

Easy Read



# Independent Living Skills courses in Wales

## What we found out

September 2025

 **Estyn**

# How to use this document



This is an Easy Read version of: **The Independent Living Skills (ILS) Curriculum in Further Education: Building a person-centred skills-based curriculum**



You might need help to read it. Ask someone you know to help you.



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# About us



We are Estyn.



We check the quality of education and training in Wales.

We also:



- Report to Senedd Cymru.

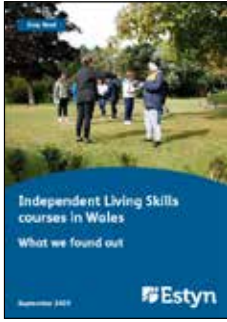


- Give advice to Welsh Government about education and training.



- Share what we find out and what works well.

# What this report is about



This report is about **Independent Living Skills courses** in Wales.



We call them **ILS courses** for short.



ILS courses support learners with additional learning needs. We call this **ALN** for short.



They are run in colleges across Wales.



They help learners prepare for work and adult life.

In 2017 we learned that:



- Colleges did not always check how ILS learners were doing.



- Colleges focused more on exams and certificates.



- Many ILS courses did not help learners become independent or ready for work and life.



The Welsh Government made changes to improve things.



This report looks at:

- What has changed since 2017.
- How ILS courses can get better.

# What we did



We looked at what ILS courses were like in Wales.



We visited 10 colleges that offer ILS courses.



We spoke to learners, teachers and other people involved in education and work placements.



We used English and Welsh questionnaires. These were also available in Easy Read.



We met learners in person to help them share their views.



We looked at information from:

- Our inspections
- Colleges
- ColegauCymru – a charity that promotes learning after secondary school
- Welsh Government
- Medr – an organisation that funds and oversees education for over 16 year olds



We checked if information on college websites was easy to use and helpful.



We want to thank all the colleges and people who took part in work.



# About ILS courses



There are 12 colleges in Wales that provide ILS courses.



The courses teach practical life skills, like:

- cooking
- cleaning
- healthy eating
- getting ready for work
- managing money
- and travel training



Teaching is based on what each person wants and needs.



There are 4 types of ILS courses called pathways. The pathways have different goals for learners with different needs:



- **Pathways 1 and 2** are for learners with the most complex needs. This means they need a lot of support.



- **Pathway 3** is for different learners with different needs. This includes learners with additional learning needs and those who need support with behaviour, feelings and mental health.



- **Pathway 4** provides supported work placements.



Not all learners on ILS courses come from special schools. Some learners start an ILS course at age 16. Learners from special schools start at age 19.

# What we found out

## Changes after 2017



The ILS pathways were updated.



Colleges changed how they teach, assess, and plan learning.



They work together to share good practice.



Many colleges still need to improve how they check the quality of their ILS courses.



Since 2017, there are new laws for supporting learners with ALN.



Colleges now have more duties.



Colleges find it hard to collect information about what learners do after their ILS course has finished.

## ILS courses



From September 2024, 12 colleges in Wales offer ILS courses.



There were just under 2 thousand learners on ILS courses across Wales.



Most colleges had between 100 and 300 learners on their ILS courses.



There are many staff who work on ILS courses.  
There are over 160:

- teaching assistants and support staff
- teachers
- leaders who manage the courses.

## Courses in Welsh



Only 2 out of 12 colleges offered Welsh courses for ILS learners.



A few other colleges can provide it if asked, but this does not happen often.



Often, Welsh speaking learners only have courses in English.

# Transport



A few colleges only offer ILS courses at one site.



Colleges in Wales are different sizes and cover different areas.



Colleges said transport is a problem for learners who cannot travel on their own.



Without proper transport, some learners cannot go to college. This can mean learners drop out of colleges.

## Learners dropping out



There are more learners who drop out of ILS courses. It has gone up from about 100 to 150 learners per year.



Learners with learning disabilities usually stay longer.



Learners with other needs leave sooner.



## Checking needs



Learners start ILS courses after college assessments.



Colleges use **Individual Development Plans** to check learners needs.



An **Individual Development Plan** is a personal plan for ALN learners.



About half of ILS learners have an Individual Development Plan.



A few learners have other plans to support their education, health, and care.

# Pathways



Some ILS learners are working towards qualifications.



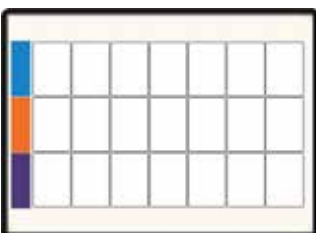
About half of all ILS learners are on Pathway 3.



There are fewer learners on Pathway 2.



There are not many learners on Pathway 1 or 4.



In 2024 to 2025, many ILS learners studied full time. Most lessons were taught in English.

## Pathway 1 and 2



Pathways 1 and 2 are for learners with the most needs.



Only some colleges offer Pathway 1.



All colleges offer Pathway 2.



Some colleges are unclear about:

- How long courses last.
- What learners should achieve.



This can make courses feel like day activities instead of learning opportunities.

## Pathway 3



Most colleges in Wales offer Pathway 3.



Many learners on pathway 3 courses do not see themselves as '**ILS learners**'.



Some colleges in Wales call Pathway 3 by different names. And teach them in different ways.



How the courses are taught and assessed is different in each college.

## Pathway 4



Pathway 4 offers supported work placements.



These courses can help learners with ALN find paid work.



But not all pathway 4 courses work that well for learners because:



- Colleges work differently with employers and work agencies.



- Some have strong links with employers, others do not.



- Some learners are not ready for training in work and need extra support.



- Colleges and agencies face problems with funding, travel, and training.



Some learners get jobs, while others mainly gain work skills.



Few staff have job coach training.

Pathway 4 courses do not always include learning about:



- Health and wellbeing



- Getting ready for work



- Independent living



- Being part of your community



This is because work agencies want the courses to focus more on getting paid work.



# Rules for how colleges deliver ILS courses



There are some problems with the rules for ILS courses:



- Courses do not focus much on goals. They do not clearly show what learners should achieve.



- ILS learning is not the same as main college learning. How learners are doing is not always recorded in the right way.



- Rules do not always match up with laws and other things like individual development plans.



## Having clear rules to support learners



The Pathways do not explain learning needs. Or how courses help learners after college.



Learners on the same Pathway course may have very different learning needs.



Colleges follow different ways to support learners.



For example, a learner on Pathway 1 in one college might be on Pathway 2 in another college.

## Course names



The name '**Independent Living Skills**' is not always clear.



It does not show what learners achieve when they finish.



Some colleges use their own course names.



This can be confusing for learners, parents and schools. It may make courses hard to find.



ILS courses cover 4 areas of learning:

- Health and well-being
- Getting ready for work
- Independent living
- Being part of your community



These areas are called the 4 pillars. But different colleges call them different things.



This is confusing, and not everyone understands what they are.

## How long courses last



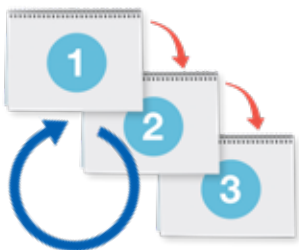
Pathway courses last for **650 hours**.



This is a 1 year full time course.



Some courses are part-time.



Learners may repeat courses or move to another course.



A few courses have no set end date, which can be confusing.

## Gaining life skills



ILS courses do not always set clear personal goals.



It is better to think about the skills learners should gain by the end of the course.



It is important for a learner to gain more independence and life skills.



Future plans depend on each learner's needs and situation.

## Meeting different learning needs



Learners on ILS courses have different needs from other learners. So, teaching must be different too.



College rules do not clearly explain how to plan lessons.



For example, they do not say:

- how support staff should help,
- what goals mean,
- or how to give feedback.



Plans also change for each Pathway.

# Individual Development Plan



An **Individual Development Plan** is a personal plan for a learners with ALN. We call them **IDPs** for short.



In schools and colleges, this plan is often used to support learners who need extra help.



In Wales, it has replaced old learning and skills plans.



IDPs work best when schools, colleges, and councils work together with learners and parents.



IDPs are often late, incomplete, or not suited for learners.



IDPs are not the same across Wales. This can make it hard for colleges to give the right support for learners.



A few colleges said IDPs still miss information about learners' needs.



Colleges measure learners' progress in different ways.



These ways do not always match IDPs.



Learners' goals are not always linked to their IDP goals.



# Assessments and checks

## Assessing skills and setting goals



Most colleges check learners' skills at the start of the programme. Some colleges also test reading and maths.



Learners usually know their goals, but goals are not always clear.



Learners often move through different Pathways. For many learners, this is good.



But moving through Pathways only matters if it helps the learner reach their future goals.

## Future goals



Colleges help learners think about their future.



Most learners say college helps them plan for life after college.



College helps learners with careers, independence, and jobs.



But sometimes colleges focus more on the future job than on skills needed now.

## Quality checks



Colleges now focus on skills, not just exams.



Quality checks in colleges are getting better.



In the best colleges, quality checks were very good. They made sure learner's needs were met.



Most colleges said they need to improve how they check how learners are doing. And the quality of courses.



Colleges and special schools do not often share the best ways of working.



There is not much checking how learners are doing after they finish college.

## Staff training



Colleges give staff training and share good ideas.



Some colleges have strong link between ILS and ALN departments. They update learning plans for new learners.



Many staff said they had training for ILS and found it helpful.



But many colleges did not have a clear training plan for ILS staff.



Few colleges share training with other colleges.



Most colleges did not check how training affected teaching and learning.

## Working with special schools



Most colleges work well with special schools. They help learners visit and settle into college.



However, this is not the same across Wales.



School plans do not always help learners move smoothly from school to college.



Many learners stay in special school until they are 19 and then go to college.



Special school leaders said events for learners moving from school to college show them courses that they cannot join.



This can confuse learners about which course they can do.



## Information on websites



In October 2024, we looked at ILS information on college websites.



No college had pages just for ILS. Or easy to read information for learners with additional learning needs.



On most websites you can search for courses. But you need to know the course name.



Few college websites said ILS courses are free. But some colleges listed extra costs, like enrolment fees.



Some colleges listed ALN and ILS separately without a link. This can make it hard for ILS learners to find ALN support.

## Additional Learning Support funding



**ALS funding** is money given to education and training providers to help learners who need extra support.



ILS courses get extra funding because learners need more support.



Most colleges use some of ALS funding for ILS learners.



The number of learners who get ALS funding is different in each college.



It is not clear why ALS funding is used differently across Wales.

## The impact of new ALN laws



The law has changed for how ALN learners are supported in education.



This has improved teamwork between schools, colleges, and other partners.



Moving from the old system has caused some problems. The old system was called SEN.



Some learners still come to college with Learning and Skills Plans. These were used under the old system.



Some colleges support more types of ALN than before.



This can put pressure on staff and resources.



Support for learners with ALN is not the same across Wales.



We need a national plan so that everyone follows the same rules. And gets the same support.

# How to contact us



We have tried to make sure all information in this document is correct.



If you have questions or comments, you can contact:

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