



AGENDA ITEM 9

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

13 DECEMBER 2011

FINAL REPORT OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL: 14 - 19 REFORM AGENDA

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To present the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following its investigation of the 14-19 reform agenda in Middlesbrough.

INTRODUCTION

2. Educational provision for 14-19 year olds was originally identified as a Government priority in 2004.
3. Since that time, a number of measures have been put in place that are primarily aimed at ensuring that all young people, irrespective of academic ability, are equipped with the skills and knowledge that they need to succeed and progress in education, employment and adult life. *Vocational education and training* - which is generally regarded as the wide range of courses and skills that help students to prepare for entering employment - is a key part of this agenda.
4. The Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel sought to examine current developments in respect of 14-19 reform proposals, most specifically how the most recent proposals might impact on Middlesbrough's young people.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL

5. The membership of the scrutiny panel was as follows:

Councillors J Walker (Chair), J Sharrocks (Vice-Chair); and Councillors, Hawthorne, Hussain, S Khan, Mrs Pearson OBE, G Purvis, Taylor and Williams. Plus the following Co-optee: Father G Holland.

HOW INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE WAS OBTAINED

6. The scrutiny panel undertook an in-depth investigation and met on six occasions between 13 July and 26 October 2011 to gather evidence and information.
7. Information was submitted by Council Officers, the Council's Executive Member for children, Families and Learning and the Principal of Middlesbrough College.
8. A Scrutiny Support Officer from Legal and Democratic Services co-ordinated and arranged the submission of written and oral evidence and arranged witnesses for the review. Meetings administration, including preparation of agenda and minutes, was undertaken by a Governance Officer from Legal and Democratic Services.
9. A detailed record of the topics discussed at Panel meetings, including agenda, minutes and reports, is available from the Council's Committee Management System (COMMIS), which can be accessed via the Council's website at www.middlesbrough.gov.uk.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

10. The terms of reference of the scrutiny investigation were as follows:
 - *To examine proposed changes in respect of the 14-19 agenda, including:*
 - a) *The findings and recommendations of The Wolf Report 'Review of Vocational Education.'*
 - b) *The effect of the transfer of Learning and Skills Council budgets and responsibilities to Middlesbrough Council.*
 - *To assess the alternatives for 14-19 educational provision locally.*
 - *To examine the Council's role in encouraging employers to offer apprenticeship training to young people.*
 - *To determine how progress in implementing the 14-19 agenda can be measured and monitored.*

THE PANEL'S FINDINGS

11. The scrutiny panel's findings in respect of the 14-19 reform agenda are set out below in respect of each of the agreed terms of reference.

TERM OF REFERENCE: *'To consider the findings and recommendations of The Wolf Report: Review of Vocational Education.'*

12. In examining this term of reference the scrutiny panel considered information in relation to the following areas:
 - Historical background around the 14-19 reform agenda.
 - The findings of the Wolf Report 'Review of Vocational Education.'
 - The Government's response to the report.

Historical Background

13. Educational provision for 14-19 year olds has long been a Government priority. For some time it has been considered that age 11 is too early to choose a subject path to follow and 16 is too late. Students who know what they want to do can often become bored at school, with the result that they underachieve by the time they are 16. Also, as not everyone is academically inclined, vocational learning opportunities are essential to ensure that all young people - irrespective of academic ability - are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed and progress in education, employment and adult life.
14. In 2004, the Tomlinson Report '14-19 Opportunity and Excellence' was commissioned by the Government. This was published in 2005 and stated that reform was considered necessary at that time for a number of reasons, including:
 - Not enough young people continued education beyond the compulsory limit.
 - There were too many qualifications and specifications - the intention was to improve clarity and transparency.
 - Too few young people had the basic skills of numeracy, literacy or communication and information technology to equip them for work.
 - Too many vocational qualifications did not meet the needs of learners, higher education or employers.
15. As a result, the principal outcome of the Tomlinson Report was a new diploma framework to replace all existing 14-19 qualifications. All vocational training, including apprenticeships, was also included in the diploma.
16. The subject of the 14-19 Agenda was considered by the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel in 2005, with a detailed report from the panel being approved by The Executive on 25 October 2005. The panel's recommendations, which were all approved and subsequently implemented, related to:
 - a) Developing a local vision for the 14-19 Agenda locally - to include collaboration between agencies, educational institutions and employers.
 - b) Reviewing and evaluating the roles of key partners including the LEA, Learning Skills Council, Connexions, educational institutions, employers and work-based providers to deliver the Government's 14-19 Education and Skills Strategy.
 - c) Developing a regional marketing plan to raise the profile of vocational learning.
 - d) Assessing the local implications of the Tomlinson Reforms.
 - e) Identifying the training needs of teachers to enable them to deliver the 14-19 curriculum and developing a plan to deliver the required training.
 - f) Ensuring that all students have a personal learning development plan, with schools and colleges having access to this to track and develop progress.
 - g) Reviewing the curriculum across all providers (pre and post 16) and improving collaboration between pre and post 16 educational institutions.
 - h) The Local Education Authority (LEA) and partners broadening the range of apprenticeships on offer for learners.
 - i) The LEA and partners reviewing the learning difficulties and/or disabilities service provision for learners post-16.
 - j) The LEA working with schools to ensure that learners achieve at least the standards expected of them at Key Stage 4.

Findings of The Wolf Report ‘Review of Vocational Education’

17. Most recently, the Secretary of State for Education commissioned ¹Professor Alison Wolf to undertake a review of vocational education for young people aged under 19. Her final report (which extends to 197 pages and can be viewed online at the address below²) was published in March 2011.
18. Key points highlighted by the Wolf Report were that:
 - In England, around two and a half million young people are aged 14 to 19, with the vast majority engaged in full or part time education.
 - Most young people now take some vocational courses before they are 16.
 - Post-16, the majority follow courses that are largely or entirely vocational.
19. The report goes on to emphasise that vocational education offers a direct route into higher education and prestigious apprenticeships. Conventional academic study encompasses only part of what the labour market values and demands: vocational education can offer different content, different skills, different forms of teaching and is therefore an important part of our educational provision. However, there are hundreds of thousands of vocational students not following courses which offer a successful pathway into employment or higher education. Among 16 to 19 year olds, the report estimates that at least 350,000 young people get little to no benefit from the post-16 education system. Nationally, less than 50% of students achieve English and Maths GCSE (at Grades A* -C) by the end of Key Stage 4 (age 15/16); and at age 18 the figure is still below 50%.
20. Furthermore, the funding and accountability systems established by government create incentives to steer 16+ students into what might be considered inferior alternative qualifications. The result is that many of England’s 14-19 year olds do not, at present, progress successfully into either secure employment or higher-level education and training, nor do they have the skills to progress at a later date. Vocational education for 14-19 year olds must therefore serve the purpose of creating and maintaining opportunities for all young people. Apprenticeships and work experience in particular offer good progression routes.
21. In the context of the wider environment, today’s vocational education system must respond to key labour market characteristics, where full-time education or training to age 18 is now the dominant pattern. This has led to massive change in the youth labour market. Another key point is that good levels of English and Maths continue to be the most generally useful and valuable vocational skills on offer, while general skills are also valuable in a labour market where young people may change jobs frequently.
22. In terms of the way forward, institutions must focus on students’ demands and needs and not those of government agencies - the Government should focus on its key roles of monitoring and ensuring quality and should provide objective information.

¹ Alison Wolf is a Professor of Public Sector Management at King’s College London who specialises in the relationship between education and the labour market. She has a particular interest in training and skills policy.

²<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/The%20Wolf%20Report.pdf>

23. The Wolf Review also makes specific reference to the importance of apprenticeship provision. It emphasises that increasing young people's access to apprenticeships is a Government priority and of the utmost importance to the future of 16-18 vocational education. The review points out that while 16-18 apprentices are legally full-time employees rather than students, they should be primarily engaged in learning (including, general, transferable skills), as is standard practice in other countries with large apprenticeship programmes.

Main recommendations of the Wolf report

24. The Wolf report includes 27 recommendations. Key among these are:
- Incentivising young people to take the most valuable vocational qualifications pre-16, while removing incentives to take large numbers of vocational qualifications to the detriment of core academic study.
 - Introducing principles to guide study programmes for young people on vocational routes post-16 to ensure they are gaining skills which will lead to progression into a variety of jobs or further learning, in particular, to ensure that those who have not secured a good pass in English and mathematics GCSE continue to study those subjects.
 - Making sure the regulatory framework moves quickly away from accrediting individual qualifications to regulating awarding organisations.
 - Removing the requirement that all qualifications offered to 14- to 19-year-olds fit within the Qualifications and Credit Framework, which has had a detrimental effect on their appropriateness and has left gaps in the market.
 - Enabling FE lecturers and professionals to teach in schools, ensuring young people are being taught by those best suited.
25. The report also contains a number of specific recommendations relating to apprenticeships:
- Evaluating the delivery structure and content of apprenticeships to ensure they deliver the right skills for the workplace.
 - Providing additional subsidies for employers taking on young apprentices in order to increase the number of places available.
 - Contracting arrangements should be reviewed to draw on best practice internationally with a particular focus on reducing the current heavy use of training providers in the English system compared to other countries.
 - Promote greater use of Group Training Associations (GTAs) to support smaller employers to collectively engage in apprenticeships.

The Government's Response

26. The Government published its formal response to the Wolf Report in May 2011. In that response, the Secretary of State for Education indicated that the Government welcomed the fact that the review:
- a) Highlighted problems that need to be addressed; and
 - b) Put in place the principles on which to base an improved system.

27. The Government has also indicated that it will take action on all of the report's recommendations, and in doing so, aims to deliver on three key themes, namely:
- Ensuring that all young people study and achieve in English and mathematics.
 - Reforming performance tables and funding rules that have devalued vocational education and pushed young people into qualification routes that do not allow them to move into work or further learning.
 - Examining the experience of other countries to simplify apprenticeships, remove bureaucracy and make them easier for employers to offer.

TERM OF REFERENCE: “ To assess the alternatives for 14-19 provision locally”

28. In examining this term of reference, information was submitted in respect of:
- Background to change
 - Options for future provision
 - The involvement of Middlesbrough College
29. The scrutiny panel heard that, since its election in 2010, the current Government has been pursuing reform of secondary and tertiary education. In addition to the Wolf Report (see paragraph 17 onwards), the recently published Education Bill, increased numbers of academies and moves towards the creation of free schools all herald a radically different post-14 educational picture.
30. Current pressures on overall public expenditure, and the related consequences for the budgets of schools, colleges and universities, require new solutions to be found if the quality and range of service to students is to be retained or possibly expanded. In Middlesbrough, the current direction of travel is for schools that do not have academy status to seek it, with the support of the local authority.
31. Although the performance of Middlesbrough's young people in respect of 5 GCSEs (at Grades A-C) in English and Maths is improving, performance remains below the national average. It is considered that, locally, the development of clear pathways to further education, apprenticeships and university is a key component of achieving further performance improvement. Against this background, it is also acknowledged that there is a particular challenge involving the most vulnerable groups of young people. An inclusive approach, involving all young people (including, for example, looked after children, those leaving care, pregnant teenagers or young people with learning difficulties or complex needs) is paramount.
32. In terms of vulnerable learners, a pilot project has operated since 2010 that was developed to provide intervention to ensure progression for year 11 students to level 2 Post-16 Qualifications. This project has worked successfully in identifying and assisting pupils who were at risk of becoming 'NEET' (not in education, employment or training).
33. Overall, in Middlesbrough, young people's participation in learning has been increasing steadily since 2002. There has been a fall in the proportion and number of young people whose destinations are not known to the Integrated Youth Support Service (IYSS), which incorporates the former Connexions Service. In addition, the number of young people who are not engaging in education, employment or training (NEET) has been significantly reduced in recent years through a number of measures.

34. However, many young people do not have sufficient experience or knowledge of post-16 options to enable them to make suitably informed choices. Their perceptions or knowledge about what their qualifications and skills equip them for or what they can progress onto are often not accurate. Some young people lack the necessary range of educational, personal and social skills to enable them to access opportunities and sustain them, while, for others, low levels of literacy and numeracy are a barrier to access and the ability to progress.
35. A further issue that has been identified is that there is not a sufficiently comprehensive source of information about post-16 provision and opportunities including progression routes and qualifications. Young people may rely on family and friends for information and advice when such people are not well enough informed or engaged in the process to provide assistance.

Options for future provision

36. Options that have been put forward for future 14-19 provision in Middlesbrough, have focussed on three basic models and permutations of those, as follows:
 - University Technology Colleges
 - Studio Schools
 - SkillsCentres
 - A collaboration of existing education providers
37. A **University Technology College** is a college for students aged 14 to 19 which specialises in technical studies and is sponsored by a university or further educational establishment. It offers full time courses which combine practical and academic studies. Employers would be involved in shaping the curriculum.
38. It allows a student to study a subject they are really interested in which is taught in industry standard facilities by teachers with real life practical experience. By 16 their technical skills are far in advance of those students in a standard comprehensive school and more enthusiastic engagement with their academic studies leads to greater achievement in this area also.
39. FE colleges can also be involved as a co-sponsor bringing their expertise in technical education but an important feature of UTCs is that that they must be led by a University. This gives them the credibility that technical schools did not have. The name of the university is also featured in the title of the college. The university does not have to provide financial support but supports the UTC with its expertise and time and actively contributes to the curriculum. Strong employer links are also a key feature of UTCs and are involved in shaping the curriculum. Support from the local authority is also welcomed.
40. Employers also play a major part in University Technical Colleges. They help plan what students are going to learn and ensure that the qualifications students gain are what employers require. They also meet the students on work placements and so can get to know them.

41. **Studio Schools** are a new type of state school model for young people of all abilities. Based on extensive research and best practice, they would offer a pioneering practical approach to learning involving enterprise projects and real work. At their heart is the insight that this more practical approach can better equip young people with the skills and experiences they need to succeed. In a country in which most lessons are still taught in a traditional way, Studio Schools would break new ground, offering a pioneering practical education rooted in the real world.
42. In Middlesbrough, it was envisaged that this would be a small school for up to 300 pupils, with staffing, curriculum and resources from the Government's Department for Education.
43. There are six essential elements at the heart of a Studio School:
- Employability and enterprise skills - Students would be supported to develop the key employability and life skills they need to succeed.
 - Key qualifications - Students would be taught the national curriculum and work towards a range of key qualifications from Level 2.
 - Personalised curriculum - Students would meet frequently with their 'personal coach' to tailor the curriculum to their individual needs and aspirations.
 - Practical learning - Students' learning would be delivered principally through enterprise-themed projects in the school, local businesses and the community.
 - Real work - Students would spend a significant portion of their weekly time in real work.
 - Small schools - Students would learn in a small, supportive and personalised learning environment of around 300 students.
44. A **SkillsCentre** is a place where young people can acquire, practise and demonstrate their mastery of skills, together with acquiring the knowledge which underpins the skills. This usually means skills in those areas of learning provision where expensive equipment is required and where individual providers are not able to generate large enough groups to run learning programmes 'in-house'; by necessity a Skills Centre would be a shared resource.
45. The key aims of developing Skills Centres are:
- Support of the concept of a skills based curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 4, to diversify the offer for young people and promote engagement and inclusion;
 - To provide the 'wrap around support' that is required for vulnerable groups of young people accessing Skills Centre provision - ie not just curriculum needs;
 - To deliver programmes that focus on employability skills and priority sectors, both locally and regionally. For example, Skills Centres will offer a diverse range of courses not generally available in schools - such as mechanics or construction.
46. In Middlesbrough, it was envisaged that a Skills Centre would be staffed in partnership with Middlesbrough College. Pupils would remain on the roll of their 'home' school.

Collaboration of Existing Providers

47. The panel spoke to Mike Hopkins, Principal of Middlesbrough College, regarding proposals being developed by the college to create a new Middlesbrough educational group structure that will deliver transformational change. The college hopes that this will provide a framework for the delivery of post 14 -16 education by proposing the creation of a new educational group infrastructure to offer clear and progressive vocational pathways to further study, apprenticeships and higher education. It will also enhance and expand student choice and deliver education and training more efficiently.
48. This could be achieved through a collaborative approach by creating a federation made up of local secondary schools and Middlesbrough College, as well as, potentially, Teesside University. The federation would take a collective approach that would:
 - Focus on the performance of young people
 - Create clear learning pathways which provide choice to learners e.g. further education, apprenticeships and higher education;
 - Ensure that public money received by the institutions in the partnership is used efficiently and effectively providing increased choice for learners allied with value for money.
49. Such a collaborative approach would be aimed at ensuring cross-sector planning, modelling and sharing of information across the town's institutions. This would, in turn, aim to provide for seamless progression opportunities and performance improvement for young people. It would also support employers, who are seeking education support for skills development, by ensuring high quality learning vocational pathways.
50. In addition, this approach would build capacity for high quality vocational learning across the school and college sector by ensuring shared staff development and staff deployment; contribute to the development of a local and regional economy; focus on widening access and increasing participation, as well as lowering truancy and drop out rates (NEETS); and would also provide a shared platform for the development of innovative learning and teaching strategies to encourage participation, widening access and performance.
51. The inclusion of Teesside University would also provide for the bridging of post-16 provision - which would result in the development of a focussed skills base offering a range of further and higher education provision. In addition, there could be significant economies as a result of developing shared central support functions and services including staff development, recruitment and deployment amongst participating institutions. Management and development capability, as well as general staffing, could also be increased as a result of the pooling and sharing of expertise and human resources.
52. It is anticipated that outcomes of developing such a collaborative approach would be:
 - Increased participation
 - Increased choice for learners
 - Significant reductions in the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

(Cont....)

- Raised aspiration and attainment.
 - Value for money delivery.
53. The above would be achieved through improvement in student performance as institutions collaborate in the development of high quality pathways to further education, apprenticeships and higher education; and greater flexibility in the delivery of high quality learning across the school/college and university sectors.
54. The scrutiny panel heard that, locally, a 14-19 Partnership has been established. This involves all relevant stakeholders and has the objective of ensuring that every young person in Middlesbrough will have the ability, aspiration and opportunity, to participate in learning or training until at least the age of 18, to achieve their potential. They will have access to the best possible provision and support in order to do this.
55. The panel was informed that, following publication of The Wolf Report, and as at September/October 2011, the existing Secondary Partnership (which comprises all secondary school heads) has considered, in detail, options for local 14-19 educational provision. Discussions are currently focussed on developing a collaborative approach in Middlesbrough.
56. Under the national reform proposals, young people aged 14 would be able to choose educational and vocational courses at a different educational establishment than their existing school - in effect, at that age, they would be able to enter a college and access a tailored package of support.
57. It is noted that, whatever model of 14-19 provision is taken forward in Middlesbrough details of local arrangements would need to be agreed and clarified, together with all implications - for example if all or part of a student's education was provided elsewhere, what would happen in terms of funding arrangements? Or, in such a case, which educational would attainment results be measured against? Or would any of the models result in creation of a new/additional school - with a possible consequent effect on pupil numbers at existing schools?

TERM OF REFERENCE: “To examine the Council’s role in encouraging employers to offer apprenticeship training to young people.”

AND: “To examine the effect of the transfer of Learning and Skills Council budgets and responsibilities to Middlesbrough Council.”

58. Due to links and overlap between the above terms of reference, these are dealt with together in the following sections of the report. Information is set out below in respect of:
- The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act
 - The Young People’s Learning Agency
 - Council involvement in promoting apprenticeships
 - 2009 scrutiny investigation of Connexions and the Youth Service
59. As covered earlier in this report (see paragraph 17 onwards), The Wolf Review of Vocational Education also makes particular reference to apprenticeships and outlines why they are vitally important to the future of 16-18 vocational employment. In this context, the scrutiny panel sought to investigate the Council’s involvement in promoting apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act

60. The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 is a large piece of legislation which deals with a wide range of topics. This includes apprenticeships and access to vocational training, as well as Children's Trusts, safeguarding and Children's Centres. The Act provides for:
- The right to an apprenticeship place (from 2013) for every young person with the appropriate qualifications.
 - Young people in schools to receive proper information and advice about vocational training opportunities, including apprenticeships.
61. The Act places apprenticeships on a statutory footing and provides an entitlement to high quality apprenticeship places for all suitably qualified young people. It also ensures that young people in schools receive proper information, advice and guidance about vocational training opportunities.
62. The Learning and Skills Council - which was previously responsible for the planning and funding of all Post 16 education - was abolished from April 2010, with local authorities taking on responsibility for commissioning and funding all education and training for young people up to the age of 19.

Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA)

63. A new body - the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) - has been established to support and enable authorities to carry out their new duties and to undertake a scrutiny role, with powers to intervene where necessary.
64. The YPLA website (see www.ypla.gov.uk), under the heading 'Championing Young People's Learning' indicates that the organisation's mission is championing education and training for young people in England. This is done by providing financial support to young learners, by funding Academies for all their provision and by supporting local authorities to commission suitable education and training opportunities for all 16-19 year olds.
65. In July 2010 the Secretary of State for Education announced changes that were aimed at streamlining and simplifying the funding and allocations system for 16-19 education. The new system will see the YPLA directly funding 16 - 19 provision in FE colleges, sixth form colleges and independent providers. This is intended to allow local authorities to focus on their role as champions of young people's learning and give them more opportunity to fulfil their responsibility to meet the needs of their local community and identify gaps in provision. At the same time, it will allow providers greater freedom in the design of the curriculum. The YPLA indicates that it will continue to support local authorities in their strategic role and work closely with all concerned to make sure that the new arrangements are introduced seamlessly.
66. The Role of the YPLA is to allocate funds through a nationally determined and consistent funding process, and within budgets made available by Government. YPLA is to ensure that funds transfer to those providers, either directly, through local authorities or through the Skills Funding Agency.³

³ The Learning & Skills Council's previous responsibility for Post-19 education and training has been transferred to the new Skills Funding Agency (SFA).

67. Local authorities, working with their partners may shape provision in their area by identifying gaps, enabling new provision and developing the market. A network of nine regional YLPA offices will foster a close working relationship with all partners.

2009 Scrutiny Review

68. During early 2009 the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel examined the subject of the Youth Service and Connexions. One of the recommendations included in the scrutiny panel's final report on the subject was as follows:

'That Connexions explores the developments of links with targeted sectors of local employers (for example the petro-chemical industry, local information and communication technology (ICT) providers), to assist in identifying training/employment opportunities for young people.'

69. The panel's final report, including the above recommendation, was approved by The Council's Executive on 23 June 2009. The response prepared by Children, Families and Learning Department in respect of the recommendation was as shown below:

'The Connexions service is working closely with partners including the National Apprenticeship Service via the National Apprenticeship Vacancy Matching Service to identify suitable opportunities for local young people to access the labour market. Connexions Service is working closely with colleagues in economic development to develop systems for identifying opportunities for local young people in the labour market. Connexions is working closely with partner agencies to obtain labour market information to cascade to staff and local partners including schools/colleges.'

70. The scrutiny panel was advised that work to implement the above recommendation is ongoing, although - following the merger of Connexions with the Youth Service (to form Middlesbrough Integrated Youth Support Service) - work is increasingly focused on supporting vulnerable learners. This work is also linked to the emerging work on apprenticeships outlined from paragraph 73 below.
71. It was noted that the Connexions name is still being used but that this will cease when the ⁴MyPlace Project opens in 2012. It is anticipated that MyPlace will provide an opportunity to improve service provision, and access to service provision, for young people
72. The position regarding careers advice - which is presently provided by Connexions in conjunction with schools - is awaiting clarification. It is anticipated that the Integrated Youth Support Service will discuss future arrangements, including the local authority's possible involvement, with schools.

Council Involvement in Promoting Apprenticeships

73. The scrutiny panel heard that current Government Policy places an emphasis on the need to increase apprenticeship places, particularly in the private sector.

⁴ MyPlace is a multi-million pound government programme to provide places for young people to go. The programme aims to deliver a world class facility for young people in Middlesbrough.

74. Apprenticeships can benefit both companies and individuals in many ways, including:
- Developing a highly skilled workforce, boosting productivity and staff retention;
 - Providing a cost effective method of recruiting staff and developing skills to meet the needs of the business, which is particularly valuable in difficult economic times;
 - Bringing fresh eyes and enthusiasm to a business and new skills and experiences to an existing workforce;
 - Utilising higher level apprenticeships can enable existing employees to train and progress in their place of work, developing higher level skills from within a business that may often seek these skills externally; and,
 - Providing routes to employment in specific sectors that are available to all age groups.
75. Recent research shows that apprenticeships are one of the most critical ways for businesses to secure a supply of people with the skills and qualities they need and can also provide an effective route for people to get into sustainable work. However, the number of people currently accessing apprenticeships in Middlesbrough is low. Growth in Middlesbrough (and the wider Tees Valley) is also lower than the North East rate with approximately 700 16 to 24 year olds taking up an apprenticeship each year plus a further 150 apprentices aged 25 plus. There has also been a significant decrease in the uptake of certain types of apprenticeships in Middlesbrough in recent years, including business administration, childcare, engineering, construction and retail. As some of these sectors are identified for future growth within the Tees Valley, there is a need to reverse this trend and ensure local people have the opportunity to develop the skills to benefit from this growth.
76. The scrutiny panel heard that the Council's Children, Families and Learning (CFL) and Regeneration Departments are both involved in developing employment opportunities and promoting apprenticeships. This is undertaken as a shared/joint responsibility. Officers from both departments provided information for the scrutiny panel.
77. CFL advised that the Council is directly involved as both a facilitator and provider of training and apprenticeship opportunities. Within the Council, such provision may typically involve work such as social care, child care, horticulture and general administration. The department, in conjunction with others, is examining how its work can support young people so that they can attain the necessary skills base to access employment opportunities and to support them into achieving positive outcomes.
78. The department is involved in working with the Council's Regeneration Department to obtain funding from the Young People's Learning Agency and the Skills Funding Agency (see paragraph 63 earlier) to promote and develop apprenticeships locally. In addition, the Integrated Youth Support Service has developed connections with approximately 50 training providers.

79. Reference was also made to work experience placements, which were previously funded by the Learning and Skills Council. Following that organisation's demise, no specific funding is currently available in this area. Such placements are now arranged directly by schools, which have a more focussed approach of identifying placements that are appropriate to the young persons concerned.
80. At October 2011, Regeneration is involved in developing a co-ordinated programme to promote apprenticeships and increase the recruitment of apprentices by businesses in Middlesbrough.
81. One constraint on the number of apprenticeships in Middlesbrough is the low number of employers offering opportunities. One of the key reasons for this is that the mechanism of seeking information on recruiting apprentices is seen as a barrier by businesses, with information appearing confusing and being held by a range of different providers. A consistent approach to signposting support would reduce this confusion and underpin any increase in opportunities being offered.
82. In this regard, the Council has a number of different services that have regular contact with businesses across the town, including environmental health, business and employment support, town centre management and HR. The opportunity therefore exists to utilise these interactions to promote the concept of apprenticeships, and signpost businesses to specific sources of support.
83. The Economic Development Team indicates that it can assist in this area. The team is aiming to ensure that all business-facing staff across the Council are briefed on the benefits of apprenticeships and the support available to businesses wishing to recruit or improve skill levels of existing employees. Such briefings have already been held for the Economic Development Team by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), which is keen to engage as wide a group of potential 'advocates' as possible. Working alongside NAS and other providers will ensure that an informed, consistent approach to promoting apprenticeships is developed and signposting to relevant support is put in place.
84. The Economic Development Team is currently (November 2011) developing the following approach:
 - a) High profile business contacts are to be targeted by the Mayor to promote apprenticeships and generate leads for the Economic Development Team to follow up.
 - b) A staff briefing will be developed to be delivered by NAS to all relevant internal contacts;
 - c) A simple business case and key common messages will be developed to promote the benefits of recruiting apprentices, for use by all relevant internal contacts;
 - d) A co-ordinated approach will be developed in relation to the marketing and promotion of apprenticeships with relevant partners;
 - e) Additional external financial resources will be identified to support the promotion of apprenticeships where appropriate; and,
 - f) Success stories, positive business engagements and links to the work of the Mayor will be publicised on an ongoing basis.
85. In delivering these actions, the Economic Development Team will need to work closely with all other Council departments.

TERM OF REFERENCE: “To determine how progress in implementing the 14-19 agenda can be measured and monitored.”

86. Having considered all of the submitted information, the scrutiny panel considers that the success, or otherwise, of reforms in relation to 14-19 education, will need to be assessed at some future point in order to measure their effectiveness.
87. It is suggested that, depending on what model(s) of provision are developed locally, performance measures or indicators could include:
 - a) Continued measurement of attainment.
 - b) Further monitoring of numbers of young people not in education, employment or training.
 - c) Measuring how many Middlesbrough residents access apprenticeships.
 - d) Measuring how many local employers develop apprenticeship schemes.
88. Further consideration will need to be given to these issues once arrangements are finalised for 14-19 educational provision in Middlesbrough.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

89. The scrutiny panel heard from Councillor Mike Carr, the Council’s Executive Member for Children, Families and Learning. The Executive Member advised that it is acknowledged that the Council has less influence on local education providers than in the past - all schools and academies are essentially autonomous. The position concerning the establishment of free schools in Middlesbrough is yet to be determined but will impact further on local education provision, as will Government moves towards increased numbers of academies.
90. Although the local authority’s role will be diminished, it will still be responsible for attainment standards across Middlesbrough. As such, the Council’s position will be one of trying to promote continued co-operation and collaboration across all educational establishments. It is recognised that, although there has been improvement in the past five years, attainment is low in Middlesbrough and many young people have difficulties engaging with the education system. The challenge is to ensure that the system supports and provides for all young people, including vocational education and training. Future sixth form arrangements, which are under development locally, will also play an important role.
91. Of the options that have been considered for vocational education provision, it is considered that a collaborative and co-operative approach would work best for Middlesbrough. This would build on existing links and support the existing educational values of Middlesbrough Council.

CONCLUSIONS

92. Based on the evidence gathered in the scrutiny investigation the Panel concluded that:

1. The Wolf Report, 'Review of Vocational Education,' highlighted a number of important issues. Not all young people are academically inclined or focussed and it is recognised that formal education settings are not for everyone. These can, in some cases, inhibit progress and development. It is therefore important that there is educational provision for those young people who learn better outside the classroom. Education and training should equip all young people with the skills and knowledge they need to gain meaningful employment, long term economic stability and lead a fulfilling life. The 14-19 reform agenda provides an opportunity to ensure that this can be achieved by developing a clearer, more coherent and flexible vocational curriculum that directly aligns to employer needs and the skills needs of the wider economy, while also catering for every young person. In this context, it is important to recognise that vocational education is not a second rate alternative to academic options. In the past this may have led to employers being confused about its purpose and becoming reluctant to engage.
2. While attainment levels are improving in Middlesbrough, they are below national levels. In this context, Middlesbrough Council is committed to continuing its partnership approach, where all stakeholders and partners work together to maximise opportunities for all young people to engage in appropriate education, training or employment with training.
3. The Council is actively involved in promoting apprenticeships, with work in this area being undertaken by the Children Families and Learning and Regeneration Departments. There is a need to ensure that work is co-ordinated in this area to maximise local benefits.
4. Various models for future 14-19 provision in Middlesbrough have been discussed and considered. To date, in terms of overall educational provision, Middlesbrough Council has successfully worked to promote a 'family of schools' approach, where existing educational establishments work well in partnership with each other and the local authority. In determining what model is to be adopted for 14-19 provision locally, it is considered that there is a need to build on this approach to ensure that provision continues to be focussed on what is best for Middlesbrough's young people.
5. Developing a collaborative approach to 14-19 provision locally would be consistent with the Council's existing values and ethos and would be the best means of:
 - a) Building on existing good practice to increase the choice of educational provision available to young people.
 - b) Improving the responsiveness of the local learning infrastructure to create appropriate pathways for all learners.
 - c) Raising the quality and availability of vocational and work-based learning.
 - d) Addressing issues of low participation, retention and attainment and driving up standards.
 - e) Reducing duplication and gaps in provision.
6. In progressing a collaborative approach, effective communication will be needed to ensure an inclusive process and to ensure a consistent level of co-operation between all involved parties, some of whom may view the proposed developments as a threat. A position where a school or schools becomes completely autonomous, in open competition with other local education providers, may impact adversely on overall educational provision and should be avoided. All concerned will need to actively work together to support the process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

93. Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the scrutiny panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Executive are as follows:
1. That Middlesbrough Council works with all relevant stakeholders and partners to develop a collaborative and inclusive model of 14-19 educational provision which best meets the needs of all of Middlesbrough's young people.
 2. That a report on progress is submitted to the scrutiny panel in 6 months, or as soon as there are any significant developments locally.
 3. That measures are put in place to ensure that a co-ordinated approach to promoting apprenticeships locally is taken by the Council's Children Families and Learning and Regeneration Departments.
 4. That monitoring is undertaken to measure the success of the Council's involvement in promoting apprenticeships - ie how many Middlesbrough residents are accessing apprenticeships and how many Middlesbrough employers are offering apprenticeship opportunities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

94. The Panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of this investigation, and who have assisted in its work, and would like to place on record its thanks for the willingness and co-operation of the following:
- Richenda Broad - Deputy Director (Children's Trust and Performance), Middlesbrough Council.
 - Julie Broadbent - WBL Transition Manager, Middlesbrough Council.
 - John Catron - Deputy Director (Attainment), Middlesbrough Council.
 - Mike Hopkins - Principal, Middlesbrough College.
 - Christina Jones - Learning Pathways & Alternative Provision 14-19, Middlesbrough Council.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

95. The following background papers were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:
- Agenda, reports and minutes of Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel Meetings held on 13 July, 3 and 24 August, 14 September and 5 and 26 October 2011.
 - January 2011 Report - 'Increasing Participation in Learning to Improve Outcomes for Young People - A Strategy for Middlesbrough.'

COUNCILLOR JEANETTE WALKER

CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

November 2011

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