

Covid class of 2020, and beyond

Supporting Sussex learners and potential learners

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Institute for Employment Studies

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1 Introduction

1.1 About the research

Sussex Learning Network (SLN) commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) to lead a research study to examine the potential for a collaborative ‘Pan Sussex’ approach to ensuring all learners are able to make effective transitions within education and training as a protective measure against the economic storm created by the coronavirus crisis. The focus includes young people and mature learners, those currently in school, further education colleges (FECs) and higher education institutions (HEIs) and other education and training providers.

SLN recognises that supporting people to continue their education and training will help individuals avoid the worst of the social and economic scarring that will result from inactivity in this crucial phase of life.

From the SLN perspective, the ‘Pan Sussex’ approach could also include tracking and tracing people as they make transitions between different phases of the education and training system, as well as: providing careers support and guidance on the changing labour market context; the differing pace of recovery that will emerge across sectors; and progression routes and pathways. It recognises that this requires a collaborative approach across education and training providers, as well as detailed insights into the changing labour market context.

The research and this report provide insights into the impact of the crisis on:

- the local labour market;
- young people in Sussex, including those at risk of, or becoming not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET), as well as mature learners and potential learners; and
- the education sector: and its current and future response on:
 - careers advice and guidance;
 - employability, vocational/technical and transferable skills; and
 - provision types and modes.

To this end, IES has undertaken analyses of labour market and education data and led a series of qualitative interviews with education and training providers, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Local Authorities (LAs) and other stakeholders.

The research addresses the following questions:

- How has the COVID-19 lockdown affected the Sussex economy and labour market?

- What early lessons can we draw to hypothesize the medium- and long-term impact of COVID-19?
- Where and who are Sussex learners and potential learners, and what are the key risks that the Pan Sussex approach should seek to mitigate?

The research activity took place between August-October 2020 at a time when young people were returning to education settings, while the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme was drawing to a close and a 'work-from-home where possible' order was still in place. The research had to take into account of a complex and rapidly changing national landscape and a multifaceted, local picture regarding geography, economy, and existing networks.

1.2 The national context

The global Covid-19 pandemic has had national, regional, and local impact and led the UK into recession for the first time in 11 years. The unemployment claimant count is up by 1.5 million since March 2020 (Office for National Statistics (ONS) Labour Force Survey). Recruitment data shows an unprecedented collapse during the crisis (ONS Vacancy Survey), which is starting to show tentative recovery but at much lower levels than before the crisis – leading to larger numbers competing for each vacancy.

Nationally, the Government's Plan for Jobs¹ published in July covered several areas in which they planned to act: retention; safe return to work; help to get work; long-term unemployment; more and better jobs; and a youth guarantee. At the time of writing, most of the new initiatives had yet to enter delivery but planning was underway for the following:

- **Youth Hubs** are for young people aged 18-24. They will build on existing community and youth hubs or be virtual and offer a chance for Jobcentre Plus (JCP) work coaches to operate in outreach locations and co-locate with other, youth services. Locally, there are plans for Youth Hubs in Hastings, Crawley, Brighton, plus other locations.
- The Plan also presented **increased funding for Apprenticeships**, in the form of incentive payments of £2,000 to employers in England for each new apprentice they hire aged under 25, and a £1,500 payment for each new apprentice they hire aged 25 and over, from 1st August 2020 to 31st January 2021.
- Additional funding will triple the number of **traineeships** and sector-based work academy programmes.
 - Traineeships are for young people aged 16-24 years old and until now have enabled young people to undertake Level 2 qualifications alongside substantial work experience. Under the Plan for Jobs, Traineeships will be extended to enable study at Level 3.
 - Sector-based work academies provide training to enable entry to sector and jobs, providing for example, the license to practice. They build on employer engagement

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-plan-for-jobs-documents>

with two week work placements and work-based training leading to guaranteed interviews with employers.

- The **Kickstart Scheme** is due to go-live from Autumn 2020, offering high quality 6-month work placements (subsidised short-term jobs) for 16-24 year olds on Universal Credit at the highest risk of long-term unemployment. To participate, employers will work with a lead body to aggregate the supply of jobs so that there are a minimum 30 positions per scheme.
- The **Restart Scheme** that will offer long-term claimants of Universal Credit tailored support and potentially bespoke training to be able to take advantage of opportunities in growth sectors, gain appropriate industry accreditations and skills to enable access new industries.
- More generally for adult claimants, the Plan included increased employment service staffing, and increased money for the flexible support fund².
- And more widely for adults, the Plan indicated investment in careers information, advice, and guidance through an additional £32 million funding over the next 2 years for the **National Careers Service** so that 269,000 more people in England can access personalised support.

While there is much to commend in these new initiatives it must equally be recognised that the Plan does not provide tailored support for some groups, for example, graduates and under 18s who are not participating in education.

1.3 The local context

The area that a 'Pan Sussex' approach would cover encompasses:

- East Sussex: a non-metropolitan county, led by East Sussex County Council with five local government districts.
- West Sussex: a non-metropolitan county, led by West Sussex County Council with seven district and borough councils.
- Brighton and Hove: a coastal city unitary authority.

Stakeholders interviewed for this research highlighted that this presents a complex picture in respect of administrative structures and local contexts. A number made the point that in such a wide area, the extremes of East and West are more different than similar with regard to labour markets, geography (urban/rural) and with different travel to work areas.

Depending on where they are resident, travel to work across the counties and unitary authority include Essex, Kent, East Surrey, and Hampshire. However, there are seen to be greater similarities along the 'coastal strip' in the south, and an existing travel to work

² Funding available to Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches to tailor support through, for example, covering expenses associated with taking up work or training in line with existing policy guidelines, filling gaps and adding support to enhance the core offer.

and education pattern within the boundaries of East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove.

In such a big area, numerous organisations and networks in the education, training and careers sphere operate across various geographic boundaries. These are often not coterminous with 'Sussex' or County Council boundaries. These networks include the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), the Coast2Capital LEP, the Greater Brighton Economic Board, and the Sussex Council of Training Providers. Each has a range of existing structures and committees to support collaboration and information sharing as well as some shared and individual strategic aims.

For example, SELEP, through a locally federated board – Team East Sussex – has produced a strategic action plan to bring together local business, education, and the local authority to support recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. The six identified missions, including 'building skills, creating jobs', emphasise local investment and growth, including in training and education. Plans referenced in the document include work academies to help young people into employment, and new courses and learning packages for businesses to aid their recovery and growth.³

SLN itself is a key networked organisation, with a local, strategic partnership that develops and delivers projects with a focus on enabling learning to participate in higher education. As well as promoting access to higher education and lifelong learning, SLN supports improvements to practice and curriculum, funds projects and lobbies for change.

SLN includes Uni Connect – which started life as the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP). It encompasses 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and local partners such as local authorities, LEPs, and local employers. These bodies work together in local contexts with the aim of boosting higher education participation rates among disadvantaged young people aged 13 to 18, and by:

- targeting and providing impartial support, advice and information (outreach) about higher education in local areas where it is most needed;
- raising expectations and ambitions; and
- providing information about the different pathways to meet career goals.

SLN has been part of Aimhigher, NCCO and NCOP, and so has seen policy, funding and infrastructure evolve over time whilst providing continuity for local stakeholders. It was clear from the stakeholders we interviewed that SLN has gained a strong, positive reputation in this role – and as a body that can collate and disseminate effective practice and mobilise funding to support new initiatives on these themes.

³ Team East Sussex (2020) East Sussex Reset, Six missions: Recovery as opportunity, September

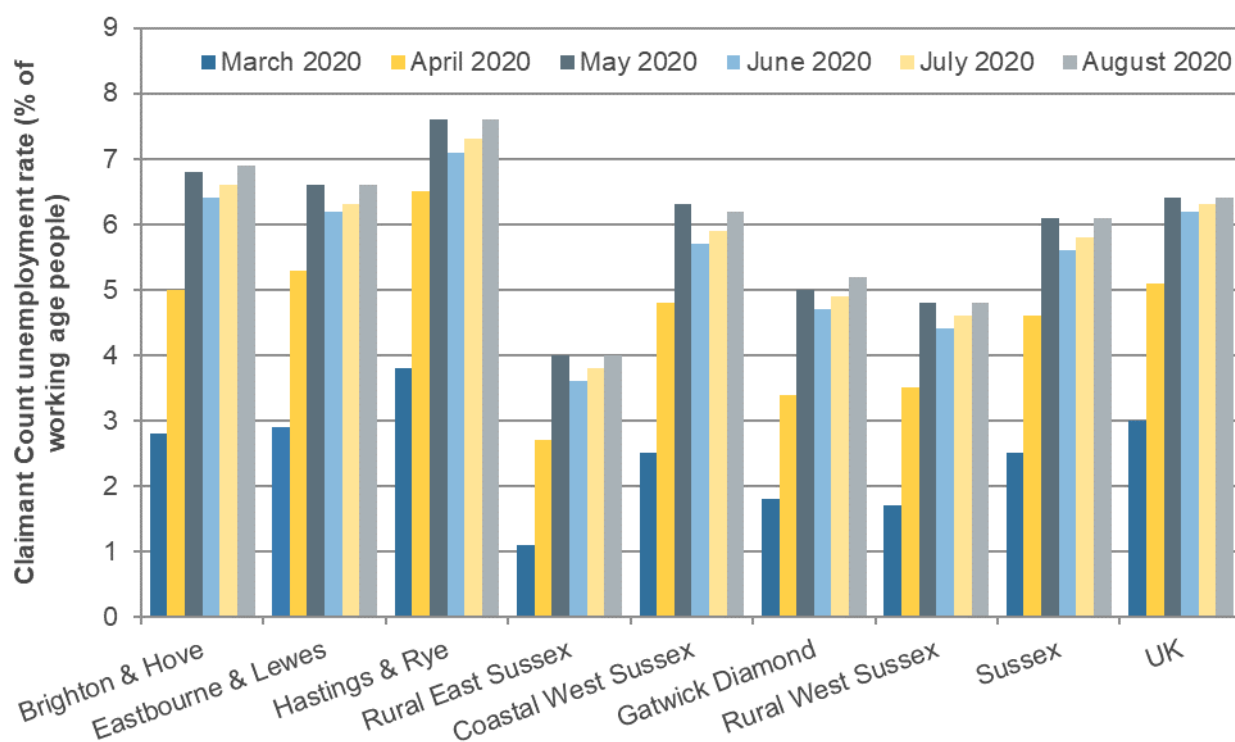
2 Local labour market insights

In this section we present information on the performance of the Sussex labour market since the introduction of Covid-19 lockdown measures in March 2020. Initial results were presented in an interim report at the end of July, and the data presented here update the findings, and present them on the basis of the seven employment and learning areas that SLN uses. The purpose is to show the distinctive effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Sussex labour market, to enable strategic thinking on the best focus for solutions to address this. The analyses show the UK and Sussex-wide effects, as well as breakdowns for the seven learning and employment areas identified by SLN which were: Brighton and Hove, Eastbourne and Lewes, Hastings and Rye, Rural East Sussex, Coastal West Sussex, Gatwick Diamond and Rural West Sussex.

2.1 Claimant unemployment

Changes in claimant unemployment provided the first indications of the impact of lockdown measures on the labour market. Nationally, claimant unemployment increased rapidly between March and May, however, has been fairly stable since then. This trend was mirrored in Sussex, although the increase between March and May was larger in Sussex than in the country as a whole.

Unemployment in March was highest in Hastings and Rye, at 3.8 per cent, and lowest in Rural East Sussex, at 1.1 per cent. The relative positions of the seven areas were similar in August to March, although the increases in unemployment were largest in those areas with the lowest initial rates – unemployment in Rural East Sussex nearly quadrupled (showing a 272 per cent increase) while in Gatwick Diamond and Rural West Sussex it nearly trebled (191 per cent and 182 per cent increases respectively), while in Hastings and Rye unemployment doubled.

Figure 2.1 Claimant unemployment rates by learning and employment area, Mar-Aug 2020

Source: ONS Claimant Count

Table 2.1 Claimant unemployment by learning and employment area, Mar-Aug 2020

	March 2020	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020	July 2020	August 2020	% change Mar-Aug
Brighton & Hove	6,605	11,675	16,020	15,005	15,635	16,340	147
Eastbourne & Lewes	4,020	7,495	9,305	8,680	8,875	9,245	130
Hastings & Rye	4,160	7,025	8,230	7,685	7,915	8,220	98
Rural East Sussex	580	1,480	2,180	1,955	2,055	2,155	272
Coastal West Sussex	4,140	8,100	10,515	9,615	9,875	10,365	150
Gatwick Diamond	3,690	7,000	10,455	9,855	10,125	10,750	191
Rural West Sussex	1,785	3,665	4,995	4,600	4,835	5,045	183
Sussex	24,975	46,440	61,700	57,400	59,310	62,120	149

Source: ONS Claimant Count

Unemployment has risen faster among the youngest age groups in the labour market. Across Sussex as a whole, unemployment among the under 30s has risen by around 165 per cent since March, and by around 145 per cent for those aged 30 and over. The analysis in the interim analysis report showed that the largest increases were among those aged between 22 and 24.

The pattern of larger increases in unemployment among younger workers was not mirrored across all seven areas. In Hastings and Rye and Coastal West Sussex, there was little variation in the rise in unemployment by age, while in Gatwick Diamond the increase among those aged 45 to 54 was similar to that for the under 30s.

Table 2.2 Percentage increase in claimant unemployment by age group, Mar-Aug 2020

	16-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64
Brighton & Hove	167	190	159	149	134	126	130	114	103
Eastbourne & Lewes	135	145	116	120	122	114	148	139	127
Hastings & Rye	92	102	89	106	96	95	105	96	100
Rural East Sussex	450	292	214	207	218	214	317	236	250
Coastal West Sussex	157	159	155	161	171	139	157	138	110
Gatwick Diamond	211	193	195	168	188	207	204	177	162
Rural West Sussex	257	209	159	183	186	138	175	161	144
Sussex	162	167	146	147	146	137	153	135	124

Source: ONS Claimant Count

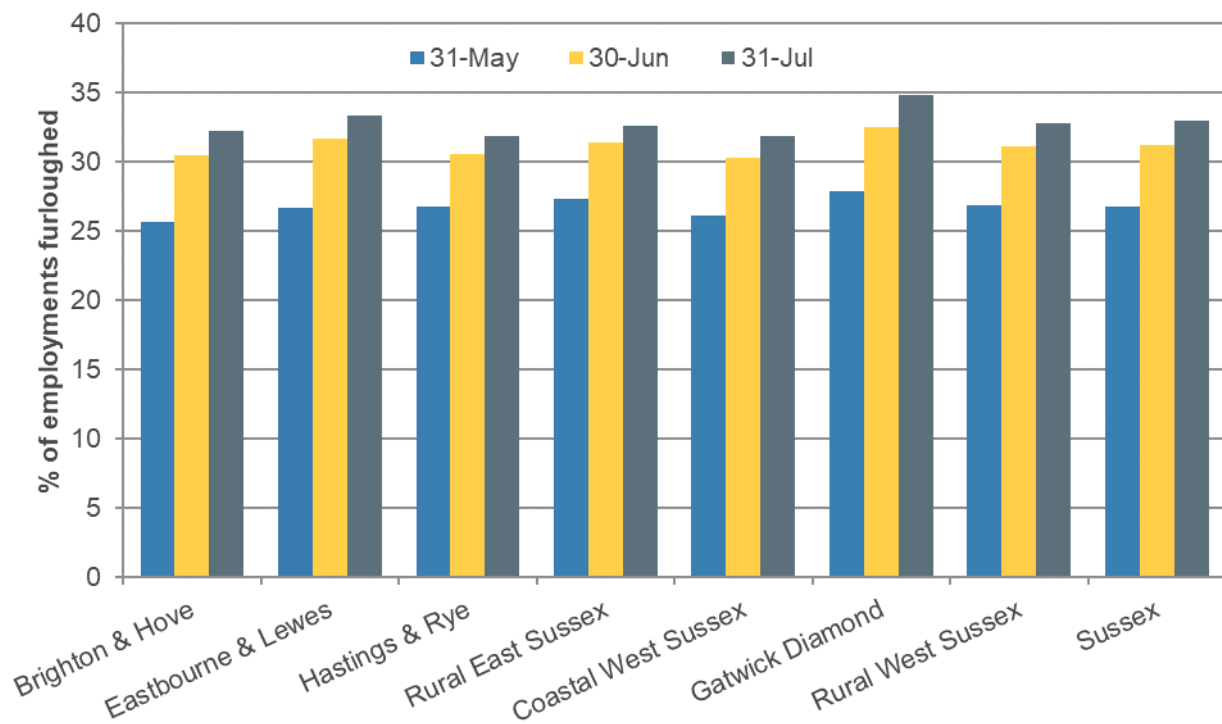
2.2 Furlough

Figure 2.1 shows the estimates of the take up of the Job Retention Scheme (furlough) for the seven learning and employment areas, based on the HMRC data for local authority districts.

Certain sectors have made use of furlough to a greater extent than others, and furlough rates were particularly high for: accommodation and food services; arts, entertainment and recreation; construction; passenger air transport; and certain sub-sectors in manufacturing.

Unsurprisingly, furlough rates have been highest in Gatwick Diamond, reflecting the impact on the airport and its supporting activities, although there was relatively little variation among the other areas. Brighton and Hove had the lowest rate in May, although it moved up the “league table” somewhat over the following months, as did Eastbourne and Lewes, while Coastal West Sussex had the lowest take-up rate in June and July.

In comparison with the furlough rates that might be expected given the industrial mix in areas and the furlough rates by sector, Gatwick Diamond, Brighton and Hove, Eastbourne and Lewes and Coastal West Sussex had actual furlough rates above their “predicted” rates, because of the airport factor in Gatwick Diamond and the large tourism and recreation sectors in the other areas. The more rural areas had predicted rates below their actual rates, and also experienced above average increases in unemployment, which suggests employers in these areas laid staff off, rather than furlough them, to a greater degree than employers in other areas.

Figure 2.2 Proportion of employments furloughed, May-July 2020

Source: HMRC Job Retention Scheme statistics

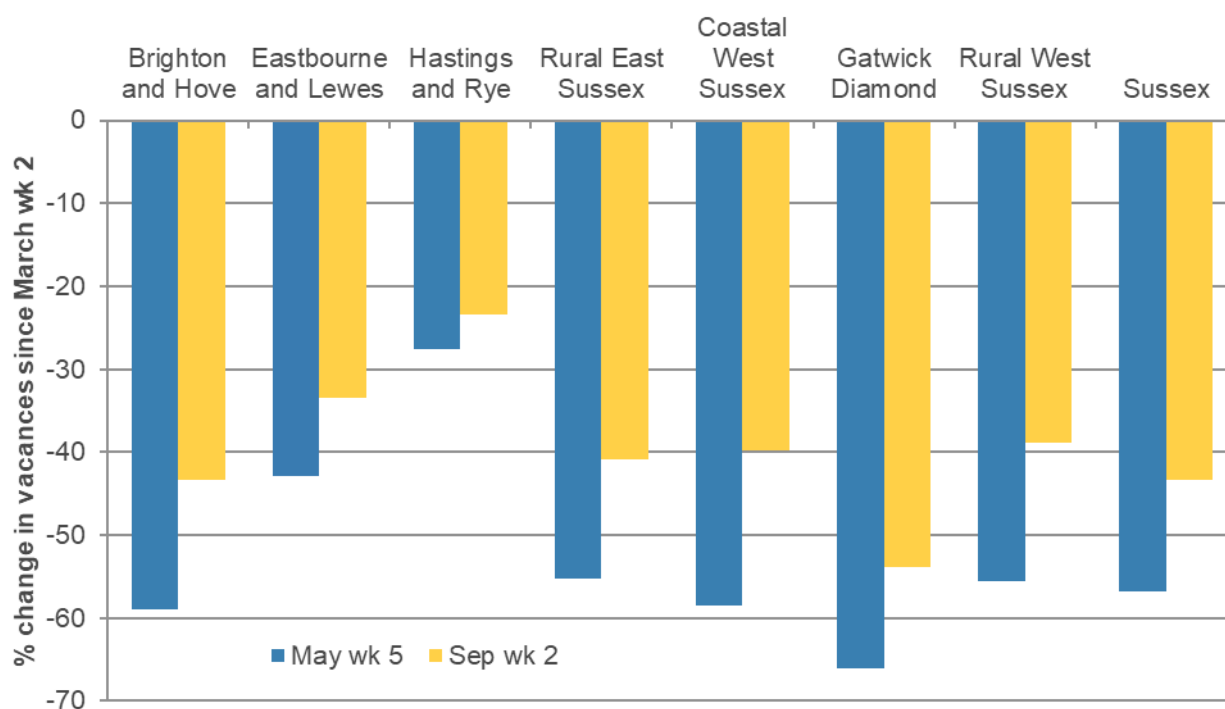
2.3 Vacancies

IES collected and analysed vacancy data collected by Adzuna (www.adzuna.co.uk) – one of the largest online job search engines in the UK, and operator of the government’s ‘Find a Job’ service⁴ – to understand the impact on Sussex employers’ demand for labour.

In comparison with the week ending 15 March (2nd week in March) as the pre-crisis baseline point, vacancies in Sussex fell rapidly in late March and April, and reached a low point in the last week of May, at 57 per cent below the baseline. From then, vacancies picked up somewhat so that by the middle of September, vacancies were 43 per cent below the baseline level.

The impact on labour demand was most severe in Gatwick Diamond, where vacancies fell by 66 per cent to the end of May, while in Hastings and Rye vacancies fell by 28 per cent and Eastbourne and Lewes by 43 per cent. The picture was similar in the middle of September, with Gatwick Diamond having the lowest level of vacancies relative to the baseline and Hastings and Rye the highest level, while the pick-up from the end of May was greatest in Coastal West Sussex and Rural West Sussex.

⁴ Adzuna aggregates job ads from thousands of sources and cleans, de-duplicates and standardises the information to provide a robust picture of employer demand, covering at least 90 per cent of all vacancy activity

Figure 2.3 Percentage change in vacancies from March week 2 by area

Source: IES analysis of Adzuna vacancy data

Table 2.3 shows the change in vacancies by the job categories used in the Adzuna data. Some job types had below average initial falls and had relatively high vacancy levels in September – these include domestic/cleaning, manufacturing, social work, healthcare/nursing, maintenance, and creative/design – while other job types had above average initial falls but then relatively large pick-ups so that the level in September was above the Sussex average – these include trade/construction, logistics/warehousing, travel, engineering, and scientific/quality assurance. Teaching vacancies had a relatively low initial fall but kept on falling from the end of May.

Table 2.3 Percentage change in vacancies from March week 2 by job category, Sussex

	Vacancies		% change	
	March wk 2	May wk 5	May wk 5	Sep wk 2
Domestic help & Cleaning	232	-9.5	-9.5	10.3
Manufacturing	190	-52.9	-52.9	-3.2
Trade & Construction	1,410	-79.4	-79.4	-13.2
Social work	1,302	-9.8	-9.8	-17.1
Healthcare & Nursing	3,179	-20.0	-20.0	-24.4
Maintenance	93	-56.2	-56.2	-25.4
Logistics & Warehouse	646	-63.3	-63.3	-28.7
Creative & Design	117	-33.0	-33.0	-35.6
Travel	86	-58.5	-58.5	-38.0

Engineering	1,448	-66.5	-38.9
Scientific & QA	126	-61.0	-41.0
Property	164	-62.1	-44.3
Customer Services	462	-67.4	-46.2
IT	2,138	-67.7	-50.7
Teaching	1,470	-32.1	-51.0
Energy	60	-80.7	-52.9
Legal	430	-61.2	-54.1
Sales	1,534	-82.4	-59.8
Admin	719	-72.5	-60.0
Hospitality & Catering	1,427	-85.9	-60.3
Retail	448	-75.2	-60.4
PR	380	-77.9	-69.3
Consultancy	197	-81.7	-71.2
Accounting & Finance	1,424	-70.1	-73.9
HR & Recruitment	271	-81.0	-76.7
Charity & Voluntary	32	-49.2	-77.8
All vacancies	20,532	-56.8	-43.4

Note: job categories sorted by %age change to September week 2; categories with above average decreases to May week 5 are shaded

Source: IES analysis of Adzuna vacancy data

Table 2.4 shows the change in vacancies by occupation, using the minor groups in the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC)⁵. Vacancy levels for skilled construction trades and elementary trade occupations were actually higher in mid-September compared with mid-March, reflecting the large pick-up in trade/construction vacancies shown above in Table 2.3. Managerial and administrative/secretarial vacancies had above average decreases between mid-March and mid-September, while vacancies for semi-skilled manual occupations – process/machine operatives and transport operatives – were only around 25 per cent below the baseline level in mid-September.

Table 2.4 Percentage change in vacancies from March week 2 by occupation, Sussex

	Vacancies		% change
	Mar wk 2	May wk 5	Sep wk 2
Corporate Managers and Directors	466	-77.2	-71.0
Other Managers and Proprietors	210	-55.0	-60.7
Science, Research, Engineering & Technology Profs	1,169	-66.9	-65.4
Health Professionals	1,381	-29.6	-47.0
Teaching and Other Educational Professionals	467	-46.2	-61.7

⁵ Occupational coding of vacancies covered around 50 per cent of all vacancies in the Adzuna data.

Business, Media and Public Service Professionals	1,061	-75.2	-68.0
Science, Engineering & Technology Associate Profs	311	-66.6	-65.9
Health and Social Care Associate Professionals	150	-13.3	-42.3
Culture, Media and Sports Occupations	117	-44.9	-36.3
Business and Public Service Associate Professionals	1,317	-79.5	-76.2
Administrative Occupations	810	-72.2	-75.7
Secretarial and Related Occupations	103	-67.3	-62.4
Skilled Agricultural and Related Trades	19	-78.4	-56.8
Skilled Metal, Electrical and Electronic Trades	487	-72.5	-49.3
Skilled Construction and Building Trades	141	-67.0	50.0
Textiles, Printing and Other Skilled Trades	378	-93.3	-69.3
Caring Personal Service Occupations	1,342	-10.5	-24.5
Leisure, Travel & Related Personal Service Occs	109	-68.7	-70.0
Sales Occupations	248	-73.3	-56.2
Customer Service Occupations	177	-56.8	-31.4
Process, Plant and Machine Operatives	136	-54.0	-22.8
Transport and Mobile Machine Drivers and Operatives	377	-54.1	-27.9
Elementary Trades and Related Occupations	174	-80.7	23.6
Elementary Administration and Service Occupations	637	-55.0	-33.2
All vacancies	20,532	-56.8	-43.4

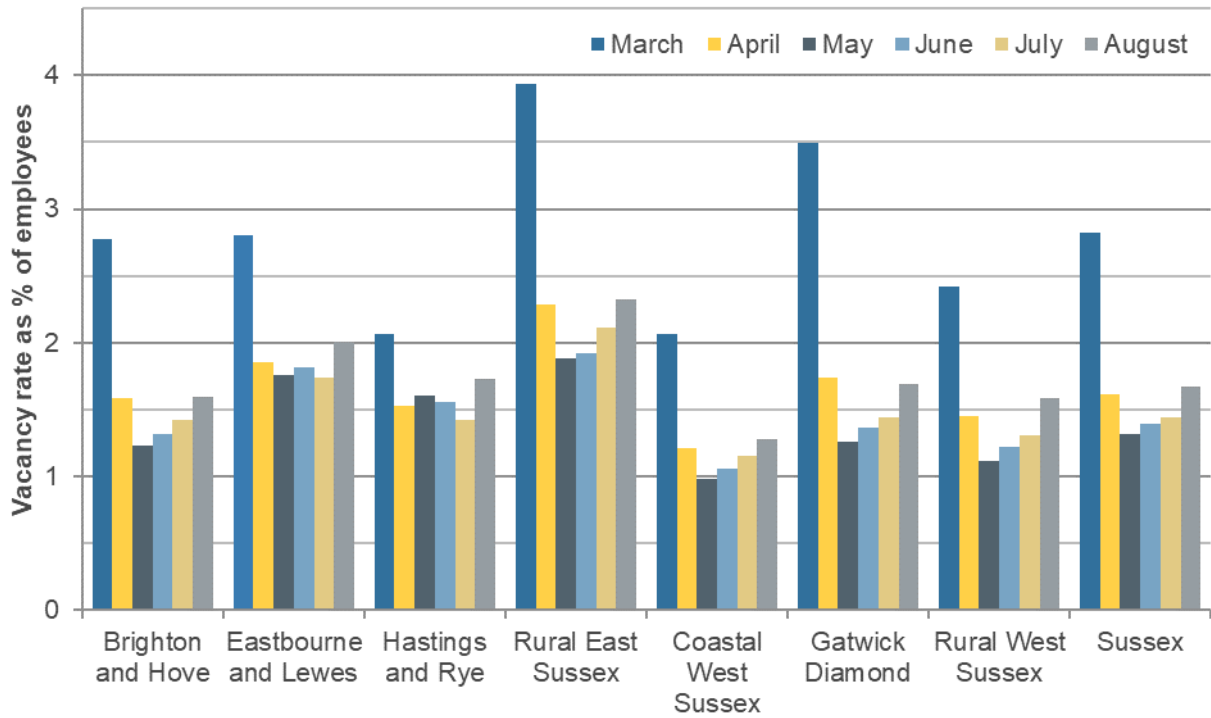
Source: IES analysis of Adzuna vacancy data

2.3.1 Vacancy rates

Figure 2.4 relates the number of vacancies to the size of the labour market in each area, in terms of the number of employees, from March onwards. Across Sussex as a whole, the vacancy rate halved between March and May, from 2.8 per cent of all employees to 1.3 per cent. In Gatwick Diamond the fall was much greater, although from a higher starting point (3.5% in March and 1.3 per cent in May), while in Hastings and Rye the impact was much smaller, although from a lower initial rate (2.1% in March and 1.6% in May). The pick-up since May has been greatest in Rural West Sussex followed by Gatwick Diamond.

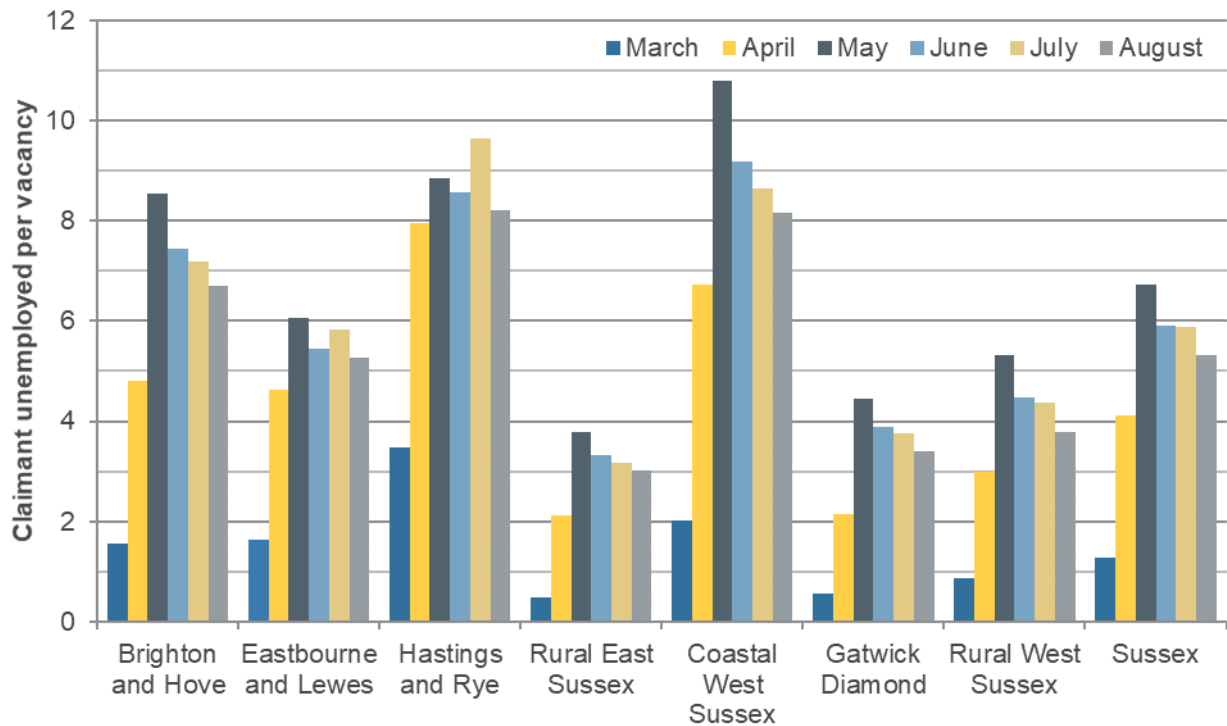
Figure 2.5 shows the ratio of unemployed claimants to vacancies from March onwards. In Sussex as a whole, there were 1.3 claimants per vacancy in March, and this increased to 6.7 in May. The largest increases in the ratio were in the areas with the lowest initial ratios – Rural East Sussex and Gatwick Diamond – with the ratio increasing eight-fold between March and May. Coastal West Sussex had the highest ratio in May, although the increase over March was the same as the Sussex average, while the increase in Hasting and Rye was much lower than in other areas, albeit from the highest initial rate.

Figure 2.4 Vacancies as a proportion of all employees by area, March to August 2020



Source: IES analysis of Adzuna vacancy data and BRES employment data

Figure 2.5 Unemployed claimants per vacancy, March to August 2020



Source: IES analysis of Adzuna vacancy data and ONS Claimant Count data

The fall in the ratio between May and August was more marked in the West Sussex areas, while in Hastings and Rye there ratio in August was only slightly lower than the ratio in May.

Labour market analysis key findings

In summary, these analyses show:

- Claimant unemployment has increased more in Sussex than it has in the whole of the UK – up by 144 per cent and 113 per cent respectively from March to August.
- Of the seven learning and employment areas, Rural East Sussex experienced the largest increase in unemployment (up by 264%) but from the lowest baseline, so it still had the lowest rate in August. Hastings and Rye experienced the smallest increase (100%), but still has the highest rate (7.6% in August).
- The latest Job Retention Scheme statistics show relatively little variation across the seven areas in terms of proportion of workers furloughed, although this masks more stark patterns by local authority, with Crawley having the highest rate (41%) due to the impact of lockdown on the airport.
- In rural districts such as Wealden, Horsham, Arun and Mid Sussex, furlough rates were below 'expected' rates based on the national sectoral furlough rates and the industry mix in these districts. These districts had above average increases in unemployment, which may indicate employers being more willing to lay staff off rather than put them on furlough in these areas.
- Labour demand (vacancies) fell by 57 per cent between mid-March and the end of May in Sussex, but then picked up somewhat so that by mid-September there were 43 per cent below the pre-lockdown level. Gatwick Diamond experienced the largest fall in vacancies, while Hastings and Rye experienced the smallest fall.
- Demand for health, social work and domestic/cleaning vacancies held up relatively well, as did demand for manufacturing, construction, logistics and engineering vacancies. By contrast, demand for many office-based roles eg HR, accounting, consultancy, PR and IT, fell by more than the overall average, leading to large falls in demand for managers, administrators/secretaries, and many professional roles.
- The number of unemployed per vacancy increased from 1.3 in March to 6.7 in May, although it has come down somewhat since then, to 5.3 in August. There was an eight-fold increase to the ratio in Rural East Sussex and Gatwick Diamond between March and May. Coastal West Sussex overtook Hastings and Rye in terms of having the highest ratio in May, although both areas now have similar ratios (8.2 claimants per vacancy).

3 Education insights

All education and training providers had to respond rapidly to the Covid-19 crisis, and their response – particularly in relation to how learning was adapted to distant and remote modes - is detailed in the parallel report for SLN that explores education provision from lockdown, and subsequently over the containment period and the changing national guidance on what is permissible.

Some groups of learners were harder hit. Our research captured commentary around the numbers of apprentices put on furlough by their employers, however by late summer, also signs that these learners were being returned to the workplace. Equally, all learners in full-time education were able to return to premises from Autumn although with limitations due to the containment strategy.

Providers indicated that their immediate response to the crisis led to changes that will be sustained in the current academic year and beyond. In some ways these increase flexibility, which indicate increased opportunities. Providers have pushed forward on digital technologies, eg online learning and increasing the use of cameras so that classroom experiences can be broadcast live or captured for later viewing. This can be a positive eg in respect of continuing intakes of international students despite the Covid restrictions and in providing more flexible learning models, enabling individuals to structure their own learning.

However, there are concerns about inclusion and whether these new digital approaches provide the support needed by some groups of learners. There was some commentary that enrolments are high this year, but this means some groups who might otherwise take labour market routes were now entering education as a default rather than a choice, and could have high support needs.

More broadly, the ramifications of Covid-19 mean that providers are aware that learners' mental health may be affected. However, they have concerns about whether existing support configured around current funding levels are sufficient to meet this increased need.

For apprentices, there is some relaxation from Ofsted in terms of measuring duration and completion and training – which is enabling providers to support apprentices to restart learning and move towards endpoint assessment despite the gap they experienced in on-the-job learning and training from spring into summer.

A parallel issue relates to the burdens on staff and specifically, the challenges of providing learning in dual modes for staff. It is leading to a need to repeat classes – to accommodate smaller group sizes through social distancing. There are thus seen to be some risks, despite the positive stance and opportunities.

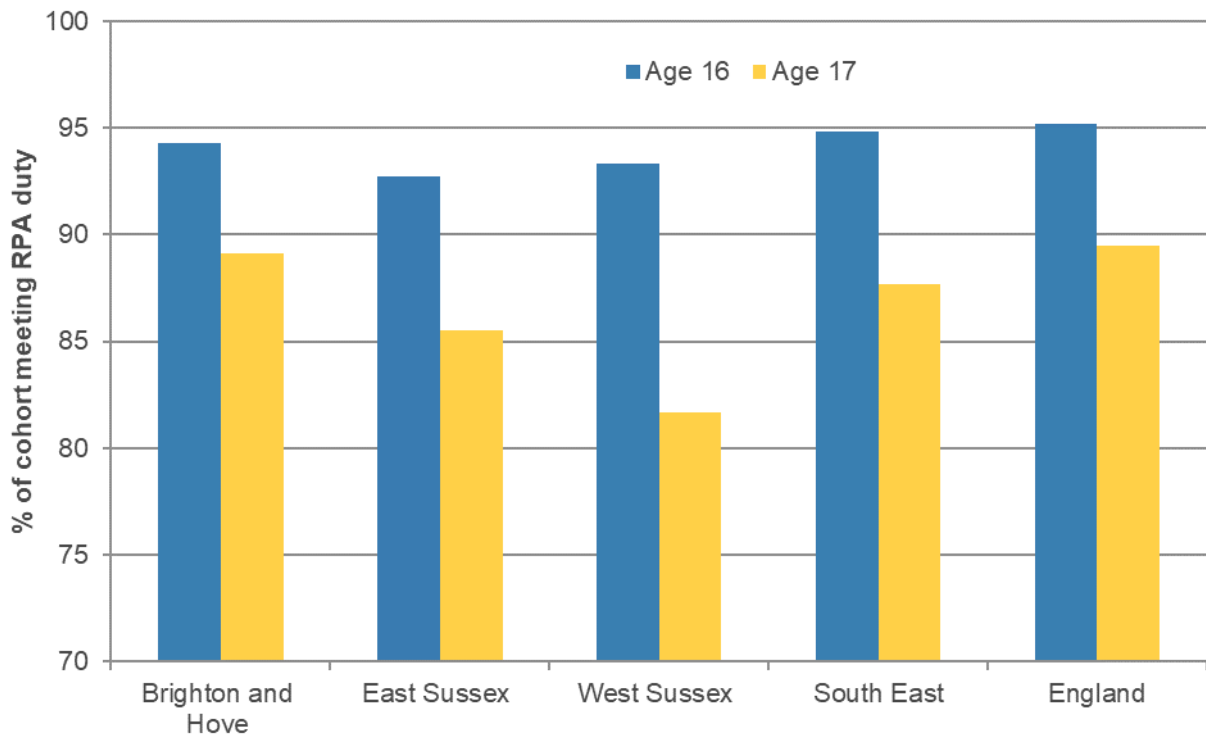
In some cases, new provision has been designed by some providers – that is similar to the sector-based work academy model which is a focus for part of the Plan for Jobs. This provides short courses – to develop the license to practice and entry level employment skills for specific industries – followed by guaranteed interviews with employers. Strong employer engagement is at the heart of the effectiveness of this model and the aim is to provide the rapid means to transition between sectors for those in the labour market at risk of redundancy or where job opportunities that they would normally have taken up have become constrained. Some of this is located in land-based subjects so there is a connection to the challenged labour markets of the rural areas.

3.1 Monitoring student activity beyond Year 11

All local authorities have duties to collect and report information in the Department for Education's (DfE) National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS) on the destinations of 16 and 17 year olds, under the Raised Participation Age policy. The NCCIS is essentially a database that provides local authorities (LAs) with the information they need to support young people to engage in education and training; to identify those who are not participating and to plan services that meet young people's needs. Information recorded on NCCIS is used to monitor the extent to which young people are meeting their duty to participate in education or training, as well as producing tables to compare and benchmark local authorities' performance.

The latest data for May 2020 shows that all three Sussex authorities were below the regional and national benchmarks for 16 year olds meeting the RPA duty – full-time education or training, an apprenticeship or traineeship, or full-time employment/working not for reward combined with part-time study until at least their 18th birthday – while Brighton and Hove was above the regional benchmark for 17 year olds, but below the national benchmark (Figure 3.1). The proportion of 17 year olds in West Sussex meeting the RPA duty was very low, at 82 per cent.

Figure 3.1 Proportion of 16 and 17 year old cohort meeting RPA duty, May 2020

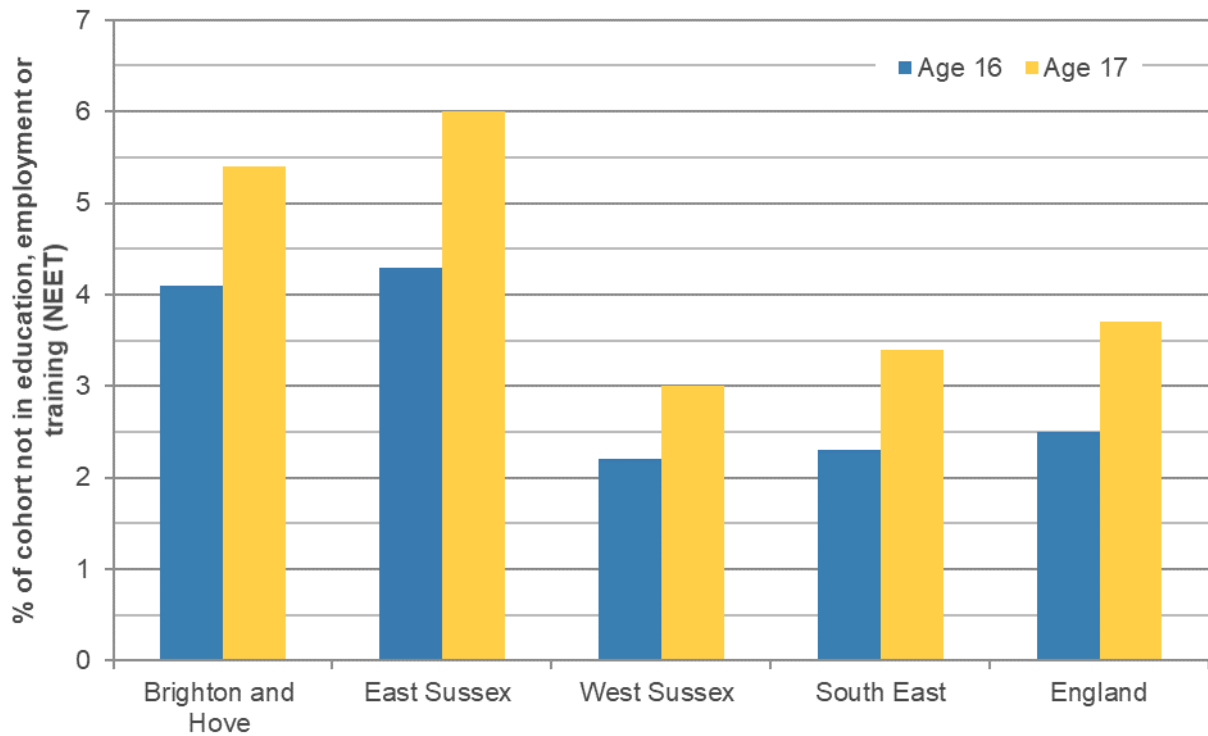


Source: NCCIS LAD data from DfE

Those not meeting the duty includes those who may be engaged in employment, education or training that does not meet the RPA requirements eg is not training to a regulated qualification, those who are known to be not in education, employment or training (NEET), and those whose situation is not known.

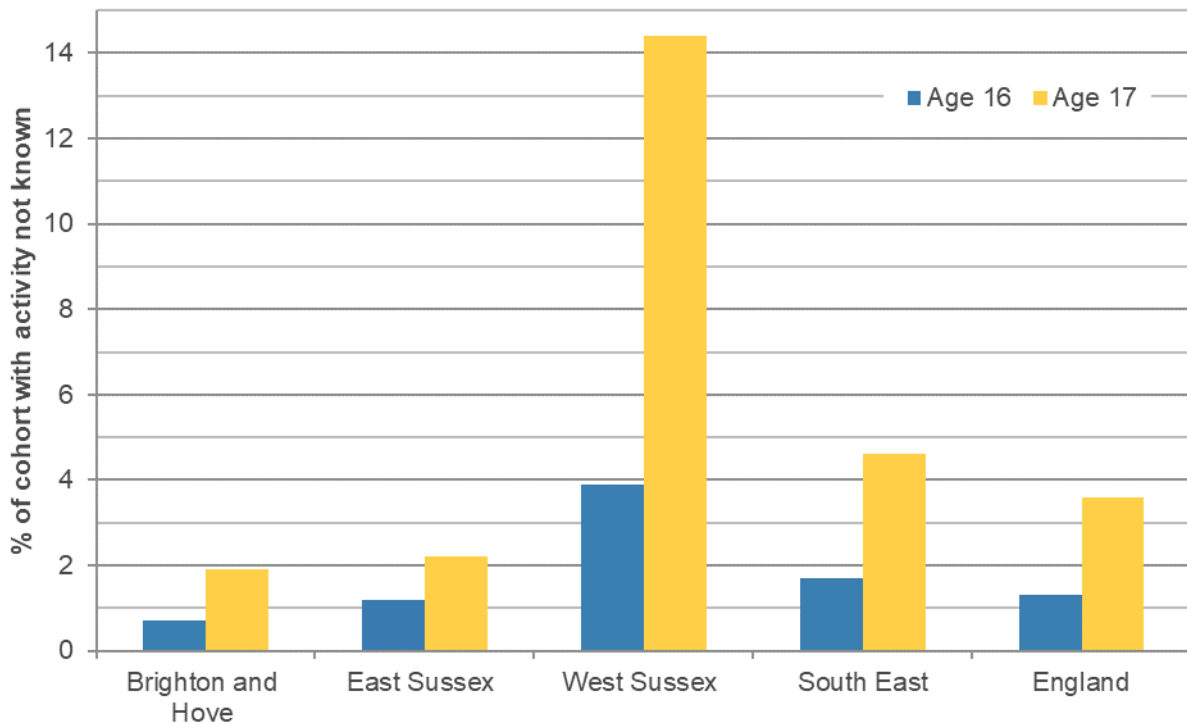
Figure 3.2 shows the proportions of young people in Sussex who are NEET, in comparison with the South East and England, and shows that NEET rates are above the regional and national figures in Brighton and Hove and East Sussex, for both year groups, but below the wider benchmark figures in West Sussex.

Figure 3.2 Proportion of 16 and 17 year olds who are NEET, May 2020



Source: NCCIS LAD data from DfE

Figure 3.3 shows the proportion of young people whose situation is not known in the NCCIS returns. The proportions in West Sussex are well above the regional and national figures, particularly for 17 year olds, with the situation not known for 14.4 per cent of West Sussex 17 year olds compared with the regional and national benchmarks of 4.6 per cent and 3.6 per cent respectively, and proportions in the other two local authorities of around two per cent.

Figure 3.3 Proportion of 16 and 17 year olds whose situation is not known, May 2020

Source: NCCIS LAD data from DfE

In comparison with May 2019, the proportion of 17 year olds in West Sussex whose situation is not known has increased, from 11.1 per cent a year ago, while in East Sussex there was a fall, and the figure was stable in Brighton and Hove. Across the South East as a whole there was an increase, from 3.8 per cent to 4.6 per cent, while there was little change in the national figure.

Further detail is available within the data held by the local authorities. The data for East Sussex contain breakdowns by lower tier local authorities, and show that the proportion meeting the RPA duty was highest in Wealden, and lowest in Hastings and Eastbourne, while the proportion of young people who were NEET was lowest in Wealden, and highest in Hastings, Eastbourne and Lewes. There are also breakdowns by personal characteristics, which show:

- The proportion of females in learning was higher than the proportion of males, among both 16 and 17 year olds, and the proportion of female students who are NEET/now known was below the male proportion.
- Students from BAME backgrounds were more likely to be in learning, and less likely to be NEET/now known, than white students.
- Students with special educational needs or a disability (SEND) were less likely to be in learning and more likely to be NEET/now known than non-SEND students.

Data from Brighton and Hove show slightly different patterns, with female Year 12 students more likely than males to be in learning but no difference among Year 13

students, white students being more likely to be in learning than those from BAME backgrounds, although SEND students in Brighton and Hove were less likely to be in learning than non-SEND students.

The NCCIS data returns contain detailed information for tracking and identifying students who are not in learning or not meeting the RPA duty, by location and by student characteristics.

3.2 Understanding applications to Higher Education

Data on university applicants and applications in the 2019 and 2020 UCAS cycles were provided by UCAS. These datasets provided rich data on the university applications made by applicants from Brighton and Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex, although they do not have breakdowns by individual providers, and so the analysis shows where Sussex applicants apply rather than who applies to Sussex providers.

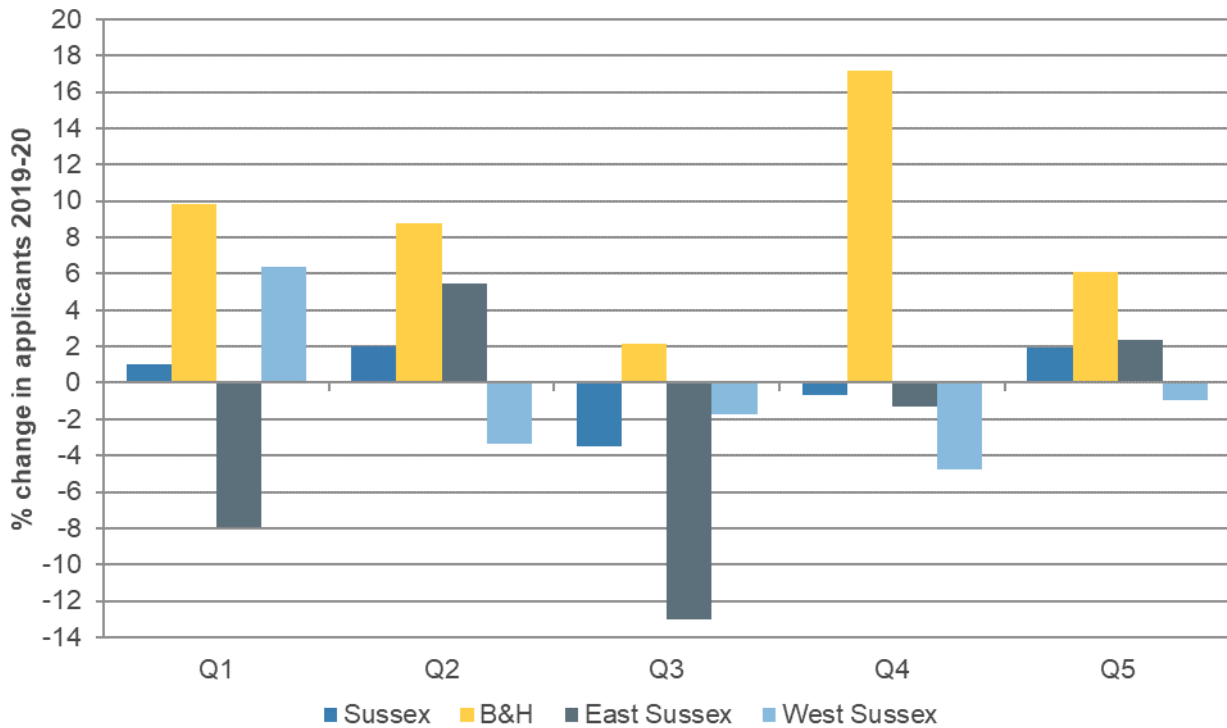
3.2.1 Applicants by personal characteristics

The number of young people in Sussex who made an application to university via UCAS was the same in 2020 as in 2019, at just under 12,000. However, this Sussex-wide figure masks large differences between the local authorities, as there was an eight per cent increase in applicants from Brighton and Hove, and a one per cent decrease in applicants from East and West Sussex. Each applicant made on average just over four applications, with the figure highest in West Sussex (4.3 in 2019 and 4.2 in 2020) and lowest in Brighton and Hove (4.0 in both cycles).

The number of 18 year old applicants was the same in 2020 as in 2019, although there was a small fall in the number of 19 year old applicants (2.2%) and increases in those aged 20 (6.7%) or 21 plus (2.9%). Applicants aged 18 as a proportion of the total population aged 18 increased from 33.8 per cent in 2019 to 35.4 per cent in 2020, as the population aged 18 shrank slightly between the two years. There was a large increase in Brighton and Hove, from 30.7 per cent to 36.7 per cent, and a smaller increase in East Sussex (31.6% to 34.0%), while in West Sussex the proportion was stable at around 36 per cent.

There was a small increase in the number of applicants from local areas with the lowest progression rates to HE – applicants from POLAR4 Quintile 1 areas increased by 1.0 per cent, and applicants from Quintile 2 areas increased by 2.0 per cent. There was also an increase in applicants from areas with the highest progression rates, Quintile 5 (1.9%), but decreases in numbers from Quintiles 3 and 4 (3.5% and 0.6% respectively). In Brighton and Hove there were large increases in the numbers of applicants from Quintiles 1 and 2 (10% and 9% respectively, although smaller than the increase in Quintile 4 of 17.2%), while in East Sussex there was an increase in applicants from Quintile 2 (5.5%, but a 7.9% decrease in those from Quintile 1), and in West Sussex there was an increase in applicants from Quintile 1 (6.4%, but a 3.4% decrease in applicants from Quintile 2).

Figure 3.4 Percentage change in university applicants by POLAR4 quintile, 2019-20

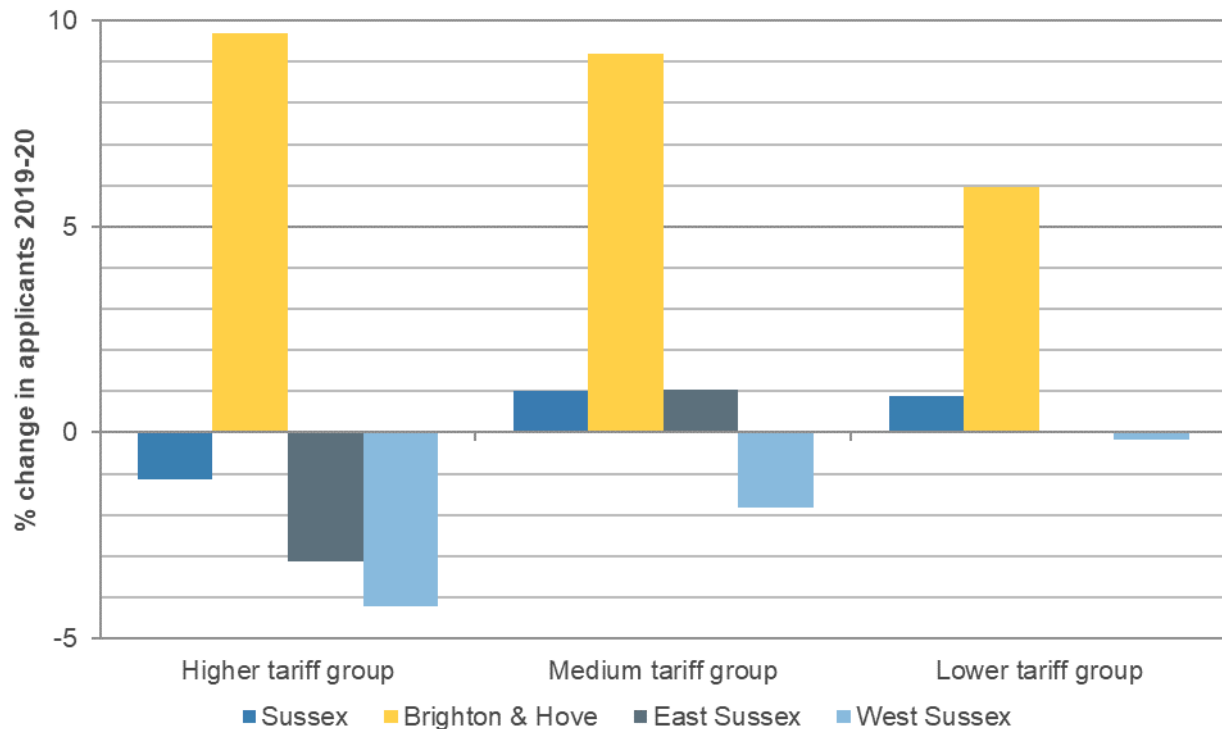


Source: UCAS

3.2.2 Applicants by provider characteristics

There was a small decrease of one per cent between 2019 and 2020 in the number of applicants who applied to a higher tariff university, while the number of applicants who made applications to medium and lower tariff universities increased by one per cent.

Among applicants from Brighton and Hove, the number applying to higher tariff universities increased by 10 per cent, and the number applying to medium tariff universities increased by nine per cent. In East and West Sussex there were decreases in the numbers of applicants who had applied to higher tariff universities, of three per cent and four per cent respectively.

Figure 3.5 Percentage change in applicants by provider tariff group, 2019-20

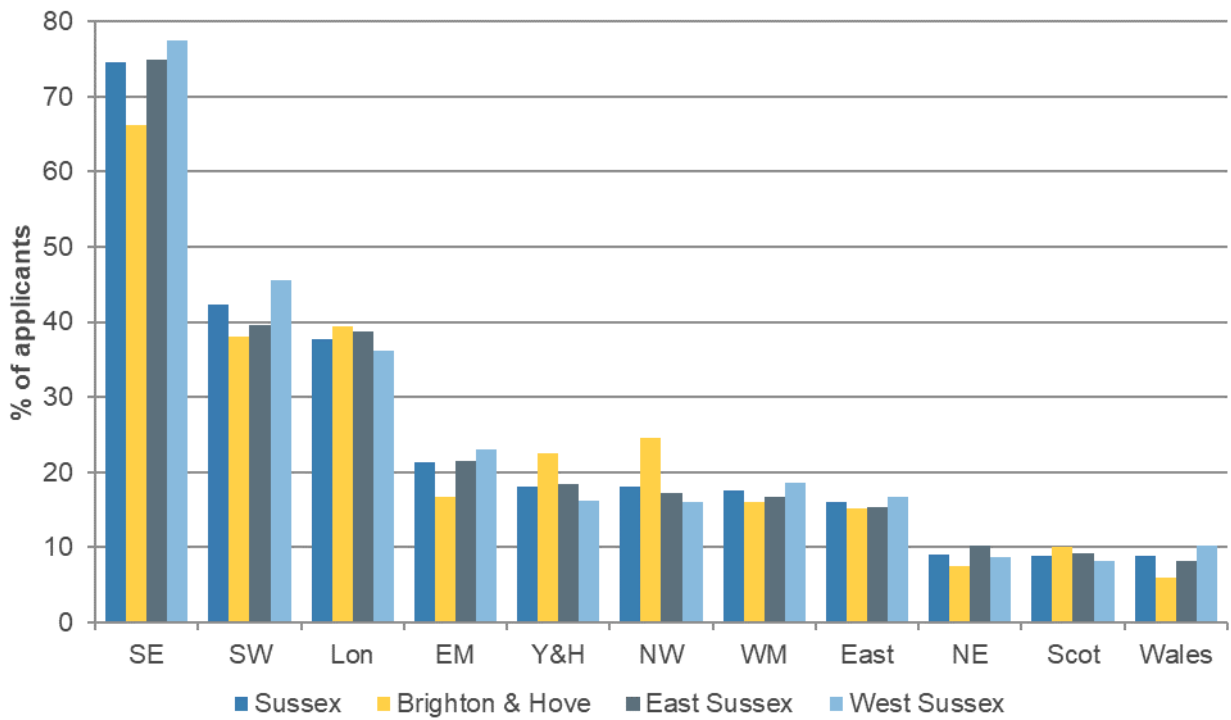
Source: UCAS

Applicants from Brighton and Hove were the most likely to apply to higher tariff universities, with nearly two thirds (65%) of 2020 applicants making at least one application to a higher tariff universities, compared with 58 per cent of West Sussex applicants and 57 per cent of East Sussex applicants.

Applicants from areas with low HE progression were less likely than others to apply to higher tariff universities, although there had been an increase in applicants from POLAR Q1 applying to higher tariff universities between 2019 and 2020.

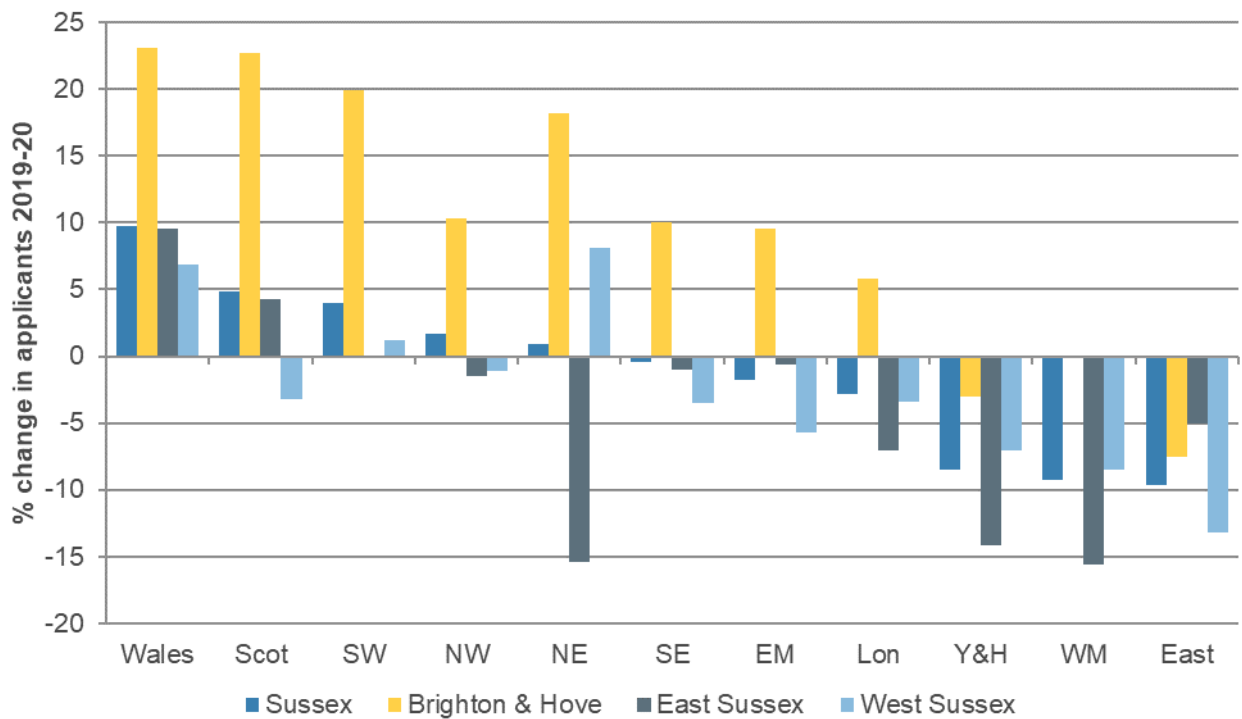
While Sussex applicants were most likely to apply to universities in the south of England (the South East, London and South West regions, see Figure), between 2019 and 2020 there were decreases in applicants to some nearby regions, and some large increases to regions further afield, as shown in Figure .

Figure 3.6 Proportion of applicants applying to providers in each region, 2019



Source: UCAS

Figure 3.7 Percentage change in applicants by provider region, 2019-20



Source: UCAS

Education sector analysis key findings

- The proportions of 16 and 17 year olds meeting the Raising the Participation Age (RPA) duty in the three Sussex local authorities in May 2020 were below the national figures.
- The proportion of 17 year olds meeting the RPA duty in West Sussex was particularly low (82% compared with 90% in England), as there was a very high proportion of 17 year olds whose status was unknown (14.4%, up from 11.1% in 2019).
- The proportions of 16 and 17 year olds who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) were above the regional and national proportions in Brighton and Hove and in East Sussex in May 2020.
- Detailed data for East Sussex showed considerable variation across the districts, and also patterns by personal characteristics – young females, and young people from BAME backgrounds, were more likely to be in learning, and less likely to be NEET, than males and White young people, while those with special educational needs or a disability (SEND) were less likely to be in learning and more likely to be NEET.
- There was no evidence of a decrease in people applying to university. Across Sussex, just under 12,000 people applied to university via UCAS in the 2020 cycle, roughly the same number as applied in the 2019 cycle. There was an eight per cent increase in applicants from Brighton and Hove, but a one per cent decrease in applicants from East Sussex and West Sussex. Eighteen year old applicants as a proportion of the population aged 18 increased between 2019 and 2020, as the population number fell slightly.
- There was also no evidence of reduced applicants among those from disadvantaged areas, as the number of applicants from areas with below average HE progression rates increased between 2019 and 2020, particularly in Brighton and Hove.
- There was however a small fall in the number of applicants making an application to a higher tariff university. This was particularly marked in West Sussex (4% fall compared with 1% for the whole of Sussex) while in Brighton and Hove there was an increase in applicants to higher tariff universities of nearly 10 per cent.
- Applicants tended to look further afield geographically, with increases in the numbers applying to universities in Wales, Scotland, the South West, the North West and the North East, and reductions in some nearby regions such as London and the East of England.

4 Systems to support learners

There is considerable overlap between the services offered in Sussex in terms of priority groups (ie by age), delivery organisations (local authorities, charitable trusts) and aims. They can broadly be summarised as:

Transition support including tracking and tracing: recording destinations data for students who are completing Key Stage 4 and moving to Key Stage 5 is a statutory obligation that involves collaboration between schools, providers and local authorities to track and trace young people from the March/April of Year 11 to their 18th birthday (beyond this for disadvantaged and SEND learners) to understand their sustained destination and support those that are at risk of being not in education employment and training to find a suitable next step.

Careers advice: Careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) is available for all age ranges. The Careers Hub is well-established in East Sussex and has recently extended its focus to include primary schools as part of a pilot with the Careers & Enterprise Company. Quality careers provision for young people in schools and colleges is guided by the Gatsby Benchmarks. The Apprenticeship Support and Knowledge for Schools and Colleges programme (ASK) is funded by the National Apprenticeship Service provides schools and colleges with information they can use to support young people thinking about Apprenticeships. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, in East Sussex work was taking place to focus on an all-age careers offer. Most recently this has resulted in a website bringing together information about services available for all age groups including signposting to careers advice. Adults can access careers support through the National Careers Service and Jobcentre Plus (there is some overlaps here with employability/employment support).

Employability/Employment support: Youth Employability Services operate across Sussex and offer free careers and employability support to young people. Young people will soon be able to access employment support from Youth Hubs as well as direct from Jobcentre Plus once they reach 18.

Jobcentre Plus is available to support people to find work and support job searching and refers to additional employability programmes. The sector-based work academy programme (SWAP) is one such example, which offers two weeks of targeted employment skills training for particular sectors or vacancies with guaranteed job interviews for those that complete the course.

4.1 Tracking and data

The Key Stage 5 (KS5) destination measure is an existing statutory duty that works well across Sussex from the perspective of most stakeholders. Some partnerships and

projects have also been configured to extend on this duty.⁶ It was thought that transition support beyond the KS5 destination measure could be valuable but it was unclear how this would be funded which some argued would necessarily determine the legal framework for data sharing needed to enact such a system. Examples were given of ESF funding streams supporting transition projects beyond statutory duties (the Think Future project), and this providing the legal framework for data sharing. Some interviewees questioned how an integrated system could be achieved given the difficulties establishing the KS4 to KS5 data transfer⁷.

It was agreed that Covid-19 meant increased tracking resourcing would be beneficial, however how this could be managed was not clear, especially in the context of local authorities and other key stakeholders being busier than usual due to responding to the pandemic and working with limited resources. There was a clear message that additional funding and resources would be required.

Schools and colleges collect their own destinations data and report this to their respective local authorities. There is no data-sharing between providers, provider organisations eg SCTP and other key stakeholders eg LEPs. The current educational system ‘encourages’ competition between provider institutions and so potentially discourages information sharing even if the legal basis for data sharing could be found. Schools will tend to prioritise their own sixth forms, while FECs and HEIs can be in competition for the same learners. Some stakeholders believed this is a particular issue in Sussex because of its geography as a coastal location although one of the college groups reported that they do share lots of data and have an Ofsted project working with the local authority on this theme

“There’s some collaboration but it’s limited, and competition is higher”.

College Group Lead

There was no desire to ‘re-invent the wheel’ in terms of data and tracking among interviewees who could not see any logic for duplicating what is already being done. However, it was recognised that the current (competitive) situation may lead to gaps in institutions’ ability to identify young people NEET, or at risk of becoming NEET. It was argued that the pandemic has shown that collaboration and partnerships are important if the needs of learners of all ages are going to be met and provision is adapted to the needs of the ‘new’ post-Covid economy. There were also some who thought there was room for more collaboration and sharing of best practice.

4.2 Careers information, advice, and guidance

Due to the abrupt way the last academic year ended, there was a cohort of students who did not receive the information, advice, and guidance (IAG) they usually would from their

⁶ It is noted that some interviewees did not like the use of the track and trace in this context because of its use in the Covid-19 pandemic and associated connotations.

⁷ Local authorities coordinate the KS5-DM collating information from pre and post-16 education and training providers into the Client Caseload Information System (CCIS)

institutions. However, all providers had made great efforts to find ways to support the 2019/20 education leavers. Extra measures included staff regularly contacting students to check in, offering support and ensuring they were going to carry on with their plans:

“Over the summer we were contacting students in Yr11 and Yr13 to provide advice, guidance, and ongoing support. This has continued as usual this term”.

FEC

One of the colleges noted they were enhancing their careers offer to support those students.

“There was a whole cohort who never came back for that end of year support. We are in contact with a lot of them with the careers team following up to see what they’re doing and see how we can help on careers and curriculum support”

FEC

There were however some difficulties due to the lockdown restrictions. A college reported that although their careers advisor had worked throughout lockdown, they were finding it harder to connect with students remotely. They were also having fewer interactions with their feeder schools, whereas they would normally be able to speak to a lot of Year 11 students around the local area, to advise them on what the college offers. In another college, the careers advice is delivered through the local authority and this was said to have continued remotely.

It was reported by most schools and colleges that their ability to secure opportunities under Gatsby 5 and 6 (meaningful encounters with employers and workplace experience respectively) had been severely hampered. Most stakeholders also anticipate a drop in encounters with employers and work experience for learners during the current academic year.

There was only one exception to these trends, and this was in a mixed economy college with a strong reputation for land-based courses.

“We have lots of employer engagement and can connect to a lot of jobs...It’s one of our key selling points”

Mixed economy college

4.2.1 Beyond KS5

The universities also reported finding it hard to get IAG to prospective students.

“We’re firefighting at the moment and this will have a knock-on effect for years to come with people not making the right choice for themselves due to not getting the right IAG. We may also see A levels taking longer and a rise in students in Yr 14”

HEI

With schools having difficulties engaging with HEIs this year due to social distancing restrictions, it was thought that there will be fewer opportunities to secure Gatsby Benchmark 7 (Encounters with Further and Higher Education). University staff also

reported hearing that time for learning skills was being reduced in the Year 13 curriculum which they are concerned will lead to less students knowing what they want to do – whether it is to go to university (or not), what subject they want to do (when they do not understand enough about the subjects on offer), how their choices impact their career choices later (closing off routes for example), and little information about the process for applying and writing personal statements.

Universities are putting on virtual open days but university staff are worried schools and colleges have not been talked about them yet or students have just been sent a digital presentation with very little extra information.

Universities are concerned that there will be a drop in applications across all students due to a lack of IAG. There was a particular worry about a lack of knowledge and information among students from the widening participation target groups.

There are also some early indications for universities that those going into A levels have been narrowing their choices – implying that secondary schools are not giving enough guidance. As one said:

“These factors will have a knock-on effect for quite a few years. When they get to university, they will not be sure why they are there and not sure about what they are studying”

HEI

One of the universities said they had been promoting careers IAG to students further afield and outside their normal ‘patch’, which also feeds into potential students accessing information about the university and what they offer.

4.2.2 Local labour market information

Local and national labour market information plays an important role in careers guidance and in the main, stakeholders believed this would be key to supporting transitions and helping people make labour market intelligence could be improved through increased coordination, although there was not a consensus on this. For example, some stakeholders suggested that a central repository of labour market information, rather than data coming from several different sources would make this data more accessible; their ideal would be that data are in ‘real-time’ as opposed to being lagged by a few months. This seemed particularly important at the moment given the rapidly changing landscape organisations find themselves in – and the role of LEPs and other bodies in coordinating LMI – to increase alignment between skills supply and employer demand - should not be overlooked.

“We are reliant on other organisations to provide us with LMI which takes time and is frustrating as some are better than others. What we currently get is piecemeal and often not up to date. I suggest all the data are held in one place, by one body.”

LEP

“LMI is hard to get and there is no obvious place or resource. There needs to be a central repository and SLN could play a part in this”.

4.3 Transitions and provision

Transition support helps young people with their planning and moving between Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 under statutory duties, and to HE under national and local support interventions eg. widening participation schemes and Uni Connect.

Transitions between all phases of education have been made more difficult by Covid-19, however, the pandemic has arguably impacted significantly most on the transitions of Year 11 and 13 students. For some students, restrictions have meant them moving into a setting they may not have seen ie from school to college or from college to university. Within KS5, there have also been issues around the transition between Level 2 and Level 3 courses, with students needing more support than normal and all cohorts experiencing anxieties around new courses, socialising and travel.

There are questions over support for young people leaving key stages – since once young people are not at school or college, it is not clear whose responsibility it is. The data collection systems take a while to ‘catch-up’ so this year more than most, there is a risk of high levels of ‘non-continuity’ of students, who may fall between the gaps between institutions and are not caught quickly enough to be helped.

4.3.1 Transitions - KS5

The research picked up noticeable differences between educational institutions in terms of the issues they are facing and the measures they are taking around transition.

A number of schools and colleges had serious concerns over the summer about some students becoming NEET and the risk of non-returners in September. In one, it was estimated that 12 of the Year 11s were at risk of becoming NEET (including two young mums), but that it had been hard to reach the pupils without college plans as they were not physically on site. A college was particularly worried about the impact on the Gypsy Roma Traveller population and those who had not engaged with learning but had been working with the Youth and Employability Service to try and combat NEET issues.

In anticipation of the issues colleges would be facing with the Year 11s having had six months out of formal education, a secondary school provided support by uploading ‘transition work’ for each subject based on sixth form syllabuses, held a virtual ‘transition day’ while also providing remote careers advice and regular contact with the head of year. Another school had managed to repurpose SLN Uni Connect money to provide therapy and 1:1 support sessions for vulnerable students and been working very closely with the Year 13s to ensure their engagement. An FEC had applied to use the 16-19 bursary fund to provide disadvantaged students with CIAG and pastoral care to support their transitions. (Although it was not thought this money would go very far as services are underfunded in the community and there will be a lot of need). Uni Connect have also funded an online CIAG tool in one school.

Only one secondary school reported no students without destinations, no deferral of HE places and was not expecting any students to become NEET – this was attributed to the planned transitions being within the local context. One provider reported receiving more enrolments than usual at the sixth form, which they attributed to students wanting to remain somewhere familiar during this time, which is different to usual patterns.

Existing good practice identified by stakeholders included the Think Future project between Brighton and Hove Council and West Sussex County Council who have had European Social Fund monies to support young people up to 'Year 14' with good progress in moving young people to positive destinations. However, funding is due to end soon.

4.3.2 Transitions - 18 and beyond

There are no statutory duties to support these transitions, and therefore no national framework for data sharing to enable this.

The Head of one mixed economy college was particularly worried about the needs of students leaving college with A levels or the equivalent and felt that they would need support to get a step up into industry. Initially when A Level results were released there were also problems around university places being withdrawn and colleges seeing fewer students going to their first choices – although the policy change reinstated places for many, and colleges and schools were relieved that lessons were learnt for GCSE results. Schools and colleges had also seen increased HEI deferrals amongst learners due to Covid-19 and a more restricted educational experience. Fewer international students were also said to be affecting some providers.

There was also a concern that support for students leaving education or training should not simply centre on finding immediate employment (or further education or training) ie that a longer-term view of career aims should not be lost. Providers believed there needed to be a focus on the quality and match of that work that students achieved relative to their interests and capabilities. Again, they were concerned that careers education and information, advice and guidance needs were high this year and this needed support. There were also concerns that national and local strategies needed to stress the importance of a strong life-long learning culture and the introduction of a more flexible funding model to enable transitions between education, training, and employment.

4.3.3 Provision

In terms of student intake, numbers were reportedly high for most FECs. Data for HEIs are not available until the end of the year however, at least one HEI said that pre-Covid-19 they were expecting more students from POLAR 4 areas but were not sure this would happen now. The HE sector overall is predicting a funding crisis in 2020/2021 with a substantial drop in revenue projected due to Covid-19.

However, the student experience will be very different, and institutions are concerned that this will lead to retention problems. In a context of self-isolation, reduced contact with other students and staff, loneliness, anxiety, plus last-minute changes in housing

allocation advice to ensure students were being housed with other people on their course to avoid social mixing, this is not the higher education experience students were expecting.

Nonetheless, there have been increasing flexibilities for learners with the introduction of blended approaches to teaching and learning. The move to more online provision in 2019/20 has continued 2020/21 alongside restrictions to attendance due to Covid-19.

A number of examples of good practice in transitions were reported:

- Early enrolment so young people are aware they have a place
- Organising teaching schedules to minimise the number of people on site.
- Hybrid learning with high quality digital content and socially distanced campus-based teaching.
- Rapid response provisions such as licence to practice provision with guaranteed interviews through the sector-based work academy programme SWAP (previously SBWA).

In terms of subjects, some are more adaptable to online and hybrid models than others and the point was made that some FECs and HEIs are better adapted to meeting the needs of the current labour market whereas schools following the national curriculum have less choice over how adaptive they can be within the current context.

“We have always been good at offering contemporal courses and keeping up with practical skills requirements. Current courses include Computing with Cyber security and Games and App development”.

HEI

However, FECs reported more complex pathways for Apprenticeships, mainly due to challenges with engaging employers and some apprentices being impacted by being furloughed. Providers also reported difficulties in completing endpoint assessments due to lockdown restrictions, although they were hoping to catch-up this term. There was commentary that Ofsted would not focus as strongly on duration/completion measures which increased confidence in providing the catch-up support and extension to duration that apprentices now need.

However, concerns around digital inclusion remain and some providers noted difficulties with engaging with some disadvantaged young people who do not have broadband and laptops; especially where there was no substitute for online delivery. There were significant concerns about the challenges of ensuring provision was suitably adapted for students with special educational needs and more mature learners who may be new to education or training. While some thought that lifelong learning had dropped off the education agenda in recent years and was under-resourced, in the current context it was likely to be more important than ever – and calls for a better focus on adult skills in the forthcoming Skills White Paper.

“If the government are serious about lifelong learning, they need to put this in the next white paper and fund it.”

HEI

It was proposed that a flexible funding model would enable projects focusing on removing barriers and support retraining, reskilling, and upskilling. It was also reported that collaboration between providers on adult learning is very important, but varies. Barriers around transport for mature learners were also raised.

“The current funding model is inflexible and C19 has brought this into ‘stark relief’...SLN provision could focus on the 50% who leave education and training at 18 and older workers who need to retrain/reskill”

HEI

Some of the providers pool their Adult Education Budget funds to identify centres of excellence to retrain education leavers and prepare them for university. It was suggested that this could be done more systematically across providers and across Sussex.

4.4 Employability/employment

Strategic recovery plans have been released by key bodies within the Pan Sussex area. Their analysis of data, and impact and skills assessments, together with dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders provide blueprints for how the landscape will look moving forward from Covid-19.⁸

One of the immediate challenges is the strong connection with and reliance on Gatwick across the whole area - impacting on jobs and making acute the need for retraining opportunities. As a college stakeholder reported, although many of the airport jobs were low skill, their loss will have a significant impact. The situation creates particular barriers for young people NEET (or at-risk of becoming NEET), the unemployed and mature learners and some of the most disadvantaged groups in the labour market. As demonstrated by the labour market analysis earlier in this report, the issues people face differ depending on where they live eg rural East and West Sussex are very different to Brighton and Hove or Chichester.

In contrast, some sectors are doing well, including land-based industries – where the concerns can relate more to Brexit than Covid-19. One college reported having strong links with employers:

“Industry connections are typically strong in land-based provision. There has been a long engagement with industry and tradition of placements within courses which act as a stepping-stone. Apprenticeship numbers have tripled in the last 4 years and there’s more demand yet.”

⁸ East Sussex Reset – Six missions: Recovery as opportunity and West Sussex Economy Reset Plan

Mixed economy college

Stakeholders had questions about how informed and prepared employers and employees are, especially given they may not have ever been in this situation before with mass-redundancies at short notice.

“Businesses don’t know there’s a place for providing information to employers and employees about training centres”

Mixed economy college

SWAPs were discussed by some colleges (mentioned above) however, it appears that demand is easily outstripping supply.

“We were inundated with applications. We got between 35 and 55 applicants (depending on the subject) and have taken 15 on. Most applicants had been made redundant”

Mixed economy college

In terms of the role of other key stakeholders, Jobcentre Plus work coaches have a role in helping people take steps into work and analyse skills gaps. They can also help with CVs, using online resources or referring to National Careers Service or other partners. Jobcentre Plus can also refer to pre-employment training or local college groups.

Some in the FE sector thought that Jobcentre Plus has an important role in a Pan Sussex approach because they understand low paid work. While it was thought that Jobcentre Plus would not have such a handle on the wider picture for professional people and businesses, they would be well placed to support institutions in recruiting professionals into teacher training or supporting re-training to fill nursing and caring roles.

The Kickstart scheme was mentioned by a number of stakeholders as a vehicle to support employers to provide placements to young people however, it was reported that it is proving difficult to secure places with employers in the area.

5 Locating findings in the evidence base

The research has identified a number of gaps and opportunities for SLN to support young people and adults across Sussex as they transition in education and employment as the ‘class of 2020’ – a term that encompasses a diverse range of age groups and experiences. The research highlights the importance of the aims SLN put at the heart of this study in:

- identifying and supporting learners to ensure they make effective education and labour market transitions; and
- providing a skills solution for those at risk of redundancy or needing to change career goals due to the recessionary environment.

More broadly, the Covid-19 crisis has highlighted further priorities where collaborative action could be taken forward. These interlace with SLN values and its mission, and include:

- Supporting the most disadvantaged/those with greater needs.
- Increased outreach/engagement to prevent anyone being left behind.
- Tackling risks of longer term (more than six months) unemployment or inactivity.
- Encouraging system change, to shared responsibility for outcomes.

In this final chapter we take stock of the position in Sussex on each of these factors and use national evidence to build towards recommendations for where SLN can support and encourage best practice to act to support learners of all ages.

Information and data flows

The qualitative research highlighted the importance of support for young people transitioning between education phases – from secondary to post 16 and to higher education – as well as into the labour market. Statutory services already support those at risk of becoming NEET between the ages of 16-19 (and up to 25 for young people with SEND). In some local areas in Sussex, transition support has been extended to include additional contacts or to wider numbers of young people identified as at risk through additional funding, which has also supported collaboration across local authority boundaries. The importance of identification of young people to ensure that no-one is ‘left behind’ is important.

Finding and attracting the ‘right’ cohort of young people to participate in an intervention can be challenging. A recent review of ‘what works’ to support young people into meaningful work conducted by Newton et al (2020) found that early warning and tracking

systems were important to identify young people in need of support.⁹ The Welsh Government's 'Youth engagement and progression framework – Implementation plan' of 2013 also acknowledged the importance of identifying young people most at risk of disengagement and need for strong tracking and tracing of young people through the system. Over half of their young engagement and progression framework was dedicated to early identification (information/data), brokerage and tracking progress.¹⁰

Beyond those at risk of entering NEET status and needing support to re-engage, learners currently in Year 13 and Year 11 face significant disruption to their education this year with quarantines, the potential isolation of year group or class 'bubbles', and exams planned for, but in doubt, thereby requiring extra support to keep them engaged in education and on track to transition to the next phase.

To serve all these groups, professionals need to build and maintain up-to-date practical knowledge to aid them in their work such as collating information about courses, availability and application processes. This became particularly apparent during lockdown as usual application and referral processes moved online. The London Enterprise Adviser Network produced a document for the Mayor of London's office for Careers Leaders supporting Year 11 students to help them advise about their possible next steps by detailing admissions information.¹¹

Data about individuals is covered by GDPR and existing statutory duties; data sharing to meet statutory tracking and tracing is thought by respondents to this research to be working sufficiently well, although it has taken time to get to this point. The view from interviewees is that positioning a track and trace service on slightly older young people would be valuable. However, they also foresee hurdles to data sharing at the individual level that would enable such an intervention without support from national government or through funding streams that bring this support (for example, ESF and the funds that replace it).

However, labour market information (LMI) is key to being able to provide a rapid policy/programme response in this crisis. Critical issues for these data surround access, coverage, and timeliness of access. LMI can assist in the planning of provision but needs to be locally nuanced. As seen in this research, there is a need to ensure that up-to-date LMI, including information about where there may be growth opportunities for apprenticeships and traineeships, is available to career professionals for use with young people to support their transitions. LMI is used for decision-making regarding adult and youth education provision, and unemployment support provision – to help ensure provision (supply) matches employer demand. Currently access to up-to-date LMI can be limited.

LMI serves other agendas too: education providers use careers tools that include LMI 'widgets' that users can access to understand the labour market. Hughes and Smith

⁹ Newton, B., Sinclair, A., Tyers, A., Wilson, T. (2020) Supporting disadvantaged young people into meaningful work, Report 548, Youth Futures Foundation

¹⁰ Welsh Government (2013) Youth engagement and progression framework: Implementation plan

¹¹ Mayor of London (2020) Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges: Information on Admissions

(2020) found that use of technology and LMI tools and resources should be delivered in highly personalised ‘spaces and places’ for learning, but that in order to not be excluded through lack of access or skills, there should also be a strong focus on digital skills development for young people.¹²

Responsive, high quality provision

This ‘class of 2020’ research suggests that high quality provision that is responsive to the needs of the local area is required especially in the face of rapid changes to the labour market due to the pandemic and the potential need for retraining. Other studies also agree that high quality provision that is attuned to individuals needs as well as those of local employers is most successful in supporting people.

The recent review of evidence of supporting young people into meaningful work (Newton et al, 2020) found that in order to best engage and sustain young people in programmes, understanding their motivations is key and can lead to their voluntary entry into support. The evidence highlighted in this review points to successful on-going support being attributed to two factors: one-to-one advisory support, and continuity of adviser throughout an intervention period.

Hughes and Smith (2020) conclude that discussions about careers and transitions need to be learner-centred – focused on their goals, ambitions and capabilities rather than information-focused and centred on curriculum.

Moreover, there is ‘strong consensus that integrated, comprehensive and holistic approaches to tackle unemployment locally are more effective for disadvantaged groups than just focusing on work search or on skill acquisition for example’ (Newton et al, 2020). An holistic approach was also identified in a review of evidence by Hughes and Smith (2020), which would cover cognitive/non-cognitive, social, and emotional skills. This evidence should inform the creation and promotion of Youth Hubs where young people will be able to access a range of support services that will work in a holistic way. Ensuring they function this way to support young people in Sussex will be important.

The evidence from this study and elsewhere points to the importance of flexible funding models and projects focused on removing barriers and those that support retraining, re-skilling, and upskilling. Rapid support is required for people made unemployed, redundant or losing their jobs in shut down sectors, to retrain or re-skill and connect to new employers. There is a lack of replacement vacancies for those jobs lost, and potential that people facing unemployment now could be facing unemployment long-term with the negative social and economic consequences that result. When the ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic are considered on the longer-term outcomes of learners, there will be an increased need for flexibility not only in provision but in funding – for fees and maintenance – to ensure individuals have the skills they need to enter and progress in the labour market, and to be resilient in a changing labour market context.

¹² Hughes, D., Smith, G., (2020) Youth transitions: creating pathways to success, Education Development Trust

There is an immediate need to mobilise to support adults and young people whose transitions are, and could be, affected by Covid-19. Both young people and adults need to be able to articulate transferable skills and understand those technical and soft skills that employers need.

Provision for learners of all ages by necessity moved online or to a blended approach at the most restricted points of lockdown where face-to-face support was not possible apart from in exceptional cases. The partner research to this paper explored more fully the approaches that schools and colleges took to delivery in lockdown. Effective online learning, as with face-to-face delivery needs to be engaging and attuned to individuals – their learning pace and style. While research already exists around effective online learning for adults, research is currently underway into effective approaches for young people during Covid-19.¹³

Governance and oversight

The evidence from East Sussex shows that there is appetite for a single coherent system or offer where young people in particular can find information and access services. Building on their successful Careers Hub, East Sussex is developing a web portal with careers information and advice to bring together information and services in one place. The National Careers Service provides careers information and advice for adults and offers face-to-face and telephone advice plus a national website. There is no current link between these two services online. Adults (age 19+) often lack awareness of the services available to them.

Stakeholders reported witnessing increased need for support at a family level. For example, during tracking calls with young people finding out about job losses, ill health and financial worries of parents and family members due to the pandemic. There is also a danger that people will experience prolonged worklessness or long-term unemployment due to stagnation in the jobs market due to Covid-19.

This research has noted the way that institutions are sometimes set up to be in ‘competition’ for learners, but also that there is appetite for collaboration in light of the need for responsive high-quality provision and increasing need for a change in approach. Some of the providers pool their Adult Education Budget funds to identify centres of excellence to retrain education leavers and prepare them for university.

In terms of partnership working and co-location of services, the evaluation of the MyGo model for youth employment and skills service in 2014-2017 showed that local and national government can work to bring together youth employment, training, skills, and welfare support. Co-location of partners was effective in improving access to services, encouraging effective working relationships, and supporting a shared understanding of roles. The evaluation found that partnerships could only be effective with simple referral processes, good quality data systems and sharing processes, regular communication and a shared understanding of the aims and objectives of the service in question. An effective

¹³ See for example: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/schools-responses-to-covid-19-pupil-engagement-in-remote-learning/>

model that can be drawn on is the MyGo provision, which was developed as part of the Greater Ipswich City Deal. This integrated support services from Jobcentre Plus, local authority and some skills and careers providers, and provided a single access point to support for all young people in Ipswich and later across Suffolk.¹⁴

The SLN is well-established in the region though for some stakeholders and interviewees there was confusion over its role, how long it would continue for and some concern about overlap or duplication with other networks. However, it is clear that SLN has supported 'deep and meaningful relationships, which have been forged between providers'. It can build on these to support collaboration and reduce constraints placed by administrative boundaries and programme restrictions to ensure all learners in Sussex can access the best provision to meet their needs.

Universities and local communities

Currently, as seen in this research, schools have been struggling to meet Gatsby Benchmarks 5 and 6 which involve high levels of employer engagement, and also Benchmark 7 which covers encounters with Further and Higher Education. While working with schools and colleges to support employer engagement is a role for the Careers Hub, SLN Uni Connect have a clearer role for Benchmark 7.

This research has already found that some HEIs have been able to expand some of their widening participation activities outside of their local area by capitalising on the new remote support that they have been offering. This shows the advantages of rolling-out good practice to encompass a broader group than the original intention. As such there is an argument for HEIs to expand their careers IAG to people beyond their own HEI and utilise Uni Connect to support this. Currently, widening participation activities conducted by universities and activities offered through Uni Connect have slightly different target groups and eligibility requirements. While this has some benefits in terms of increasing the scope of who can access support, it can be confusing for schools and young people.

As well as targeting those young people on pathways towards HE, university careers services also support their graduates with careers information, advice, and guidance for a period after graduation as well as lighter-touch information provision for older alumni. Jobcentre Plus have traditionally served young professionals and graduates less well through their services, relying on them to 'off-flow' from benefits before they become eligible for support programmes aimed at the long term unemployed. Therefore, there is a potential gap in the careers provision for young professional and graduates who have returned to their home area of Sussex or may be seeking information about jobs locally.

¹⁴ Bennett, L., Bivand, P., Ray, K., Vaid, L. and Wilson, T. (2018) *MyGo Evaluation: Final report Summary*, Learning and Work Institute

6 Recommendations

Our recommendations and action strategy address gaps and opportunities indicated by the research and focus on adding value. Underpinning principles concern coordination; avoidance of duplication; high-quality information, advice and provision; and reflecting 'place' – the population, geography, local labour markets – including travel to work and learning areas – as well as the COVID-19 context.

The key proposal is for a sector-leading all-age employment, careers and skills service across Sussex. This needs the support of stakeholders across Sussex as it involves linking up existing and planned resources into a coherent service. SLN could supply a coordinating role, and play to its strengths (i) in supporting and advising young people and adults, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds and (ii) as a focus point for effective practices around transitions. Collaboration will be key to success, enabling aggregation of information and resources across Sussex and working to ensure coherence.

A national lobby should be taken forward on an agenda for structural change and transformation to lift barriers to the uptake of learning across the life course. There needs to be strong advocacy for the value of learning, a focus on breaking down practical barriers to ensure people can take-up the best forms of learning and training for their needs. Within the Sussex area, intelligence on the labour market recovery which partners including local authorities and LEPs can bring, will ensure there is practical insight to shape training opportunities and inform careers decisions. In summary:

1. lobby government to improve funding, and opportunities, to enable affected learners to overcome lost learning caused by the pandemic as well as to enable the engagement of potential learners to support career transitions. The lobby should challenge policymakers to improve funding, opportunities for flexible provision (including part-time and modular), accrediting prior learning/experiential learning, and enabling learners to access the most appropriate learning for their needs even if this involves repeating a qualification level. Ensuring improved 'join-up' between DWP and DfE agendas is crucial. Strong regional leadership for lobbying is crucial.
2. develop a transparent and coherent offer (eg. careers advice and guidance, transition support, study skills, mentoring, finance, data sharing, LMI) for all residents pan-Sussex. This necessitates collaboration and coordination of existing resources offered by stakeholders, rather than replacing or replicating them, and nationally through lobbying for structural change to increase coherence in guidance services. A mapping process and gap analysis will be key to developing this.
3. advocate for the residents affected by the pandemic who will need additional opportunities and support to secure future economic and social outcomes. Collaborative actions taken by partners must ensure residents can pursue the best

courses of learning now and in the future – and can overcome disadvantage to achieve meaningful outcomes.

4. share of expertise and knowledge on supporting all learners towards suitable educational opportunities, and securing funding to support targeted areas of work. Establishing the means to share effective practices eg. around short and longer-term training options and models, including best use of online learning approaches will support this. This will require a body to act in a coordination role. SLN could be well placed for this.

Action Strategy

Collaborate	Promote good practice	Share data	Responsiveness
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Youth Hubs to ensure a consistent offer of guidance and information – filling gaps and promoting the hubs through its networks and website, focusing on raising aspirations for learning to support alignment with the new Skills White Paper with its focus on higher technical skills 2. Local HEIs and Careers Hubs to support schools/colleges on Gatsby Benchmark 7 and relationships within HE, to ensure their access to the encounters being made in new modes 3. Stakeholders to create a Sussex Opportunity Guarantee, ensuring access to an offer of high quality education, training or retraining, with strong employer engagement to ensure this new system works. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Capturing and disseminating best practice information about what works well to identify and support people in need or at risk of NEET 5. Attracting people to learning, focussed on groups least likely to make education transitions 6. Using blended learning, building provider capability and increasing flexibility for learners; researching into effective models of online provision for different learner groups 7. Supporting a Sussex Youth Hub to become a national exemplar via a pooled prospectus of learning provision and through ensuring high quality IAG (see action 3). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Bring together resources from bodies conducting LMI analyses into one place to support its networks and adults in Sussex 9. Pull in or point to information published by the LEPs and subregional bodies 10. Pointing to resources made available by the National Careers Service – and the services adults in Sussex could access – would add value, 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Fund the expansion of well-matched provision: geographically, increase volume, additional target groups, joining up services; increased flexibility 12. Mobilise on employment and careers support and support universities to expand their graduate careers service offer to all graduates and other young professionals in Sussex 13. Identify sources of support to help people retrain and change sector, to replace ESF funding for the Think Future project and support this model to be implemented across Sussex. 14. Lobby central government for fundamental change to allow people to take-up learning throughout the life course at the level and in the format/structure that is most suitable for their needs. 15. Monitor labour market recovery and provide labour market intelligence to inform careers advice and provision - retraining, reskilling and upskilling.