



# Implementation of post-16 aspects of Additional Learning Needs

## (ALN) reform in FEIs

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## Context

During the autumn term 2024 and spring term 2025, further education institutions (FEIs) were visited by their Estyn link inspectors and an inspector with experience in working with learners who have additional learning needs (ALN). During each visit, inspectors met with key staff to discuss the ongoing implementation of colleges' statutory responsibilities under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

This report uses discussions from these meetings along with evidence from inspection activity to provide an update on the 2024 insights report [Additional Learning Needs in Further Education Colleges](#).

## Key findings

Nearly all colleges have well established structures and processes in place to meet the needs of learners with individual development plans (IDPs).

Nearly all colleges report that the time taken to fulfil their obligations has exceeded expectations and that pressure on workloads is compounded by the ongoing lack of a pan-Wales IDP electronic platform.

Collaborative working has increased, and most colleges are now working effectively with schools, local authorities and wider stakeholders to plan successful transitions into college for learners with ALN.

Most colleges report an increase in the number of learners who require support who have not formerly been identified as having ALN or who have chosen not to have an IDP.

## Statutory responsibilities

Many colleges are now effectively communicating the additional learning provision (ALP) they can provide for learners with ALN alongside the support ordinarily available at the college. A few colleges include this information on their websites or have developed brochures.

A few colleges are unclear about the definition of 'universal learning provision' and how it relates to their statutory responsibilities. Too often this is negatively impacting decision-making processes on whether a learner has ALN or if their needs can be met without an IDP.

A minority of colleges report that expectations from local authorities that they should meet a wider breadth of ALN within their independent living skills (ILS) provision than they previously met under the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system, is stretching resources and/or is unrealistic. Conversely, a minority of other colleges report that they have effectively increased their capacity and expertise to meet the needs of learners with a wider breadth of ALN. These differences in approach have resulted in an ongoing inconsistency across Wales in the range of ALN that can be met by the FEI sector.

Welsh Government's flow through approach for the implementation of post-16 aspects of ALN reform has seen the overall number of learners in colleges with IDPs increase each year and this is placing pressure on colleges to fulfil their statutory obligations within expected timeframes.

A minority of colleges report that learners are still arriving at college with learning and skills plans (LSPs) that were used under the SEN system when they should have IDPs. Additionally, colleges report that learners joining from alternative provision and education other than at school (EOTAS) often do not have IDPs. These scenarios result in colleges having to commence statutory processes and this adds to staff workloads.

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. Colleges reported that sometimes challenges are due to provision not being described in shared language, such as learners arriving with specific interventions named in their IDPs, when colleges may deliver similar or equivalent support using different terminology. They also told us that in both of these circumstances, the expectation remains that the learner will attend the college. This risks learners needs not being met.

Nearly all colleges told us that the ongoing lack of a pan-Wales IDP electronic platform for consistent information sharing is detrimental to their ability to assess and meet learners' ALN in a timely manner. Many colleges reported that access to pre-entry information about learners was difficult and that information from schools and local authorities is sometimes withheld due to data protection concerns. 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.

Around half of colleges reported that LSPs contained more relevant post-16 information than IDPs and that this has affected their ability to plan to meet individual learner's ALN.

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

Colleges said 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 arrive at college from non-feeder schools or from out of county, colleges reported that IDPs are more likely to arrive late and to be missing essential information. In a few cases, this has resulted in learners dropping out of courses because the college has unknowingly been unable to meet their ALN. Processes for reassessing learners' ALP in these circumstances were unclear.

A minority of colleges said that learners' intended learning outcomes in IDPs were sometimes not appropriate to post-16 settings or aligned with individuals' aspirations. When this occurs, it is usually because colleges have not been involved in learners' transition reviews.

A majority of colleges reported that, in order for them to ensure learners' education and training needs are understood and that positive post-college transitions can be planned, IDP reviews for first year learners and for college leavers are required in the autumn term. This puts pressure on staff workloads at a busy time of the academic year.

A few colleges reported that time constraints 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.

Nearly all colleges reported inconsistencies in the quality of information in IDPs and in the timeliness of receiving the documents. A minority of colleges reported that information was often out of date and no longer relevant. For example, they included photos of learners as younger children and detail about behavioural challenges that the learner no longer presented.

A minority of colleges reported that in some cases, IDPs did not include essential information about learners' ALN. For example, the IDP of one learner with a visual impairment made no reference to their disability. As a result, one college shared that they have added an IDP heading of 'significant diagnosis and primary need', to ensure staff at the college are able to understand learners' ALN.

## **Working with stakeholders**

Most colleges 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.

A majority of colleges have developed effective relationships with their regional Designated Education Clinical Lead Officers (DECLOs) who have facilitated support for learners' health needs and staff training. However, a minority of colleges have told us that



different DECLOs provide different 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.

## **Learner support**

Many colleges have consistent support for learners with ALN across their campuses and curriculum offers. However, in a minority of cases, access to additional learning provision for part-time and work-based learners is underdeveloped.

Most colleges are experiencing an increase in the number of learners entering college whose highest prior attainment is level one of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). Many of these learners may not have ALN but do require support in building their resilience, social and life skills. A few colleges are using non-accredited development programmes using RARPA (recognising and recording progress and achievement) processes to develop and monitor learners' skills. Colleges report that, where appropriate, these learners are completing this alongside accredited courses.

Many colleges provide enhanced transition arrangements for learners with ALN. This includes taster days, visits, quiet tours and lesson observations.

Most colleges are continuing to see the number of learners requiring exam access support rise.

## **Quality assurance and professional learning**

Many colleges have now developed teaching and learning observation processes to include assessments of how ALN are being met.

Nearly all colleges have increased ALN-related professional learning opportunities for teaching staff. However, opportunities to develop the professional knowledge and skills of learning support staff are less prevalent. Overall, colleges' ability to evidence the impact of professional learning on learner outcomes remains underdeveloped.

Nearly all colleges have developed effective approaches for measuring the progress of learners on non-accredited study programmes. In a few colleges, these systems are integrated into cross-college quality assurance systems. However, in a few colleges we

noted that evaluations of the progress of learners with ALN did not only consider learners with ALN, but also those learners accessing additional learning support (ALS) funding.

A minority of colleges are integrating learner feedback and attainment data within quality assurance processes and this is strengthening their ability to effectively evaluate the impact of their provision on learner outcomes.

### **Additional learning provision for learners whose first language is Welsh**

Additional learning provision through the medium of Welsh remains variable. A minority of colleges offer fully bilingual additional learning provision.

A minority told us that Welsh medium provision is available, but learners choose to be educated in English.

## Spotlights

**Collaborative working:** Most colleges are now part of multi-agency forums that include school ALNCoS, health, local authority and college representatives. This collaborative approach supports information sharing and timely transition planning.

**Learners at risk of not being involved in education and training (NEET):** one college works closely with their local authority to identify learners' risk including those who have experienced EOTAS, learners who have attended pupil referral units (PRUs) or had modified timetables in school. These learners typically have identified or unidentified ALN and the college provides enhanced transition activities including summer schools. Another college holds progression boards every six weeks that are able to identify learners at risk of dropping out of their programmes.

**Meeting learners ALN:** a minority of colleges reported that they have created 'inclusion panels' that share decision-making on whether a college is able to meet individuals' ALN. They work with ALNCoS and local authority officials to ensure timely decision-making for learners whose ALN cannot be met by the college so that local authorities can maintain these learners' IDPs.

**Evaluating teaching and learning for learners with ALN:** one college monitors learner attainment and progression across a range of protected characteristics including ALN. Additionally, teaching staff self-assess their strengths and areas for development, working in triads with colleagues experienced in the skills they want to develop to improve their practice.

**Information and guidance:** one college has created a transition brochure for learners that is symbolised and available in Welsh and English. It includes information on what learners should expect and QR codes for learners to access virtual campus tours.

**Work-based learners with ALN:** In one college, the ALNCo has responsibility for ensuring that work-based learning providers understand and can meet learners ALN.



## Self-reflection questions for colleges

1. How do you ensure a productive relationship with local authorities to support current learners and plan for future cohorts?
2. How do you evaluate the quality of teaching and learning experiences for learners with additional learning needs across all provision?
3. How do you plan for professional learning in relation to ALN? How do you evaluate the impact this has on learners?
4. Do all learners have equal access to ALN support? Does this include those learners on the roll of the college on other government funded provision, ESOL learners or learners whose first language is Welsh?
5. How do you ensure that new learners have IDPs which are relevant to their course of study and future aspirations?