

London 14-19 Regional Planning Group

16-19 Education and Training

Background

Since 2007 London boroughs have been working towards assuming the responsibility for commissioning 16-19 education and training from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) on 1 April 2010. London Councils has led and overseen the development of a pan-London commissioning model to reflect the specific characteristics of the capital. This included the establishment of a Regional Planning Group (RPG) bringing together key stakeholders including members, officers, providers, employers, the GLA and others. The RPG helps to consolidate 32 local commissioning plans into a coherent pan-London offer for young people, as well as providing strategic leadership to help direct the growth of provision across the city.

New Changes

On Tuesday 20 July the government announced three key changes to 16-19 funding and commissioning arrangements:

- The Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) which formerly channelled funding from government through local authorities will now make payments directly to Further Education Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges and private providers. Local authorities will continue to pay School Sixth Forms.
- From September 2010 the funding process for the 2011/12 will be simplified to reflect 'lagged learner numbers' i.e. providers will be allocated funding based on learner numbers in the previous academic year.
- There is no longer a requirement for local authorities to form sub-regional or regional planning groups – arrangements will be at the discretion of local authorities. However there remains a duty for councils to co-operate with each other in relation to commissioning 16-19 education and training.

Key issues

- Unclear local authority role - Information issued so far by central government has stressed that local authorities are to retain their strategic commissioning role for 16-19 education and training as described in the Apprenticeship, Children, Skills and Learning Bill (2009). However, there is presently little detail in how this role will now work in practice – leaving scope for boroughs to help shape this debate.
- Strategic commissioning – Local authorities have a statutory obligation to secure enough suitable education and training for 16-19 year-olds in their area.¹ If boroughs are not given sufficient powers to effectively shape the provision it is not clear how they will fulfil this duty.
- London is different - London has different needs to other parts of the country both in the complex travel-to-learn patterns of its learners across borough boundaries, and also in the skills needs of its employers. It is vital that London is represented in discussions with Government in order to highlight these differences, and where necessary argue for the most effective arrangements for London's young people.

¹ This duty also covers young people subject to learning difficulty assessment up to age 25.

- Development of a 'market' - The simplified funding system is based on a more market-based approach to 16-19 education and training. Providers will have the freedom to decide on their curriculum offer and mix of provision to respond to the needs of individuals and employers. Again, if local authorities are to fulfil their statutory duties they will need strategic leverage to be able to develop the market.
- Disadvantaged young people - It is feared that unregulated 'marketisation' may lead to the needs of the most disadvantaged young people being overlooked in the development of provision. Although London has high rates of participation post-16, there are still large pockets of NEET youngsters equating approximately 10,000 young peoples across the capital. It is crucial that local authorities are able to support providers to provide for these young people.
- Needs of London's employers - It is also debatable how far individual colleges or schools will be able to reflect the needs of London's employers without a wider regional perspective on the capital's future skills needs. This will also be a concern of the London Skills and Employment Board (LSEB) and provides common ground on which to work with the Mayor.
- Staffing issues – Former LSC staff were transferred to local authorities in April under TUPE-like conditions. Government gave a commitment to fund these transferred posts for a period of three years through a Special Purpose Grant, which is incorporated in the Area Based Grant (ABG). Whilst the funding for posts has been made available for the current financial year, the ABG has been subjected to budget cuts mid-year and is likely to be further impacted following the Comprehensive Spending Review. Furthermore, were it to be established that local authority functions are transferring to the YPLA it is highly likely that Directors of Children's Services would argue that TUPE should apply.
- Future of RPG – Although there will no longer be a *requirement* to form regional planning groups London Boroughs will still need to co-operate in some sort of regional forum to adequately fulfil their commissioning duties. London's RPG has always been a more substantial body than in any other region to reflect the specific characteristics of the city (as outlined earlier) and funding for posts is provided directly by Government. London boroughs will need to consider how they would wish to remodel the RPG in light of the realigned system – taking into account the views of other key stakeholders such as the YPLA, the LSEB, and Providers.

What we want

London Councils is preparing a list of wants to put before Government. Local authorities must:

- be able to influence forward planning (through local leaders) and funding under a lagged pupil numbers methodology i.e. – acting as gatekeeper to the market for new providers; helping to direct funding made available for developing the market; acting as final approval body for funding decisions that fall outside lagged pupil numbers.
- determine the performance criteria for 16-19 provision, i.e.- the requirements to be in the market.
- have the ability to work in partnership with the YPLA to direct any funding for significant changes in the curriculum to meet emerging gaps.
- have the ability to co-ordinate places planning; admissions; exclusions; SEN; school challenge and support; and careers – i.e. – those services that better enable learners to exercise choice and enable providers to meet learners' needs.
- be able to act as the local democratic voice articulating need and identifying gaps in provision.