

Area reviews in London - Developing a Proposed Approach

Introduction and Background

The government published a policy statement in July: “Reviewing Post-16 Education and Training Institutions”, which set out its approach to facilitating a restructuring of the Further Education sector through a series of area based reviews of FE provision. This is available to view [here](#)¹. Guidance on the area review process has now been published - which can be viewed [here](#)² - that sets out a national framework to ensure a level of consistency across all the reviews, but which also allows space for local areas to scope work flexibly, e.g. in London because of its size and particular local government structure.

Each review will start by taking stock of the skills landscape in local areas and assessing the economic and educational needs of the area, and the implications for post-16 education and training provision – including school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, FE colleges and independent providers. The reviews will then focus on the current structure of Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges, although there will be opportunities for other institutions (including schools and independent providers) to opt in to this stage of the analysis. Regional School Commissioners will consider the implications of the first stage of the analysis for school sixth form provision.

The reviews will ascertain whether the skills provision on offer can facilitate delivery of the Government’s objectives, as set out in the Government’s productivity plan: “Fixing the Foundations – creating a more prosperous nation”³, which in addition to the expansion of the Apprenticeship programme, are:

- i clear, high quality professional and technical routes to employment, alongside robust academic routes, which allow individuals to progress to high level skills valued by employers; and
- ii better responsiveness to local employer needs and economic priorities, for instance through local commissioning of adult provision, which will help give the sector the agility to meet changing skills requirements in the years ahead, building on the agreements with Greater Manchester, London and Sheffield.

These objectives can only be delivered by strong institutions, which have the high status and specialism required to deliver credible routes to employment, either directly or via further study. These will include a new network of prestigious Institutes of Technology and National Colleges to deliver high standard provision at levels 3, 4 and 5.

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/446516/BIS-15-433-reviewing-post-16-education-policy.pdf

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/459845/BIS-15-526-reviewing-post-16-education-and-training-institutions-guidance-on-area-reviews.pdf

³https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/443898/Productivity_Plan_web.pdf

While we already have many excellent further education (FE) colleges operating across the country, substantial change is required to deliver these objectives while maintaining tight fiscal discipline. The work of the FE and Sixth Form College Commissioners has identified there is significant scope for greater efficiency in the sector, in a way that frees up resources to deliver high quality education and training which supports economic growth.

Across the country, reviews will be led by local steering groups consisting of chairs of governors of each institution, the FE and Sixth Form College Commissioners, local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Regional Schools Commissioners, who will oversee and steer the review's work. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Education will also be represented, either through or alongside the funding agencies, reflecting Government's responsibility for protecting students.

Proposed approach in London

The government has proposed a differentiated approach to local involvement which will enable areas with the strongest governance and levers to take a leading role. In London, the Mayor will lead the reviews working with sub-regional groupings of boroughs. The Mayor and borough leaders will work collaboratively with government and the skills sector to use this process to develop and deliver a more resilient, high quality and stable post-16 skills and education landscape in London focused on meeting the educational, business and economic need of the local area. Over the entirety of the English FE and sixth form college sector, government expectation is that the scope for rationalisation and greater efficiencies will lead to fewer, but stronger individual institutions.

Geographical scale

Given the scale and diversity of the city, it is proposed that area reviews in London are undertaken sub-regionally, where the starting point could be based on the geographies of existing sub-regional partnerships or groupings of boroughs (e.g. Central London Forward, West London Alliance etc.). These sub-regional partnerships have the political identity and governance structures to support the process and can act as brokers to facilitate changes based on the final review recommendations. Where boroughs are not currently members of a sub-regional partnership, discussions are underway to agree their inclusion in borough groupings in time for the area review process. The current picture of sub-regional partnerships is provided in annex one, but this is subject to change, given ongoing political discussions.

The process for undertaking the area reviews will need to give consideration to the provision available in the outer metropolitan area adjacent to Greater London and will be flexible to evolving alliances between institutions that may cross over the proposed sub-regional grouping areas.

Governance

Reviewing post-16 Education and Training Institutions explains that area reviews will be a collaborative process involving a range of bodies. In London, the overall review process will be led and overseen by a London-wide steering group chaired by the Mayor, with a

nominated borough Leader as Deputy Chair, the FE Commissioner and the Sixth Form College Commissioner and representation from the LEP, other borough leaders, further education and sixth form colleges, regional schools commissioners, government and other key stakeholders to ensure that the outcomes of the reviews provide the City as a whole with the skills base and structures that it needs to compete as a world City. Each Area Review will also have its own sub-regional steering group, which will report into the London-wide steering group.

It is proposed that the Mayor and the London Steering Group are advised by an independent post-16 Skills Commissioner for London to help shape the area reviews and provide the necessary expertise on strategic and economic outcomes for the future skills landscape.

The London steering group will also be asked to consider the establishment of Institutes of Technology to provide specialist higher level professional and technical education. Where the review process identifies an existing institution as a candidate to become an Institute of Technology (IoT), options to do that will be carefully considered and quality assurances will be sought to ensure the institution meets the criteria required to become an IoT.

Supported by the Skills Commissioner for London, the London Steering Group and sub-regional steering groups will oversee and steer the work of the area reviews, including analysis and consideration of options. The FE and Sixth Form College Commissioners will work with the steering group to ensure consistency, quality and neutrality, ensuring boundary issues are addressed appropriately and will ensure the reviews' recommendations are clear and deliverable. However, it will be for the governing bodies of each individual institution to decide whether to accept the recommendations – reflecting their status as independent bodies. Governing bodies will therefore be expected to engage actively in the review process, and in particular to ensure that the analysis of the reviews covers the options they would wish to be considered.

The approach to the area reviews will consider how best to ensure full implementation of the recommendations of the reviews and oversee production of an implementation plan. Summary reports on each review will be made publicly available. The Education and Training Foundation and Jisc stand ready to help the steering group consider potential workforce and technology opportunities arising from the reviews. They will also help institutions implement improvements including for curricula analysis and development, promoting excellent teaching standards and raising quality of learning for all including effective use of technology in both curriculum and assessment as well as back office. London is also giving consideration to a 'development pot' linked to this work.

Scope of Reviews

Across the country, reviews will usually cover both FE and Sixth-Form Colleges and will be able to include other providers where they agree; the availability and quality of wider 16+ provision including school sixth forms and HEIs will also be considered during the analysis phase.

In London, as well as further education and sixth form colleges, it is proposed that the reviews also include independent learning providers, school sixth forms and HEIs where these organisations choose to opt-in. This will help to provide a strong assessment of the potential impact of demographic changes in an area. We also propose that the reviews take account of the Adult and Community Learning Services available in the area, given their role in providing basic and employability skills and some of the larger providers may wish to opt into the options analysis.

Area reviews should take into account factors including:

- i. Local economic objectives and labour market needs and any local outcome agreements in place;
- ii. National government policy, including the national expansion of the Apprenticeship programme; creation of clear high quality professional and technical routes to employment; the desire for specialisation, including the identification and establishment of centres of excellence such as Institutes of Technology; and the need for high quality English and maths provision;
- iii. Access to appropriate good quality provision within reasonable travel distances, particularly for 16-19 year olds and students with special educational needs and disabilities;
- iv. Funding, including the need for 16+ providers to operate as efficiently as possible within a tight fiscal environment;
- v. Effective support for the unemployed to return to work;
- vi. Legal duties relating to the provision of education, including but not limited to section 15A of the Education Act 1996 and section 86 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

Analysis

To achieve the area reviews successfully, government will expect the reviews to be supported by an underpinning analysis that requires the sharing of relevant data in order to help inform and undertake a strategic economic need assessment of the current local skills landscape and future needs. This information will be supported by London's own analysis including on the demand and supply data of skills to determine London's specialisms, key outcomes for the future skills system and how collectively key stakeholders can work together to achieve the reform that is needed. This analysis will cover:

- Current and future economic priorities of the area - led by London government with support from the Commissioners' advisers and funding agencies. The aim will be to look at the future needs for the next 5-10 years, where possible.
- Current and future demand for education and training at age 16 plus in the area, including longer term demographic change. This will be supported by the funding agencies, but will also draw on local authorities' and institutions' data.
- Progression routes for young people from school to other education and training providers, the extent to which these align with local economic needs and priorities and meet the needs of employers.

- An assessment of the level of publicly funded provision which is affordable in London in the context of both central government funding decisions and contributions that the LEPs, local authorities and others may be able to make, taking account of the move to local commissioning.
- With support of expert advice from the FE Commissioner and advisers, identification and assessment of the range of options available to improve delivery of skills whilst also ensuring the long term viability of institutions and management of cross boundary issues.

The analysis will be supported by a review delivery team, which will include FE and Sixth Form College Commissioners’ advisers and staff from the funding agencies.

Proposed timeline

To enable suitable time to undertake this analysis and to set up a robust approach and clear vision for the future, it is proposed that London commences the Area Reviews in wave 2 of the government’s timeline with the first of London’s reviews starting in February 2016. It is proposed that the remaining reviews take place concurrently from August 2016 to allow for lessons from the first review to be considered in the approach for the remaining ones. However, the timing and geographical breakdown for the London area reviews are still open to discussion, and the timetable below is therefore only a proposal at this point.

Broad next steps and the proposed timeline for the area reviews are included below:

2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and agree the approach to area reviews in London • London Area Review Information/ launch Event • Establish the London Steering Group • Appoint a London Skills Commissioner • Conduct analysis to inform the area reviews • Agree the sub-regional area for the first review
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish sub-regional skills and employment boards • Sub-regional boards begin collating and sharing labour market intelligence • Sub-regional engagement events • Commence London area reviews, with the first review starting in February 2016, with the others to run concurrently from August 2016
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete London area reviews and publish final recommendations • Commence implementation of the review outcomes relevant to the wider London landscape

Shaping the Approach – Your Response

London government is keen to hear your views to help shape the approach to undertaking area reviews in London, in particular:

1. The proposal to undertake the area reviews sub-regionally based on the existing geographies of borough partnerships included in annex 1. How best to address overlap in travel to learn patterns?
2. The make-up of steering groups (sub-regional and regional); how to achieve the balance between inclusivity and impractical numbers. Who should represent sub-regions on the regional steering group?
3. The proposal to undertake the first of the reviews from February 2016 with the remaining ones undertaken concurrently from August 2016.
4. The scope of London's reviews; how best to include the greater metropolitan area outside of London.
5. The proposal to have an independent post-16 Skills Commissioner for London to advise the Mayor and boroughs on the approach and strategic context for area reviews.
6. The proposal to include within the review the availability and quality of all post-16 academic and work-based provision in each area.
7. The establishment of Institutes of Technology.
8. What support mechanisms are required to support successful implementation?
9. Any other views, challenges, opportunities that you think are important and should be considered in the approach to area reviews in London.

How to respond

Responses should be sent to Honor.Main@london.gov.uk before **12pm on Friday 23 October**.

Annex 1: Borough Partnerships 2015

