Department for Education

CAYT Centre for Analysis of
Youth Transitions

Raising the Participation Age:

A survey of local authorities' preparations for full participation in 2013/2015

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a survey of local authorities (LAs), examining preparations for Raising the Participation Age (RPA), conducted by NatCen Social Research on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE).

The age at which young people in England are required to continue in education or training is due to go up to the end of the academic year they turn 17 in 2013 and to their 18th birthday in 2015. Local authorities have a key role in preparing for RPA.

The survey excluded the 35 LAs who have been involved in the first 3 phases of the locally-led delivery projects for RPA. All other LAs in England with responsibility for education (117) were included. Ninety-two LAs (a response rate of 79%) took part in a survey about their preparations for RPA, during the period 2nd to 28th February 2012. They were given the option of completing the survey online or over the telephone.

Key findings

- 67 per cent of LAs had a written strategy for RPA in place

- The vast majority of LAs reported that it was easy to engage with maintained schools, special schools and Further Education (FE) Colleges about RPA

- The majority of LAs reported that it had not been easy to engage with employers or parents and carers about RPA

- 93 per cent of LAs had been in touch with other LAs to share best practice about RPA

- 59 per cent of LAs had completed work to estimate the numbers of young people in the 16-17 age cohort in 2013

- 23 per cent of LAs had completed the development of a Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI)

- The majority of LAs rated their overall level of preparation for RPA as 7 (39 per cent) or 6 (24 per cent) out of 10, with 1 being least prepared and 10 the most prepared The lowest rating given was 2 (by one LA) and one other LA gave a rating of 3 out of 10. The highest rating given was 9 out of 10, by just five per cent of LAs.

- The most common suggestions for additional support that could be provided by DfE were national guidelines, additional funding, national communication of the RPA message and dissemination of best practice.

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of a survey of local authorities (LAs), examining preparations for Raising the Participation Age (RPA), conducted by NatCen Social Research on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE).

1.1 RPA

The age at which young people in England are required to continue in education or training is due to go up to the end of the academic year they turn 17 in 2013 and to their 18th birthday in 2015. Young people will be able to choose from the following options:

- full-time education, such as school, college or home education

- an Apprenticeship

- part-time education or training if they are employed, self-employed or volunteering for 20 hours or more a week.

LAs have been given a key role in preparations for RPA, to champion the needs of young people in their areas and work with local partners to achieve full participation.

1.2 The survey

The Department for Education commissioned NatCen Social Research to conduct a survey of LAs to look at preparations for RPA. The purpose of the survey was to examine:
- What activities LAs have undertaken already and what activities are planned to prepare for RPA;
- How LAs are working with other partners to prepare for RPA;
- What the priorities are for delivering full participation; and,
- What additional support might be useful to help LAs prepare for RPA.

This survey excluded the 35 LAs who have been involved in the first 3 phases of the locally-led delivery projects for RPA but included all other LAs in England with responsibility for education (117). A total of 92 LAs took part in the survey, a response rate of 79 per cent. LAs were given the option of taking part in the survey online or by telephone. The survey was open from 2nd to 28th February 2012. The questionnaire used for the survey can be found in Appendix A of this report.

The Department for Education wished to identify individual LAs who might benefit from additional support with their preparations for RPA. Therefore LAs who took part in the survey were asked for permission for their responses to be identified to the Department. Seventy-five of the 92 LAs who took part in the survey agreed that their responses could be identified.

This report contains the anonymised responses of all 92 LAs who took part in the survey.
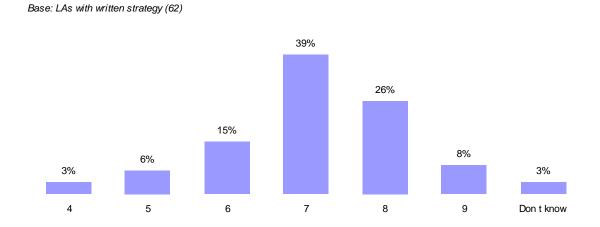
2 Survey findings

2.1 Planning for RPA

Two-thirds (67 per cent) of LAs had a written strategy in place for RPA. All except two of these authorities had developed this strategy in consultation with local partners, for example, schools, colleges and the local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

LAs with a written strategy in place were asked to rate how effective they thought this strategy will be in achieving full participation, using a scale from 1 (least effective) to 10 (most effective). The majority rated the strategy 7 (39 per cent) or 8 (26 per cent) out of 10 (Figure 2.1.1). The lowest rating given was 4 (by three per cent of LAs) while six per cent gave a rating of 5 out of 10.

Figure 2.1.1 Effectiveness of written strategy for RPA (rating from 1 to 10)

Base: LAs with written strategy (62)

When asked the reasons for the rating they had given, 24 per cent referred to the positive partnerships that had been established but a similar proportion (23 per cent) mentioned challenges in establishing partnerships. Good understanding of the cohort was mentioned by 23 per cent of LAs while 18 per cent cited difficulties in engaging young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) or hard to reach young people.
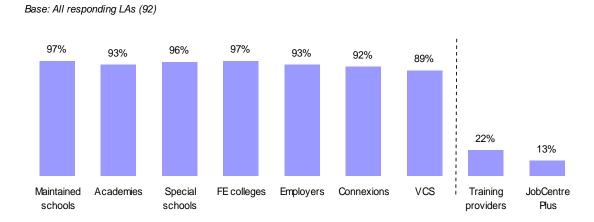
LAs were asked to name the main challenges in their area for achieving full participation. The most common issues mentioned were:
- Lack of work-based learning opportunities (43%)
- Vulnerable learners (37%)
- Tracking young people (21%)
- Geographical issues (14%)

2.2 Partnership working

Most LAs were working with a range of partners to prepare for RPA. Ninety-seven per cent were working with maintained schools and the same proportion were working with Further Education (FE) Colleges; 96 per cent were working with maintained special schools and 93 per cent with academies (Figure 2.2.1). Ninety three per cent of LAs were working with employers and 92 per cent with Connexions, while 89 per cent were working with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). When prompted to mention other organisations they were working in partnership with, 22 per cent mentioned training organisations and 13 per cent mentioned Job Centre Plus.

Figure 2.2.1 Partnership organisations for delivering RPA

Base: All responding LAs (92)

Note to Figure 2.2.1: Training providers and JobCentre Plus were mentioned spontaneously by LAs, other organisations were prompted.

LAs were asked, for each of the partner organisations that they were working with, how easy they had found it to engage with them. Partnerships with schools and colleges were generally positive, with most LAs saying it was very easy or quite easy to engage with maintained schools (91 per cent), special schools (92 per cent) and FE colleges (93 per cent) (Figure 2.2.2). Engagement with academies was slightly more mixed with 75 per cent saying that this was very easy or quite easy. LAs who reported that engagement with academies was not easy tended to say that this was because academies did not want to engage with the LA.

Engagement with employers appeared to be more problematic for the majority of LAs. Only 18 per cent said that it was very or quite easy to engage with employers, with 59 per cent saying it was 'not very easy'. The most common reasons given for difficulties engaging with employers were that local employers tended to be small or medium businesses (cited by 42 per cent), that there was not a clear message to communicate (23 per cent) and the lack of an existing forum or structure in which to engage with employers (21 per cent).
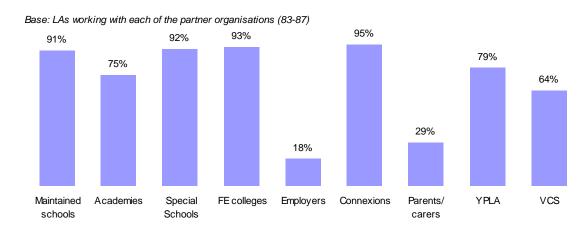
Engagement with parents and carers also presented challenges for LAs, with just 29 per cent saying that this was very or quite easy. The most common reason given by LAs for finding engagement with parents difficult was having to go through schools to do this, as they did not have structures set up to communicate directly with parents. Other issues mentioned included: the need to communicate with parents, lack of resource or capacity for engaging parents and the challenges of communicating with particular groups of

parents who were less likely to be engaged with schools (parents of 'hard to reach' young people, parents of young people in jobs without training).

The Connexions service was reported to be very or quite easy to engage by 95 per cent of the LAs working with Connexions, perhaps unsurprisingly given LAs' responsibility for Connexions. The Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) was felt by 79 per cent of LAs to be very or quite easy to engage.

The majority of LAs (64 per cent) reported finding it very or quite easy to engage with the VCS.

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Figure 2.2.2 Ease of engaging different partners (% rating each very or quite easy to engage)

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Base: LAs working with each of the partner organisations (83-87)

Most LAs (93 per cent) said that they had been in touch with other LAs in the context of RPA, to share best practice.

2.3   Activities undertaken to prepare for RPA

LAs were asked to list the activities they had already undertaken to prepare for RPA and, separately, the activities they were planning to carry out.

Most LAs reported having carried out a number of activities already. The most commonly cited activities were:
- Analysis of the cohort (50%)
- Communications strategy underway (37%)
- Identifying gaps in provision (35%)
- Establishing a planning group (33%)
- Improving tracking (24%)
- Holding an event or conference (23%)
- Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) developed (21%)[1]
- Data sharing (17%)
- Promotion to parents and young people (14%)

When asked what activities were planned but not yet underway, the most common activity was further communication and marketing, mentioned by 42 per cent of LAs. Other activities planned included engagement with post-16 providers (20 per cent), development of a RONI (17 per cent), tracking young people (12 per cent), more detailed data analysis (10 per cent), data sharing (nine per cent).

When asked specifically if the authority had developed a RONI, 23 per cent said this was complete while 46 per cent said that it was underway (Figure 2.3.1). A quarter (25 per cent) of LAs were planning to develop a RONI but had not yet started, while five per cent said that they were not planning to develop one.

The majority of LAs (59 per cent) had completed work to estimate the numbers of young people in the 16-17 cohort in 2013, while 35 per cent said that this work was underway and seven per cent that it was planned but not yet underway.
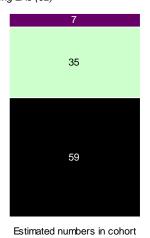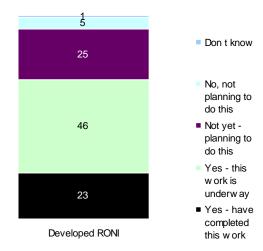
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[1] A Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) is a tool to identify young people in secondary schools who may be at risk of becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

Base: All responding LAs (92)

Estimated numbers in cohort   Developed RONI

Legend:
- Don t know
- No, not planning to do this
- Not yet - planning to do this
- Yes - this work is underway
- Yes - have completed this work

2.4   Identifying young people

When asked to list the priority groups of young people not in education or training in their area, the majority of LAs mentioned young people with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LLDD) (63 per cent), children in or leaving care (63 per cent) and young parents/ pregnant learners (62 per cent). Almost half of LAs (49 per cent) mentioned young offenders as a priority group. Other groups mentioned by a minority of LAs were low educational achievers (22 per cent), those in Jobs Without Training (13 per cent) and those living in particular wards (12 per cent).

LAs were asked if they faced any challenges identifying young people in their area at risk of not participating in education or training. The most common challenges mentioned were engagement with schools and academies (24 per cent), tracking young people who moved in or out of the area (20 per cent), and staffing or funding cuts (18 per cent). Seventeen per cent of LAs said that they did not face any challenges in doing this.
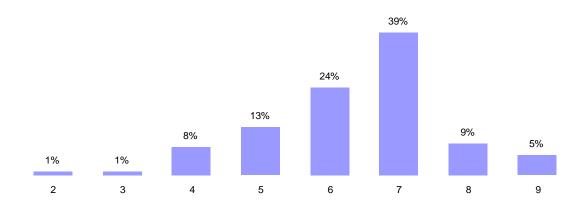
When asked if they faced any challenges identifying and re-engaging young people who dropped out of education or training, LAs cited difficulties tracking young people (33 per cent), the availability of provision (21 per cent), having less funding available (21 per cent) and challenges in communicating with these young people (14 per cent).

2.5   Overall preparedness and support needed

LAs were asked to rate their level of preparedness for RPA on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 was 'not at all prepared' and 10 was 'very well prepared'. The majority of LAs gave a rating of 7 (39 per cent) or 6 (24 per cent) out of 10 for their overall level of preparation (Figure 2.5.1). The lowest rating given was 2 (by one LA) and one other LA gave a rating of 3 out of 10. The highest rating given was 9 out of 10, by just five per cent of LAs.

Figure 2.3.1 Overall rating of how prepared LA is for RPA (using scale from 1 to 10)

Base: All responding LAs (92)

LAs identified a number of areas where the Department for Education could support them in their preparations for RPA. Provision of clear guidelines on RPA preparation was suggested by almost half of authorities (49 per cent) while 18 per cent specifically suggested guidance for partnership working. More than a third of LAs (35 per cent) suggested that DfE could provide additional funding for RPA preparation. National communication of the RPA message was suggested by 30 per cent of LAs. A further suggestion was that the Department could disseminate best practice and feedback to LAs (mentioned by 26 per cent).

3 Conclusions

In this section we draw together the main themes emerging from the survey findings.

RPA preparations appeared to be underpinned by strategic planning in the majority of LAs, with two-thirds having a written strategy specifically for RPA and most of these LAs thinking that this strategy would be effective in delivering full participation.

LAs were working in partnership with other organisations to deliver RPA. Engagement appeared to be easier where there were existing mechanisms for partnership working, for example with schools and colleges. Employers were identified as being more difficult to engage with because of their diversity and because LAs were less likely to be working with them already in a related context. This may be an area where additional support, for example guidance on how to engage employers or the dissemination of best practice, would be welcomed.

While many LAs had begun work to communicate the RPA message, the majority were not finding it easy to engage parents and carers. This tended to be because LAs did not have mechanisms in place for direct communication and were reliant on schools to disseminate information. With further work on communications planned in LAs, this might also be an area where additional guidance would be helpful.

LAs were at different stages in their activities to analyse the cohort. Most had begun work to estimate the numbers in the 2013 cohort and the majority had completed this work. While fewer LAs had completed work on developing a Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI), most (but not all) were planning to do this as part of their RPA preparations. Tracking young people was identified as a challenge, particularly those who moved in or out of the LA. The sharing of best practice on developing a RONI and tracking young people may be helpful for those LAs who are at an earlier stage in these activities.

The economic context was felt by some LAs to be having a number of impacts on preparations for RPA. A lack of employment opportunities that could offer training was affecting the level of provision in some areas. Reductions in funding, meant that some LAs were finding it difficult to resource the work that they needed to do to prepare for RPA, while post-16 provision had also been affected by funding cuts in some areas. More than a third of LAs (35 per cent) suggested that additional funding from DfE would be useful.

Many LAs identified vulnerable learners, particularly those who did not come within mainstream provision, as a challenge for delivering participation. Learners with LDD, those in care/ leaving care and young parents were the most common priority groups not in education or training. Identifying appropriate provision for these groups was felt to be a challenge by some LAs.

The types of support that LAs felt would be most useful from DfE (apart from additional funding) tended to be the provision of guidelines, best practice and national-level communication, perhaps indicating a desire for a clearer central steer and higher national profile for RPA.

Appendix A   Questionnaire

P3151 RPA LA Survey Questionnaire

ASK ALL
INTRO
Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey. The purpose of this study is to find out more about how Local Authorities are preparing for Raising Participation Age (RPA). The information will be used to help DfE develop its RPA implementation strategy, including the package of support for Local Areas in Raising the Participation Age in 2013 and 2015.

PERMIS
DfE want to use the findings of this survey to decide how best to support local authorities' preparations for RPA, including support to individual local authorities. Therefore they would like to identify the responses of local authorities to the survey. The responses of local authorities will only be identified to DfE and will not be identified in any published reports. Can I have your permission to identify your local authority?
Yes
No

IF NO
PERMIS2
As you have not given permission for your local authority to be identified, your responses will only be presented to DfE in an anonymised form.

ASK ALL
INTRO2
Firstly, some questions about planning…

STRAT1
Does the Local Authority have a written strategy in place for delivering full participation?

Yes
No
Don't know

IF YES AT STRAT1
STRAT2
How effective do you think this strategy will be in achieving full participation in your area on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being least effective and 10 the most effective?

1….10

If partially effective or ineffective at strat2
Why is that?
[OPEN]

IF YES AT STRAT1

STRATP
Has the LA developed this strategy in conjunction with local partners (e.g. schools, colleges, VCS)?
Yes
No

PRIORM
Now thinking in general about RPA in your local authority. What would you say are the main challenges in your local area in relation to preparing for delivering full participation?
[OPEN]

ASK ALL
PART
Is the Local Authority working with other organisations in the local area to prepare for RPA? If so, which ones?
[Please select all that apply/ READ OUT]

LA Maintained Schools
Academies
Maintained special schools
FE Colleges
Employers
Connexions
VCS organisations
Other (please specify)
None
Don't know

1. working with or planning to work with
2. not planning to work with

ENGAGE
How easy has the Local Authority found it to engage with ….. to prepare for RPA?'
    a) LA Maintained schools
    b) Academies
    c) Maintained special schools
    d) FE Colleges
    e) Employers
    f) Connexions
    g) Parents and carers
    h) YPLA
    i) VCS organisations

Very easy
Quite easy
Not very easy
Not at all easy
Don't know
Not applicable

FOR EACH ANSWERING 'NOT VERY/ NOT AT ALL EASY'
ENGHARD
Why has it not been easy to engage [textfill] ? [OPEN]

ASK ALL
SHARE
Have you been in contact with any other LAs / areas in the context of RPA, to share best practice etc?
Yes
No

ASK ALL
INFO1
Thinking about the local authority's preparations for RPA, what work has the local authority undertaken so far? Please include any activities that are underway or already completed.
This may include work around understanding the cohort, determining priorities for implementation, managing transitions and tracking destinations, establishing support for young people, identifying gaps in provision or communicating the RPA message.
[OPEN]

ASK ALL
INFO2
Still thinking about the local authority's preparations for RPA, what work is planned, but not yet underway to prepare for RPA?'
[OPEN]

ASK ALL
INFOU
Thinking about local information, has the Local Authority mapped the numbers of young people who will be aged 16-17 from 2013?
          Yes – have completed this work
          Yes – this work is underway
          Not yet - planning to do this
          No, not planning to do this
          Don't know

ASK ALL
INFIND
  Has the Local Authority developed a RONI, also known as a 'risk of NEET indicator' to use as part of your work to prepare for RPA?

          Yes – have completed this work
          Yes – this work is underway
          Not yet - planning to do this
          No, not planning to do this
          Don't know

ASK ALL
INFO7
Overall how well prepared would you say the LA is for RPA on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being least prepared and 10 the most prepared ?

1…10

ASK ALL
PRIOR
Who are the priority groups not in education or training in your LA?
(OPEN)

ASK ALL
RISKCH
Does your area face any challenges in relation to identifying young **people at risk** of not participating in education and training? If so, what are these challenges? [OPEN}

ASK ALL
DROPCH
Does your area face any challenges in relation to identifying and re-engaging **young people who drop out** of learning/training? If so, what are these challenges? [OPEN}

ASK ALL
SUPP
Thinking about the Department for Education's role, in what ways do you think the Department could best support Local Authorities to prepare for RPA? [OPEN]