

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 JULY 2026

People Select Committee Scrutiny Review of Post 16 Education – Executive Summary

Summary

- 1.1. This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the People Select Committee's scrutiny review of Post-16 Education.
- 1.2. There is a strong Post-16 offer in Stockton-on-Tees, with five providers offering a range of courses and qualifications to fulfil a variety of different passions and career aspirations, namely Conyers School and Sixth Form, Egglescliffe School and Sixth Form College, Stockton Sixth Form College, and The Education Training Collective (Etc), which has two site, Bede Sixth Form College, Stockton Riverside College. Etc also have the NETA site which has an engineering focus.
- 1.3. The review aimed to consider the current position, challenges and proposed solutions in Stockton-on-Tees' post-16 provision. In doing so, the review aimed to assist in increasing attraction and retention of post-16 education, reduce the number of young people becoming NEET, and lead to better outcomes for the young people of the Borough.
- 1.4. A Post-16 Partnership has been established to enhance strategic collaboration and communication between providers, improve the quality of education and training in the borough, share best practice and innovative approaches, identify and address common challenges facing the sector, and develop and implement strategies to promote the offer more widely. The partnership has senior representatives from all the providers, careers service, school support, education. Economic development and other relevant stakeholders.

Excellence for All

- 1.5. While there is a natural competitiveness between the providers, who are seeking to recruit students to their courses, genuine collaboration is taking place via the Post-16 Partnership to improve outcomes across the borough. The Excellence for All Work Strand is focussing on ensuring there is a strong offer with good outcomes across the borough that encourage students to enrol at in-borough providers. Two trials have taken place to address the outcomes: Business Mentor Support – Excellence for All, which aims to support students fulfil their full potential and bridge the gap between education and work; and Teach Meets which aims to bring teachers together to share best practice, practical innovations, and personal insights.
- 1.6. Further collaboration taking place includes providers receiving monthly information on young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET), information on funding opportunities as these arise, and local employer information and business

intelligence in terms of gaps and areas of growth, with sectors now speaking directly to students which has proved to be more powerful than providers sharing the information with students. Partnerships are in place with providers to offer industry placements, provide the learning for apprenticeships, and co-create curriculum with employers in key growth sectors.

Communication and Marketing

- 1.7. The Committee heard how the different providers are communicating and marketing their courses to schools both within the Borough and the wider Tees Valley area through a range of engagement activities targeted at Years 9 – 11, however there are some activities regarding careers choices aimed at younger year groups. Engagement and recruitment activity begins in September and continues throughout the year.
- 1.8. The Post-16 Partnership Communication and Marketing Work Strand aims to work together to keep students local and has developed a communications and marketing initiative spanning industry engagement, careers provision, transitions, and enrichment programmes. Activities that have taken place include creating a framework to map current engagement activity and identifying growth sectors and businesses, producing a Post-16 brochure showcasing each provider as part of place brand messaging of Stockton-on-Tees being a place to study, live, work and play, and Mystery Shopper exercises.
- 1.9. The Work Strand is now building on this foundation by developing a school engagement toolkit available for all staff showcasing the local offer, Alumni success stories profiling local people who built careers in Stockton-on-Tees and Digital ambassadors advocating for Stockton-on-Tees. Postcards directing prospective students to the Post-16 Brochure and a glossary of terms making this easier to understand are also being developed and a Stockton Post Secondary Pre-Open Event is planned for September 2026, giving young people and parents a chance to get initial information on all providers in one convenient location
- 1.10. Providers have seen an increase in engagement from school leavers at events and this has resulted in a significant increase in the number of applications to all in-borough providers. It should be noted, however, that school leavers may apply for more than one course including at providers out of borough.

Careers Advice

- 1.11. Providing early advice and guidance is considered essential in supporting young people to choose the right post-16 pathway for their talents and ambitions and secondary schools and colleges have a duty to provide careers education to all their students in Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 5. Schools fulfil this duty either in-house by directly employing a qualified Careers Adviser, or by contracting with a Careers Guidance provider. SBC's Careers has contracts with five schools. It also currently provides targeted support to Year 11 residents in Stockton-on-Tees who require further support, with the demand and complexity increasing significantly over time.
- 1.12. Both universal and targeted Careers Guidance is also available in all colleges/Years 12 and 13. This include in-house staff and SBC Careers, who currently offer progressive tailored support. SBC Careers is aiming to develop systems across

colleges where they are made aware of declining attendance, attainment, or behaviour early so that support can be offered before crisis or students leave.

- 1.13. A Phase 2 Transformation Outcome-based review regarding Opportunities for Young People in Employment (OYPE) has been taking place at the same time of the Scrutiny Review, with a focus on operational redesign of the SBC Careers Service current service model to improve NEET outcomes via early intervention and digital first as well as operating within a reduced budget. The review is ongoing and will be undertaken in alignment with, and complementary to, the Scrutiny Review of Post-16 Education, ensuring consistency and that Scrutiny recommendations are included. The findings and outputs from this review will be considered alongside the Scrutiny Review and will inform recommendations.
- 1.14. In addition to careers advice and guidance provided in schools and colleges, the Employment & Training Hub has also been delivering programmes for young people of the borough to raise their knowledge, ambitions, and personal skills. These include Skills for Success, Excellence for All, Youth Guarantee Trailblazer, Care Experience Young Person Recruitment Coordinator, and Industry Insights.
- 1.15. The Careers Network Work Strand supports colleges to identify gaps in career education, share good practice and highlight innovative and inspiring opportunities. This has included working with Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), who are relaunching their Business Directory, and facilitating dialogue between schools and colleges and the TVCA Work Experience Coordinator. Roadshows activities are also being developed for Key Stage 3 Work Experience Week and “How To” guides shared for Key Stage 4 Work Experience Week. Finally, a Parent & Carer guide to careers has been developed.

Transitions from School to Post 16 Provision

- 1.16. The Committee were informed that the Transitions Work Strand aims to strengthen retention and progression as well as understand challenges faced by providers and how best to give advice and guidance to young people and parents/carers. A student survey has been conducted to find out what influences their decisions when applying for courses. There is a wide range of courses available, all providers are rated as Outstanding or Good by OFSTED, and outcomes are competitive. The survey results reiterated that the in-borough provision offer is competitive.
- 1.17. However, the survey highlighted that transport is an important factor, with young people choosing to attend providers that are quick and easy to get to. In some areas of the Borough it is easier to travel to out-of-borough providers, with direct and frequent bus routes, rather than travel across town which may take longer and require changing buses.
- 1.18. The survey also highlighted early engagement and awareness as being important when making post-16 choices. A shared language and messaging are important to help young people and parents/carers understand the different pathways, and a Jargon Buster has been proposed to simplify the process.
- 1.19. SBC teams are assisting in the transition to post-16 by ensuring providers have the information they need to support vulnerable learners in to the right provider/courses, and the multi-agency event Preparing for Adulthood Day proved to be effective.

However, there are still challenges including late identification of non-attenders and inconsistent application systems, and a Borough-wide data framework using both school and college data management systems is being developed to strengthen this.

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

- 1.20. In April members were informed that NEET was 7.3%, a rise from 5% in 2020. The impact of additional staff resources in Leaving Care Team and Employment & Training Hub has not yet been seen in the national data for Care Experienced young people NEET rate, however smaller caseloads and increased proactive support for those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has had a positive impact on reducing the NEET rate.
- 1.21. The OYPE review that has taken place is proposing a new service model and operational redesign to improve awareness of opportunities, strengthen transitions, and influence a reduction in NEET rates.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- 1.22. The Committee recognises the importance of building on the strong foundations already in place for post-16 collaboration and improving outcomes. The Committee concludes that with sustained focus and collective commitment, there is significant opportunity to further enhance post-16 education in Stockton-on-Tees, improving participation, reducing NEET levels, and enabling more young people to achieve their potential while contributing to the borough's future economic growth.
- 1.23. The Committee recommends that:
 1. Transition support is strengthened by developing a consistent borough-wide transition framework between schools and post-16 providers, including clear pre-enrolment guidance, earlier course matching, data sharing, and structured support during the first term/end of Year 12 when drop-out risk is highest.
 2. Early warning systems for flagging declining attendance, behaviour, and attainment are embedded across all post-16 providers with clear escalation and intervention pathways are in place before disengagement reaches crisis point.
 3. Collaborative initiatives that are showing signs of successfully assisting young people, such as Teach Meets, Skills for Success, and Business Mentor Support, are expanded to all providers and prioritising subjects with historically smaller student cohorts.
 4. Communication between all providers and young people and their parents/carers regarding the Post-16 in-Borough offer is strengthened
 5. Careers education is embedded in to the curriculum in all schools and post-16 providers to ensure young people choose the right pathways for them and reduce early withdrawal by:
 - ensuring careers advice and guidance/post 16 options are available from Year 9 (or earlier) to enable young people to build their knowledge

- developing resources and staff training to show how subject-specific knowledge and skills translate into employment, business and industry
 - give clear course expectations, progression routes and employment outcomes to reduce early withdrawal from and dissatisfaction with courses.
6. Labour-market intelligence and cohort growth data is utilised to plan academic, vocational and apprenticeship provision more strategically, to ensure capacity keeps pace with demand and competition between age groups does not disadvantage younger learners.
 7. Cross-provider enrichment opportunities are broadened to not only create a more competitive offer compared with regional competitors but also raise aspirations.
 8. Post-16 providers explore collaborative approaches and strategic networks to address transport barriers, highlighted as a significant influence on post-16 choice including connectivity to all in-Borough post-16 providers and cost, so young people can access efficient, cost effective in-borough provision.
 9. Post-16 providers ensure that vocational courses provide coherent pathways to meet industry requirements

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