
Learner progress and destinations in independent living skills learning areas in further education colleges

June 2017



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Introduction

This report is published in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Cabinet Secretary's annual remit letter to Estyn 2016-2017. The report examines the arrangements for measuring the progress of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities on specialised programmes of learning in further education (FE) colleges. It focuses on how well colleges identify learners' needs and how well the programmes that they deliver meet learners' abilities and prepare learners for transition from college.

The report is intended primarily for the Welsh Government, FE colleges and local authorities. It may also be of interest to independent specialist colleges and to agencies, learners, parents and carers, staff and managers in other sectors who work with children and young people with additional learning needs.

The report contains case studies of good practice and draws on the evidence noted in appendix 1. It should be read in conjunction with the report published in May 2016 on learner progress and destinations in independent specialist colleges (Estyn, 2016). Case studies from both reports are intended to promote best practice in developing post-16 provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities across Wales.

Background

Twelve FE colleges in Wales currently provide programmes of learning for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. Adult Learning Wales (formerly the Workers' Educational Association YMCA Community College Cymru) and St David's College in Cardiff are the only colleges for post-compulsory education that do not provide such programmes. In 2015-2016, around 1,400 learners completed these programmes in FE colleges in Wales.

One FE college offers residential care alongside its education provision. Weston House is a registered care home for young adults with disabilities, learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder whose residents attend courses at Bridgend College. The cost of educational provision at Weston House is funded directly by the Welsh Government on the same basis as for independent specialist colleges.

The programmes offered include a range of courses and qualifications at pre-entry, entry level and, in a few cases, level 1. They fulfil the requirements of learning programmes specified within the relevant subject area guidelines of the Welsh Government's Post-16 Planning and Funding Framework. In around half of FE colleges, these courses are referred to collectively as independent living skills (ILS) programmes. However, in the other FE colleges these courses are grouped under programmes such as skills for life, preparation for work or life, or foundation studies.

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 difficulties, including moderate to severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and, in a few cases, profound and multiple learning difficulties. 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.

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 placement at an independent specialist college.

Current legislation requires learners with statements of special education needs (SEN) in their last year of school who wish to attend an FE college to have an assessment of their education and training needs (The Learning and Skills Act: Great Britain, 2000). Other learners, such as those who are supported by School Action or School Action Plus and who have been subject to an annual or transition review process consistent with that undertaken for those with a statement of SEN, may also be eligible for such an assessment. These assessments (known as learning and skills plans (LSP)) are undertaken by Careers Wales on behalf of Welsh Ministers and are intended to ensure that learners with complex needs get suitable provision and the support they need to meet their assessed learning needs. In 2015-2016, according to data provided by the FE colleges for this report, around half of learners on ILS programmes had a LSP in place. However, the proportion of learners on ILS programmes with LSPs varied significantly between colleges. At one college, only a very few learners on ILS programmes had LSPs, while in a minority of colleges almost three-quarters of learners had LSPs.

The Welsh Government recognises that there are additional costs to securing provision designed exclusively for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities. Within the Post-16 Planning and Funding Framework, provision for learners with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties receives additional funding to cover the higher cost of programmes of learning for this group of learners. In addition, funding is available from Welsh Government through the additional learning support mechanism for a few individual learners on ILS programmes who would be unable to cope without higher levels of support.

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, as well as information on destinations of learners when they leave the college. The destinations of learners are matched to 12 pre-set codes, which address broad categories for continuing education, employment or other destinations.

Estyn has conducted four inspections of ILS learning areas in FE colleges since February 2015. These inspection reports identified a number of common shortcomings, including:

- Colleges do not record and track learner progress from learners' starting points sufficiently well
- Targets on learners' individual learning plans do not take into account sufficiently the needs and abilities of the learner
- The content of programmes of learning does not focus sufficiently on the skills and knowledge that learners will need to make them more independent in their future lives
- Colleges are unable to evaluate the progress that learners make in the development of their skills in relation to their prior attainment
- Managers and teachers are unable to demonstrate how programmes of learning contribute to learners' long-term needs and destinations

The Welsh Government is currently seeking to replace existing legislation in this area. The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill (National Assembly for Wales, 2017) aims to provide greater continuity in transition planning between pre-16 and post-16 education and training for this group of learners. This will provide opportunities for FE colleges, particularly in how they work more closely with families and local authorities to increase access to further education for young people with complex learning difficulties. However, it will also raise further challenges for colleges if they are to ensure that the range and quality of their provision support successful transition to purposeful destinations for all ILS learners, including those with the most complex needs.

Main findings

- 1 Most FE colleges collect a wide range of relevant information about the abilities, needs and prior achievement of learners before they join the college. This helps to ensure that most learners make a successful transition from school or other providers into the ILS learning area of the college. In a few cases, the quality of information provided by previous providers varies widely. In addition, a few colleges report difficulties in capturing the full range of needs when learners move from children's social services to adult social services because of the quality of information provided.
- 2 Most colleges do not use a wide enough range of data to measure learner progress, particularly for learners with more complex needs. This is because they do not have arrangements in place to assess or track learners' skills in important areas such as independence, wellbeing, employability or communication. In addition, very few colleges have enough in-house specialists to assess the full range of learners' more complex needs and rely on the information provided by previous education providers, local authorities and Careers Wales. As a result, teaching and support staff within colleges have limited opportunities to develop their expertise and understanding in these important areas.
- 3 All colleges have individual learning plans (ILPs) in place for learners. However, ILPs vary considerably in how well they set a clear direction for learners that extends beyond the completion of the course or programme of learning. Very few ILPs set coherent short-term, medium-term or long-term targets that take account of all learners' likely destinations when they leave the college.
- 4 Most colleges review learners' progress against the targets on their ILPs regularly, but few colleges track learners' progress against their targets over time. In addition, in many colleges the quality of target setting is too variable for ILPs to serve as an accurate record of learners' progress. Many targets do not relate sufficiently to the outcomes of initial assessments and are not specific enough to capture small steps of learning.
- 5 In many colleges, systems of tracking and monitoring the progress of learners on ILS courses are 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.
- 6 In most colleges, staff plan the ILS curriculum carefully to support learners' progression within college. Most learners complete their courses successfully and many learners progress onto further courses at either the same or a higher level. In many colleges, programmes of learning do not take enough account of learners' destinations or make suitable provision for developing learners' independence, employability and life skills. As a result, in many cases, programmes of learning fail to prepare learners effectively for the challenges they will face in their future lives.
- 7 In most colleges, learners have opportunities to take qualifications at a level that is generally well matched to their abilities. In many cases, qualifications do not address

the broad range of learners' needs or reflect their destinations well enough. Overall, there is too much emphasis on qualifications as a measure of achievement or progress when this is not relevant to learners' needs, abilities or future destinations.

- 8 Nearly all colleges have a clear focus on developing learners' literacy and numeracy skills. They use the results of initial assessments in literacy and numeracy to check that learners are placed on courses at the appropriate level. However, baseline assessments do not capture the strengths and areas for development for many less able learners well enough and only a very few colleges focus sufficiently on developing learners' communication skills.
- 9 Many colleges do not focus well enough on developing learners' life and independence skills. Although most programmes include units that develop skills in relevant areas, such as cooking or independent travel, learning activities generally do not provide learners with suitable opportunities to acquire practical skills or apply these in realistic contexts. Most colleges do not evaluate the progress learners make in developing these skills over time.
- 10 Most colleges have arrangements to ensure that learners on vocational programmes benefit from relevant work experience. Provision for work-related education for learners who are not on vocational courses is more limited, particularly for lower-ability learners. Around half of colleges lack a clear rationale for developing learners' work-related skills when this is not a requirement of the qualification.
- 11 Many learners who completed their ILS programmes of learning in 2015-2016 progressed onto appropriate courses within the ILS learning area at the same or a higher level. A few learners progressed onto higher-level courses within the mainstream provision of the FE college. A very few learners entered employment on completing their course, around the same proportion of learners who were not in employment, education or training when they left the college.
- 12 Most colleges provide regular advice and guidance to learners about their futures, but the data they collect on learners' destinations following the completion of their programmes of learning and how well they evaluate this data is too inconsistent.
- 13 Many colleges do not place enough emphasis on learners' likely destinations throughout their time at the college. As a result, the destinations of many learners are mainly determined by what is available locally, rather than as an outcome of co-ordinated planning.
- 14 Overall, the destinations of learners completing ILS courses vary too much across local authorities. This variation reflects differences in local provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities, as well as differences in the way in which colleges have configured partnerships locally to secure reliable progression routes for their learners. In particular, there is a lack of suitable employment opportunities in many local authorities, including supported employment, to allow learners to continue to develop and apply the skills they have learned in college.

Recommendations

FE colleges should:

- R1 Identify learners' wider skills and abilities during initial assessments and include a suitable focus on communication, independence, employability and wellbeing 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

Local authorities should:

- R6 Provide colleges with relevant information about learners' needs when they start college
- R7 Develop a broader range of partnerships with the post-16 and voluntary sectors to develop and improve progression routes in the local area

The Welsh Government should:

- R8 Review the collection of information on the outcomes of learners on independent living skills programmes to ensure that this provides an accurate picture of learners' destinations across Wales

How well do FE colleges measure learner progress?

Pre-entry assessment and information from previous learning providers

- 15 Most FE colleges have suitable arrangements in place to gather relevant information about the prior learning and achievement of learners before they enter the college. They collect a range of information about prospective learners from a wide variety of sources. For example, they interview prospective learners and their parents and carers on application to the college and use information provided by learners' current education providers, social services and Careers Wales.
- 16 Most colleges make use of an appropriate range of documentation to inform their understanding of learners' abilities and needs. This includes behaviour plans, care plans, risk assessments, qualifications data, certificates of prior attainment and records of achievement, the results of specialist medical or therapeutic assessments, and the minutes of multi-disciplinary team meetings and statutory annual reviews.
- 17 At Bridgend College, learners applying for placements at Weston House have a residential pre-entry assessment over a 36-hour period against criteria that include social skills, life skills and behaviour. This helps to ensure that the staff at Weston House have detailed knowledge about learners' skills and abilities before they join the college. However, very few colleges have robust arrangements in place to conduct assessments of learners' skills and abilities before they join the college, other than through informal observations of learners during visits to the college. As a result, most colleges rely on the information they gather from previous education providers, Careers Wales advisers, social services and parents and carers to assess the full range of learners' needs.
- 18 Most colleges collaborate well with learners' previous education providers to ensure that they have accurate information about the learners' abilities and needs before they join the college. They build valuable relationships with school staff by attending annual reviews and through school link programmes. For a few colleges, this presents a considerable logistical challenge. For example, one ILS learning area draws learners from around 40 schools and providers. Other colleges draw their learners from a much smaller number of schools, which helps communication and transition planning between the college and the schools.
- 19 Most colleges collect valuable information about prospective learners from schools by attending annual reviews for those learners who have a statement of SEN. For example, at Coleg Sir Gar, a student mentor attends all school reviews during the learners' penultimate year in school. However, the number of reviews attended varies between colleges. One college attends about 95% of reviews, while the proportion for another college is around 70%.
- 20 Most colleges have well-established school link programmes in place. These programmes provide learners with valuable opportunities to visit colleges while they are still at school. They enable college staff to observe learners in the college setting

over time and provide valuable information about learners before they join the college. However, many learners do not have the opportunity to participate in school link programmes. As a result, the quality of information gathered about learners before they join the college through this means varies widely both within and between colleges.

- 21 Careers Wales are required to complete a Learning and Skills Plan (LSP) for those learners who have had statements of SEN in school in order to assist the transition to the college. Other learners, such as those who are supported by School Action or School Action Plus and who have been subject to an annual or transition review process consistent with that undertaken for those with a statement of SEN, may also be eligible for such an assessment. In many cases, LSPs are detailed and comprehensive and are valued greatly by the college. However, in a few cases, the information provided about the learners' educational achievements is not accurate enough or is not received in a timely manner.
- 22 Most colleges gather reliable information regarding learners' personal care, medical and support needs before they join the college. However, in a few cases, the quality of this information varies widely between providers. In addition, a few colleges experience difficulties capturing the full range of needs when learners move from children's social services to adult social services because of the quality of information provided.
- 23 Many colleges seek to gather information relating to learners' emotional, social and personal attributes through a variety of approaches. In Pembrokeshire College, staff observe pupils in their current setting before they make the transition to the college. Many colleges gather this type of information through informal observations of learners during school link programmes. However, in many colleges there is not a consistent approach to recording or evaluating this information.
- 24 In a few cases, colleges find that the information relating to learners' prior educational achievement is not accurate and that it does not reflect the college's own assessments of learners' skills after the learner has joined the college. This means that the work that learners complete when they start their course is at a lower level than work completed in their previous school. Overall, most colleges find it difficult to gather reliable information about learners who are not from the catchment area in sufficient time before the start of the college course.
- 25 Many colleges record the information they gather about learners on their management information systems. As a result, staff within the ILS department have access to a relevant range of information so that they can support learners effectively. In nearly all cases, the information gathered is used well to ensure that learners are placed on appropriate courses within the college.

Range, quality and use of data to measure progress

- 26 Most FE colleges do not use a sufficiently wide range of data to measure the progress of all learners within the ILS learning area. Nearly all have effective arrangements in place to collect data on attendance, retention, and the completion of qualifications. For many learners on higher level programmes wishing to progress

onto mainstream courses, these may be appropriate measures of progress. However, for learners with more complex needs, these measures do not address the nature of their learning needs well enough. Very few colleges collect data on the development of learners' wider skills, or evaluate accurately the progress that learners make in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills during their programmes of learning.

- 27 A few colleges are developing their approaches to initial assessment in order to establish more accurate baseline measures from which they can determine progress. However, these are at a very early stage of development. Most colleges do not identify well enough the skills learners need to develop in important areas such as independence, wellbeing, employability, or communication at the start of the course. In addition, very few colleges have sufficient in-house specialists to assess learners' more complex needs, including their communication needs, and are reliant on information provided by local authorities and Careers Wales. As a result, staff within colleges have limited opportunities to develop their expertise and understanding in these important areas.
- 28 Nearly all colleges have arrangements in place to assess learners' starting points in literacy and numeracy after they join the college. Most colleges use an online initial assessment tool to do this. For many learners following entry level 3 qualifications, this provides accurate information about learners' skills. However, the majority of colleges recognise that, even for more able learners within the ILS learning area, the information generated is not always reliable. Around half of colleges use observation and teachers' expertise to check the accuracy of assessment outcomes.
- 29 For learners with more complex needs for whom online assessment is not appropriate, many colleges have alternative arrangements in place, including the use of paper-based assessments. A few colleges have developed their own assessments, including observational approaches to assessment. However, in many cases, these arrangements do not result in targets that are specific or measurable enough.
- 30 All colleges have individual learning plans (ILPs) in place for ILS learners. However, there is no consistent format to these and the content varies widely between colleges. In most colleges, ILPs for ILS learners reflect the model used by all learners in the college. In many cases, they provide a record of tutorial activity and serve as a management information platform for staff who work with the learners. For learners aiming to progress onto mainstream courses, this consistent approach across the college supports them in making a successful transition to mainstream courses on completion of their ILS courses. However, overall, this model of ILP does not provide an effective record of progress for many learners in the ILS learning area.
- 31 In most colleges, ILPs include targets for literacy and numeracy, as well as other areas of focus chosen by the learner in conjunction with his or her tutor. Most often, these targets address areas such as independence, social skills or personal development. Usually, targets on ILPs are set by learners together with staff. This process is suitable for more able learners, allowing them to take ownership of their own learning and progress. However, learners who have more complex needs require considerable assistance from staff to set targets that are specific as well as

purposeful. Where learners do not receive this guidance, targets are often too broad to measure progress effectively and do not link well enough to the results of initial assessments.

- 32 ILPs for ILS learners vary considerably in terms of how well they set a clear direction for learners that extends beyond the completion of the course or learning programme. Most targets support completion of the learners' present course to enable progression within the college to the educational next step. However, few ILPs set coherent short-term, medium-term and long-term targets that take account of learners' likely destinations when they leave the college. This means that much learning at the college does not equip less able learners in particular with the specific skills they will need in their future lives.
- 33 In most colleges, teachers and learning support staff working with the learners have appropriate and ready access to the information contained within the ILP. However, in the majority of colleges, the targets contained within the ILPs are not sufficiently well integrated into all learning activities. This is because in many lessons the achievement of the qualification is the main outcome.
- 34 Most colleges review learners' progress against the targets on their ILPs regularly in accordance with the arrangements for all learners in the college. In most cases, they carry out termly reviews. A few colleges review learner progress more frequently. This process is undertaken usually on a one-to-one basis during tutorial time with the learners' personal tutor. However, only a few colleges collate this information or evaluate it systematically to track learners' progress against their targets over time or the progress of groups of learners within the ILS learning area.
- 35 Many colleges do not have appropriate arrangements in place to monitor and track how well learners develop their literacy and numeracy skills against their baseline assessments. These colleges rely on learners' achievement of qualifications to demonstrate the progress they have made in these skills. Where learners take additional qualifications in literacy and numeracy as part of their programme of learning, this can be an appropriate measure. However, for less able learners, provision for literacy and numeracy is usually included within the main qualification. In most cases, this is a relevant approach to the teaching of literacy and numeracy and allows these skills to be applied in context. However, overall, these qualifications do not provide a specific enough measure of the progress learners make in developing their literacy and numeracy skills.
- 36 In many colleges, the overall quality of target-setting is too variable for ILPs to serve as an accurate record of learners' progress. Many targets do not relate sufficiently to the outcomes of initial assessments and are not specific enough to allow for small steps of learning. They focus too heavily on the completion of qualification aims and do not address sufficiently the wider skills learners will need in their future lives.
- 37 Few colleges have robust systems in place to assess learners' communication, independence, employability and social skills. As a result, many colleges are unable to set targets for learners that are developmental and relevant to their needs and abilities. Systems for the tracking and monitoring of learners' progress in these key areas are too reliant on units of credit achieved and do not build progressively from learners' individual starting points towards clearly defined and relevant goals.

- 38 Many colleges do not have secure arrangements to assure the quality of targets on learners' ILPs. Nearly all ILS learning areas review the courses they offer regularly to assess how well the provision matches the needs of learners. In many cases, colleges have made changes to their provision to reflect the changing needs of learners coming into the college. However, this process does not consider well enough the effectiveness of targets or whether teaching strategies are sufficient to meet individual learners' targets.

Case study 1: Initial assessment of ILS learners at Cardiff and Vale College

The college has reviewed its arrangements for the initial assessment of learners joining the ILS learning area following its Estyn inspection of March 2015. As a result, the outcomes of initial assessments are more reliable and align more closely with target-setting and the monitoring of learners' progress.

Leaders and managers in the learning area had already identified the need to improve transition arrangements with learners' previous schools to ensure that they had robust pre-entry information on new learners before they joined the college. They introduced a new transition protocol to be followed by the college and provider schools. As a result, the college now gathers comprehensive pre-entry information on nearly all learners prior to entry and during the college's initial assessment period.

All learners are assessed on entry into the provision using an online assessment tool which assesses learners' social and independence skills. The college uses this information well, together with outcomes from literacy and numeracy assessments, to ensure that learners are placed on the correct course and progression pathway.

The outcomes of the initial assessment link directly to the four target areas on the college's electronic individual learning programme (EILP). The EILP highlights four key areas of assessment in literacy, numeracy, independence and social skills. Tutors use the outcomes of the assessments to set targets with learners in each of the four key areas. These targets are then addressed within the curriculum and in lessons.

The assessment gives baseline data scores, which can then be used as a starting point to record progress as targets are reviewed with the learner at three intervals during the year. The head of the learning area tracks learners' progress and checks the quality of target-setting through weekly reports.

As a result of these actions, nearly all learners now have individual specific and measurable targets. This allows teachers and managers to monitor the progress of learners and generate data to show the distance travelled for all learners against their targets. A recent internal review also highlighted that there is an increase in the pace and challenge of learning in specific sessions, as learning is personalised against individual areas for improvement.

Case study 2: How target-setting at Grŵp Llandrillo Menai is leading to improved outcomes for learners

Following the merger of the colleges that comprise Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, staff undertook a review of their ILS provision, using questions drawn from previous Estyn reports to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

The review highlighted aspects of good practice across the provision. However, it also became apparent that the group would benefit from a common approach to developing the curriculum offer and setting targets in ILPs. In particular, many staff across the group needed to improve their target-setting techniques to ensure that all targets on ILPs were specific, relevant to learners' needs and measurable.

The group identified the following key actions to address these areas for improvement:

- Introduce a six-week period of initial assessment at the start of learners' courses to include diagnostic assessments and individual tutorials to ensure that targets are based on accurate and relevant information
- Set clear targets for all learners at the start of their programmes based on information received during the transition process
- Ensure that learners' long-term destination goals inform all short-term and medium-term targets
- Review ILPs to include targets for wellbeing, employability, independent living and community involvement, as well as literacy and numeracy
- Ensure that learners' targets reflect their individual needs and abilities accurately, particularly in literacy, numeracy and independence
- Review learners' targets each half-term in personal tutorials

Staff have received extensive support to enable them to improve their target-setting and to ensure that short-term and medium-term targets take appropriate account of individual learners' planned destinations. As a result, staff are able to provide co-ordinated support for individual learners to progress inside and outside college. Examples of learners' achievements since the review of target-setting include:

- A learner who previously had difficulty socialising with peers made her own arrangements to join a local youth club and is still attending
- A learner who had problems ordering food and eating lunch at college is now able to do this independently
- A learner who previously would not cook at home now prepares and cooks a meal for herself and her mother
- A learner who lacked the confidence to attend a work placement without support now attends independently

How well do FE colleges prepare learners for transition?

Transition into the FE college

- 39 Most learners make a successful transition from school or other providers into the ILS learning area of the college. This is largely because of the information gathered by the college prior to and during the application process. This allows colleges to decide in good time whether they can accommodate prospective learners' needs or whether they will need to refer learners elsewhere.
- 40 Most colleges have appropriate and effective arrangements in place to co-ordinate the transition of ILS learners into the college. At Gower College, a dedicated transition officer has responsibility for co-ordinating the transition of all learners into the ILS learning area.

Case study 3: How the role of the transition officer promotes positive outcomes for ILS learners at Gower College

As a result of the college's involvement in the Unlocking the Potential of Special Schools (UPOSS) project in 2013, the college recognised the need to review its transition strategy to ensure that all learners are placed on appropriate level courses and reach their full potential.

A key element of this strategy was to employ a dedicated transition officer with responsibility for co-ordinating all aspects of transition of ILS learners, both into college and onto the next stages of progression. The transition officer provides a link to the college's 25 provider schools, ensuring that all applications into the ILS learning area are dealt with consistently. He co-ordinates college attendance at annual reviews of statements in the college's provider schools, organises information sessions for potential learners and their parents, and liaises with external organisations including careers advisers, social services and local authority education departments.

In addition, the transition officer supports college tutors in dealing with pastoral and behavioural issues, liaises with external organisations and oversees the progression of ILS students within college

The introduction of the transition officer has provided opportunities to develop partnerships with feeder schools and external organisations and ensured that potential learners become familiar with key personnel in the college at an early stage. In addition, teachers and support staff within the college have a clearer idea of individual students' care and educational needs throughout the admissions process. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of course transfers for new learners.

41 Most colleges liaise well with learners' parents and carers and previous education providers to ensure that learners make a smooth transition into the college at the start of their course. Many colleges organise beneficial events to support learners' transition into college, such as:

- School-college link programmes
- Open evenings and open days at key stages through the year
- Induction and taster days for Year 11 pupils

A few colleges offer summer taster courses for learners to become familiar with the college before starting at the college.

42 Most colleges check carefully that they can meet the social and personal needs of learners referred to the college before they offer them a place. Most colleges have effective links with a wide range of external agencies, including social services, educational psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). This collaborative working ensures that colleges usually have the information they need to assess whether they can offer the learner a placement to meet his or her needs. However, in a few cases the information the colleges receive from these agencies does not arrive in a timely fashion, particularly when learners are applying to join the college from outside the catchment area of the college.

43 Nearly all colleges provide advice and guidance about the range of courses available within the ILS learning area. At Coleg Cambria, learners benefit from taster options in different vocational areas before they start a specific learning pathway. This approach allows learners to experience areas they may not have considered when selecting their course or talking about their aspirations. Where it emerges that learners have been placed on the wrong course within the ILS learning area, most colleges have appropriate arrangements in place to reassign learners within the first few weeks of study.

44 In most cases, FE colleges rely on Careers Wales to provide impartial advice and guidance regarding the full range of options available to post-16 learners, including independent specialist colleges. Many ILS learning areas refer prospective learners whose needs they cannot meet either internally to mainstream provision within the college or to Careers Wales if this is appropriate. However, in a very few cases, colleges feel under considerable pressure from parents to offer learners a place although they do not feel able to meet their needs. Equally, in a very few cases, colleges feel under pressure from parents to indicate to the Welsh Government that they cannot meet a learner's needs when the college is confident that it can, as this would allow the learner to be considered for Welsh Government funding for a placement at an independent specialist college.

45 Many colleges provide regular training for staff to support learners' medical and care needs. This ensures that staff are able to support learners with a wide range of physical and medical needs to make a smooth transition into the college. However, in many colleges, training does not have a sufficient focus on educational strategies to support learning, particularly when learners have more complex needs, or when communication difficulties provide significant barriers to learning.

- 46 Most colleges work closely with specialist advisers from Careers Wales and social service teams within local authorities. These partnerships are particularly effective in supporting the transition into the college of learners with complex needs, including those with statements of SEN.

Programme planning

- 47 In most FE colleges, the curriculum within the ILS learning area is carefully planned to accommodate learners with a broad range of abilities from pre-entry level to entry level 3, and in a few cases level 1. The courses offered in most colleges provide appropriate pathways that support the progression of learners well within the ILS learning area and onto level 1 mainstream courses.
- 48 Most colleges use the information well that they have gathered about the learner to place the learner on an appropriate programme of learning. This ensures that most learners complete their courses successfully and that many learners progress onto a further course at either the same or at a higher level.
- 49 The majority of colleges plan particularly well to ensure the progression of learners on entry level 3 courses to relevant vocational courses within the mainstream provision of the college. As a result, across Wales, just over 20% of learners progressed successfully from ILS learning areas to mainstream level 1 provision in 2015-2016.
- 50 The majority of colleges have made recent changes to their provision to improve the progression and retention of learners on ILS courses. In nearly all cases, these changes have resulted in the inclusion of additional courses to support further progression within the ILS learning area, or to act as a bridge to mainstream courses. In a few cases, this reflects the changing needs of the learner cohort and is the result of effective collaboration and planning with local schools and Careers Wales advisers.
- 51 Most colleges ensure that programmes of learning support learners' understanding of society and the community they live in by including topics such as how to keep safe, careers advice, and accessing leisure. In many colleges, programmes of learning provide learners of all abilities with many opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills, in addition to learning about topics relevant to the main qualification aim. In the majority of colleges, teachers select units carefully to cover a varied range of topics for learners. However, for many learners on ILS courses, the content of qualifications means that learning experiences are insufficiently challenging. Activities are too classroom-based and learners have limited opportunities to apply their understanding of what they have learned in different contexts.

Case study 4: How the curriculum supports the development of learners' skills at Coleg Cambria

At Coleg Cambria, the ILS department undertook a thorough review of its provision in December 2015. As a result of this, the college has developed personalised learning programmes that link more closely to initial assessment processes and support learners' individual needs and aspirations more effectively.

Central to this has been the development of a skills-based curriculum that focuses on the development of learners' life skills, work skills, personal skills, learning skills and health and wellbeing. Each learning programme ensures that activities address learners' individual needs and abilities as identified during the college's extended period of initial assessment. In terms of life skills, for example, the focus can be on developing basic cooking skills or supporting learners to use a vacuum cleaner to clean their bedroom. Activities are reviewed regularly with the tutor to ensure that learners are making progress and continue to engage in increasingly challenging skills and tasks.

The college has also implemented a broader range of opportunities to develop learners' work skills. Learners can now participate in vocational tasters and realistic working environments at college, as well as undertaking voluntary work and employment placements outside college.

Although the college has only implemented these changes fully this academic year, it has already begun to see improvements in provision and in learner engagement. Tutors demonstrate greater understanding of learners' personal and social skills needs, and individual learning plans show that learning is personalised and that progress in learning can be closely tracked.

The college has noted improvements in the participation and engagement of learners as they respond to challenges that are differentiated specifically for their individual needs and interests. Learner motivation has improved as the detailed tracking system within the individual learning plan provides recognition of their progress and the achievement of new skills.

- 52 Most colleges offer learners appropriate opportunities to access enrichment activities as part of their learning programme. The majority provide for this well within the timetable. A few colleges have a well-co-ordinated approach that includes valuable opportunities for fundraising and community engagement. However, many colleges do not evaluate the impact of these activities sufficiently or consider them a fully integrated element of the learning programme.
- 53 A few colleges have reviewed their curriculum to offer learners more practical approaches to learning and skills development. However, in too many ILS learning areas, the curriculum offer is based on established practice and the available resources rather than the needs and abilities of the learners.

- 54 In many colleges, programmes of learning do not take enough account of learners' desired destinations. In particular, programmes of learning for learners with the highest level of need are not sufficiently relevant to their needs or likely destinations. For many learners, the provision for developing learners' independence, employability and life skills is not individualised sufficiently. As a result, in many cases, programmes of learning fail to prepare learners effectively for the challenges they will face in their future lives.
- 55 Most colleges make appropriate provision for learners to develop their knowledge and understanding of Welsh culture. The majority of colleges have arrangements for Welsh-speaking staff to support learners, whose first and home language is Welsh. However, the provision for fully Welsh-medium courses is limited and across Wales only a very few learners complete their ILS programmes in Welsh.

Qualifications and certificates of learning

Case study 5: Flexible curriculum planning creates purposeful learning experiences for ILS learners at Pembrokeshire College

In 2015, following a qualification review for its ILS courses, the college decided to reduce the number of credits that learners needed to achieve on each course. This focus has allowed teachers to plan a more flexible curriculum that enables extended learning and the acquisition of practical skills.

Creative timetabling includes relevant vocational options and enables learners to experience a rich and varied curriculum. Vocational options available to learners include brickwork, carpentry, animal care, horticulture, catering, hairdressing and beauty, travel and tourism, art and sport. These vocational subjects are delivered by mainstream tutors, using their expertise and specialist vocational facilities. This has proved very effective in supporting the transition process when progressing to higher level courses.

In addition, all programmes of study focus on developing learners' practical living skills. The ILS department includes a kitchen area containing adaptive equipment, which allows all learners to access the catering curriculum. A washing machine, dishwasher, irons and ironing boards enable the learners to learn important home-making skills. Sewing machines have been purchased for learners to practise making and repairing garments and home items. Learners are on rotas to make the tea and coffee for their group tutorial session.

The diverse range of learners' progression routes reflects the breadth of the curriculum offered in the college. In 2015-2016, nearly all learners progressed to traineeships in a diverse range of vocational areas within the college. Learners' experience of vocational areas helps to build their skills and inform decisions about future career routes that are appropriate to their needs and abilities.

- 56 In most FE colleges, learners have suitable opportunities to take a range of qualifications, certificates and units of credit relevant to their course. Most often, colleges ensure that learners take qualifications at a level that is generally well matched to their abilities. This ensures that qualifications recognise learners' achievements appropriately in their programmes of study and promote progression within the ILS learning area or to mainstream programmes in the college.
- 57 Most colleges make suitable provision for learners on higher level ILS courses to achieve additional qualifications in essential skills. This supports the development of these learners' literacy and numeracy skills and enables them to progress to higher level programmes within the college.
- 58 Most learners achieve the qualifications or relevant units of credit they are entered for. A few learners who do not achieve full qualifications achieve units of credit. In most cases, these are learners who have been unable to complete their main qualification because of health or personal issues.
- 59 Most learners value the qualifications they achieve because they support their progression within the FE college. In a few cases, the units covered within qualifications address topics that are relevant to learners' future lives. However, in many cases, these units do not address learners' individual needs and abilities, or reflect learners' likely destinations well enough. Frequently, activities are based too much on worksheets and do not develop or accredit practical skills that will be of use in learners' future lives.
- 60 In a few cases, the number of units that colleges include within qualifications does not allow learners to consolidate their learning through repetition or applying skills in different contexts. The emphasis on qualifications as a measure of progress is particularly unhelpful for learners with higher levels of need who do not have the literacy or numeracy skills to progress onto mainstream programmes of learning.
- 61 Overall, there is too much emphasis on qualifications as a measure of achievement or progress when this is not relevant to learners' needs, abilities or future destinations. In a few colleges, teachers ensure that there is a balance between the number of units learners complete and the skills they will need in their future lives. These colleges adopt a more flexible approach to qualifications to match them better to learners' individual needs and aspirations and ensure that qualifications are used effectively to support learning.

Literacy and numeracy skills

- 62 Nearly all FE colleges have a clear focus on developing learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Most ILS programmes of learning place a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy within schemes of work and lesson planning. This helps to ensure that the provision for literacy and numeracy supports progression routes within the college.
- 63 Many learners on entry level 3 courses have appropriate opportunities to take relevant qualifications in literacy and numeracy in addition to their main qualification. A few learners at this level access mainstream GCSE resit classes with support from ILS staff. These arrangements support learners' ability to progress successfully onto mainstream courses.

- 64 For many learners at entry levels 1 or 2, relevant units within the main qualification ensure that learners have regular opportunities to practise and develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Such units include important topics such as money management, using public transport and reading recipes. Practical activities such as cooking and horticulture provide many opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills within the context of the activity. However, too many activities at this level are based on worksheets and do not allow learners to consolidate their skills through repetition and application in different contexts.
- 65 Many colleges make good use of enterprise activities and project work to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills. At Gower College, for example, pre-entry and entry level 1 learners develop these skills in a practical context through taking part in a project supplying vegetables to staff. These learners visit suppliers, select produce and work successfully as a team to make up vegetable bags for staff. However, in many cases, the focus of such activities is not linked well enough to individual starting points or personal targets. In most cases, colleges do not track well enough the progress learners make in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills through these important activities.
- 66 Nearly all colleges use the results of initial assessments in literacy and numeracy to confirm that learners are placed on courses at the appropriate level. For many learners on entry level 3 courses, these assessments help to identify relevant areas of skills development. However, baseline assessments do not capture the strengths and areas for development for many less able learners well enough. Many colleges do not reassess learners' progress regularly against their starting points. As a result, many colleges are unable to evaluate how well learners develop their literacy and numeracy skills during their time at the college.
- 67 Many colleges rely on learners' achievement of qualifications in literacy and numeracy to demonstrate the progress they have made in these skills. However, most colleges do not have robust systems in place to track learners' progress in literacy and numeracy where this is taught in lessons across the curriculum. In many cases, targets for literacy and numeracy on ILPs are not specific enough. As a result, most colleges are not able to track the small steps of progress that learners make in developing these skills. This is particularly the case for learners who are not likely to progress onto mainstream further education.
- 68 Few colleges focus sufficiently on developing learners' communication skills, even when this has been identified as a specific learning difficulty. Many targets for communication are too broad and do not address the nature of the learning difficulty. In many cases, targets for literacy focus exclusively on reading and writing. For many less able learners, this results in repetitive low level activities that are of questionable value.
- 69 FE colleges do not have sufficient in-house expertise to assess learners' communication needs, and most struggle to access specialist services in this respect. Most staff do not have the appropriate expertise to ensure that learners are supported appropriately through all means to develop their communication skills while at college. As a result, the use of communication strategies to address learners' individual communication needs within colleges is underdeveloped.

Life and independence skills

- 70 Many FE colleges do not focus sufficiently well on developing learners' life and independence skills. Most colleges gather useful information about learners' skills and priorities for development in this area before they join the college. In most cases, they use this information well to ensure that learners are placed on programmes at an appropriate level. However, many colleges do not use this information well enough to plan for the development of learners' skills in line with their long-term destinations.
- 71 At Weston House, learners benefit from the increased opportunities provided by the 24-hour curriculum. Learners set themselves targets for key areas of social and independence skills, which are then shared with staff working with the learners in the education setting. Targets are reviewed monthly and contribute to overall assessments of learners' progress.
- 72 Most ILS courses include units that develop skills in relevant areas such as cooking, managing budgets or independent travel. In a minority of lessons, these activities provide valuable opportunities for learners to develop their practical skills. However, even when independence is specifically referred to in the title of the qualification or unit, many activities do not provide learners with sufficient opportunities to acquire practical skills or apply these in realistic contexts.
- 73 In around half of colleges, the number of units included within the qualification restricts opportunities for learners to consolidate their learning. Too often, the teaching of skills for independence is driven by the requirements of the qualification and does not allow learners sufficient opportunities to practise and consolidate these skills. In these cases, many classroom activities involve filling out worksheets and carrying out low level listening and writing tasks.
- 74 Most colleges ensure that programmes of learning include suitable activities that provide valuable opportunities for learners to develop their social skills. At Coleg Gwent, learners benefit from a wide range of volunteering and charitable projects that promote learners' engagement in the community. However, overall, colleges do not track learners' achievements in this area well enough or exploit sufficiently the opportunities such activities present to reinforce key skills and understanding.
- 75 A few colleges have responded well to shortcomings identified in inspection reports of ILS learning areas, and have begun to emphasise the teaching of relevant skills for independence as an integral part of their ILS programmes of learning. At Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, for example, initial assessments focus on skills for independent living, as well as employment, community inclusion and health and wellbeing. All learners are set targets across each of these areas to ensure that they develop these skills across all areas of the curriculum. A few colleges have reduced the number of units included within qualifications to ensure that these are relevant and allow learners sufficient opportunities for repetition and consolidation of learning.
- 76 Most colleges do not have robust mechanisms in place to evaluate the progress learners make in developing their life and independence skills over time. While there is clear anecdotal evidence of individual learners making good progress in developing these skills, most colleges are not able to evaluate the quality and impact of this important area of their work reliably.

Work experience

- 77 The provision to develop learners' experience of work and work-related education varies significantly across FE colleges.
- 78 Most colleges have suitable arrangements in place to ensure that learners on entry level 3 or level 1 vocational courses participate in relevant work experience when this is a requirement of the course. In many cases, work placements relate closely to the vocational area that learners plan on attending in the future. This is very effective in supporting their progression onto higher level courses within the college.
- 79 Around half of colleges plan very effectively to provide learners with opportunities to participate in work experience or work-related education that is tailored well to their abilities. These colleges have developed strong links with a range of employers in their local community. In these cases, the learning area benefits from the input of Careers Wales advisers and arrangements within the college to support ILS staff to find placements for the full range of learners. In many of these colleges, staff include relevant targets for work experience within learners' ILPs, and evaluate well the impact of work experience in the context of the learners' overall progress.
- 80 In these same colleges, staff have made appropriate alternative provision for learners who cannot access external work experience to develop an experience of work within the college. They exploit the opportunities provided by the wider college for internal work placements very well. A minority of colleges have developed regular opportunities for learners to experience teamwork and work towards their goals through regular and well-planned volunteering programmes in the community.
- 81 In around half of colleges, however, opportunities for work experience for learners who are not on vocational courses are limited, particularly for lower ability learners. In these colleges, there is little provision to develop employability skills through internal placements or work-related activities within the college. Staff do not evaluate the provision for work experience other than through the achievement of main qualifications. Overall, these colleges lack a clear rationale for developing learners' work-related skills when this is not a requirement of the qualification.
- 82 Nearly all colleges include units in learners' main qualifications that relate to the world of work. These include topics such as applying for a job, health and safety at work and working with others. However, often the work required to complete the unit is theoretical and based on worksheets, and does not develop learners' practical skills well enough. In many cases, the content of the work does not link sufficiently to individual learners' aspirations or likely destinations.

Case study 6: Effective partnership working at Cardiff and Vale College provides opportunities for supported internships for ILS learners.

Cardiff and Vale College has systematically reviewed its ILS provision to improve progression routes and outcomes for learners following its Estyn inspection in March 2015. As a result, all learners now follow one of four progression pathways, which build on learners' social and independence skills, and reflect more closely their long-term aims.

A key aim of the college's review was to improve the progression rates into work for ILS learners and to improve the quality of support available for learners in the work setting. To this end, the college developed a programme of supported internships in conjunction with Cardiff University, Elite supported employment agency and Learning Disability Wales. The partnership is supported by Engage to Change funding and follows the model established by Project Search in the USA.

The scheme was launched in September 2016, with 11 learners due to complete three 10-week placements at different departments within the university over the course of the year. The range of internships includes administration assistant, chemistry lab technician, and coffee shop assistant. An instructor and job coach provided by the college and ELITE supported employment agency provide additional support for the learners in the workplace.

The interns arrive at 9.00 a.m. each day and participate in an hour of vocational learning, which they then apply to the real work environment. At the end of the day, the interns review their day and complete a daily log to record their key learning. At the same time as they complete their internship, the interns work towards a vocational qualification in employability skills.

The immersive approach to learning provided by this model results in many benefits for learners. The interns acquire vocational skills at first-hand in real life work contexts, and consolidate their learning through reflection and discussion as they complete their qualifications. The instructor and job coach support the learner both in their job role and in completing their qualification.

The aim of the project is to increase the progression of learners into paid employment at the end of the programme. As this is the first year of the project, there is no data relating to the Cardiff and Vale college learners. However, early indications show that learners have made a very successful transition to the programme as a result of the different approach to learning.

Case study 7: How work experience leads to positive outcomes for ILS learners at Pembrokeshire College

In 2015-2016, all ILS learners at Pembrokeshire College took part in short work experience placements over one or four weeks. Following the success of this, staff were keen to explore how extending the duration of placements would support learners' progress and development.

All ILS courses now include external work placements that take place for a half or whole day throughout the year. The college has a carefully structured approach to planning learners' placements. During the autumn term, work placements take part on a whole group basis to allow the learners to grow in confidence and manage the change to different work settings. During the spring and summer terms, learners have a choice of work settings so that they can be aligned to their individual career pathways.

The college works with a range of local employers to provide a varied work experience programme. The college offers a choice of outdoor and indoor work placements, including dog walking, woodland management, cabinet making and working in a warehouse. In addition, the college continues to exploit opportunities for internal work placements, with learners accessing placements in the college's ICT and estates department and bookshop.

The work experience programme has led to an increase in learners' personal confidence and their ability to focus and follow instructions. Learners have an increased awareness and understanding of the world of work. Work placements have raised learners' expectations about their future progression options as they benefit from age appropriate expectations and responsibilities in realistic work settings.

- 83 Nearly all colleges have robust arrangements in place to carry out risk assessments for work experience placements. Where successful work experience programmes are in place, risk assessments include information that is specific to the individual and reflect accurately their abilities and needs. College staff provide appropriate levels of support for individual learners and visit providers regularly to check on the progress they are making.

Transition out of college

- 84 Most FE colleges ensure that learners receive regular advice and guidance about their futures. In most colleges, careers advice is integrated well into the tutorial programme and included within specific units within the main qualification. Careers Wales advisers attend regularly to provide advice for learners on an individual basis or to meet with groups of learners. Around half of colleges organise valuable transition events, which are well attended by providers and parents and carers. However, in a few cases, these events are held too close to the end of the course and learners and their families are not well placed to make best use of this information.

- 85 Overall, the advice that FE colleges provide is most relevant for those learners who are capable of progressing on to mainstream programmes at level 1 or on to traineeships within the college. For learners not wishing or unable to progress onto higher level courses, choices are limited by what is available locally in terms of employment options, voluntary work or day service provision.

Case study 8: How partnership working with Careers Wales supports ILS learners at Coleg Ceredigion

In 2014, Coleg Ceredigion worked with Careers Wales to develop a six stage progression model for all learners attending the college. The model starts in Year 9 of school and continues throughout the learners' time in college. The aim is to ensure that learners have a seamless transition into college, and that they are supported throughout their time in college until they transition out of college or until they reach 25 years of age.

The college's work with the Careers Wales specialist adviser is integral to the success of this process. Her involvement with the learner starts in Year 9 as she attends the school transition planning meeting for learners with a statement of SEN or school action plus resource agreement (SAPRA) and all annual reviews while the learner remains in school. Learners have a gradual induction into the college and, when it is decided that the learner wishes to attend the college, the college holds a planning meeting with the learner, parents and carers and all relevant agencies.

The Careers Wales adviser retains close involvement with all learners during their time at college, attending regular meetings to review learner aspirations and ensure that work placements are chosen that suit their particular interests. During these reviews, learner progress and future destinations are discussed. Learners wishing to enter employment are referred to specialist support agencies, such as the Shaw Trust, and receive advice from disability learning advisers in the job centre. Learners wishing to progress onto further education have a support interview with the college learning adviser. The Careers Wales adviser continues to work with all learners who remain in education or are seeking employment until the age of 25.

The close working relationship with Careers Wales and other stakeholders ensures that all learners have agreed destinations before they leave college. This helps to ensure a learner retention, attainment and successful completion rate of 100%. All learners either progress onto further courses (full or part-time), supported or unsupported employment, or voluntary work in the community.

The college continues to make new partnerships to ensure that these successful progression rates can continue and has recently become involved in the Careers Wales Engage for Change project.

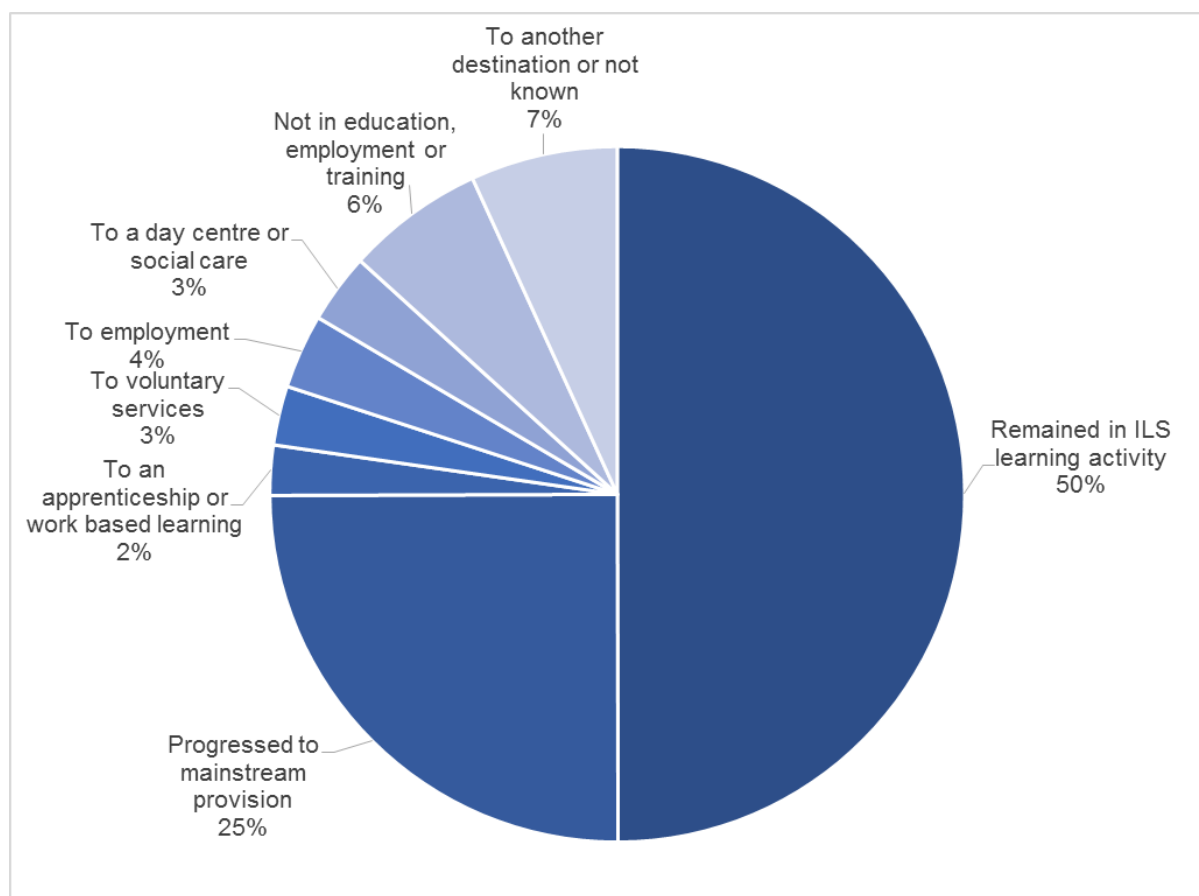
- 86 Nearly all colleges see the role of Careers Wales as very significant in providing support and guidance to learners regarding transition out of college. Most value the partnership working provided by Careers Wales, employers, third sector organisations and social services as many colleges lack detailed knowledge of alternative progression routes.
- 87 However, the support that individual learners receive in planning their transition from the college varies considerably according to whether or not they have a LSP in place, the range and quality of provision available locally, and the available progression routes within the college.
- 88 Most colleges are unable to evaluate how many learners achieve the destination of their choice when they leave the college. Overall, many colleges do not place sufficient emphasis on learners' likely destinations. Too few colleges identify specific destinations for learners at the start of their course. As a result, in many cases, learners' transition out of the college is likely to be determined by what is available locally, rather than as an outcome of co-ordinated planning towards a clear set of goals.

Destinations

- 89 All FE colleges submit information to the Welsh Government on the destinations of learners on full time ILS programmes via the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR). The LLWR collates information on learners' destinations after they leave the learning programme or when the learner leaves prior to completion, according to the following categories:
- Continuing existing programme of learning
 - Seeking work/unemployed
 - Voluntary work
 - Self-employed (including setting up own business)
 - Progressed to learning with a higher level learning aim (other than higher education) at the same provider or another provider
 - Further education at the same level or lower level, at the same provider or another provider
 - Progressed to higher education (QCF Level 4 or equivalent, or higher), at the same provider or another provider
 - Other (see notes)
 - Employed (full-time)
 - Employed (part-time or short-term)
 - Not applicable (part-time learner)
 - Not known
- 90 In many cases, these categories do not reflect sufficiently well the full range of potential destinations for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities, particularly for learners with more complex needs. As a result, colleges vary in the range and quality of data they collect on learners' destinations following the completion of their programmes of learning. Only a few have developed their own data in addition to the information that they provide for the Welsh Government to capture the destinations for learners on ILS programmes. Only a few use this information sufficiently well to evaluate their provision.

- 91 From the data supplied to Estyn by colleges in the course of this review (see Figure 1), around half of learners completing their ILS courses in 2015-2016 progressed onto courses within the ILS learning area at the same or at a higher level. For many learners this was a course at the same level rather than at a higher level. However, this may still represent progress, depending on the needs and abilities of the learners and the aims of the course, as it offers learners the opportunity to consolidate skills and knowledge.

Figure 1: Destinations of leavers of learners studying independent living skills from further education colleges in Wales, 2015-2016



Source: Unpublished, unverified data provided by each FE college

- 92 Across all FE colleges, a few learners from ILS courses progressed onto higher level courses within the mainstream provision of the college. In nearly all cases, learners progressed onto vocational courses at level 1. However, most colleges do not track the progress of these learners once they have left the ILS learning area.
- 93 Of those learners who completed their ILS courses in 2015-2016, a very few learners entered employment. This is the same proportion who were not in employment, education or training on completing their course. Very few learners accessed voluntary services or local authority day centre provision, or progressed onto traineeships with work-based learning providers.

- 94 The proportion of learners accessing apprenticeships, employment, voluntary services, employment or day service provision varies significantly between FE colleges. For example, 17% of learners at one college found employment on completing their ILS programmes. This is more than double the average for leavers from all colleges. Similarly, leavers from ILS programmes at three FE colleges accounted for almost 85% of learners accessing local day service provision on leaving the college. This reflects variations in local provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities, as well as the way in which colleges have configured partnerships locally to secure reliable progression routes for their learners.
- 95 Overall, the opportunities for progression from FE colleges when learners have completed their ILS courses vary significantly across local authorities. Many colleges expressed their frustration at the lack of relevant local provision for learners on completing their courses. In particular, there is a lack of suitable employment opportunities, including supported employment, to allow learners to continue to develop and apply skills they have learned in college.
- 96 In most colleges, staff were unable to evaluate how well leavers' actual destinations matched their aspirations when they entered the college. This is partly because most learners on ILS programmes do not have identified destination goals when they start their course. For most learners, the target destination remains a qualification outcome. Only a few colleges have developed systems to set realistic and challenging long-term goals for learners that include the wider skills they will need in their future lives and to ensure that their provision supports this.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

This report uses evidence from visits to 11 of the 12 independent living skills learning areas in FE education colleges in Wales:

- Bridgend College (including Weston House)
- Cardiff and Vale College
- Coleg Cambria
- Coleg Ceredigion
- Coleg Gwent
- Coleg Sir Gar
- Coleg y Cymoedd
- Gower College
- Grŵp Llandrillo Menai
- NPTC Group of Colleges
- Pembrokeshire College

Information about the ILS provision at The College Merthyr Tydfil was gathered during the core inspection of the college in November 2016.

During visits to the colleges, inspectors met with the head of the learning area, senior managers, staff and learners. They scrutinised documentation and data and examined records of learner progress and progression.

Evidence was also gathered through scrutiny of relevant documentation and information from the recent inspection of independent living skills learning areas of FE colleges.

Appendix 2: ILS provision in Wales

Bridgend College

The ILS learning area at Bridgend College provides courses from pre-entry to level 1 to meet the needs of learners with a wide range of learning needs. These include learners who have ASD, learning difficulties, physical disabilities and sensory impairments. In 2016-2017, 56 learners aged between 16 and 23 enrolled at the college.

Bridgend College is the only FE college in Wales to offer specialist residential provision. Weston House is a registered care home for learners with learning difficulties, physical and sensory disabilities and ASD. It is situated on the Bridgend College site and residents attend courses within Bridgend College. The access to specialist support services offered by Weston House, including communication support, physiotherapy, rebound and hydrotherapy, ensures that learners with a range of complex conditions are supported to access the ILS and mainstream courses in the college.

The ILS learning area was inspected in March 2016 as part of the core inspection of Bridgend College.

Cardiff and Vale College

The ILS department at Cardiff and Vale College provides education for learners with a wide range of learning needs. These include learners with ASD, speech and language difficulties and learners with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Learners' ages range from 16-22. Learners come to the college from a range of providers including special schools, specialist resource bases and mainstream schools.

Learners are assessed on transition into the college and study in one of four main learning areas: work skills, life skills, vocational access and skills for progression in college. Learners are placed on an appropriate pathway according to their level of social skills, independence skills, and competence in communication and application of number. Nearly all learners work towards qualifications at entry levels 1 to 3.

The ILS learning area was inspected in March 2015 as part of the core inspection of Cardiff and Vale College.

Coleg Cambria

The ILS provision at Coleg Cambria is based on two sites, at Northop and Yale. In 2016-2017, 101 students enrolled on ILS courses at the college. The Northop campus provides full-time life skills and vocational courses from pre-entry to entry 2. The college's mainstream offer starts at entry 3, and therefore a number of additional learners with moderate learning difficulties are enrolled directly onto mainstream programmes outside the ILS area. Learners follow individual programmes that aim to enable them to achieve their full potential in independent living or employment (paid, voluntary or supported).

Learners have a variety of learning needs including moderate and severe learning disabilities and ASD. Learners at Coleg Cambria have access to a wide range of vocational areas, according to their needs and aspirations. These include the floristry facility, ornamental gardens, horticulture workshops, animal care and equine facilities.

The college draws from four specialist schools and 12 mainstream schools.

The ILS learning area was inspected in November 2015 as part of the core inspection of Coleg Cambria.

Coleg Ceredigion

ILS provision at Coleg Ceredigion is based at the Aberystwyth campus. The college delivers a vocational access course which leads to qualifications in personal and social development; skills for independence and work; vocational studies; communication, application of number and digital literacy essential skills. The college aims to enable learners to acquire skills they need for life, for progression onto level 1 courses within the mainstream of the college or onto volunteering or supported and unsupported employment.

In 2016-2017, 13 learners aged between 18 and 23 enrolled on ILS courses at the college. The college has developed highly effective relationships with Careers Wales staff who work with the individual learners. This allows the college to anticipate and plan very well for learners' future needs and ensures that the college's close involvement with the learners, their parents and other professionals continues throughout their learner journey.

Coleg Gwent

The ILS learning area at Coleg Gwent provides courses across four campuses at Crosskeys, the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone, Newport and Pontypool. The college provides courses in independent living skills, independence and work, employability and vocational studies from pre-entry to entry level 3. All courses are one year long and are designed to promote progression within the ILS learning area or onto mainstream courses in the college.

The learning area aims to enable learners to manage their own money, cook independently, plan a career and live an independent life in the community, as well as increasing learners' self-esteem and confidence.

In 2016-2017, the college enrolled 281 learners aged between 16 and 27 onto its independent living skills courses from 40 different schools.

Coleg Sir Gar

The ILS provision at Coleg Sir Gar is based primarily on one campus in Ammanford where there are currently 74 learners aged between 16 and 23 studying a range of courses. Learners come from 13 schools across Carmarthenshire and from different institutions beyond the county. Around three quarters of ILS learners had Learning and Skills Plans when they joined the college in 2016-2017.

Learners have a wide variety of learning difficulties and disabilities including ASD, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, physical and sensory impairments, general, moderate or severe learning difficulties, speech and language difficulties, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

The college has an inclusive ethos and aims to integrate the learners as much as possible into campus life. In this context, the college works hard to develop the learners' social, independent living and employment skills as well as the skills they need to help them enjoy hobbies and leisure.

Many of the ILS learners speak Welsh as a second language. However, for those who speak Welsh as their first language, or who have attended Welsh medium schools, some lessons are delivered bilingually in Welsh. Welsh speaking lecturers and support staff have the ability to fluctuate between languages, ensuring that all learners are able to take part and extend their Welsh vocabulary and understanding.

Coleg y Cymoedd

The foundation learning area at Coleg y Cymoedd is based across its four campuses at Aberdare, Nantgarw, Rhondda and Ystrad Mynach.

The learning area offers a range of courses from entry levels 1 to 3 in personal progress, living skills, skills for independence and vocational studies. This includes courses at entry level 3 in a wide range of vocational areas including hair and beauty, construction, ICT and business, creative arts and media, health and social care and hospitality and catering. The provision aims to develop learners' independence, social skills and progression into further education or employment.

In 2016-2017, the college enrolled 344 learners onto its foundation learning courses from 25 schools. Learners experience a range of learning difficulties and disabilities, including ASD, general learning difficulties and dyslexia.

Gower College

The ILS learning area at Gower College is based at the Tycoch campus. The college currently offers 14 full-time courses ranging from pre-entry to entry 3 to learners with a range of physical and learning difficulties, including learners with sensory impairments, Down's syndrome, speech and language difficulties and ASD. In 2016-2017, the college enrolled 144 learners from 23 schools and other providers.

Learners study for qualifications at the appropriate level, with units selected carefully to provide for the development of key social and independence skills, while including literacy and numeracy at each opportunity.

Each course aims to provide practical, experiential opportunities that lead to progression onto three clear pathways, including independence and social living, work, or education at a higher level.

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai offers a range of courses across its campuses at Dolgellau, Glynllifon, Llangefni, Rhos-on-Sea and Rhyl. The ILS learning area caters for learners with mild to moderate learning disabilities, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The college offers a range of courses from pre-entry to level 3 in areas including personal progress, life and living skills, skills for work and life, employability and vocational learning. The college has matched its provision to four distinct pathways that offer clear progression routes for learners and take good account of learners' likely long-term destinations. They include:

- Developing independence
- Life & Work Skills
- Foundation
- Prevocational

All provision at Dolgellau, Glynllifon and Llangefni is either Welsh medium or bilingual. In 2016-2017, the independent living skills provision enrolled 156 full-time learners studying across Grŵp Llandrillo Menai.

NPTC Group of Colleges

At NPTC, the ILS learning area sits within the school of Foundation, Adult and Community Learning. The school caters for learners with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities, including ASD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, sensory and physical impairment, mild to severe learning difficulties and attachment disorders. The college also works with learners who need to acquire the necessary social and emotional skills to be accepted in the community and the world of work. In 2016-2017, the college enrolled 190 learners aged between 16 and 23.

The school delivers full-time courses from pre-entry through to level 1. It aims to give learners the skills and confidence they need to move onto the next stage of their lives, whether they gain employment, move towards independent living or progress onto further study. The courses provide opportunities for learners to develop skills in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy along with the core skills needed for employment and training.

The college's multi-site provision in Afan, the Brecon Beacons, Neath and Newtown gives learners the opportunity to access a wide variety of vocational options on different campuses. Facilities include restaurants, gardens, vehicle workshops, theatre and media technology studios and a farm.

Pembrokeshire College

The provision for ILS at Pembrokeshire College offers four courses from entry level 1 to level 1. Learners have access to a broad range of vocational options, including catering, animal care, retail and tourism, ICT, horticulture, brickwork, carpentry, sport,

and arts and craft. All courses provide a focus on literacy and numeracy, while developing learners' knowledge of sustainable issues, citizenship, bilingualism, enterprise and Welsh culture. All courses aim to prepare learners for further study, progression to employment and independent living.

In 2016-2017, the college enrolled 40 learners on courses that match their stage of development and individual learning needs. All programmes are timetabled over four days. Most learners have multiple learning difficulties. Learners experience a range of disabilities, including ADHD, physical or visual impairments, moderate to severe learning difficulties and ASD.

The College Merthyr Tydfil

The ILS learning area at The College Merthyr Tydfil provides courses from pre-entry to level 1 to meet the needs of learners with a wide range of learning difficulties. These include learners with Down's syndrome, physical and sensory disabilities and ASD.

Learners follow courses in personal progress, life skills and employability at a level appropriate to their ability. The college aims to promote the development of social and life skills through all courses, as well as to provide opportunities for learners to work on their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. The department currently has 56 full-time learners.

The ILS learning area was inspected in November 2016 as part of the core inspection of The College Merthyr Tydfil.

Glossary

ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
ASD	Autistic spectrum disorder
CAMHS	Child and adolescent mental health services
FE	Further education
ILP	Individual learning plan or programme. The ILP is a personalised plan that records progress against clear learning goals and targets during the learner's time at the college.
ILS	Independent living skills
Learning area	The department within the further education college where specific programmes of learning take place
LLWR	Lifelong Learning Wales Record
LSP	Learning and Skills Plan
Programme of learning	The full range of experiences for which learners are funded at college, including qualifications, work experience and enrichment
SAPRA	School Action Plus Resource Agreement
SEN	Special educational needs

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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