



Post-16 Review

Summary of the final report – final draft

June 2023

Foreword

Summary

1 Introduction and context

- E1:1 Medway Council undertook a *Review of Post-16 education, training and employment* available to young people in Medway [the Review] between October 2022 and February 2023. This document is a summary of the full Review report.
- E1:2 The Council's *People Strategy 2021-25: Supporting Medway's people to realise their potential* identifies five priorities for its children and young people – they will: have the best start in life; develop well; lead independent and fulfilled lives; contribute to their community; and have a meaningful say in decisions and services that shape their lives.
- E1:3 Its *Skills and Employability Plan for Medway 2035: Growing skills for a growing workforce* is a “plan for all ages” that is intended to “support those in, and considering options for, primary, secondary, further and higher education ... [and] engage those who are not in employment, education or training [NEET], as well as those looking to take up apprenticeships.”
- E1:4 In addition, the *Medway Local Area Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities [SEND] Strategy 2022-25: Inclusion, Participation, Aspiration and Achievement* sets out a number of specific ambitions for children and young people with SEND – they will: achieve the best outcomes through inclusion and participation; be prepared for a successful future at the earliest opportunity; have access to the right support, at the right time, in the right place; and be supported to recover from the pandemic.
- E1:5 The aim of the Review is to support the delivery of these priorities and ambitions by ensuring that:
- Medway's post-16 opportunities are accessible and inclusive for all its young people
 - Appropriate support is in place so that young people have the tools and help they need to be successful
 - Provision is of high quality and leads to further positive progression as young people move into young adulthood.

2 Approach

- E2:1 The Review was overseen by a Steering Group comprising Council staff, provider representatives and others with an interest in post-16 provision in Medway. An external expert (acl consulting [acl]) was appointed to provide objectivity, insight, and rigour to the Review.
- E2:2 An extensive programme of fieldwork interviews and group discussions (completed by a research team of 8 comprising staff from acl, the Council and Kent Further Education), supplemented by surveys and data analysis, informed the Review. The key elements of the workplan were:

- A programme of interviews with post-16 providers – all post-16 providers active in Medway in 2022-23 were interviewed for the Review. (Whilst it is possible that a provider may have been missed, the statement is a fair reflection of the extent to which providers were engaged in the Review)
- Focus groups with young people in years 11 and 12 – a total of 23 groups were run across 11 schools (3 grammars; 8 non-selective schools [NSSs]), a pupil referral unit [PRU], and MidKent College [MKC]
- Other, primarily qualitative, elements to the fieldwork – interviews with other, non-provider-based, individuals (principally Council staff and members, and employers)
- Analysis of quantitative data, both local and national
- An online survey of young people in Year 11 (240 responses were received, c. 6% of the total number of pupils in Year 11 in 2022-23) and their parents/carers (30 responses).

E2:3 The process of evidence gathering has been as robust and comprehensive as it could reasonably be.

3 Principal findings

E3:1 This section of the Summary sets out the principal findings from the fieldwork just described – for the most part they are presented under headings that are based around a notional “journey” taken by a young person prior to and during their time in 16-19 education; other findings relate to the future viability of provision, collaboration between post-16 providers, and environmental factors including the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on education provision. (A fuller description of the findings is in Section 3 of the full Review Report).

The offer (see Review Report, Section 3.1)

E3:2 The Level 3 programmes available in Medway are largely academic (A levels and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme [IBD]), and mainly offered by schools; by comparison, there is limited vocational and technical provision at Level 3 – almost all of it offered by MKC at its Gillingham site.

E3:3 Generally schools do not “promote” their A level offering widely – not least because the number of places available for those not from their own Year 11 is generally very limited. Couple this with the lack of a single source of information about post-16 opportunities in Medway (it would take a determined young person time and effort to trawl through providers’ websites to extract sometimes sketchy details of what is available), and the result is that a high proportion of young people in Medway (for grammar schools almost 100%) progress to their own school’s sixth form at 16.

E3:4 The corollary of this is that non-schools-based post-16 general further education in Medway is not attracting the share of the market for young people that it does elsewhere. Some students, from NSSs with particular vocational/technical ambitions, will transfer to MKC; some will do so to study Level 3 qualifications. However, this is

not seen as a mainstream route and in general is not particularly encouraged by schools – certainly not for those young people who are considered to have the ability to take A levels (or one of the school’s own BTECs where offered).

- E3:5** The majority (c.90%) of post-16 Level 2 [vocational and technical] provision in Medway is provided by MKC.
- E3:6** There is a shortage of Level 2 apprenticeships. However, to the extent that employers do recruit externally onto apprenticeships, for young people any such opportunities tend to arise post-18 rather than at 16. Evidence from this Review – and elsewhere – suggests that employers consider that young people, particularly at 16, are largely unprepared for the world of work.
- E3:7** Unless there is something particularly academic about Medway’s young people, it is difficult to do other than conclude that they are not currently being best-served by the range of opportunities on offer. Without further action, it is not immediately clear that the introduction of T Levels will have much of an impact on this, at least in the immediate future.
- E3:8** Outside “mainstream” post-16 provision, there is insufficient alternative provision for young people who are not yet able to continue their learning at a school or college post-16, or who try to do so but subsequently drop out (or are at risk of so doing); for young people with an education, health and care plan [EHCP] there is insufficient local provision.

Location, access, and structure of post-16 provision (3.2)

- E3:9** Support is available for travel to most forms of post-16 provision – both from Medway Council and from most, though not all, providers direct (through Discretionary Bursary Fund [DBF] allocations). Given that, with the obvious exception of the Hoo Peninsula, in theory travel around Medway is relatively easy, it is hard to make a case that access to any of the mainstream provision on offer is difficult for the majority of young people.
- E3:10** For other forms of provision, access to APs and special schools is constrained by the limited number of places available compared to the demand that exists for these, rather than by travel considerations. The lack of sufficient local SEND provision means that there is a significant outflow of young people each day to provision at EKC Group’s Canterbury College. The lack of AP provision creates a risk that these young people will become ‘not in education, employment or training [NEET].
- E3:11** However, and notwithstanding the fact that most provision is accessible, young people often reported that travel-related considerations had consequences for the provision that they were in practice able to access. They also seemed to have little or no awareness of the support – both from the Council and from schools and colleges – that could be available to them to help with the costs of travelling to provision.

Equal opportunities (3.3)

- E3:12** There is little to suggest ethnicity or gender bias exists in terms of access to post-16 provision. What is clear from the data is that access to post-16 learning by disadvantaged young people is not equal across the board – all of the grammar schools and 8 of the 13 NSSs take considerably fewer disadvantaged students than the average.
- E3:13** To address this, given that it is what happens for Year 7 that determines much of what follows, mitigating the impact of disadvantage at 16 would require action to be taken much earlier in a young person's time in education.
- E3:14** There is number of issues relating to young people with High Needs that need addressing – specifically: access to work-based opportunities; timely provision of EHCPs; and Element 3 funding.
- E3:15** The level of funding for providers who disproportionately recruit young people with additional (but not High) needs appears to be restricting their ability to meet the needs of this group.

Pre-Year 12 decision-making processes (3.4)

Schools' views

- E3:16** Schools invest a considerable amount of time and resource in delivering a programme of careers education, information, advice and guidance [CEIAG] across the secondary phase of education.
- E3:17** There is a concern that the way providers interpret some of the statutory and other requirements risks creating a box-ticking approach to elements of CEIAG, "wasting" pupil and provider time in the process. Within the requirement to deliver CEIAG to all young people, more targeted inputs (particularly for those unlikely to follow an academic route post-16) may be a more fruitful use of the available resources.
- E3:18** Parents and carers can have a potentially negative impact on their child's choice of post-16 options – for various reasons they may push their child into doing something that does not match their capabilities, and/or they may underestimate their child's abilities – with the risk that young people choose a post-16 pathway that they really do not want to be on, and that they end up dropping out from it.
- E3:19** As the options process progresses in Year 11 and into Year 12, it would be helpful to schools if external providers gave feedback on how applications to them were progressing: this will help schools identify and work with those pupils most at risk of becoming NEET at 16.

Year 11s' views

- E3:20** Year 11s recognised the CEIAG inputs that they received from their schools, and importantly a clear majority were content with these and with their likely post-16

destination. Current school sixth forms predominate as Year 11s' first choice (almost 1 in 2), with a further 10% planning to go to other sixth forms; around a third pick a general further education college [GFEC] (mainly MKC) as their first choice. Almost no one (fewer than 5%) has a work-based option as their preferred first destination (more have it as their "back-up" plan).

- E3:21 However, a significant minority felt that their school only really presented its own sixth form offer and wanted more information on alternative post-16 options. In particular they are interested in finding out more about work-based opportunities. In the absence of information coming from their school, young people found it difficult to find out about the range of options available to them.
- E3:22 Should they fail to get into their preferred choice, a third of young people have not thought about an alternative or have yet to decide on what it would be.
- E3:23 Young people in PRUs feel particularly well-supported and are broadly happy with their choice of destination at 16. They receive considerable 1:1 support through the decision-making process and there may be lessons that can be taken from this for others in the cohort (e.g. the potentially NEET post-16 group).

Year 12's views

- E3:24 Year 12s shared the concerns of Year 11s, in particular *re* the partiality of the CEIAG they had been given, and the need for more focused/tailored (1:1) inputs. They also thought more exposure to the world of work would have been helpful for them.

Year 11 parents'/carers' views

- E3:25 Parents and carers are interested in finding out more about the options available to their child. They also share their children's concerns *re* schools "pushing" their own sixth form, generally to the exclusion of all other options and with no support if the young person is interested in anything else – in particular they would also like more information on work-based options.
- E3:26 Compared to the views of Year 11 pupils, parents and carers are more likely to believe that their child is interested in, and sufficiently well-informed about, their own school's sixth form. They think their child is less interested in finding out about other options than would seem to be the case – for example young people are almost twice as likely to be interested in MKC as an option than parents/carers think. If the child is prepared to discuss the issues, these mismatches are a potential source of tension between it and their parent/carer – if not it the result may be a child who chooses a post-16 option "to please their parents/carers", is unhappy with it, and underachieves or even drops out as a result.

Other providers' views

- E3:27 The quality of other providers' relationships with individual schools is people-specific and therefore very variable – there is no sense of an embedded system that would survive a change of personnel (on either side).

- E3:28** Providers also have concerns about the quality, and in particular the partiality, of CEIAG in schools; when they are given access, often the school appears to have done little in advance to raise awareness of their offer. (Of course schools may have tried to raise awareness but found it hard to push against 'stated' preferences – pupil and/or parental – for sixth form.)
- E3:29** Providers are keen to work with schools earlier, particularly with those young people who would benefit from a programme that included more vocational inputs/elements pre-16.
- E3:30** Parental pressure and uninformed attitudes towards their provision can prove particularly difficult for these providers to address.

Overall assessment

- E3:31** However comprehensive and well-delivered a school's CEIAG programme is, in practice it tends to result in pupils deciding that their current school's sixth form is the logical next step for them. (And, looking further ahead, that higher education [HE] should follow.) Whilst this pathway will be entirely appropriate for many, there is a generally shared concern that for a not insignificant minority it will not.
- E3:32** For a range of reasons, it is currently: (a) a difficult and significant decision for a young person to determine that they would prefer to go elsewhere; and (b) even harder for them to take the necessary steps to make this happen. To help them take the best route for them, young people need more and earlier exposure to information on, and experiences of, the alternatives.

Transition into post-16 provision (3.5)

- E3:33** Transitions into the sixth form of a Year 11's current school are generally well-prepared for and well-managed; transitions from schools to any other post-16 provider are almost invariably – and possibly inevitably – not as well supported.
- E3:34** In particular:
- It is a challenge to ensure that external entrants are as well-prepared for sixth form as a school's own Year 11 pupils (though such transfers are rare)
 - PRUs are not routinely funded for, and therefore struggle or are unable to provide, continued support for their former pupils once they are in their post-16 destination.
- E3:35** From the perspective of the "receiving" provider, young people's previous providers are not funded to offer on-going support once a pupil has left them: should things start to go wrong, this puts the receiving provider at a significant disadvantage when compared to a sixth form receiving one of its own schools' pupils. Some of these young people, particularly those with (often undiagnosed) needs below the EHCP threshold, struggle to adapt to their new learning environment, and as a result dropout rates can be relatively high for this group.

- E3:36 Whilst MKC takes steps to ensure that transitions to it (from the PRUs, from the special schools, and from some NSSs) work well, for a relatively small proportion of young people the change in learning environment that the move to college represents can prove difficult to cope with.
- E3:37 High Needs providers are generally able to invest well in supporting the transition of young people. They also have the option of retaining young people for at least a year post-16, which can help ensure that any subsequent move is properly planned and prepared for: this, and/or other forms of extended support that High Needs providers are able to provide, would almost certainly be beneficial for other vulnerable learners (e.g. those in PRUs pre-16; those in AP post-16).

Delivery of post-16 provision (3.6)

- E3:38 Most young people felt that their programmes were living up to their expectations, and they were enjoying them.
- E3:39 The availability of resources is a constraining factor on the delivery of learning. However – with the important exception of AP – most providers have been able to find a way of living within what is available to them.
- E3:40 Something more needs to be done pre-16 to reduce the numbers of young people forced to retake qualifications they have already failed to pass (particularly in English and mathematics), often to get no better result.
- E3:41 Whilst schools will do what they can to help their former pupils who are experiencing difficulties (even though they are not funded to do so), a major barrier to them stepping in is that they simply do not know when a former student is in difficulty.

Outcomes from post-16 provision (3.7)

- E3:42 The proportion of young people achieving Level 3 after Key Stage 5 in Medway is lower than its statistical neighbours; conversely the proportion achieving at Level 2 or below is higher. The gaps are significant – for example 46% of Medway young people do not achieve a Level 3 qualification at KS5, as opposed to 31% nationally.
- E3:43 Given this it is no surprise that post-18 destinations for Medway show lower proportions of young people proceeding to higher education (and higher proportions not recording a sustained destination) than its statistical neighbours and the national average.
- E3:44 Taken together, these findings suggest that there is a need to expand the Level 3 offer, particularly in technical and vocational provision: much of this will need to be at MKC's Medway site.
- E3:45 For those disadvantaged students who make it into a sixth form, comparing their outcomes with their non-disadvantaged peers shows that in almost all cases proportionately fewer reach Level 3 by the end of their time in KS5, and proportionately fewer will progress on to achieve a sustained destination post-18,

though some schools (grammar and NSS) perform better than others on this indicator.

- E3:46** For the more disadvantaged (or challenged) young people, special schools and APs reported high levels of progression into meaningful destinations (including employment).
- E3:47** The shortage of apprenticeships available to young people (at both Levels 2 and 3) is acting as a real brake on progression for those ready to enter employment. It has been argued that if more young people expressed an interest in apprenticeships it would be easier to stimulate employer interest in providing them, and therefore to grow the number of work-based opportunities.

Post-Year 13 decision-making and transition (3.8)

- E3:48** For the majority (and almost invariably for grammar school students) progression at 18 will be from school to HE. These progressions are generally well-supported by the schools and universities, though the options are numerous and geographically spread so there is only so much that schools feel they can usefully do to assist. Fear of debt and cost of living pressures are pushing some young people to look for more local universities that would allow them to continue to live at home.
- E3:49** Non-grammar school students are more likely to be not considering going to university, and therefore more open to other progression options – apprenticeships; college; employment; and gap years. More thought is being given by them to using work experience to inform their choice, though the interest they have in higher level and degree apprenticeships is currently largely unaddressed (and there are few such opportunities available anyway).
- E3:50** Progression from special schools and other SEND-focused provision is almost invariably to further education or supported employment, often via a supported internship; key to it being completed successfully is the ability of providers to give wide ranging and individually focused support to each young person.
- E3:51** Similarly the importance of properly supporting the transition process from AP was also emphasised; without this many young people who have been in an AP lack the confidence and social capital to sustain their onward destination.

Future viability (3.9)

- E3:52** There is an overall confidence in the ongoing viability of post-16 provision, however concerns were raised in relation to:
- The ability of smaller sixth forms – those projected to total less than 200 students – to offer a sufficiently wide curriculum at Level 3 ...
 - ... particularly if BTECs are withdrawn as T Levels are rolled out ...
 - ... and the challenges that offering these new qualifications represent to schools.

- E3:53 It is not always clear that the threats are fully appreciated.
- E3:54 APs' principal concern continues to be the need to identify a sustainable source of funding (post- the loss of the European Social Fund [ESF]) that will allow them to continue to fulfil the valuable role they perform in the post-16 sector.

Collaboration (3.10)

- E3:55 Notwithstanding the changes to the technical/vocational qualifications landscape at Level 3, examples of collaborations to deliver the post-16 curriculum are limited; there is no sign of this changing for the foreseeable future.
- E3:56 There is more interest in developing collaborations that are not curriculum-related; these would add value in their own right – and may, in time, lead to more interest in collaborating in other areas.

Environmental factors (3.11)

- E3:57 The use of technology to support the delivery of learning is increased during the pandemic: where retained, this has opened up attractive new options for some young people and some providers, and has broadened the range of what can be delivered using new technologies. Whilst a degree of caution is needed, both of these are broadly positive developments.
- E3:58 Missed learning and the methods of assessment used during the pandemic continue to have knock-on effects in terms of CEIAG inputs, the availability of work-based and alternative options, the choice of provider and of subjects, and decisions about post-18 destinations.

4 Principal Recommendations

- E4:1 This report makes eleven principal recommendations; these are summarised and explored in the following paragraphs. (A fuller description of what each recommendation would/could involve is in the corresponding paragraphs of Section 4 of the full Review Report).

Identify aspirations; raise outcomes (see Review Report, Section 4.1)

- E4:2 The “offer” in school sixth forms needs to be improved in order that what is available more closely and accurately builds upon and reflects the aspirations of young people.
- E4:3 To help to achieve this, as a first step performance data should be used to identify issues requiring action at individual sixth form level. There are a number of software tools that schools can use to compare their students' attainment at 16+ with national data – ALPS is a popular example.
- E4:4 Schools could act on their analysis of performance data as a way of improving their provision. However the best use of this analysis would be for schools to share their ALPS or other data across the community of sixth form providers in Medway as part

of an acknowledgement that all providers have something potentially to learn from others.

Develop technical/vocational provision at Level 3 (4.2)

- E4:5** The first step must be to improve awareness of technical education as an option that all young people should at least consider as a potential alternative to an academic route.
- E4:6** At present school sixth forms tend to concentrate (some almost exclusively) on offering A level programmes that implicitly focus on higher education as an outcome: sometimes the expectations placed on/of young people and/or the CEIAG that young people receive make this focus explicit. As a result, there is a poor match between what is offered in school sixth forms and the local labour market. Moreover, young people who are capable of Level 3 study but do not want to follow an academic pathway tend at the moment to have to choose between doing A levels anyway and moving to MKC to study (often starting at Level 2).
- E4:7** Government has invested a great deal in promoting T Levels, and this investment should be capitalised upon by in turn promoting them across Medway, both in MKC (where this has started) and in schools.
- E4:8** For schools in particular, the requirements of T Levels are likely to be better addressed through collaboration and partnership with MKC, which has the breadth and depth of vocational and technical expertise and facilities that schools generally lack.
- E4:9** T Levels require a high degree of support from employers – a minimum of 315 hours (45 days) of industry placement per student – so gaining sufficient employer engagement will be key. Again MKC has the breadth and depth of vocational and technical expertise, experience, credibility and contacts to deliver this element of the programmes – almost invariably schools will struggle here.
- E4:10** As part of the process of implementing T Levels, support will need to be given to help schools transition from BTEC qualifications – particularly if the defunding of these qualifications is to continue. (Recommendation 4.3 is also relevant here.) Ultimately it seems probable that a relatively compact area such as Medway would be best-served at Level 3 by schools focusing on what they are best-placed to deliver (i.e. A levels and the IBD) with MKC taking the lead on T Levels and other vocational and technical qualifications.¹
- E4:11** Alternatively (or in addition) Medway Council might, as part of the “honest broker between partners and stakeholders” envisaged in the *Skills and employability plan*, offer to provide coordination – for example to ensure that multiple school sixth forms are not chasing the same employers for contributions to CEIAG, work placements etc..

¹ MKC is in the process of introducing A levels from academic year 2023-24, but only at its Maidstone campus.

- E4:12 Apprenticeships are of course also a valuable route for young people seeking a technical vocational pathway. These are in short supply (nationally as well as in Medway) and their further development should be encouraged with MKC and other training providers working alongside employers to support their delivery.
- E4:13 As will be apparent, this recommendation provides an opportunity to enhance and expand the role of technical and vocational providers in the area's Level 3 offer, and it is vital that they are enabled, encouraged and supported to do this – by the Council and by the area's schools.

Ensure the sufficiency and sustainability of the post-16 offer (4.3)

- E4:14 It is important that the post-16 offer currently available to young people in Medway is sufficient and sustainable; in addition to provision at Level 3 (covered in 4.2 above) there are two other aspects of provision that are causes for concern:
- Small sixth forms
 - Providers delivering qualifications below Level 2, both in general and more specifically to young people who have been or who might become NEET.

Small sixth forms

- E4:15 Small sixth forms present challenges to a school's resources, and will almost certainly only be able to support a small range of Level 3 qualifications, constraining the choice for any student who does not want to move at 16.
- E4:16 None of Medway's mainstream school sixth forms is vanishingly small; though some currently fall below the DfE recommended minimum size, most are on a projected growth trajectory that will take them above it by the end of the decade.
- E4:17 However, developments – particularly with regard to T Levels and the future of BTEC and the IBD – will pose challenges to school sixth forms, especially if they lead to young people following technical or vocational Level 3 qualifications elsewhere. The impact of qualification changes on school sixth forms is an important area for further investigation.
- E4:18 If schools are concerned about the pressure on their sixth forms, one solution might be to encourage collaboration: this has already been discussed as a possible approach to offering T Levels but collaboration between school sixth forms could simultaneously increase the range of A levels students can be offered and at the same time ensure that class sizes were raised to economic levels.
- E4:19 Medway Council should reach out to schools facing current and/or potential future difficulties with sixth form viability and offer to broker collaborative working where this might be helpful.

Alternative providers delivering qualifications below Level 2

- E4:20 Providers delivering courses below Level 2 face a different set of issues. Many of these providers operated through ESF funding. However this is now discontinued, and there is no equivalent ready replacement.
- E4:21 At the same time, providers funded by the Education & Skills Funding Agency [ESFA] through a consortium model have found that ESFA's reluctance to support consortia has affected them too. There is now as a result a serious shortage of provision below Level 2 in Medway (and Medway is not alone).
- E4:22 Learning below Level 2 that leads to qualifications (and hopefully progression) should be funded by the body charged with funding learning nationally for this age group – namely the ESFA, which already funds SIs. As a first action discussions should take place with ESFA around how they think this provision more generally should be funded.
- E4:23 Once it is clear what kind of sub Level 2 provision (especially for young people with behavioural difficulties) ESFA will support, then Medway Council will, with its partners, be able to work with existing and potential providers to ensure there is sufficient provision for this group of young people.

Improve young people's work-readiness (4.4)

- E4:24 Medway Council and its partners should – as far as possible and practicable – agree a set of minimum expectations that employers can reasonably have about young people's preparedness for work and the skills they will bring with them to the work place. Some of this will already be known but there would probably be value in producing and confirming a 'Medway statement of needs'. Existing resources – particularly *Skills Builder* – could be used to support this.
- E4:25 Employers should be centrally involved in drawing up this set of minimum expectations. Once this is agreed, employers can be reassured that their expectations of what a young person can be expected to do, or what behaviours they can be expected to manifest, when they start in the workplace are reasonable.
- E4:26 Post-16 providers can use the statement of needs to shape the aspects of their offer that have a role to play in promoting work readiness. This may be by asking providers to implement a 'work skills curriculum'; equally it could be actioned, at least in part, through aspects of employer engagement (workshops, presentations or other events), work experience, ways in which the curriculum is delivered etc..

Develop a single information source for post-16 opportunities (4.5)

- E4:27 A single information hub which includes details of all post-16 opportunities should be established so that young people can more easily find out for themselves and/or be signposted towards all the post-16 options they might consider.
- E4:28 The single source of information should, of course, be searchable electronically through a web interface.

- E4:29 Although Medway Council has no power to compel providers of post-16 opportunities to participate by putting details of their offer on the hub, it is reasonable to expect that almost all will. Once the hub becomes regularly used (reinforced by developments in CEIAG; see 4.7 below) opportunities not listed on it will find it harder to recruit.
- E4:30 Many will be familiar with Kent County Council's [KCC's] *Kent Choices* system, and it may be possible to adopt or adapt elements of it to meet Medway's needs – in broad terms, at this stage, these are probably for the single information hub element but not for application processing.
- E4:31 As a minimum the system would include details of all the A levels and all other qualifications on offer from all sixth forms in Medway and MKC, plus work-based opportunities with training (including supported internships).

Provide ongoing support for vulnerable young people (4.6)

- E4:32 A far better system of support for vulnerable pupils as they transition into, and remain in, post-16 learning is needed. Ideally this should match what was available (from one source or another) for these pupils just before their transition into post-16.
- E4:33 In particular, some way needs to be found to support young people who may have additional needs (including behavioural needs not previously diagnosed) but who do not qualify for an EHCP. Post-16 providers cannot be expected to support what can be significant proportions of these young people in their provision purely on the basis of normal per capita average funding.
- E4:34 For young people with an EHCP there is scope to do more of what has already been proved to work in a supported internship [SI] context – specifically:
- The option of a short extension to an SI for those who need a bit more time with their work coach in order to secure a sustained employment outcome
 - Further support post-SI to make the achievement of sustained employment outcomes more likely
 - In the short term, more places on pre-SI programmes to reflect the negative effect that Covid has had on this group of young people.
- E4:35 Post-16 providers should be encouraged to consult with students' previous schools or settings whenever difficulties arise, and in particular before taking any action such as terminating provision. Post-16 providers cannot be expected to learn all about their young people during their first few weeks with them, and in this way the knowledge and experience of young people's needs gained over many years by their pre-16 providers are not lost.
- E4:36 A further idea – rather more experimental – might be for pre-16 providers to think of a transition period (possibly for terms 1 & 2 or a full year) where young people not ready to transfer into post-16 learning at the end of Year 11 might remain for a further period of time with their pre-16 provider on a programme that will prepare them better for the move into post-16 provision.

E4:37 The benefits of continuing dual registration, which exist pre-16 for young people in PRUs but do not currently extend into post-16 provision, would also be worth exploring in this context.

E4:38 Ultimately these are first steps towards an overall vision that sees schools and all providers sharing a holistic, collective responsibility for students from years 7 to 13. This vision is considered more specifically in Recommendation 4.11 below.

Improve CEIAG (4.7)

E4:39 While it is difficult to adjudicate between the different views expressed during the Review without actually inspecting CEIAG provision, the mismatch in opinions about the effectiveness of current CEIAG arrangements in providing young people with the information they need on the full range of options that are available to them identified by the fieldwork needs to be addressed.

E4:40 What appears to be needed are:

- A clearer vision of what CEIAG is. (The Gatsby benchmarks, and the duty created by the Provider Access Legislation [PAL], represent a start towards these aims, but are probably not sufficient in themselves to stimulate the necessary changes)
- Earlier interventions throughout a young person's time in secondary education to ensure that they are aware of post-16 alternatives sufficiently early for this to have an effect on their subsequent destination
- More targeted inputs, particularly for those unlikely to achieve as they should through an academic route post-16. These may be a more fruitful way to use the available resources, provided the universal entitlement is not weakened
- Specific CPD for school staff so that they have greater awareness of the alternative pathways at 16 and the opportunities that these might open up for young people
- A framework that is designed to support the incorporation of CEIAG goals into ideally all learning activities undertaken by all providers.

E4:41 There will need to be materials produced, and workshops offered. But these will be about the way in which CEIAG is to be included in all learning rather than aimed towards careers lessons.

Improve parent and carer engagement (4.8)

E4:42 Given that parents and carers have a significant influence on young people's decision making, it is obviously important that they are as well informed as possible about the range of opportunities available to their children. What is not so clear is what should be done to ensure this.

E4:43 A reported reluctance of (some) parents and carers to engage with school after options in Year 9 limits the likely effectiveness of the most obvious ideas (careers fairs, open evenings for parents and carers with their young people, etc.)

- E4:44 To an extent, better CEIAG for young people (Recommendation 4.7) will lead to young people educating their parents/carers about what is on offer, but this cannot entirely be relied upon and actions that seek to have a more direct impact on parents' and carers' views are likely to be required. This recommendation, therefore, seeks to be more ambitious about what can be done to ensure that parents/carers are better-informed.
- E4:45 As a first step, Medway Council should set up a working party that will engage with a representative sample of parents and carers (probably of Year 7 and Year 8 pupils). The purpose of the group would be to explore how, when and what to communicate to parents/carers about post-16 (and arguably post-18) destinations.

Develop an approach to information-sharing (4.9)

- E4:46 Particular pressure points are:
- Between pre- and post-16 providers as the young person approaches the point of transition, to support progression
 - At the point of transition and subsequently, to ensure that the transition is successful and to reduce the chance of a young person becoming NEET
 - In the approach to and through transition at the end of 16-19 study, again with a view to helping ensure that a young person does not become NEET.
- E4:47 This may be seen as a technical area – but sharing data between providers is important, and should accrue considerable benefits to the young person.
- E4:48 Any concerns over data sharing should be clearly specified and addressed as a matter of urgency. It should be possible to resolve them.

Improve access (4.10)

- E4:49 The fieldwork clearly identified transport difficulties as a potential disincentive to young people considering post-16 provision other than at their current school.
- E4:50 The vast majority of Medway's post-16 providers will have a DBF allocation to use *inter alia* to support students who find it difficult to meet travel costs. (Matters are more problematic for non-school/college options.)
- E4:51 However, for the availability of DBF support to have any impact on a young person's post-16 decision they need greater and earlier certainty about:
- Details of bursaries, and eligibility – these need to be made widely known to young people before they start to consider where to apply
 - (So they may reasonably estimate the costs that may fall on them or their families) the level of award that the young person would (or could) receive should their application be successful.
- E4:52 There may also be more that employers could be asked/encouraged to do – for example to support travel to work experience placements.

E4:53 Matters would be helped considerably if central Government supported travel to post-16 education in the way that it already does pre-16; the Council should continue to lobby for this.

Develop an overarching vision for post-16 provision in Medway (4.11)

E4:54 Two common themes have emerged from the Review; that:

- Young people should be encouraged to consider the full range of academic and vocational opportunities available to them at 16+, and that their choice should not be limited by what is available locally to them or by a lack of knowledge on their or their parents'/carers' behalf
- Having made their choice, young people should then be supported to follow it, particularly during times of transition and especially for those young people whose previous difficulties or vulnerabilities may make it initially difficult for them to stay the course.

E4:55 To bring these two themes together an overarching vision of how learning can be facilitated from Year 7 to Year 13 (and beyond for EHCP holders) should be developed.

5 Conclusion

E5:1. This has been a major review of Medway's post-16 provision: all post-16 providers active in Medway in 2022-23 were interviewed for the Review, and a significant proportion of young people engaged through focus group discussions for Years 11 and 12, and a survey of Year 11 pupils. The process of evidence gathering has been as robust and comprehensive as it could reasonably be.

E5:2. The recommendations that have emerged from the Review are wide-ranging; taken together they represent a major opportunity for a step change in post-16 provision in Medway. Delivering these recommendations will require contributions from across the sector – providers, the Council, and employers – and from young people and their parents and carers. The reward will be better life chances for more of Medway's young people.