
Learner progress and destinations in independent specialist colleges

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Contents	Page
Introduction	1
Background	1
Main findings	3
Recommendations	5
How well do colleges measure learner progress?	6
Pre-entry assessment and information from previous learning providers	6
Range, quality and use of data to measure progress	9
How well do colleges prepare learners for transition?	12
Transition into college	12
Programme planning	13
Qualifications and certificates of learning	14
Literacy and numeracy skills	15
Life and independence skills	15
Work experience	16
Transition out of college	17
Destinations	19
Appendix 1: Evidence base	21
Appendix 2: Independent specialist colleges in Wales	22
Glossary/references	25
The remit author and survey team	25

Introduction

This report is published in response to a request for advice about the arrangements in independent specialist colleges for measuring learner progress and the extent to which learners are prepared for transition to further education or employment. The request is from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter to Estyn 2015-2016.

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

This report draws on evidence noted in appendix 1.

Background

Independent specialist colleges (ISCs) provide education for learners from 16 years of age who have a range of learning difficulties and disabilities. Four of the six independent specialist colleges in Wales offer residential care alongside their education provision.

Currently, learners' placements at independent specialist colleges are funded directly by the Welsh Government following an application from Careers Wales. Careers Wales undertake an assessment under section 140 of the Learning and Skills Act (2000). This assessment identifies both the learners' needs and suitable provision to meet those needs. For learners with statements of special educational needs (SEN), these assessments are carried out in their final year of school when they intend to go on to further education (FE), work-based learning or higher education. Where these assessments conclude that the only suitable provision available is an ISC then a funding application is made to the Welsh Government.

There is no formal process of referral to a particular ISC. Learners and their families are usually pointed towards an ISC by individual teachers, headteachers, Careers Wales advisers and social workers. In most cases, this happens through the formal annual statement review process and the section 140 assessment. However, in practice, most families who are successful in their application for a placement at an ISC have identified this as the preferred pathway for their child many years earlier and will have worked with their social worker over a period of time to achieve this end. Most of the parents visit the ISC before Careers Wales make a formal application for funding to the Welsh Government.

The Welsh Government Draft Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill (2015) sets out proposals for a new legislative system, which will replace existing legislation surrounding SEN and the assessment of children and young people with learning difficulties aged between 0 and 25. Proposals include giving

local authorities, rather than the Welsh Government, the responsibility for securing specialist FE provision where it is necessary to meet the individual learning needs of the young person.

Estyn inspection reports, and evidence from annual monitoring visits, show variable practice in the way in which ISCs record, monitor and track learner progress. However, recent reports show an improving trend over the last few years. In addition, the extent to which learners are prepared for transition to further education or employment also varies considerably.

Main findings

- 1 There are six independent specialist colleges (ISCs) in Wales that provide education for learners from 16 years of age who have a range of learning difficulties and disabilities. Learners' educational placements at ISCs are funded directly by the Welsh Government.
- 2 In four of the six ISCs, pre-entry assessment of learners is well defined with clear aims and objectives. The assessments are purposeful with a strong focus on making sure that the provision will be the best placement for the learner. Four ISCs clearly list the information they require in advance of the learner's placement. They use this information well to make sure that education and care facilities are appropriate and to help the learner to settle quickly. There is a strong emphasis on obtaining a thorough understanding of any barriers to learning and also the areas of learning that learners particularly enjoy. However, too often, ISCs do not receive the full range of information they need before the learner starts.
- 3 Four of the ISCs encourage learners to visit the ISC in advance of their placement as part of their pre-entry assessment and use the visits to verify the information they have previously gathered. In one ISC, learners undertake a three-day visit while staying at the residential accommodation. This visit fulfils valuable purposes for the provider and the learner is informally assessed by education and residential staff.
- 4 Most ISCs use a wide range of data to measure learner progress. They use pre-entry and baseline assessments of skills from which to measure progress and record these well using commercial data packages. Nearly all ISCs use these pre-entry and skills baseline assessments to set targets on individual learning plans (ILPs). However, a majority of ILPs, across nearly all providers, do not have targets for small steps of learning or a clear focus on the learner's desired destination. Staff in two ISCs use learners' ILPs well to inform their planning and delivery of lessons.
- 5 Four ISCs are making good progress in expanding their use of data. Their data now goes beyond achievement of qualifications and units of credit to include broader skills and learner progress against ILP targets. They supplement the formal assessments with teachers' and care managers' knowledge and expertise. For example, they establish how well a learner can cope with personal hygiene or choose what to wear to suit the weather. However, many ISCs do not make sufficient use of staff expertise and specialists to establish learners' skills baseline starting points in areas such as communication and behaviour.
- 6 The colleges that set robust learner targets also have better data on learner progress. Four ISCs review learner progress against ILP targets at least weekly. However, in two ISCs reviews are not robust enough and learner progress is difficult to identify or measure. These ISCs are also unable to collate enough information to meet Welsh Government requirements.
- 7 One of the most important methods ISCs use for measuring learner progress and capturing data is individual learning plans (ILPs). The most effective ILPs:
 - set a clear direction for the learner that helps them to move towards their future aspirations
 - include short-term, medium-term and long-term targets

- include the learner's preferred or likely destination
 - plan short steps of learning for the learner to achieve a positive outcome
 - take good account of the full range of skills the learner needs to develop
- 8 A majority of the ISCs offer a broad range of learning programmes including agriculture, horticulture, wood crafts and catering. Most ISCs plan programmes of learning that are tailored to meet the needs of individual learners. Most of these programmes contain a good balance between work and leisure activities and many include appropriate opportunities for physical exercise. Nearly all ISCs review their learning programmes termly to make sure that they remain relevant to the learner. However, learning programmes do not take enough account of learners' desired destinations or possible future employment opportunities.
- 9 In general, ISCs do not strike the right balance between the number of qualifications a learner takes and their general skills development. Many ISCs rely too much on qualifications and certificates of learning as a means of assessing and measuring learner progress.
- 10 All ISCs use a range of baseline assessments to identify the literacy and numeracy skills learners need to develop. They use these assessments well to set literacy and numeracy targets on ILPs. Most teach literacy and numeracy skills through contexts that the learners can relate to easily. However, a few of these targets are too general. This means that they are difficult to achieve and progress against them cannot be measured easily. In a few colleges, there is an over-reliance on worksheets in skills classes.
- 11 All ISCs have a clear focus on developing learners' independence and life skills. They make the most of opportunities for learners to develop their social skills and they encourage learners to take responsibility for areas relevant to independent living such as managing their money. However, although there is anecdotal evidence to support learner progress in these areas, ISCs do not set targets, assess progress and record evidence of this learning that could help them evaluate the effectiveness of their work and meet Welsh Government requirements.
- 12 Many learners across all ISCs benefit from work experience opportunities. These are effective in helping learners to improve their employability, self-confidence and self-esteem. However, tracking the value of work experience is underdeveloped and many work placements are not specific enough to the learners' desired destinations.
- 13 Learners move from ISCs to a range of destinations that include further education, higher education or employment. A few move to supported living or to independent living. A minority, from residential colleges, move back to live with their parents. Most ISCs plan well for learners' transition out of college once their preferred destination is established. However, arrangements for transition out of college are based too often on what is available rather than where the learner would wish to be.
- 14 In two ISCs, most learners achieve the destination of their choice. However, around a half of learners in ISCs do not have secure destination goals when they start their course. For a minority of learners, there is a delay in finding a suitable destination placement. Communication between stakeholders is slow and delays occur where there have been changes of social worker or where learners are from a different local authority to the site of the ISC.

Recommendations

Independent specialist colleges should:

- R1 Make sure all pre-entry assessments are relevant to learners' full range of needs including communication and behaviour
- R2 Make sure all ILPs:
- recognise the learners' desired destination
 - briefly identify short, medium and long-term measurable targets and set out plans to achieve these targets
 - are regularly reviewed
- R3 Develop clear processes to set targets, and to assess, track, monitor and evaluate learner progress in independence skills
- R4 Develop processes to measure the value and outcomes of work experience
- R5 Reduce the reliance on generic worksheets to teach literacy and numeracy skills

Local authorities should:

- R6 Co-ordinate the information that travels with learners between providers and at transition points
- R7 Make sure that plans and processes for learner destinations beyond the ISC are in place early enough for there to be a positive outcome and a smooth transition

Welsh Government should:

- R8 Review the information requested from ISCs to make sure that it is clear and specific and includes a focus on learner progress and the learner's desired destination, as well as achievement of qualifications

How well do colleges measure learner progress?

Pre-entry assessment and information from previous learning providers

- 15 All ISCs seek to gather as much pre-entry information as they can about a learner before they start at the college and during their first few weeks. They achieve this through a process of pre-entry assessments. In four ISCs, these pre-entry assessment processes are well defined with clear aims and objectives. They are purposeful with a strong focus on making sure the provision will be the best placement for the learner.
- 16 Most pre-entry assessments consider information from a wide variety of sources including the learner themselves, their family, their current education provider, social services and careers advisers. Most ISCs also scrutinise information from statements of special educational needs (SEN) or education, health and care plans (EHC plans), which are the equivalent in England.
- 17 Most learners in ISC provision have had a statement of SEN or EHC plan prior to starting at the college. These statements and plans provide useful information on the nature of any learning difficulties and disabilities, broad learning aims and details of the support that they will receive during their time in school. Where these are completed comprehensively, they provide useful information, including destination recommendations, in an easily accessible format. However, too few are completed well enough to provide the full range of information required.
- 18 Four ISCs, particularly those with residential facilities, gather personal, emotional, social and medical information, as well as information on learners' educational needs and achievement. There is a strong emphasis on obtaining a thorough understanding of any barriers to learning and also the areas of learning that learners particularly enjoy.
- 19 Two ISCs, where possible, make a useful visit to a learner at their current provider to observe first-hand the type of environment that has been conducive to the learner's development and to gather information from the provider themselves. The information that ISCs obtain from current providers varies considerably in terms of the quality and the range of information. For a few learners, this impedes the effectiveness of the ISCs' pre-entry assessment processes.

Pre-entry assessment information collected by ISCs includes:

Medical:

- medical needs
- clinical assessments and diagnoses
- GP reports
- care plans
- mental health reports
- speech and language reports

Educational:

- statements of special educational needs (SEN) or equivalent
- transition plans
- latest school report
- latest annual review report
- individual education plans (IEPs)
- school data and test results
- accreditation/qualifications
- literacy and numeracy reports
- school behaviour plans

Personal and social:

- emotional wellbeing reports
- essential lifestyle plans
- risk assessments
- social services reports
- respite placement reports

Skills baseline assessment information collected by ISCs includes:

- Literacy skills ability and areas for development
- Numeracy skills ability and areas for development

- 20 Most ISCs also request a short report from the learner themselves. These usually focus keenly on matters such as ‘what I like to eat’, ‘what I like to do in the evening’, and ‘my favourite lesson’.
- 21 In addition to the collation of evidence from external sources, four of the ISCs encourage learners to visit the ISC in advance of their placement as part of their pre-entry assessment. These visits vary between the six providers. In two, the learner visits for a whole or part educational day. In these ISCs, the learners will not normally be resident. The purpose of the visit is to allow learners to experience the provision. These visits are often repeated over several months to ease learners into a familiarity with the surroundings. In a further three, the learner visits for at least a full day with some additional visits to events such as summer fayres, open days and

activity weekends. These events are beneficial to both day and residential learners. The learner becomes more familiar with the environment and has useful opportunities to meet their peers. In one ISC, learners undertake a three-day visit while staying in the residential accommodation. This fulfils valuable purposes for both the provider and the learner. In this ISC, the learner is under continuous informal assessment by education and residential staff. This ISC completes a comprehensive assessment profile for the learner based on reports from teachers, support staff, residential staff, therapeutic staff and the learner.

Pre-entry residential visits in Coleg Elidyr

In Coleg Elidyr, learners are encouraged to take advantage of a three-day visit to allow both the college and the learner to establish whether the placement is conducive to the learner's development.

The college provides accommodation on the college site for the prospective learner. The learner arrives on day one with an accompanying adult, settles into the accommodation and has lunch. In the afternoon, the accompanying adult completes a care assessment with the house manager and an education assessment with the head of education before leaving the college. The college head of education designs a programme for the learner for the duration of the visit. This is planned around the learner's interests and to provide as broad an experience as possible in accordance with the learner's needs and capabilities.

During day two and the morning of day three, the learner attends various work areas and classes on the college site.

During the afternoon of day three, the accompanying adult returns to the college and attends a communication needs meeting with the learner, followed by a structured interview.

During the three day visit, all staff at the college, including managers, teachers, support assistants, care managers and care staff, use the time to observe the learner informally. They complete comprehensive forms on all aspects of the learner's achievements, behaviour, and educational and care needs.

The head of education and head of care use this information very effectively to support information gathered in advance of the visit. They are able to assess the needs of the learner and compare this to the facilities and care they can offer. The process ensures a robust and thorough understanding of the learner and nearly all learners attending Coleg Elidyr settle quickly and have successful outcomes.

- 22 Four ISCs use the pre-entry visits well to check and verify the information they have previously gathered. In the best ISCs, all of the information is collated and checked thoroughly for consistencies and inconsistencies by either a team of senior staff or by the head of education. Any issues or barriers encountered by the learner during the visit are scrutinised and compared to the collated information. This means that most ISCs have a very thorough and rounded understanding of the learner before they join, including their educational, emotional and physical ability. This is particularly

important for learners whose learning needs can impact on their ability to adapt to new situations and where their behaviour can vary considerably between different settings.

- 23 Once all possible information is received, most ISCs use it effectively to propose or design a programme of study specifically tailored to the learners' academic abilities, personal interests, educational needs and social development needs. These learners settle in very quickly and discernible progress is evident from an early stage of their learning.
- 24 However, many ISCs struggle to obtain the full profile of requested information and in most there is an over-reliance on the information provided by parents or carers. A few placements are made with incomplete advanced planning. For a few learners, a lack of advanced planning in their previous placement means that new placements are requested as late as a week before the start of the academic year. For a minority of learners, there is a delay in confirming funding and this slows the pre-entry assessment and planning process. Difficulties occur too often when learners are moving between local authorities or between countries. For these learners, the ISCs carry out detailed assessments as soon as possible, making effective use of professionals such as therapists and counsellors to gain information quickly. Despite the speed of the reaction by the ISCs, there is inevitably a delay in forming the full picture of the learner and many of these learners start in their new provision without fully tailored programmes of study and without secure arrangements for support.

Range, quality and use of data to measure progress

- 25 Four ISCs use an appropriate range of data to measure learner progress. They capture data effectively to measure learner progress in skills such as literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). They use awarding organisation records consistently to capture data for achievements in qualifications and units of credit. Most have secure records and data for learner attendance, punctuality and behaviour. Many have useful data capture systems for measuring progress in the broader targets related to personal, social and emotional development.
- 26 Nearly all ISCs obtain their data by establishing the learners' starting points and measuring learner progress from there. They use pre-entry and skills baseline assessment well to establish the learners' current ability against a range of measures. Most try to obtain the pre-entry and skills baseline measures before the learners start their programmes of learning, or within the first few weeks. This provides them with sound data from the beginning of the learning programmes and provides them with sufficient information to set meaningful targets.
- 27 All ISCs use a wide range of commercial packages, both on-line and paper-based, to assess learners' skills baselines in literacy and numeracy. Most match these well to the learners' abilities. In addition to these, four of the ISCs have assembled a suitable range of skills baseline assessment materials to suit the needs of learners of different abilities and to establish the learners' starting points for the broader skills of free writing, understanding of texts and thinking skills. A few of these are self-designed by the ISCs to meet their own and the learners' specific needs.

- 28 Overall, all ISCs use pre-entry and skills baseline assessment materials that are relevant and appropriate to the learners. Nearly all these assessments are appropriate to the age of the learners. Four ISCs supplement the formal assessments with teachers' and care managers' knowledge and expertise. For example, they might establish how well a learner can cope with personal hygiene or make appropriate choices in dress to suit the weather conditions. However, many ISCs do not make sufficient use of staff expertise and specialists to establish learners' skills baseline starting points in areas such as communication and behaviour.
- 29 One of the most important methods ISCs use for measuring learner progress and capturing data is through the use of individual learning plans (ILPs). Nearly all ISCs use their pre-entry and skills baseline assessments well to set learning targets for learners. These targets are recorded consistently on ILPs. Whenever possible, nearly all ISCs include the learner themselves when setting and recording targets. This allows the learner to understand, and take ownership of, their own learning and progress.
- 30 There is no consistent format to ILPs in ISCs and the structure varies between providers. They can range from a set of single sheets to a comprehensive file. They can be multi-functional and cover a range of targets across academic, personal, behavioural and social skills or they can be specific to each of these areas.
- 31 The most effective ILPs:
- set a clear direction for the learner that helps them to move towards their future aspirations
 - include short-term, medium-term and long-term targets
 - Include the learner's preferred or likely destination
 - plan short steps of learning for the learner to achieve a positive outcome
 - take good account of the full range of skills the learner needs to develop
- 32 However, a majority of ILPs across nearly all providers have targets that are not short enough or specific enough to allow for small steps of learning. A few are not completed early enough to be of immediate use in a programme of learning. A minority focus too heavily on qualification aims and outcomes and neglect the wider and broader skills such as literacy and numeracy, social and life skills and personal development.
- 33 Very few ILPs recognise the learner's expected or aspirational destination. This means that learners develop generic skills and broaden their knowledge and understanding in areas that are not necessarily going to be used by them in the future or support their future employment or independent living.
- 34 In two ISCs, staff use the learners' ILPs very well. In these ISCs, all staff have a thorough understanding of the ILP aims and targets. All staff use the information on the ILPs in every lesson. They use the targets as a priority when planning their teaching methods and strategies. Teachers and support staff constantly review ILPs to make sure that they are relevant and up-to-date. However, in two ISCs, ILPs are not well understood, there is too much focus on using them as a record of lesson activity and they do not provide a clear and focused direction for learning.

- 35 In four ISCs, most ILPs, take good account of the learner's prior learning and achievement. They use this information well to make sure the learner is moving forward in their skills and development.
- 36 All ISCs are consistently improving their systems and processes for capturing, recording and analysing data. Most ISCs use on-line commercial packages to track and analyse data. Although the range of commercial packages varies between the ISCs, all packages are effective in producing relevant information. All ISCs are consistently good at recording the qualifications and units of credit achieved by learners. However, there is too much variation in how effectively ISCs record and monitor learners' progress and achievement in broader skills such as communication, behaviour, thinking skills and motivation. Systems for the tracking and monitoring of learners' personal and social skills are too reliant on units of credit achieved and do not take sufficient note of learner progress.
- 37 Overall, the colleges that set robust learner targets have more secure data on learner progress. Around a third of ISCs measure learner progress and achievement in relation to their individual targets very well. In these colleges, there is a robust and comprehensive structure for setting ILP targets that are short, measurable, achievable and relevant to the learner.

Target setting in Coleg Elidyr

Coleg Elidyr has a well-structured format for targets on learners' individual learning plans.

The college sets 10 targets for each learner:

- Three targets focus on residential skills including personal skills such as hygiene practices, household skills such as using the washing machine, and skills to access to leisure activities or the wider community.
- Three targets focus on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) development.
- Three targets focus on communication, social skills and participation in learning.
- A further target relates to work experience. The work experience target is always context specific. Progress within work experience placements is also recorded in the learner's individual work experience log book.

Teachers record progress against the targets on a daily basis. The head of education reviews teacher progress files once a week and provides feedback to the teacher on the quality of evidence recorded. These reviews inform the tri-annual progress reviews attended by the learner and where progress is formally recorded.

This process provides the college with robust systems to track and demonstrate learner progress. Progress against targets currently stands at 91%.

- 38 In four ISCs, teachers review the ILP targets and learner progress against these targets on at least a weekly basis and frequently more often. The process is

overseen by the head of education and the information is collated at relevant points throughout the year as determined by the provider's quality cycle. The collated information is used well to identify strengths and areas for improvement in the self-assessment reports and to inform quality improvement planning.

- 39 However, in two ISCs, the quality assurance cycle is not secure or robust enough. Learner targets are not measurable or clearly recorded and staff do not use them well enough to assess learner progress. Quality checks of ILPs, to make sure they are completed accurately and used consistently across the provision, are too sparse. In these ISCs, learner progress is very difficult to define, identify or measure. This means that these ISCs are not able to complete Welsh Government returns well enough or supply the quality of information the Welsh Government requires.
- 40 The Welsh Government requires all ISCs to complete a form to provide them with details of learner progress. Forms are individual to the learner and are a collation of learner ILP targets. The quality and standard of the completion of these forms vary too much both within and between ISCs. The Welsh Government is not able to identify learner targets or progress easily and is not able to evaluate effectively the outcomes for the funding they provide.

How well do colleges prepare learners for transition?

Transition into college

- 41 Most learners have an effective transition into their chosen ISC. The pre-entry assessment processes carried out by the ISCs make sure nearly all learners have sufficient time to visit their new provision. This provides learners with useful time to develop a familiarity with the surroundings and, in a majority of cases, to meet up with new friends.
- 42 The six ISCs in Wales offer a variety of provision and are based on a range of educational principles. In general, learners choose their ISC placement based on parental preferences and recommendations from Careers Wales and local authorities. Most decisions are based on whether the ISC can offer learning programmes and experiences that meet the learners' interests and needs. Suitable care facilities, relevant to the learners' health needs, are a prime consideration. Most placement decisions are made on the learners' current requirements. Very few placement decisions are based on a learner's anticipated destination beyond the ISC. For example, a learner who is identified for potential employment in retail is not necessarily referred to an ISC based on their provision for retail training.
- 43 However, nearly all ISCs work well with the learner to establish whether they are able to offer the best options in terms of both care and education. If the ISC feels that they are not able to meet the learner's needs, they refer them appropriately to alternative provision or back to Careers Wales.

Programme planning

- 44 Most ISCs plan tailored programmes of learning well to meet the needs and interests of individual learners. Nearly all ISCs allocate the learners to small groups to provide a stimulating and interactive learning environment. Many of these groups are based on the learners' abilities. For example, in Beechwood College, learners are broadly allocated to lower, middle and higher ability classes. However, all ISCs also give considerable priority to where the learner will feel comfortable in terms of their personal, social and communication skills.
- 45 Most ISCs plan programmes of learning that allow the learners to move around the college site between classrooms, workshops and outside spaces. This provides variety and helps to maintain interest and motivation. They plan a stimulating variety of classes that engage and motivate the learners.
- 46 In most ISCs, nearly all learning programmes are planned well to provide a suitable mixture of work and leisure activities. As well as formal learning, they include a range of informal activities that are based around real life experiences. For example, learners in Coleg Elidyr and in Coleg Plas Dwbl present their garden produce for sale to the public and learners in Pengwern College sell the eggs from the college chickens.
- 47 Many learning programmes also include an appropriate amount of physical exercise in line with the learners' health, abilities and interests. These physical activities include swimming, games, dance and walks.
- 48 A majority of the ISCs offer a broad range of learning programmes. These include agriculture, horticulture, wood crafts and catering. In addition, learners can access certificates of learning in areas such as art and design, music and iron forge skills. A few learners, where their ability and interests allows, access both academic and vocational courses at local further education colleges. This widens the range of learning options available to them and provides a valuable opportunity for consolidating social and personal skills. Most learners at both of the Priory Colleges access courses in the local further education colleges with support from Priory College staff. Most of these learners follow academic rather than vocational studies, although a few learners take courses in areas such as hair and beauty and the construction trades.
- 49 Nearly all ISCs review learners' programmes of study formally on a termly basis to make sure they remain relevant to the learner. They review the short, medium and long-term targets on ILPS and take the learners' progress into good account. In addition, informal reviews of the learners' progress and emotional wellbeing are ongoing in most ISCs.
- 50 However, learning programmes in most ISCs do not take sufficient account of the learners' desired destinations. Programmes of learning for those who are anticipated to move to supported or independent living are not sufficiently relevant to this end goal. There is too little attention to the possible areas of employment that may be an option for more able learners. Too many learners do not have robust and meaningful programmes of learning, with specific targets on ILPs, which will prepare them effectively for their likely futures.

Learning programmes at Coleg Plas Dwbl are designed around the learners' desired destination

Staff at Coleg Plas Dwbl develop relevant and useful learning programmes that take full account of the anticipated and desired destination of the learner.

The college student journey manager discusses the learner's long term goals with the learner as part of the pre-entry assessment process when they first start at the college. This information is transferred to the ILP and is shared with all staff and teachers who have responsibility to set short-term targets that will be small steps of learning towards the desired destinations.

The student journey manager chairs termly student-focused progress meetings that are useful in helping all staff and teachers to retain a clear focus on the learner journey. Long-term goals are reviewed to check for relevance and qualifications are reviewed to make sure they continue to support the learner's desired destination. Where there is a need to change the goals following discussions with the learner, these are shared with all tutors and the pathways team reset the learner's short term goals and relevant qualifications accordingly.

This means that learning programmes are very clearly and securely aimed at supporting the learner to achieve their desired destinations. All college leavers last year progressed to their desired destination of either further education or employment.

Qualifications and certificates of learning

- 51 Learners at all colleges have very good access to a wide range of qualifications. These include:
- Asdan qualifications at award, certificate and diploma levels
 - BTEC at various levels
 - Agored units of credit at various levels
 - Essential Skills Wales qualifications
 - City and Guilds qualifications
 - Duke of Edinburgh awards
- 52 Most learners are entered for qualifications at the correct level for their development and ability. Nearly all achieve the qualifications they have been entered for. Many of these are qualifications recognising their skills in areas of independent living, personal progress and social development. Learners at both Priory Colleges take academic qualifications through the further education providers at both AS and A level.
- 53 A few ISCs make good use of units of credit to obtain certificates for learners in areas such as animal care, retail, catering and workshop occupations, including spinning and wood turning. For nearly all learners, a certificate or qualification can provide motivation and a sense of pride in their work.

- 54 In general, ISCs do not consider well enough the balance between the number of qualifications a learner takes and their general skills development. For a few learners the over-emphasis on attaining a qualification has a negative impact on their development of general skills and personal targets. Many ISCs rely too heavily on qualifications and certificates of learning as a means of assessing and measuring learner progress.

Literacy and numeracy skills

- 55 All ISCs use the results of skills baseline assessment well to identify the literacy and numeracy skills that learners need to develop. They use this information to set specific targets for learners and record these clearly on the learners' ILPs. However, in half of ISCs, skills targets remain too vague and generic to be measured or achieved easily.
- 56 Nearly all learners, in most ISCs, attend specific classes for skills development. Most skills teachers are suitably qualified and many plan well to make sure that learners develop their literacy and numeracy skills through contexts that they can recognise and through topics that they are interested in. However, in half of the ISCs there is an over-reliance on worksheets. Examples include learners completing sheets of pure sums and making lists of adjectives without context or relevance. Learned in isolation, learners are not able to transfer these skills to other areas of learning or to their lives in general.
- 57 In half of the ISCs, literacy and numeracy skills are developed very well through all lessons. In these ISCs, all teachers have a clear knowledge and understanding of the learners' literacy and numeracy skills targets and plan very well to include activities in their teaching that will enhance and support the specific target aims. For example, in woodwork sessions at Coleg Elidyr, learners use estimation, prediction and measurement to design a coffee table of a suitable size to hold six coffee cups. In Pengwern College, learners practise counting skills during entrepreneurial activities within the college shop.
- 58 Four ISCs have dedicated literacy and numeracy co-ordinators who manage and monitor literacy and numeracy across the college. They take responsibility for tracking learners' progress in skills and for developing the skills of teachers across all subjects. In many ISCs, this leads to effective planning for progression.
- 59 Most ISCs use learners' ILPs well to track learners' progress in skills development. They routinely review the ILP skills targets to assess progress, to confirm achievement and to set new targets. Many ISCs use their pre-entry assessment commercial packages efficiently to re-assess learners at regular intervals. They use the re-assessment to support and confirm the tracking of ILP targets.

Life and independence skills

- 60 All ISCs have a clear and specific focus on developing learners' life and independence skills and recognise that these skills are a priority for all learners in ISC provision. Nearly all ISCs are very thorough in assessing the life and independence skills that learners need to develop, and pre-entry assessment processes are effective in collecting evidence from a range of sources and professionals.

- 61 In both Priory Colleges, staff plan well to reduce over time the amount of support they provide to learners on their main college programmes. They reduce the level of support over the time of the course to enable learners to cope more independently when they progress to advanced further education courses or to university. Where required, they teach learners how to travel safely to college sites and consolidate this with safe travel in social settings such as shopping and evenings out.
- 62 In most other ISCs, particularly those with lower ability learners, there is a strong emphasis on developing learners' skills for supported or independent living. Learner timetables are planned to include lessons on accessing the community, cooking for one and home management. In Coleg Elidyr, the 24-hour curriculum is divided into a useful number of target areas including money management, food management, personal hygiene, health, housekeeping, transportation, emergency and safety skills, and legal rights and responsibilities
- 63 Within the education setting, most ISCs make the most of naturally occurring opportunities for learners to develop their life and independence skills through initiatives such as helping to prepare lunches and moving around the site unaccompanied.
- 64 However, the ongoing target-setting, assessment, tracking, monitoring and evaluation of life and independent skills are weak in five of the six ISCs. This is particularly significant for those learners whose main targets are related to life and independence skills. Whilst there is clear anecdotal evidence of learners making considerable progress in developing these skills, formal records are not comprehensive or secure enough to provide robust evidence. This means that there is too little evidence for ISCs to be able to evaluate the quality, impact and outcomes of this valuable area of their work. In addition, ISCs are not able to draw on this information to inform the Welsh Government as required

Work experience

- 65 Nearly all ISCs recognise well the value of work experience to enhance and develop learners' personal, social, independence and employability skills. Most have secure processes to identify learners who would benefit from work experience opportunities.
- 66 Work experience placements in nearly all colleges are tailored well to each individual learner, based on availability and learner interest. Nearly all ISCs provide useful in-house opportunities that are a useful stepping stone towards external placements for a few less confident learners. Internal opportunities include working in the college shop, garden or kitchens, undertaking small animal care, car valeting, reception desk duties, and assisting with farm management. However, in most ISCs, a few staff place too great an emphasis on the learner 'helping out', rather than undertaking structured and planned work experience.
- 67 Nearly all ISCs have secure links with a range of employers. Most have a work experience co-ordinator who strives to secure suitable placements. In two ISCs, the links with employers are very broad and strong. These employers provide learners with a wide range of opportunities and accept learners on a very regular basis. For example, Pengwern College has an effective partnership with a local work experience placement company. They offer learners appropriate opportunities to work in areas such as catering, retail and recycling.

- 68 In addition to employers, most ISCs work effectively with voluntary groups to provide further work experience opportunities. Learners in Coleg Plas Dwbl can choose to join volunteers in areas such as a community garden, the national park and in a bread-making social enterprise. Learners from Coleg Elidyr join volunteers to contribute to charity organisations such as the local branches of the Welsh Wildlife Trust and the RSPCA.
- 69 All ISCs use work experience opportunities well to develop learners' skills in important areas such as punctuality, taking responsibility, communication and social interaction. Learners benefit from developing these generic employability skills and most gain in confidence and self-esteem. Many are able to use the skills they gain in other areas of their lives and many parents report that they can see significant positive changes in their child's attitude to independence and social responsibility.
- 70 In two ISCs, work experience placements are planned carefully to provide learners with opportunities that are relevant to their desired destinations. In these placements, learners develop the specific skills they need for their desired destination as well as employability skills. However, in many ISCs, many work placements are not sufficiently specific to the learner's desired destination and likely future.
- 71 All ISCs have appropriate processes to carry out risk assessments for work placements. They visit the providers on a regular basis and maintain consistent and continuous communication with them to ensure the safety of the learners and the value of the work they are doing. However, finding sufficient staff to accompany learners both to, and within, work placements is a challenge and too often this lack of resource restricts the number of work placements colleges can support.
- 72 Most ISCs record work experience on the learners' files and reports. One ISC monitors the impact of the work placements very effectively and encourages the learners to keep their own log and appropriate records as valuable evidence to support any future employment applications. However, in general, the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the value of work experience are not developed well enough.

Transition out of college

- 73 Nearly all ISCs recognise the importance of ensuring learners receive appropriate advice and guidance about their futures. They take opportunities in tutorials and in personal development and citizenship classes to engage learners in discussions about their future lives beyond the college.
- 74 However, too few learners have a clear, identified and specific destination at the start of their course. This means that arrangements for a learner's transition out of college are too often based on what is available for them at the time, rather than secure planning for where they want to be and what they want to achieve.

Planning for successful transition in Coleg Plas Dwbl

Coleg Plas Dwbl plans very effectively for learners to achieve a successful transition out of college.

The college starts planning for an effective destination as soon as the learner enters the college. The college pathways team meet with the learner to work with them to form an appropriate plan that will enable them to achieve their long-term goals. Learners are supported by the pathways team to follow this plan throughout their time at the college so that by their final year they are secure in what they are aiming for in terms of their future.

The college has a thorough understanding of the time required for all stakeholders involved with a learner to achieve a secure destination. Therefore, they start planning with stakeholders in the autumn term of the learner's final year, when the pathways team chair a learner focused transition and planning meeting. This meeting is a multi-agency meeting attended by the pathways team, social services, Careers Wales and the learner's family.

Following this meeting, the pathways team works with relevant agencies to ensure that housing and job opportunities in the learner's local area are in place as early as possible. The pathways team supports learners in visiting potential housing, work or further education placements.

The college reviews the plans with the learner and the learner completes a transition timetable. This includes plans for the learner to complete and use vocational qualifications relevant to their long term goal and to undertake final and relevant work experience opportunities.

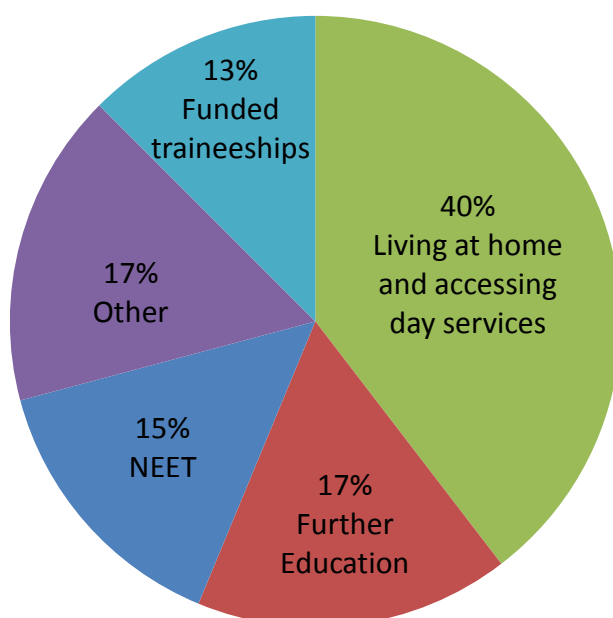
When all stakeholders, including local authorities, engage well with the provider and the learner, learners achieve successful destinations where they have a role to play in society and a meaningful future ahead of them. Over the last two years, all learners at Coleg Plas Dwbl achieved their desired destination.

- 75 Most ISCs liaise well with mainstream further education providers to identify progression routes into further education. A few learners who move on to further education undertake vocational courses in areas such as the construction trades, horticulture, catering and hospitality, and equine studies. However, many learners move on to independent living skills courses. These learners continue, usually for three years, to follow similar programmes to those in the ISC, rather than specific courses that lead directly to supported or unsupported employment.
- 76 Most ISCs liaise well with the local authority and Careers Wales to make sure that transition out of college is as smooth as possible for the learner. They support them well to visit their new home or place of employment and to help them to settle quickly. Most ISCs establish what information the new placement requires and make sure that all relevant details travel with the learner.

Destinations

- 77 Learners move from ISCs to a range of destinations that include further education, higher education or employment. A few move to supported living or to independent living. A minority, from residential colleges, move back to live with their parents.
- 78 In two ISCs, most learners achieve the destination of their choice. In these ISCs, more able learners move to appropriate further education courses, traineeships, or employment. Less able learners, who had independent living or supported living as their destination aim, achieve their goal and take with them enhanced skills that will allow them to be as independent as possible within their communities and within society.
- 79 When there is robust advanced planning for learners in ISCs, they have an identified pathway that starts when they leave school and takes them beyond their time at an ISC. In these cases, learners achieve a meaningful destination and a secure future that allows them to be an active member of society relevant to their ability and interests.
- 80 However, overall, around a half of ISC learners do not have identified destination aims when they start their course. For many, destination planning is too late in their learning for there to be relevant and realistic options for them. A very few learners have unrealistic expectations of what is achievable. Many learners return to living at home and accessing day services or community independent living skills classes.

Destinations of leavers aged 16 to 25 from all Independent Specialist Colleges, Wales, 2015



Shows the destinations 48 leavers.

"Other" includes 3 leavers entering supported living, 3 entering employment and 2 going on to Higher Education.

Source: Data provided by each Independent specialist college (Unpublished)

- 81 For a minority of learners who are secure in their choice for their future, there is too often a delay in finding a secure and suitable destination placement. Learners and ISCs are reliant on robust communication with social service departments to secure or transfer funding. Many extended delays occur where there have been several changes of social worker or where learners are from a different local authority to the site of the ISC. In addition, there is a lack of available and suitable employment opportunities and a lack of work placements where learners can make use of the skills they have developed during their time at the ISC. For many learners, there is little choice for their future and many end up accepting what is available, rather than what meets their needs.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

This report uses evidence from visits to the six independent specialist colleges in Wales:

- Beechwood College
- Coleg Elidyr Camphill Communities
- Coleg Plas Dwbl
- Pengwern College
- Priory College North Wales
- Priory College South Wales

During visits to the six colleges, inspectors met with the head of education, 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, information from Estyn inspection reports and information from Estyn annual monitoring visits.

Reference list

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Welsh Government (2015) *Draft Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill*. Cardiff: Welsh Government. [Online]. Available from: <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/consultation/150703-draft-aln-and-education-tribunal-wales-bill-e.pdf> [Accessed 21 April 2016].

Appendix 2: Independent specialist colleges in Wales

Beechwood College

Beechwood College is an independent specialist college and care home, situated in Sully in the Vale of Glamorgan. It is owned by Beechwood Court Ltd, which is part of Ludlow Street Healthcare. The college offers day and residential placements to learners aged 16 years of age and over who have a range of learning difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorder. A few learners also have associated mental health needs or an acquired brain injury. Many learners also demonstrate behaviours that challenge. A few have physical difficulties. Beechwood College opened in September 2004. Its first learners arrived in January 2005.

Overall responsibility for the running of the college lies with the director for education. The head of education leads a team of tutors and learning support assistants and has responsibility for the provision and delivery of all education programmes. The college's senior management team includes the director for education, the care home manager and the clinical lead.

The college has provision for around 57 residential learners and 20 day learners. Learners come to the college from a wide range of local authorities across England and Wales.

Coleg Elidyr Camphill Communities

Coleg Elidyr is a residential independent specialist college located within a Camphill Community for young people aged 18 to 30 years. The college estate includes a working farm, kitchen garden and woodlands. The college has provision for around 18 learners who are funded for education, all of whom live on site in one of the six residential houses. The majority of these learners come from Wales. The others come from England.

The campus is also home to a further 18 young adults, aged between 23 and 29, who are funded by social services for residential placements within the community. Estyn does not inspect this provision.

The curriculum at Coleg Elidyr was originally inspired by the educational and social philosophy of Rudolf Steiner and Karl König. It emphasises experiential, practical learning and offers a combination of land-based, vocational and craft subjects to help learners to develop skills for a more independent life.

The college is led by a leadership team, responsible to a board of trustees.

Coleg Plas Dwbl

Coleg Plas Dwbl, which is part of the Ruskin Mill Trust Group, opened in September 2011. It is situated on a farm of one hundred acres at the base of the Preseli mountains in Pembrokeshire. The land consists of pasture, woodland and extensive gardens for horticulture.

The college caters for residential and day learners with a range of learning difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and attachment disorders. Residential learners live in houses on the site or in the nearby village. The college has provision for around seven learners aged 18 to 25 years.

The college bases its educational philosophy on the founding principles of the philosopher and scientist Rudolph Steiner. It offers a Practical Skills Therapeutic Education curriculum, which gives learners the opportunity to learn through real life activities.

The college is managed by the principal and a team of education and residential staff. The Ruskin Mill Trust oversees the work of the college.

The college shares key functions with Ruskin Mill College. These include technical services, human resources, health and safety management, staff training and development and financial support.

Pengwern College

Pengwern College is an independent specialist college providing education for up to 75 learners aged 16 to 25 with moderate to profound and multiple learning difficulties, physical disabilities and autistic spectrum disorder. The college has residential facilities and also accepts day learners.

The college is situated in a rural location in Rhuddlan, in north Wales, and has a small farm and forest school within the large grounds. The college 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 curriculum provides opportunities for learners to develop their functional, vocational, personal, communication and employment skills. There are two pathways: exploring work and exploring independence. Each learner has an individual learning programme with access to accredited courses, work-based learning, communication enhancement programmes, independent life skills and enrichment activities.

In May 2014, the college was bought from Mencap by the Cambian group.

Priory College North Wales

Priory College North Wales is an independent specialist college providing support and care for young adults aged 16 to 25 with Asperger's syndrome, autistic spectrum disorder and associated conditions. The college is adjacent to the Yale campus of Coleg Cambria in Wrexham.

Due to the complexity of their needs and learning abilities, a minority of learners access education exclusively at Priory College's own premises. These learners follow pre-entry and entry level courses, including independent living skills.

A majority of learners follow full-time courses at Coleg Cambria. They study a wide range of courses from entry level qualifications in range of subjects to A levels in, for example, geography and geology. All learners, irrespective of their main place of study, receive both in-class and additional support by Priory College staff, for example to develop their social use of language.

Priory College North Wales is part of the education facilities offered by the Priory Group. The group aims to provide young people with individualised and tailored support to enable them to achieve their academic independence and social goals and develop the necessary life skills for integration into the community, together with employability skills to ensure they are work ready.

Priory College North Wales is managed on a daily basis by the vice-principal. A principal oversees the work of all the colleges within the Priory group.

Priory College South Wales

Priory College South Wales provides post-school education for around 40 learners, aged 16 to 25 years, with autistic spectrum disorder and associated conditions. The Priory College South Wales learning centre is set within the grounds of Coleg Gwent's Pontypool campus.

Priory College South Wales learners access a broad range of facilities. These include specialist vocational training areas such as construction and professional hair and beauty salons, which are open to the public. Many learners attend classes provided by Coleg Gwent in the main campus buildings and receive extra support as needed from the specialist Priory College South Wales learning centre.

In addition, Priory College South Wales offers a small number of specific courses for employability, social use of language, art therapy and independent living skills.

Priory College South Wales is part of the education facilities offered by the Priory Group. The group aims to provide young people with individualised and tailored support to enable them to achieve their academic independence and social goals and develop the necessary life skills for integration into the community, together with employability skills to ensure that they are work ready.

Priory College South Wales is managed on a daily basis by the vice-principal. A principal oversees the work of all the colleges within the Priory group.

Glossary/references

A level	Advanced level
AS level	Advanced subsidiary level
ALN	Additional learning needs
BTeC	Business and technical education council
EHC plan	Education health care plan
ICT	Information and communication technology
IEP	Individual education plan
ILP	Individual learning plan
ILS	Independent living skills
ISC	Independent specialist college
RSPCA	Royal society for the prevention of cruelty to animals
SEN	Special educational needs

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