

# **Department for Education**

## **‘Evidence check’ memorandum**

### **Raising the participation age (RPA)**

#### **Background**

1. The Education and Skills Act 2008<sup>1</sup> raised the participation age in two stages, so that pupils who left year 11 in summer 2013 were required to continue in education or training for at least a further year, and pupils who left year 11 from summer 2014 onwards are required to continue until at least their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
2. Young people have a choice about how they participate: through full-time education, a job or volunteering combined with part-time study, or by undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship.
3. There is no penalty for young people who do not follow the duty – they are encouraged to participate because of the benefits this brings. While the position will be kept under review, there is no current plan to commence the enforcement powers in the Education and Skills Act.

#### **Rationale**

4. There is a link between post-16 participation and increased attainment – for example, of those without a level 2 qualification at age 16, 60% of those in full-time education catch up compared to 15% of those who go to jobs without training (DfE, 2010).
5. Higher attainment is associated with both increased employment (Bynner, 2004), and greater earnings for those in employment (Spielhofer, 2007) – taken together the economic benefits for a single cohort of young people who remain in education or training until the age of 18 have been estimated to be around £2.4 billion (Hunt and McIntosh, 2007).
6. Research describes wider benefits of learning – even lower-level attainment where narrow economic returns are less strong, including: reduced likelihood of teenage pregnancy; reduced likelihood of drug use; wider civic involvement; health benefits; increased life satisfaction; and reduced likelihood of offending behaviours (Hosie, 2007; Beinart et al., 2002; Milligan et al., 2003; Aldridge and Lavender, 2000; Hillman and McMillan, 2005; Flood-Page et al., 2000).
7. Conversely, the estimated lifetime cost to public finance of 16- to 18-year-olds being not in education, employment or training (NEET) is £56,000 per person - whilst the broader “resource cost”, reflecting lost productivity to the economy and welfare to individuals and families, is higher at £104,000 (Coles et al, 2010).

#### **International evidence**

8. International literature on increasing the age of participating in compulsory education or training reveals only limited direct evidence of the impact or challenges of RPA. This is often because the changes in other countries have come into effect very recently and the first cohort of pupils has not yet passed through the revised system (Spielhofer et al., 2007).
9. Also, in some cases, the ages to which compulsory education have been raised in other countries are not relevant for comparison with England (where RPA has been introduced in two stages).

#### **Conclusion**

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/25/contents)

10. Figures published in June 2014 reveal the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds NEET is at the lowest level since comparable records began 20 years ago.
11. The statistics also show the number of 16- to 18-year-olds NEET has dropped by more than a quarter since the end of 2009.
12. The figures show that for England at the end of 2013:
- there were 33,400 fewer 16- to 18-year-olds NEET than in 2012 – a drop of almost a fifth in just one year – and 55,200 fewer NEETs since the end of 2009;
  - the proportion of 16- to 18-year olds NEET was also down – to 7.6%, the lowest rate since comparable records began in 1994;
  - there were more than half a million 16-year-olds in full-time education – up 16,200 (2.4 percentage points) on last year – these are the first figures available since we raised the age to which young people must stay in education or training beyond the age of 16; and
  - the number of 16-year-olds NEET fell by almost 12,000 (1.9 percentage points) – the largest fall seen since comparable records began.
13. This is the first cohort impacted by RPA and while it cannot be evidenced that RPA has been the single factor in the increase in participation, it does suggest that RPA has had a positive impact. This is the highest increase for this age group in a single year since consistent records began in 1994.

## References

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