-16.

3.4:37 Almost every other type of provider accused schools of "hanging on to their own pupils" at 16, when it may be best for them the young people in question to progress elsewhere.

The tendency for schools to want to hold on to their students is a challenge for every other provider. (GFEC)⁶²

3.4:38 This is not just an issue that other providers raised – a number of the focus groups with young people variously mentioned that:

- ... there could have been more opportunity to explore opportunities such as college
- ... we were encouraged towards grammar school options. The full range of options was not discussed
- ... careers interviews push us down the road of A levels, which some of us didn't want to go into

⁶² Boxes are used to provide 'quotes' from the fieldwork interviews and the surveys. Because interviews for the Review were not recorded, these are not direct quotes. However, they are taken from the Review team members' notes of their discussions. Also included in the box is the type of provider making the comment.

- ... employment opportunities were not really talked about. There was an assumption we would be staying on for A levels.

3.4:39 The young people's voice, as quoted in the box below, is strong, clear and requires no interpretation:

[There was] a lot of pressure from school to go to sixth form.

The school only discussed sixth form as the main option.

My teachers said I was too smart for college.

Teachers at school talked negatively about other options such as college.

My secondary school basically made us progress to sixth form if we achieved the grades. The end of my Year 11 (before the pandemic) was focussed on progression to sixth form, even if you weren't academic.

We were heavily pressured to stay on for the sixth form. Even when you had informed them you were going to college [or elsewhere] we were still made to apply to the school's sixth form.

My school gave the impression that sixth form was the best option for everyone. No other option was mentioned or suggested.

I chose to go to college. I believe a lot of other people were influenced and pushed by teachers to go to the sixth form.

School teachers were mainly encouraging us to do sixth form/A levels [and then university].

I ended up taking my teachers' guidance and completed a year of sixth form before switching to college. [If I had known then what I knew a year later] I would never have attended sixth form.

When a school you're attending already has a sixth form, they guide you towards it and don't tell you about other options. It was as if sixth form were the only plausible option for me, when it was not.

We were not given a lot of choice outside of the school's sixth form, and we were never encouraged to go and seek other opportunities.

I attended sixth form for 18 months, but then left for college. Sixth form was undoubtedly the worst 18 months of my life. I wish I had been given more information on other places. In the end I switched to college, which I much prefer. I was not told about college opportunities at school, yet I now realise it was the best choice for me all along. My school made us believe going to college was for people who got lower grades, weren't as smart, or didn't have as many aspirations; it was solely focussed on getting us into sixth form, particularly their sixth form. [I think] the

school was just thinking of themselves or their stats. I know students from other schools who feel exactly the same.

The school I was attending gave no advice [beyond] telling me that college wasn't the best thing I could do, and that I should stay on for sixth form at the school.

Teachers did not want to help with people who didn't want to do A levels and then go on to university.

It was quite isolating knowing that every teacher expected you to go to sixth form; you weren't offered any support if you weren't expected to get the GCSE grades to progress there. I had to search for myself for a place for post-16 education that I could progress to.

There shouldn't be so much pressure to attend sixth form – and so much stigma around leaving to attend another place of education.

- 3.4:40 However, it is important to note that the proportion of survey respondents who believed that, in the end, they had most or all of the information they needed about their own school's sixth form and about GFECs was similar (52% and 58% respectively) – albeit that those wishing to find out about college appear to have had to do so using their own endeavours, whereas information about its own sixth form was provided by the school.
- 3.4:41 Within a general concern that options elsewhere were not adequately covered, more specific issues regarding the lack of information on employment and the jobs market, and in particular about apprenticeships, were raised regularly – in the survey, only 16% of young people felt that they had all or most of the information that they needed about apprenticeships.
- 3.4:42 Even fewer (only 6%) felt that they had sufficient information on employment more generally and, given this, it is not surprising that they were alleged to have a very limited understanding of the jobs market – key trends; skills shortage areas; which sectors and occupations should offer the best prospects for them; the range of opportunities that are available within any given sector etc..

Because young people are insufficiently vocationally aware at the start of the process, it is not surprising that poor choices are made. There are too many inappropriate staying-ons. There needs to be more open access to schools for other providers, particularly to anyone considering or potentially interested in a vocational/technical option. Better access would improve awareness of what the options are, enable earlier and more informed choices to be made, and make for better planned transitions. (GFEC)

- 3.4:43 Those young people who had found their way elsewhere, and in particular to work-based provision, gave a description of a decision-making process that was much more considered, and had to be conducted largely independently and by them – in large part, they claimed, because there was no support from their school.

There was no information about college or apprenticeships: I feel like [the school] didn't do right by me.

I never had been told about colleges or apprenticeships.

I was never once informed fully about apprenticeships [or colleges or other sixth forms] in my area.

Other options such as apprenticeships or college were rarely mentioned.

- 3.4:44 In the absence of good CEIAG in schools, young people determined to go elsewhere post-16 were overly-reliant on the opinions of parents, non-CEIAG specialist teaching staff, and family friends when considering where they might go and what they might do – with perhaps a greater risk that their choice could prove unsatisfactory and result in them becoming NEET at some point in the near future. Equally, those persuaded to remain in school were, it was claimed, more likely to switch to another provider at some point during Year 12 – some providers reported a November 2020 surge in referrals that, in their view, was unusual and reflected poor choices being made in September 2020.

There is a lack of effective CEIAG re work-based options; combined with a focus from the schools on retaining as many of “their” young people as they can, this simply leads to inappropriate choices and the risk of NEETs. (Work-based provider)

- 3.4:45 Covid may have had an effect here. Inevitably there is also a degree of generalising – there were schools that reported that they were doing their best to put the range of options before pupils, and most schools rated their own CEIAG as good. However, some of the more detailed comments from the interviews with grammar school staff in particular echo those from the young people highlighted above and give cause for concern.

If you get the grades, then there really is no decision to be made – you stay in school.

Young people are supported to make choices other than sixth form – if they don't meet our entry criteria.

We don't discourage entry to college – for trades.

- 3.4:46 Also, as noted in Section 3.1 (see 3.1:35 *et seq.*), “pupil inertia” – an apparent tendency for young people to remain with their pre-16 school “regardless”, rather than look into opportunities that they are either qualified and/or have an interest or aptitude for that are available elsewhere for them – is also likely to be a factor here. (Pupil inertia also suggests that, notwithstanding the Provider Access Duty, the Gatsby benchmarks, etc. there is much that remains to be done.) The task is not simply to give young people the information that they need by improving CEIAG, but to give them confidence in their ability to pursue pathways outside and to assure them that a choice to do so is equally “valid”.

Young people with additional needs

- 3.4:47 No evidence was presented by interviewees to suggest that young people with additional needs (whether holding an EHCP or not) were disadvantaged in the provision of CEIAG. One interviewee in fact suggested that these pupils were particularly well-supported in choosing from the range of 16+ destinations available to them (though it is noted elsewhere in this report that the availability of 16+ qualifications below Level 2 may be limited – see paragraph 3.1:67 and following).

Young people in PRUs

- 3.4:48 A different set of concerns *re* the difficulties of progressing into work apply to PRU-based pupils. They are often motivated to get a job – any job – with no particular consideration of the labour market conditions or their long-term prospects. Whilst PRUs have the resources to support and help them, often these young people tend to drift into something they know with friends or family. The parental pressure applied to them to do this can be considerable, to the detriment of the young person, and is hard for PRUs to counter.
- 3.4:49 PRUs do nevertheless work hard to raise pupils' ambitions. Interviewees described the detailed, individually-focussed, efforts they made on a pupil-by-pupil basis to ensure that those that finished their pre-16 education whilst still at/linked to the PRU made a sound choice for their future learning – even if, as noted in 3.1:60, most progression was for obvious reasons to a college or work-based provision rather than a school sixth form programme.

We do a lot for our young people to help them decide what to do next – group sessions; 1:1s; careers drop down days; individual support with applications/CVs; lots of contact with college and training providers; lots of support for and involvement of parents; and an end of year support session. More work experience would be helpful to support the decision-making process, but we cannot find the employers.
(PRU)

- 3.4:50 [To anticipate the next Section, PRUs were also notable in the extent to which they continued to support their pupils through the transition process even after they had “left” the PRU, as noted in 3.5:14 below.]

Structure of education in Kent

- 3.4:51 Overall it is difficult to dispel the notion that a hierarchy of post-16 options exists – this is implicit in the findings reported above. But it is worth being clear about the impact that the selective structure has on young people's choices:
- Schools-based routes are preferred to all other options
 - Within schools, grammar schools are preferred to high schools

- In any hierarchy of options, there does not appear to be as clear a distinction drawn between technical/vocational routes “followed at a GFEC” as opposed to “in the work-place”.

3.4:52 If a reasonable option to transfer to a grammar school at 16 is available, very few “high performing” students opt to stay in a high school sixth form or to move to a GFEC.

Grammar school is still the high-status destination. (11-18 non-selective)

Very few high performing students stay in our sixth form. We get some referrals from grammar schools – those they will “not allow” to progress into their own sixth form. Some of them arrive feeling they have been already “written off”. (11-18 non-selective)

Grammar schools have a big impact – they keep all their more able young people, and attract a good proportion of those from other schools. (11-18 non-selective)

It is common for our high-grade pupils to want to go to grammar schools. GFECs can be perceived as a lower status option. (11-18 non-selective)

3.4:53 Pupils that do not progress into their grammar school’s sixth form (or are not able to), may be as likely to switch to a GFEC (a positive decision to do something different), as to go to a high school sixth form (a “second-choice” option, taken [only] because they were “not clever enough for a grammar school sixth form”). This is a structural point, it is suggested, and not necessarily the fault of the schools concerned.

3.4:54 There is some evidence from the interviews to suggest that interest in (and the status of) apprenticeships is growing, but that:

- The supply of places is not sufficient to meet the potential demand for them, and/or
- The opportunities for progression to higher level qualifications (and higher status occupations) are not as clear as they are perceived to be through the more traditional A level/HE route.

3.4:55 Any negative perceptions held by young people about work-based routes possibly reflect the views of those whose opinions may have an influence on them (principally parents and teachers – but also some staff at GFECs), rather than the young people themselves.

The quality of the apprenticeship offer is now better than it’s ever been – especially with progression options to higher levels; there is a general ignorance about these that has to be addressed, so people see it as a route that offers as many opportunities for development as school or college. They are not low level qualifications for those who cannot do anything else. (Work-based provider)

3.4:56 There was also some comment that the provision mix in Kent was overly complex, both in terms of the range of providers and the routes on offer. The current position is summarised in the table below.

	A levels	Vocational L3s	IB	Apprenticeships
Selective	Yes	Yes	Yes (IBDP)	No
Non-selective	Yes	Yes	Yes (IBCP)	No
GFECs	Yes (1 only ⁶³)	Yes	No	Yes
Work-based	No	No	No	Yes

3.4:57 Most other LAs would not have the 'selective' row or the 'IB' column as options. The introduction of T Levels will further complicate the picture.

The Kent provision mix is very complicated and this adds to parental confusion over choices and options post-16. After the 11+, there is a disengagement from decision making which affects what happens at 16+. There is a sense of "choice by default" – if you went to a grammar school you will do A levels and go to university; if you went to a high school you won't. (11 to 18 non-selective school)

An early start for CEIAG

3.4:58 Careers inputs need to occur throughout a young person's time at secondary school, and are important in highlighting opportunities and raising aspirations – and making clear what will be needed of the young person if these are to be realised.

3.4:59 The need to start CEIAG early is also a specific requirement of the new Government guidelines in relation to exposure to vocational/technical options throughout years 8 to 13 (the Provider Access Duty), and was stressed in many interviews and in responses to the survey of young people.

More information should be provided in schools more often and earlier. Help young people to start making decisions about their future earlier. (Young people's survey)

Pupils have 1:1 meetings in Year 9 about their GCSE choices. If they have a career at this stage then they will be advised about the options they need to do now – and post-16. We also work with parents to make sure they are well informed and can support their young person. (11 to 18 selective school)

In particular, pupils are often not aware that decisions taken at the start of Year 9 can limit their choices at 16+ and beyond, if hastily or unwisely taken. (11 to 18 selective school)

⁶³ ... currently. As noted elsewhere, EKC Group will have its own sixth form offering A levels to a first intake of Year 12s in September 2022.

3.4:60 In this context, one careers advisor from an 11-16 school reported that their school worked closely with its attached primary school to start younger children thinking about the world of work early. This intervention was reported to be effective.

Influencers

3.4:61 There are three key influencers who potentially affect young people's thinking about what to do post-16: their parents; their peers; and their teachers.

3.4:62 The influence of teachers has been referred to above. Interviewees suggested that broadly, though obviously with exceptions, teachers tended to favour the "academic route". This may be because this route is best understood. The sense from the fieldwork is that many teachers feel that young people should stay in their school's sixth form if they are able to. Anything technical/vocational that the school does not deliver is seen as inferior, and largely for those who do not have the grades for sixth form – the notion that a young person who is able to enter sixth form should want to go elsewhere is difficult for teachers to comprehend.

Our biggest challenge is selling apprenticeships as good options for young people to schools and to parents. Part of the problem is that parents do not know where to start, and that schools still see them as the 'worst option' and for low achievers, which is entirely inaccurate. Apprenticeships are no longer the dumping ground for those unable to cope with school or college that perhaps they once were seen as.

(Work-based provider)

3.4:63 In a CEIAG context, this suggests that non-schools-based routes are not always being given the fair treatment variously required by the statutory guidance, legislation, Gatsby benchmarks, quality standards etc..

3.4:64 For parents, the issue is primarily about perceptions of the options available – many see A levels in a sixth form as the preferred route, because that is how it was when they were at school. It is also seen as the aspirational route in terms of their child's future. The risk for young people is that they are pushed down a route that is not their preferred option; whilst most will "cope", the opportunity cost of their choice at 16 may be considerable.

3.4:65 For those young people who do not get into sixth form, the risk is two-fold:

- That their and others' expectations of what they are capable of are automatically limited
- That low-skilled/no training/no prospects employment is an acceptable alternative to college- or work-based learning.

The pressures to work can be considerable – this includes employment in the shadow economy in order to preserve access to support, which could otherwise be lost. (Alternative16-19 provider)

Family role models are significant. Students' thinking can become short- rather than long-term. There needs to be more done to drive up aspirations and encourage them to achieve more. (11 to 18 non-selective school)

Young people's decisions are often based on short-term gains. They will take a job because there is money on offer now, but can't seem to grasp that a good qualification would help with their longer term employment and earning prospects.

(Work-based provider)

- 3.4:66 Whilst there is a very real sense that the attitudes of many parents have not moved on, it is important to note that, compared to the alternatives, A levels are tried and tested, and (in terms of understanding of the "brand" and what it represents) have remained stable over a long period. By contrast, vocational qualifications, and apprenticeships have undergone constant review and revision (and continue to do so – the introduction of T Levels and the wider Level 3 reforms being the latest changes). If, as a result, parents have limited understanding of them but a general sense that "something must not be right" and that they do not have the currency of A levels, this is perhaps excusable. ("Why else would they be making the changes?")
- 3.4:67 In particular, parents may not have kept up to date with the developments in apprenticeships, including higher level apprenticeships, and the greater potential that these may offer when compared to the anecdotal experience of "apprenticeships" within a previous generation⁶⁴.
- 3.4:68 Building knowledge and raising awareness of apprenticeships and other technical/vocational routes in schools through interventions, presentations etc. throughout a young person's time in secondary schools should lead to more informed decisions. The work of the Apprenticeships Skills Knowledge programme [ASK] was specifically mentioned as helping in this context⁶⁵.
- 3.4:69 However, ensuring that parents are also fully involved in the decision-making process with the necessary knowledge as to the merit of all routes to make their input properly informed, and their involvement of real value, remain vital.

For parents of our Level 3 students the challenge is to persuade them that their child going to GFEC is not a failure.

Parents' [and other adult influencers'] perceptions about GFECs are often negative; at best it is often seen as the second choice option.

⁶⁴ Though apprenticeships are in short supply, particularly at the higher levels, and the majority of new apprenticeship starters are 19+ or older rather than 16+.

⁶⁵ ASK is a DfE/ESFA programme that offers a variety of activities and workshops, delivered by local experts, to help students, teachers and parents to understand apprenticeships, traineeships and T Levels.

Parents have a very high level of influence, often based on own experiences: for some reason this seems to be especially so in Kent.

Parents are more swayed by relative status of institutions [than young people are].

If parents are not aspirational for their children, this can dampen young people's aspirations for themselves.

Working with parents can be challenging, expectations- and aspiration-wise; they often under-estimate the abilities and potential of their child. The school structure in Kent may have a [reinforcing] effect here.

- 3.4:70 Interviewees also mentioned the impact of peers in relation to choice of post-16 destination, particularly in relation to decisions to switch to GFECs at 16 – the impression from some of the interviews is that one or two young people from a friendship group deciding to go to college can make it 'acceptable' for others to follow. Again, this is not necessarily the best foundation upon which to decide what a young person should do next, and the fieldwork yielded examples (albeit fewer) of young people being as dissatisfied with a decision to leave school as to remain.
- 3.4:71 The key point is that all those involved in the decision-making process need to be better informed if they are to provide the young person with more bespoke and up to date advice on what would be best for them, and to support them in their decision on what they will do post-16.

Conclusion

- 3.4:72 It is difficult to dispel the notion that a hierarchy of post-16 options exists in Kent:
- Schools-based routes are preferred to all other options
 - Within schools, grammar schools are preferred to high schools
 - There is perhaps not as clear a distinction drawn between technical/vocational routes "followed at a GFEC" as opposed to "in the work-place"
 - Negative views about apprenticeships do persist in some quarters.
- 3.4:73 This hierarchy has an impact on young people's choices at 16, particularly as the fieldwork highlighted concerns at the lack of access to impartial CEIAG which would inform a young person's choice of option.
- 3.4:74 For those young people in school pre-16, two linked concerns were raised: the extent to which schools kept "their own" students post-16, and the extent to which this was enabled by a lack of access to comprehensive CEIAG on the full range of post-16 options available. Within these general concerns, the lack of information on employment and the jobs market, and in particular about apprenticeships, were regularly raised.
- 3.4:75 In the absence of good CEIAG in schools, young people wanting to go elsewhere post-16 were overly reliant on, and influenced by, the opinions of parents, non-

CEIAG specialist teaching staff, their peers, and family friends when deciding where they would go.

- 3.4:76 The challenges of determining what to do next are even greater for those young people who are largely detached from formal schools-based education (those electively home educated [EHE] and in the youth justice system, but also those excluded from their school in a range of “non-permanent” ways); they have no – or at best very limited – access to any CEIAG.
- 3.4:77 Young people also need to be confident in their ability to pursue pathways outside school. Staff need to assure them that a choice to do so is equally “valid”, and to encourage others with an influence on their decision not to undermine a young person’s stated preference.
- 3.4:78 To achieve this, all providers (including GFECs and work-based providers) need to be given access to young people in schools in order to give them the information that they need to make their choices. Moreover careers-related inputs need to start early and occur throughout a young person’s time at secondary school – highlighting opportunities, raising aspirations, and making clear to the young person what they need to do if these aspirations are to be realised. (All this is no more than is specified by the Provider Access Duty, statutory guidance, and the *Gatsby Benchmarks for Good Career Guidance*.)
- 3.4:79 Section 4 describes how the major recommendations that have emerged from the Review will seek to address these issues; specifically in sub-sections:
- 4.1 Improving outcomes
 - 4.2 Raising young people’s aspirations through better CEIAG
 - 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
 - 4.5 Further supporting the mental health of learners.

Related subsidiary recommendations are in Section 5 (paragraphs numbered 5.4).

3.5 Transition into post-16 provision

Introduction

- 3.5:1 Before considering findings relating to the process of moving from pre- to post-16 provision, it is important to note at the outset that Covid-19 has had a significant impact on what could be done to support young people making the transition from pre- to post-16 learning.

Issues from the fieldwork

Internal transitions into school-based provision

- 3.5:2 As noted above, the majority of young people will stay-on for post-16 provision in their pre-16 school providing it has a sixth form. For these young people, Covid notwithstanding, the transition process has generally worked well: they were known by staff; their school could plan transition-related activities, and ensure that they were released from the curriculum to attend them; and they could readily ask for and access more personalised advice and support should this be necessary.

Inevitably internal students already know, and are known by, the staff; they feel more comfortable making the transition. (Grammar school)

- 3.5:3 In many cases, a “transition” is hardly perceived to have taken place.
- 3.5:4 Nevertheless, a range of support for transition is generally available – for example:
- Periods of time for Year 10 and 11s – from 2 days to 2 weeks – where the focus is on the transition to post-16 learning
 - Transition-related work and activities over the summer term (or the break after GCSEs) – including skills development (e.g. independent study skills; personal organisation/responsibility skills) and an introduction to the curriculum
 - Presentation evenings and subject taster days
 - Small group sessions and 1:1s with staff.
- 3.5:5 In addition to allowing students to prepare for their course(s), introductions to a subject’s curriculum content also help to ensure that students are happy with their course selections: this is particularly important where the subject is not something that they studied pre-16.
- 3.5:6 Whilst most schools are doing something to support internal transitions, there was a general awareness that more could probably be done – for example a school that was not currently offering a taster/transition week thought that it would be good to run one.

- 3.5:7 The lack of resources to support this work – staff (funding) and the ability to release young people from their GCSE curriculum – were two areas of common concern:

Getting time out of curriculum delivery and finding the resources to deliver good transition are particularly difficult. Staff [and pupils] are too busy. Inevitably there is a sense of lip service to this. (11-16 only school)

“External” entrants to school sixth forms

- 3.5:8 Particular difficulties in ensuring that those transferring into a sixth form from another school had access to the same range of information, support, and advice etc. that a school’s own pupils had were noted. Whilst some schools endeavoured to provide additional support for external entrants – visits; taster days; “meet your tutors”; parents’ evenings/visits – it was still a challenge to ensure that these young people were as properly prepared for sixth form as “their own”.
- 3.5:9 Covid-19 has certainly not helped, making it difficult to get face-to-face, on site, access to/for young people from elsewhere before they start. Remote open evenings have been run; these tend to be seen as “better than nothing”, but far from ideal – they do not properly introduce the young people to the sixth form and to the young people they might be studying with, nor do they help with travel arrangements. Hence the need for the extended inductions over the summer break and into the autumn term that some schools were running.

Transition into other provision

- 3.5:10 There are three main groups of young people transferring from schools to other provision for post-16 studies:
- Those leaving an 11 to 16 only school, the majority of whom will transfer to a school sixth form
 - Those leaving an 11 to 18 school at 16, some of whom will transfer to another school (see above) but most of whom will be going to GFECs or apprenticeships
 - Those who have been disengaged from provision pre-16 who are looking to re-engage post-16, most of whom will be looking at a GFEC or an apprenticeship.
- 3.5:11 11-16 only schools have an interest in ensuring that their pupils make appropriate choices for their post-16 education or training. Both staff and young people generally felt that a good level of information, support, advice, and guidance about next steps was available.

We work hard on transition as we have no 6th form. We employ additional advisers to support the decision-making process and use specific software at an early stage to help the transition and decision-making process for post-16 options. We run visiting days etc. to various post-16 providers, including the colleges.

We are not selective pre-16 and many of our learners will look to progress into vocational and technical post-16 provision or work. In fact, in some respects, ensuring our high achievers get into local grammars is our main post-16 progression challenge. (11-16 only school)

We get good support around next steps – we each have a careers plan; we get information, advice, and guidance on options when we need it; plus support from teachers (when we ask). We feel comfortable with the transition. (Young people – 11-16 only school)

- 3.5:12 Otherwise, the transition from school to anywhere other than a school's own sixth form, and in particular into the world of work, was – with exceptions – generally felt to be poorly supported.

What we do has improved immeasurably in recent years. We are promoting apprenticeships, and there is a better awareness of the alternative routes more generally. However, there is more work to be done to support those moving on to other providers. (11 to 18 selective school)

- 3.5:13 But

Schools do not generally prepare young people well for progression outside of their own offers. (Work-based provider)

Age 16 is a cliff edge for young people who are unprepared for progression – and some of our clients are very unprepared. (Work-based provider)

Transition to work-based routes was not offered. Information on job searching, CV writing, interview skills would have been helpful, but we did not get it. (Young people)

- 3.5:14 Transfers from PRUs, and from High Needs provision (usually at 19 rather than 16), generally into GFECs, were felt to work well with young people receiving considerable and tailored support pre-16, including time spent in college on a weekly basis pre-16 to become familiar with the environment, to ensure that the transition went well.

There are lessons we [schools and colleges, and other providers] could learn from the transition planning we do for young people where we think there are likely to be 'issues'. Transition support for this group is very good, and based on being very structured and tightly managed, and all parties knowing the processes. (GFEC)

Our young people generally come from large comprehensives – this presents challenges for them that are often at the root of, or contribute towards, their difficulties (over a thousand young people; many different staff; timetable management; finding their way around; being on time for every lesson etc.).

When they go to college, they become part of a small group, which meets every day, in the same place, and are in the care of a vocational tutor. The college may be vast, but their part of it is small and more family-like. Plus they are studying a craft or skill they expect to enjoy. As a consequence they often find college much easier than school. Transition problems for our young people are often not as great as might be supposed. (PRU)

- 3.5:15 The difficulties posed by Covid-19 in relation to transitions into schools-based provision – i.e. the lack of face-to-face contacts and on-site experiences – also apply here.
- 3.5:16 GFECs and, to a lesser extent, work-based providers commented that the application process was taking place earlier in Year 11, with most places being offered and accepted before open enrolment in September for colleges, and young people confirming their apprenticeship before the end of the summer term. Anyone waiting until September before deciding what to do was likely to find the available options reduced.

Transition failure

- 3.5:17 It is important to stress that demonstrable transition failure – a young person switching provision, or becoming NEET – is a relatively rare event; retained learner percentages are generally very high. Of course, not all ‘failures’ will be open and obvious; the extent to which failure is there but hidden – for example, a young person continuing with a pathway that, had they known what they now know, they would not have started – is difficult to determine.
- 3.5:18 Where it occurs, transition failure can generally be attributed to two factors.
- Not doing “the right subjects”
- 3.5:19 Young people may lack clarity about what they want to do next (or ultimately). Having a clear vision, including for their career, should be motivational and should help to direct young people to the next steps towards achieving their vision. This emphasises the importance of good pre-transition advice.
- 3.5:20 As noted in sub-section 3.4, young people may be overly influenced by others in choosing what subjects to do next – most often parents or friendship groups.
- 3.5:21 In particular, young people in 11-18 schools may prioritise staying on at their existing school (and therefore accepting “the best” from the perhaps limited range of post-16 options available) rather than making a fully informed choice from the complete range of post-16 options in schools, colleges and elsewhere.
- 3.5:22 Choice of subject may also be influenced by grades: this can work both ways – either they do not get what is required to do what they really wanted to, and therefore pick other subjects/qualifications; or they perform better than expected and this persuades them to do “X rather than Y”.

- 3.5:23 The gap between pre- and post-16 subjects, in particular Science and Maths, can be substantial – anyone tempted to take an A level they would not previously have considered because they achieved a higher than expected grade at GCSE (something that centre-assessment and apparent grade inflation has made more likely) will in all probability struggle.
- 3.5:24 And some subjects will be entirely new at 16 (most of the social sciences; some foreign languages), and young people may be electing to study them on the basis of very little information.
- 3.5:25 Where they know the young person, schools will usually provide [strong] advice where necessary. However, providing that they meet any entry requirements, ultimately it is up to the young person to choose and they may choose poorly.

Not going to “the right provision”

- 3.5:26 Young people may choose the wrong sort of provider (e.g. staying in school rather than going to college) – or, more accurately, may encounter a style of learning required by their provider that they are not suited to. Non-school-based options tend to be more practical, and to require the young person to develop a greater degree of self-motivation and independence; post-16 provision in schools is, to some extent, the safer/more comfortable option – more of the same, in an environment which will be broadly familiar to them, but with an increased focus on academic study and research skills.
- 3.5:27 Or again they may be overly influenced by others. As implied in subsection 3.4, it takes a young person in high school who really wants to go to college considerable strength of character and determination to see this through, particularly if their parents are pushing them towards A levels in the local grammar school sixth form and this is where most of their friends are going.
- 3.5:28 Or young people’s hands may be forced – they did not get the results that they were expecting and therefore have had to change their post-16 destination (and potentially type of qualification and subject area) relatively late in the day.

Post-transition support

- 3.5:29 For anyone who does make the wrong choice, post-transition support is essential to ensure that they can transfer to, and hopefully remain in, something that is more suited to them rather than becoming NEET. This support needs to be particularly effective early in the academic year because a late decision to change course or provider may be difficult once the year is fully under way.

For those who make the wrong choice, pathways to other provision are important – we need to ensure that they do not drop out entirely and become ‘lost’.
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- 3.5:30 The fieldwork found some interest in making the ‘application’ process more rigorous to ensure that young people are making a more informed choice. In one school, staff described how it was actually trying to strengthen its interview process, and another

provider was developing a system of 'early alerts' to identify those at risk of dropping out and initiate pre-emptive action.

Just over half our young people go to college. Many end up on Level 2 programmes, become demotivated, and their aspirations drop. The rest go to grammar schools; some receive little support and find the step up – in a new school – difficult. Students who achieve grade 4s at GCSE almost invariably struggle with A levels; there is a real need for some other form of provision at Level 3 for this group.

As a result, post-16 drop out is high [we think]. (Whilst we contribute to the 'tracking' process (via TEP), we get little in the way of feedback.) It would be helpful if we received information as soon as it is known that one of our ex-pupils has dropped out of their chosen pathway; they know us and we could help to pick them up and find them something else. (11 to 16 school)

- 3.5:31 However, post-transition support is currently unfunded and it requires providers, probably collectively within a local area, to commit to taking action for there to be any impact.

Conclusion

- 3.5:32 Covid-19 has had a significant impact on what it has been possible to do to support young people making the transition from pre- to post-16 learning.
- 3.5:33 Providing their school has a sixth form, and they achieve the necessary grades, the majority of young people will stay on for post-16 provision in their pre-16 school. For these young people the transition process generally works well.
- 3.5:34 In contrast the transition from school to anywhere else (i.e. other than to a school's own sixth form, for its own pupils), and in particular into the world of work, was generally felt to be poorly supported.
- 3.5:35 Nevertheless, clear instances of transition failure – where a young person switches provider or becomes NEET – are relatively rare. Where it happens, support is essential to ensure that a young person can transfer to, and hopefully remain in, something that is more suited to them. This support needs to be particularly effective early in the Autumn Term because a late decision to change course or provider may be difficult to accommodate once the year is fully under way.
- 3.5:36 Section 4 describes how the major recommendations that have emerged from the Review will seek to address these issues; specifically in sub-sections:
- 4.1 Improving outcomes
 - 4.2 Raising young people's aspirations through better CEIAG
 - 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
 - 4.4 Improving provision below Level 2
 - 4.5 Further supporting the mental health of learners

- 4.7 Learning from lockdown.

Related subsidiary recommendations are in Section 5 (paragraphs numbered 5.5).

3.6 Delivery

Introduction

- 3.6:1 As already noted, this project was based on interviews with participants, or interested parties, in 16+ provision in Kent rather than on observation of 16+ activities. This section therefore focusses on interviewees' perceptions of factors affecting the delivery of Kent's 16-19 offer, and the factors that inform or constrain it.
- 3.6:2 This section covers:
- The impact on delivery of the availability of resources
 - Aspects of SEND support and support for gifted and talented students⁶⁶
 - Support from employers
 - Why students did not always complete the programme they started
 - Students' views of their learning
 - Students' mental health.

Issues from the fieldwork

Resources

- 3.6:3 Many if not all interviewees believed that their ability to deliver 16+ provision was constrained by resources.
- 3.6:4 Schools, and to an extent GFECs, most often mentioned capital resources – specifically buildings. Many school and some college buildings in Kent are reaching the end of their design life, and even when they are still in good condition were designed at a time when less was known about how young people learn and how best to foster this learning. Often the sheer space available is insufficient for the numbers and needs of students following a modern 16+ curriculum.
- 3.6:5 Equipment also can be in short supply. As technical and vocational education in particular is expected to become more attuned to the needs of employers and the employment market generally (as noted in 3.1, an aim of the current Skills and Post-16 Education Bill), students, and their providers, need appropriate and ideally current “industrial standard” equipment on which to develop their work skills. Such

⁶⁶ This Review has taken into account where relevant, but has been careful not to overlap with, the implementation of the Council's Written Statement of Action on SEND following the Ofsted SEND Inspection of 2018.

equipment tends to be physically large – challenging the accommodation provided once again – and also expensive.

- 3.6:6 Shortages of appropriately qualified staff, particularly in STEM, were also referred to; this is explored in more detail in Section 3.9.
- 3.6:7 Alternative 16-19 providers referred more generally to what they saw as inadequate funding for the complexity of what they needed to deliver – and in particular for securing effective placements and subsequently supporting young people in them. “Lag funding”, where effectively the funding for a particular year is based on the number of trainees in the previous year, was also an issue for alternative 16-19 providers seeking to grow provision.
- 3.6:8 Alternative 16-19 providers also argued that their status (in some instances) as subcontractors meant that too great a share of the funding allocated for their provision was being top-sliced by the prime contractor, given the limited amount the prime contractor had to do – but that is a charge frequently levied by subcontractors in all industries and businesses.
- 3.6:9 Otherwise, some schools complained (with justification) that the *per capita* funding provided for sixth form activities was less than that provided for Key Stage 4, which seemed unfair⁶⁷, and schools with small sixth forms saw these as particularly uneconomic to run (see Sections 3.1 and 3.9).
- 3.6:10 Before last year’s c.5% increase, the base funding rate in the 16 to 19 funding formula for full-time 16- and 17-year-olds had remained unchanged in cash terms (£4,000 per student) since 2013-14; for 18-year-olds the full-time rate had been £3,300 since it was introduced in September 2014. Whilst the actual funding allocated per student will be higher than the base rate due to various factors applied to it in the funding formula, the Institute for Fiscal Studies [IFS] calculates that there has been a reduction in real terms income per student of 15% for GFECs and 28% for school sixth forms between 2010-11 and 2020-21⁶⁸.
- 3.6:11 Note that the IFS is looking at **spending allocated per student, as opposed to actual amounts of spending on students**, which could be higher or lower depending on how schools (and GFECs) allocate funding for different stages of education. For example, schools, at least in theory, have the option of cross-

⁶⁷ Unless one bases a heavy discount on the view that 16+ students are “volunteers”, while pre-16 students have little choice but to participate and may cost more to motivate as a result.

⁶⁸ In the academic year 2021–22, the IFS calculate that GFECs will receive c.£6,350 per 16 to 19 student, compared with £5,100 per student for school sixth forms. The difference is because students in GFECs are likely to be studying vocational qualifications, and are more likely to come from deprived backgrounds, both of which attract higher levels of funding in the formula to reflect the additional costs that will be incurred. See <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15858>

subsidising their post-16 provision from pre-16 funding, which has increased in cash terms, but remained broadly flat in real terms, over the period 2010-11 to 2021-22⁶⁹.

Support for students with additional needs

- 3.6:12** Interviewees did not have a great deal to say about support for students with SEND, except to remark that while the funding provided to students with EHCPs was usually adequate this left a significant number of students with lower levels of need unfunded. Providers had to use their own resources to support these students as best they could.
- 3.6:13** See the fuller discussion of the interpretation of inclusion in a post-16 vocational context at paragraph 3.3:8 and following.
- 3.6:14** Perhaps surprisingly in a system that includes grammar schools, interviewees had even less to say about what if any support they provided for gifted and talented students. Rightly or wrongly, the impression given was that any additional support these students received was largely left to the individual efforts of the teachers concerned.
- 3.6:15** There is an argument to be made within vocational education for “universal competence” rather than “excellence”: that is to say, that the aim is to raise as many as possible – if not all – young people in a group to the competence level required for merit level in the area concerned, not to provide special support to those capable of even higher levels than this. But it is surprising that academic excellence – which is not so competence-based – is not encouraged more than it appears to be. This may contribute to the generally poorer outcomes of 16+ learners in Kent when compared to statistical neighbours (see Section 3.7).

Support from employers

- 3.6:16** As a general principle, each education reform of recent years (including the current and ongoing introduction of T Levels) requires an increase in the commitment from employers to offer meaningful work skills placements alongside school- or college-based study. At the same time, employers are being encouraged to offer apprenticeships at all levels, including advanced and degree apprenticeships, to bolster the intention to place academic and technical/vocational pathways on an equal footing. And schools are always on the lookout for “taster” work experience sessions for their Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils.
- 3.6:17** Unsurprisingly, this means that the same group of employers – namely, those who are predisposed to be helpful in the provision of placements and other support for young people – are approached again and again. Also unsurprisingly, some of them

⁶⁹ See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-funding-statistics/2021-22>.

are struggling to cope. Though employers recognise that having young people on placement can be a benefit to employer as well as to the young person, most also acknowledge that only relatively long – and for that matter structured – placements can deliver this benefit. Short, unstructured “work experience tasters” in particular can require employers to undertake considerable supervision of the young person for little apparent return.

- 3.6:18** It is not surprising, therefore, that most providers in the interview programme for this study reported increasing difficulty in identifying work placement opportunities to support their 16+ curriculum – a difficulty that (as noted) the introduction of T Levels is likely to make worse. GFECs and apprenticeship providers are likely to struggle least, if only because traditionally their links to the local employment market and its individual employers are much stronger than those of schools.
- 3.6:19** Most affected are alternative 16-19 providers, whose young people – not necessarily through any particular fault of their own – are not seen as so attractive to employers. Often the offer of a placement to an alternative 16-19 provider is a matter of conscience and this is not necessarily a good basis.
- 3.6:20** Covid-19 has, as might be expected, made all this much worse by effectively discontinuing students’ work placements in all but a few cases. However it is not a foregone conclusion that work placement volumes will “bounce back” to their former levels in the near future, and it may remain more than usually difficult to obtain the former volume of placements for some time to come – let alone any more to meet new demands.

Students discontinuing their studies

- 3.6:21** Not all students who commence a programme of study post-16 necessarily finish it. A proportion leave their programme as early as the first few weeks of the first term. Others complete the first year of a two-year programme and do not return for the second. And students may leave at any stage during their programme for a variety of reasons.
- 3.6:22** For some, the discipline required to attend a 16+ programme regularly, and commit to it, just adds too much stress to already chaotic lives. If home support is limited, it may just become too difficult to continue to attend. There are perhaps limits to what individual providers, or the system as a whole, can do about this, except to ensure that the NEET support system provided by the County is standing by to help (see Section 3.1) and that pathways are provided for young people to return to learning in later years when their lives may have become less complex.
- 3.6:23** Some may have made what turn out to be suboptimal choices, perhaps through not knowing much about – or even just “drifting” into – the opportunity they have chosen.
- 3.6:24** It is significant in this context that there is a much lower rate of drop-out from A level programmes, which are arguably “more of the same” after GCSE, than from vocational programmes, which by their nature may be quite different from anything done at school.

- 3.6:25 A third reason why students discontinue their studies, and where neither chaotic home lives nor a poor choice of vocational area seem to be to blame, is simply the shock of transition. This has been covered in Section 3.5 above.

Students' views of their provision

- 3.6:26 The student focus groups described in Section 2 devoted time to asking students for their views of their current provision. Students were given every opportunity to make constructive suggestions about how the education and training provision they were currently receiving might be improved or simply made more appropriate for their intended career paths. In fact, very few suggestions for improvement were made.
- 3.6:27 One might speculate that students who were significantly discontented with their programme of study would have moved on by the time the interviews were conducted (May and June 2021), or simply come to terms with what they were being offered. It is also possible that despite all assurances to the contrary students were unhappy about raising what might appear to be “complaints” in front of a third party. But nevertheless students in general appeared happy with the provision being made for them.
- 3.6:28 What students did say, perhaps unsurprisingly, is that in the end the single most crucial determinant of the quality of their learning was the knowledge, skill and expertise (including expertise guiding learning) of their teachers, lecturers and instructors.

Mental health

- 3.6:29 The one area where students – and for that matter their teachers and tutors – did feel more could be done was in connection with mental health. Concerns about student mental health have come into national focus recently, and this is true in Kent too. The mental health pressures on students are many and varied, and some of them – for example, the malign influence commentators see in much of social media – are not of providers' making. But when a student's mental health is disturbed then his or her education and training is often the first thing to suffer; and self-evidently falling back in one's learning can only make one's mental health worse.

There is a need for much more work on, and resources for, supporting mental health and well-being: this is a big issue for us and a huge cause of underachievement. Addressing this would lead to higher aspiration and increase motivation. (11 to 18 non-selective school)

Mental health issues are a big factor in preventing young people from achieving their full potential. The school has two counsellors; both are very busy and we need more

specialised support, and early help. Waiting lists for CYPMHS⁷⁰ are long and their support therefore too slow in coming. (11 to 18 selective school)

3.6:30 Clearly Covid has been a factor:

- Anxiety about coming back – and the uncertainty as to how long provision would be open for
- Other causes of insecurity and uncertainty – for example will there be exams
- The impact on friendship groups
- Students feeling isolated
- Dealing with bereavements.

3.6:31 However, concerns over student mental health pre-date the pandemic, and there is every reason to expect that they will continue once it has passed.

3.6:32 GFECs, and an increasing proportion of schools, have good mental health support systems in place, offering first-line counselling and reassurance to students with a minimum of formality and fuss. But when this is not sufficient, or the student continues to struggle, referral times to external services (including the Kent Children and Young People's Mental Health Service and other associated services) can be slow. And during any delay a student's learning continues to be affected, leading to a greater "academic" problem to be tackled even when the mental health concerns have been addressed.

3.6:33 Some interviewees suggested that in particular the impact of "failing" the Kent Test at age 11 can persist and affect High School students' choices at 16+ and indeed their overall self-confidence in choosing to attempt further potentially demanding study, particularly if this would involve moving to a grammar school. At the same time, expectations on young people at grammar schools can be very high and this can affect the self-confidence of students too. In both instances, this lack of self-confidence can have serious implications, including but not limited to self-harming behaviours.

3.6:34 There may be signposting issues here: there are a number of mental health initiatives offered on an area or district basis that in some sense "sit between" a school or college's efforts on the one hand and NHS funded children and young people's mental health services on the other, and it may be that not all schools are aware of these. Nevertheless, the conclusion is that a greater investment in mental health support, particularly at the stage when school-based counselling approaches have been tried and found to be not entirely sufficient, might pay dividends in returning young people to effective learning faster than under current arrangements.

⁷⁰ The Kent Children and Young People's Mental Health Service (which includes, but is wider than, the service often known as CAMHS elsewhere in the country).

- 3.6:35 Providers should also perhaps not accept too glibly that the causes of student mental health issues are entirely external to them. Both the formal and informal aspects of life and study in a school or college can impinge on students' wellbeing. It is legitimate to ask whether the way subjects are taught, or instruction given, to a 16+ student can be modified or enhanced – based on best practice – to mitigate or reduce stress on students. It is also legitimate to ask whether there are aspects of the student culture within the institution, and in particular any apparent need to conform to any unwritten “rules” of student behaviour or activity, that may have a malign influence on the student who does not find “fitting in” particularly easy.
- 3.6:36 It is striking that young people on apprenticeships, and apprenticeship providers' staff, did not raise mental health as an issue to anything like the same extent as those at schools and colleges, though this does not mean that it is not an issue for them.

Finance restricts what we can do. We can really only offer counselling and other support to those with a funded EHCP: many with high anxiety do not have one, and this limits what we can do for them. (Work-based provider)

We are finding that young people's resilience is very low. We have more apprentices with mental health issues, and more with EHCPs [for these] than previously – up to 10% of current intake. This is increasing the workload for staff, particularly in Construction and Engineering, where most of the needs seem to be (young males are our main mental health concern). The need for support has grown sufficiently for us to make a bid for ALS for our apprentices – we have never had to do this before. We are also looking at reducing tutor caseloads, in part to take more account of individual apprentices and their mental health needs. (Work-based provider)

- 3.6:37 It is also striking that major mental health concerns in schools and colleges are being treated increasingly as a “given” – so ubiquitous that interviewees did not always refer to young people's mental health issues as a concern until prompted to do so, whereupon it was indeed acknowledged as a major concern “but isn't that the same everywhere?”

Conclusion

- 3.6:38 The focus of this sub-section has been on the factors directly affecting the delivery of Kent's 16-19 offer; in this context the availability of resources and the mental health of young people were regularly raised in the fieldwork.
- 3.6:39 Despite recent increases in the base rate and other elements of the funding model, the IFS calculates that there has been a real terms income per student reduction of 15% for GFECs and 28% for school sixth forms between 2010-11 and 2020-21. In these circumstances, the ability to deliver 16+ provision is being constrained by limitations on the ability to invest in buildings, equipment, and/or staff.
- 3.6:40 It is also proving increasingly difficult to find employers willing to participate in the delivery of any work-related elements to young people's learning programmes, and

the Covid pandemic had an immediate and detrimental impact on apprenticeships (this is explored in more detail in Section 3.11).

- 3.6:41 For alternative 16-19 providers, resourcing-related issues are further complicated by the complex needs of their young people. In particular, for those in receipt of ESFA funding the lagged funding model, and more general contractual uncertainties, have made it difficult for them to plan provision and recruit staff.
- 3.6:42 There are also widely shared concerns about student mental health and the lack of resources to address these – indeed the issue has become ubiquitous for schools and colleges (less so for young people on apprenticeships).
- 3.6:43 Section 4 describes how the major recommendations that have emerged from the Review will seek to address these issues; specifically in sub-sections:
- 4.1 Improving outcomes
 - 4.5 Further supporting the mental health of learners.

Related subsidiary recommendations are in Section 5 (paragraphs numbered 5.6).

3.7 Outcomes

Introduction

3.7:1 As already noted, provision of 16+ education and learning was not in any sense “observed” during this project. This assessment of outcomes, therefore, looks first at what can be deduced from data and then at the comments made by the providers interviewed. These two together should help form initial conclusions.

The picture from the quantitative data

- 3.7:2 The project was fortunate to be able to draw on a significant range of data compiled by the Strategic Commissioning Directorate Analytics team within KCC. The Analytics team were able to draw on data from the Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT), an interactive spreadsheet for comparing data about children and young people across all local authorities in England; the DfE’s Key Stage 5 destination measures 2016 to 2017 and 16-18 Student Destinations 2018/2019; and the Analytics Team’s own cohort analysis from the Council’s existing data. In general the data is from pre-pandemic years.
- 3.7:3 Comparisons between authorities are never easy, even when “statistical neighbour” techniques are used. It must be said, nevertheless, that the picture that emerges from outcomes data is mixed.

Destination data (1) by level of qualification at 18+

3.7:4 The following diagrams illustrate the destinations of Key Stage 5 students in Kent and (for comparison) nationally, both overall and on the basis of their level of attainment as they progress⁷¹. The first covers all students and the following three illustrate the destinations of students holding a Level 3 (as highest) qualification at the end of Key Stage 5, a Level 2 qualification, and a qualification below Level 2 respectively. Data is for 2018/19.

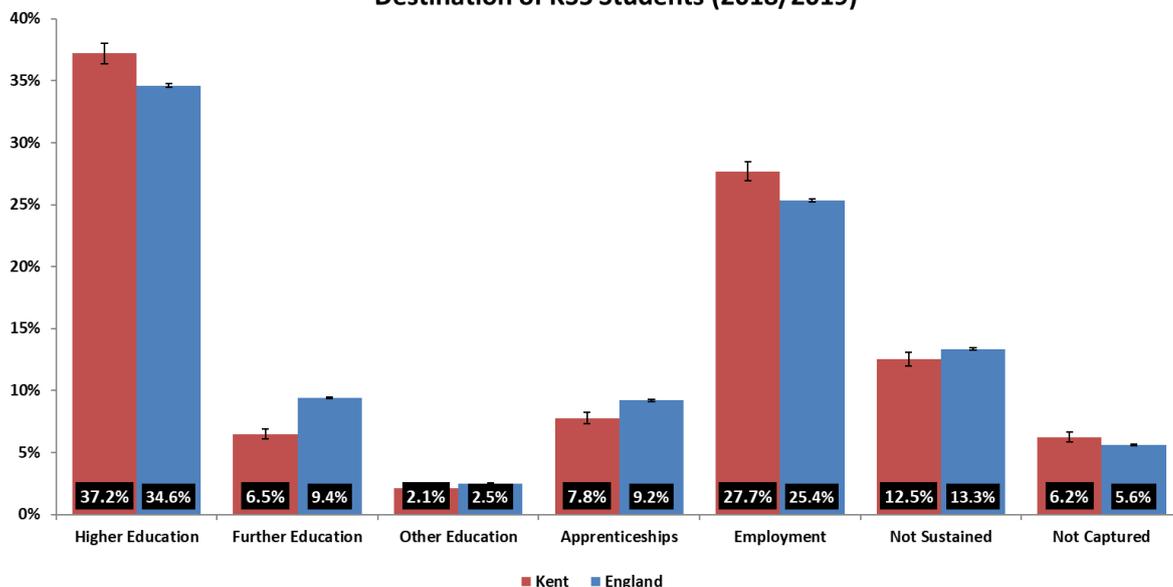
3.7:5 The numbers of students represented by the graphs are as follows:

Key Stage 5 pupils in total	13,837
Made up of:	
Level 3 pupils	10,212
Level 2 pupils	1,885
Below Level 2	1,740

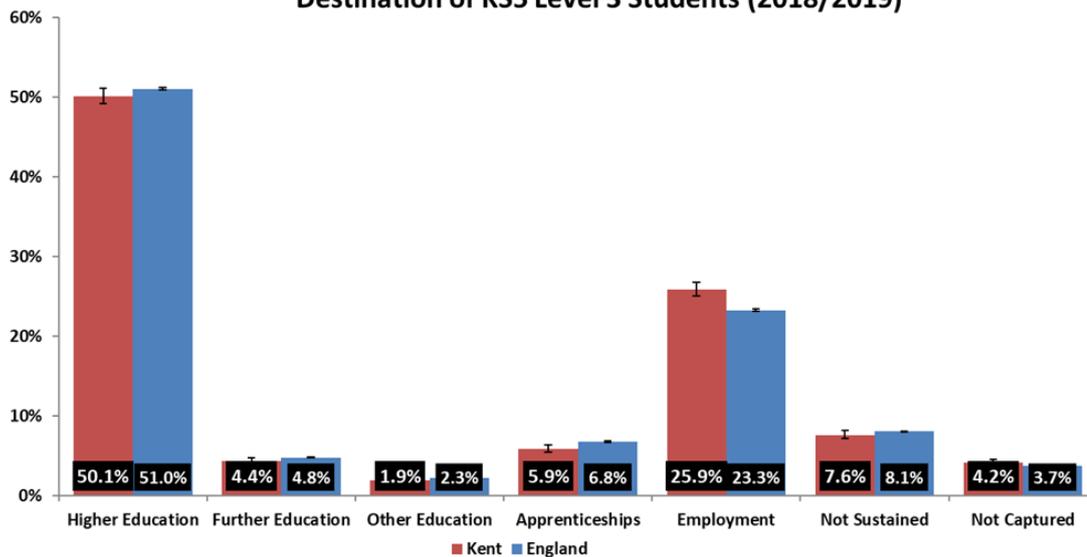
⁷¹ Key Stage 5 is the two years of post-16 education for students aged 16-18 – the vast majority of these young people will be in school or college for these two years.

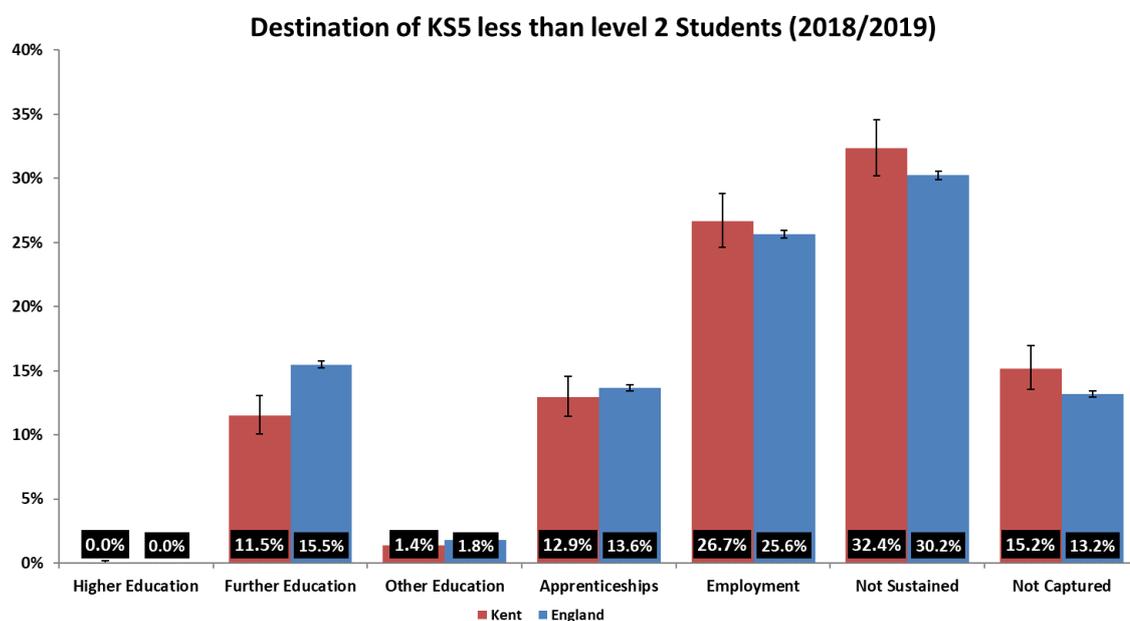
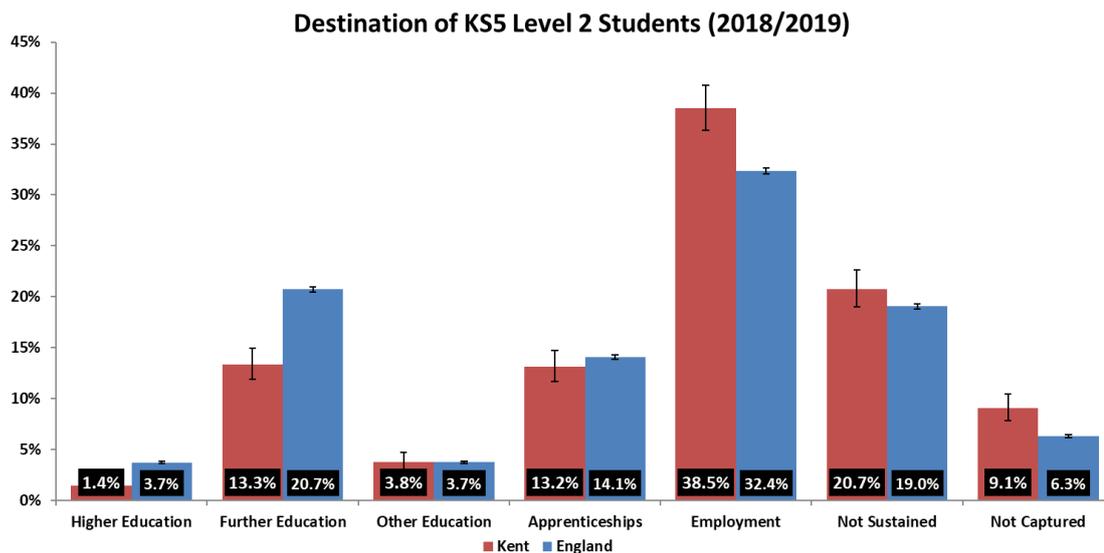
The students represented in this diagram (and the accompanying graphs) are those that have completed Key Stage 5 in mainstream schools and colleges (excluding private providers). For reference, the total cohort size is 15,673.

Destination of KS5 Students (2018/2019)



Destination of KS5 Level 3 Students (2018/2019)





3.7:6 Overall, Kent's destinations at the end of Key Stage 5 are in line with, or better than, national averages. (See the first diagram above.) Rates of progression into Higher Education are higher than the national average, as are rates of progression into employment.⁷² Progression into further education is lower, but this is not necessarily a "key destination" for the cohort as a whole at 18 (though see below) and if the proportion of young people going into HE and into employment is higher then, by definition, the numbers have to be lower somewhere else.

⁷² Though the statistics do not distinguish between employment "with training" (e.g. that may lead to further qualifications) and merely "having a job".

- 3.7:7 In any case progression into apprenticeships is far higher at age 19+ than it is at 16-18 (nationally 76% and 24% of starts respectively in 2019-20).
- 3.7:8 Kent is also very near national averages for those qualified at Level 3 (second diagram) – the principal difference is in those progressing to [non-Apprenticeship-based] employment.
- 3.7:9 For those qualified at Level 2 (third diagram) when they leave post-16 provision, Kent students are again more likely than the national average to proceed to work (again non-Apprenticeship-based) and less likely to be at college⁷³ – but, as previously discussed, this may simply reflect the greater local availability of certain types of employment.
- 3.7:10 Kent is perhaps least successful when the destinations of those not yet qualified at Level 2 are analysed (fourth diagram). “Not sustained” is the highest category nationally and in Kent, but the figure for the county is higher than the national average. “Not sustained” and “not captured”, together, represent 47.6% of the Kent sub-L2 cohort, as opposed to 43.4% nationally, and while not all “not captured” destinations necessarily represent unfulfilling destinations many may do so⁷⁴. The data thus suggests that this group of young people is currently not being best served by provision in the county.
- 3.7:11 Moreover, the proportion of young people not yet qualified at L2 who go to college (or remain there) for further study is, at 11.5%, only three quarters of the national figure. However those that proceed to an apprenticeship will in almost all cases aspire to a qualification at Level 2 or above so really the comparison should be with the “further education plus apprenticeships” figure, which in Kent is 24.4% and nationally is 29.1%. Even so Kent is still behind.
- 3.7:12 There is no data on the proportion of young people in employment who are also following a qualification through “day release”. However with the availability of apprenticeship funding it is perhaps reasonable to assume that many employers who traditionally took on underqualified employees and enrolled them on part-time courses in the local GFEC will now have adopted the apprenticeship route instead. The “employment” figures in the data are therefore more likely to be “employment without training for a recognised qualification”. If indeed this is the case, this is where the immediate challenge lies – i.e. the need to attract more of the young people in the “Level 2 (or below) at the end of Key Stage 5 group” to continue in some form of recognised education or training at 19. Currently too many of this group are in employment, have an outcome that is not sustained, or are “not captured” – the data

⁷³ Probably “staying on” at college, rather than “going to”, but the figures do not show this: it is unlikely, as already noted, that many students age 19 will just have achieved their Level 2 qualifications in a school sixth form.

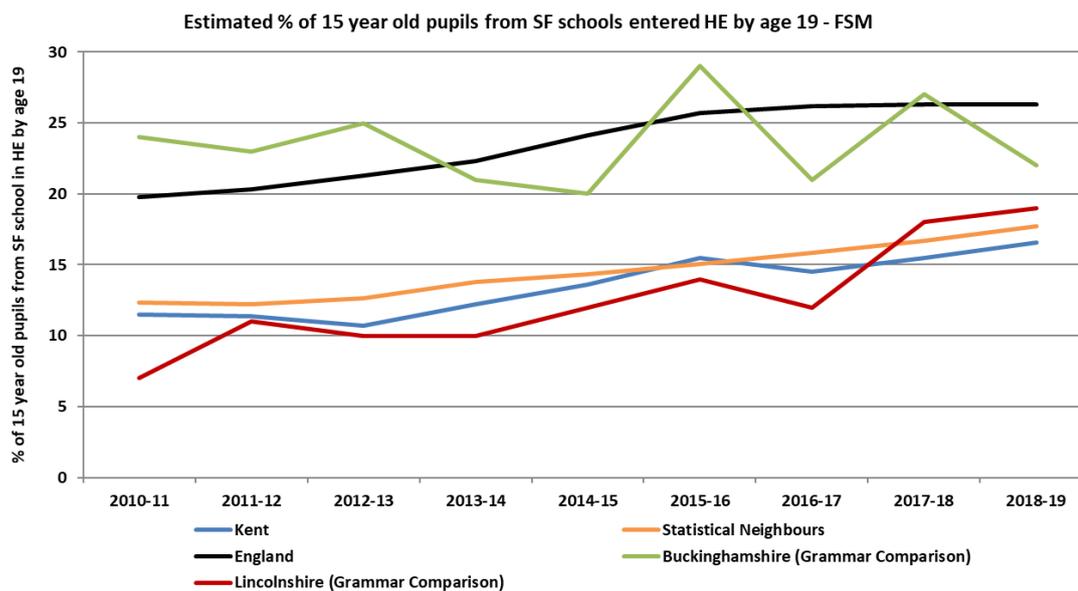
⁷⁴ The position has, it is understood, improved significantly this year. However for the time being this Report will continue to draw on data for the last full pre-pandemic year, as already noted.

is bad enough for England as a whole (57.7% of the Level 2 group; 69.0% of the less than Level 2s), and worse for Kent (68.3% and 74.3% respectively).

Destination data (2) by relative disadvantage

- 3.7:13** It is also important to look at how well disadvantaged young people (here defined, for the sake of illustration, as those entitled to free school meals⁷⁵) progress.
- 3.7:14** The first graph below shows progression by 15-year-olds previously in receipt of free school meals into higher education.
- 3.7:15** In this graph, the line for England (black line) shows a steady increase from 20% at the start of the period (2010) to about 27% at the end (2018). Over the same timeframe, Kent's line (blue) rises from 13% to 17%. However this is broadly equivalent to that of Kent's "statistical neighbours" (orange).
- 3.7:16** The graph also contains lines for two "grammar school comparison authorities" (Lincolnshire and Buckinghamshire). Both of these currently perform better than Kent on this measure: one (Buckinghamshire) continuously so, albeit that its performance fluctuates; the other only over the past two years.
- 3.7:17** It could be argued that despite Kent's selective system, which should improve the outcomes for all, those from disadvantaged backgrounds appear to make less progress than the national average. This raises questions about the numbers of disadvantaged young people who manage to access Grammar School provision and the wider impact of the selective system on outcomes.

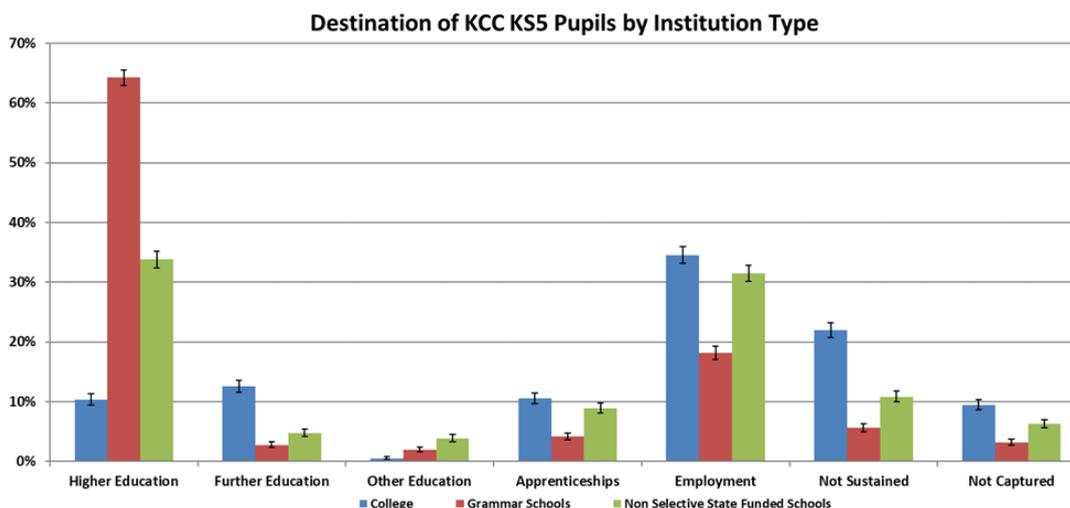
⁷⁵ Free school meals is not of course the only possible marker of disadvantage, and many families who for whatever reason may not qualify for free school meals for their children may be significantly disadvantaged nevertheless. However, it is a reasonable, and nationally consistent, indicator of disadvantage.



Year	Kent	Statistical Neighbours	England	Buckinghamshire (Grammar Comparison)	Lincolnshire (Grammar Comparison)
2010-11	11.5	12.37	19.8	22.6	10.9
2011-12	11.4	12.2	20.3	24.9	10.1
2012-13	10.7	12.63	21.3	21.4	9.7
2013-14	12.2	13.78	22.3	19.6	11.6
2014-15	13.6	14.33	24.1	29.5	13.7
2015-16	15.5	15.05	25.7	20.8	12
2016-17	14.5	15.85	26.2	26.6	18.2
2017-18	15.5	16.68	26.3	22.5	18.8
2018-19	16.6	17.75	26.3	26	15.6

Destination data (3) by type of post-16 provision

3.7:18 The graph below shows destinations from 19+ for grammar schools, high (non-selective) schools and further education colleges for 2018-19. The number of pupils covered by the graph is 13,774:



3.7:19 The low progression from colleges to higher education stands out on this diagram – at 10%, less than a third of the progression rate from high (non-selective) school sixth forms – which is in turn around half of the progression from grammar schools to HE. However, as stated in paragraph 3.1:49 (and as shown in the associated graph) the average GCSE grade of students proceeding to GFECs is very much lower than that of students going to school sixth forms. It is well known that GCSE attainment is strongly correlated with higher education progression (notwithstanding a student’s 16+ experience)⁷⁶, so this difference is perhaps not entirely surprising.

The limited range of “academic” programmes currently on offer in colleges, especially A levels, will also be part of the explanation here. And in fairness some of the c. 12% of students staying on in further education post-19 may also transfer to higher education in due course. The picture will change as EKC Group’s sixth form offer develops.

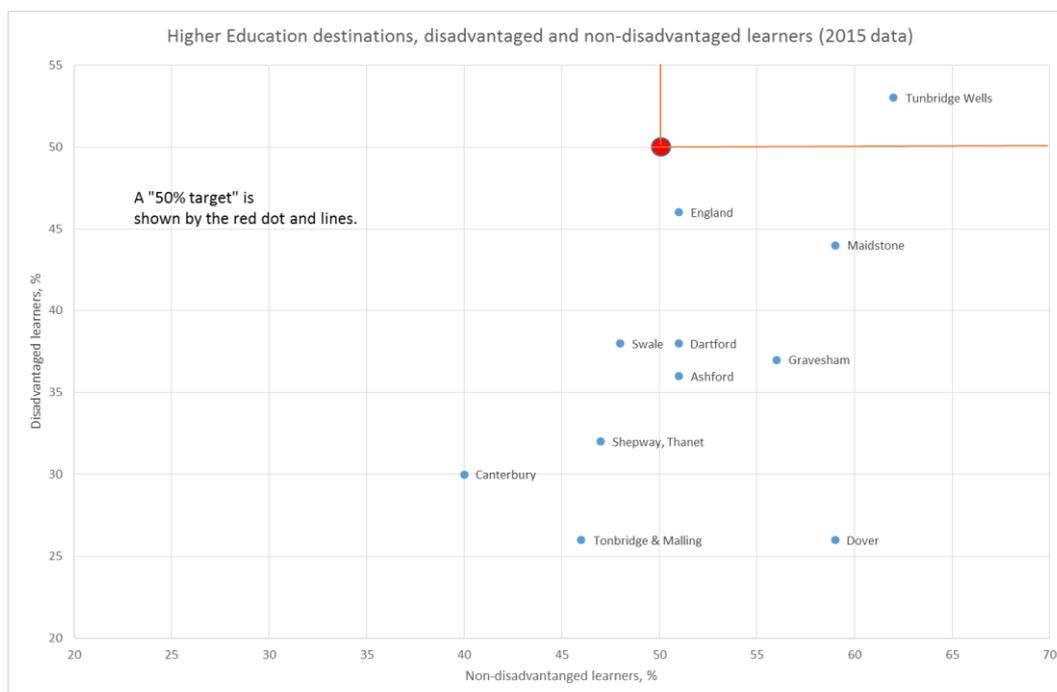
3.7:20 Kent’s GFECs do succeed in helping many students achieve Level 3 qualifications, including for example BTECs, and in turn many of these qualifications are accepted as entry qualifications for further study at Level 4 or above provided they are achieved at a high enough standard. Nevertheless questions were raised during the fieldwork interviews about the strength of the pathways from GFECs to higher education. There is perhaps an unspoken assumption that students’ next destination after GFEC is most likely to be into work.

3.7:21 The differential between progression rates to HE from grammar and high schools is also worthy of note, and (as noted above in relation to disadvantaged students) raises questions as to whether the selective system may act as a barrier to/reduce the aspirations of some young people – in this case those who do not go to grammar school at 11.

⁷⁶ See for example <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/early-success-gcse-key-university-applicants-achieving-their> [sic].

Differences between districts

3.7:22 Kent is of course not a homogeneous authority. The two diagrams below show progression of Kent students to higher education by District in 2015⁷⁷: the first graph shows progression to all universities and the second progression to universities included in the “Russell Group”⁷⁸. The data set concerned relates to students who complete two years of Key Stage 5 or equivalent study in a mainstream school or college. The opportunity is taken to distinguish between disadvantaged students (again, those previously on free school meals) and others.



3.7:23 The red dot in the graphic above is at the “50% point” – that is to say, the point where a district would fall if 50% of its disadvantaged students and also 50% of its non-disadvantaged students completing Key Stage 5 were to proceed to higher

⁷⁷ Sevenoaks is omitted from this and the following graphic due to lack of data. In this particular graphic Shepway and Thanet share the same point on the graph.

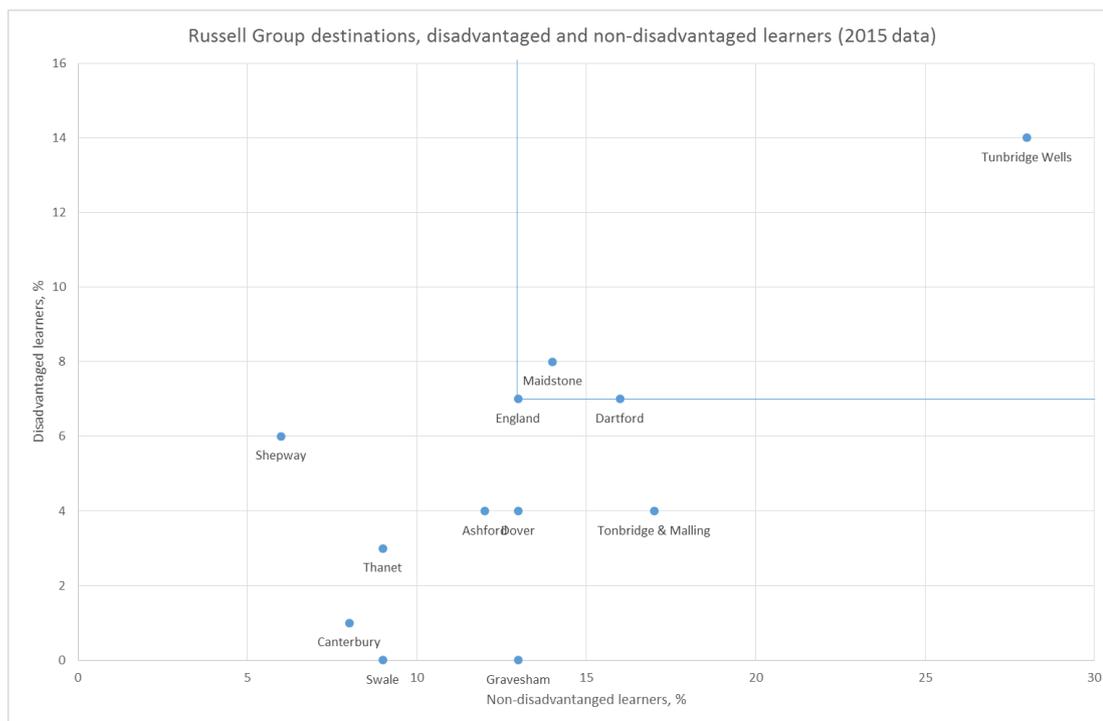
⁷⁸ The “Russell Group” of universities is largely comprised of universities that have medical schools (though any university can apply to join by invitation and not all universities with medical schools are members). In this context, the Group stands proxy for those universities where gaining entry traditionally requires higher qualifications from the prospective student, and where entry is more competitive. But this is only a proxy, and some courses at non-Russell Group universities are in fact more competitive than the typical Russell Group course.

education. This is in some sense a “target”⁷⁹ and, if it is, only Tunbridge Wells meets (or in this case exceeds) it.

- 3.7:24 The statistics for England miss this target zone, but not by much, since for England 46% of disadvantaged and 51% of non-disadvantaged students completing Key Stage 5 do indeed proceed to HE.
- 3.7:25 It should be stressed that, as noted, these statistics only refer to students who have completed two years of Key Stage 5 study, and are therefore still “in the system” at 18+. Many students (both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged) do not do this. For comparison, UCAS estimates that in 2020 18.8% of the *entire* relevant cohort of disadvantaged young people began a higher education programme: the corresponding figure for **all** young people is 30.2% and therefore the figure for non-disadvantaged young people even higher⁸⁰.
- 3.7:26 The other districts do reasonably well by their non-disadvantaged learners – between 40% and 59% attend HE – but comparatively badly by their non-disadvantaged learners. The disparity is worst in Dover (59% of non-disadvantaged learners versus 26% of disadvantaged learners). But in every case the disparity between the proportions of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged learners progressing to an HEI is greater in Kent than it is for England as a whole.

⁷⁹ It is not immediately clear whether the “50% target”, as sometimes expressed by previous Governments, relates to the whole cohort of students or just to those completing Key Stage 5 in school or college (a smaller group). See paragraph 3.7:25 below.

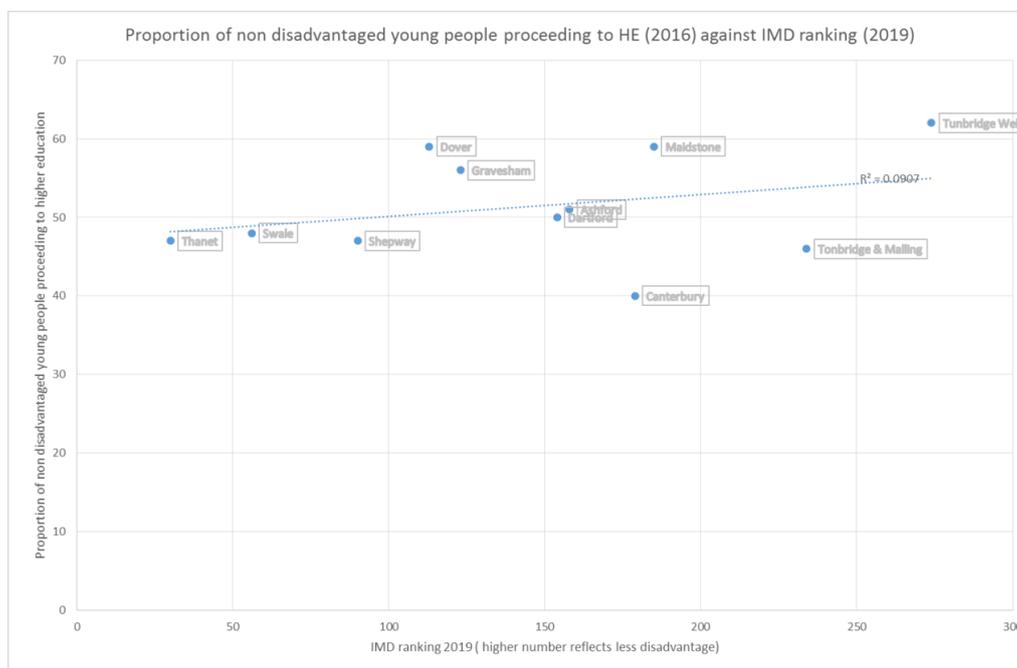
⁸⁰ See <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/students-disadvantaged-backgrounds-more-likely-ever-be-accepted-university-results-day> . UCAS’ figures quoted are based on the appropriate cohort of 18 year olds: of course many older students also choose to attend university after a spell of employment or other activity.



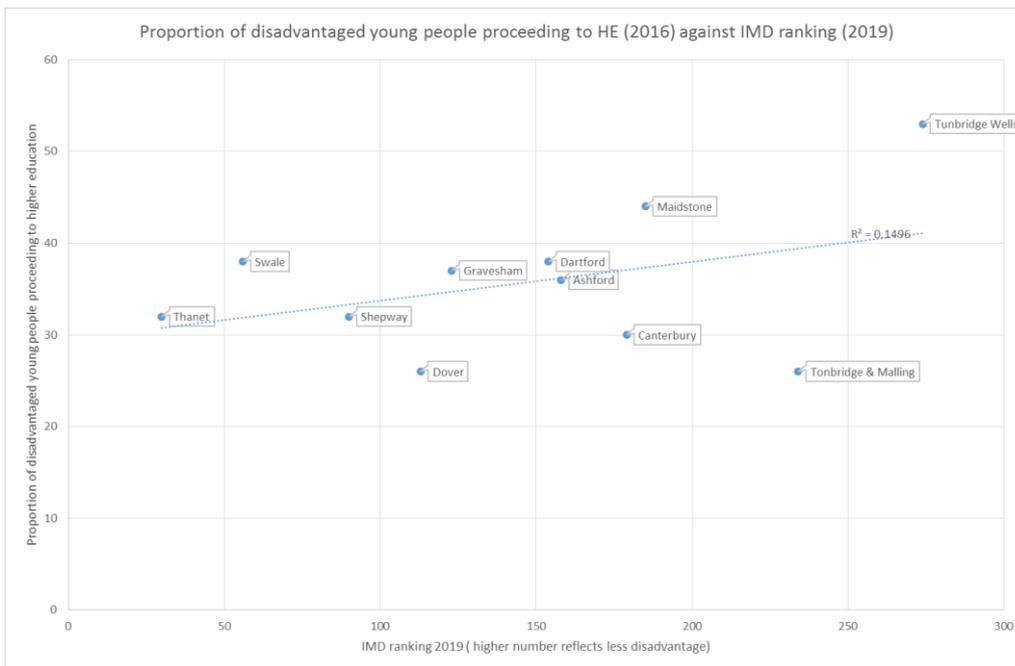
- 3.7:27** The second graph (above) covers just Russell Group universities. There is no concept of a “target” here but the blue lines extend upwards and sideways from the England figure. In other words, any District in the top right hand corner is “doing better” than the England average on this measure.
- 3.7:28** It is important to note that this graph indicates that, nationally, disadvantaged young people completing Key Stage 5 education in a school sixth form are about half as likely as their non-disadvantaged peers to get into a Russell Group university – perhaps demonstrating, as some argue, that the Russell Group universities themselves have work to do in this regard.
- 3.7:29** Focussing on Kent’s districts, clearly Tunbridge Wells is again doing much better than the England average, and Maidstone slightly so. Dartford is right on the line for disadvantaged young people, and ahead of it for the non-disadvantaged. In summary progression to Russell Group universities from Kent districts:
- For non-disadvantaged learners is at or ahead of the England-wide figure in 6 districts (and therefore behind it in the other 6)
 - For disadvantaged learners is at or ahead the England wide figure in three districts (and therefore behind it in the other nine).
- 3.7:30** Of the nine lagging in terms of disadvantaged learners’ progression, in two Districts – Swale and Gravesham – apparently no students on free school meals make it to Russell Group universities at all, and in Canterbury only 1% do. The other six Districts’ figures are not a great deal better.

District characteristics and progression to HE

- 3.7:31 There is another way of looking at the data presented in the two graphics immediately above: how do the characteristics of individual districts, and in particular their average ranking in Index of Multiple Deprivation [IMD] terms⁸¹, influence (if at all) progression to HE and in particular progression to Russell Group universities?
- 3.7:32 The first two graphs below show the progression to higher education for non-disadvantaged and disadvantaged students respectively.

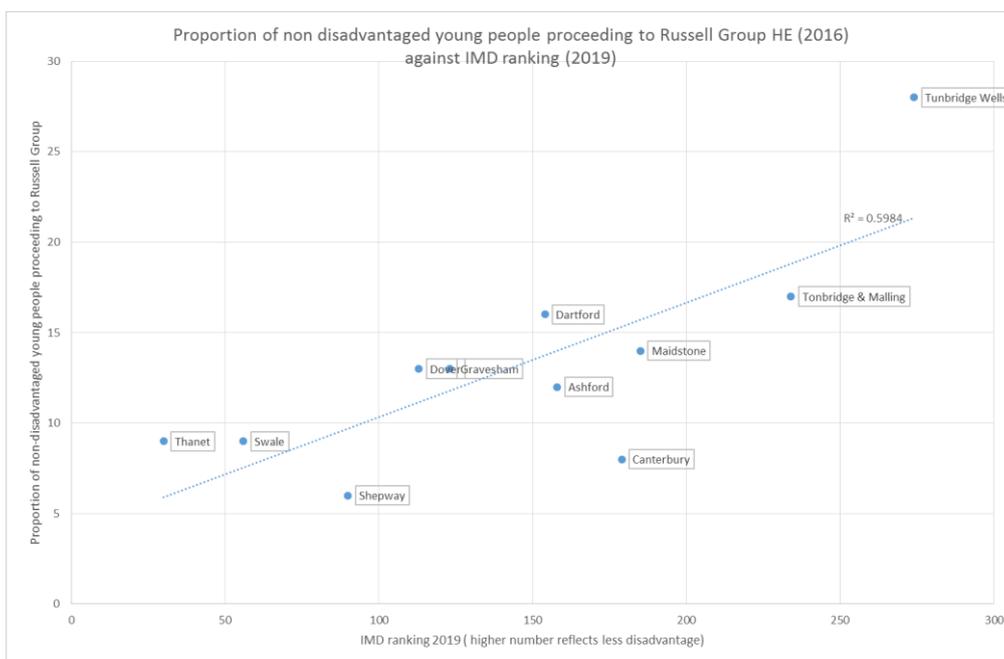


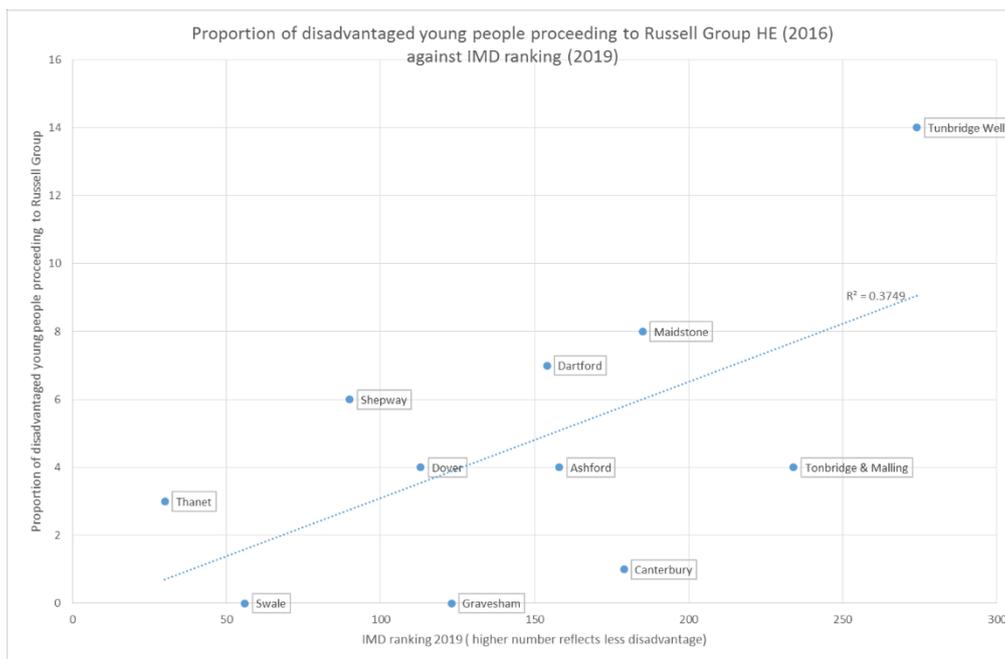
⁸¹ IMD scores are calculated at a low level of aggregation across the whole of England (technically, on the basis of Lower Super Output Areas [LSOA], of which many go to make up a district in a county like Kent". Typically the ranking of an LSOA's IMD score is used (i.e. the most deprived LSOA in England counts as 1) rather than the actual score itself. An "average ranking" for a district can be obtained by calculating the numerical mean of all the rankings of the LSOAs that go to make up the district concerned.



3.7:33 It will be seen that – although there is significant variation between different districts – the correlation between the average IMD ranking of the district and the proportion of young people completing Key Stage 5 that proceed to higher education is not particularly strong, either for disadvantaged or non-disadvantaged students. Thus whether or not a student lives in a deprived district appears to have little or no bearing on whether they progress to an HEI. Whatever is causing the variation between districts in this regard is not easily explained by IMD statistics.

3.7:34 However, the following two graphs, which cover progression to Russell Group institutions, are very different:





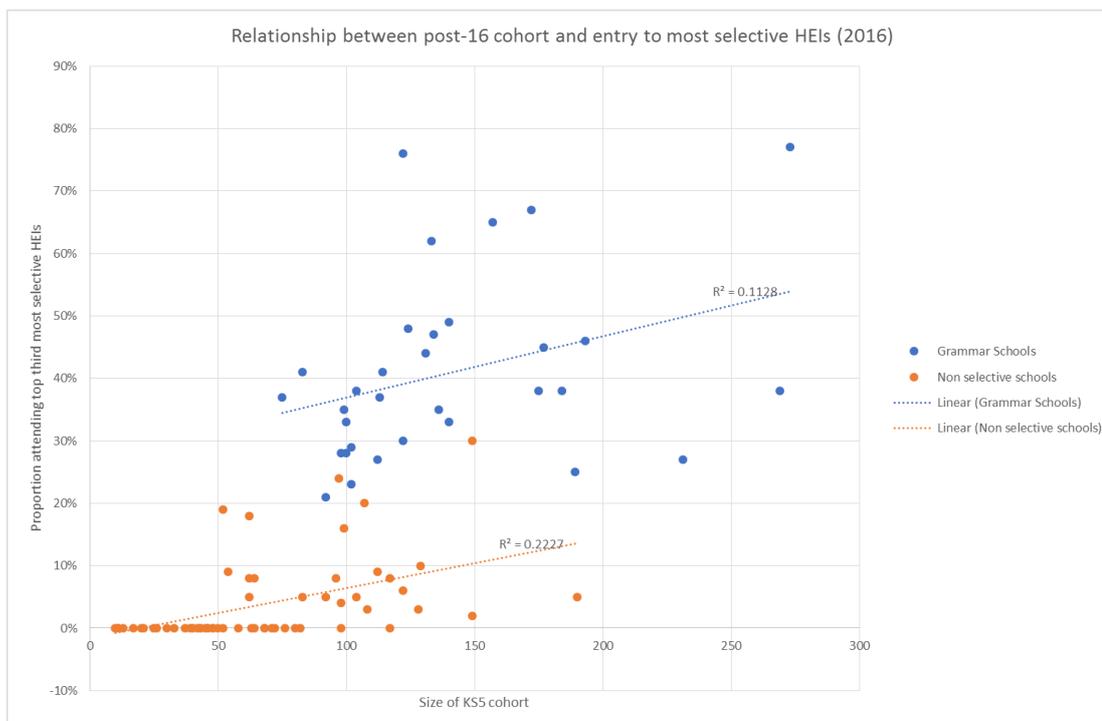
- 3.7:35** Here there is a very strong correlation between the average IMD ranking of the district and the proportion of young people completing Key Stage 5 progressing to Russell Group universities, both for disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged young people. The correlation is highest for non-disadvantaged young people.
- 3.7:36** This suggests that young people who come from districts of high disadvantage in IMD terms are less likely to think of applying to Russell Group universities (or, if they apply, are less likely to be successful in their application) than their peers from districts of lower disadvantage⁸², whether they are themselves disadvantaged or not.
- 3.7:37** One possible explanation for this is that the advice young people receive in schools that serve areas of high disadvantage does not adequately raise with them with the opportunity to attend a Russell Group university, even when the young people concerned have the potential to do so. However, it seems probable that a number of factors will be at play here also.

Progression to HE for sixth forms of different sizes

- 3.7:38** It will not be a surprise that most students in Kent that go to the most selective higher education institutions⁸³ come from grammar schools, since these schools select by ability at age 11. The graph below shows the proportion of students going to selective higher education institutions plotted against the size of the sixth form concerned, with grammar and high schools distinguished.

⁸² Recall that a low IMD average ranking represents increased disadvantage.

⁸³ This graph is based on the third of HEIs that are most selective – a wider group than the Russell Group.

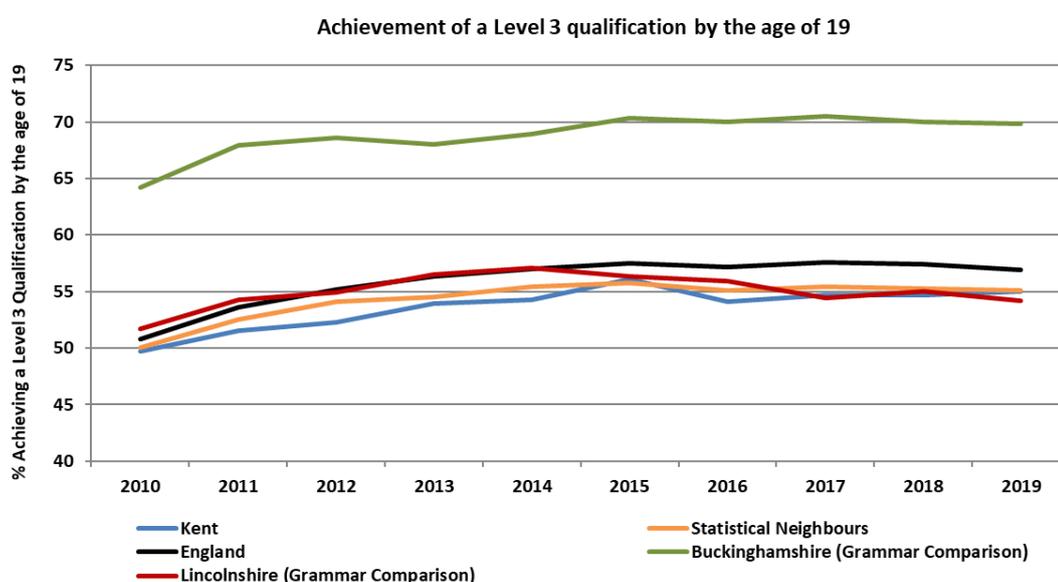


- 3.7:39** On this measure, the most successful non-selective schools manage to perform on a par with the least successful grammar schools, though the majority of non-selective schools are much below this level. Note in particular the large number of non-selective schools whose sixth forms did not send *any* pupils to a selective university in the year in question (orange dots on the lower axis of the graph).
- 3.7:40** Also note the small size of many of these (mainly high school) sixth forms (already referred to in Section 3.1). However, although there is a correlation between the size of the sixth form and the proportion of its students going to a more selective HEI, statistically the correlation is quite weak ($R^2 = 0.1128$ for grammar schools and 0.2227 for high schools). This suggests, but no more, that high schools with small sixth forms are slightly more likely to struggle in this regard.
- 3.7:41** It is important to point out that focussing on progression to higher education, and to selective universities in particular, is simply a way of evaluating and comparing parts of the sector using the available data sets. No value judgement is being made. This measure does not evaluate other destinations – for example, apprenticeships and other employment which includes training leading to qualifications.
- 3.7:42** There are also methodological difficulties in interpreting much other destination data: for example, a high proportion of students leaving GFECs at 19 with a Level 2 qualification might indicate that many more students were attaining the basic qualification they need to enter employment (a positive outcome) but could alternatively represent students who could reasonably have achieved a Level 3 choosing not, or for whatever reason not being able, to do so (not so positive).
- 3.7:43** Given the range of available data, the data that is presented here indicates that:

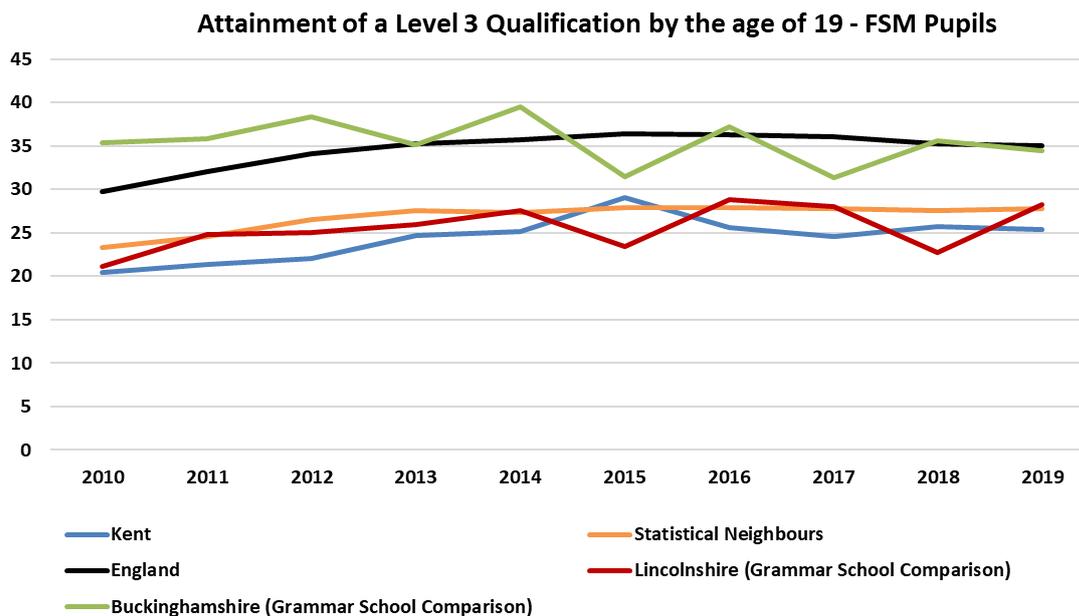
- While many Kent students from (broadly) non-disadvantaged backgrounds seem to progress as well as their peers elsewhere in the country, in the majority of cases those from disadvantaged backgrounds do not
- There is, throughout the country, regrettably a gap between progression to the most selective HEIs achieved by the disadvantaged and the non-disadvantaged: this gap appears to be greater in Kent
- As far as progression to **all** HE is concerned, there is a relatively small gap nationally between progression by disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students once they have completed Key Stage 5 study (46% to 51%). In every Kent district, the gap is greater than this.

Attainment data

3.7:44 To what extent does attainment data back up this picture? The graphs below show the proportion of students achieving a Level 3 qualification by the end of Key Stage 5, first for all pupils and then for pupils in receipt of free school meals:



Year	Kent	Statistical Neighbours	England	Buckinghamshire (Grammar Comparison)	Lincolnshire (Grammar Comparison)
2010	49.7	50.09	50.8	64.2	51.7
2011	51.5	52.52	53.6	67.9	54.3
2012	52.3	54.09	55.2	68.6	54.9
2013	53.9	54.55	56.3	68	56.5
2014	54.3	55.39	57	68.9	57.1
2015	56.1	55.77	57.5	70.3	56.3
2016	54.1	55.12	57.2	70	55.9
2017	54.7	55.46	57.6	70.5	54.4
2018	54.7	55.29	57.4	70	55
2019	55	55.14	56.9	69.8	54.2

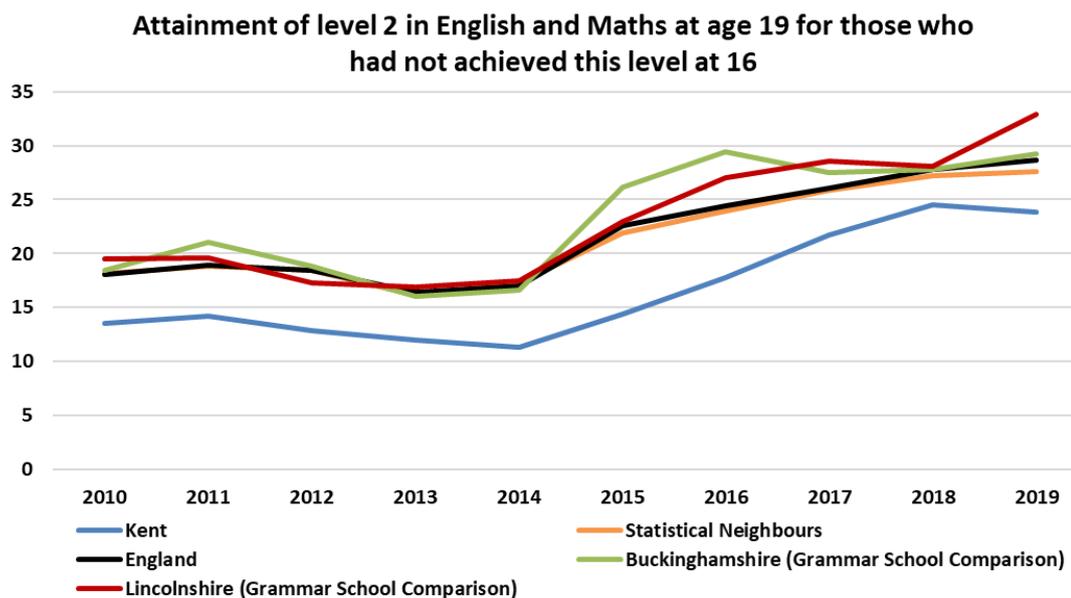


Year	Kent	Statistical Neighbours	England	Buckinghamshire (Grammar Comparison)	Lincolnshire (Grammar Comparison)
2010	20.4	23.26	29.7	21.1	35.4
2011	21.4	24.56	32	24.8	35.8
2012	22	26.47	34.1	25	38.3
2013	24.7	27.59	35.3	25.9	35.1
2014	25.1	27.27	35.7	27.6	39.5
2015	29.1	27.89	36.4	23.4	31.5
2016	25.6	27.89	36.3	28.8	37.2
2017	24.6	27.81	36	28	31.3
2018	25.7	27.53	35.2	22.7	35.6
2019	25.4	27.81	35	28.3	34.4

3.7:45 Again, this data shows that Kent students' attainment at Key Stage 5 is comparable both with statistical neighbours and with national data when all students are considered, and only slightly worse than statistical neighbours when students on free school meals are considered. However the attainment of students on free school meals is considerably worse than the national data (black line on the second graph).

3.7:46 This is consistent with the destination data already included in this section, and again raises questions as to the impact of the selective system on disadvantaged learners. (Buckinghamshire is again clearly an outlier in both datasets.)

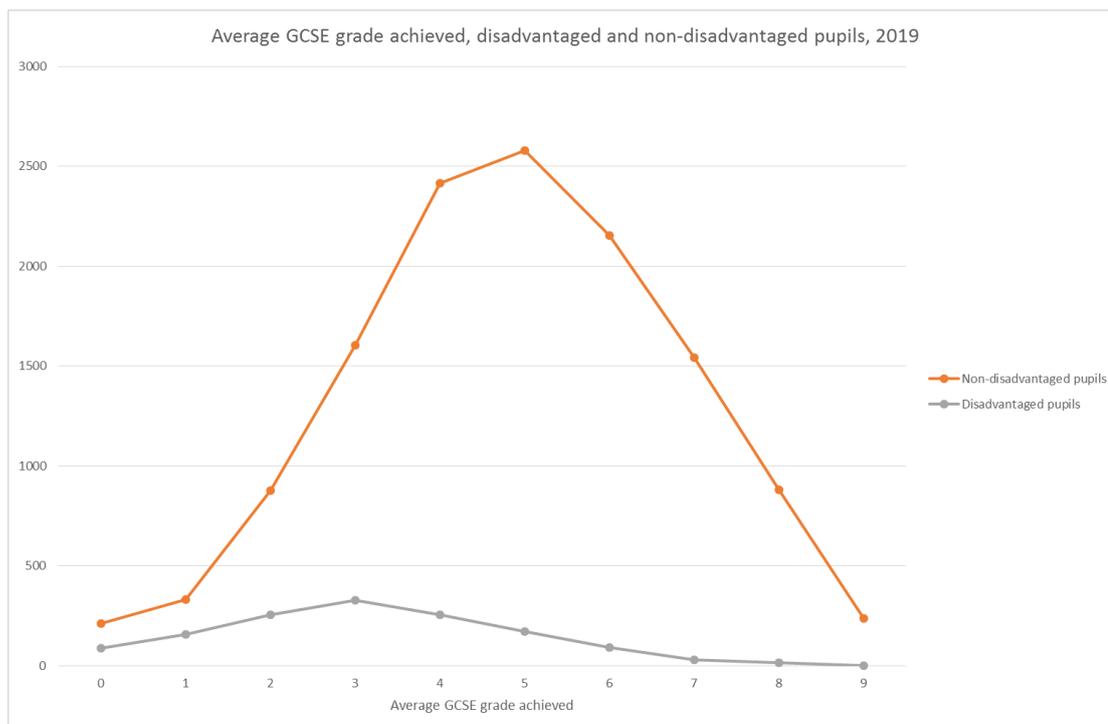
3.7:47 Kent – and the country as a whole – also does particularly badly in terms of enabling those without a Level 2 qualification in English and mathematics at age 16 to attain it by age 19:



Year	Kent	Statistical Neighbours	England	Buckinghamshire (Grammar Comparison)	Lincolnshire (Grammar Comparison)
2010	13.5	18.15	18.1	18.4	19.5
2011	14.2	18.82	18.9	21	19.6
2012	12.9	18.49	18.4	18.8	17.3
2013	12	16.15	16.4	16	16.9
2014	11.3	17.31	17	16.6	17.5
2015	14.4	21.94	22.6	26.2	23
2016	17.8	23.9	24.4	29.4	27
2017	21.7	25.87	26.1	27.5	28.6
2018	24.5	27.2	27.8	27.8	28.1
2019	23.8	27.6	28.7	29.2	32.9

3.7:48 This is also proof – if any is needed – that the idea that young people without GCSE English and Maths at 16+ should be obliged to retake it during Key Stage 5 is simply “not working”. Less than one in three of these students nationally, and less than one in four in Kent, is successful in this aim: this level of failure would probably not be tolerated in any other context. There is a clear need to provide and promote alternative qualifications in literacy and numeracy that students *can* achieve.

3.7:49 Any impression that underperformance by disadvantaged students can be laid entirely at the door of the 16-19 sector is however incorrect. The graph below shows the average grade at GCSE for the most recent pre-pandemic cohort for students in receipt of free school meals compared to those not:



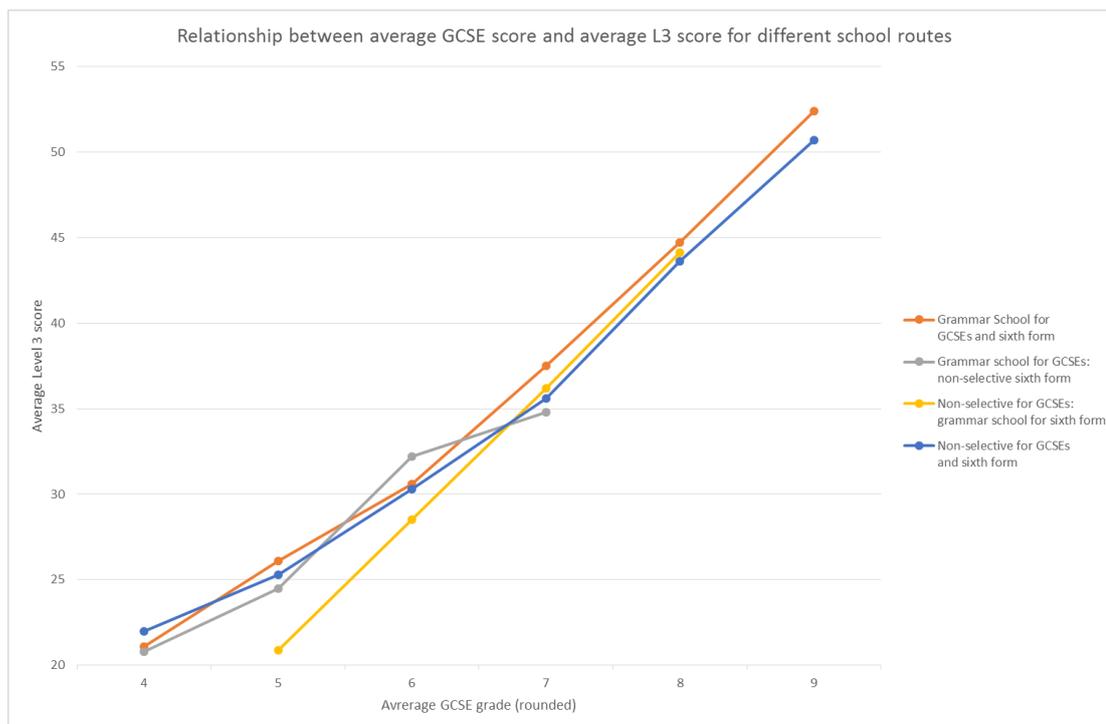
3.7:50 Most young people in Kent are not, of course, in receipt of free school meals. But to put the graph in perspective, in the year in question just forty-eight pupils in receipt of free school meals achieved average GCSE grades of 7, 8 or 9, representing just over 3% of the FSM cohort. For pupils not on free school meals the figure was 2662, representing nearly 21% of the cohort.

3.7:51 Clearly the causes of ongoing underperformance by disadvantaged young people between the ages of 5 and 16 reflected in the graph are beyond the scope of this review. But if the disparity in attainment by age 16 could be narrowed then one would expect a consequential reduction in any disparities post-16.

Added value

3.7:52 The final graph in this section shows “added value” (i.e. the comparison of average Level 3 scores at 18+ to average GCSE scores at 16+ for the four school-based routes at 16+, namely

- Students from grammar schools who stay on at a grammar school (usually their own previous school) at 16+
- Students from non-selective schools who stay on at a non-selective school (usually their own previous school) at 16+
- Students who transfer from grammar school pre-16 to a non-selective school at 16+
- Students who transfer from a non-selective school pre-16 to a grammar school at 16.



Average GCSE grade	Grammar School for GCSEs and sixth form	Grammar school for GCSEs: non-selective sixth form	Non-selective for GCSEs: grammar school for sixth form	Non-selective for GCSEs and sixth form
4	21.1	20.8	N/A	22
5	26.1	24.5	20.9	25.3
6	30.6	32.2	28.5	30.3
7	37.5	34.8	36.2	35.6
8	44.7	N/A	44.1	43.6
9	52.4	N/A	N/A	50.7

3.7:53 In interpreting this graph it should be borne in mind that the numbers of students moving from high school to grammar school for sixth form studies (and vice versa) are relatively small. The population figures behind the graphic are given in the table below.

Students remaining in grammar school for sixth form studies	3378
Grammar school students transferring to a non-selective school	160
Students remaining in a non-selective school	2916
Students transferring from a non-selective school to a grammar school	372
Total	6826

- 3.7:54 Nevertheless, it is encouraging that all four routes add similar value to most students, though students who achieve average Level 5 at a non-selective school and transfer to a grammar school do not do quite as well as the other three groups.
- 3.7:55 It would be interesting to compare the value added by other routes at 16+. Unfortunately the data is not easily available. The “metric” used to calculate the average Level 3 score is related to the “points score” used by UCAS for university entrance, and this is not easy to calculate for vocational attainment gained by students in GFECs and other providers.

Issues from the fieldwork

Aspirations of young people

- 3.7:56 The most consistent comment made during the interviews was that (in the views of their teachers and lecturers) those young people who under-achieved lacked the necessary aspiration and ambition to realise their full potential. These students, it is claimed, “do not believe in themselves”, and can become apathetic when faced with what seems like a mountain to climb to achieve the outcomes of which they are capable.
- 3.7:57 On top of this, “basic jobs” (that is to say, jobs without much training or progression potential) are as already noted relatively easy to find in Kent, and many students are attracted to earning money now rather than investing in what they see as an uncertain future.

Lack of knowledge of potential progression routes

- 3.7:58 Section 3.4 has already mentioned the lack of knowledge among both young people and their families about the range of potential progression routes post-19, and the report will return to this in Section 3.8 (see 3.8:19). It is sufficient to point out here that this lack of knowledge – particularly of alternatives to A level and subsequent higher education – may lead to young people becoming demotivated entirely, rather than considering alternatives, when they perceive (rightly or wrongly) that the A level route is not for them.

3.7:59 In particular, the apprenticeship route is not generally well understood. Although the limited availability of higher level apprenticeships will need to be addressed before this route becomes a genuine alternative for those wanting to see a clear progression route beyond Level 3, demand from young people for an apprenticeship already outstrips supply.

Young people tend to be happy to stop at Level 2 and this is something that needs to be addressed. Part of the issue is a lack of opportunities, certainly above Level 3. However, progression to further learning from Level 2 is certainly possible, and we recognise that we need to do more here. For example:

- Earlier provision of information so that young people are aware of opportunities
- Earlier dialogue with young people about what their aspirations are
- Follow-ups built-in to the process to ensure that any inputs now that would facilitate progression later happen.

At the moment we tend to leave things until the exit/end of programme interview – this is really too late. If we are asking schools for the opportunity to do more earlier, then we really need to look to what we do before young people complete their apprenticeship with us. (Work-based provider)

Individual and family circumstances

3.7:60 As previously noted, individual and family crises of various kinds can also destabilise a young person's course of study. Even if the young person does not drop out altogether due to the impact of the crisis in question, their progress can still be hampered and they may achieve less than otherwise would have been possible.

Limited horizons

3.7:61 A further factor constraining outcomes is perhaps the limited horizons of some Kent students. As far as progression to higher education is concerned, interviewees (and some students themselves) suggested that students often limited their consideration to universities local to Kent rather than – as is perhaps more the norm elsewhere – considering the full range of university destinations open to them⁸⁴.

3.7:62 This is perhaps a specific example of the general point that many Kent communities are tightly homogeneous, and many students as a result see their future careers as entirely within these localised communities. Again, this is not a factor particular to Kent.

⁸⁴ Of course there is a local “pull factor” among universities everywhere, and many modern universities recruit extensively from their local area. But there are also a number of universities that have traditionally recruited nationally, and not many Kent students seem to consider these.

3.7:63 It also goes some way to explaining the lack of progression of Kent's post-16 students to:

- Russell Group HEIs – Kent does not have one
- The wider group of the most selective HEIs – which, as measured by the percentage of students who apply to a university who receive an offer from it, does not include either Canterbury Christ Church University (82.7% who apply are offered a place – 100th of 132 HEIs) or the University of Kent (88.6%, 123rd)⁸⁵.

Are providers doing enough?

3.7:64 The views – largely from providers – expressed above are of course valid and of themselves may go a long way towards explaining underperformance by students where it occurs. However it is also not unreasonable to hold the mirror up to the providers themselves. The fact that 16+ students have, broadly, chosen their field of study does not necessarily mean that they will bring with them the all the motivation and will to succeed needed to achieve their full potential. Are providers actually doing enough to encourage young people to be their best? (The support that is being given is outlined in Section 3.8.)

3.7:65 More generally, interviewees were not likely to say directly that they and their immediate colleagues were falling short in this regard. But suggestions were made that providers sometimes counted “positive outcomes” defined very broadly, rather than looking at the prospects offered by these outcomes or the extent to which they addressed the young person's aspirations. Inspection and funding regimes might inadvertently encourage them in this oversimplification.

3.7:66 Providers were also happy to compare their students' attainment with that of previous cohorts, so as to identify (hopefully) continuous improvement, but did not always compare their students' achievements with those of other providers – or indeed have the means to do so easily. If some of the graphs in the first part of this section come as a shock, this may be significant.

3.7:67 It is also worth making a distinction between examination and other “results” for a particular cohort, which are easy to assess and compare with previous years, and learner destinations, which are more difficult to categorise but which may when investigated yield more interesting information about the relevance of the programmes on offer.

3.7:68 Interestingly, the 11-16 [only] schools (i.e. those without their own sixth form, and including PRUs) had their own ideas of what their young people might be capable of

⁸⁵ Analysis of data from UCAS – see <https://www.savethestudent.org/freshers/which-universities-are-easiest-to-get-into.html>

at 16+ but did not usually receive any information about their final achievements at 19+ unless (say) a younger brother or sister passed the information on informally.

Good practice

3.7:69 Lest all this seem negative, there is good practice being carried out by the Kent and Medway Progression Federation [KMPF]. This includes:

- The Kent and Medway Progression Federation itself, which involves 47 secondary schools in widening participation activities in partnership with the four local HEIs (Canterbury Christ Church, University College of the Arts, Greenwich University, University of Kent). KMPF is a direct descendant of the Aim Higher programme, which was funded locally after national funding ceased
- The Kent and Medway National Collaborative Outreach Programme, which is funded by the Office for Students under Uni Connect, and which is open to students in certain specified postcodes.

It is possible for a given school to be a member of both programmes, and many are.

Conclusion

3.7:70 The quantitative data indicates that :

- Progression to a range of “positive” destinations at the end of Key Stage 5 (HE, further education, apprenticeships, and employment) in Kent are in line with, or better than, national averages for those with a Level 2 or 3 at 18
- Kent is less successful in terms of the destinations of those qualified below Level 2 and there is a need to ensure that more of these young people continue in some form of recognised education or training at 19
- Kent students from (broadly) non-disadvantaged backgrounds seem to achieve at and progress from Key Stage 5 as well as their peers elsewhere in the country – those from disadvantaged backgrounds do not. In particular ...
- Throughout the country, a gap exists between the progression rates to the most selective HEIs achieved by the disadvantaged and those achieved by the non-disadvantaged: this gap appears to be wider in Kent than nationally
- As far as progression to all HE is concerned, there is a relatively small gap nationally between progression by disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students (46% to 51%)⁸⁶. In every Kent district, the gap is greater than this – in some cases substantially.

⁸⁶ These statistics refer specifically to destinations of students that remain in education to the end of Key Stage 5. Fewer disadvantaged than non-disadvantaged students do so, therefore the **overall cohort** participation in HE is lower than the figures quoted.

3.7:71 Overall, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (variously defined) appear to make even less progress than their non-disadvantaged peers compared to the national average. In particular, the differentials between progression rates to HE from grammar and high schools raises questions as to whether the selective system may act as a barrier to, or reduce the aspirations of, those not proceeding to grammar school at 11.

3.7:72 Qualitative findings from the fieldwork interviews suggest that:

- Young people can lack the necessary aspiration and ambition to realise their full potential; they “do not believe in themselves”
- “Basic jobs” (those without much training or progression potential) are relatively easy to find in Kent and many students are attracted to them by the prospect of earning money now, rather than investing for their future
- Lack of knowledge – particularly of alternatives to A level and subsequent higher education – may lead to young people becoming demotivated
- Those considering university often limited their choice to universities local to Kent.

3.7:73 Section 4 describes how the major recommendations that have emerged from the Review will seek to address these issues; specifically in sub-sections:

- 4.1 Improving outcomes
- 4.2 Raising young people’s aspirations through better CEIAG
- 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
- 4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.

Related subsidiary recommendations are in Section 5 (paragraphs numbered 5.7).

3.8 Post-Year 13 decision-making and transition

Introduction

- 3.8:1 The focus in this section is not on the outcomes that young people achieve at 19 and where they progress on to (this was covered in Section 3.7), but on the support they receive from their provider when deciding, and making the transition to, what comes next.
- 3.8:2 There is some variation between the support given by different providers, so the key findings from the interviews are presented by type of provider.
- 3.8:3 The role of parents (and friends and, to a more limited extent, other family/acquaintances) as influencers in relation to decisions on what to do at 16, previously mentioned in Section 3.4, was also referred to here. Again, where it was mentioned, this was mainly in a negative (options limiting) way, rather than an encouragement to “try to get into ...”.

Issues from the fieldwork

Work-based and alternative 16-19 providers

Preparation for transition

- 3.8:4 Whilst there was a recognition that more could always be done, most work-based and alternative 16-19 providers had maintained a strong focus on transitional support. Despite the fact that Covid-19 has affected progression options, and has meant that a lot of support is being given remotely, most considered that the support that had been given was valuable and helped young people achieve a positive outcome.
- 3.8:5 Providers referred to a structured process, with steps in place towards the end of the young person’s final year of their current programme to ensure that their intended next step is identified and the necessary support then put in place to enable it to happen.
- 3.8:6 Typically these steps would include:
- Discussions between the young person and provider staff to identify aspirations and opportunities
 - Discussions with the young person’s current employer (and/or potential employers, or other providers if they are hoping to go to college or into an apprenticeship as appropriate)
 - Provision of support required by the young person to enable the transition to happen
 - Work with parents if their support is necessary to enable the transition to happen (e.g. support with transport), and to maximise the chances that it would be successful

- Preparatory work with employers to secure the proposed pathway, and to plan for the young person to move to their new role/place etc..

Limited options

- 3.8:7 In some industries, particularly in the current Covid-related climate, immediate access to pathways for next steps or moving up levels may be limited. Additionally, some vocational routes may have limited opportunities for further progression to higher level training or apprenticeships.
- 3.8:8 Where this is the case, providers work with employers to identify ways of keeping young people engaged – for example around the transfer of a qualified apprentice into a permanent role within the organisation’s structure; identifying opportunities for further development or training in areas tangential to their current role (e.g. moving from a more generic business administration-based apprenticeship into a more specific functional area – finance, sales etc.); increasing rates of pay.

Post-transition support

- 3.8:9 Encouragingly, the doors of work-based providers, and of providers of alternative 16-19 provision in particular, remain open to their programme leavers after they have “moved on”.

We run a Progression Club post-‘completion’, and will do our absolute best to not let young people leave us if they have nowhere to go. (Work-based provider)

- 3.8:10 These providers actively follow-up their “leavers” to check on their progress, and whether further support would be helpful. This is not generally just something that is left to the young person to decide (an open invitation to “call us if you need us”). The experience of providers is that self-referring cannot be relied upon (young people may be reluctant to admit “they have failed”, as they might view it), and some therefore maintain regular personal contact by phone, often for at least a year, to ensure that the young person continues to get any help they need. Of course they are not funded to do this.

All our apprentices have a discussion with their employer and their account manager (trainer) on next steps and progression – this could be to a higher level apprenticeship or other course or indeed job continuation or retention elsewhere within the employer. We then work on providing the relevant transition support that will enable this to happen. (Work-based provider)

Schools

Raising aspirations

- 3.8:11 The need to address issues of low self-esteem continues into post-18 destination planning for some young people.

The damage caused by “rejection” at age eleven has a huge impact on students, even seven years later. Bright A-grade students often don't believe in themselves; we have to challenge and encourage them to apply to Russell Group universities. (11 to 18 non-selective)⁸⁷

3.8:12 However, action to address this needs to start before the age of 16; it is not possible to raise aspirations to the extent required in the year that young people have before they start applying to universities – particularly if that young person has changed school and is relatively unknown to their new post-16 provider.

Progression to HE

3.8:13 As noted in Section 3.7, approximately half of the cohort progress to higher education after Level 3 (Key Stage 5) and there is a range of support available from schools and elsewhere (e.g. KMPF) for those young people wishing to pursue this route. For example:

- Post 18 options evenings
- (When conditions allow) group and 1:1 guidance meetings, and post-18 focus days and visits to HEIs
- Mock applications and interviews; personal statement workshops
- Review of UCAS forms pre-submission
- Use of alumni to sell the HE experience (and specific institutions).

3.8:14 From the interviews, this support is generally seen as valuable by staff and students.

3.8:15 The data, and the impression from the interviews, is that grammar schools are more likely to be focussed on getting their young people into Russell Group institutions. (The data reviewed in Section 3.7 highlights issues in relation to students from disadvantaged backgrounds in this regard.)

Support for our brightest young people to help them get to Russell Group universities is important. (Grammar school)

3.8:16 Young people from non-selectives are (a) more likely to be focussed on local HEIs, and therefore (b) less likely to go to a Russell Group university (as already noted, there are none in Kent). KMPF also has a particular focus on Kent's, and other local, HEIs.

3.8:17 For this group in particular, the total cost of higher education is also a factor.

⁸⁷ See also the discussion of “outcomes” in Section 3.7.

More of our students tend to want to stay local – often for non-educational reasons (e.g. to maintain their part-time jobs to offset the costs of going to university). (11 to 18 non-selective)

- 3.8:18 Support from schools for this group has been particularly important during the pandemic as more usual ways of exploring options etc. (e.g. by visiting HEIs) have not been available due to travel and other restrictions, and they appear to be less comfortable with the prospect of going to an HEI.

Progression to other destinations

- 3.8:19 Approximately half the cohort progress to destinations other than higher education. Feedback from the interviews on the extent to which support and information on these options was available for this group of young people, and the quality of what was there, was more mixed.

Around a third of our young people go into employment or apprenticeships; our support for them is not as good as it should be. (11 to 18 non-selective)

- 3.8:20 Whilst most young people were happy about the support they received from their school in relation to progression to HEIs, they were concerned that it seemed to be “the only valued route”, and that there was little information on the alternatives available to them. Interestingly this was an issue for students at both selective and non-selective schools – more so the latter, but still a concern for the former.
- 3.8:21 Again aspirations are an issue here, with young people tending to go for “easier local apprenticeships”, in much the same way as they go for [easier] local HEIs, rather than considering options elsewhere that might be more challenging.
- 3.8:22 Schools reported more interest from the current cohort in apprenticeships – Covid-19 was certainly felt to be a factor, but the cost of going to higher education is also an issue.

The cost of HE is a big factor in the decision. Young people and their parents are worried about it. We work with them to try to explain how the system works and the support that is available. However, fear of student debt is an issue and young people are certainly looking for alternatives. We definitely have more students who are now considering degree apprenticeships. (Grammar school)

- 3.8:23 Messages in the media *re* the lower value that some employers are placing on degrees are also having an impact.
- 3.8:24 In these changed circumstances, the need for more information on the apprenticeship offer, particularly the options and opportunities at higher levels (post-Level 3), was generally felt.

Post-transition support

- 3.8:25 Interviewees gave the impression that post-transition support *is* available from schools – but perhaps less frequently on offer than is the case for work-based and alternative 16-19 providers, and where it is available probably offered on a less proactive basis by schools. In other words, young people generally have to ask for it/seek it out, rather than being proactively contacted by their school to see if “everything is progressing well”. However, practice does vary.

We maintain contact with students after they have left sixth form. We are still [in May 2021] advising students who left us a year ago. (11 to 18 selective school)

GFECs

- 3.8:26 Colleges are very focussed on progression and destinations.
- 3.8:27 The nature of study programmes, with work experience embedded into many programmes, facilitates progression into employment, as does apprenticeship provision when this is offered by colleges.
- 3.8:28 Equally, for students following a classroom-based programme, progression into HEIs is also reasonably strong taking into account the level of post-16 qualification achieved.
- 3.8:29 The interviews highlighted an emphasis on positive outcomes and destinations across Kent’s GFECs, with not inconsiderable staffing being allocated, from early in a student’s study programme, to ensure that the post-18 transition runs smoothly – including support for non-completers, and generally for students after they have technically ‘left college’. As a result, post-provision NEET rates for ex-GFEC students are low.

Progression for High Needs students

- 3.8:30 Many High Needs students who have stayed on in a special school choose to proceed to a GFEC at age 19, and are supported in doing so by staff both from their school and from the GFEC concerned. In some instances, as noted in 3.1:26, special schools are seeking to sponsor their “own” independent specialist provider so that they can continue to offer a level of support to these learners post-19 that would otherwise be beyond a mainstream GFEC’s resources.

Supported Employment

- 3.8:31 Young people (indeed those of any age) who are struggling to find work can access support from the Kent Supported Employment Service [KSE]. KSE focus support on people with a disability, care leavers and ex-offenders and although their service

supports job seekers of all ages it is naturally relevant to young people leaving specialist provision⁸⁸.

- 3.8:32 KSE works with significant numbers of clients (of the order of 420 per year), of whom around 70% are supported into full employment by the end of their time on the programme.

Other issues

- 3.8:33 Concerns were raised at the impact that the pandemic might have on progression opportunities into employment for High Needs students. Work experience is often key to helping these young people adjust to work. Whilst providers invest resources to support and help with the transition (job coaches; employer engagement staff etc.), if the number of opportunities available to this group of young people are reduced, it will be more difficult to find employment for them. Such employment opportunities as exist may be more likely to be filled by others that employers might perceive “come with less baggage”.
- 3.8:34 For those whose education to date has been in special schools, there is a risk that this limits their (or their parents’) view of what it is possible for them to achieve when they leave education. It is very easy for an expectation of “unemployment” to become an unnecessary, and self-fulfilling, outcome – with lifelong consequences for the young person in terms of their ongoing support needs.

Conclusion

- 3.8:35 Most work-based and alternative 16-19 providers have a strong focus on transitional support. Providers often described a structured process, with steps in place towards the end of the young person’s final year of their current programme to ensure that their intended next step is identified and the necessary support then put in place to enable it to happen. During the pandemic, providers have worked with employers to identify ways of keeping young people engaged, and ideally progressing, in their workplaces.
- 3.8:36 The doors of work-based providers, and of providers of alternative 16-19 provision in particular, remain open to their programme leavers after they have “moved on”. These providers actively follow-up their “leavers” to check on their progress, and whether further support would be helpful.
- 3.8:37 Similarly, GFECs have an emphasis on positive outcomes and destinations, with not inconsiderable staffing being allocated from early in a student’s study programme to ensure that the post-18 transition runs smoothly – this includes working with non-completers, and with students after they have technically ‘left college’. However,

⁸⁸ See <https://www.theeducationpeople.org/our-expertise/specialist-employment/supported-employment-for-jobseekers/> for more details.

whilst there is extensive work on destinations data, it is difficult for GFECs (and other post-16 providers) to track their leavers over the longer term.

- 3.8:38 For schools, approximately half of the cohort progresses to higher education after Key Stage 5 and there is a range of support available from schools and elsewhere for those young people wishing to pursue this route.
- 3.8:39 For the other half of the cohort (those progressing to destinations other than higher education), feedback suggests that the extent to which support and information on these options was available for this group of young people, and the quality of what was there, is less satisfactory.
- 3.8:40 Students at both selective and non-selective schools were concerned that progression to HE seemed to be “the only valued route”, and that there was little information available on the alternatives. Yet there is growing interest in apprenticeships from the current cohort, and a desire for more information on the apprenticeship offer, particularly the options for progression at higher (post-Level 3) levels.
- 3.8:41 Post-transition support is available from schools – but perhaps less frequently on offer than is the case for work-based and alternative 16-19 providers and GFECs, and where it is available probably offered on a less proactive basis by schools.
- 3.8:42 The role of influencers (in this context principally parents and friends) on decisions about what to do at 16, previously mentioned in Section 3.4, is also a factor here. Again, where it was mentioned, this was mainly in a negative (options-limiting) way, rather than an encouragement to “try to ...”.
- 3.8:43 Section 4 describes how the major recommendations that have emerged from the Review will seek to address these issues; specifically in sub-section 4.2 (Raising young people’s aspirations through better CEIAG). Related subsidiary recommendations are in Section 5 (paragraphs number 5.8).

3.9 Future viability of provision

Introduction

3.9:1 In addition to reviewing the current provision map of 16+ education and training in Kent, the Review also considered how this provision may have to change in the future. This section explores the following points, many of which are linked:

- The impact of small sixth forms
- Proposed national changes to the vocational curriculum
- Shortages of apprenticeships, particularly at the higher levels
- Staffing difficulties
- Uncertainties over funding.

Issues from the fieldwork

The impact of small sixth forms

3.9:2 Section 3.1 has already noted that many sixth forms in Kent are small. The Government's regulations for creating new academy sixth forms state that any new sixth form should have a minimum of 200 students⁸⁹, and this is a useful criterion to apply.

3.9:3 To recap, the data shows that 8 of the 32 Kent grammar school sixth forms, and 38 out of the 55 high school sixth forms, appear to have less than 200 students. The smallest sixth form in Kent appears to have around 25 students, and there are a number under 100⁹⁰.

3.9:4 There is nothing *ipso facto* "wrong" with small sixth forms, and certainly no evidence that students in smaller sixth forms do less well in terms of "added value" between their GCSE grades and their concluding Level 3 "score". (Though, as already noted, there is a suggestion in the data that disadvantaged students in small high school sixth forms are somewhat less likely than their peers to progress to Russell Group universities.) Indeed, most teachers would if challenged prefer the occasional small group to teach (particularly post-16) as an opportunity to deliver more individualised tuition. But, even if the impact on achievement is limited or uncertain, there is of course a cost.

⁸⁹ Some of the colleagues interviewed suggested that 250 was a better size criterion: clearly even fewer of Kent's sixth forms meet this.

⁹⁰ All data taken from the last pre-pandemic year.

- 3.9:5 In a revenue sense, there is a financial cost associated with every small class. In an 11-18 school, that cost is generally hidden, but implicitly met by cross-subsidy from the school's 11-16 provision.
- 3.9:6 There is also a capital cost if buildings and/or capital equipment have to be purchased to support the studies of relatively few 16+ students.
- 3.9:7 The more serious influence, however, is in the range of provision that can be offered at sixth form level. For example, a school that has an A level programme offering the "standard" nine subjects⁹¹ to a (two year) population of 100 students is already looking at an average group size of less than 14 in most cases⁹². Since some subjects will be more popular than others, the smallest groups will be very small indeed.
- 3.9:8 If in addition it is also hoped to offer a range of vocational qualifications alongside an A level programme (as many high school sixth forms do), then the risk of small group sizes may become a real concern. To cope with this, the range of A level subjects offered may have to be reduced. This is not a hypothetical point: the data in Section 3.1 suggests this does in fact seem to happen.
- 3.9:9 In a school with a large 11-16 cohort the cross-subsidy going to a small sixth form, when calculated per 11-16 pupil, is not that great. And schools often find that teachers enjoy teaching A level subjects and other Level 3 provision, to the extent that offering this may attract more highly qualified and experienced teachers to apply for posts at the school when vacancies arise. This in turn can be a benefit to all pupils. Nevertheless headteachers and governors in schools with small sixth forms must be aware of the costs – financial and otherwise.
- 3.9:10 Of course, in theory a school whose small sixth form can only offer a reduced range of subjects may well lose students to another sixth form nearby that offers a wider range, and is therefore more likely to provide the combination of subjects that students need for progression post-18.
- 3.9:11 However, as noted in Section 3.1 the evidence suggests that in fact students do not tend to move between schools at post-16 as much as they arguably should: they have a tendency to choose subjects from whatever is on offer in their current school, rather than transfer to another one. Interviewees suggested that young people in 11-18 schools, whilst not necessarily actively discouraged from looking at what is available elsewhere (though there is some evidence that this discouragement does

⁹¹ See the footnote to paragraph 3.1:11

⁹² 50 students per year, average of 2½ A levels each: a total of 125 chosen subjects divided by 9 = 14. Sixth form colleges will usually try to average at least 20-25 per group.

indeed take place), are perhaps not as encouraged as they might be to review the full range of opportunities available to them⁹³.

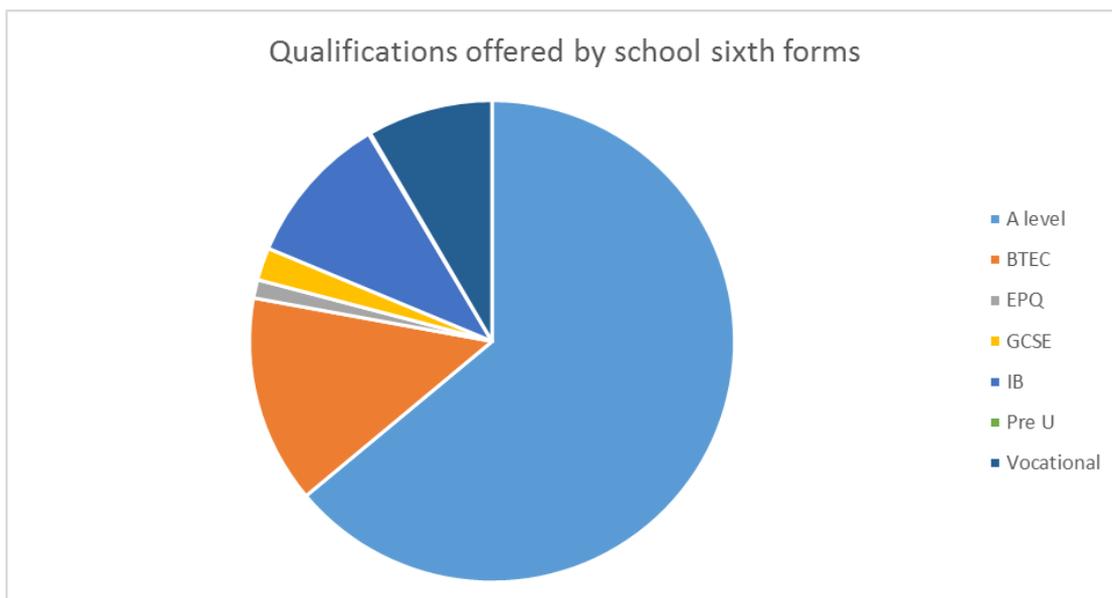
- 3.9:12** As a result, they may find that they have unwittingly limited their post-Year 13 options, particularly if their aspiration is to go on to STEM-related opportunities, either in higher education or employment. A school that does not offer all the sciences, plus mathematics and further mathematics, is almost certainly limiting the options that will be available to its students.
- 3.9:13** It is perhaps significant that the 11-16 schools whose staff were interviewed during the fieldwork appeared to provide a much more complete guide to the full range of options at 16+ to their students:

We offer a wide range of careers activities, including individual activities with each young person, aimed at broadening their horizons and encouraging them to consider the full range of opportunities available. Without this, there would be a danger that young people would just choose from the range of training/employment opportunities that they know about (often from family experience). Given that the Academy serves quite a poor area, this would in itself be limiting. (11-16 non-selective school)

Proposed changes to the vocational curriculum

- 3.9:14** As already mentioned in Section 3.1, sixth form provision in Kent is not by any means restricted to A levels. The pie chart below (again based on data from the last pre-pandemic year) breaks down the 1,696 qualifications offered by school sixth forms by type of qualification.
- 3.9:15** Apart from highlighting the relatively low number of repeat GCSE programmes available (already referred to in 3.1), this chart shows that Kent schools between them offer 237 BTEC National programmes and 142 other programmes classed as “vocational”, for a total of 22% of programmes on offer. BTECs can also feature as part of the IBCP, which is offered by many, mostly non-selective, schools in Kent.

⁹³ Schools struggling to maintain their sixth forms are, to say the least, likely to be conflicted if they are required to actively encourage their students to consider a full range of options, including the offers of other school sixth forms, for their post-16 study.



3.9:16 As is well known, it is the Government’s intention to introduce a new group of vocational qualifications (T Levels), equal in status to A levels but with a close fit between the qualification and a specific vocational area (and including a substantial work placement component). At the time of writing (March 2022), whilst there has been some back-tracking in terms of timescales (and potentially scope), it is still intended that funding for many BTEC Nationals and other AGQs will be progressively withdrawn as (or after) the related T Levels are introduced, making it effectively impossible for providers to continue to offer these qualifications. (As noted in 3.1, the GFECs hope to have a matrix that will describe their rollout of T Levels by mid-2022.)

3.9:17 What is clear is that:

- Kent schools (and the GFECs) make extensive use of BTECs
- Many young people find them to be an attractive alternative (or supplement) to A levels
- They afford a degree of flexibility to the “less academic” around what they might do next – and offer opportunities for progression at 18 that would otherwise not be open to them
- They enable non-selective schools to run larger sixth forms than would otherwise be the case.

3.9:18 In summary, BTEC Nationals and other AGQs serve a range of purposes – both nationally and specifically in a Kent context – that it is not obvious that their proposed replacement (T Levels) can similarly meet⁹⁴.

⁹⁴ It appears as if T Levels are sometimes being offered as suitable for all learners while on other occasions their equivalence to A levels is stressed. That these two are self-evidently in some contradiction has not, so far, been entirely resolved.

- 3.9:19 There is currently a powerful lobby opposed to the de-funding of BTEC Nationals⁹⁵, including former education ministers now in the House of Lords; their demise has been postponed, and is by no means a foregone conclusion. But at the time of writing it remains Government policy and the process of introducing T Levels has begun⁹⁶.
- 3.9:20 GFECs, as might be expected, are best-placed to deliver the new qualifications, having – at least to an extent – the qualified staff, necessarily capital accommodation and equipment, and the contacts with employers to be able to do so, and the critical mass to source the necessary additional investment required.
- 3.9:21 Kent schools, on the other hand, are faced with the possibility that they will simply not be able to deliver T Levels. Their main hope is that many students will not want to follow them but will seek alternatives at Level 3 and even Level 2: what these may be, post defunding of BTECs, is not clear.
- 3.9:22 It is the requirements for specialist staffing, specialist equipment, and (particularly) considerable work placements that schools believe they will find it most difficult to meet. Although not all schools have yet drafted contingency plans, most have realised that the threat is real and imminent. (Kent GFECs are identifying that considerable sums, running to many millions, will be necessary in order to fund the transition to, and delivery of, T Levels.)
- 3.9:23 The significant level of employer engagement required is also a concern – will employers play the role required of them, especially given the other demands being made of them *re* wider engagement with education?
- 3.9:24 From a young person's perspective, it is almost inconceivable that every young person currently studying a BTEC (or IBCP) will want – or, even if they want to, be able – to start a T Level:
- The level of employer involvement required is daunting
 - Whilst there are some suggestions that some young people may be more motivated to achieve, the level at which the qualification is pitched (a technical equivalent to A levels) will be too high for some
 - There are real concerns that young people will be required to commit to a very specific occupation or sector at 16, rather than keeping their options more open until 18 if not 21.

⁹⁵ And BTEC Highers, which are potentially under similar threat from the Higher Technical Qualifications reforms.

⁹⁶ At the time of writing, the progressive withdrawal of funding for BTEC Nationals and other applied general qualifications has been delayed to 2024 rather than 2023. This may or may not signal the start of a change in Government policy: clearly merely delaying the change will not meet the objections of those opposed to it.

- 3.9:25 Under the worst case where BTEC Nationals and other vocational qualifications offered by schools are de-funded and schools do not offer T Levels to replace them, perhaps half the high school sixth forms in Kent would become unviable – and what then happens to a significant proportion of young people at 16 becomes unclear.
- 3.9:26 It is certainly unsustainable to do nothing about this.

Shortages of apprenticeships

- 3.9:27 The Government's plan to make apprenticeships the third major prong of its 16+ strategy is also under threat due to an ongoing shortage of apprenticeships, particularly at the higher levels.
- 3.9:28 If even partial parity is to be achieved between what might be called the “academic”, “technical” and “vocational” routes post-16, then the availability of degree level destinations via apprenticeships is key. Yet, as already noted, there is a major shortage of these in Kent (the county is not unique in this) with, at the time of writing, only two opportunities available (both in construction).
- 3.9:29 This ongoing shortage runs the risk of confirming existing stereotypes of apprenticeships as not offering the same opportunities for career progression as the more conventional route via school sixth forms and on to full-time higher education.

Staffing difficulties

- 3.9:30 Providers from all sectors – schools, colleges, apprenticeships and alternative 16-19 providers – said that it was becoming increasingly difficult to attract specialist staff to deliver their 16+ programmes.
- 3.9:31 Partly this is due to general labour shortages across many sectors. But there is also the perception that lecturers' salaries have not kept pace with equivalent salaries in the private sector, particularly for those with the level of technical expertise required to deliver the new vocational programmes including T Levels.

Our main issue is the availability of suitable staff – they need to be vocationally experienced, have the right aptitude and skills to support young people and employers, and be able to cope with the processes and documentation. Finding someone able to cope with the range of demands that will be placed on them can be difficult, especially when the salary on offer is not as attractive as the earning opportunities open to them in the private sector. Plumbing/heating engineers are a particular problem area for us at the moment. (Work-based provider)

- 3.9:32 Schools also report the by now traditional shortages of teachers in STEM subjects. The proliferation of schools with sixth forms has not necessarily helped with this, since students hoping to achieve A* grades at A level may require particular levels of technical expertise from their STEM teachers.
- 3.9:33 Alternative 16-19 providers may also suffer staff shortages if their existing or potential instructor employees are concerned over their organisations' viability and future, due

to contractual and funding uncertainties. (This point is developed in the following paragraphs.)

Uncertainties over funding

- 3.9:34 While the funding for Level 2 programmes and above (from ESFA) is relatively secure, and even – due to lagging – protected to an extent against sudden downturns in demand, alternative 16-19 providers offering Level 1 programmes and below may not be so fortunate.
- 3.9:35 As already noted in Section 3.1, many alternative 16-19 providers are funded through ESF and charitable sources (which are often either in decline or uncertain, or indeed both). These providers referred in interview to the difficulties of transferring this provision to ESFA core funding, even though ESFA has a responsibility to fund provision of this type and at this level. If this issue is not resolved, it is likely that more alternative 16-19 providers will see their future as unsustainable and exit the market, rendering the shortage of places in this sector even worse.

Conclusion

- 3.9:36 In addition to reviewing the current provision map of 16+ education and training in Kent, the Review also considered the viability of this provision and how it may have to change in the future.
- 3.9:37 Many sixth forms in Kent are small. Whilst there is no compelling evidence that students in smaller sixth forms do less well in terms of “added value” between their GCSE grades and their concluding Level 3 “score”, the more limited range of provision that can be offered by a small sixth form is a cause for concern, especially when, as seems to be the case, young people tend to restrict their post-16 options to what is available in their current school's sixth form. There are also financial costs – revenue and capital – associated with every small class.
- 3.9:38 With regard to that offer, a substantial proportion of the programmes are AGQs – principally BTECs, which may also form part of the IBCP. At the time of writing (Spring 2022), the Government intends that funding for many AGQs will be progressively withdrawn as the related T Levels are introduced, making it effectively impossible for providers to continue to offer these qualifications.
- 3.9:39 Kent's GFECs are large enough with the necessary employer links across a range of provision to make T Levels a viable proposition; most if not all school sixth forms that currently offer BTECs – mainly those of high schools – are not. In the event of AGQs becoming non-funded, perhaps half these sixth forms in Kent could become unviable. Qualifications reform at Level 3 is therefore a direct threat to these sixth forms. What then happens to a significant proportion of young people currently opting for AGQs at 16 is unclear.
- 3.9:40 For work-based options, there has been a reduction in the number of young people starting an Apprenticeship at 16 as more stay on at school or enter college. As the UK comes out of lockdown, there are more – and a wider range of – employment

choices for young people now than there were 18 months ago. What the new “steady state” position will be remains to be seen, and there is an ongoing – and probably increasing – shortage of apprenticeships for progression at the higher levels.

- 3.9:41** Section 4 describes how the major recommendations that have emerged from the Review will seek to address these issues; specifically in sub-section 4.3 (Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision). Related subsidiary recommendations can be found in Section 5 (paragraphs numbered 5.9).

3.10 Collaboration

Introduction

- 3.10:1 An initial analysis of the data identified a number of factors – the large number of relatively small sixth forms in Kent, and the proposed Level 3 reforms in particular – that suggest that more collaboration between providers was likely to be necessary. The issue was therefore further explored in interviews.
- 3.10:2 A number of collaboration-related themes emerged from the interviews:
- There are examples of collaborations in Kent
 - There is (when the direct suggestion is made) at least a willingness to contemplate doing more collaboratively
 - There are factors pushing towards more being done collaboratively
 - However, a number of barriers to collaboration remain.
- 3.10:3 These barriers in particular are explored in this Section.

Examples from the fieldwork

Collaborative offers within a MAT structure

- 3.10:4 There are various examples of collaborative sixth form offers within a MAT in Kent. For example, publicly available websites show that:
- The Swale Academies Trust runs a joint sixth form across four of its sites in Sittingbourne (Westlands School, Sittingbourne Community College, and its Skills and Vocational centres). The joint curriculum offer covers Levels 1, 2 and 3
 - The Endeavour Trust’s grammar schools for boys and for girls in Wilmington, operate under a single brand (“WG6”) as a joint sixth form.
- 3.10:5 Within these collaborations, young people are able to study subjects across the collaborating schools if a suitable timetable can be arranged. As a consequence, some post-16 subjects may only be offered by just one school, others by both.

Collaborative offers between schools outside a MAT structure

- 3.10:6 The fieldwork identified one such collaboration, also in Sittingbourne, between Fulston Manor (a non-selective school), and two selective schools (Highstead Grammar School and Borden Grammar School). The three schools operate a joint timetable to enable post-16 students from each school to access a wider range of subjects than any one institution could offer individually.

3.10:7 From the schools' websites, a common core of subjects is offered at all schools in this Sittingbourne Partnership; more specialist (less popular) subjects are only offered by one or two, as summarised in the table below.

Subject area	Subjects offered by all three schools	Subjects offered by two schools	Subjects offered by one school
STEM	Biology Chemistry Mathematics	Computing/IT/ICT Further Maths Physics 3D Design	Health & Social Care
Art/Design	Photography	Art & Design	Fine Art Textiles
Social Sciences	Business Studies Psychology	Economics Financial Studies Sociology	N/A
Modern Foreign Languages	N/A	French	German Spanish
Arts	English Literature Film Studies	Music	Media Studies Performing Arts Theatre Studies
Humanities	Geography Government/Politics History	N/A	Law Religious Studies
Other	Physical Education	Extended Project Qualification	N/A

(Some of the subjects are offered as A levels in the grammar schools, and also as vocational qualifications, generally at Fulston Manor.)

(Fulston Manor also offers English and Maths GCSE retakes at Level 2.)

3.10:8 A more informal relationship exists between Harvey Grammar and The Folkestone School for Girls, under which c. 20 students move each way each year. Again this is mentioned on the schools' websites.

Other, non-offer-related, areas of collaboration

3.10:9 There is a range of examples of schools working together on areas other than their curriculum offer:

- The East Kent Learning Alliance schools collaborate on staff recruitment, training, and development
- There are informal CEIAG-related networks in the Dover area, led by Astor School, and in Thanet, led by the Coastal Academies Trust

- A post-18 progression-related collaboration is in place between the Coastal Academies Trust and the University of Kent – in essence, to encourage more disadvantaged young people to consider a career in medicine. A (partly residential) Year 14/transition year is being developed to enable the IBCP to be converted to an IBDP, which will then open up access to the University’s medical school (and those of other HEIs). The programme will be developed next year for a first intake starting in September 2024; they will then have the opportunity to progress on to the University of Kent in 2025.
- 3.10:10 In addition, Thanet schools and EKC Group have worked together to improve the area’s NEET statistics. Briefly, each school produces a list of those Year 10 pupils they consider to be at risk of becoming NEET. Pupils remain at school on a core GCSE-based programme throughout, but are also offered a series of college-related/based sessions (2 to 3 days per term through Years 10 and 11) in order to familiarise them with college as an option, and to offer taster sessions in vocational areas of interest. As part of this process, schools share with the college any relevant information about individual students in order that the college has a good understanding of each young person’s needs.
- 3.10:11 The NEET position at every school has improved and, as already noted, overall Thanet is now ninth of the twelve districts across Kent, rather than bottom. The school headteachers are now considering whether elements of the programme could be started in Year 9.
- 3.10:12 Examples of collaborations involving other parts of the post-16 sector are thinner on the ground, but do exist, particularly in working with the NEET group. For example:
- A work-based provider is working with Hillview School’s “View @ East Street”, a centre for young people aged 16 and 17 who would benefit from studying in a smaller learning environment before moving onto an apprenticeship or further full-time educational studies in a sixth form or college
 - There are instances of inter- and intra-sector collaborations involving combinations of work-based and alternative 16-19 providers and GFECs.
- 3.10:13 The IBCP schools also work together on curriculum development and other issues of common concern.

Issues from the fieldwork

A willingness to do more

- 3.10:14 Whether through pressures in the system, or a need to collaborate to address an identified shared issue, there is a willingness to contemplate more collaborative working.
- 3.10:15 Areas highlighted by the fieldwork included:
- The curriculum offer – there is some evidence that schools with small sixth forms are aware of their vulnerability, and of the cost of trying to sustain their

own provision, and are therefore more open to collaboration as a means through which to retain it

- Pre-16 provision – including collaborative working with GFECs, possibly with work-based and alternative 16-19 providers, in years 10 and 11 in order to reduce the potential for young people to become NEET post-16
- SEND – a recognition that considerable benefits would accrue if more young people with High Needs could be educated in-county
- Employer engagement – a recognition of the increased demands that all providers will be seeking to make on employers.

3.10:16 However, invariably far more barriers to collaboration were raised than factors pushing for it, particularly by schools.

Barriers to collaboration

Practicalities

3.10:17 Most interviewees produced a list of practicalities as to why collaborations are hard to make work – these can be broadly summarised as follows:

- Distance, transport and travel time between providers, and other logistical issues
- Timetabling
- The resources required
- Responsibility for the young person.

3.10:18 Distance/travel time between providers will inevitably place restrictions on which providers will be able to collaborate and over what. Collaborations over the curriculum are most likely to involve reasonably close neighbours – as is the case for all the offer-related collaborations highlighted above.

3.10:19 Where distances are greater, then time spent travelling may be a consideration, limiting the feasibility of movements between sites during the day. Transport may also need to be provided, at the schools' cost.

3.10:20 In every case, common timetabling will be a requirement.

3.10:21 The development of approaches to enable learning to take place remotely are considered to have opened up opportunities for joint timetabling that might not previously have existed. For example, every W6 student, whether “from” the Boys or the Girls school, has personal access to ICT facilities that are seamless across both sites: this includes Microsoft Teams groups for each of their subject lessons, with all work securely stored in one area, and for their form.

3.10:22 More generally, however, the “logistical challenges” of collaborating were felt to be prohibitive – though clearly some schools have been able to make it work in relation

to the offer, and there are other issues where logistics should be less of a concern (collaborating to address NEET; collaborating around IAG etc.).

- 3.10:23 In relation to resources, the issue was not so much the costs of collaboration – which certainly exist but are perhaps not as great as some may fear (though lack of capacity to take on anything “extra” can be an issue). It is more about the extent to which any investment in collaboration would earn a reasonable return: this was particularly a concern for alternative 16-19 providers, and reflects the general level of relative uncertainty they often operate under.
- 3.10:24 For example, it was stated that if an alternative 16-19 provider was part of a successful collaborative bid for funding, the probability was that at some point in the near future it would end up re-bidding for funding to continue, or submitting a new bid for something else (potentially in competition with the provider’s current partners). Collaboration takes time and resources to develop; if, at the end of the process, the parties will only be collaborating for a relatively short period would it be worth the effort?
- 3.10:25 Finally, there were concerns relating to who would be responsible for the young person – financially (difficulties with the post-16 funding model), contractually (the ESFA was perceived to be anti-sub-contracting arrangements), and operationally (responsibility for the quality of provision; credit for outcomes achieved).
- 3.10:26 Providers also expressed concern that “their” Ofsted inspection, and its outcome, might be adversely affected by the quality of provision offered by collaborative partners, if this was not particularly satisfactory.

Geography and structures

- 3.10:27 The lack of vehicles through which to service needs and encourage parties to consider joint working was raised.
- 3.10:28 The position in Kent can appear complicated:
- KCC has multiple definitions of “area” – four area education officers, twelve districts, and different “planning groups” for selective and non-selective schools (12 and 18 areas respectively)
 - As noted, some existing collaborations take place on another basis (e.g. within a MAT; more locally)
 - Some providers lie on the boundaries of (or cover) more than one “area”, however defined, and may need to participate to a greater or lesser extent in a range of collaborative activities, with different partners, to reflect this
 - There are some very isolated providers (in Romney Marsh and the Isle of Sheppey, but also potentially the south central part of the county and in Sevenoaks) – whom they might collaborate with is by no means obvious.
- 3.10:29 There is some interest in KCC – and across post-16 providers – in re-establishing area-based cross-sector groupings to develop a more shared way forward for

provision, and more collaborative approaches between providers. The risk is that, whilst this might work – in the sense that it encourages collaboration to address certain issues – an “area-based approach”, however defined, will not be fit for all purposes. Greater flexibility is needed – and needs to be encouraged.

Competition between providers

- 3.10:30 Some interviewees (mainly work-based and some alternative providers) cited a competitive environment between providers, which meant that relationships were not necessarily currently conducive to collaborative working.
- 3.10:31 However, the picture is mixed and elsewhere work-based and alternative providers are already working collaboratively with schools and/or colleges in their area. Those working with colleges were hopeful that collaborations with one business unit would, if successful, be replicable at other campuses – presumably this could also apply to those working with one school within a MAT.
- 3.10:32 The overall sense from the fieldwork interviews is that, to the extent that it exists – and this is not as pervasive an issue as might be assumed – competition between providers is about too many young people being retained by schools, a lack of knowledge about the alternatives available, and “the system” perpetuating traditional progression routes [to HE] over the alternatives. The hope is that actions in relation to CEIAG would help to redress this, with the additional benefit of enabling more collaborative working as a side effect.

Durability/sustainability

- 3.10:33 It was claimed that previous attempts at collaboration “have not been supported [by governing bodies]”, and that they can “collapse at almost no notice for a variety of reasons” – most often due to a change in leadership at, or a departure of a key member of staff from, one of the collaborating organisations.
- 3.10:34 It was also noted that changes to policy – in this context by the DfE or one of its agencies/NDPBs – can undermine collaborations.

Size of provision

- 3.10:35 There was a general acceptance that smaller providers had an incentive to collaborate, but that they often had difficulties that acted as immediate barriers to doing so – the risk of being swallowed or exploited by a larger provider; a lack of capacity and resources; and (for alternative 16-19 provision in particular) contractual uncertainties that raised question marks over their continued existence and therefore put limits on their ability to collaborate.
- 3.10:36 As providers grew in size there was less consensus as to what this might mean for collaborations, at least as far as these related to the offer. Two contradictory viewpoints were put forward:
- Collaboration is *less* likely among larger providers – because individual providers have the numbers to be able to make a wider offer themselves

- Collaboration is *more* likely – because individual providers are more secure about their own position and can more easily accommodate gaining (or losing) a few students through offer-based collaborations.

3.10:37 Of course, as this Section has sought to emphasise, collaboration is not solely about “the offer”, and there are plenty of other areas requiring action where a collaborative approach would potentially be beneficial regardless of an individual provider’s size. Most often mentioned among these is collaboration in staff development and in-service training. (Though it is important to note that, unless they were involved in such collaborations, most interviewees tended to see collaboration purely in offer-related terms.)

Conclusion

3.10:38 There are examples of collaborations in Kent – particularly within a MAT, but also between schools outside a MAT structure, and involving other providers (GFECs, work-based and alternative providers). Such collaborations generally cover the post-16 offer, but also exist in other areas (e.g. work to address the NEET group; staff recruitment, training, and development; IAG-related networks; post-18 progression options, including work with HEIs).

3.10:39 Whether through pressures in the system, or a need to collaborate to address an identified shared issue, there is a willingness to contemplate more collaborative working, and factors pushing providers towards doing more collaboratively.

3.10:40 However, a number of barriers to collaboration remain:

- Practicalities – the distance, transport and travel time between providers, and other logistical issues; timetabling; the resources required to enable collaboration to happen; and responsibility for the young person, including specifically ownership of the adequacy and quality of the provision made for the young person overall (including under Ofsted inspection)
- Competition between providers, though this is not as pervasive a concern as might be assumed
- The geography and structure of education in Kent
- The evolving context at both local and national level, which can prevent new and undermine existing arrangements, especially for smaller providers in general, and alternative 16-19 providers in particular.

3.10:41 Section 4 describes how the major recommendations that have emerged from the Review will seek to address these issues; specifically in sub-sections:

- 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
- 4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.

Related subsidiary recommendations are in Section 5 (paragraphs numbered 5.10).

3.11 The impact of Covid-19

Introduction

- 3.11:1 The Review commenced during the summer term of 2020, and fieldwork continued through to the end of the summer term of 2021. For all of this time – and beyond – the UK was experiencing the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3.11:2 This Section of the Report starts with an overview of the context – in particular the various lockdowns that were imposed from March 2020, and their broad impact on education, training and employment.
- 3.11:3 The remainder of the Section explores a number of issues related to impact of the pandemic on young people and their experience of education, training and employment raised during the course of the fieldwork.

Context

- 3.11:4 The following paragraphs give an overview of the extent to which young people's education, training and employment was disrupted by Covid; the impact was considerable – and in many respects will be ongoing for some time, even once the pandemic is “over”.
- 3.11:5 In practice the impact of the pandemic differed by age group, sector etc., and by region/area when the tiered structure was briefly introduced in late 2020. However, the following paragraphs should provide a helpful reminder of what happened, and its impact on the 16-19 sector and young people.

First national lockdown – 26th March 2020

- 3.11:6 From 26th March 2020, all but essential places of employment closed; staff worked from home where possible. Post-16 students did not have anything that approximated to a normal experience of school/college for all of this period.
- 3.11:7 Education establishments effectively closed from Friday 20th March, other than for the children of those in designated priority groups, who remained entitled to face-to-face provision [in schools] throughout the pandemic. Providers did their best to put in place alternative arrangements to enable their young people to engage remotely in some form of educational activity. Inevitably the extent to which (a) this happened and (b) it was possible for young people to work with the materials produced varied.
- 3.11:8 Public exams for summer 2020 were cancelled; details of alternative arrangements for the assessment and award of qualifications were confirmed at a later date (see *Impact of Covid-19 on the assessment of 16-19 year olds* below).
- 3.11:9 From 1st June 2020, there was a phased reopening of schools during the course of the remainder of the summer term. For post-16 provision, this process started from 15th June with secondary schools, sixth forms and GFECs offering “... some face-to-

face support to supplement the remote education of Year 12 students, and [other] 16 to 19 learners ... who are due to take key exams next year⁹⁷. Other year groups returned on an incremental basis.

- 3.11:10 School and colleges reopened “as normal” for the start of the autumn term. Year group-based “bubbles” were generally used to keep control of the virus, with implications for how much time young people spent in their setting with a member of staff, and how much remote learning was required of them. Education settings undertook contact tracing, with self-isolation – in some cases of whole year groups – for those in contact with someone who had tested positive. Face coverings were no longer advised for pupils, students, staff, and visitors, either in classrooms or in communal areas; individual providers varied on the extent to which they insisted they be worn.
- 3.11:11 Covid-19 continued to spread, such that there were (ultimately unsuccessful) calls for a “circuit breaker” lockdown for two weeks over half term at the end of October.

Second national lockdown – 5th November 2020

- 3.11:12 During the second lockdown, schools and colleges remained fully open, but in practice education was disrupted by individual cases/outbreaks of Covid-19 and the need for “bubbles” to self-isolate to control the spread.
- 3.11:13 On 2nd December the lockdown ended and a national tiered system was introduced, with the range of restrictions varying according to the tier an area was placed in. All of Kent was placed in Tier 3, meaning that education establishments continued to remain open, but that there were restrictions imposed on out-of-area movements, and on the extent to which some sectors of the economy were allowed to stay open (hospitality was particularly hit by these).
- 3.11:14 Rates of infection varied considerably across the county – from extremely high, broadly in the northern districts, to very low in the south. In just six weeks, Swale went from having one of the lowest infection rates in England in mid-October to one of the highest: 540 infections per 100,000 people for the week ending 20 November, when eight of the top 100 areas for infections were Kent districts⁹⁸.
- 3.11:15 Educational establishments were instructed to open “as normal” after Christmas in the week commencing 4th January 2021.

⁹⁷See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020/actions-for-education-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020>

⁹⁸ Various reported – for example see <https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-kent-mps-call-for-tiers-allocated-by-borough-not-county-but-scientists-disagree-12142201> .

Third national lockdown – 6th January 2021

- 3.11:16 All education establishments, and all but essential places of employment, were closed on 6th January. Schools went back to remote learning – provision was generally better placed to cope with this than had been the case in the first lockdown, but issues *re* access remained a concern for some young people.
- 3.11:17 On 8th March 2021 educational establishments reopened. The rest of the economy gradually opened up in a 4-stage process, with lockdown officially ending on 21st June.

Autumn 2021 onwards

- 3.11:18 Coronavirus has continued to have an impact on young people. For example:
- The return to schools and colleges in September was often staged (e.g. by Year group), and made subject to a negative lateral flow test
 - Local practice vis a vis mask-wearing varied – requiring them in classrooms was not uncommon
 - First jobs for the 16- and 17-year-olds were made available from early August (those aged 18 and over were already eligible) – initial advice that one dose would be sufficient was subsequently updated to two recommended doses, and then a booster
 - Education continued to be disrupted through the Delta and, from December onwards, the various Omicron variants.

Other impacts on the sector

- 3.11:19 The work of the sector was disrupted in many other ways by Covid-19 – for example:
- Producing materials to enable mixed-year group in-class teaching (for those entitled and able to attend) and to support distance learning for the rest
 - Enabling remote access to learning. (Not everyone had access to the required devices, sufficient data capacity in their internet package, and/or a suitable home learning space)
 - Producing contingency plans (e.g. in the event of an outbreak; in case of further lockdowns)
 - Producing plans to enable pupils and students to catch up on missed learning
 - Maintaining a clean and safe working environment.
- 3.11:20 It would be easy to continue with this analysis and to provide greater detail. However the intention has been to give a flavour, rather than a comprehensive picture, of the impact that Covid-19 had on educational establishments, their pupils, students, and staff, and on employers, work-based providers, and apprentices.

3.11:21 In summary, the pandemic and associated lockdowns have had many effects on young people's learning; most of these have been negative. Inevitably, most should eventually prove to be temporary for the system – if only because the affected age groups will eventually move through it – though possibly not for the young people concerned.

Issues from the fieldwork

3.11:22 Clearly, many of the general points made above *re* areas where Covid-19 has had an impact will be seen in Kent. The remainder of this Section explores six specific areas that were regularly identified during the fieldwork for the Review – i.e. the impact of the virus on:

- The assessment of 16-19 year olds
- Employment-related opportunities
- Post-16 destinations and transition
- The development of blended learning
- Mental health
- Post-18 destinations.

The assessment of 16-19 year olds

3.11:23 In 2020 there were no summer examinations. Students due to sit A level, AS level or GCSE exams received a centre-assessed grade for each subject (the grade their provider believed they would be most likely to have achieved had exams gone ahead). Initially these centre-assessed grades were put through a process of standardisation, using an Ofqual model, to arrive at the final grade. However, for various reasons, the standardisation process produced many anomalous gradings when results were published; ultimately final grades were awarded at whichever was the higher of the centre-assessed or the standardised grade.

3.11:24 For students sitting vocational and technical qualifications [VTQs], individual awarding organisations developed their own approach to determine their results – some still had to go into college to undertake formal assessment; others had centre assessment of work already completed. Following the withdrawal of the Ofqual standardisation model for non-VTQs, awarding organisations that had included a similar moderation process within their grading were able to reassess and reissue their results if they wished to do so.

3.11:25 Opportunities to appeal grades were restricted. Students who felt a final grade did not reflect their ability, or who were not able to receive a grade (e.g. some of those EHE), could sit an exam in the autumn term.

3.11:26 By summer 2021, students due to sit public exams in 2020-21 would have missed face-to-face teaching for most of the summer 2020 and much of the spring 2021

terms. In addition, some would have had to self-isolate during the autumn term 2020. Public exams were therefore again cancelled, with grades this time based entirely on centre-assessment (some schools included their own “mock” exams as part of their assessment process), with no central statistical adjustment processes being used⁹⁹.

3.11:27 A more recognisable appeal process also applied for students who believed they had been misgraded.

3.11:28 Overall, final grades for those who should have taken exams in the summers of 2020 and 2021 were higher than those awarded pre-pandemic in 2019¹⁰⁰. A/A* grades at A level nearly doubled between 2019 and 2021.

	2019	2020	2021
GCSEs awarded at grade 4 or above	69.9%	78.8%	79.1%
GCSEs awarded at grade 7 or above	21.9%	27.6%	30.2%
GCE A levels awarded at grade C or above	75.5%	87.5%	88.2%
GCE A levels awarded at grades A* or A	25.2%	38.1%	44.3%

3.11:29 In terms of the distributions of grades being awarded for vocational and technical qualifications, the picture is complicated by the variety of grading structures in use. Ofqual has conducted an analysis of the grades awarded; their key conclusions are that:

- “When focussing on the proportions of top grades being issued, the patterns of changes are mixed, with some qualification groupings seeing a decrease in proportions and others seeing an increase”
- “In most cases there have not been any substantial changes to the general shapes of the grade distributions at any qualification level, suggesting general stability across 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021”¹⁰¹.

3.11:30 In a Kent context, and whilst it is difficult not to welcome more young people achieving better results, the principal concern of interviewees was that grade inflation would encourage and enable young people to pursue options post-16 that would not, under more normal circumstances, have been open to them. This could have a

⁹⁹ An external quality assurance process, covering approximately 20% of centres, was undertaken by awarding bodies; fewer than 1% of centre-assessed grades were adjusted as a result of this.

¹⁰⁰ See <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2020/08/gcse-and-a-level-results-2020-how-grades-have-changed-in-every-subject/> and <https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2021/08/gcse-results-2021-the-main-trends-in-grades-and-entries/>. In 2021 one-in-five A levels were graded A*.

¹⁰¹ See Ofqual’s “Analysis of grades awarded for VTQs in spring and summer 2021” at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/analysis-of-results-vtqs-2021/an-analysis-of-grades-awarded-for-vtqs-in-spring-and-summer-2021-level-3-qualifications>

potential short-term benefit – fewer young people becoming NEET after their GCSE results in September. However, the longer-term concern was that this could prove simply to be a problem deferred – that young people would drop out of post-16 destinations at a later date, having found themselves to be unable to cope and/or having chosen the “wrong” option.

Employment-related opportunities¹⁰²

- 3.11:31 Covid-19 has had – and in some respects continues to have – significant impacts on apprentices, and their employers and learning providers.
- 3.11:32 For those wanting to start an apprenticeship, opportunities to access face-to-face careers guidance, to attend option events, to go on work experience, etc., were significantly impaired. For these and other reasons (working from home; general uncertainty making employers reluctant to recruit), the concern is that the pandemic will have made it harder for young people to access information on, and the skills needed for, an apprenticeship.
- 3.11:33 Analysis of national DfE data shows that total apprenticeship starts in the UK fell by 46% in the first lockdown compared with March to July 2019. Some of the sectors popular with young people wanting to start an apprenticeship were particularly badly affected – hospitality and catering; child development and well-being; business administration – and it may take longer before they are able to offer previous levels of opportunity to young people¹⁰³.
- 3.11:34 In terms of apprentices already in the workforce, many staff (including apprentices), were furloughed or working from home during the pandemic. During the first lockdown: 39% of apprenticeships were “continuing as normal”; 17% of apprentices were still employed but had had their apprenticeship suspended; 36% of apprentices were furloughed; 8% were made redundant. Some of those on furlough may not have returned to work once the support scheme was withdrawn in September 2021.
- 3.11:35 As restrictions were lifted, a further complication was that 40% of employers reported that a learning provider they used had either gone out of business, or was otherwise unable to continue to support their apprentice training.
- 3.11:36 Looking forward, whilst employers were broadly positive about the prospects for their apprentices once economic restrictions were relaxed – 58% “were confident all their apprentices would return”; 81% that at least some would – around a third (31%) reported that they were likely to hire fewer apprentices over the coming year, or none

¹⁰² Unless stated otherwise, the data that follows is from research for the Sutton Trust. “Covid-19 and Social Mobility. Impact Brief #3: Apprenticeships”. May 2020. See <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Covid-19-Impacts-Apprenticeships.pdf> .

¹⁰³ In any case, it has been noted in paragraph 3.7:7 that around three-quarters of apprenticeship starts nationally are at 19+ not 16+

at all. There was no certainty as to when things will return to relative normality. However, employment opportunities are increasing as the economy comes out of lockdown; young people certainly have a wider range of employment choices now than they had 18 months ago.

3.11:37 Echoing the national picture, concerns raised during the Review for those young people in Kent looking to move into work-based provision post-16 related to:

- Missing out on work-related opportunities
- There being fewer apprenticeships available
- Apprenticeships taking longer to complete.

3.11:38 Young people were particularly concerned about the first of these – that they were missing out on work-related opportunities and experiences as a result of Covid-19. Their concerns were partly due to not being able to participate in work-related aspects of the curriculum post-16 – work placements; work experience – but also sometimes simply due to the loss of opportunities to work part-time to gain valuable work-based experiences, whether or not these were directly related to career aspirations.

3.11:39 They were also aware that Covid-19 meant they had less knowledge of work-related options post-16 than would have otherwise been the case.

3.11:40 Feedback from work-based providers and GFECs, but also from others who typically look for their students to progress into work (special schools, PRUs, and alternative 16-19 providers) was that work-based opportunities would be reduced, and that it was difficult to predict when the market would recover to its pre-Covid position. In part this is due to blockages in the system – specifically delays in existing apprentices completing their training, meaning that opportunities for new apprentices were not currently there. However, some were concerned that the issue was more fundamental, and that demand from employers to take on apprentices would take time to return to previous levels.

Existing apprenticeship completions are being delayed, with a knock-on effect on opportunities for this and next year's leavers [at least]. (Work-based provider)

3.11:41 More positively, young people already on an apprenticeship who were not furloughed or made redundant were more likely to consider that they had been least affected by Covid-19, and remained positive about their future.

Post-16 destinations and transition

3.11:42 Both the factors mentioned in the preceding sub-sections – grade inflation and a lack of work-based opportunities – have the potential to impact negatively on young people's choice of post-16 destination.

3.11:43 Two further factors were noted that could also be at play here:

- Difficulties in seeing what was available elsewhere

We had less time to explore options and ask questions. And we missed out on trips so we were less awareness of what other learning environments would look or feel like. (Young person's group)

The pandemic interrupted the programme of visits, inward and outward, that is at the heart of our IAG programme. They really help young people broaden their horizons. (11-16 only school)

Visits to colleges, careers events, etc. have all had to stop – and have certainly been missed by students. However, the expertise of our external IAG adviser has made up, to a large extent, for what has been lost; it is not clear that any particular students have been disadvantaged. (PRU)

- A general sense that, in uncertain circumstances, it was in some sense “better to stay with what you know” rather than risk moving to somewhere unknown.

The pandemic influenced many of us to stay at our sixth form. Covid has just created so much uncertainty. (Young person's group)

We do encourage young people to go for a good apprenticeship, but most want to come back to the school for post-16. Particularly at the moment, they seem to want the security of returning to an environment that they know and feel safe in. (11 to 18 selective school)

3.11:44 Taking this and the preceding two sub-sections together, the fear is that, for a range of reasons, young people will have made the “wrong” choice.

Results, combined with a lack of access to other providers, have meant more of our young people staying in our sixth form. (Grammar school)

3.11:45 However, as already noted, the fact that there is a strong tendency for young people to stay where they are rather than consider something different at 16 anyway may mean that, in practice, Covid-19's impact may not have been as significant as it might first appear.

Developments in blended learning

3.11:46 The pandemic has forced providers to consider new ways of working; as a result, many have made step changes towards alternative (more “blended”) ways of learning – developments that might otherwise have been introduced more incrementally and over a longer timeframe, if at all.

3.11:47 In general terms, work-based and alternative 16-19 providers and GFECs were broadly positive about the development of a more blended approach to learning; schools much less so.

- 3.11:48 For young people in work-based settings, the use of ICT to deliver elements of their training was sometimes simply an extension of how they were working for their employer anyway – i.e. remotely, using ICT. They were therefore as comfortable with it as a means through which to learn, as they were with it as a means through which to work.
- 3.11:49 For work-based and alternative 16-19 providers, benefits focussed on the way that developing a more blended approach to learning had enabled them to broaden their reach, making their provision more widely available across more of the county. Some had already started this process pre-Covid-19, the pandemic had simply accelerated it or extended the range of provision covered.

We were already predominantly on-line, but Covid has forced us to up our game. Our quality is now better, and we have a greater reach. Plus young people have become more accustomed to online learning. (A work-based provider)

Covid has extended our online remote delivery model, which has worked well the main. As our online provision has evolved, our offer is now Kent wide and easier to access. (A work-based provider)

- 3.11:50 Other providers were starting from scratch but already seeing benefits.

During Covid access we were able to open up access to a much wider group through remote provision. We had participants from across the county. More young people have been helped, and more have achieved a positive outcome, than would have normally been the case. (An alternative 16-19 provider)

- 3.11:51 These providers expected that elements of their provision would continue to be delivered remotely, as part of a more blended learning package. The general sense is that these developments are taking place within individual providers; the extent to which they could also involve collaboration between providers that are geographically distant is currently unexplored.
- 3.11:52 However, the importance of maintaining some face-to-face contact with young people, and their employers, had also been reinforced by their Covid-19 experiences. Alternative 16-19 providers in particular stressed the need to have developed the relationship with a young person on a face-to-face basis before moving to a more blended approach.
- 3.11:53 Work-based providers also reported that many employers still want a face-to-face element to the service, and that it was in any case important to retain visits to workplaces, and to undertake onsite reviews, in order to be able to pick up on issues that might not be evident (or even raised) online.
- 3.11:54 Alternative 16-19 providers also made the point that their young people had often had poor experiences of learning delivered through traditional settings in class-based ways. A fully remote or a more blended approach to learning was considered to open up more options for retaining these young people in learning initially before, ideally, gradually reintroducing them into more mainstream settings. It was felt that

this more phased reintroduction to institution-based learning might prove more fruitful, in terms of sustaining their involvement in some form of education or training, in the medium term.

3.11:55 Kent's GFECs were similarly broadly positive about the expansion of blended learning that had occurred. They had invested considerable human, financial and ICT resources early on to produce an online remote/blended offer, and to provide the necessary support to staff and students to enable remote learning. Again, as things returned to "normal", there was an expectation that much of this would be retained.

3.11:56 From a student perspective, one of the potential benefits of a blended approach was that it could reduce the number of days students would need to attend college, and therefore amount of travelling, potentially opening up college as a realistic alternative. Colleges said that they were already considering how timetables could be adjusted to facilitate this.

3.11:57 Of course there are concerns – for example the need to ensure that:

- Remote learning does not lead to isolation, and does not contribute to mental health issues
- Young people have access to the necessary technology, internet packages etc. to enable remote access
- Group/practical work, which often cannot be delivered easily online, still takes place or if not is adequately substituted by other learning opportunities.

3.11:58 There is also a recognition that remote learning will not work for all young people, so retaining flexibility and the ability to deliver face-to-face are important.

3.11:59 However, to reiterate the point made above providers (and young people) were broadly positive about their online learning-related experiences during Covid-19, and saw value in retaining and taking forward much of the materials and practice developed out of necessity during the pandemic as more "normal" times returned.

3.11:60 Equally some schools, having made not inconsiderable investments in remote delivery, were able to recognise some benefits:

Our approaches to Teaching and Learning are being re-evaluated. Staff and students have developed great online working skills. And some students have loved the anonymity and have 'blossomed'. (Grammar school)

Our young people have developed better independent learning skills as a result of the Covid experience. (Grammar school)

3.11:61 Nevertheless, most were generally looking to "return to pre-Covid-19 ways of working as soon as possible", with (at best) relatively minor tweaks to accommodate some limited online delivery. Whilst schools recognised the same issues as other providers (the need to build the relationship with the disengaged; difficulties delivering group/practical tasks; ensuring access to the necessary ICT; the need to maintain a

physical presence), these were generally seen as barriers that prevented anything being done remotely, rather than challenges that could be overcome.

- 3.11:62 The concern is that, particularly for schools, the experience of more blended approaches to learning will be seen as an aberration, to be abandoned in its entirety at the earliest opportunity, and that good and helpful practice that could be of benefit to young people will be lost in the rush back to the classroom and full-time face-to-face delivery. Being able to offer an alternative way of delivery that is schools-led would seem to offer a potentially attractive option for those who have struggled with school – particularly in a context in which EHE is increasing.

As far as possible we will put everything back the way it was before. (11 to 16-only school)

Most schools are looking to return to pre-Covid ways of working as soon as possible, with only small tweaks [to how they teach]. (Grammar school)

- 3.11:63 Slightly tangentially, there was positive feedback from those schools that had run “parents’ evenings” online, though again the need to ensure that there is a face-to-face option for those who want it, and to guard against digital exclusion, were also raised in this context.

Mental health

- 3.11:64 Mental health has already been referred to in Section 3.6. In the context of this section, existing concerns with regard to student mental health have been exacerbated by the pandemic.
- 3.11:65 Well-being issues in relation to staff were also of concern – the weight of, and stresses caused by, centre- (teacher-) based assessment and the production of materials for online learning and the delivery/support of that learning were particular issues mentioned by interviewees.

Post-18 destinations

- 3.11:66 For some of those closer to leaving their post-16 provider, Covid-19 had had an impact on their choice of what to do and where to go next. There was a general uncertainty as to what the quality of an HE experience would be – most had friends ahead of them whose experience had been less than satisfactory – and how they would be able to explore what that experience might be like if opportunities to visit (say) universities were restricted in Year 13.
- 3.11:67 The concerns already noted in relation to work-based options post-16 applied equally to those young people considering this as a potential route post-18, as did the tendency to want to stay in local provision in a time of uncertainty.

Conclusion

- 3.11:68 The Review commenced during the summer term of 2020, and fieldwork continued through to the end of the summer term of 2021. For all of this time the UK was experiencing the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic; the learning and work experiences of young people already in, and progressing into, post-16 provision during this period (and beyond) have been significantly disrupted.
- 3.11:69 In a Kent context, whilst it is difficult not to welcome more young people achieving better results, interviewees were concerned that grade inflation would encourage (enable) young people to pursue post-16 schools-based options that would not, under more normal circumstances, have been open to them and with which they might not be able to cope.
- 3.11:70 For those looking for work-based opportunities the concerns were that these would be reduced in the short- to medium-term. Sectors popular with young people wanting to start an Apprenticeship were particularly badly affected by the pandemic, and may take longer to recover.
- 3.11:71 For those young people already in the workforce, whilst relatively few will have had their apprenticeship terminated during the pandemic, many were furloughed or worked from home. As a result, at best their work experience will have been dramatically different, and their progress to completing their Apprenticeship significantly slowed; if furloughed, their employment may not have continued after the return to work, and the chances of finding another employer with which to continue the Apprenticeship dramatically reduced.
- 3.11:72 The potential for these factors – grade inflation and a lack of work-based opportunities – to negatively impact on young people’s choice of post-16 destination has been further complicated by:
- Difficulties in young people seeing what was available elsewhere – virtual visits can only go so far
 - A general sense that, in uncertain circumstances, it was in some sense “better to stay with what you know”.
- 3.11:73 Overall, the concern is that, for a range of reasons, young people will have made the “wrong” choice of post-16 option, and that a benefit (fewer young people becoming NEET after their GCSE results in September) could prove transitory as more young people find themselves unable to cope and/or having chosen the “wrong” option and drop out at a later date: the risk of NEET being postponed rather than removed.
- 3.11:74 More positively, the pandemic has forced providers to consider new ways of working; many have made step changes towards more “blended” ways of learning. Work-based and alternative 16-19 providers, and GFECs were broadly positive about this; schools much less so.
- 3.11:75 The concern is that the experience of more blended approaches to learning will be seen as an aberration, and abandoned in its entirety at the earliest opportunity. Not

all young people were happy in school pre-Covid; the ability to offer them something schools-led but delivered in a different way is something worth retaining and developing, particularly in a context in which EHE is increasing.

3.11:76 Section 4 describes how the major recommendations that have emerged from the Review will seek to address these issues; specifically in sub-sections:

- 4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision
- 4.4 Improving provision below Level 2.

Related subsidiary recommendations are in Section 5 (paragraphs numbered 5.11).

4 Recommendations

Introduction

- 4.0:1 Section 3 of this Report set out the findings from the fieldwork and associated information analysis that comprised this Review, using as its framework the young person's path from deciding which 16+ opportunity to follow to their post-19+ transition to work or further study.
- 4.0:2 It would be possible to present the Report's recommendations on the same basis. However, a better way to proceed might be to look at the overall picture presented by the findings in Section 3 and frame recommendations for major changes in practice that will address more holistically the concerns raised in that section as a whole. The recommendations thus framed would then typically address concerns identified under more than one of the Section 3 headings. This is the approach adopted below.
- 4.0:3 Recommendations are therefore presented under the following major topics:
- 4.1 A concerted effort should be made to improve outcomes from 16+ provision
 - 4.2 In parallel, work should be done to raise young people's aspirations through more effective CEIAG, beginning early in the secondary phase (Key Stage 3). These aspirations, once raised, should be actively supported both directly and by proxy by ensuring those who influence young people are themselves well informed
 - 4.3 The network of sixth forms, which includes many very small sixth forms by national standards, should be supported through the development of an "area offer" to cover **all** providers (specifically including GFECs, other organisations providing vocational learning and alternative 16-19 providers). The implementation of that offer will require collaboration between all the providers concerned
 - 4.4 Improvements should be made to the provision available below Level 2
 - 4.5 Further steps should be taken to support the mental health of learners
 - 4.6 The provision of further support to enable young people to access post-16 learning should be considered, including further support for travel
 - 4.7 The opportunity should be taken to learn any lessons from the various lockdowns that have resulted from Covid 19, and not just to assume that everything should return to "normal"
 - 4.8 A 16+ Strategic Leadership Board should be put in place to ensure all involved parties collaborate to deliver these recommendations and indeed oversee the future strategic development of the sector.
- 4.0:4 Each subsection that follows therefore:
- Summarises the findings from the Review that establish the need for the recommendation

- Explains in detail what the recommendation involves
- Indicates the likely level of support for the recommendation (including any existing good practice that is relevant). In gauging the level of support the project team have in particular drawn on the consultation programme undertaken in November and December 2021 (as described in Section 2 – see 2.0:30)
- Provides examples of relevant practice where these were identified during the fieldwork interviews – a separate relevant practice document is being prepared giving more details of the examples quoted.

4.0:5 The following table, which will serve as an introduction, makes explicit the links between the Review's findings from Section 3 and the recommendations presented in this Section.

Recommendations	Related finding(s) ¹⁰⁴	Explanation/link	
4.1 Improving outcomes	3.3	Economic disadvantage has a greater impact on student outcomes in Kent than elsewhere: this needs to be addressed	
	3.4	If pre-year 12 decision making is improved, outcomes should improve too – because young people will be better suited to their choice at 16+	
	3.5	Better transition will support the improvement in outcomes	
	3.6	In a time of resource shortage, effective management of resources is key to improving outcomes. Support for gifted and talented learners could be improved	
	3.7	Kent lags behind the pattern in England on many outcome measures, especially for disadvantaged learners, and specific action is needed here	
4.2 Raising young people's aspirations through better CEIAG	3.1 & 3.4	Small sixth forms can constrain choice if young people are not aware of the whole range of 16+ provision. Young people should be encouraged to aspire to their best choice	
	3.3	Disadvantage can constrain aspirations and good CEIAG will address this To improve the aspirations of young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, the expectations of them from those with influence on them need to be raised	

¹⁰⁴ The references to the “related findings” in Section 3 are as follows:

- 3.1 The offer – provision that is currently available in Kent for 16- to 19-year-olds
- 3.2 Location, access, and structure
- 3.3 Equal opportunities
- 3.4 Pre-Year 12 decision-making – how young people decide what they want to do post-16
- 3.5 Transition into post-16 provision – moving from school in Year 11 into post-16 provision
- 3.6 Delivery – issues affecting the delivery of Kent's 16-19 offer
- 3.7 Outcomes – outcomes from post-16 education and training
- 3.8 Post-Year 13 decision making and transition – moving on to what comes after post-16
- 3.9 Future viability of provision – how post-16 provision may change in future
- 3.10 Collaboration – providers working together on aspects of post-16 provision
- 3.11 The impact of Covid-19 – the impact of the pandemic on post-16 learning.

Recommendations	Related finding(s) ¹⁰⁴	Explanation/link	
	3.5	Many causes of “transition failure” can be ameliorated through better CEIAG, particularly if this is extended into some post-transition support	
	3.6	If aspirations are raised this should itself benefit outcomes	
	3.7	If aspirations are supported, outcomes should improve	
	3.8	Progression at 19+ is critically influenced by what young people believe it possible: raising aspirations is key to improving this Post-transition support is important here if opportunities opened up at 16 are to be realised at 18	
4.3 Implementing an area offer of 16+ provision	3.1	An “area offer” will help to ensure that pupils’ choice at 16 is less constrained	
	3.2	The area offer will need to take into account the provision available in each location and facilitate access to what is not available locally	
	3.4	If a good area offer is in place, then young people will be encouraged to choose from a wider range of provision	
	3.5	Transition into post-16 provision will need to improve if the area offer is to be fully taken advantage of	
	3.7	The proposed area offer will support this by making a wider range of opportunities available to young people and informing them of progress-ion routes	
	3.9	The viability of small sixth forms is challenged by the proposed reforms to 16+ funding. An area offer is vital in offsetting this challenge	
	3.10	The area offer will require effective collaboration to be successful – there is some good practice upon which to draw. However some practical difficulties do need to be overcome	
	3.11	Lessons learned in lockdown – particularly over the effectiveness of blended learning, and in which contexts – will help support the introduction of area offers.	
4.4 Improving provision below Level 2	3.1	The current offer is very limited in what it can provide at this level: improvement is needed	
	3.2	The ability to access current provision can be constrained by location; improvements should increase the coverage	

Recommendations	Related finding(s) ¹⁰⁴	Explanation/link	
	3.3	Disadvantaged young people, including those with ESOL, are disproportionately more likely to require provision below Level 2	
	3.5	Improving provision below Level 2 should help to open up pathways into further learning at Level 2 and beyond	
	3.7	Outcomes will be achieved by a group that currently is more likely to become NEET, take up employment without training and/or prospects etc.	
	3.10	The creation of pathways will promote collaboration between providers	
	3.11	The development of blended learning may help to open up access to this provision for some young people who have been alienated from mainstream provision	
4.5 Further supporting the mental health of learners	3.4	Choosing an unsuitable programme at 16+ can impact on students' mental health	
	3.5	Better arrangements for transition will directly support students' mental health	
	3.6	Students need more support with mental health and specific proposals are needed for this	
4.6 Improving access by support for travel	3.2	If students are to have access to the full offer at 16+ then support for travel will need to improve	
4.7 Learning from lockdown	3.2	Access to the offer without too much travelling may be facilitated if the experience of blended learning in lockdown is built upon	
	3.5	Transition arrangements were hampered during lockdown but its ending gives an opportunity to re-evaluate what works best	
4.8 Improving strategic leadership	This recommendation underpins the implementation of all the recommendations in this report, and arguably therefore addresses all of the findings in Section 3. It will particularly support taking actions in relation to the following:		
	3.4	In particular, strategic leadership will facilitate the development of an area offer	
	3.9	A central resource will enable a coordinated response to developments such as the introduction of T Levels and the proposed changes to Level 3 qualifications and funding	

Recommendations	Related finding(s) ¹⁰⁴	Explanation/link	
	3.10	Strategic leadership should help to enable greater collaboration between providers	

- 4.0:6 This table does not refer to all the recommendations emerging from the fieldwork: a number of supplementary recommendations can be found in Section 5.
- 4.0:7 The recommendations made here go far beyond what KCC can achieve on its own, or indeed what it has the statutory power to implement. These recommendations are therefore made to the entire community of 16-19 learning within Kent; an early task in implementing them will be to identify the roles for the various partners concerned in bringing them to fruition. Indeed, it will become clear that one specific recommendation (4.8) is aimed at providing the mechanism to ensure this happens.

4.1 Improving outcomes

Summary of findings from the Review

- 4.1:1 “Outcomes” in this context include not only results from post-16 education and training, and progression to higher education (including to Russell Group institutions), but also progression to meaningful employment, apprenticeships, and “careers with prospects” in general.
- 4.1:2 The overall level of achievement at 16+ is lower in Kent than in its “statistical neighbours” (other authorities with a similar demographic profile).
- 4.1:3 At the same time, a consistent message from work-based providers (and, indirectly, from employers) is that young people are poorly prepared for work, and lack the employability and softer skills that are necessarily for employment. (Of course this issue frequently arises in a national context too.)

What should be done

- 4.1:4 Clearly all provision should be designed to give young people the best possible outcomes, in terms of attainment, progression, destinations, and life skills. However the quality of provision itself is a matter for the individual providers, and is overseen by statutory agencies (most importantly Ofsted). Although KCC is fully committed to supporting the 16+ sector and raising standards, it is not within the remit of either the Council or its 16+ partners to intervene directly within the sector except in highly specific circumstances.
- 4.1:5 Therefore, what is proposed is a two-part support programme that will encourage providers to address the issue of improving outcomes for themselves:
- A comprehensive benchmarking programme
 - A life skills curriculum.

Benchmarking

- 4.1:6 The comprehensive benchmarking programme will allow individual providers to see how their outcomes compare with those of their peers, both within Kent and (to the extent the data is available) with those of Kent’s “statistical neighbours”. There is already a wealth of data routinely collected both at County and national level that can be used for this purpose.
- 4.1:7 It is generally accepted that – providing they are seen to be reasonably based – over time such comparisons lead to performance improvement. The benchmarking approach adopted will therefore need to take full account of the individual circumstances of 16+ providers, including (for instance) the prior academic or vocational achievement of learners and their economic situation.

- 4.1:8 The benchmarking concerned does not need to be restricted to “academic” outcomes but could also for instance include reference to the achievement of Gatsby benchmarks for CEIAG.
- 4.1:9 There are many precedents and the task of designing an acceptable benchmarking framework (or selecting an existing one) should not be too difficult.

A life skills curriculum

- 4.1:10 The lack of work-related life skills was identified by students, work-based providers, and employers. To address this, it is proposed that:
- A life skills curriculum is designed and built (or an existing one selected and promoted) to reinforce the skills that young people need to achieve their goals post-16 and post-18
 - Schools and other providers are encouraged to adopt it.
- 4.1:11 Work on a life skills curriculum does not need to be done “from scratch”. TEP has undertaken work in this area, and there are a number of model life skills curricula already available – some of which have already been implemented and evaluated elsewhere in the country. The implementation of the life skills curriculum could be supported by the CEC.
- 4.1:12 It will be important to ensure that the curriculum adopted is relevant to Kent as a county and to the range of providers – and, once young people have completed their learning, to their subsequent employers within the region.

Support for this recommendation

- 4.1:13 This recommendation emerged directly from statements made to the project team during the fieldwork, in particular – as noted above – from students, work-based providers, and employers and their representatives (directly and by report from providers).
- 4.1:14 With regard to a life skills curriculum, respondents to the consultation were generally supportive of the recommendation. Additional points made by consultees pointed out that:
- Life skills needed to sit alongside technical skills to be most effective
 - Providers need to take account of young people who start programmes other than in September, especially those young people who may be transferring from other provision that had proved unsuitable for them: such young people may be in particular need of life skills input.

On the subject of benchmarking, consultation respondents stressed the need to take context into account, and to ensure that the exercise did not become bureaucratic.

4.2 Raising young people's aspirations through better CEIAG

Summary of findings from the Review

4.2:1 Improving outcomes from 16-19 learning is not solely within the control of the providers concerned. The young people in question also have to want to succeed, and to have aspirations and ambitions that reflect, or indeed exceed, their potential. They then need to be supported in achieving these aspirations.

4.2:2 We need to:

- Ensure young people's aspirations are enhanced and the range of choices they consider broadened through a better awareness of the opportunities open to them
- Strengthen the support that young people receive and ensure those with an influence on them (including their peers, teachers, and parents) share these high aspirations for them.

Young people's aspirations

4.2:3 During the fieldwork for this project, concerns were raised that young people do not always appreciate, or are even not aware of, the range of opportunities they might aspire to. CEIAG is not always as effective as it might be, meaning that some young people are unaware of the range of opportunities available to them at 16+, and/or unable to give adequate consideration to the alternatives open to them.

4.2:4 This is not entirely surprising – the range of potential opportunities is huge, and the difficulties associated with ensuring that each young person is even partially aware of what they might aspire to therefore considerable. However, there was a general sense from the fieldwork with young people and providers that more could be done.

4.2:5 It was also claimed by young people that, where they were thinking of post-16 opportunities outside their current [11-18] school, it was not as easy to access support when exploring these options and making their applications. (This was also accepted to be an issue by some schools – either explicitly or implicitly.)

4.2:6 The ready supply of low-level employment opportunities, and the desire or pressure on them to earn, were considered by some to be a contributory factor to lowering aspirations; it was claimed that they encouraged some young people to take a [local] job “for the money” as soon as they could – and to pass up opportunities to invest their time in more education or training now for an ultimately better future.

4.2:7 Similar concerns applied at 18, when young people who were capable of more too often settled for what was available at universities within the county, rather than pursuing potentially more challenging options that could be open to them if they looked more widely.

- 4.2:8 Interviewees also pointed out that CEIAG also needs to be provided earlier, and to relate to a longer timeframe. It was claimed that young people do not always appreciate that the choices they made at 14+ could limit their opportunities at 16+ (and beyond); nor that their choice of provider and/or subjects at 16 could be equally as limiting in terms of what they might do next. Some of the comments made by young people in the fieldwork also suggest that this is an issue.
- 4.2:9 Particular concerns were raised in relation to young people who, for whatever reason, were not ordinarily or regularly in school. Almost invariably they will have, at best, considerably reduced access to any CEIAG.
- 4.2:10 Finally the contribution of poor (or no) CEIAG to young people becoming NEET was apparent from the fieldwork. Those EHE or excluded from school are most likely to receive little or no CEIAG, and more likely to make the “wrong” choice and subsequently end up NEET as a result.
- 4.2:11 For a variety of reasons, therefore, it is important that steps are taken to ensure that young people are better informed, and that their aspirations are raised, through better CEIAG.

Support for young people’s aspirations

- 4.2:12 However, raising young people’s aspirations is only part of the story. Those who influence young people in turn must support these new enhanced aspirations. Otherwise efforts to improve outcomes and raise aspirations will be hampered.
- 4.2:13 In particular, fieldwork has shown that parents and teachers are not always aware of the full range of options available to young people and, to the extent that they are aware, their knowledge is often based on outdated and/or incomplete information. They can, albeit inadvertently, project their own experiences onto young people, thereby contributing to the low aspirations some have and the inappropriate choice of route some make.
- 4.2:14 These issues are relevant in Year 9 (when young people are making their choice of GCSEs – meaning that preparatory work for these decisions is required earlier than this), in years 10 and 11 (when young people are considering where to go post-16), and in years 12 and 13 (when young people are considering what to do next).

What should be done

- 4.2:15 It is recommended that:
- A model CEIAG curriculum, customisable by all pre-16 and post-16 settings, is developed to address the gaps observed in CEIAG
 - Young people are actively encouraged to consider the full range of post-16 options available to them, including those not on offer within their current school, or indeed in their immediate geographical area

- Young people are given sufficient support to enable them to achieve their potential in employment or further education, and subsequently in employment or higher education.
- 4.2:16 Significant progress has been made by the CEC Careers Hub with regard to a model CEIAG curriculum, and – as is the case with life skills – it therefore also does not need to be developed “from scratch”.
- 4.2:17 The Provider Access Duty requires schools to allow access to their pre- and post-16 students by all post-16 providers, and some schools may need to be reminded of this.
- 4.2:18 In particular, 11-18 schools should be aware of the “inertia factor” (see Section 3.4) and ensure that they do not inadvertently encourage young people to transfer into their own sixth form when the ambitions and indeed best interests of the young people concerned might suggest otherwise.
- 4.2:19 In addition, the new curriculum will need to embed and encourage the adoption of the Gatsby benchmarks, and reflect the emphasis that Ofsted is now giving to access to independent CEIAG as part of the new inspection framework: these statutory pressures will help in implementing this recommendation.
- 4.2:20 It is particularly important that young people not in school pre-16 (for whatever reason) are not excluded from CEIAG provision. This will be difficult and resource-intensive to ensure. But if these young people are not to “progress” to NEET before (hopefully) they are reengaged in some form of education or training then action must be taken. A conscious effort to ensure that they do not miss out needs to be made.
- 4.2:21 As far as support from teachers and parents is concerned, more research will be needed to identify how best to tackle this issue. However it is clear that specific strategies should be developed for:
- Parents, to ensure they have at least a working knowledge of the full range of destinations post-16 currently available and what they can lead to, and that they understand that “staying in school” is not the only option
 - Teachers (including but not limited to those with CEIAG responsibilities), to ensure that they are also familiar with destinations other than school sixth forms and the progression opportunities these can in turn lead to, and that they are able to support young people who wish to explore post-16 opportunities away from their pre-16 school.

Support for this recommendation

- 4.2:22 As noted, support for this recommendation was implicit in the feedback received from fieldwork participants. Young people themselves argued that they often did not receive information about the full range of post-16 opportunities available to them, and were unaware that decisions taken at 14+ could have significant impacts on their future options. For their part, post-16 providers (other than schools) suggested that

they did not always have adequate opportunity to engage with pre-16 pupils in order to make them aware of the full range of provision available.

- 4.2:23 It was also argued that there can be too much emphasis currently placed on university destinations, and that allowing a range of providers to present to pre-16 young people might rectify this. Again, young people echoed these comments in discussions.
- 4.2:24 Consultation respondents stressed the importance of good CEIAG. They also reinforced findings from the fieldwork interviews and focus groups that lack of knowledge among parents and other influencers did affect students' choice of destination post-16, particularly for "non-schools-based" routes.
- 4.2:25 It was suggested that Family Learning programmes funded under adult and community learning might help families appreciate the range of destinations to which their children might aspire.
- 4.2:26 Whilst the concept of a CEIAG model curriculum was supported, this should not be a "one size fits all" approach that displaced existing good practice: whatever form the model curriculum took, it should leave space for existing good practice to continue and be incorporated in it.

Existing relevant practice

- 4.2:27 Relevant examples of practice observed during the course of the fieldwork include:
- a. Romney Resource Centre's range of engagement activities with local employers
 - b. Homewood School's employer advisors, who work with local employers and pupils on employer engagement and support for CEIAG
 - c. The wide range of CEIAG activities offered by New Line Learning Academy to its pupils from Year 7 onwards
 - d. EKC Group's support for in-school delivery of vocational tasters as a way of introducing pupils to some of the range of vocational opportunities that could be open to them post-16 at EKC Group colleges – potentially thereby ensuring some young people do not become NEET
 - e. For EKC Group, Work Higher has a good relationship with some schools and is allowed in to create a level of awareness of, and provide information on, Apprenticeships, that goes well beyond just attending careers fairs
 - f. Each pathway on the EKC Group website provides a neat summary of key labour market information relevant to the sector/occupational grouping
 - g. SLT leadership of a comprehensive all-years CEIAG programme at Astor School

- h. Astor School's use of the Kent and Medway Collaborative Outreach Programme provision [KaMCOP] to provide their pupils and students with access to a range of aspiration-raising opportunities throughout their time at the school
- i. Astor School making best use of CEIAG-related materials that are already available through the CEC and others
- j. The strong focus on supporting parents to support their young people at Hadlow Rural Community School.
- k. ThinkForward is currently working with a number of Kent schools; its *My Future* coaches offer young people a range of employability and life skills interventions, plus ongoing support in their onward destinations, to ensure post-16 transitions happen and are successful: 84% of the young people who graduated from *FutureMe* in Kent in the summer of 2021 are working and/or in education.

4.3 Implementing an “area offer” of 16+ provision

Introduction

- 4.3:1 Two aspects highlighted by the fieldwork are relevant to the development of an “area offer” – small sixth forms, and the proposed reforms to post-16 qualifications.
- 4.3:2 Taken together, they represent an existential threat to an important element of the county’s post-16 provision – provision that currently provides a valuable progression route to destinations at 18 for many young people.

Summary of findings from the Review: small sixth forms

- 4.3:3 Government guidance is that the effective size for a school sixth form is in the region of 200 students or more. There are 87 school sixth forms in Kent; only 42 (less than half) satisfy this criterion.
- 4.3:4 Although outcomes from small sixth forms can be strong, the Review identified concerns that small sixth forms:
- May have small classes; these take a disproportionate share of resources from the school as a whole
 - Offer a narrower range of subjects, restricting young people’s choice at 16 and, in combination with a reluctance among young people to move to provision elsewhere, limiting their options at 18
 - Tend to duplicate the offer of other small sixth forms, rather than expand the choices available to young people, in any given locality.

Summary of findings from the Review: qualification reform

- 4.3:5 The Government remains committed to wide-ranging reforms to qualifications, particularly at Level 3. Currently these reforms will include the de-funding of BTEC Nationals and other applied general qualifications [AGQs] in favour of T Levels, which over time will become the principal alternative to A levels at Level 3. The proposed reforms may also have a consequential negative impact on the International Baccalaureate Career-Related Programme [IBCP] – a significant part of the offer in many Kent schools.
- 4.3:6 Many school sixth forms in Kent rely on BTECs, other AGQs and/or the IBCP as a central part of their post-16 offer¹⁰⁵, and there is a concern (nationally as well as in Kent) that a “gap” will emerge at Level 3, with T Levels proving too demanding for many young people, requiring a level of investment that schools will not be able to

¹⁰⁵ See paragraph 3.9:15.

make, and making demands of employers in terms of their level of engagement that some may be unwilling to contemplate.

What should be done

- 4.3:7 If there is to be a strong, varied post-16 offer, a comprehensive and effective range of provision must be locally available to all.
- 4.3:8 A way must be found of overcoming the disadvantages of the small size of sixth forms and of addressing the impact of Level 3 reforms. Short of major closures of small sixth forms, which seems inevitable if nothing is done, this has to involve genuine, practical collaboration between neighbouring sixth forms, and other providers, that amounts to an “area offer”.
- 4.3:9 If possible, the flexibility for students to follow “mixed programmes” – some A levels and some vocational qualifications – which has proved so attractive to a significant proportion of high school students, needs to be retained and, through closer work with GFECs, improved.
- 4.3:10 There is a need to:
- Set out, and consult upon, what a comprehensive local “area offer” at post-16 should include
 - Encourage schools with sixth forms, in conjunction with their local GFEC(s) and other providers wherever possible, to construct such an “offer” for their area, combining academic (A level) and vocational programmes to replace the range of qualifications that are to be discontinued
 - Encourage the strong collaboration at a local level that will be needed to deliver this offer. (The exact form that this collaboration will take may vary from place to place)
 - Review and “kitemark” those collaborations that are delivering strong and effective area offers that meet the “comprehensive” criterion above
 - Continue to lobby Government, both to moderate the impact of its reforms on vocational qualifications and to ensure that adequate provision is made at Level 3 for those whose Level 2 attainment is insufficient to support progression to T or A levels and where AGQs currently fill gaps not catered for by T Levels
 - Make more provision for students that do not achieve sufficiently high grades to commence Level 3 programmes: this could include one year programmes at Level 2, including Maths and English for those not achieving the necessary grades at GCSE, which would enable a transition to Level 3 in Year 13/14, delivered by schools in collaboration with GFECs.
- 4.3:11 Clearly there are issues to be resolved (travel, enrolment, timetabling, staffing, funding and accountability), but something has to be done. What is described above represents an appropriate collaborative way forward.

Support for this recommendation

- 4.3:12 Schools, particularly those 11-18 with small sixth forms, are naturally concerned about the future of their post-16 provision; the kind of “strong collaboration” that will be needed to deliver an area offer can however be seen as challenging their independence.
- 4.3:13 There are also issues of responsibility for individual students, including from Ofsted, where students take a “combined programme” that involves attendance at two different, and notionally separate, schools/providers at different times during the week. However, it would be unfortunate if systems- and structure-related requirements continued to dictate what can be done where this is contrary to the best interests of individual students.
- 4.3:14 The experience of those (few) schools that have delivered a joint sixth form timetable – see below – shows that these difficulties can be overcome.
- 4.3:15 And schools with small sixth forms are increasingly worried about the impact of qualification reform; many are acknowledging the need for action.
- 4.3:16 Consultation respondents pointed out that implementing a shared area offer would not be straightforward. In particular, in rural areas there may be considerable travel time issues between providers in the same locality for “area offer” purposes. However, this does not mean that there is nothing that can be done and that no steps can be taken – for example timetables may be capable of being designed and/or opportunities for remote learning developed, such that students do not need to move from one location to another in the middle of the day, or to be physically present in the classroom for every lesson.
- 4.3:17 A “single directory” of what is available in the area offer, directly accessible by students, would be essential. It will need to allow learners to “build up” programmes by choosing from the offer at more than one local provider where this is appropriate. The existing “Kent Choices” website and database will provide the foundation for this.
- 4.3:18 Respondents also asked that:
- Opportunities for technical and vocational education be fully provided within the area offer: it should not be wholly about A level programmes
 - The Review acknowledge the potential strengths of small sixth forms, particularly for students who found large settings difficult
 - KCC do all in its power to resist the wholesale defunding of BTECs, pointing out the vital contribution these currently make to many students’ progress and arguing that as yet T Levels are not proven to be a completely satisfactory alternative.

Existing relevant practice

- 4.3:19 Relevant examples of practice observed during the course of the fieldwork include:

- a. A planned A level collaboration between St Anselm's and St Edmund's schools
- b. EKC Group's Junior College, which provides young people with a vocationally-based alternative pre-16 that accelerates their technical/vocational learning whilst also reducing the risk of them becoming NEET post-16
- c. EKC Group's Home Educated Programme, which offers the home educated an alternative/addition to a fully home-based education, and allows them to experience some of what coming to college at 16 might offer them – thereby also reducing their risk of becoming NEET post-16
- d. The advantages of the collaborative offer that formerly separate colleges and other provision within the EKC Group structure are now able to offer
- e. A collaboration between Astor School and Dover Technical College on an alternative programme at Key Stage 4 for those who are struggling with GCSEs

Other “non-offer-related” examples of collaboration are discussed in paragraph 3.10:9.

4.4 Improving provision at and below Level 2

Summary of findings from the Review

- 4.4:1 There is a significant group of young people who have found, and are likely to continue to find, “conventional” provision in a school (or possibly a GFEC) unsuitable for, or inaccessible to, them; they may have struggled through school and/or have become disengaged from learning pre-16.
- 4.4:2 Either way, if they are to fulfil the requirement of remaining actively involved in learning up to 18 and to avoid becoming “not in education, employment or training” [NEET], many will need access to some form of alternative 16-19 provision.
- 4.4:3 It is difficult to help young people avoid becoming NEET if the appropriate provision is not on offer. Kent’s NEET percentage is proving difficult to reduce; this is at least in part due to there being insufficient provision for this group, and in some districts this feeds through to youth unemployment (18-24) significantly higher than the National Average. There are a number of challenges:
- Historically this “alternative” 16-19 provision has been funded from the European Social Fund [ESF]. ESF funding is being wound down post-Brexit and alternative UK-based arrangements are yet to be confirmed. “Mainstream” funding through the Education and Skills Funding Agency [ESFA] is available for a range of Entry Level (E1, E2, E3) and Level 1 programmes but this has not been perceived to be suitable for all. One reason, anecdotally, may be perceptions of the regulatory regime involved
 - ESFA does not currently support subcontracting wholeheartedly, which can make it difficult for smaller providers to enter the market, and also operates a “lagged funding” model that militates against new and expanding organisations
 - Providers can be judged harshly when they deliver impressive results for their young people which – given the client group – nevertheless do not meet “standard” benchmarks
 - It is often difficult for young people to progress from current alternative 16-19 provision¹⁰⁶ if this does not interface with the vocational qualification structure and provide clear progression routes to mainstream education, training or employment.
- 4.4:4 It is something of a paradox that those providers who are willing to engage with these hardest-to-help young people have to cope with many more contractual and funding uncertainties and difficulties than those engaging with more mainstream post-16s – a

¹⁰⁶ Recall that the definition of “alternative 16-19 provision” in this document does *not* include PRUs, which are pre-16 only. PRUs’ good work in facilitating transition is in fact referred to in paragraph 3.5:14.

school that was required to run its sixth form with the same degree of uncertainty would probably opt out of the market.

- 4.4:5 For some alternative 16-19 providers the challenges have proved too great and they are exiting – or have already exited – the market. The number of providers has reduced, as noted in Section 3, from 59 to 25 over recent years.

What should be done

- 4.4:6 Ways must be found to support further growth and development in alternative 16-19 provision to stem, and indeed reverse, the current decline. In particular, provision needs to be put on a stable footing with guaranteed long-term formula funding rather than a reliance on short-term applications to multiple funding sources.

- 4.4:7 It is recommended that the county:

- Identify the extent to which ESFA can support developments in this area by guaranteeing funding
- Lobby ESFA to extend the range of programmes it can fund if the current range is insufficient
- Investigate options for setting up an “umbrella” organisation, in order to enable more providers to offer programmes for this group of young people without having to carry the associated administrative burden unaided: this has worked well elsewhere in the country
- Support new providers wanting to enter the market, whether as part of such an “umbrella” or in their own right, and lobby ESFA to facilitate this
- Encourage GFECs to continue to offer a range of Entry Level qualifications and qualifications at Level 1, and to work to develop pathways back into their provision for young people who attend other providers, recognising that not all young people are immediately ready for a college environment
- Support all providers in developing progression routes for successful completers into further vocational (or other) learning or employment.

- 4.4:8 As noted, ESFA does not at the moment seem to be especially supportive of “subcontracting”, though this position may be changing. There may be an unhelpful confusion between (a) the situation of a prime contractor who subcontracts “bits” of the programme delivered, and may indeed subsequently take less interest in their delivery than they should, and (b) the idea of an “umbrella organisation” whose entire role is to support the delivery of high quality, in-house, provision by each of its member providers. Discussions with the agency may enable this confusion to be resolved.

- 4.4:9 At the same time, existing providers (including GFECs) should be encouraged to review their provision at Level 2 and particularly below, to ensure that sufficient progression opportunities are in place for learners not currently able to commence a Level 3 programme in their chosen vocational area immediately.

4.4:10 In this way, a coherent offer of provision up to and including Level 2 can be put in place from which learners are able to choose.

Support for this recommendation

4.4:11 Support for this recommendation from those responding to the consultation was strong.

4.4:12 As a strategy to avoid young people becoming NEET, appropriate provision at 16+ was clearly important.

4.4:13 It was also pointed out that in some instances the “root causes” of NEET appear around years 8 and 9, so that appropriate provision at 16+ is only half the solution required. The development of alternatives to the traditional, entirely schools-based, provision pre-16 should help to reduce the need for a safety net of alternative 16-19 provision.

4.4:14 It was also suggested that 11-18 schools should attempt to provide a post-16 offer that would allow **all** their pre-16 pupils to remain with them post-16, if this is what they want to do, rather than have an offer and/or set “entry criteria” for their sixth forms that effectively prevent internal progression for some of their less able pupils. This may not be a practicable idea as it stands, but could be used to challenge schools to ensure that their criteria for progression are not too rigorous and do not deny students’ options for internal progression unreasonably¹⁰⁷.

Existing relevant practice

4.4:15 Relevant examples of practice observed during the course of the fieldwork include:

- a. Think Forward working, from Year 9, with small groups of young people at risk of becoming NEET post-16 in 4 schools in the county – the inputs are designed to enable positive progressions to be achieved
- b. At EKC Group, Work Higher is using Traineeship to the potential of a vocational option post-16 for those who would benefit from something prior to starting an Apprenticeship, and for employers who are new to work-based training programmes
- c. A one-year employability pathway, at Astor School for students in Year 12 who are not be ready to start a Level 3 course, and want to gain some employment-

¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere in this Report the suggestion is made that 11-18 schools may encourage *too many* students to remain in their school post-16 rather than review all the options open to them. This present point may seem to contradict that suggestion. However there is no contradiction between wishing young people to consider all options open to them and deciding to offer provision at sub Level 2 because a shortage of such provision has been identified locally.

related experience whilst they continue to study for their mathematics and/or English GCSEs

- d. Preparation for permanent and purposeful employment for young people with SEND at Forward2Employment
- e. Alternative 16-19 provision @ **The View** to allow those who have not been able to access school to continue in education.

4.5 Further supporting the mental health of learners

Summary of findings from the Review

- 4.5:1 Throughout the fieldwork, attention has been drawn to increasing concerns about young people's mental health and the impact that mental health issues can have on their learning, particularly in non-work-based provision. The issue is twofold:
- Identifying and supporting young people with mental health issues in appropriate ways – including those not in mainstream settings
 - Reviewing and modifying teaching styles, making them more appropriate to a student population where mental health issues are increasingly common.
- 4.5:2 The NHS does make provision for young people's mental health support (through the Kent Children and Young People's Mental Health Service¹⁰⁸ and also through a range of other services). In addition KCC funds some specific mental health services for young people. Nevertheless, waiting lists for these services can be long, the delays in providing direct support have significant consequences for students' progress, and for some support service providers making information available to third parties can be difficult.
- 4.5:3 Some additional national funding for work in this area has recently been announced, but (at £1,200 per school) it is not enough to address the scale of the problem.

What should be done

- 4.5:4 There is a need to:
- Identify and promulgate the best evidence-based pedagogy to create practice that supports learning in a mental health-friendly way for all students
 - Draw up and implement a clear framework for emotional wellbeing approaches and services across the county, supported by appropriate workforce development, to identify mental health concerns early, intervene appropriately and subsequently support the young people concerned
 - Work collaboratively beyond education in support of better two-way communication routes to ensure that on the one hand Education colleagues are aware of the full range of proactive and reactive support already available, while on the other hand the NHS and other services understand the extent of mental health issues within the 16-19 sector

¹⁰⁸ The Kent Children and Young People's Mental Health Service includes the service badged as CAMHS elsewhere in the country, but includes a range of additional services too.

- Ensure that providers are able to offer “frontline” support to individual young people with mental health issues where such approaches are appropriate and proportionate
- Consider further investment in a “second line” support service where within-institution support (however enhanced) is likely to be insufficient but where a referral to NHS services may not be entirely necessary.

4.5:5 This recommendation is made in the context of a 16-19 Review, but of course a separate 16-19 service (within schools, for example) is not what is being proposed: the recommendation should apply to all learners, in all settings, regardless of age.

Support for this recommendation

4.5:6 It is fair to say that the map of support for mental health provision among young people is complex, and providers may have difficulty in identifying to whom to turn and how. For their part, existing mental health professionals (both from within KCC and from NHS organisations) consulted about this recommendation were lukewarm about the suggestion that a further “support service”, at district level, would add much value.

4.5:7 Yet the views of fieldwork participants, and indeed from the consultation, are clear. Consultation respondents agreed that better support for “frontline” staff in schools, and better sources of support when schools need to refer to other agencies, were both important. How this is to be done remains to be determined and will clearly require the involvement of existing agencies and organisations. However better communication with schools and other providers regarding the full range of services on offer and how learners can access them may be a useful first step.

4.5:8 In particular, the Review is not seeking to replicate agencies nor add further to any existing confusion. If the spirit of these recommendations can be accomplished by working entirely with existing agencies and organisations then that would be the best way to proceed. Yet there is evidence of (apparent) unmet need from the fieldwork: *prima facie* some new arrangement would seem to be necessary.

Existing relevant practice

- 4.5:9 Relevant examples of practice observed during the course of the fieldwork include:
- a. Cross-service *Change for Kent* discussions that have resulted in a revamp of mental health-related services and processes, and more generally raised levels of mental health awareness, that has improved the support offered to young people and their families in the Dover area
 - b. Using *Recreate Kent* funding to create a well-being team within Astor School
 - c. Cross-agency working through *Operation Encompass* to ensure that Dover’s schools are better placed to understand the issues that their young people are facing at home, and as a result able to offer more targeted and immediate support

d. **Viewpoint at Hillview**'s anxiety-based school avoidance programme.

4.5:8 There are also a range of web-based mental health support services available. Young Minds and Kooth have been used heavily by the GFECs to supplement their in-house support for mental health and wellbeing¹⁰⁹. KFE has also worked with TEP on the delivery of wellbeing training for staff at its TLA Conferences in 2021/22.

¹⁰⁹ See <https://www.youngminds.org.uk> and <https://www.koothplc.com>. Kooth has also been working with Surrey & Borders Partnership NHS Foundation trust as part of its integrated Children's and Adolescent Mental Health programme. See <https://www.koothplc.com/article/kooth-surrey-and-borders>.

4.6 Improving access by support for travel

Summary of findings from the Review

- 4.6:1 A central aim of this review is to provide better education, skills and training opportunities for Kent's young people (paragraph 1.0:3). If this is to be done, and if Kent's young people (particularly in rural areas) are to have access to the full range of post-16 opportunities, some of them are likely to have to travel a reasonable distance to take part their chosen provision. For those willing to make the investment, this has consequences in the time and cost of "commuting". For many others, in practice it restricts the range of options they have available to them.
- 4.6:2 The support KCC offers for post-16 travel to learning is more generous than many counties; however, it has no statutory responsibility to do this and there are pressures on budgets. Further funding for post-16 travel, and learner support more generally, was delegated some years ago to individual providers and each determines how best to spend its allocation to support those of its students it considers to be in need. Post-16, there is no entitlement to support and students cannot rely on it being available to them when applying for their chosen provision.
- 4.6:3 In particular, providers are not usually in a position to consider financial support for travel until a young person has applied for and been accepted on a specific course.
- 4.6:4 More generally, providers were not always aware of the impact that the cost of travel had on student choice, for obvious reasons.
- 4.6:5 Given that students up to the age of 18 are now required to participate in meaningful education, training or employment, logic would suggest that they should be enabled to travel to the provision best suited to their needs and aspirations. If cost considerations are not to impact on young people's choice of what to do post-16, particularly if they are not yet earning an adequate wage and/or if their or their families' financial circumstances are limited, then financial support must be made available.

What should be done

- 4.6:6 There is a need to:
- Prioritise for support those whose choice of post-16 destination is contingent upon the receipt of financial assistance to enable them to travel to it
 - Ensure the design of (student) travel arrangements takes account of the local collaborative "area offer", including travel between providers where this is required, and for vocational education more widely (see section 4.3 above)
 - Continue to lobby Government to support travel for young people to post-16 education, training and employment in the same way as it supports travel to school for pupils

- Reduce the need to travel by building on the experience of the pandemic to provide education online or through blended learning (see 4.7.4 below).

4.6:7 Ideally there should, of course, be free travel for 16-19 year olds following any full-time post-16 programme. However the costs of such a recommendation would be prohibitive. At a time of budget pressures, prioritising those young people for whom cost of travel is a barrier to access is not an unreasonable compromise position.

Support for this recommendation

4.6:8 Respondents to the consultation were broadly in favour of this recommendation. Indeed many would go further and implement free travel for all 16-19 year olds scheme; unfortunately without central Government support for this, the cost is prohibitive.

4.6:9 The uncertainty of needing to apply to a provider before discovering whether financial support for travel would be available was specifically referred to as something that needs to be addressed.

4.6:10 Reference was made to the fact that, in some instances, where travel is by bus, providing the means of paying for it does not guarantee that there will be a spare place on the bus on the required service. Greater numbers of people working from home may have a positive effect on service capacity.

4.6:11 It was also suggested that if all students in Kent were truly to be able to access the full range of 16+ opportunities available it might be necessary in some cases to provide support for accommodation: while desirable, this is arguably unachievable at this time (any additional resources might, for instance, be better spent supporting travel for a larger number of young people than residential support for relatively few).

Existing relevant practice

4.6:12 Relevant examples of practice observed during the course of the fieldwork include:

- a. Bursaries up to the full cost of travel to those who otherwise could not afford to attend NACRO's provision.

4.7 Learning from lockdown

Summary of findings from the Review

- 4.7:1 The pandemic and associated lockdown has had many effects on young people's learning. It has obliged providers to consider new ways of working and perhaps make a step change towards "blended learning" and other technology-informed learning styles and delivery – methods that might have taken far longer to introduce incrementally. Some, especially the harder to reach young people, have found these arrangements to be particularly helpful.
- 4.7:2 In some instances there appears to be a rush to return to pre-pandemic modes of delivery, with the risk that what has been learnt and the opportunities that have been created will rapidly be lost.
- 4.7:3 There is an opportunity to identify and consolidate the experiences of new ways of teaching and learning gained during the period since March 2020, and evaluate how they can contribute to a richer variety of styles into the future, help to (re-)engage those who have become detached from learning, and support the delivery of an area offer.
- 4.7:4 If "blended learning" becomes more prevalent students may not need to travel every day: this may help the available support for travel to learning to stretch further (see Section 4.6 above) and indeed support the development of local offers (see Section 4.3).
- 4.7:5 It could also allow for more collaboration between schools and colleges at some geographical distance.

What should be done

- 4.7:6 It is proposed that:
- The lessons to be learnt from lockdown are identified whilst the knowledge gained about these is still fresh in minds
 - A minimum standard of requirements for home-based learning is developed, including software, hardware and broadband access: this should guide 16+ providers and their students when implementing blended learning approaches
 - Circumstances in which students might be given a "right to request" remote or more blended learning (e.g. illness, challenging personal circumstances, etc.) are agreed and protocols are established to encourage students to make appropriate requests
 - Students' use of remote learning is tracked to see whether blended learning does in fact meet the needs and address the issues, whilst not compromising young people's mental health and confidence – if it does how it might further be developed, and if it does not how it can be further adapted such that it provides a workable solution.

Support for this recommendation

- 4.7:7 Again, the consultation showed general support for this recommendation.
- 4.7:8 It was argued that virtual or blended learning was not a “one size fits all” approach: for example, students on lower level courses, and those perhaps less motivated, might struggle more with blended learning more than self-directed learners already performing at a relatively high level.
- 4.7:9 Funding would definitely be needed to offset any access-related inequalities between students whose families could afford to provide adequate technology and those who could not; and this is before factors like the lack of access to a quiet space (about which external agencies can on the face of it do very little) are taken into account.
- 4.7:10 Blended learning might also be relevant in supporting those who are elective home educated [EHE]¹¹⁰.
- 4.7:11 There were however some dissenting voices from colleagues who had found online learning unsatisfactory and were therefore seeking to move away from it in future, as circumstances allowed.
- 4.7:12 It was also pointed out that “semi-blended learning” (where some students are physically present and some are accessing remotely) could be particularly difficult to deliver effectively. Certainly there is a suggestion that some staff are better able to cope with the requirements of remote delivery than others, and that there therefore would be a development need for some staff.
- 4.7:13 Effective virtual learning was also claimed to require significantly more preparation time than providing the equivalent on a face-to-face basis to a physically present class.
- 4.7:14 Concerns were also raised that remote learning may not be as immediately applicable to practical subjects, though equally technology is being successfully applied to the remote delivery of some apparently incompatible vocational subjects (e.g. welding).

Existing relevant practice

- 4.7:15 Relevant examples of practice observed during the course of the fieldwork include:
- a. The Coastal Academies Trust’s use of online workshops to support curriculum delivery and enable access for young people not currently in school

¹¹⁰ Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools has recently suggested that greater regulation of EHE would be worthwhile, perhaps running to a “register” of all pupils and students so educated. Access to blended learning opportunities might make it easier to convince parents and guardians of the value of such registration. This is clearly an all-age and not just a 16+ issue.

- b. Using experience from lockdown, making greater use of the possibilities for remote learning at EKC Group.

4.8 Improving strategic leadership at 16+

Summary of findings from the Review

- 4.8:1 It is clear to any impartial observer that responsibility for post-16 provision is now fragmented across a number of organisations and agencies. The issues raised by this were identified by many interviewees.
- 4.8:2 While there are a number of local coordinating groups and initiatives that have an interest in 16+ provision, there is at present no one forum that, by virtue of its membership, can coordinate the entire 16+ system and, in doing so raise issues, work collaboratively and make real progress, nor a team to facilitate this.
- 4.8:3 Previous Government sponsored arrangements – most recently the Learning and Skills Council [LSC]; before it the Training and Enterprise Councils – did not have responsibility for the full range of provision (in particular schools-based post-16 provision was not within their remit), have been discontinued, and, post- the LSC, not replaced.
- 4.8:4 Also the strategic area review processes – commissioned both under the LSC, and subsequently by the FE Commissioner (between September 2015 and August 2017) – were focussed on GFECs and sixth form colleges. Whilst other provision could opt into the process, and the relevant Regional Schools Commissioner was involved in each Review Steering Group in order to inform it of any gaps or problems in school sixth form provision, no changes in school-based provision could be made as a result of the reviews.
- 4.8:5 Kent's post-16 provision has suffered from the lack of a body that has an overview of the sector. The Review Steering and Working groups have shown the value of bringing together colleagues with an interest or direct involvement in 16+ provision and are keen to see this continue post-Review.

What should be done

- 4.8:6 It is proposed that:
- A 16+ Strategic Board is formed, both to take forward the recommendations of this current review and, subsequently, to take a strategic oversight of the coordination and development of 16+ provision throughout Kent
 - The Board is given a small secretariat, headed by a principal officer, with funding to promote its activities and ensure that work streams are owned and taken forward.
- 4.8:7 The foundations of the Strategic Board might well come from the Steering Group that has overseen the Review. The Group has brought together senior colleagues from the full range of providers in Kent, their representative organisations, and others with a stake in post-16 provision including representatives of employer groups and from

higher education. It has demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that the opportunities for Kent's young people are maximised.

Support for this recommendation

- 4.8:8 The fieldwork established clear support for “something being done” in this regard.
- 4.8:9 The “market economy” created through Government’s abolition of successive coordinating agencies has not, of itself, been effective in ensuring comprehensive or coherent provision (as will have been seen with provision below Level 2) since not all needs may present as financially viable opportunities to providers. Nor can geographical coverage be guaranteed. Providing a forum in which unmet (or insufficiently well met) needs can be identified and provision underwritten (if only morally) will act to the benefit of the group of learners as a whole.
- 4.8:10 This view was echoed during the consultation. (Indeed one consultee remarked that there was a similar need for strategic coordination of pre-16 education provision: this is outside the brief for this Review.)
- 4.8:11 There was some concern over whether a strategic board would have sufficient influence over providers (almost all of which are now independent bodies not subject to any control by KCC or indeed by any other agency) to be able to deliver the level of coordination and strategic direction required. Nevertheless the consensus was that there was potential strength in collaboration and that developing a sense of collective responsibility for the whole 16+ sector was worth pursuing.
- 4.8:12 It is fair to say that support for the provision of a (paid) secretariat was more mixed. However, based on experience of a number of grant-funded coordination initiatives over the years, coordinating teams or groups do tend to need the support of a paid officer to enable them to function.

Existing relevant practice

- 4.8:13 Prototype coordinating boards working across the 16-19 spectrum have been shown to be successful in Thanet. There is also a history of 14-19 planning forums set up to promote diplomas some years ago, which were successful while their funding lasted. These demonstrate that at least in principle the idea is workable. Indeed, they suggest that one approach the Strategic Board might choose to adopt would be to set up “sub-Boards” for different regions of the County, perhaps related to the “areas” in which the area offers (see 4.3 above) are implemented.
- 4.8:14 Indeed sub-Boards might be given specific responsibility for Area Offers.

5 Other recommendations emerging from the fieldwork

Introduction

- 5.0:1 The previous section of this report has identified eight major recommendations which taken together will contribute greatly to the future of 16-19 learning in Kent. However the fieldwork carried out for this project also identified a number of other suggestions for improvement which it is important not to lose.
- 5.0:2 These are included in this section, with references back to their source in the fieldwork findings.
- 5.0:3 Paragraph numbering is designed to reflect the layout of Section 3: there are (as it happens) no paragraphs numbered 5.2.

The offer

Young people in PRUs

- 5.1:1 As noted in 3.1:58, and for understandable reasons, students that transfer out of pupil referral units at 16+ tend to prefer to go to GFECs. It is hardly surprising that having presumably struggled in a school context they do not always find the option of returning to a school sixth form attractive.
- 5.1:2 However this does mean that at present it is difficult for a young person transferring from a PRU to follow an A level programme when they have the ability and interest to do so. As part of the Area Offer arrangements recommended above work should be done to ensure that A levels are offered to this group, where appropriate, in a way that they find easy to access. This might involve, for instance, registration at a GFEC and subsequent attendance at a school sixth form for part of the week.

Equal Opportunities

Supporting aspirations for students with EHCPs

- 5.3:1 Paragraph 3.3:13 suggests that more emphasis should be given to what students with additional needs aspire to do with their lives, as opposed simply to what their additional needs actually are. Where students have significant additional needs, for example at the level where an EHCP is normally required, it is always tempting to find a provider that supports “that kind of need”: ideally the first choice would be a provider that supports the student’s “kind of aspiration”, who can subsequently be helped to meet the additional need concerned if it is not already equipped to do so.

ESOL provision

- 5.3:2 Paragraph 3.3:15 points out the need to re-balance ESOL provision so that it meets demand in all areas of the county.

Pre-Year 12 decision making

Young people “off-rolled”

- 5.4:1 It seems strange that data on the number of pupils that are off-rolled or on reduced timetables is not routinely kept. It is suggested that this data is (by association if not as a direct causal link) a useful indicator of the likelihood of increases in the proportion of pupils becoming NEET at 16+, and that it should be systematically collected and analysed, to the extent it is in KCC’s power to do so. (See paragraph 3.4:31¹¹¹.)

Availability of apprenticeships

- 5.4:2 Insofar as it lies within the Council’s (or indeed any member of the proposed Strategic Board’s) power to do so, steps should be taken to increase the number of good quality apprenticeships available in all vocational areas and at all levels within Kent. It will be difficult to ensure that students take a balanced view of the different options available at 16+ when apprenticeships, as one of the key options, are in short supply. See paragraph 3.4:54. (It is fair to say that post-Covid there are signs of improvement in the supply of apprenticeships.)

Pressures to find work

- 5.4:3 There is a need to continue to counter pressure on their young people to “get a job” of any sort rather than stay in education, training or employment-with-training (paragraph 3.4:48). This is a particular issue for ex-PRU pupils, though the fieldwork found pressure to work being applied to high school leavers at 16 and 18.

Existing relevant practice

- 5.4:4 Relevant examples of practice observed during the course of the fieldwork include:
- a. The work of the independent CEIAG advisor at Birchwood PRU to enable pupils to apply successfully to their preferred post-16 destination.

¹¹¹ The Education Policy Institute has conducted research in this area (see for example **Unexplained pupil exits from schools: A growing problem?** April 2019. <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/unexplained-pupil-exits/>) and has recently suggested that schools should be measured on the extent to which they exclude or off-roll pupils (reported in the media at the end of January 2022 – see <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jan/31/schools-should-be-ranked-on-exclusions-as-well-as-gcses-say-experts>).

Transition into post-16 provision

From a school to another provider

- 5.5:1 More could be done to ensure that students transferring to a *different* 11-18 school (or indeed from an 11-16 school) for A level studies are fully supported through the transition process. This is particularly important since in many cases they will be joining an established peer group that may have known each other since the age of 11: their assimilation into this group cannot be left to chance. (Paragraph 3.5:8.)
- 5.5:2 Equally, where students are leaving an 11-18 school at 16 in order to attend other provision – even if these are in the minority – then a full transition programme will be needed for them. It is too simple to see that responsibility for this programme is fully in the hands of the “receiving” provider; schools also have a responsibility in these cases to ensure that transition is fully supported (Paragraph 3.5:12.)

Support post-transition

- 5.5:3 Post-transition support (that is, ensuring that a 16+ placement does not “fail”) may primarily be the responsibility of the post-16 provider, but the pre-16 school also has a role to play. In particular, its staff are likely to be more familiar with any additional needs or behaviour issues that may be affecting how the young person “settles into” their new placement.
- 5.5:4 Within the area offer framework, consideration should therefore be given to explicitly involving pre-16 schools alongside post-16 providers in transition support. Certainly early reference should be made to a student’s pre-16 setting in any instance where a course or placement appears to be starting to break down (Paragraph 3.5:29).
- 5.5:5 To enable the NEET support service to find and support NEET young people, education providers should report when a young person leaves their institution to the teams as soon as possible. Also, to make tracking young people easier, schools should ensure that all young people’s contact details are up to date.

Existing relevant practice

- 5.5:6 Relevant examples of practice observed during the course of the fieldwork include:
- a. Broadstairs College (EKC Group)’s work to give applicants a sense that they are already part of the college before they start in September
 - b. EKC Group’s focus on application, admission and induction activities taking place at departmental, rather than whole college, level
 - c. Broadstairs College (EKC Group)’s work with the EHCP cohort from Year 9 onwards to ensure that their post-16 options are established as early as possible, and that their education experience to 16 and their transition to post-16 can be properly planned

- d. Goldwyn School's work with post-16 providers to ensure that their young people transition successfully from the School into their provision
- e. Mid Kent College transition team's work with school to ensure supported transition for students that need it.

Delivery

Gifted and talented students

- 5.6:1 Between 2002 and 2010 additional support for "gifted and talented" young people was a focus of Government policy, with specific interventions to help them achieve to the full extent of their ability pre- and post-16. The fieldwork for the Review suggested that, over time, this specific focus has perhaps been lost and that more could be done to support "gifted and talented" students, and to ensure that these students consider the full range of opportunities open to them post-18 (Paragraph 3.6:15).

Employer involvement

- 5.6:2 Anything that can be done to widen the circle of local employers that support post-16 education (whether by providing work placements, by engaging with CEIAG, or in other ways) would reduce the number of times the same few employers are called upon and generally improve provision (Paragraph 3.6:17). In this context the CEC is setting up "cornerstone" employer groups. Cornerstone Employers "work with networks of schools and colleges to improve careers education, make sure key skills for their sector are understood by teachers and education leaders, inspire students, champion jobs in their local area, and have a direct route into potential new employees living on their doorstep."¹¹² Greater support from all partners would be helpful here.

Existing relevant practice

- 5.6:3 Relevant examples of practice observed during the course of the fieldwork include:
- a. Support for Marsh Academy's gifted and talented students through the Kent Academies Network's *University Access Programme* and the School's football and rugby academies

¹¹² See the Careers and Enterprise Company's fuller description at <https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/employers/become-a-cornerstone-employer/>, from where this extract is taken.

- b. The “Cranbrook Sixth Form Diploma”, which is an enrichment, extension and employability programme that all students are expected to achieve during their time in the School’s sixth form.

Outcomes

Progression from FE to HE

- 5.7:1 It was suggested that GFECs were perhaps less strong at providing ongoing pathways to higher education for their 16-19 students, even when they have followed programmes that would entitle them to progress in this way. GFECs might wish to review their existing practice in this regard (Paragraph 3.7:20).

Disparities by district

- 5.7:2 The disparities between outcomes in different areas of Kent are marked (see the diagram at paragraph 3.7:22). While some disparities might be expected given that Kent is not economically or socially homogeneous, it would be worth reviewing – perhaps as part of the Area Offer implementation – whether social or economic factors really do fully explain the disparities highlighted. If not, there is evidence here to inform the work on enhancing students’ aspirations (and those of their influencers).

Disparities by (dis)advantage

- 5.7:3 In particular, the disparity between progression by disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students seems particularly great: this itself suggests that aspirations may be an issue.

English and Mathematics

- 5.7:4 The strategy of expecting young people who have not achieved an adequate grade in GCSE English and Mathematics to retake the qualification(s) concerned is clearly not working; the proportion of students attaining a Level 2 in English and Mathematics by age 19 (who had not already done so by age 16) is lower in Kent than its already low base in England as a whole. (See the graph at paragraph 3.7:47 above.)
- 5.7:5 There is something fundamentally wrong with a system that puts young people through a process that only around a quarter of them “pass”. Retaking these qualifications only to get the same grade (or indeed a lower one) is a highly dispiriting experience. It is recommended that early consideration be given to finding a better way of providing basic Level 2 literacy and numeracy to 16-19 students that do not already have it, investigating how to improve this progression (including identifying good practice and sharing it, designing new methods, new pedagogy), and lobbying examining boards and Government to bring about the necessary reforms and revisions.

- 5.7:6 Functional skills qualifications may provide an alternative, and it has been suggested that learners following functional skills programmes in alternative 16-19 provision, where the programmes are fully integrated with their learning, may have better success than those at college. However many qualifications in alternative 16-19 provision are at Level 2 (meaning the Mathematics and English requirements are at Level 1, and consequently less demanding on the learner).

Post-Year 13 decision making and transition

Better support for progression

- 5.8:1 Schools need to continue to prioritise support for progression post-year 13, in particular to counter any tendency among disadvantaged but potentially able young people to consider only a narrow range of possible destinations (Paragraph 3.8:11).
- 5.8:2 Schools should also support those that decide to progress to opportunities other than higher education (Paragraph 3.8:19).

Existing relevant practice

- 5.8:3 Relevant examples of practice observed during the course of the fieldwork include:
- a. The UTC's *Routes to Success* programme, through which the options available to students once they leave the UTC are presented and discussed from mid-year 12
 - b. The Coastal Academies Trust's work with the University of Kent to encourage more disadvantaged young people to consider a career in medicine through a post-IBCP transition Year 14
 - c. Broadstairs College (EKC Group)'s work to secure employment-based outcomes for their students, including "early leavers", through a range of support
 - d. NACRO maintains regular phone contact with young people for 12 months after they have left its provision.

Future viability of provision

Lack of apprenticeships

- 5.9:1 The shortage of apprenticeships continues to be a major issue, and has already been referred to in this Section (paragraph 5.4:1, referencing paragraph 3.4:53; also paragraph 3.9:27). For young people the issue has at least two dimensions – the lack of good opportunities at 16 or 18, and the lack of pathways beyond this to the achievement of higher level qualifications via an apprenticeship route.

Lack of staff

- 5.9:2 A major threat to future viability of provision is the shortage of appropriately trained, qualified and experienced staff. This conclusion will come as no surprise. The Strategic Board might consider what long-term steps could be taken within Kent to increase the attractiveness of post-16 teaching/lecturing/instructing as a career. Any steps taken would not self-evidently have an immediate effect but might generate improvements in the staff supply position in the longer term (Paragraph 3.9:30).

Collaboration

Need for improved collaboration

- 5.10:1 Collaboration lies at the heart of the “Area Offer” major recommendation (see Section 4.3 above) and both the difficulties and the good practice outlined in Section 3.10 will be relevant as this recommendation is implemented.
- 5.10:2 It is also potentially relevant in other aspects of post-16 provision – staff recruitment and training, and in collectively addressing particular issues (e.g. provision for the potentially NEET group of young people; meeting the challenge of improving attainment in English and maths at Level 2).

Existing relevant practice

- 5.10:3 Relevant examples of practice observed during the course of the fieldwork include:
- a. The collective and collaborative action taken by schools in conjunction with other providers in Thanet to reduce the number of young people who are NEET in the district
 - b. East Kent Learning Alliance’s work across local schools in the Thanet area to: improve teacher recruitment; support, train and develop staff; and raise teaching standards.

The impact of Covid-19

- 5.11:1 As employment sectors closed down, or were attenuated, during the pandemic students naturally found it less easy to consider work-based alternative destinations 16+, or at 19+, than would normally have been the case. This may mean that some students who would normally have transferred to such destinations decided instead to stay in academic education (school sixth forms, or higher education, respectively).
- 5.11:2 Many of these students will succeed, and in any case it is of course impossible to identify the individuals concerned with any certainty. However 16-19 providers should be alert for “more students than might be usual” struggling with academic 16-19 study, and also stand by to advise students in danger of “dropping out” of higher education if these students return to them for advice (which of course they may not). (See paragraph 3.11:30.)

6 Conclusion

A major review

- 6.1 It will be clear to readers of this Report that the County Council's Review of 16-19 provision has been a major undertaking. The range of provision on offer in this as in any county is significant, and the preceding sections have made major recommendations covering almost every aspect of this provision.
- 6.2 16-19 provision is also, self-evidently, in the hands of an equally diverse range of providers, very few of whom (arguably none) are within the direct sphere of control of the Council. Correspondingly, few of the recommendations here can be introduced by fiat – even if this was possible, it would not be desirable to do so. The implementation of each recommendation will require discussion, persuasion, negotiation, and ongoing support.
- 6.3 And, perhaps inevitably, the Review has taken place in the context of further planned major changes to the post-16 vocational landscape, which while perhaps postponed are not likely to be abandoned entirely¹¹³.

A major opportunity

- 6.4 Yet the responses of those interviewed as part of this Review indicate that there is a willingness to look anew at the provision of post-16 learning in the county, and in particular to collaborate on improving the offer made to all young people. Kent's Pledge strapline is "Making Kent a county that works for all children", and in support of this all Review interviewees are equally committed to making the county work for all 16-19 year olds.
- 6.5 Collaboration is not straightforward to achieve, and in particular to maintain: collaborative partnerships require ongoing support and reinforcement once the initial enthusiasm starts to fade (and as the initial enthusiasts move on). Yet if collaboration is supported it can achieve significant results. Within a collaborative framework, all the recommendations in this Report can be implemented, and will individually and collectively make a significant difference to the life chances of Kent young people.
- 6.6 This Report therefore represents a major opportunity for step change in 16-19 provision in Kent. It is commended to all interested parties.

¹¹³ Major changes to the vocational qualifications framework have, of course, been all too frequent in recent years. Many believe that new arrangements tend to be introduced before previous initiatives have had time to take full effect. In contrast, it could be argued that there has not been a really fundamental change to "academic" 16-19 education since the introduction of Advanced Level qualifications in 1951.

Annexes

Annex 1**The 16-19 Review Steering Group**

The members of the 16-19 Review Steering Group, as at the conclusion of the Review, are listed below.

Members

Christine McInnes - Director of Education, KCC (Chair)

Michelle Stanley - Education Lead Adviser and Review Lead, KCC

Lee Kane - Headteacher, Astor School

John Somers – Headteacher, Wyvern School

Graham Razey - CEO, East Kent College Group

Pauline Smith – CEO, CXK

Will Calver – Widening Access Consultant, University of Greenwich

Tracy-Anne Barker /Tim Aker, Federation of Small Businesses

Christie Ransom - Head of 6th Form, Maidstone Girls' Grammar School, Chair of KMGSA

Phil Larter, Assistant Headteacher, Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School Faversham, Acting Chair of KMGSA

Tim Rowe – Managing Director, eTraining Ltd.

Jo James OBE – Chief Executive, Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce

Alan Shaw - Senior Manager, Further Education Directorate, ESFA

In attendance

Mike Rayner - Principal Post-16 Lead, TEP

David Lucas – Principal Associate, acl Consulting

John Atkins – Principal Associate, acl Consulting

Wendy Dunmill – Business Support Officer, KCC

The 16-19 Review Working Group

The members of the Working Group were as follows:

Michelle Stanley (Chair) - Education Lead Adviser and Review Lead, KCC

Mike Rayner - Principal Post-16 Lead, TEP

Allan Baillie - Skills and Employability Manager, Adult Skills, KCC

David Knox - Apprenticeship Lead, TEP

Sam Birkin - Analyst Manager - Projects, KCC

Paul Manning – Lead Officer Alternative Provision, KCC

Siobhan Price – Education Officer, Mainstream Inclusion, KCC

David Lucas - Principal Associate, acl consulting

John Atkins - Principal Associate, acl consulting

Wendy Dunmill – Business Support Officer, KCC.

Annex 2**Interview schedules for the fieldwork interviews**

As mentioned in the main text, fieldwork interviews (carried out remotely using appropriate video technology) were underpinned by interview schedules that led interviewees through the eleven topics of the Review (see paragraph E2:3 and elsewhere). A total of five interview schedules were prepared, covering:

- 11-16 schools, and those responsible for Key Stage 4 in 11-18 schools
- 16-19 providers (including 11-18 schools' sixth forms)
- General interviewees
- Young people in years 10 and 11 (by focus group)
- Young people in years 12 and 13, or equivalent in vocational education (by focus group).

The schedules covered very largely the same ground, but were adjusted for present/past tense as appropriate and with questions not pertinent to a particular set of interviewees omitted.

One sample schedule is provided below.

Kent County Council and partners: Review of post-16 education

Proforma for recording interviews and discussions

16-19 providers

Background information

Interviewee(s)	
Organisation	
Date and time	
Team member(s)	

Learner strands covered by this organisation's provision		
1	Learners holding a full Level 2 and seeking to follow an academic pathway	
2	Learners holding a full Level 2, and seeking to follow a fully or partly vocational pathway, including Applied General Qualifications	
3	Learners not yet holding a full Level 2, but with the potential and a level of engagement with learning that will enable them to do so	
4	Learners not holding a full Level 2 whose additional difficulties (including a lack of engagement with education, if present) mean that they may need additional support if they are to reach their potential	

Interview write-up

Introductory questions	
1	A brief introduction to the organisation
2	Geographical area covered
3	Any other helpful background details etc.
Your 16-19 offer	
4	The current "offer" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmes, qualifications, etc. involved • "Strands" addressed?

5	How do young people find out about the offer?	
6	Gaps in the current offer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are they? • To what extent are they filled by what is available more widely? 	
7	How well does the 11-16 sector prepare young people for the range of programmes you offer at 16+?	
8	What factors beyond your immediate control are having an impact on your offer? (What would you like to do but cannot?)	
9	How does your offer, or any elements of it, relate to employer demand within Kent, or more widely?	
Where relevant, highlight: variations in any of the above by strand; anything that seems particularly strong practice or that needs to change; any suggested improvements.		
Location, access, and structure		
10	Does your provision meet the demand for it? Can you offer it where it is required (geographically)?	
11	Do travel to learn issues impact on young people's ability to access any of your offer?	
12	What is the impact of the structure of the post-16 system on opportunities for young people?	
Where relevant, highlight: variations in any of the above by strand; anything that seems particularly strong practice or that needs to change; any suggested improvements.		
Equality of opportunity		
13	Are all sectors of the community equally represented in your provision? Are there any "barriers to learning" affecting specific groups? What can be done about them?	

Where relevant, highlight: variations in any of the above by strand; anything that seems particularly strong practice or that needs to change; any suggested improvements.	
Pre-Year 12 decision making	
14 The quality of advice and support on post-16 options Is more support necessary? For/from whom?	
15 Impact of economic considerations on young people's choices	
16 Relative status of post-16 destinations How does this affect decisions taken by young people?	
17 External pressures on the decision-making process?	
Where relevant, highlight: variations in any of the above by strand; anything that seems particularly strong practice or that needs to change; any suggested improvements.	
Transition (into post-16)	
18 Support for transition into a new post-16 learning environment for those: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing with you (if relevant) • Joining you from elsewhere 	
19 Support in adapting to new environments, learning styles and/or expectations	
20 'Transition failure' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What causes it? • How can it be addressed? 	
Where relevant, highlight: variations in any of the above by strand; anything that seems particularly strong practice or that needs to change; any suggested improvements.	

Delivery	
21	How does the availability of resources affect delivery?
22	Support for those with additional needs, including those who fall behind <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is provided? • How effective is this support? • How do you support gifted and talented learners?
23	What are the reasons for non-completion? What can be done?
24	What engagement is there with employers? Is it sufficient to underwrite delivery?
Where relevant, highlight: variations in any of the above by strand; anything that seems particularly strong practice or that needs to change; any suggested improvements.	
Outcomes	
25	What are regarded as successful outcomes from your programmes? What proportion of your young people achieve a satisfactory outcome?
26	What prevents your young people from achieving to their full potential (or hinders their progress)? What might be done about this?
Where relevant, highlight: variations in any of the above by strand; anything that seems particularly strong practice or that needs to change; any suggested improvements.	
Post-programme decision making (and onward transition)	
27	Support for young people deciding on what to do next Is more support necessary? For, and from, whom?
28	How are particularly high-achieving, and particularly low-achieving, young people supported?

29 How do external pressures affect young people's decision-making processes?	
30 What knowledge do young people have of the employment and skills landscape when considering what they might do next?	
31 How do you support onward transition? What more might be done, and by whom?	
Where relevant, highlight: variations in any of the above by strand; anything that seems particularly strong practice or that needs to change; any suggested improvements.	
Future viability of provision	
32 How viable is your offer? Which elements or programmes are considered to be vulnerable and why?	
33 How easy is it to deliver provision as you would like/appropriately?	
34 How open are you to expanding (or contracting) provision in response to (anticipation of) changes in demand?	
35 What changes to provision have you made recently? What changes are currently being contemplated?	
36 Where are/would you be vulnerable to changes in national Government policy (as far as these can be predicted)?	
Where relevant, highlight: variations in any of the above by strand; anything that seems particularly strong practice or that needs to change; any suggested improvements.	
Collaboration	
37 Is (could) any of your provision (be) delivered collaboratively?	
38 What might collaboration involve? What advantages would it offer?	
39 What factors are supportive of collaboration What works against it?	

Where relevant, highlight: variations in any of the above by strand; anything that seems particularly strong practice or that needs to change; any suggested improvements.	
Covid-19	
40 Impact on provision, how it is delivered etc.?	
41 Impact on your young people, their learning, and the opportunities open to them at 16 and 19?	
42 Are these impacts likely to be short-term or more long-term/fundamental?	
Where relevant, highlight: variations in any of the above by strand; anything that seems particularly strong practice or that needs to change; any suggested improvements.	
General	
43 Any further comments about 16 to 19 provision in Kent	

Glossary

AGQ	Advanced general qualification
ALS	Additional learning support
AS	Advanced subsidiary [level qualifications]
ASK	Apprenticeships Skills Knowledge [programme]
BTEC	The Business and Technology Education Council
CAMHS	Child and adolescent mental health services
CEC	The Careers & Enterprise Company
CEIAG	Careers education, information, advice, and guidance
CYPE	Children, Young People & Education (a Directorate within KCC)
CYPMHS	Children and young people's mental health services
DfE	The Department for Education
EHCP	Education, health, and care plan
EHE	[Young people who are] electively home educated
EKC	East Kent College – in this report usually used in the format “[college name] (EKC Group)”
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
ERDF	The European Regional Development Fund
ESF	The European Social Fund
ESFA	The Education & Skills Funding Agency
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
FE	Further education
FSM	Free school meals
GCE	General Certificate of Education Advanced Level – more commonly known as an A level
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education

GFEC	General further education college
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
IAG	Information, advice, and guidance
IB	International Baccalaureate
IBCP	The International Baccalaureate Careers Programme
IBDP	The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme
ICT	Information and communications technology
IFS	The Institute for Fiscal Studies
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
ISP	Independent specialist provider [for young people with SEND]
IT	Information technology
KCC	Kent County Council
KFE	Kent Further Education
KMGSA	The Kent & Medway Grammar Schools Association
KMPF	The Kent and Medway Progression Federation
KSE	Kent Supported Employment [Service]
LA	Local authority
LAIT	Local Authority Interactive Tool
LLMI	Local labour market information
LSC	The Learning & Skills Council
LSOA	Lower Super Output Area
MAT	Multi-Academy Trust
NACRO	The National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders – though, reflecting the wider focus of its work, in practice it now goes by the acronym and no longer uses the full translation
NCS	The National Careers Service

NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NHS	The National Health Service
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
RPA	Raising of the participation age
SELEP	The South East Local Enterprise Partnership
SEND	Special educational needs and [or] disabilities
SLT	Senior leadership team
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
TEP	The Education People
TLA	Teaching and learning activities
UCAS	The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UKSPF	The UK Shared Prosperity Fund
UTC	University Technical College
YPPO	Young People's Progression Officer

