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Raising the participation age: staying in education and training

The world of learning is ever evolving. Recent Government plans detailed in the document 'Raising Expectations: Staying in education and training post-16', outline proposals that will see all young people participating in education or training until their 18th birthday. This means significant changes for young people over the coming years.

'Participation' may be at school, in college, on an Apprenticeship, or in accredited training provided by an employer. The proposals deem that participation should be full-time for young people not in employment for a significant part of the week, and part-time for those working more than 20 hours per week.

Whilst real progress in participation levels is being made, there are still too many 16-18 year olds who are not engaged in any form of learning or training. This group is often the most vulnerable young people, who have most to gain from participating, but who need support to do so.

The proposals will see a phased introduction with the participation age raised to 17 in 2013 and 18 by 2015.

The economic benefit to the United Kingdom of young people staying on in learning is estimated to be around £2.4 billion for each cohort of young people who remain in education or training to age 18¹. Other, wider benefits which may accrue include improved health benefits or reduced likelihood of crime. This contributes to the twin goals of raising economic prosperity and improving social justice.

To support all young people to participate in learning we must continue to

consider the holistic needs and development of each young person. Importantly, the September guarantee, critical to reducing the number of young people who leave 'compulsory education' without a positive destination, will need to be built on, ensuring that there is a suitable offer of a place in learning for all 16 and 17 year olds, but also that providers are flexible to the needs of learners.

All young people and their families need high quality impartial information advice and guidance from a range of sources to inform their decisions. Many will also continue to need financial support which has been successful in improving participation and attainment levels.

This is an age of opportunity and it should be so for all our young people. We need to raise the expectations and aspirations that we have for them so that young people can all benefit from learning for longer and achieve more. We are legislating now to build expectations early on with those who will be the first to benefit; to ensure that the provision and support is in place; and to galvanise the system to deliver. It will take hard work to deliver this challenging agenda. I pay tribute to the dedication and commitment of all those in the world of education and training and look forward to working with you to turn this vision into reality.

1. Department for Children, Schools and Families, *Raising the participation age: An assessment of the economic benefits*. November 2007.
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploads/files/DCSF-RBW026.pdf>