



# The Independent Living Skills (ILS) Curriculum in Further Education: Building a person-centred skills-based curriculum

September 2025

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Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

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<b>Executive summary.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Background.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Recommendations.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Current context .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Current ILS provision across Wales.....	11
ILS information on websites .....	15
Additional Learning Support (ALS) funding .....	15
Progress since our 2017 review.....	15
<b>The current curriculum structure .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Pathways 1 and 2.....	18
Pathway 3.....	19
Pathway 4.....	22
Quality assurance and improvement planning.....	26
Current ILS programme specifications.....	27
<b>Leading an ILS curriculum area .....</b>	<b>33</b>
Initial assessments, target-setting and recording progress .....	33
Quality assurance and self-evaluation .....	38
Professional learning.....	39
Links with maintained special schools.....	40
<b>The impact of ALN reform .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Appendix: Learner and staff survey data .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Methods and evidence base .....</b>	<b>57</b>
Types of evidence gathering .....	58
<b>Glossary .....</b>	<b>59</b>
Numbers – quantities and proportions .....	60
<b>References .....</b>	<b>61</b>

## Executive summary

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- 1 The further education (FE) sector has seen notable improvements to Independent Living Skills (ILS) provision since we last reported on it in 2017, especially in personalising learning and improving collaboration. However, variability in provision, inconsistent assessment and tracking, and weaknesses in quality assurance systems persist. In addition, curriculum offers are not consistently aligned to statutory responsibilities under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 risking non-compliance and inconsistent outcomes for learners. This report calls for re-configuration of the ILS curriculum into a more coherent, aspirational, and outcome-focused model that better supports learners in preparing for fulfilling adult lives.
- 2 As of September 2024, 12 further education institutions (FEIs) in Wales, including Adult Learning Wales, provide ILS programmes for learners with ALN, an increase of one provider since Estyn's 2017 thematic review. St David's Catholic Sixth Form College remains the only FE institution not offering ILS provision. Around 1,700 learners completed ILS programmes in 2023-2024, reflecting growing demand.
- 3 ILS programmes serve learners with a range of needs including moderate to severe and profound learning difficulties and disabilities, autistic spectrum conditions, and social or mental health needs. They also cater for learners who have disrupted educational experiences and minimal qualifications. While some learners join at age 16, others enter aged 19 from special schools.
- 4 Entry into ILS programmes is guided by college-level assessments, drawing on Individual Development Plans (IDP) and, occasionally, Education, Health and Care Plans for learners from England. Where provision is unsuitable, learners may be referred to independent specialist colleges.
- 5 Medr recognises the additional cost of supporting learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. ILS learners receive differentiated funding through course funding structures, and sometimes through additional learning support (ALS). Key information is tracked via the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR), which collects data on course completion and qualifications. There is no national collection of destination data for these learners.
- 6 The 2017 Estyn review identified a lack of robust assessment and tracking systems, overreliance on qualifications to measure progress, and inadequate focus on life skills, independence, and employability. This led to five key recommendations, prompting reforms including the adoption of the Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) framework, a reduction in inappropriate accredited learning, and a move to personalised, skills-based curricula. While many improvements have been



made, inconsistencies in quality remain, especially in initial assessments and IDP integration.

- 7 Pathways 1 and 2 serve learners with the most complex needs. However, inconsistency in interpreting learner profiles leads to variation in which learners access these pathways. For example, learners with a similar profile may end up on pathway 1, 2 or even in independent specialist colleges, dependant on the local offer. Some providers lack clarity on programme duration and learners' expected outcomes, risking perceptions of the college providing day service-like activities rather than purposeful learning and skills development.
- 8 Pathway 3 accommodates the largest share of learners and meets a wide range of learning needs. It often includes learners with behavioural or emotional challenges, many of whom have not been identified as having ALN or who do not identify as being an ILS learner. Colleges have developed a breadth of curriculum offers including vocational tasters, employability training and personalised development of social and communication skills. The delivery, planning and assessment of these pathway 3 programmes varies considerably and often includes accredited learning. In some providers this is similar provision to the Jobs Growth Wales+ 16-19 employability programme, and meets the needs of similar learners. It is important to note that not all FEIs deliver Jobs Growth Wales+.
- 9 Pathway 4 provides supported internships. While the delivery model for this pathway has demonstrated life-changing potential for some learners, delivery inconsistencies, funding constraints, and the differing expectations of learners, parents and/or carers, colleges, supported employment agencies and employers limit its impact.
- 10 Quality assurance practices across FEIs are evolving but remain inconsistent both within and across different institutions. Strong providers align self-evaluation with learner achievement of targets, use robust observation processes, and involve learners and stakeholders. However, many colleges identify progress monitoring, especially for non-accredited learning, as a key area needing improvement.
- 11 Current programme specifications overemphasise learners' impairments rather than their learning needs and goals. The four 'pillars of learning' (health and well-being, community inclusion, independent living, and employability) are inconsistently defined, not well understood and sometimes misapplied. Many view the existing terminology, including the term 'ILS', as lacking aspiration and clarity.
- 12 FEIs are improving transition support from schools, aided by growing collaboration. However, issues persist, including misaligned curricula, lack of consistency in IDP content, and learners entering college without an IDP.

- 13 Welsh-medium provision remains underdeveloped. Only two colleges routinely deliver Welsh-medium provision, and a very few other providers report being able to provide this if it is requested but rarely do. As a result, too often learners whose first language is Welsh are only able to access ILS provision through the medium of English.
- 14 While professional learning opportunities have expanded, they are inconsistently aligned to the specific demands of ILS teaching and assessment. Many colleges lack tailored professional development plans for ILS staff, and the evaluation of how professional learning impacts on learner outcomes remains limited.
- 15 ALN reform has increased collaborative working across stakeholders, although the transition from the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system has created challenges. IDPs are often delayed, incomplete, or misaligned with post-16 needs. The administrative burden of developing, maintaining and sharing IDPs on colleges has increased substantially, and inconsistencies in IDP quality hamper effective curriculum planning for meaningful, individualised skill development.

## Introduction

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This report is written in response to a request from Medr<sup>1</sup> in August 2024. The report focuses on the quality of independent living skills provision in further education institutions across Wales.

Independent living skills (ILS) provision is designed to provide a practical approach for gaining and consolidating skills to prepare learners with additional learning needs (ALN) for adult life. The curriculum is underpinned by a person-centred approach to delivery, only accrediting learning where of benefit to the learner.

Under Medr's (and previously the Welsh Government's) programme specifications there are four full-time learning programmes:

- Pathway 1 – for learners with profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- Pathway 2 – for learners with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- Pathway 3 – for learners with moderate learning difficulties and/or social, emotional and mental health difficulties and/or disabilities
- Pathway 4 – for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on supported internships

Each ILS pathway is built around a core made up of four learning pillars:

- Health and Well-being
- Employability
- Independent Living
- Community Inclusion

Communication, numeracy, and digital literacy skills are described as being key features of learning under all pathways, with opportunities to develop and practise these skills embedded within each of the four pillars. The provision is tailored to each of the four pathways and will be dependent on learner skills and their long-term destinations. Programmes may also include work-related experience, together with qualifications or other assessable learning activities. The inclusion of qualifications or other assessable learning activities must add value and meet specific learner needs, supporting them to meet their long-term destinations.

This report draws on evidence from visits to 10 of the 12 FEIs in Wales that currently offer ILS provision as well as recent inspection activity in the other two. Not all of these

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<sup>1</sup> Medr, also known as the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, is a tertiary educational and Welsh Government sponsored body, overseeing post-16 education and research in Wales.



providers use the term ‘ILS’ to name this provision, but all are using the ILS programme specifications to meet their local needs.

The visits included meeting with leaders, meeting with learners, learning walks and document scrutiny. We also drew on evidence from our ongoing inspection activity and further education college link visits. We completed a range of online and face-to-face discussions with relevant stakeholders including ColegauCymru staff, Medr, local authority post-16 staff, leaders in maintained special schools, supported internship agencies and supported internship employers.

We collected feedback from staff and learners on ILS programmes through bilingual questionnaires, which were also available in an easy-read symbolised format for learners. However, we acknowledge that not all learners would have been able to communicate their feedback fully using this method due to their additional learning needs. In order to mitigate this limitation we also met with a cross section of learners during each visit to an institution and provided guidance within the questionnaire about how staff could support learners to provide their feedback.

We reviewed a range of documentation submitted by the FEIs, ColegauCymru, the Welsh Government and Medr. These included curriculum plans, programme specifications, case studies, timetables, data about learner outcomes and peer reviews.

During the week beginning 7 October 2024, we viewed the websites of the providers to evaluate the usefulness and accessibility of the information provided. This information is included in the relevant sections of this report. More information on the methods used and the providers who participated can be found in the methods and evidence section.

The intended audience for this report is Medr, the Welsh Government, local authorities, education providers, learners, parents and carers of young people with ALN and any other key partner organisations who have a role in supporting young people with ALN to access further education.

**“Being at college puts you out of your comfort zone, and that helps you grow.”**

**- ILS learner during college visit, 2025**

## Background

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Currently 12 FEIs in Wales provide ILS programmes for learners with ALN. This includes 11 further education colleges and Adult Learning Wales (ALW). This represents the addition of one new provider since the Estyn thematic review in this area in 2017. ALW now offer this provision for a very few learners in Ceredigion. St David's Catholic Sixth Form College in Cardiff is the only further education institution in Wales that does not provide such programmes.

In 2023-2024, around 1,700 learners<sup>2</sup> completed ILS programmes in FE colleges in Wales. This represents an increase of around 300 since the time of the last thematic review. However, it is important to note that this report only considers the full-time ILS programmes delivered at FEIs. The majority of FEIs also deliver part-time ILS programmes for older learners, which we did not evaluate as part of this report.

One FE college also offers education and training for learners with ALN as well as residential care through a subsidiary independent specialist college (otherwise known as an independent specialist post-16 institution, ISPI). However, placements at Bevan College (located at Bridgend College) are funded through the Welsh Government or local authority funding arrangements for independent specialist colleges, and do not form part of this review.

For the purposes of this report, the term ILS programmes refers to all discrete programmes of learning within FE colleges for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities. These learners have a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities, including moderate to severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum condition (ASC) and, in a few cases, learners described as having profound and multiple learning difficulties. Not all learners on ILS programmes join FEIs from maintained special schools and so approaches within ILS departments require transition from a range of settings including specialist resource bases, mainstream schools, home education and pupil referral units. In many colleges, this provision also includes courses for learners who join the college with skills below those required for entry on to mainstream courses but who may not have learning difficulties or disabilities. Many of this group of learners may also have experienced serious challenges with attendance and engagement during their time at school for a variety of social and personal reasons. As a result, the ILS provision within nearly all FE colleges includes learners with a very broad range of needs and abilities.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Medr published data, February 2025 [Sta/Medr/06/2025: Further education, work-based learning and community learning, August 2023 to July 2024 - Medr](#)

Nearly all FE colleges provide education for learners from 16 years of age. However, many learners do not join the college until they are 19, particularly if they attend a maintained special school with its own post-16 provision. In a very few cases, learners will join the FE college after having completed a course at an independent specialist college as they were not able to access a mainstream FE environment when they left compulsory education.

Learners apply to these courses through college-specific admissions processes. For most learners this includes the college reviewing the IDP (or equivalent) to assess and confirm that it can provide the additional learning provision (ALP) to meet each learner's ALN. Where a college cannot meet a learner's needs, they typically are then able to apply to an independent specialist college. However, this is only the case if the local authority agrees to maintain the learner's IDP and agrees that they have a 'reasonable need for education and training'.

Within the Post-16 Funding Framework, provision for learners with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties on ILS courses receives additional funding to cover the higher cost of programmes of learning for this group of learners, such as higher staffing ratios. In addition, funding is available through the additional learning support (ALS) mechanism for a few individual learners on ILS programmes who would be unable to cope without higher levels of support. Given that ILS provision has augmented funding, it appears that Medr recognise the additional costs to securing provision designed exclusively for learners with ALN.

The Welsh Government collects a broad range of information about the outcomes of learners enrolled at FE colleges, including learners on ILS programmes, via the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR). The LLWR collects information on completion, attainment and success rates for learning activities. The destinations of learners are matched to 12 pre-set codes, which address broad categories for continuing education, employment or other destinations. This information is shared with providers, and more recently, Medr.

In 2017, Estyn completed a [review](#) of the independent living skills learning areas in further education colleges. The main findings were that most colleges did not use a wide enough range of data to measure learner progress, notably when recording progress in skills development. Further, in many colleges, systems of tracking and monitoring the progress of learners on ILS courses were too reliant on the achievement of qualifications. For many learners with complex needs, this approach does not provide an accurate or relevant measure of progress. In many colleges, programmes of learning did not take enough account of learners' intended destinations or make suitable provision for developing learners' independence, employability and life skills.

The report left five recommendations for colleges delivering ILS courses:

**R1 Identify learners' wider skills and abilities during initial assessments and include a suitable focus on communication, independence, employability and well-being within these**

**R2 Make sure that individual learning plans reflect the outcomes of initial assessments and that they include specific, measurable targets that link clearly to learners' long-term goals and likely destinations**

**R3 Design independent living skills programmes of learning that:**

- are sufficiently challenging
- include opportunities to develop skills that are relevant to learners' needs and likely destinations when they leave the college
- have an appropriate balance between completing qualifications and learning activities

**R4 Implement reliable systems to track the progress of all learners in relation to their individual starting points**

**R5 Track learners' destinations when they leave the learning area or college accurately**

Following the publication of the 2017 thematic report, the Welsh Government supported colleges with the development of the current ILS pathways. Across Wales, colleges moved to new methods of monitoring learner progress, most commonly 'Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement' (RARPA). Further, they reduced the focus on accredited learning and moved towards a more person-centred approach to curriculum design. This current thematic report evaluates the impact of these changes and identifies recommended areas for further improvement.

**"College has shown me that I can do anything. Because of college I volunteer at Blaenau Gwent FM radio station and have my own programme."**

**- ILS learner during college visit, 2025**

## Recommendations

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### **Medr should:**

R1 Revise ILS programme specifications to:

- ensure that they are aspirational, better reflect learners' ALN, have clear expectations on learner outcomes and progression and support FEIs to be person-centred
- align with colleges' statutory responsibilities under the ALNET (Wales) Act (2018) and wider national priorities including The Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015)

R2 Ensure that learners have clearly understood targets and progression pathways by providing guidance to the sector on important areas of ILS such as:

- person-centred baseline assessing, incorporating personal development goals
- outcomes-based curriculum planning, including accredited learning
- part-time provision
- what destination data to record and how to use it in planning for improvement
- progression within and between learning pathways

### **The Welsh Government should:**

R3 Ensure that all young people with ALN can access post statutory education and training in line with their non ALN peers, in Welsh and English

R4 Ensure that updates to the ALN Code provide clear guidance to local authorities, schools and FEIs on how to work in partnership to support better transition into tertiary education, and in particular onto ILS programmes, through appropriate target-setting, IDP drafting and curriculum planning

R5 Provide further national guidance and accountability mechanisms to ensure consistent implementation and quality assurance of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) across all regions

### **FEIs should:**

R6 Embed systematic links between RARPA target-setting and IDP intended outcomes to ensure statutory coherence

R7 Provide professional learning for teaching and support staff that is appropriately tailored to meet the breadth of additional learning needs learners experience as well

as the pedagogy to support this, including ensuring that staff supporting the development of learners' employability skills and in work placements are suitably trained

- R8 Work with local employers to identify skills gaps that could be filled by learners as trainees or interns, leading to volunteering, apprenticeships or paid employment
- R9 Ensure that the attainments and destinations of ILS learners informs self-evaluation processes including collating and evaluating the number of learners dropping out of ILS courses and reasons for them leaving
- R10 Ensure that their websites provide accessible information for young people who have ALN on the courses available to them
- R11 Ensure that all learners classified as having ALN meet the statutory definition and hold a current, high-quality IDP

**Local authorities should:**

- R12 Ensure that advice and guidance they give to young people with ALN leaving statutory education is clear and reflects their ALN post-16 strategy, working with Careers Wales as appropriate
- R13 Work with FEIs, local employers and independent specialist colleges to ensure equitable access to the most suitable further education and training provision for all learners with ALN, in English and Welsh
- R14 Support schools and PRUs to ensure a consistent understanding of the legalities and importance of timely information sharing as pupils progress to further education and training, including sharing IDPs
- R15 Formalise arrangements to support those learners with ALN who drop out of further education in terms of appropriate review, updating or ceasing of an IDP and provision of any other support in line with the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework



## Current context

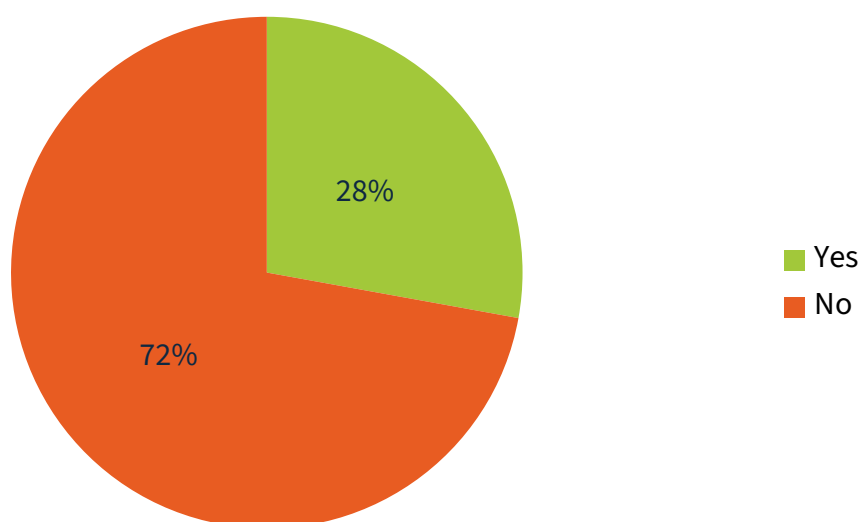
### Current ILS provision across Wales

In autumn 2024, 11 FE colleges and Adult Learning Wales completed a data return (in the form of an online survey) explaining their current provision within ILS departments. During this period, colleges reported that just over 2,000 learners were enrolled on these courses pan Wales. Many colleges had between 100-300 learners enrolled on ILS courses at their college.

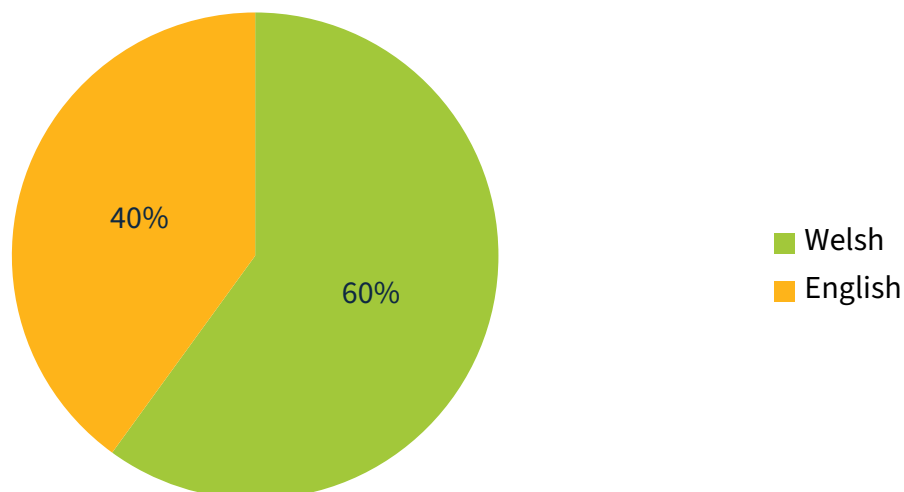
All providers offered pathway 2, most offered pathway 3 and 4 (91.7%) and a minority offered pathway 1 or another course (33.3%). Only two out of 12 (16.7%) providers offered Welsh-medium or bilingual provision. One additional college reported offering Welsh-medium provision. However, there was no current uptake from learners.

In our staff survey, 27.8% reported teaching learners whose first language was Welsh, of these 40.0% reported that they were taught in English. Around half of learners who responded to our survey felt that they could choose to learn in Welsh. This is in line with the verbal feedback we received on college visits; often Welsh-speaking learners only had access to English-medium provision.

**Figures 1 and 2. Responses to: “Do you teach any learners whose first language is Welsh?” and “Which language are they taught in?”:**



*Based on responses from 79 staff*



*Based on responses from 20 staff; a further 2 staff chose both options*

Providers reported that across Wales approximately 90 teaching assistants and support staff, 60 teachers or lecturers and 12 leaders work in ILS provisions in total.

#### **Grŵp Llandrillo Menai: Bilingual delivery**

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai recognises and values the benefits that bilingualism brings to all its learners in enhancing social, cultural and vocational opportunities. All ILS programmes are delivered bilingually in Welsh and English. As a result, learners can communicate in their preferred language and alongside have informal opportunities every day to learn the other language that may be less familiar to them. The college group shares good practice working in partnership with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol using the 'Sgiliaith' app.

A minority of providers reported offering dedicated provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities at one college site only, whereas many offer ILS courses at between two and five sites across their area. Wales' colleges vary in size, geographical coverage and the number of sites. This highlights the variability in travel time for learners accessing ILS provision within each college. It is important to note that across Wales colleges and learners report challenges for transport even for those learners without ALN.

Further, colleges reported challenges in the variability of provision of transport for these learners, who often are unable to travel independently. For example, in some areas local authorities provide transport to colleges. However, often this varies even within colleges which cover more than one local authority. Travelling to and from college can be particularly challenging for learners unable to independently use public

transport safely, and a lack of appropriate transport risks learners being excluded from further education as they are unable to attend college. Colleges reported that transport was cited as a factor when learners dropped out of courses, although it is unclear what proportion of learners this impacts, and if it is disproportionately impacting learners with ALN or on ILS courses, which underscores the need for statutory IDP review processes to continue post-withdrawal to safeguard learners' rights to suitable ALP. This demonstrates the variability of the current post-16 education landscape and the complexity behind areas such as course dropouts, which are often not purely a reflection of the quality of curriculum being offered at a provider.

The majority of providers reported having links with maintained special schools, which included on-site provision at the college enabling older pupils to experience aspects of college life.

Colleges reported that the number of learners who drop out of ILS programmes, including early withdrawals, has increased slightly over the last three years. In Autumn 2024 colleges reported that this had increased from around 100 learners per year, to 150. However, individual rates vary between colleges year on year. During visits, a very few colleges reported that this was because of the increase in learners with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) and that learners with learning difficulties (who do not have SEMH) generally had stronger retention rates.

Despite course descriptors suggesting that nearly all learners on these courses should have an IDP or equivalent, FEIs reported that only 68% of learners on ILS programmes have a statutory ALN document outlining their learning needs and the provision required to meet them. Providers reported that, when learners have a statutory plan linked to their ALN, around half of learners have an IDP (50%), around half have a learning and skills plan (LSP)<sup>3</sup> (46%) and a very few have a statement or education, health and care plan (5%).

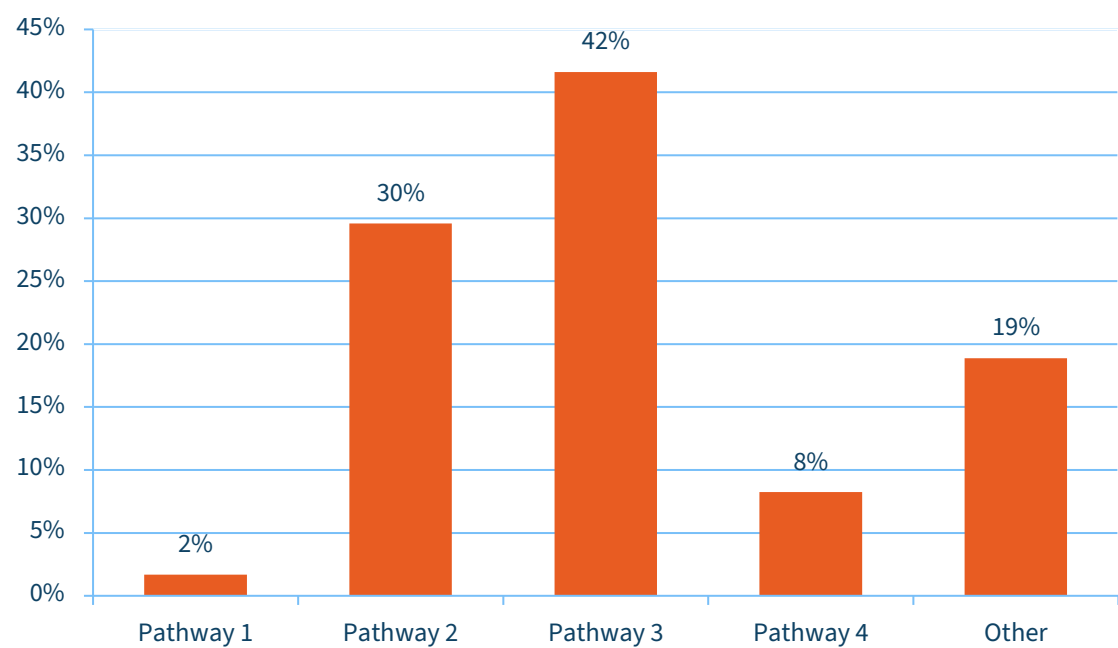
Most providers (91.7%) reported that learners may undertake formally accredited qualifications as part of ILS programmes. For example, in vocational areas, learners may pursue food hygiene or health and safety certification. The majority (66.7%) of colleges reported that learners were working towards accreditation alongside ILS programmes. According to the data submitted by colleges in autumn 2024, only a minority (33.7%) of learners on ILS programmes were working towards accreditations or qualifications as part of their programmes of learning.

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<sup>3</sup> LSPs were the required plan prior to ALN reform and will become less common over the next couple of years as learners in Wales come through the tertiary system with IDPs.

Providers reported that around half of learners were enrolled on pathway 3, a minority were enrolled on pathway 2 and a very few were enrolled on pathway 4 or pathway 1. Providers reported that a few learners were enrolled on other courses as part of ILS provision, for example, Foundation for Learning: Cam Ymlaen.

**Figure 3. How many learners are enrolled on each pathway?**



*Based on responses from 12 providers*

In further education, a period of full-time study means a period of study on one or more designated courses comprising 500 or more contact hours during the academic year. Colleges reported that, during the academic year 2024-2025, many (78.5%) ILS learners were enrolled full-time, a few (15.4%) were enrolled part-time, and a very few 6%) had other arrangements.

Only one college highlighted commissioning partners to deliver ILS courses through specific units of accredited learning.

Across Wales, the ILS offer varied substantially with the vast majority of curriculum being delivered in English for learners with moderate learning difficulties and neurodivergent learners with social, emotional and mental health needs. As a result, curriculum offers for learners with severe and profound learning difficulties and disabilities in FEIs and Welsh-speaking ILS learners were restricted to a minority of colleges. Where colleges did offer pathway 1 courses, the number of learners on these courses was comparably very low. Many learners who might be eligible to access pathway 1 provision remain in maintained special schools and then often move on to independent specialist colleges or day provision.

## **ILS information on websites**

When we reviewed FEI websites in October 2024, we noted the following:

- No FEI had dedicated webpages on ILS courses or accessible information for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Most websites had a course search function, but you would need to know what courses were called to search for them, as the term ILS or the pathway titles are not always used.
- Only one college offered any information and guidance for learners whose ALN may not be able to be met by the college.
- Only a very few providers explicitly state that ILS courses are free of course fees and a minority of colleges cite extraneous costs, such as enrolment fees.
- In a minority of cases, ILS and ALN were detailed separately, without a link between for relevant information. This can help those learners with ALN who are not on ILS courses find information with more ease, but may make it more challenging for ILS learners to find information about ALN support available at the college.

## **Additional Learning Support (ALS) funding**

ILS programmes already funded at a higher rate to recognise the additional support these learners need. However, most colleges used a proportion of their ALS funding to support learners on ILS courses. The proportion of learners on ILS programmes that received this funding varied considerably between colleges. A few colleges reported using no ALS funding for these learners, half of colleges reported that all ILS learners access this funding, and a minority of colleges access this funding for 10-35% of ILS learners. Where all learners on ILS courses accessed ALS funding, often this is used appropriately for enhanced transition arrangements. It is unclear why there is such variation in the use of ALS funding in support of ILS learners across Wales.

**“College has helped me with having friends, cooking and writing.”**

**- ILS learner during college visit, 2025**

## **Progress since our 2017 review**

Following recommendations in the 2017 thematic report ‘Learner progress and

destinations in independent living skills learning areas in further education colleges' (Estyn, 2017), the Welsh Government developed new programme specifications introducing the four ILS pathways. Since the introduction of the new curriculum, colleges have redesigned approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. The curriculum is now focused around the four stated ILS pillars, with a greater focus on personalised skills development than accredited learning.

Across Wales, colleges were routinely collaborating with each other to share best practice and evaluate provision, for example through ColegauCymru peer review work, working groups, or targeted college-to-college visits. However, a majority of colleges identified progress monitoring and quality assurance of non-accredited learning as an area for improvement.

All colleges were using the ColegauCymru Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) self-assessment framework and were engaged in the peer exchange initiative. However, during our document scrutiny and site visits we noted that overall initial assessment processes were largely based on the ILS four pillars, literacy and numeracy, rather than holistic consideration of individual learners' education and training needs.

Despite many improvements in the curriculum, learning experiences within the ILS pillars may be limited. For example, in a few visits we noted that the ILS pillar entitled 'independent living skills' was dominated by the development of cooking skills rather than incorporating the targeted development of broader life skills.

Since the publication of the 2017 thematic report, post-16 aspects of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) have been rolled out and colleges' statutory responsibilities have increased. As a result, these different sets of guidance do not fully link and the integration of IDP review processes with ILS programmes, curriculum and assessment processes.

Overall, we noted that colleges were more confident in their provision on pathways 3 and 4. Destination-led, target-driven, time-limited and person-centred programmes of education and training appeared to be less well developed within pathways 1 and 2. Further, evidence from discussions with providers suggests that colleges may be uncertain how many times learners will repeat pathways 1 and 2. This has negatively affected outcomes-based learning, progression and destination planning. Whilst some learners may benefit from repeating a programme to aid their further progression, this should only happen with an agreed individual intended outcome.

FEIs reported that collecting data on the destinations of learners when they leave ILS courses was a challenge. The majority of providers did not share destination data for



learners during the evidence collection part of this report. Of those who did, a few only shared data over the previous one or two years, or had data that was not helpfully broken down. Further, detail on and understanding of what constitutes a ‘destination’ was inconsistent.

## The current curriculum structure

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### Pathways 1 and 2

Pathways 1 and 2 are designed to meet the needs of learners with the most complex ALN whose education and training needs can be met by FEIs. Learners whose needs cannot be met by an FEI may apply to attend an independent specialist college. The majority of providers we met with reported that their local authority had asked them to consider accepting more complex learners and providing pathway 1 provision. This was further complicated by the fact that most colleges work across more than one local authority who may have different expectations for the provider.

However, only four of the 12 FEIs delivering ILS provision in Wales offered pathway 1. While all 12 FEIs offered pathway 2, during our visits, as well as in discussion with stakeholders, it became clear that the ALN of learners on pathways 1 or 2 varied substantially between providers. The profile of one college's pathway 1 learner may have been similar to a profile for a pathway 2 learner in a different college.

This inconsistency may be in part due to the current programme specifications. The language of pathway 1 refers to learners' possible challenges, barriers and support needs more than the curriculum and pedagogy which might be beneficial.

The current programme specification lacks alignment with IDP intended outcomes and the wider principles of the ALNET Act. It does not sufficiently describe the ALP required or how programmes will deliver person-centred, time-bound outcomes. As a result, there is an insufficient focus in these specifications on the skills these learners should aim to develop during their time at college and their possible outcomes at the end of their course.

Typically, the tutor role is both to teach learners and to deploy and guide support staff so that they are working effectively with individual learners. How effectively they are doing this joint role should be a focus of quality assurance. However, there was no reference to support staff in the specifications.

**"I have improved all my skills, and my confidence."**

**– ILS learner during college visit, 2025**

When reviewing the current offer across Wales on these pathways it was difficult to compare due to broad programme specifications and varied profiles of learners across

different providers. For example, a few providers used local authority specialist staff or links with their Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO) to support with assessment and programme delivery of pathway 1, such as by using an educational psychologist to assess presenting behaviours and skills as part of initial assessments.

A very few programmes did not have a clear duration and end date. This did not effectively support outcome-driven learning and risks devaluing this provision, with a lack of clarity between clear programmes of learning with skills development at their core and day service provision, where the primary focus is on care and the opportunity to socialise.

Where provision was most effective, the provider had appropriately skilled staff who could meet the additional learning needs of learners effectively. For example, staff were able to understand and meet learners' communication needs through the use of easy-read documents or 'talking buttons'. In addition, these staff delivered a clear person-centred curriculum, which matched the skills learners would need for their future lives. For example, they focused on learning how to use public transport safely, developing an understanding of learners' preferred leisure activities or completing a range of activities with greater independence.

A few providers recognised that learners on these pathways may require a different approach to initial assessment to fully evaluate the skills each learner has, which skills are emerging, and which skills are key for their future lives.

### **Bridgend College: Travel warrant scheme**

Learners on pathway 2 programmes at Bridgend College engaged in a learner voice project with the charity Leonard Cheshire, during which transport was identified as a barrier to learners accessing their wider communities. As a result of a meeting with Senedd members, Transport for Wales and the company First Bus, learners on ILS courses at Bridgend College have been provided with a Travel Warrant that allows them to use buses in the locality to develop their abilities to travel independently. As a result, learners on this project can plan local journeys, access local facilities and work placements and increase their independence.

### **Pathway 3**

In autumn term 2024, nearly all of the FEIs delivering the ILS curriculum told us that they offered pathway 3. Over half of learners enrolled on ILS courses in Wales were on pathway 3.

The course specification for pathway 3 acknowledges that this pathway can support the needs of a broad range of learners from a variety of backgrounds. This includes those learners with learning disabilities and/or difficulties, social or behavioural needs that have interrupted learning. The specification reports that for these learners a likely destination is employment (either supported or unsupported), further education or independent living.

Colleges reported that learners on this pathway had a particularly wide range of needs and that often the learners studying on these programmes did not identify as being an 'ILS learner'. As a result, across Wales there were several approaches to curriculum delivery of pathway 3 under a variety of course names.

A few colleges had created pathway 3 courses specifically for neurodivergent learners and learners with social, emotional and mental health needs. Colleges reported that many of these learners may be undertaking accredited learning alongside or instead of non-accredited learning.

**"I was nervous getting the bus, but now it is starting to get easier."**

**– ILS learner during college visit, 2025**

Like the other pathways, the curriculum in this area is developed under the pillars of health and well-being, community, independent living skills and employability. Work related experience was seen as an important element of this programme by providers and learners. Accredited learning or qualifications may be more relevant for learners on this pathway than for those on pathways 1 or 2.

### **The College Merthyr: Developing emotional literacy**

The emotional literacy of independent living skills learners at The College Merthyr is enhanced through the use of 'zones of regulation', supporting them to categorise feelings and emotions in four coloured zones. The framework supports learners to reflect on their emotional states and, if necessary, to make adaptations. Visual and physical resources allow learners to identify and access tools to help them calm down or stay regulated. As a result, learners are empowered to develop personalised toolkits to solve problems, self-regulate and manage their sensory needs, which in turn enables them to engage more fully in their learning.

In the most effective providers, each pathway 3 course had a clear outcome. For example, one college identified pathway 3 learners who wished to progress to further education or work and developed the curriculum around this. This was easiest to achieve for those largest colleges or those with provision spread across fewer campuses. However, in other colleges these learners were grouped inappropriately, mixing learners across pathways for shared sessions with starkly contrasting planned outcomes. It is important to note that this does not mean that the pathways cannot mix at all. For example, other colleges planned successful shared sessions, such as pathway 3 learners running gym sessions for pathway 2 learners as part of their employability skill development.

### **Coleg y Cymoedd: Employability coaches**

Coleg y Cymoedd has created employability coaches who work with learners on the college's ILS courses. These coaches work with learners individually and in small groups across the college campuses to improve employability skills through college-based work experience opportunities. For example, a breakfast club in Nantgarw makes hot drinks and toast for learners and staff, and learners can also work in a bike maintenance workshop or in the college garden. At Ystrad Mynach, learners wash, iron and package donated clothes for their 'Walk in Wardrobe' available to all college learners to access clothes, shoes and accessories free of charge. At Rhondda, learners run a café serving food and drinks.

A few colleges used pathway 3 as an 'access to FE' course to enable learners to have tasters of different courses available at the college. In these colleges, many learners progressed from one pathway 3 course to another. For some learners this is appropriate and demonstrates positive progress. However, for other learners this risks repeatedly completing courses without a clear destination planned for their future lives.

Examples of the courses available on pathway 3 include:

- Pathways to music; art and design; community and independence; health and well-being; performing arts; employment and volunteering; catering; hair and beauty; horticulture
- More general vocational studies, including opportunities to sample courses across a range of vocations
- Work experiences in the college
- Extended Certificate in work skills or exploring work
- Building resilience
- Foundation studies

- Life skills

As a result of the breadth of needs that pathway 3 can meet, a minority of colleges offered pathway 3 to Entry 3 and Level 1 learners. Only a minority of these learners had IDPs. For a few learners this was appropriate, but for others risked using ILS provision to meet the needs of learners who are not described in the programme specification and who may need more challenging work, for example at level 1. ILS courses should not be used as a replacement for meeting the needs of learners with low skills levels on mainstream courses.

A few colleges included pathway 3 learners without an IDP in their data collection for ALN. As a result, retention and attainment data as well as the number of learners undertaking accredited learning can be skewed by the inclusion of learners who do not have IDPs and so do not have ALN (or have not been assessed or have ALN but have refused an IDP).

### **Coleg Cambria: Pathway 3 work skills**

Pathway 3 learners engage in weekly 'work skills' days providing experiences to inform their post-course aspirations. They choose from vocational areas across the college including animal care, catering, car valeting, as well as volunteering with a local theatre company, residential care home and a hair and beauty salon.

Learners gain hands-on experience through taster sessions on vocational courses, guest speakers, and real-world placements with local organisations and businesses. This approach develops practical and professional skills and connects learning with real life, boosting employability and helping learners shape their next steps.

### **Pathway 4**

Supported internships are a one-year study programme premised on securing employment for young people with ALN. According to data provided by colleges, in the academic year 2024-2025, 8.2% of ILS learners were enrolled on pathway 4.

Interns are enrolled and supported by a learning provider but typically spend 70 – 100% of their time in a workplace where they may also receive tutorial support to develop their essential skills and understanding of the world of work. The intention of supported internships is that a triad comprising an FEI, a job coach and an employer work together to facilitate routes to sustained paid work.



The original 'Project Search' model engages large public sector organisations such as hospitals and local authorities as employers. Interns are typically then offered up to three 'rotations' where they can experience different roles in different departments, for example catering, administration and estates. Job coaches work with employers to agree tasks and the development of competencies in specific roles.

To date, colleges delivering pathway 4 have predominantly worked with Elite (South Wales) and Agoriad (North Wales) supported employment agencies. However, colleges were increasingly seeking to independently recruit and train their own staff to support learners in workplaces based on local agreements with local employers.

Supported internships were originally introduced in 2016 in Wales through the Engage to Change project, a seven-year collaboration funded through the National Lottery Community Fund and supported by the Welsh Government. It was led by Learning Disability Wales and brought together Elite and Agoriad supported employment agencies to deliver job coaching, unpaid and paid placements and paid jobs in workplaces. According to the initiative's data, during its tenure the project delivered 244 supported internships and achieved an overall employment rate of 41%<sup>4</sup>. Learners and staff reported that these placements can be life changing for learners, supporting them onto successful employment where they did not think this would be possible.

**"I never thought I would get a job! It's crazy to think that I am now working!"**

**– ILS learner during college visit, 2025**

Supported internships in Wales are currently only available through pathway 4 of the existing ILS programme specifications. The pathway 4 programme specification states:

*Learners will typically be aged between 16 and 25 and come from a variety of backgrounds. All will have a need for significant support to enable them to successfully achieve paid employment. Assessment of need could be through a diagnosis of a learning disability and/or difficulty and/or autism or a needs assessment plan. Learners will also need to have a mature attitude, be willing to learn and develop their skills and be dedicated to finding employment. Many of the learners will have progressed from Pathway 2 or 3 and this Pathway will be the 'final year' for learners who have the potential to progress into paid employment. Welsh Government would not expect learners from a mainstream programme to access Pathway 4 unless a need is identified.*

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<sup>4</sup> [Employing people with learning disabilities](#)

*The supported internship programme has been developed to support learners to achieve sustainable paid employment by combining workplace-based learning with a personalised study programme which includes elements from the four pillars of learning. The focus of the programme is to equip learners with the relevant skills and qualifications they will need for employment in their chosen area.*

*Communication, numeracy and digital literacy skills remain a key part of learning, with opportunities to develop and practise these skills both within the workplace and embedded within each of the four pillars.*

Evidence from discussions with colleges demonstrated that the ways in which FEIs work with employers and supported employment agencies across Wales varied substantially. For example, Elite have worked closely with Cardiff and the Vale College to build college staff knowledge and experience of their supported internship model, whereas other providers had more limited contact with supported employment agencies.

Both employment agencies stressed that they are committed to collaborative working. However, they both also stressed that the move to the programmes being ‘owned’ by FEIs has adversely affected their ability to deliver employment outcomes and for their organisations to be financially sustainable. The reasons they gave for this include:

- Colleges do not consistently regard paid employment as an expected outcome of pathway 4. This is at odds with the employment agencies and their funders for whom post-programme sustained employment is a key measure of success.
- The expectation that colleges progress learners from pathway 3 to pathway 4 as their final year of college means learners on pathway 4 are not always the most suitable for supported internships. For example, they are likely to require one-to-one support. Learners are often not ready for the demands of a supported internship, such as being able to travel independently or work shifts.
- Employment agency perceptions that colleges do not always recognise that successful supported internships rely on a three-way partnership or that job coaching is about more than one-to-one support, for example that it includes vocational profiling; benefits support (including Access to Work); having an overview of the types of jobs available; matching learners to different roles in different workplaces; and being competent in task analysis and systematic instruction.
- Employment agencies require a pre-entry transition period to identify potential employers and ensure any pre-requisite training or DBS checks can be completed before a learner commences their internship and this timeframe isn’t consistently recognised by colleges. As a result, interns can be delayed in entering workplaces.

- Interns are not consistently supported to adopt work-related behaviour and expectations. For example, they may not attend workplaces during college holidays or when the college has an INSET day.
- College learning support staff are not always appropriately trained to support interns to develop their employability skills.
- Attendance can often be poor with no consequence. Low attendance results in reduced engagement. This undermines the programme's effectiveness for learners and relationships with employers.
- The requirement to cover the four pillars detracts from the vocational focus of the supported internship.
- Interns are expected to cover travel costs from limited allowances, which is often unaffordable and adversely affects attendance.
- They feel that without employment agency job coaches, learners' employment post-course is too often limited to six months.
- The existing funding model is not financially sustainable for employment agencies who are paid retrospectively by both colleges and Department for Work and Pensions.

At the same time, colleges experienced challenges with supported internships, reporting the following issues to us:

- Supported employment agencies do not always have job coaches available.
- The model is not appropriate for colleges and learners in rural Wales due to fewer large employers being based in these areas.
- There is frustration that colleges do not line manage job coaches, who are delivering their programme.
- There are rising costs to the college of employment agency fees.
- Employment agencies and employers are too prescriptive on the number of days and hours learners are required to attend.
- The methods of delivering mandatory training (for example, e-learning modules) can be a barrier preventing some learners from being able to take on a supported internship.
- There is concern that without supported employment agencies' knowledge and

expertise, they would be unable to navigate Access to Work funding.

- Some learners would benefit from an internship in a local micro-business (for example village shop or café) rather than travelling to a large organisation, but that they felt that the current model would make this challenging.

Other emerging changes and challenges from our meetings with providers, employers and employment agencies included:

- At the time of the review, all learners on pathway 4 were on ILS provision and so were expected to have ALN and an Individual Development Plan (IDP). However, colleges and supported employment agencies were increasingly identifying a wider cohort of learners likely to benefit from a supported internship. This included the increasing number of level 1 learners who may not have had a formal assessment of ALN, but who may be neurodivergent or have social, emotional or mental health needs that prevent their engagement on a full-time FE course. It also included the rising number of FE learners whose prior educational experiences were other than at school (EOTAS) such as home-educated learners or learners who have been in pupil referral units (PRUs).
- Learning Disability Wales had identified that the eligible age criteria for employability and skills programmes should be 16 to 30-year-olds and that job coach support should be available for any person of working age. At the time of this review, colleges felt that learners were only able to access supported internships up to age 25 as the current specifications say that this is what ‘typically’ happens. This could be a challenge, especially for those learners who may not join the college until they are 19, or who have interrupted education.
- It is not unusual for learners’ parents to end a supported internship for fear that household benefits would be adversely affected by their child being able to travel to and from a workplace independently and earn an income.
- Around half of colleges have developed a pathway 3 study programme that can be described as a preparation for a supported internship programme. They reported that this is helpful in preparing learners better for pathway 4.

### **Quality assurance and improvement planning**

Individual skill development and post-college employment rates are both important quality measures of pathway 4. However, FEIs, employment agencies and funders identified success in different ways, and this affected stakeholder evaluation and quality improvement processes. For example, only one college told us that many of their pathway 4 learners went on to secure employment while a representative of one

employment agency stated, '*pathway 4 is grossly inefficient in terms of delivering employment*'. However, colleges were able to demonstrate how learners who had been on pathway 4 have increased employability skills and wider skills such as increased confidence, resilience, time management and personal responsibility skills.

There is no clear direction for providers on the integration of a learner's IDP intended outcomes in the pathway 4 programme specification. Employment agencies report having little or no understanding of learners' IDPs.

Best practice for job coaches is recognised by the British Association for Supported Employment ([BASE](#)), through a level three Certificate for Supported Employment Practitioners, National Occupational Standards, and a Quality Framework. However, only two colleges told us that staff supporting learners on supported internships were required to have achieved the certificate. Employment agencies reported frustration at the lack of shared aims and practice in workplaces between job coaches and college support staff.

The extent to which the requirement to include the four pillars of ILS in pathway 4 programmes is adhered to was mixed and a cause of frustration for employment agencies who suggested that curriculum content should be more focused on employment.

### **Cardiff and Vale College: Pathway 4**

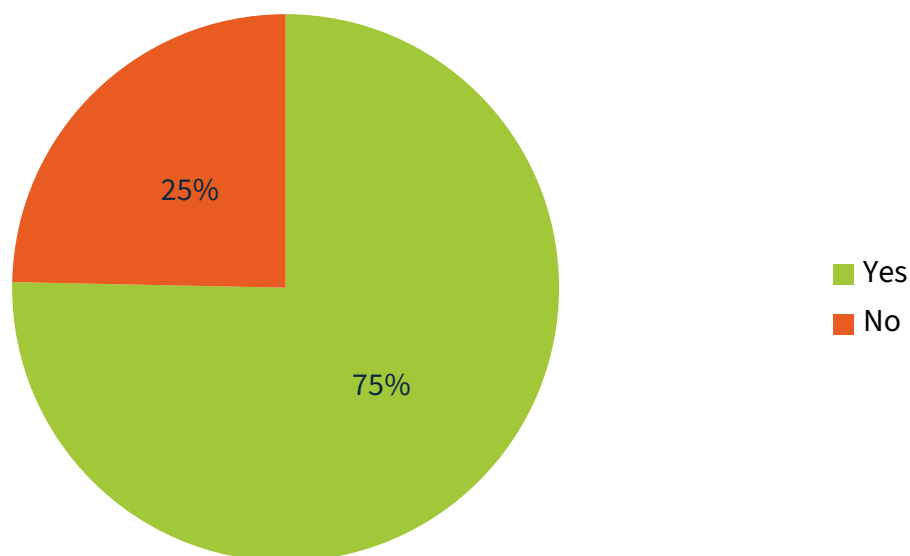
At Cardiff and Vale College, a majority of learners who complete supported internships secure employment at the end of their programme. Working with key employers including Parkgate Hotel and Dow Silicones UK, learners' aspirations are raised. Learners complete appropriate accredited qualifications such as forklift truck operation, food hygiene and health and safety to support routes to employment. Job coaches complete a nationally recognised qualification and follow a quality assurance framework.

### **Current ILS programme specifications**

The programme specifications developed in response to Estyn's 2017 Thematic Review have helped move FEIs away from the delivery of accredited units and awards that were not always relevant to learners' wants and needs to non-accredited learning pathways that can be tailored to meet specific learners' needs.

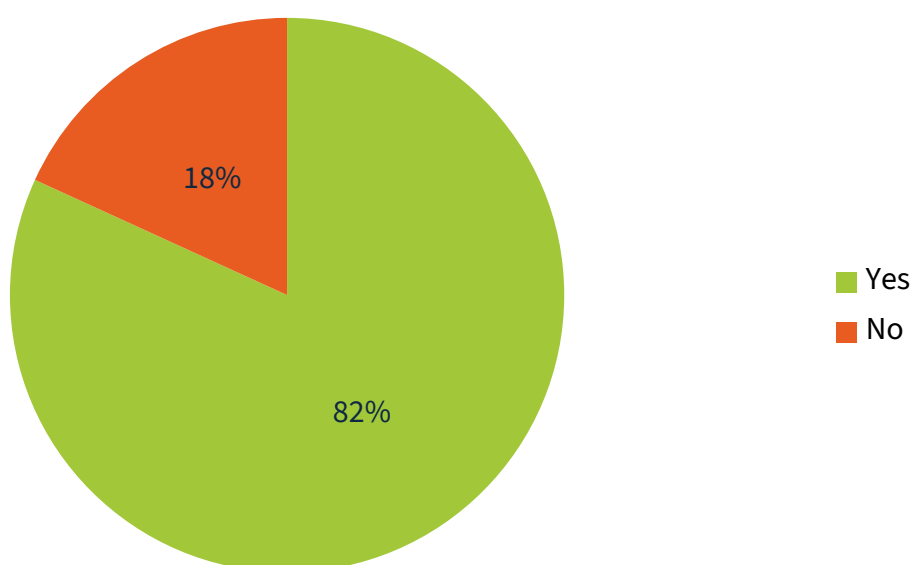
In our survey, 75.3% of staff reported that the pathways met the needs of all learners although, notably, around half of those who felt positively about current pathways felt that this was because of a person-centred and flexible approach. However, 81.8% of staff also identified that the profile of the typical ILS learner has changed and overall ALN has expanded to include learners presenting with more challenging behaviour, including lower levels of engagement, social skills, confidence and resilience.

**Figure 4. Responses to “Do you think the current pathways meet the needs of all ILS learners?”:**



*Based on responses from 77 staff*

**Figure 5. Responses to “Has the profile of the typical ILS learner changed since the pandemic?”:**



*Based on responses from 77 staff*



Evidence from recent college inspections as well as visits to colleges as part of this thematic review suggests meaningful curriculum change has been achieved to varying degrees of success across FEIs. Further, colleges reported that have had an increasing proportion of learners who have social, emotional and mental health needs who benefit from non-accredited learning offers.

This thematic review took place as post-16 aspects of ALN reform were implemented and FEIs started to meet their new statutory responsibilities. This provided an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme specifications and learning pathways in respect of wider system and cultural changes.

**In general, during our review we found that the programme specifications:**

- **do not have an explicit focus on purpose and outcomes.** This includes considering whether the title and terms ILS and pillars of ILS remain appropriate.
- **do not consistently recognise and accommodate how provision for this group is different** to mainstream FE. This includes progress recording of non-accredited learning, the enhanced role of learning support staff and wider stakeholders in ensuring positive learner outcomes
- **do not accommodate colleges' statutory responsibilities, initiatives and wider contexts**, such as Individual Development Plan (IDP) processes, UK Skills, well-being indicators and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

### **Pathway categories**

The narrative in the programme specifications overemphasises the nature of learners' learning difficulties and disabilities to the detriment of describing learning needs and how time-limited, target-driven and destination-led personalised programmes of learning will support positive outcomes for individuals to prepare them for their post-college adult lives.

Categorising groups of learners into different pathways by a high-level description of learning difficulties and disabilities is not helpful because of the following:

- The use of categories that are not diagnoses does little to help staff assess individuals' learning needs. Additionally, learners in the same category will not have the same barriers to learning.
- Learners with learning difficulties and disabilities will typically have 'spikey profiles' meaning that learners may have high skill levels in one area, and much lower in other areas. For example, a learner described as 'high functioning' may benefit from aspects of a sensory curriculum typically provided for learners with the most complex learning disabilities.

- We know different colleges meet different levels of complexity of ALN and that one college's pathway 1 learner would be placed on pathway 2 in another college.

### **Programme names**

The term 'independent living skills' does not always adequately describe provision because:

- It does not reflect the achievements of learners who complete the programmes. We know that some of the colleges are using their own course titles and hold their own award ceremonies.
- It lacks aspiration and ambition for this group of learners and compounds the notion of them as 'other'. Anecdotally, colleges told us about ILS learners who 'don't identify as ILS learners'.
- ILS is both the title of the programme area and one of the four pillars of learning which can be confusing.

The use of the term 'ILS' should be reviewed to ensure that it does not detract from the rights-based, aspirational ethos of ALNET. Naming conventions should make it clear that learners are accessing a statutory entitlement, not a separate or marginal provision

Currently, not all colleges are using the name ILS to describe courses in this area. This is positive where it more clearly demonstrates to learners the benefits and desired outcomes for learners. However, this also risks being less identifiable to learners and parents when they are searching for appropriate college courses.

### **Four pillars**

The explanation of the four pillars is confusing because:

- The pillars are described as 'pillars of learning', 'ILS pillars' and 'learning pillars', all of which can be interpreted differently. Additionally, one of the ILS pillars is titled 'ILS'.
- Pathway 1 initially says it has three pillars and then four pillars.
- Rather than pillars of learning (assumed to be foundational concepts to support the learning process), they read more as curriculum areas (they are health and well-being, community inclusion, independent living skills and employability). UNESCO for example, use the four pillars of learning: to know, learning to do, learning to be, learning to live together.

- The specifications also say 'literacy, numeracy, communication and digital literacy skills are a key feature of learning under all pathways'. Overall, 'key features of learning', 'pillars of learning', 'ILS pillars' and 'learning pillars' are difficult to understand.
- There is a danger that weaker providers will build curriculum offers and timetables around the 4 pillars to the detriment of a person-centred curriculum.

**"The course is a great thing for those who lack confidence."**

**– ILS learner during college visit, 2025.**

### **Programme duration**

The pathway descriptors have guided contact hours of 650 that translate as a one-year full-time programme (based on 18 hours per week for 36 weeks). There is no specific guidance on the length of courses and learners may repeat courses or progress to another course after one year. Some colleges deliver the programmes in part-time capacities. A few courses do not have a specific duration or end date, which risks undermining the purpose of education in this area and confusing this with day provision.

### **Learner destinations**

Within the existing ILS programme specifications, a focus on the personalised outcomes learners should achieve and in what timeframe is under-developed. It may be more helpful for the destination to also be considered as a set of skills a learner should have at the end of the programme once they have achieved their personal outcomes. For example, employment, further education or supported living are very broad categories. A pathway 1 learner who progresses onto supported living may not reflect good progress. However, a learner who progresses onto supported living with higher independence skills and more well-developed living skills reflects good progress.

Understanding learners' post-college aspirations and goals is vital. However, there is a danger that stated 'location' destinations (such as a specific employer, supported living provider or independent specialist college) are not always helpful in planning person-centred, target-driven programmes of learning. This is because providers report that post-college destinations can often feel out of the learners' or colleges' control. Further, the range of possible destinations may vary dependant on the learner's pathway or individual living situation. For example, learners on pathway 1 and 2 are much more likely to progress onto supported living than those learners on pathway 3 and 4.

## **Recognising difference**

The nature of the learners and their needs means that the pedagogy used is likely to be substantially different from other learner groups, including the pedagogy for learners with ALN on mainstream courses.

Current programme specifications do not provide providers with guidance or expectations on how they should plan for these courses. For example, the specifications don't articulate the expectation for planning to consider, such as what should be happening in the learning environment, what progress looks like, how support staff should help learning, what aspiration means, or how feedback is given.

Planning approaches may also vary by pathway as intended outcomes and appropriate activities on pathway 1 are different than for those on pathway 3 or 4.

### **Gower College Swansea: Artificial Intelligence**

Gower College has identified two digital champions within their ILS department who support learners to be safe online and improve their digital skills. The College is using artificial intelligence (AI) to support learners to use a 'target tracker' to set learning goals and to plan personalised curriculum activities and assessments that are aligned to prior achievements and learners' interests. AI is used to personalise feedback in ways that are meaningful and helpful for learners so that they can plan their next steps.

## **Accommodating wider context**

There is no alignment between the pathways and FEIs' statutory obligations, for example to review and maintain IDPs including the statutory duty to deliver and review IDPs, as required under the ALNET Act. The curriculum should be framed around the required ALP to meet each learner's identified need. While the 'intended outcomes' in IDPs cannot consistently be relied upon to be person-centred, age appropriate, ambitious, in line with the learner's aspirations and destination-led, they should be a helpful reference point for informing each learner's ILS curriculum.

As part of this thematic review, colleges have reported an increase in learners with social, emotional and mental health needs. As a result, they feel that the current pathways do not accommodate this emerging group of ILS learners who are equally not ready to access mainstream FE provision. For example, one college has developed a new course outside of the traditional ILS pathways, Cam Ymlaen, as a transition course to support disengaged or anxious learners to reintegrate into education. Unlike similar programmes, such as Jobs Growth Wales+, it is not age limited.

## Leading an ILS curriculum area

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### Initial assessments, target-setting and recording progress

#### Baseline assessments and target-setting

Nearly all FEIs used RARPA as a means of completing a baseline assessment of the skills learners have when they join an ILS course. Where appropriate, colleges supplemented this with more formal literacy and numeracy assessments.

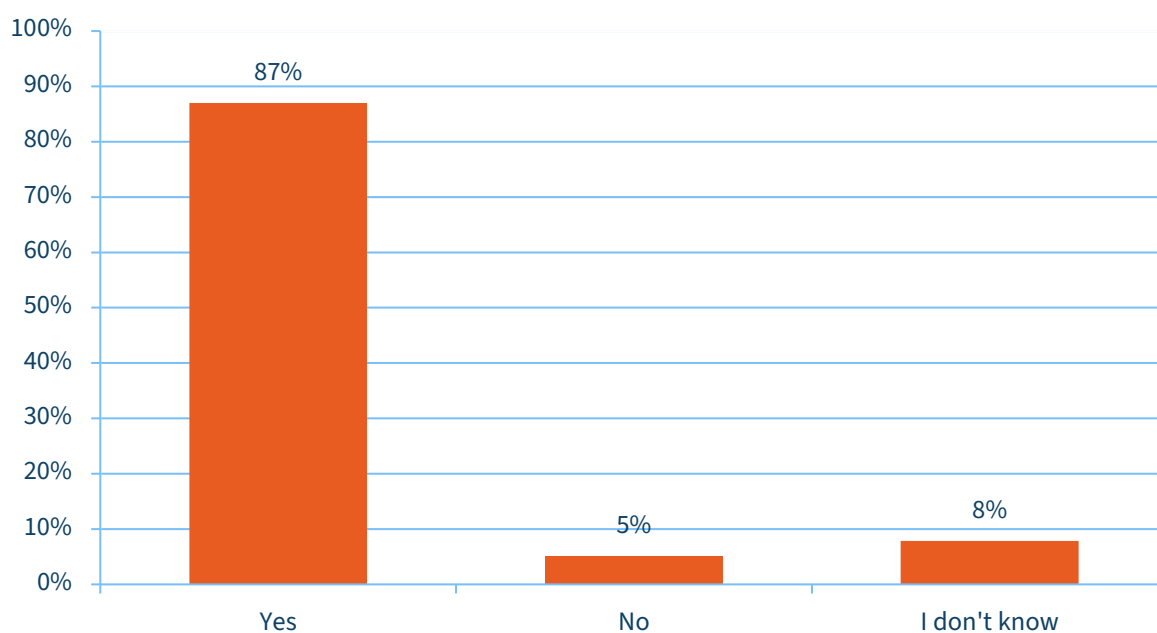
A few colleges had developed more bespoke approaches to assessing learners' skills, with different skills frameworks for each pathway linked to expected outcomes. Others used multi-agency working to gather a broad range of information about learners, including areas such as well-being and communication. In our survey, most staff said they were confident that learners were making progress in areas which were important to them and many learners reported that they were learning new skills and were happy with the progress they are making. However, baseline assessments used were often too narrow and did not consider the full range of skills learners will need for their future lives.

Most colleges aimed to link learner targets to IDP outcomes. However, this was not consistent both within and across colleges. Further, a few colleges reported that this can be a challenge due to the variable quality of incoming IDPs. FEIs have a statutory responsibility to ensure that IDPs are up to date and relevant. However, due to the high workload in this area in the autumn term, providers felt that learners were working towards unhelpful or irrelevant IDP outcomes until these could be amended during their first college annual review.

In our learner survey, 87.0% of learners knew their targets and goals and 81.6% felt that they helped choose their targets. However, during visits to colleges we noted that overall, the quality of targets was too variable. Targets were not consistently specific, relevant, or well-understood by learners and did not support meaningful evaluation of the small steps of progress learners make. Too often colleges had inconsistent approaches to evidencing the progress learners make towards targets. In a few cases, this was because new electronic systems for progress monitoring were not yet fully implemented.

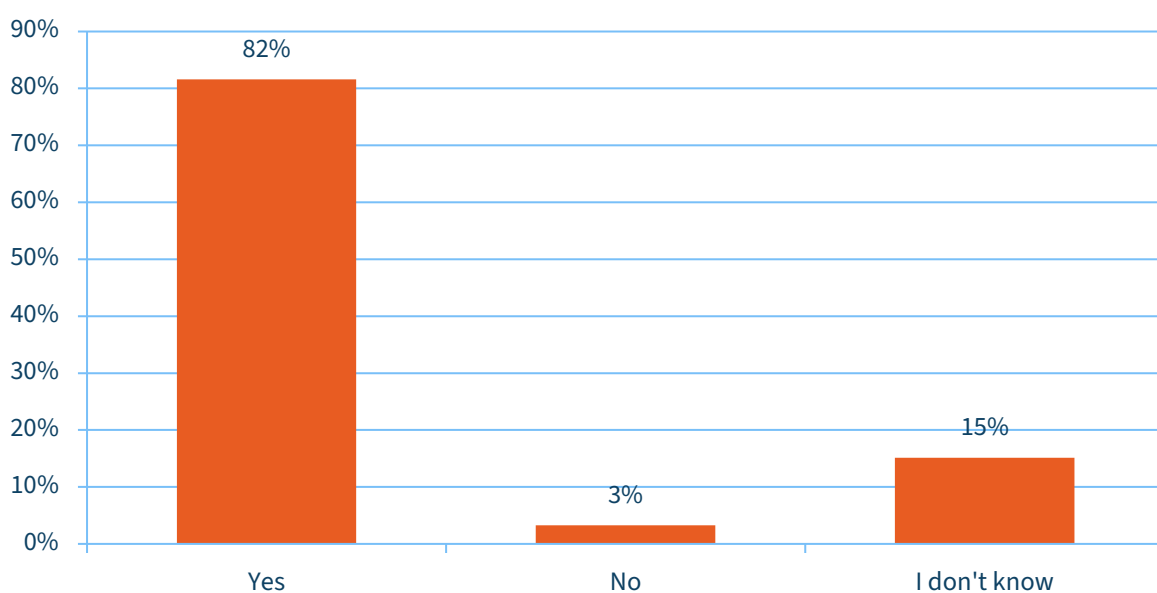
Baseline assessments and targets should directly relate to IDP intended outcomes to support meaningful statutory review. Where IDP outcomes are not appropriate, processes should be in place to promptly amend them in collaboration with the local authority, as required by the ALNET Act.

**Figure 6. Responses to “Do you know your learning targets and goals?”:**



*Based on responses from 547 learners*

**Figure 7. Responses to “Can you choose your next learning targets?”:**



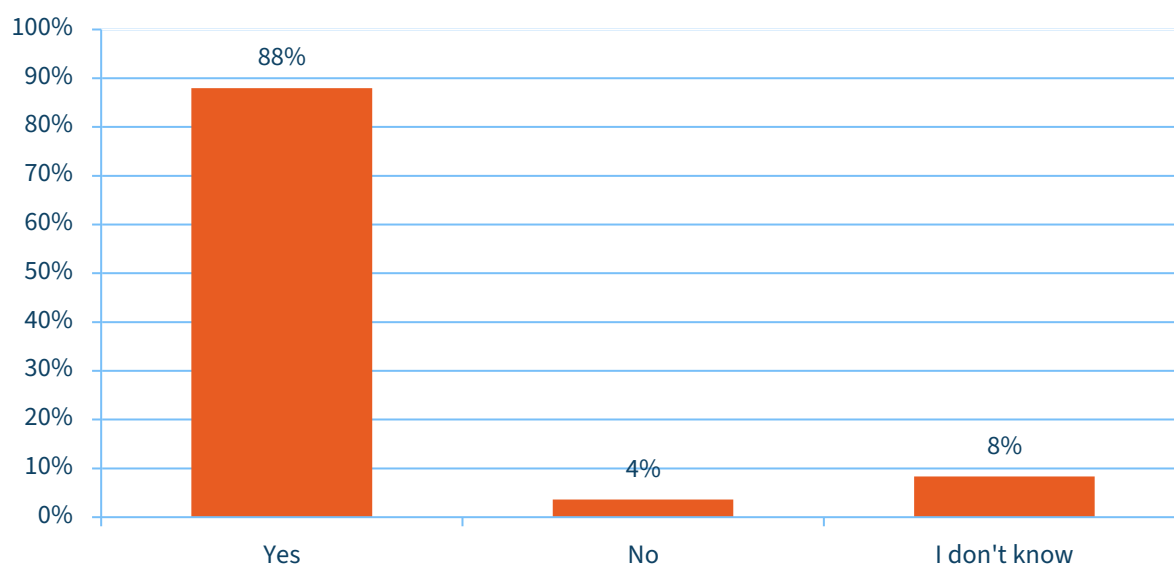
*Based on responses from 548 learners*

### **Progress through the pathways**

For many learners it is expected that they progress through the pathways, even if this is not always an appropriate expectation. For example, learners may progress from pathway 3 to pathway 4 or onto mainstream courses. For many learners this represents good progress towards positive future destinations. However, it is important to note

that this does not represent good progress for all learners. Progress through pathways is only relevant within the context of the long-term goals of the learner and whether this is beneficial for their next steps.

**Figure 8. Responses to “Are you happy with the progress you are making?”:**



*Based on responses from 549 learners*

### **Adult Learning Wales: Partnership working**

Adult Learning Wales entered into a partnership with Ceredigion local authority to deliver an ILS curriculum to a very few learners where Coleg Ceredigion cannot meet their needs within mainstream provision. Leaders report that they have developed strong working relationships within the local authority, including with social care and education, and with health.

In order to ensure that they develop a secure understanding of each learner to meet their needs and plan for positive progress, Adult Learning Wales work with the range of services supporting a learner including educational psychology, the learning disability team, speech and language, occupational therapy and physiotherapy. They complete an adaptative behaviour assessment, which they link with RARPA. This process identifies which skills are strong, emerging and not present. This information informs learner targets.

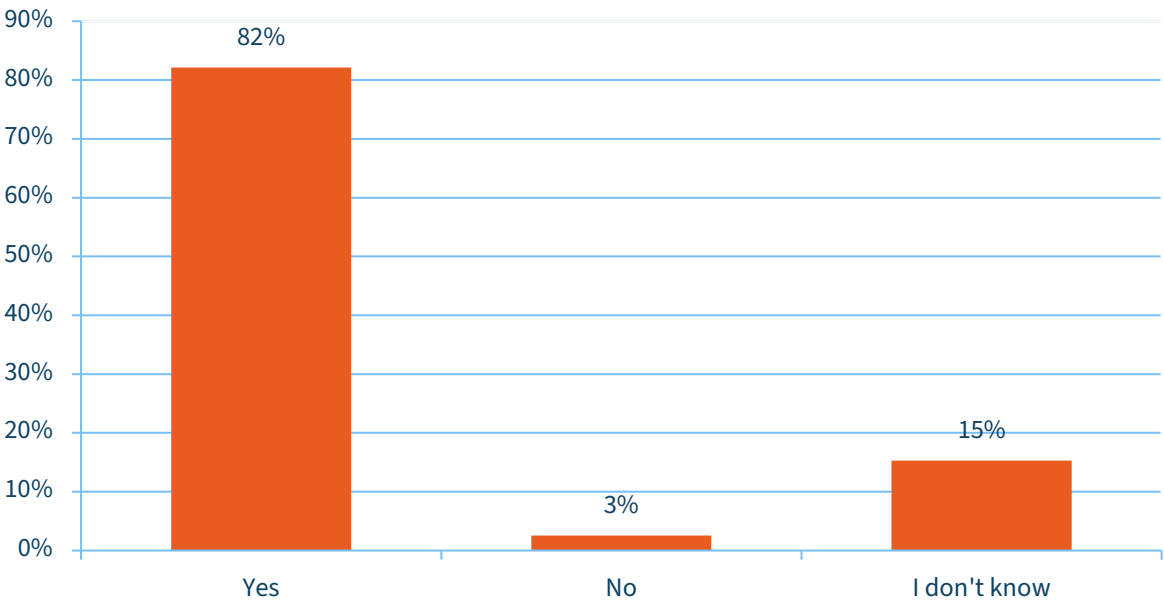
Staff who deliver the ILS curriculum benefit from the same professional learning opportunities as all specialist staff within the local authority in addition to wider professional learning within the ILS sector.

In addition, through links with the local authority, learners benefit from enhanced provision with access to day service provision on the days they are not in college.

**Preparation for future lives**

Colleges have strengthened their approach to considering learners’ future lives when planning for progress. In our survey, 100% of staff responded that they considered learners’ future pathway when planning sessions and 82.1% of learners reported that college helped them plan for their future. In the best cases, colleges collected information about a learner’s future plans when they joined a course and then tailored their curriculum around this.

**Figure 9. Responses to “Does college help you plan for your life after college?”:**



*Based on responses from 543 learners*

Generally, colleges provided a range of realistic and meaningful learning experiences which built upon learners’ skills. For example, pathway 2 learners benefited from massage and manicures from mainstream beauty learners. This helped them with sensory needs, visiting a new place and communication with new people. Learners delivering these services got an insight to supporting those with additional support needs.

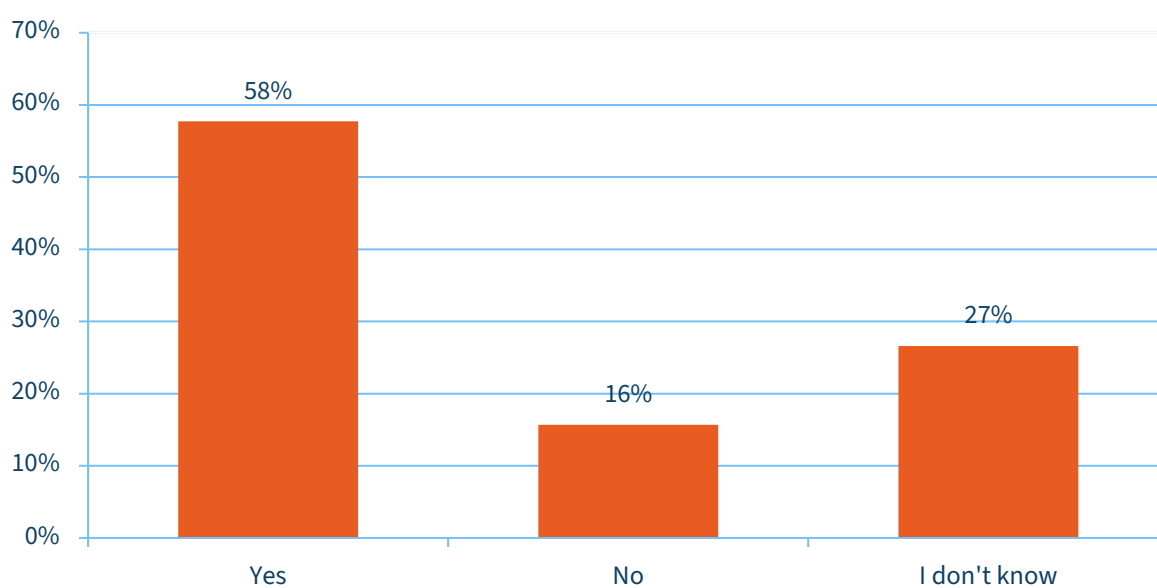
In our survey, learners were positive about how college helped them prepare for the future and gave examples such as careers advice, building independence, IDP reviews, targeting skills development, making career plans and supporting them into employment. These answers are likely to be from learners on pathways 3 or 4, rather



than those on pathway 1 or 2 who are more likely to progress to day services, independent living or voluntary work.

However, colleges were sometimes focusing more on a specific future destination than planned progress and outcomes within learning programmes. For example, if a learner leaves college to move on to supported living, skills development based loosely around the realities of independent living is less meaningful than when based on a secure evaluation of current skills. Further, only around half of those learners who responded to our survey knew what they planned to do after the end of their course.

**Figure 10. Responses to “Do you know what you will do after college?”:**



*Based on responses from 549 learners*

### **Pembrokeshire College: Skills competitions**

Learners from Pembrokeshire College’s Life Skills Academy enter World Skills competitions alongside their non-disabled peers. The college integrates the competitions into learners’ individual learning programmes and curriculum areas including horticulture, media skills, cookery, childcare and hospitality. Learners speak very positively about their experiences and the skills they have developed. In a few cases, engagement in the competitions has led to learners securing employment.

## **Quality assurance and self-evaluation**

Overall, as colleges have moved away from accrediting learning and towards a skills-based curriculum, leaders told us that they have recognised the need for a new approach to quality assurance and self-evaluation of ILS departments.

In the most effective providers, a highly focussed quality assurance process was in place, which recognised the individuality of the ILS programmes and was tailored to acknowledge the non-accredited progress learners make. ILS leaders in these providers took a forensic approach to their quality assurance processes. The department was included in the college's quality assurance cycle, yet the uniqueness of the course was appreciated by the senior leadership team. As a result, the focus on individualised and bespoke learning experiences was valued.

In these settings, leaders completed a range of activities and gathered first-hand evidence to inform self-evaluation including: learner voice initiatives, focus groups, learning walks, progress reviews against targets, checking the quality of target-setting and non-accredited internal quality assurance (IQA). Learning walks and lesson observations focused suitably on the impact that teaching and support staff were having on learning, and recognised the need to have different expectations than in other areas of learning.

However, in their own evaluations, a majority of colleges identified progress monitoring and quality assurance of non-accredited learning as an area for improvement. This need was reinforced in the staff survey. For example, in a very few colleges, approaches were inconsistent across different campuses and there was no holistic evaluation of ILS across the college, only within campuses. We found very little evidence of sharing best practice in this area between colleges and special schools.

In addition, wider systems to monitor progress of learners after they leave the FEI did not appear to be readily available to enable providers to evaluate the long-term impact of the ILS provision.

### **Neath Port Talbot College: Transitions in and out of college**

At Neath Port Talbot College, dedicated Transitions Officers support the transitions of learners accessing the college's ILS provision, both from school to college and from college to their next steps. For example, they work closely with schools and local authorities attending learners' annual reviews from Year 9. They also support learners in planning their next steps onto other courses, employment, volunteering or other

activities. As a result, the college has a thorough understanding of learners' ALN and can better support learners to achieve their post-course aspirations.

### **Professional learning**

Across all providers we visited, there was a consistent focus on professional learning, collaboration and sharing good practice with other colleges. A minority of colleges reported strong links around professional learning between their ILS and ALN departments, including updated professional learning plans based on the profiles of incoming learners.

Positive examples of professional learning included 'teach meets' or 'teaching triangles' with a strong focus on teaching practice and opportunities to discuss challenges within departments.

In our staff survey<sup>5</sup>, many staff reported that they had received professional learning to support with the delivery of the ILS curriculum. Nearly all staff found this training helpful. However, too often, providers did not have a specific professional learning plan for ILS departments to reflect the different model of delivery required. Further, in other colleges, professional learning focused too prominently on systems and procedures rather than on meeting the needs of learners. There were very few examples of shared professional learning with other providers working with post-16 learners with similar profiles – for example special schools.

Across most providers the evaluation of the impact of professional learning on teaching and learning was weak.

### **Coleg Sir Gâr: Professional learning**

Coleg Sir Gâr teaching and support staff complete a self-evaluation at the beginning of the academic year, where specific professional learning needs are identified. They have the opportunity to work in triads with colleagues experienced in the skills they want to develop to improve their practice. Staff can also undertake their own action research projects, the findings of which are shared at an annual two-day Festival of Practice.

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<sup>5</sup> See figures 17 and 18 in the appendix

## **Links with maintained special schools**

The majority of FEIs reported having beneficial links with maintained special schools, including on-site provision, which older pupils from these schools accessed as part of their daily education.

Leaders from maintained special schools and colleges reported that relationships were improving between them, partly due to ALN reform. Special schools we met with reported that colleges were increasingly keen to understand and meet the needs of incoming learners. These stronger relationships were having a beneficial impact on transition for learners when they join a college, with learners reported to be more at ease in the college environment and better prepared to find their way around and adjust to a different learning environment. Despite this progress, there was inconsistent strategic collaboration across Wales, between local authorities, schools and colleges to ensure curriculum continuity and consistency of teaching and assessment approaches.

There was limited consideration of how the curriculum supported transition, which was resulting in learners unnecessarily repeating content rather than building on prior learning to develop new skills. Many learners and their families opt for the young person to remain in their special school until they are 19 years old and join the college after this. Overall, this is appropriate for many learners. However, for a few, it may restrict access to age-limited opportunities, such as certain employability-focused programmes like Jobs Growth Wales plus. Based on feedback from learners in college and the experiences of college staff, these opportunities were not always clearly communicated to learners while they are still in school, which may have inadvertently limited their future options.

### **Canolfan Addysg Y Bont**

Transitioning from a special school to college requires careful co-ordinated planning and support. At Canolfan Addysg Y Bont, staff focus this work on the specific individual needs, goals and the aspirations of learners and their parents or carers. Thorough and timely professional discussion allows all voices to be heard.

Various post-school options are explored and tested from Year 9 onwards, including standard transition programmes, attendance at ILS link courses, and newly introduced bespoke weekly taster sessions for more complex learners in their last year of school. These have been particularly well received, and empower learners, parents and providers to better make informed decisions about future pathways. Crucially, meaningful collaboration between home, school and college underpins all aspects of ensuring that learners have a positive and rewarding journey into adult life.

However, leaders of maintained special schools reported that too often transition events, including ‘taster days’, showed pupils courses that they would be unable to access due to course entry requirements. This can create unrealistic expectations and lead to confusion for learners and their families about appropriate and accessible future pathways.

Further, leaders from these schools reported feeling a sense of frustration that pupils faced a ‘postcode lottery’ upon leaving school as the provision for young people with ALN varies so greatly across Wales. They felt that this was the most challenging for the learners with the most complex additional learning needs. They highlighted concerns about a reduction in the number of pupils able to transition to independent specialist colleges, and concerns about those learners who drop out of FEIs and the lack of formal support in place to stop them becoming or remaining NEET (not in education, employment or training).

Colleges have responded to Estyn’s 2017 thematic report by reducing the use of units of accreditation. Overall, colleges are now using accreditation appropriately and it is not having a negative impact on the breadth of the curriculum offer in ILS departments. Instead, FEIs now focus on broader skills development to better prepare learners for adult life. In contrast, maintained special schools often use a range of accreditation as part of their curriculum. These differences in approaches to validating progress risk misunderstandings for parents and learners in relation to what constitutes a positive outcome. While accreditation can be a helpful way of validating skills development, we would typically only expect providers to deliver units of accreditation to learners where it is meaningful and may benefit learners in the future, for example where it may help a learner access education or work. Currently, there is limited evidence of collaboration between colleges and maintained special schools in relation to the meaningful and consistent use of accreditation.

## The impact of ALN reform

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A minority of colleges reported that learners are still arriving at college with learning and skills plans (LSPs) that were used under the SEN system when they should now have IDPs under the ALNET (Wales) Act 2018.

Around half of colleges reported that LSPs contained more relevant post-16 information than Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and that this has affected their ability to plan to meet individual learners' ALN. However, other colleges welcomed IDPs and felt that they were beneficial documents for supporting learning. Overall, this highlights the variability of IDPs across Wales. Variability in IDPs can lead to inconsistent support, gaps in planning and unequal access to resources during transition from schools to colleges. This may hinder progression, reduce learner engagement, and undermine the equity intended by the ALN system.

Nearly all colleges reported that the time taken to complete processes to fulfil their obligations has exceeded their expectations. For example, administrative time taken to collect information and time to complete person centred reviews. They note that pressure on workloads is compounded by the ongoing lack of a pan-Wales IDP electronic platform, meaning that often colleges have to share information using a range of different methods and electronic platforms.

Collaborative working had increased, and most colleges were working effectively with schools, local authorities and wider stakeholders to plan successful transitions onto ILS programmes. Most colleges report that they are working proactively with schools and local authorities, for example by being part of multi-agency working groups, attending regional Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) forums and liaising with local authority post-16 lead officers. However, despite these positive developments, many colleges raised concerns about limited access to essential pre-entry information about learners. In some cases, schools and local authorities withhold information due to data protection concerns, which hinders effective planning and support. One college told us that, as a workaround, they encourage parents to upload IDPs to a parent portal so that the college can access essential information. Some FEIs reported effective information sharing protocols with local authorities and schools, which were beneficial in determining if a college can meet need and also supporting transition. However, overall information sharing remains too variable. This variability can undermine colleges' ability to assess whether they can meet learners' needs and risks compromising the effectiveness of transition arrangements.

While most colleges report positive relationships with their regional Designated Education Clinical Lead Officers (DECLOs), who play a valuable role in supporting learners' health needs and delivering staff training, there are notable concerns. A minority of colleges have highlighted inconsistency in levels of support, and this can be a frustration in meeting learner health or therapeutic needs in the timeframe required. For example, when a learner needs speech and language or behavioural support to meet their ALN or if they require interventions to meet mental health needs. They highlighted how the move from children's to adult health services can coincide with transitions to college. This means that some learners may no longer be eligible for specific therapeutic support and new referral and assessment timeframes can exceed learners' time at college. These issues risk disrupting continuity of care and undermining learners' ability to access the support they need to succeed in further education.

### **Coleg Gwent: Inclusive symbolised transition document**

Coleg Gwent recognises that the transition from school to college can sometimes be a challenging time for all learners and particularly for young people who have learning difficulties and disabilities. As a result, the college has developed an inclusive transition document that includes symbolised language for learners with communication difficulties or speakers of languages other than English or Welsh. The guide includes a QR code to enable learners to take virtual campus tours, to help them know what to expect when they visit. This symbolised support and inclusive approach to information supports learners' understanding, well-being and autonomy.

A minority of colleges reported expectations from local authorities that they should meet a broader range of ALN within their independent living skills (ILS) provision than they previously met under the special education needs (SEN) system. In some cases, colleges find these expectations unrealistic or feel that they are placing increasing pressure on already stretched resources.

Conversely, a minority of other colleges reported that they have effectively increased their capacity and expertise to meet the needs of learners with a broader range of ALN. It is important to note that a college meeting a broader range of need than previously does not necessarily reflect best practice. Where colleges do plan to meet a broader range of need then best practice would include careful preparation including ensuring a staff team with a secure set of knowledge and skills as well as a helpful professional learning offer. There is also a risk that those colleges who have broadened their provision are taking risks in meeting needs for which they are not well-equipped. As a result, there remains substantial inconsistency across Wales in the extent to which the

further education sector can meet the diverse ALN of learners, leading to unequal access to appropriate provision depending on geographical location.

To fully meet the aims of the ALNET Act, there must be national co-ordination to ensure that all learners who meet the definition of ALN receive timely, high-quality IDPs, and that FEIs are resourced and supported to fulfil their statutory duties to deliver, monitor and review ALP in collaboration with learners, families and local authorities.

**“College helped me a lot to have lots of different experiences.”**

**– ILS learner during college visit, 2025**

### **Statutory responsibilities**

Based on discussions with college leaders during thematic and link visits, we found that most colleges had suitable structures and processes in place to meet the needs of learners with individual development plans (IDPs). However, data submitted by colleges highlighted that, in a minority of colleges, learners are arriving on ILS courses without IDPs. In some instances, this had been attributed to the special school or PRU from which learners have progressed, having not prepared IDPs for individual learners on the premise that their ‘universal provision’ meets the learners ALN. A minority of colleges reported a lack of a shared understanding between local authorities, schools and themselves on what ALN colleges can meet.

Data submitted by FEIs in autumn 2024 showed that a minority of learners on ILS courses did not have IDPs despite these courses being planned for learners with ALN. Some will have been in college for multiple years and will have a learning and skills plan (LSP); some may have declined to participate in ALN processes; however, in a minority of cases some ILS learners had neither an LSP nor an IDP. As a result, this minority of learners were denied the protections that a statutory document brings. Additionally, the college’s ability to effectively evaluate the quality of their provision was hindered as they are not part of formal processes for evaluating ALN, such as through annual reviews.

Very few colleges told us that, occasionally, the additional learning provision described in IDPs is not available at the college, for example transport to and from college or the provision of Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA). Despite this, colleges noted that there is often still an expectation for learners to attend, even when the agreed provision has not been put in place. This creates a risk that learners may begin their further education without the support they need, potentially impacting their well-being, engagement and ability to make progress.



In autumn 2024, colleges reported an increase in the number of learners dropping out of ILS courses over the last three years. However, further evaluation of this information by pathway and whether drop outs were also for positive reasons is not consistently collected across colleges. Concerningly, when learners drop out and become NEET, processes and arrangements with the local authority to secure alternate provision are too often unclear. There is inconsistency on whether processes are in place for the review of learners' IDPs to ensure that appropriate ALP can be sought if they do drop out of further education. As a result, there is no consistent approach across Wales to supporting those learners with ALN who drop out of college, risking those most vulnerable learners becoming NEET.

### **Individual Development Plans (IDPs)**

Colleges reported that IDPs were strongest where schools, colleges and local authorities work collaboratively, for example when college representatives are invited to attend and contribute to Year 9 and Year 10 review meetings. Where learners progress to college from non-partner schools or from out of county, colleges reported that IDPs are more likely to arrive late and to be missing essential or up-to-date information. For example, one college reported an IDP that did not contain information about a learner's visual impairment. In a few cases, such omissions have resulted in learners dropping out of courses because the college has unknowingly been unable to meet their ALN. Colleges also noted that procedures for reviewing and reassessing learners' ALP in these circumstances were unclear, increasing the risk of unmet needs and disrupted learning.

A minority of colleges said that learners' intended learning outcomes in IDPs were sometimes not appropriate to post-16 settings, for example where the focus was on handwriting, rather than on other skills they would need for their future life. When this occurs, it is usually because colleges have not been involved in learners' transition reviews.

A majority of colleges reported that holding IDP reviews for first and last year learners during the Autumn term was most valuable for understanding learners' needs and planning transitions, but they also noted that holding them during this busy period places substantial pressure on staff workloads. A few colleges reported that time constraints and high workloads have led them to undertaking IDP review meetings online rather than in person. They have told us that, while this is a practical solution, it is counter to the person-centred aims of the reforms and that they would prefer to be able to give learners more choice.

A minority of colleges reported that, in some cases, IDPs did not include essential information about learners' ALN. As a result, one college shared that they have added an IDP heading of 'significant diagnosis and primary need', to ensure that staff at the college are able to understand learners' ALN.

**“College has helped me not to feel so nervous.”**

**– ILS learner during college visit, 2025**

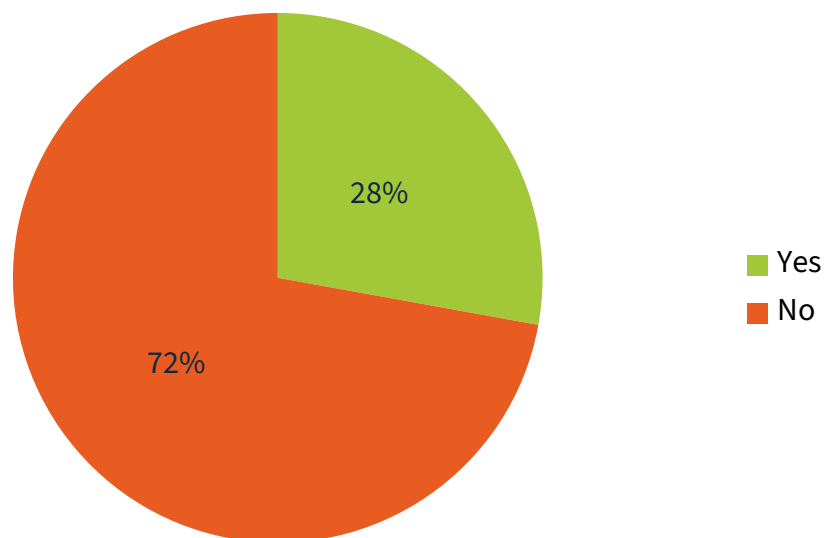
## **Outcomes**

There is limited alignment between the systems used by colleges to measure learners’ progress on ILS courses and the systems used to monitor their statutory responsibilities such as annual IDP reviews. As a result, learners’ targets and goals are not consistently aligned to IDP intended outcomes and a minority of colleges are holding multiple review meetings.

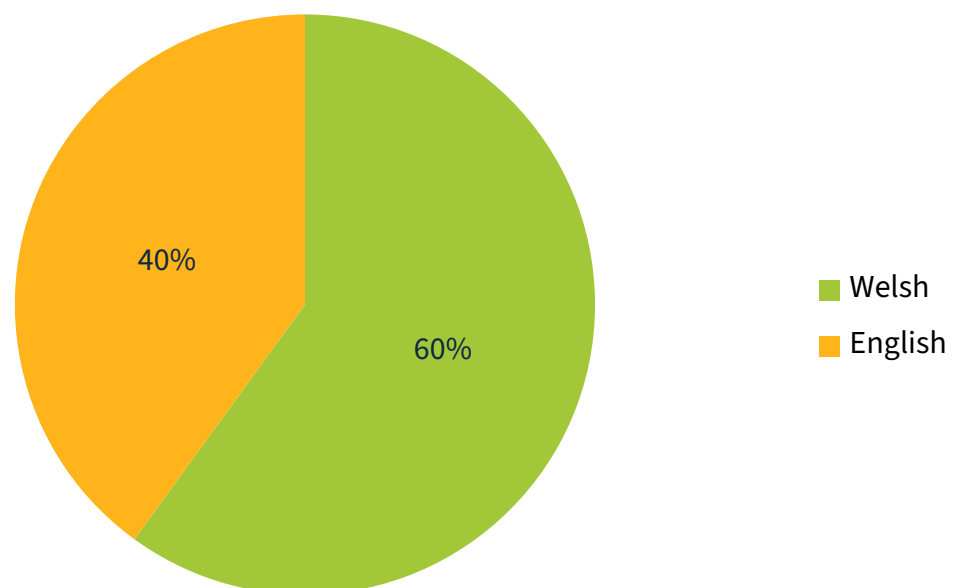
## Appendix: Learner and staff survey data

The learner survey was shared with all FEIs and available bilingually and in a symbolised version. We acknowledge that this may not be accessible for all ILS learners. We received 576 responses. The staff survey was shared with all FEIs and available bilingually. We received 88 responses.

**Figures 1 and 2. Responses to: “Do you teach any learners whose first language is Welsh?” and “Which language are they taught in?”:**

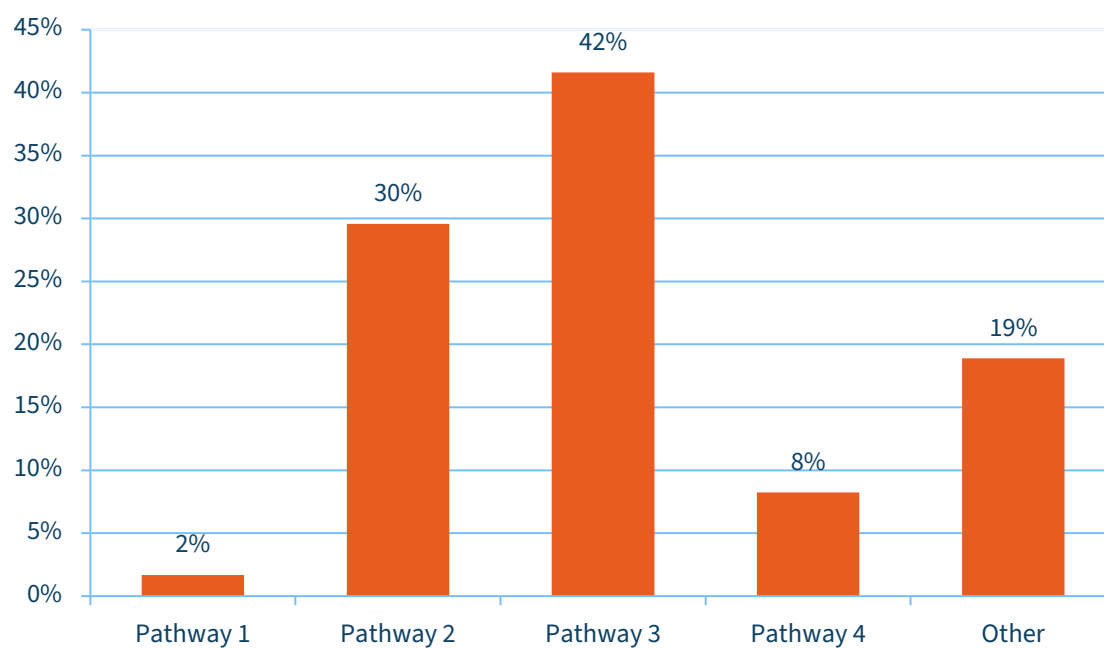


*Based on responses from 79 staff*



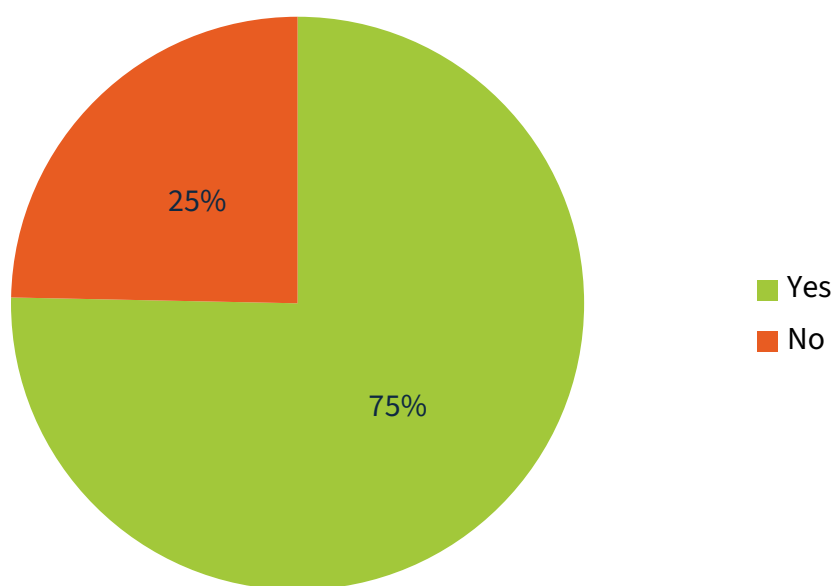
*Based on responses from 20 staff; a further 2 staff chose both options*

**Figure 3. How many learners are enrolled on each pathway?**



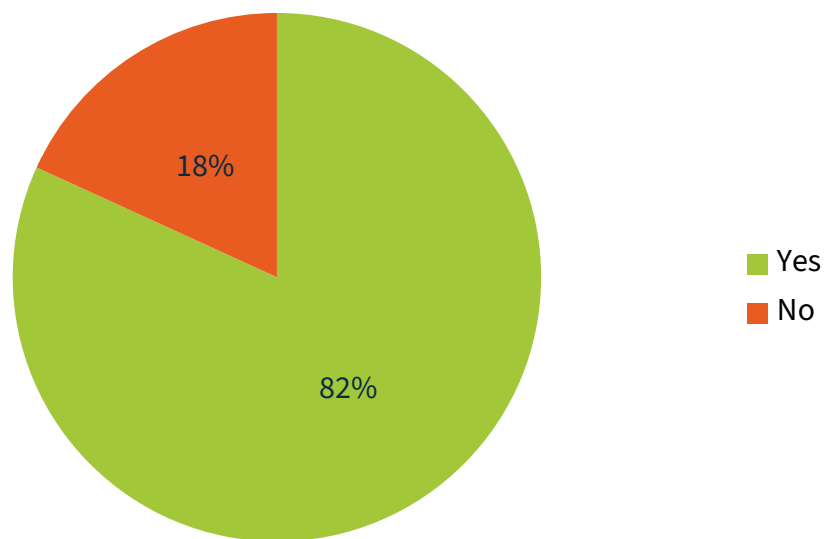
*Based on responses from 12 providers*

**Figure 4. Responses to “Do you think the current pathways meet the needs of all ILS learners?”:**



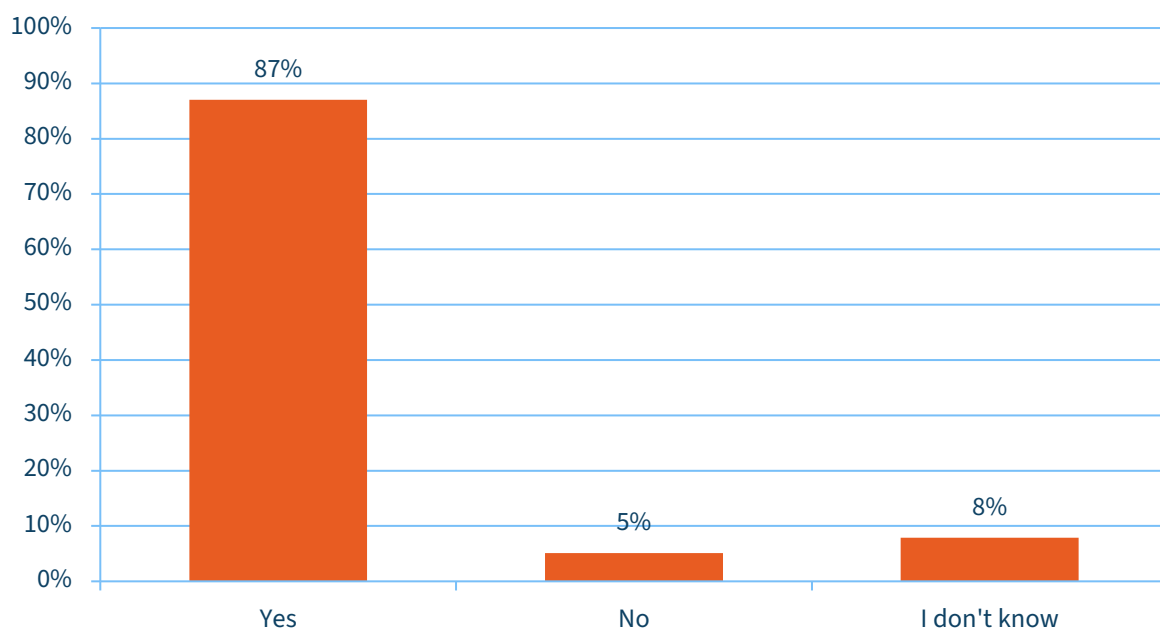
*Based on responses from 77 staff*

**Figure 5. Responses to “Has the profile of the typical ILS learner changed since the pandemic?”:**



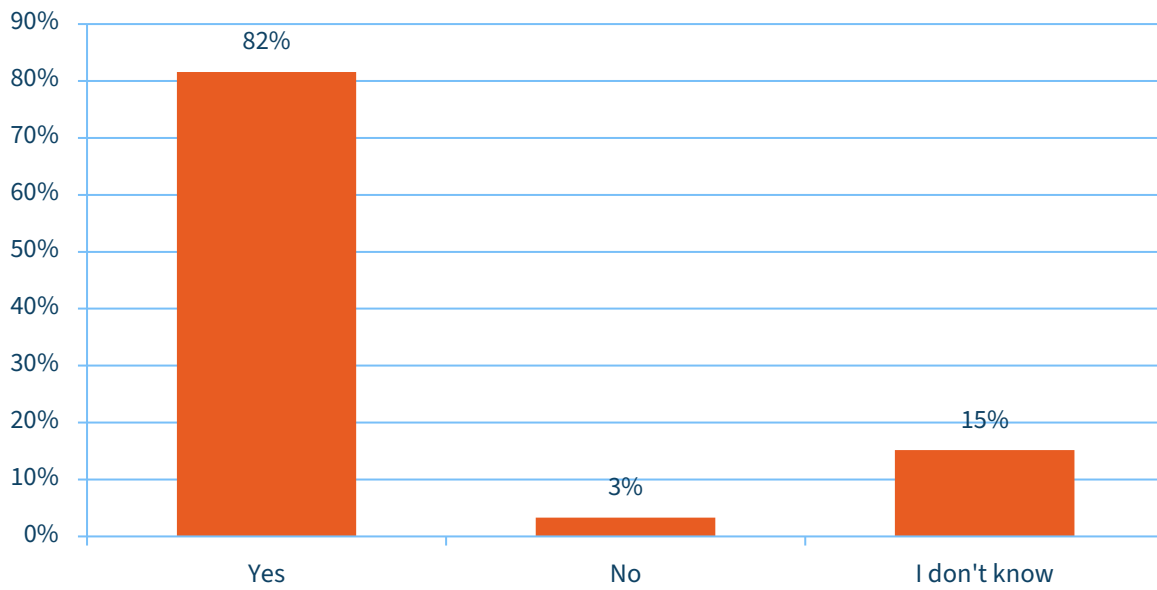
*Based on responses from 77 staff*

**Figure 6. Responses to “Do you know your learning targets and goals?”:**



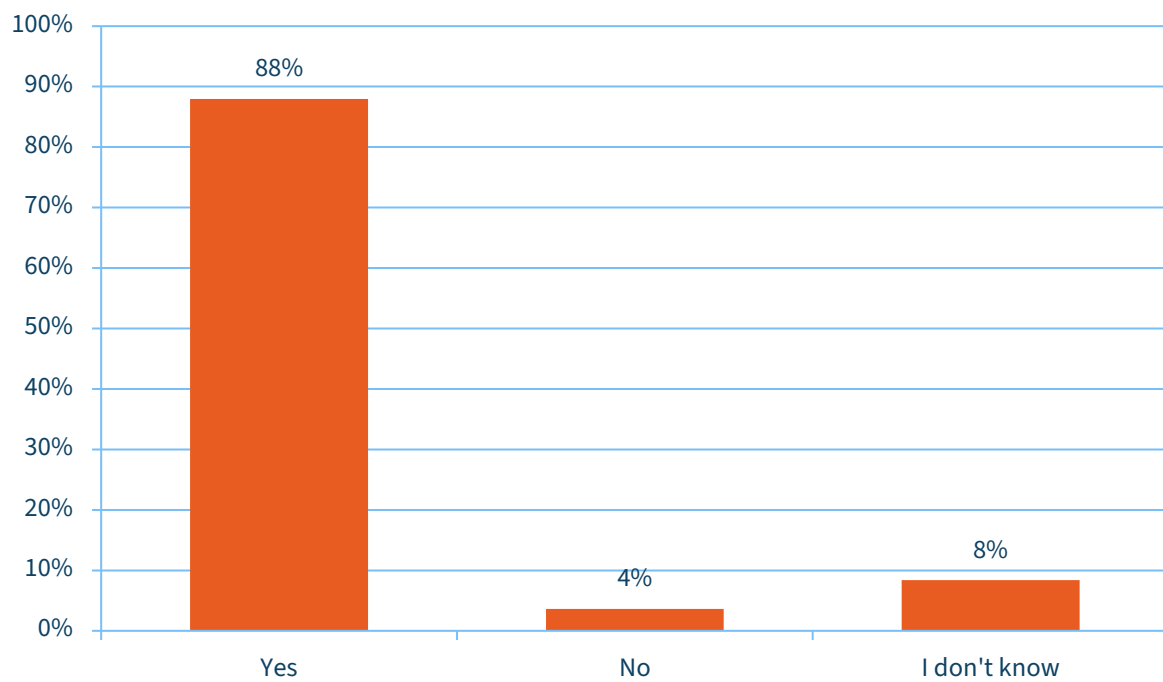
*Based on responses from 547 learners*

**Figure 7. Responses to “Can you choose your next learning targets?”:**



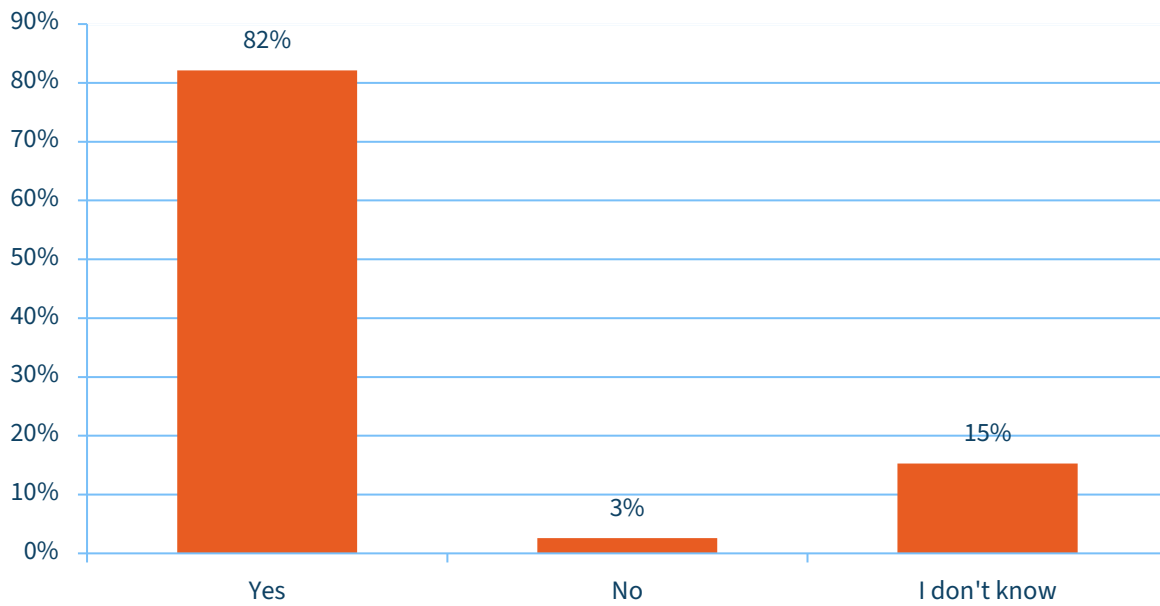
*Based on responses from 548 learners*

**Figure 8. Responses to “Are you happy with the progress you are making?”:**



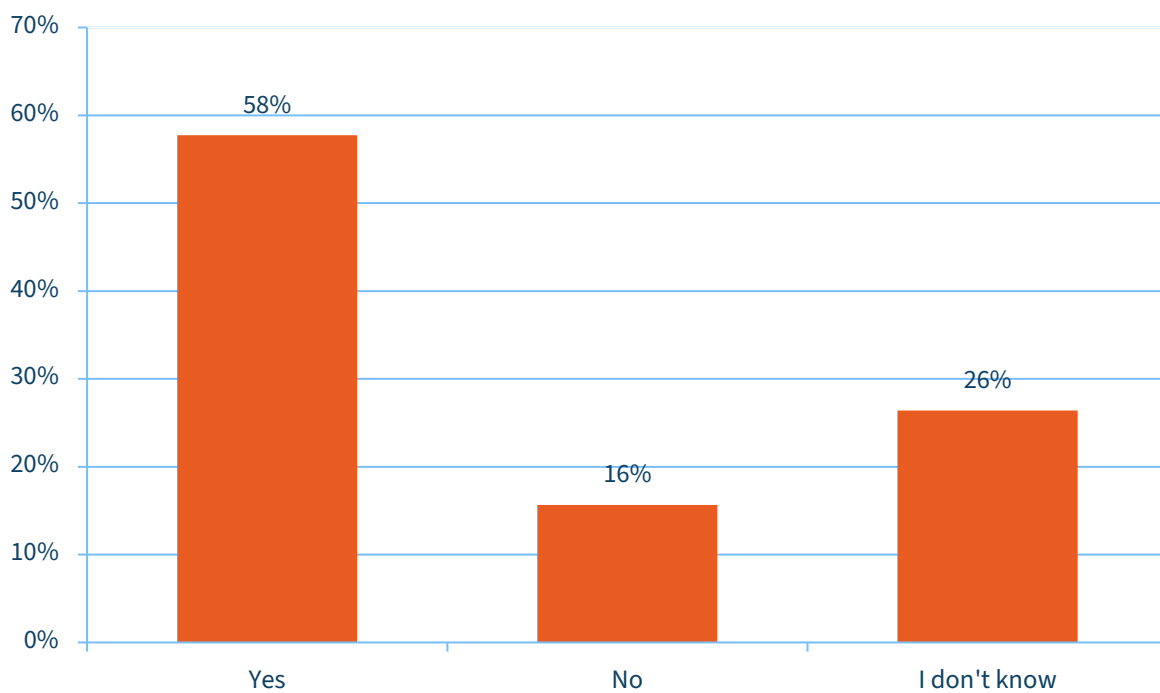
*Based on responses from 549 learners*

**Figure 9. Responses to “Does college help you plan for your life after college?”:**



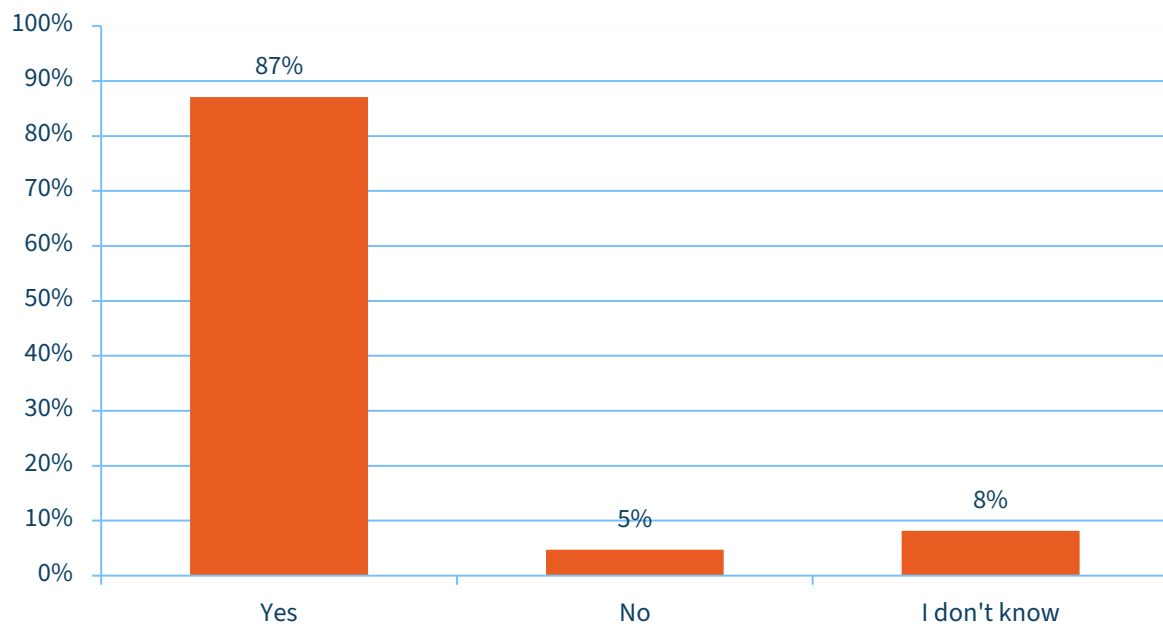
*Based on responses from 543 learners.*

**Figure 10. Responses to “Do you know what you will do after college?”:**



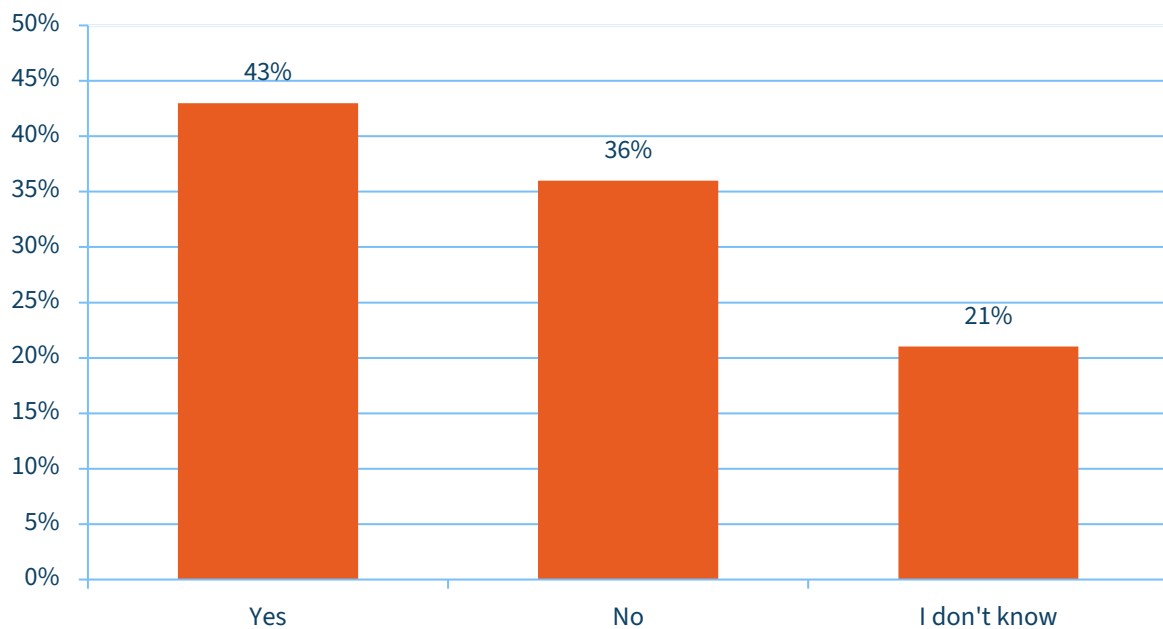
*Based on responses from 549 learners*

**Figure 11. Responses to “Are you learning new skills?”:**



*Based on responses from 550 learners*

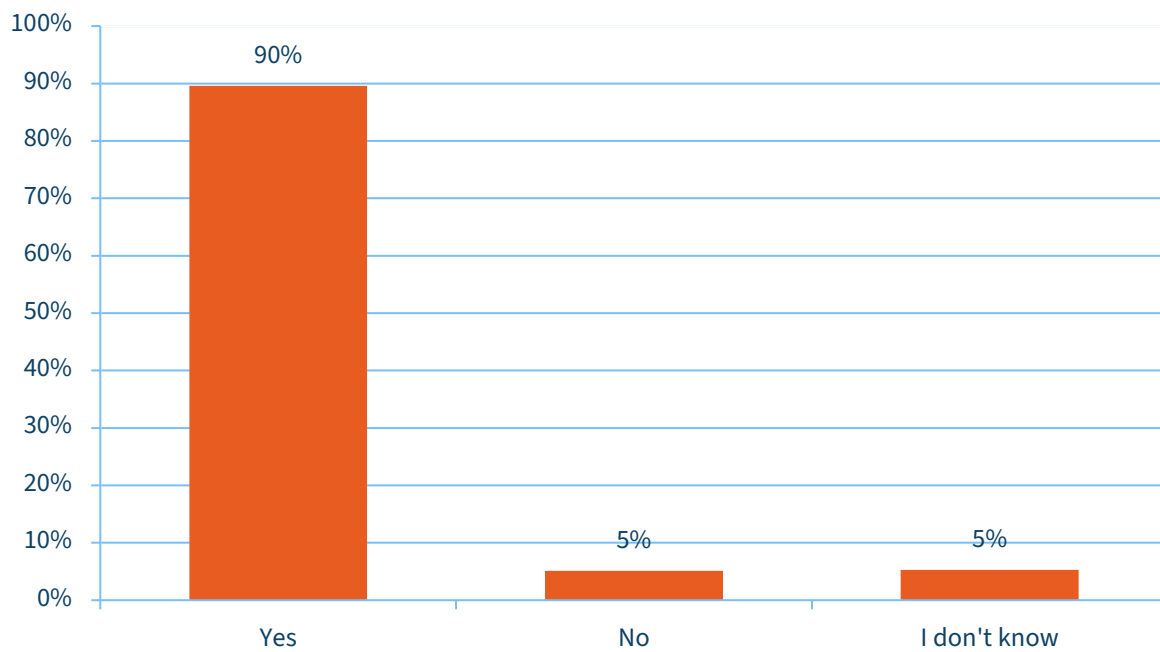
**Figure 12. Responses to “Are you working towards any qualifications or accreditations?”:**



*Based on responses from 542 learners*

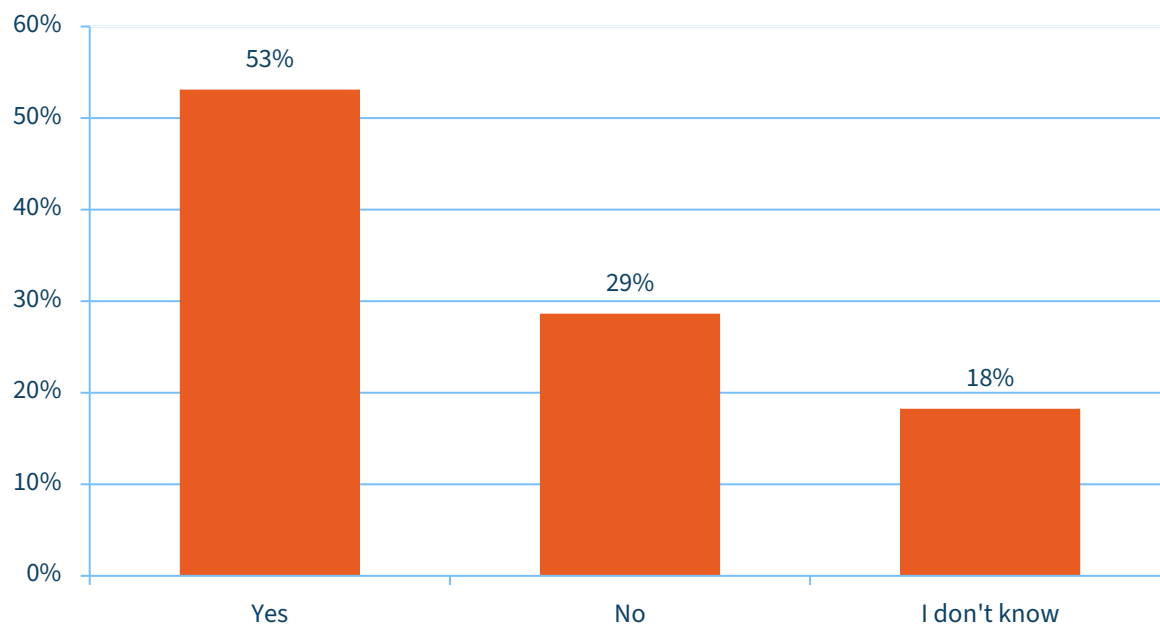


**Figure 13. Responses to “Do staff understand when you need help?”:**



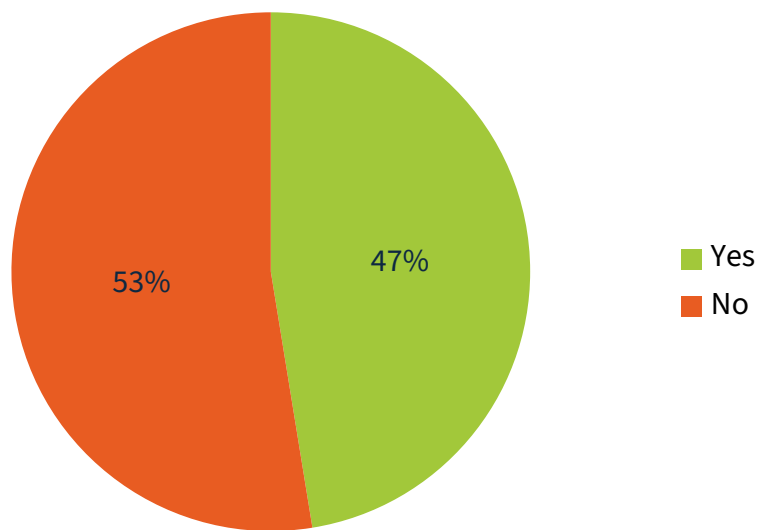
*Based on responses from 548 learners*

**Figure 14. Responses to “Can you choose to learn in Welsh?”:**



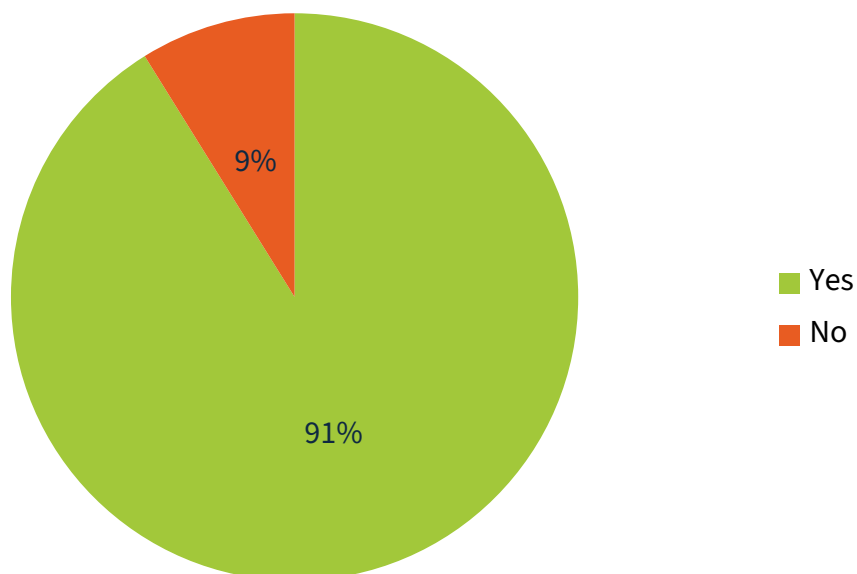
*Based on responses from 548 learners*

**Figure 15. Responses to “Are any of your ILS learners currently working towards a qualification or accreditation?”:**



*Based on responses from 78 staff*

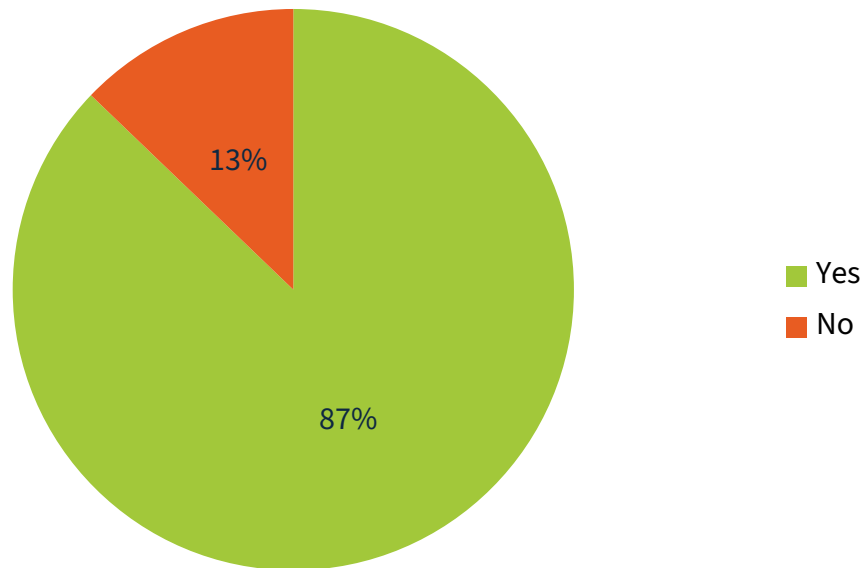
**Figure 16. Responses to “Are you confident that learners in your setting are making progress in areas important to them?”:**



*Based on responses from 79 staff*

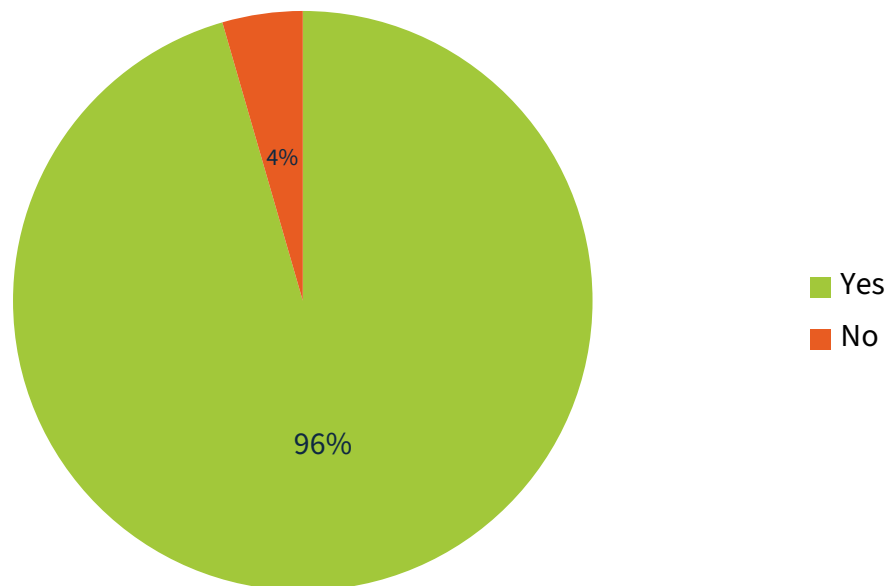
**Responses to “When planning sessions, do you consider the future destination of your learners?”: 100% (77 staff) responded “Yes”.**

**Figure 17. Responses to “Have you received professional learning or training to support you in delivering ILS curriculum?”:**



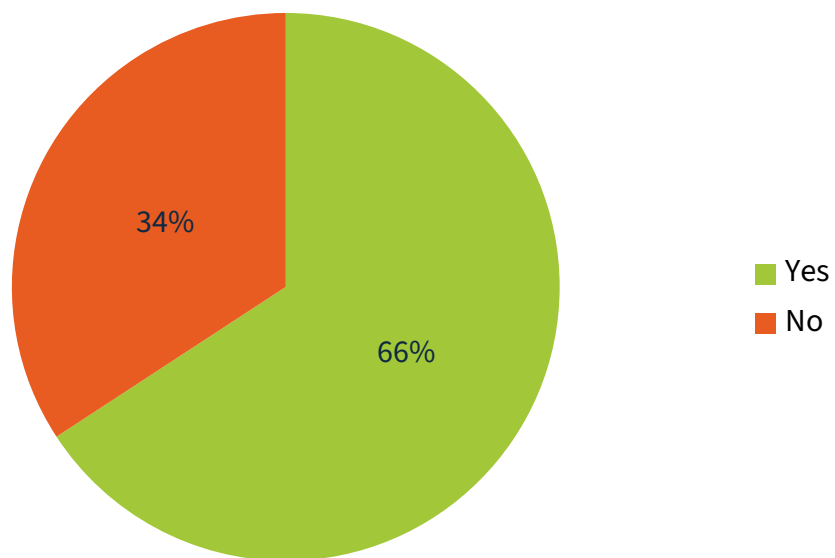
*Based on responses from 78 staff*

**Figure 18. Responses to “You said you received professional learning or training to support you in delivering the ILS curriculum. Was it helpful?”:**



*Based on responses from 54 staff*

**Figure 19. Responses to: “Have you noticed any changes as new learners arrive at college with IDPs rather than LSPs?”:**



*Based on responses from 76 staff*

## Methods and evidence base

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This report draws on evidence from visits to 10 of the 12 FEIs in Wales who currently offer ILS provision. Of these, two were conducted bilingually. These visits included meeting with leaders, meeting with learners, learning walks and document scrutiny. We also drew on evidence from our ongoing inspection activity and further education college link visits.

In autumn 2024 we invited all 12 FEIs who offered ILS provision to complete an online survey covering areas including the number of ILS learners at the provider and on each pathway, the proportion of learners studying full time or part time, which pathways each provider offered, the Welsh medium offer, the use of ALS funding for ILS learners, how many sites within each provider offer ILS provision, the number of staff supporting ILS learners, the proportion of ILS learners with an IDP or equivalent, which providers had links to maintained special schools, the rate of accreditation on ILS courses and the rate of ILS learners dropping out over the last 3 years. This was to inform the planning of the visits. We have referred to the information in this report but are not publishing the data set. Official data is published on [Medr's website](#).

We completed a range of online and face-to face discussions with relevant stakeholders including; ColegauCymru staff, Medr, local authority post-16 staff, leaders in maintained special schools, supported internship agencies and supported internship employers.

We collected feedback from staff and learners on ILS programmes through bilingual questionnaires, which were also available in an easy-read symbolised format for learners. However, we acknowledge that not all learners would have been able to communicate their feedback fully using this method due to their additional learning needs. In order to mitigate this limitation we also met with a cross section of learners during each visit to an institution and provided guidance within the questionnaire about how staff could support learners to provide their feedback. Further, we acknowledge that a possible limitation of the questionnaire is that those learners on ILS programmes who do not identify as ILS learners may not have completed the survey.

We reviewed a range of documentation submitted by the FEIs, ColegauCymru and Medr. These included curriculum plans, programme specifications, case studies, timetables, data about learner outcomes and peer reviews.

During the week beginning on 7-10-2024, we viewed the websites of the providers to evaluate the usefulness and accessibility of the information provided. This information

is included in the relevant sections of this report. The providers are listed in the methods and evidence section.

Estyn would like to thank the following for their participation in this thematic inspection:

- Cardiff and the Vale College
- Coleg Cymoedd
- Coleg Gwent
- Coleg Sir Gâr
- Adult learning Wales
- Neath Port Talbot College
- Gower College Swansea
- Grŵp Llandrillo Menai College
- Coleg Cambria
- Merthyr College
- Bridgend College
- Pembrokeshire College

## Types of evidence gathering

Provider	Autumn 2024 evidence submission	Thematic Visit	ALN discussion in link visit	Inspection	Online meeting
Cardiff and the Vale College	X	X	X		
Coleg Cymoedd	X	X	X	X	
Coleg Gwent	X	X	X		
Coleg Sir Gâr	X	X	X		
Adult learning Wales	X			X	X
Neath Port Talbot College	X	X	X		
Gower College Swansea	X	X	X		
Grŵp Llandrillo Menai College	X	X	X		
Coleg Cambria	X	X	X		
Merthyr College	X		X	X	
Bridgend College	X	X	X		
Pembrokeshire College	X	X	X		

## Glossary

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<b>ALN</b>	Additional learning needs
<b>ALNET</b>	Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 - a unified statutory framework for identifying and meeting the needs of learners with ALN from 0 to 25 in Wales
<b>ALNCo</b>	Additional learning needs co-ordinator
<b>ALP</b>	Additional learning provision – the educational or training provision required to meet a person’s ALN, as set out in their IDP
<b>ALS</b>	Additional learning support (this includes support for learners with support needs but not ALN)
<b>DECLO</b>	Designated Educational Clinical Lead Officer
<b>FE</b>	Further education
<b>FEI</b>	Further education Institution
<b>IDP</b>	Individual development plan
<b>Learning area</b>	The department within the further education college where specific programmes of learning take place
<b>LLWR</b>	Lifelong Learning Wales Record
<b>LSP</b>	Learning and skills plan
<b>PMLD</b>	Profound and multiple learning difficulties
<b>Programme of learning</b>	The full range of experiences for which learners are funded at college, including qualifications, work experience and enrichment
<b>SEMH</b>	Social, emotional and mental health needs
<b>SMART</b>	specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound

## **Numbers – quantities and proportions**

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%



## References

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