



# Revitalising Rural

Realising the Vision

## The Rural Services Network

We are a membership organisation and we work on your behalf for rural communities.

The RSN is the national champion for rural services, ensuring that people in rural areas have a strong voice. We are fighting for a fair deal for rural communities to maintain their social and economic viability for the benefit of the nation.

Our membership comprises 121 rural local authorities plus over 215 other rural service providers and interest groups including Rural Housing Associations, Healthcare Trusts and Charities.

You can find out more about the RSN at our website [www.rsnonline.org.uk](http://www.rsnonline.org.uk).

We always welcome new members and if you are interested in joining the RSN, click here for more information. [Join the RSN!](#)

## Revitalising Rural, Realising the Vision

Revitalising Rural, Realising the Vision is a campaign run by the RSN, which sets out a number of policy asks in 14 key subject areas to help support rural areas to achieve their full potential, and to 'level-up' areas of historical underinvestment.



# Revitalising Rural

Realising the Vision

## RURAL FURTHER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND SKILLS



### Why it matters

To pursue their aspirations, young people brought up in rural areas need education and training opportunities. At age 16 that means having access to a wide range of further education (FE) subjects or courses, most likely made possible by having access to a number of high quality sixth form or FE colleges.

To prosper and grow rural-based businesses need good access to training providers, so that their workforce can gain and update necessary skills. Without doubt this includes digital skills. It can mean on-site training, attending one-off sessions or longer-term courses e.g. one day per week.

Having access to apprenticeship opportunities is important for those wishing to follow a practical vocation, whether straight out of school or later in life. Equally, this provides rural businesses with a route to bring in and train up promising new employees.

Land-based sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, and environmental management, must be able to acquire people with specific practical and administrative skills, which are often gained from specialist training or education providers.

## The national policy context

Key elements of national policy include:

- Further Education – young people must remain in education, training, or an apprenticeship until age 18. Remaining in education, which the great majority do, means attending a school sixth form, a further education college or a sixth form college. For young people one key consideration is the choice of academic or vocational courses they have and what FE schools or colleges are accessible to them. This can be determined by the availability and cost of transport options (see also the section on transport).
- Workforce training – the Government’s Industrial Strategy sought to enhance the technical training system, announcing extra funding to boost skills in STEM subjects and to help reskill the workforce.<sup>1</sup> More recently the Skills for Jobs White Paper announced the introduction of a Lifetime Skills Guarantee that from 2025 would make loans widely available to those wishing to attend higher technical courses at any stage in their career (matching the loans for university students).
- Skills Advisory Panels – these partnerships have been established locally to help Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) meet skills needs in their areas, taking account of LEP Local Industrial Strategies. The Panels comprise representatives from local employers, local authorities, colleges and universities (see also the chapter on LEPs).
- Apprenticeships Scheme – in 2018 the Government reformed this scheme, seeking to improve the standard of apprenticeships and to plug gaps in provision. New employer-designed apprenticeships are due for introduction during 2020. The Scheme is part-funded by an Apprenticeship Levy which larger businesses must contribute towards. A quarter of the funding raised by the Levy should cover apprenticeships based in SMEs.
- Land-based training – specialist land-based colleges offer further (and sometimes higher) education courses in land-based occupations. Examples can include courses in agriculture, arboriculture, animal science and welfare, conservation, horticulture, and related business administration. There are also apprenticeship standards in aspects of agriculture, animal care and environmental management.
- A Plan for Jobs – in July 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a £160 billion package of measures designed specifically to address the economic impacts of the pandemic and restrictions. The measures seek to help businesses to retain their employees, through grants, loans, and rate cuts. Measures due to be taken forward in 2021/22 include a Restart programme to offer tailored support to the unemployed and a Kickstart scheme to create subsidised employment opportunities for young people.

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<sup>1</sup> STEM subjects are science, technology, engineering and mathematics.



## The rural dimension

Just over half a million young people, aged from 15 to 19, live in rural areas.<sup>2</sup> They comprise 5.3% of the total rural population (which is slightly less than the 5.5% figure for England as a whole). It is the following cohort, aged 20 to 24, where evidence shows a large outmigration from rural areas.

The working age population is skewed towards older age groups in rural areas, compared with the England average. Only 13.5% of the rural population is aged 20 to 34, whereas 22.6% of the rural population is aged 50 to 64.

*Proportion of the total population within working age bands (2018)*

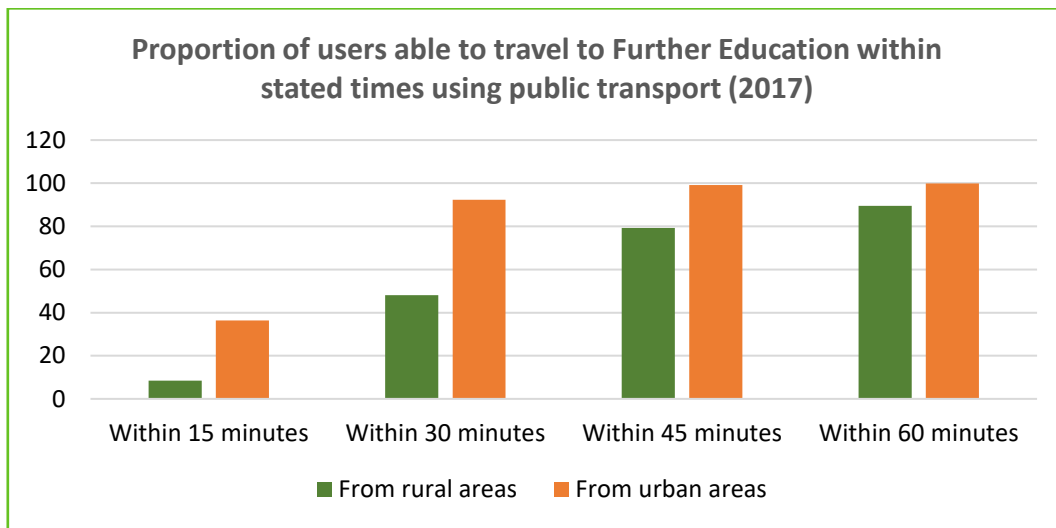
	Rural areas	England
Age 20 to 34	13.5%	19.9%
Age 35 to 49	17.9%	19.5%
Age 50 to 64	22.6%	18.8%

Note: Columns do not add to 100% because other population groups are below age 20 or over age 64.

Students living in rural areas have longer journeys to access FE institutions than their urban counterparts, especially if using public transport.<sup>3</sup> More than a tenth of rural students must travel for over one hour in each direction (and this data does not measure the frequency of any public transport option).

<sup>2</sup> *Mid Year Population Estimates 2018*, Office for National Statistics.

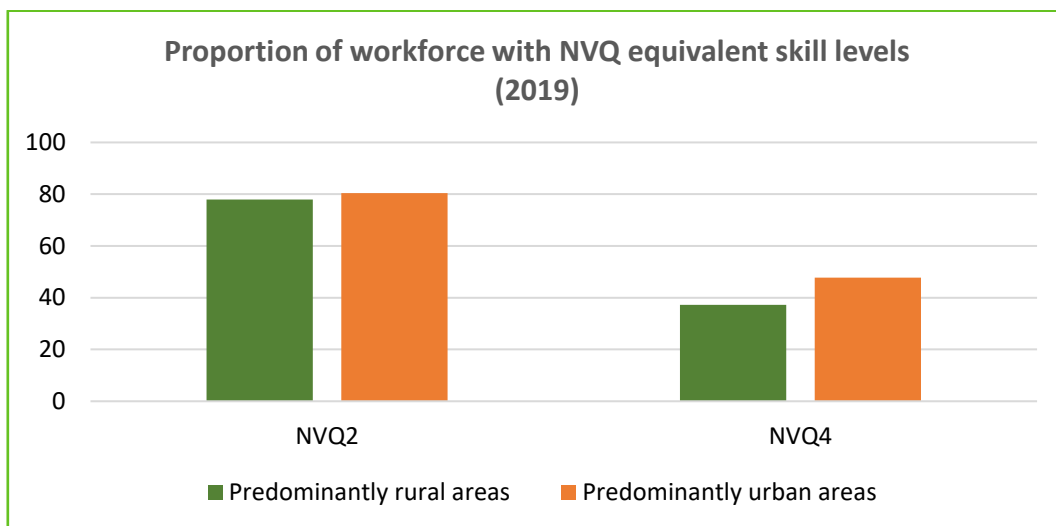
<sup>3</sup> *Statistical Digest of Rural England*, Defra, based on Journey Time Statistics from Department for Transport.



Students from rural areas often face a limited choice (or even no realistic choice) of FE provider. On average:

- Students from rural areas can travel to 1 FE institution within 30 minutes and 5 FE institutions within 60 minutes using public transport or walking; while
- Students from urban areas can travel to 4 FE institutions within 30 minutes and 9 FE institutions within 60 minutes using public transport or walking.

On average those working in predominantly rural areas have somewhat lower skill levels than those working in predominantly urban areas, based on National Vocational Qualification (or equivalent) standards.<sup>4</sup> This is workplace-based information and probably indicates that some better qualified rural residents commute to urban jobs.



Research which considered apprenticeships (though only in respect of young people) found that:<sup>5</sup>

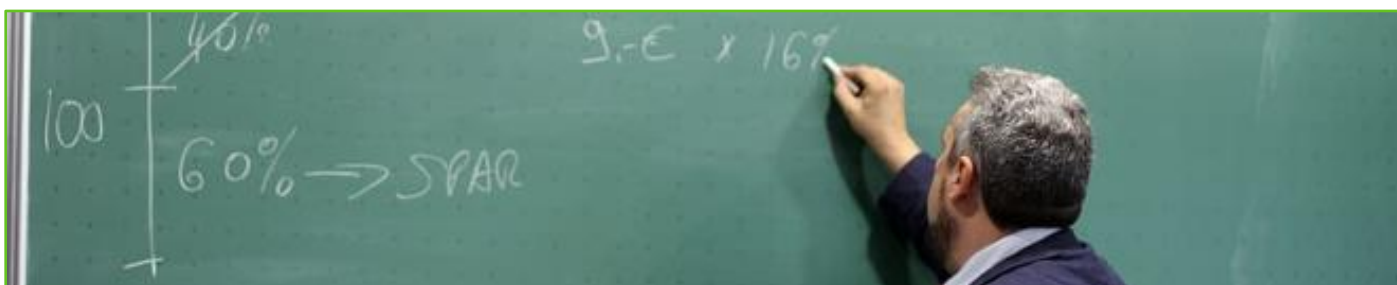
<sup>4</sup> *Statistical Digest of Rural England*, Defra, based on ONS Annual Population Survey 2019.

<sup>5</sup> *Challenges Facing Rural 16-18 Year Olds in Accessing Appropriate Education and Work Based Training*, Rural England CIC (2018).

- A slightly higher proportion of 16-year olds go into an apprenticeship from predominantly rural areas than from predominantly urban areas;
- Young people in apprenticeships in rural areas often find those opportunities through a personal contact rather than via any formal application process;
- The paucity of larger employers in rural economies can limit the variety of apprenticeships that are on offer, both in terms of their sector and skill level.

## Policy solutions

In rural areas the scope to access further education and training opportunities is, to a significant extent, dependent on the availability of transport options and digital connectivity. Another recent need arises from job losses resulting from the pandemic and consequent recession. Some rural people now need retraining opportunities, to acquire new skills and get back into employment.



## Rural Further Education, Training and Skills

### Specific policy asks

**Further Education:** for rural young people three linked issues need addressing – travel options to access FE, the cost of that travel and the choice of institutions/courses available. Students aged 17 or 18 should be entitled to statutory free travel to FE colleges or schools, matching the existing scheme for those aged up to 16. This scheme should be fully funded by central Government.

**Careers advice:** the Government's Careers Strategy has gone some way to improving the advice on offer to pupils. Young people in rural areas need local access to impartial and high-quality careers information and guidance, to help them understand all post-16 opportunities. This will help to raise ambitions and better enable young people to navigate career pathways, so they can acquire the right skills. One challenge is ensuring that careers advisers understand opportunities within the land-based sector.

**Skills Advisory Panels:** these Panels need to recruit businesspeople who have knowledge or experience across a range of sectors and who understand the current skills policy framework. This should include representatives with experience of rural business needs. Their advice to Local Enterprise Partnerships needs to assess and highlight any specific skill needs of rural based businesses. It should support rural objectives within Local Industrial Strategies.

**Access to training:** with no centrally funded adult education budget, some colleges and training providers have been opting out of training provision for that population group. The proposed Lifetime Skills Guarantee should help. Government needs to show how it can financially support provision. It is important that courses are accessible to rural based businesses and their staff. Solutions could include providing outreach sessions at hub locations in market towns and making more training content available online, with rural connectivity a prerequisite.

**Plan for Jobs:** measures that are being introduced under the Plan for Jobs, whilst broadly welcome, need to be designed more carefully and flexibly so that they take account of rural circumstances and are accessible to rural clients.