

Progression post-16 for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

This survey evaluates the arrangements for transition from school and the provision in post-16 settings for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities up to the age of 25. Through visits to 32 providers and the completion of 111 detailed case studies, inspectors assessed the effectiveness of provision in enabling learners to develop greater independence, and progress to further learning or open or supported employment.

Age group: Post-16

Published: August 2011

Reference no: 100232



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Executive summary

Too few young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress from school to complete programmes of learning in post-16 settings which develop greater independence; lead to further study, supported or open employment; or provide skills for independent living. A recent longitudinal study reported that an estimated 30% of young people who had a statement of special educational needs when they were in Year 11, and 22% of young people with a declared disability, were not in any form of education, employment or training when they reached age 18 in 2009 compared with 13% of their peers.¹ Current figures from the Labour Force Survey show for quarter 1 of 2011 that 41% of men and 43% of women designated longer-term disabled were economically inactive.²

Between October 2010 and March 2011, inspectors visited 32 providers to evaluate the arrangements for transition from school and the quality of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities up to the age of 25. They conducted 111 detailed case studies of learners in a range of settings including colleges, independent providers of work-based learning and local authority providers of adult and community learning. Inspectors observed discrete provision for groups of learners who were mainly studying programmes at foundation level (pre-GCSE). They also assessed the quality of additional support provided for individuals on a range of education and training courses up to level 3 (A-level equivalent), including full-time and part-time vocational programmes and apprenticeships.

In order to plan the survey and capture a wider range of evidence than was possible from the small sample of visits, inspectors held two focus groups with key stakeholders prior to the fieldwork. During the period of the survey, inspectors held two further focus groups at a national conference for teachers and other specialist staff working in the post-16 sector; met with representatives from national organisations; and conducted structured telephone interviews with senior managers in 13 local authorities and in nine colleges involved in projects for these learners.

Since 2008, local authorities have been required to carry out multi-agency assessments for pupils with statements of need or in receipt of support, prior to their transition to a post-16 provider. Inspectors found that these arrangements were not working effectively.³ Providers had received a completed learning difficulty assessment in only a third of the case studies where one should have been made available to them. These assessments were not always timely or adequately

¹ Department for Education analysis of the Youth Cohort Study and Longitudinal Study of Young People in England: The Activities and Experiences of 18-year-olds: England 2009, in *Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability*, DfE, 2011; www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM%208027.

² Labour Force Survey Historical Quarterly Supplement; www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/LFSHQs/2010/Table01.xls.

³ The learning difficulty assessment should form the basis for determining the support and programme requirements. In making recommendations for placements, the assessment should take account of all provision available locally and include practical considerations such as the arrangements for transport.

completed, and did not form a reliable basis on which to plan support or an appropriate programme of learning.

In the learning difficulty assessments evaluated by inspectors, the criteria used for placement decisions were not always clear, local options were not adequately explored and the recommendations were not always based on an objective assessment of need. Independent providers of work-based learning were rarely considered or recommended by local authority personal advisers and in some cases, colleges had been asked to complete the assessment on behalf of the local authority.

All of the post-16 providers visited had their own well-established systems to provide learners with an initial assessment of their current level of skills and potential support needs. These arrangements had been developed over many years in line with disability equalities legislation and successive post-16 inspection frameworks. The providers' assessment procedures were freestanding and, at the time of the visits, had not been integrated with the local authorities' arrangements for learning difficulty assessments. No guidance had been provided to the post-16 sector about the local authority assessments when they were introduced. Inspectors found duplication of effort in assessment at the point of transition from school to post-16 provision and little evidence of improvement in the sharing of information as a result of these changes.

The colleges visited had comprehensive arrangements for induction and initial assessment, the results of which were used well to support learning. Independent providers of work-based learning and local authority providers of adult and community learning were able to assess the learners who attended, but overall, their range of specialist staff was more limited. All the providers visited were making good use of networks and partnerships to improve their specialist capacity to support learners with a wide range of needs.

Where learners had made the transition to the post-16 sector and were enrolled on programmes appropriate to their needs, the case studies evaluated by inspectors showed that the provision of additional support enabled learners to engage productively in their studies and to make good progress. All of the supported learners for whom it was appropriate had become more independent in their learning and their levels of support had been reduced over time. Success rates for supported learners across the provision visited were good, with learners achieving as well as, or better than, their peers.

Learners on discrete foundation programmes were generally successful in achieving units of qualifications at entry levels and in preparing for progression to further study. However, the programmes reviewed by inspectors were too narrowly focused on accreditation and were not effective in enabling learners to progress to open or supported employment, independent living or community engagement.

Too few practical, real work opportunities were available to learners on foundation programmes. This was because the most effective provision, such as social enterprises and internships supported by job coaches, could not be funded under the

foundation learning arrangements. The most successful provision seen was typically funded separately as part of specific projects or funded at a higher level, which enabled learners to engage in activities for five days a week.

Examples of good teaching and learning were seen in all the settings visited. Common to the better sessions observed was an inclusive approach which built on learners' identified capabilities and previous learning. The support for individuals was respectful and unobtrusive. Teachers and support staff in the less effective lessons, however, did not have high expectations of learners and did not build on previous learning. The support provided was poorly planned and learning was not routinely evaluated.

Information provided by local authorities and evidence from visits demonstrated that the availability of specialist post-16 provision varied considerably. Insufficient provision was available locally for learners with the very highest levels of need, and varied locally for specialist needs such as sensory impairment and behavioural difficulties. The current local authority placement process resulted in significant inequities in types of provision offered to learners with similar needs. Criteria for assessing social care needs varied between local authorities.

The transition at age 19 from children's to adult services, and from the Young People's Learning Agency to the Skills Funding Agency, created barriers for learners when they encountered different criteria for funding. Learners, and their parents or carers, identified that they would have welcomed more advice and careers guidance when they received a personal budget to purchase a learning programme, care and support.

Too little is known about the destinations of learners once they leave post-16 provision. A more systematic national approach to the collection and analysis of data about learners' destinations would help to ensure that limited public resources are deployed effectively to support learners in making a successful transition to adult life.

Key findings

- The local authorities' arrangements to provide learners with a learning difficulty assessment as the basis for their transition to post-16 provision were not working effectively in the provision visited. In two thirds of the case studies where it should have been available, the providers had not received an assessment, and where they were received they were often lacking in specific detail or arrived late. The timing of the local authority arrangements for assessment was not aligned to the post-16 providers' recruitment and induction procedures, and providers continued to rely on their own assessments.
- The recommendations for further study at post-16, made in the learning difficulty assessments, were not sufficiently objective or based solely on need. Work-based learning provision was rarely considered as an option.
- Information provided by focus groups and local authorities, and evidence from visits to providers, demonstrated that the availability of provision at post-16

varied considerably. Very little provision was available locally for learners with the highest levels of need. The current arrangements resulted in inequities in the placements for learners.

- Recent reductions in budgets for adult learning had further reduced the options available for adult learners.
- The colleges visited had well-established and effective transition and initial assessment arrangements, which included the flexibility to respond to late referrals, and in circumstances where no local authority learning difficulty assessment had been received. The independent providers of work-based learning and adult and community learning providers visited had fewer specialist staff but their initial assessment arrangements had also worked well for the learners in the case studies.
- Learners on mainstream provision, including apprenticeship programmes, who were receiving additional support, were well supported. When learners had their support needs discussed with them and reviewed, it was common for adjustments to be made to the support provided and for learners to become more independent in their learning.
- Foundation learning programmes were successful for learners whose main goal was to progress to level 2 provision or higher. But for those learners for whom this was not a main goal, they were too narrowly focused on accreditation. The programmes seen offered too few meaningful opportunities for work experience and other practical learning situations in which to develop skills.
- Unlike in schools, foundation learning in post-16 settings could only be funded for around three days a week. This did not provide sufficient time to prepare learners effectively for other destinations, in particular some form of employment.
- Evidence from the focus groups and the case studies, identified that when learners reached age 19, the changes in the arrangements between children's services and adult services, and in moving from the Young People's Learning Agency to the Skills Funding Agency funded provision created additional difficulties. Insufficient advice about personal budgets, the requirement to pay fees and uncertainty about benefit entitlements were identified as potential barriers to participation when learners transferred from local children's to adults' disability services.
- Half of the sessions observed were good or better, and examples of good teaching and learning were seen in all the settings visited. In the most effective sessions, learners' capabilities were built upon, their support needs were met unobtrusively and the session furthered their main long-term goals.
- In the less effective sessions, areas for improvement included poorly planned support, low expectations of learners and too much focus on achievement of units, rather than generic goals such as social skills that would prepare learners for their future destinations.
- Where learners had made the transition to the post-16 sector, the success rates for supported learners in the providers visited compared well with those of their peers. This reflected the national picture. The success rates for supported

apprentices in the survey visits were mostly high, and sometimes above that of other apprentices. This was better than the national success rate for supported apprentices, which in 2009/10 was four percentage points lower than those for their peers.⁴

- Too little is known about the destinations of learners once they leave post-16 provision, particularly once they reach the age of 19 or 20. The providers visited were beginning to collect destination information, but funding agencies and local authorities did not have systematic procedures to collect this data to monitor the effectiveness of this provision in supporting progression.

Recommendations

The Department for Education together with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills should:

- review the arrangements for transition from school to the post-16 sector, to build on the strengths of the schools and post-16 sectors and to reduce duplication in initial assessment processes, while ensuring that the learning difficulty assessments are objective and impartial in their recommendations
- review the current emphasis on accreditation and ensure that foundation learning provides meaningful programmes of learning that enable learners to progress to apprenticeships, employment, greater independence, further learning or community engagement
- consider the introduction of national programmes of extended workplace learning in conjunction with third sector providers, using models developed through the successful projects identified in this survey
- ensure that learners can access equitable funding and quality of provision irrespective of the post-16 setting in which they study, and that funding arrangements do not significantly disadvantage learners who are not on 'active benefits', or who might take longer than their peers to complete programmes such as apprenticeships
- develop a national database that enables all providers to find out about enabling technologies and specialist training
- ensure that outcomes from all types of provision are monitored locally and nationally, so that the effectiveness of the provision in different settings can be evaluated.

Local authorities should:

- improve the arrangements for transition from school to the post-16 sector by ensuring that personal advisers are adequately resourced and trained to

⁴ Data Service Statistical First Release, March 2011;
www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_current/.

provide objective learning difficulty assessments and to keep in contact with learners who become disengaged from formal learning or employment on leaving school

- ensure, where applicable, that social services and health services are fully involved in the transition process at all stages
- consider the use of a mentor to maintain contact with the learner at all stages up to age 25
- ensure that advice and guidance are impartial, and that decision-making about the provision is based on objective criteria and identified needs
- build on the expertise within the post-16 sector and the third sector, to improve local capacity, particularly for learners with the most profound and complex needs.

Providers should:

- offer programmes which provide an appropriate level of challenge and prepare learners for progression to the destinations that match their long term goals
- explore ways to provide job coaching and internships to prepare learners for open or supported employment and apprenticeships
- ensure that teaching and learning focus on providing meaningful practical activities that match individual needs
- continue to find ways of enabling supported learners to become more independent and make use of developing technologies where possible
- continue to work in partnership with other providers and third sector organisations to maximise the specialist resources in the locality, and increase the range of options for learners with the most complex needs
- provide more detail in their self-assessment reports about outcomes, including learners' destinations and the distance travelled by them from the start of their programme to achieve their long-term goals.

Context

1. This survey follows on from Ofsted's special educational needs and disability review (SEND).⁵ It takes account of the impact on post-16 provision of recent legislative, funding and curriculum changes, some of which took effect after the fieldwork for the SEND review had been completed. These changes are briefly outlined and some key terms are defined in the paragraphs which follow.

⁵ *The special educational needs and disabilities review: a statement is not enough* (090221), Ofsted, www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/statement-not-enough-ofsted-review-of-special-educational-needs-and-disability-0.

2. The Disability Discrimination Act (1995), and the subsequent Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) define disability as 'having a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day to day activities'. The Learning and Skills Act (2000) defines a learning difficulty as 'having a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of people of that age, or having a disability which prevents the use of facilities generally provided by post-16 education and training'.
3. Unless indicated otherwise, in this survey report, the term 'learners' refers to young people or adults who have been identified as requiring support. References to specific types of learning difficulty and/or disability are included only where appropriate in clarifying specific issues.
4. The terms 'additional learning support' or 'supported learner' apply where a young person or adult is following a mainstream programme of study, and is also receiving some form of additional support. The term 'discrete' is used where the programme is specifically for individuals who have been identified as having a learning difficulty and/or disability as defined above.
5. The term 'capabilities' is used when referring to learners, rather than 'abilities', which is usually associated with academic attainment. The term 'capabilities' encompasses a broader range of a learner's strengths and potential. The term 'community engagement' is used to cover a wide range of activities such as voluntary work, participation in leisure activities in the community, the pursuit of particular interests and hobbies, and social activities such as meeting friends. 'Outcomes' include the development of specific skills leading to effective community engagement or greater independence, as well as destinations and success rates.

Assessment and funding

6. Under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act (2010) local authorities have a statutory responsibility to carry out multi-disciplinary learning difficulty assessments (also known as S139As) for all young people who require them, from the point of leaving school up to the age of 25 regardless of how they are funded. Under the previous legislation, the local authority only had responsibilities for monitoring people up to the age of 25 in the provision that it funded.
7. Separate from the responsibilities of local authorities, post-16 providers have developed their own arrangements for the assessment and identification of need. Following the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), further education colleges have had responsibility for provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In accordance with the recommendations of the Tomlinson Committee Report (1996), learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been assessed individually to identify their needs, and colleges have been funded to make any adjustments that could involve the use of

adaptive aids or personal support.⁶ Since 2001, disability equalities legislation has strengthened the duty of all post-16 providers to make reasonable adjustments and provide auxiliary aids and services for any applicant declaring a disability.

8. *Aiming high for disabled children*, launched in May 2007, was the former government's transformation programme for disabled children's services in England. One of the issues that it highlighted was that more work was needed to improve and coordinate services across education and health for disabled young people in transition to adult life. To address this, a Transition Support Programme was introduced in 2008. The Council for Disabled Children's National Transition Support Team coordinated the work with partner agencies to support local authorities and primary care trusts to meet minimum standards in transition. The three-year funding for this programme ended in March 2011.
9. In April 2010, the responsibilities of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) were transferred to two new agencies: the Young People's Learning Agency, responsible for funding learners aged 16 to 18; and the Skills Funding Agency, responsible for funding those aged 19 and above. The Young People's Learning Agency is responsible for funding learners aged 19 to 25 if they have a learning difficulty assessment in place.⁷

Programmes of learning

10. Over the last five years, a number of policy initiatives have informed the development of the curriculum. The LSC's strategy 'Learning for Living and Work' (2006) set out expectations that programmes of learning for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities should focus on progression and should lead to employment or independent living. This strategy signalled a commitment to improving the quality of provision by ceasing to fund courses where learners repeated programmes of learning at a similar level rather than following a defined progression route. In 2010, the then Department for Children, Schools and Families, in conjunction with the LSC, stated in its *16–19 statement of priorities and investment strategy for 2010–2011* that:

'By September 2010, providers will no longer be funded to deliver work-preparation courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that do not focus on learning in the workplace and the supported employment model. More adults and young people with learning

⁶ *Inclusive learning: the report of the committee of enquiry into the post-school education of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in England*, HMSO, 1996; www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0885625970120302.

⁷ The Young People's Learning Agency will become the Education Funding Agency from April 2012.

difficulties and/or disabilities will be expected to gain meaningful employment.⁸

11. At the time of the survey visits, the provision below GCSE (level 2) was undergoing change. From August 2010, new arrangements known as 'foundation learning' came into effect for learners aged 14 to 19 and up to 25 for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.⁹ Learners follow programmes, accredited through units of qualifications, designed to support progression to positive destinations. The programme is made up of three strands: vocational or subject learning; personal and social development; and functional skills. Providers are mainly funded for accredited courses or units of courses that are listed on the Qualifications and Credit Framework. A percentage of time, usually not more than 10%, can include non-accredited provision where agreed with the funding body. An additional requirement is that functional skills qualifications have to be achieved if a learner is to gain a full qualification and progress to a higher level.
12. Entry to Employment, which had acted as a bridging course and an entry, or re-entry, point for young people, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, was withdrawn. A further curriculum change that affected foundation level learners was the announcement in 2010 that the National Apprenticeship Service would cease to fund programme-led apprenticeships. This programme had served as a preparatory route to full apprenticeships for those not in employment.
13. The visits for this survey focused on two kinds of provision in post-16 settings for learners up to age 25:
 - provision, mostly discrete, for groups of learners who were mainly studying programmes at foundation level
 - additional learning support for individuals on a range of education and training course programmes up to level 3, including full-time and part-time vocational programmes and apprenticeships.
14. The foundation learning programmes visited, funded by the Young People's Learning Agency or the Skills Funding Agency, were mainly offered over three days and funding was in part based on the achievement of accredited programmes. This contrasted with school sixth form provision, special schools and independent specialist colleges, where learners were funded on an individual basis for five days a week, irrespective of learner outcomes.

⁸ *16–19 statement of priorities and investment strategy for 2010–2011*, DCSF, 2010; <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/664/>.

⁹ Further information is provided in *A guide to funding foundation learning*, Young People's Learning Agency, 2011; www.ypla.gov.uk/publications/latest/Detail.htm?id=b19e39a4-51dd-459a-b890-bc7428607687.

15. The colleges visited provided foundation learning programmes and a broad range of additional learning support for learners on mainstream programmes and apprenticeships. The independent learning providers visited offered foundation learning and apprenticeships. The range of local authority providers of adult and community learning seen by inspectors was diverse, which reflected the sector. These providers offered very different types of accredited and non-accredited programmes. One provider offered work-based programmes, including apprenticeships, while another offered re-engagement programmes for school leavers. Three providers offered short entry-level courses for adults, many of whom lived in residential care settings.

Assessment and identification of needs

Local authorities' learning difficulty assessments and transition arrangements

16. Prior to the Learning and Skills Act 2008, the Connexions service was responsible for carrying out learning difficulty assessments on behalf of the Secretary of State. Since 2008, local authorities have had responsibility for completing the multi-disciplinary learning difficulty assessment for learners identified by their school as requiring support at the end of their schooling. This process is intended to take account of all local provision available and make recommendations that embrace the learning and support needs and the aspirations of the young person.
17. Providers, participants in the focus groups and stakeholders reported that although there had been some improvement in the quality of the learning difficulty assessments during 2010/11, they were still not of the required standard. They noted that:
- reductions in the number of personal advisers meant that the service was being spread more thinly and specialisms had been lost
 - the current arrangements for identifying appropriate provision usually depended upon historical links between schools and post-16 providers
 - the failure to explore all possible options led to inconsistent recommendations being made to learners with similar levels and types of need
 - the criteria for residential placement were unclear. This resulted in significant inequities in the final placements in terms of the facilities and opportunities available. For example, one learner could be recommended for a placement that involved residence and five days a week of tuition, but a learner with a similar level of need could be recommended to attend locally provided day provision for only three days a week.
18. Inspectors found that the arrangements of the local authorities visited, to provide learners with a learning difficulty assessment as the basis for transition to post-16 provision, were not working effectively. Providers had received a

completed learning difficulty assessment in only 31 of the 92 case studies conducted where learners had statements. Where received, the content and quality of the learning difficulty assessments did not have sufficient specialist input and were not typically of a sufficiently high standard to be used as an action plan for a transition, and were not always accurate. For example, one personal adviser had advised the wrong font size for a learner with a visual impairment, where it was essential that the correct font was used. The provider's own assessment identified this error.

19. In only 10 of the case studies were the assessments found to be helpful by the providers who received them. The timeliness of the arrangements for assessment was problematic, as providers' processes of familiarisation and induction often started a year before the learning difficulty assessment was required to be carried out. These arrangements, which were helpful for students in enabling them to become familiar with the provider, had been developed over many years but did not fit the requirements for the learning difficulty assessments. Local options for provision were not adequately explored. In particular, work-based learning provision was rarely considered or recommended.
20. Representatives from all 12 of the local authorities interviewed for this survey acknowledged that the learning difficulty assessments were not yet consistent in quality and were sometimes completed by colleges themselves. This was confirmed by stakeholders interviewed and providers visited for the survey.
21. The representatives from the local authorities reported that the National Transition Support Programme¹⁰ had been helpful in enabling them to plan the provision and identify the local needs. The local authorities were at different stages in the process of transforming their arrangements, and all had further to go. All had a transitions team which included representation from care, education and health but all acknowledged that the availability of the health staff was sometimes limited. They were not always able to contribute to the meetings to advise on such matters as therapies for learners with complex needs. The local authority managers identified, in particular, concerns about funding for those with mental ill-health, and the fact that the criteria for assessment of need were different between the different agencies.
22. There were few examples of active participation by social services and health service professionals in the case studies evaluated by inspectors. In 10 of the case studies, social services were actively involved in the transition arrangements. These interventions mainly related to travel, housing and foster care. The involvement of the health service at transition was mentioned in six case studies. Most of these concerned speech and language therapists, who had successfully supported learners who were elective mutes or had other significant communication needs.

¹⁰ Details can be accessed on www.transitionsupportprogramme.org.uk.

23. All of the local authorities identified the action they had taken to ease the transition from children's to adult social care services. Learners and their parents/carers had been introduced to the new arrangements for funding social care support, whereby they were allocated 'personal budgets', which they could use to purchase support themselves. However, stakeholders, parents from the focus group and 10 of the case studies identified that the system only worked well where the parents/carers had adequate information and guidance about what was available, and the confidence to make choices.
24. Interventions to enable learners to travel to providers included travel training provided by the local authorities. All the local authority managers interviewed acknowledged that more needed to be done, as this could result in significant savings in transport costs in the future. In six of the case studies, travel training was mentioned as having been helpful in enabling learners to access the provision.

Post-16 providers' transition, induction and assessment procedures

Transition and induction

25. Seventy-seven learners in the case studies had made the transition to post-16 provision straight from school. The arrangements worked best when the learners had the opportunity to become familiar with the setting and with the courses available. Effective activities which contributed to the transition process involved:
 - link courses where learners attended the setting during the final years of schooling for a set time each week to follow a specified programme
 - taster opportunities, where the learner sampled subjects, including tasters during the summer break
 - opportunities to get to know the building and the facilities and to meet the tutors and support staff before starting
 - interviews which focused on attainment and capability
 - a discussion and agreement about any adjustments required
 - the opportunity for specialist familiarisation activity such as mobility training before the start of the programme.
26. The providers visited identified that up to a third of referrals for additional learning support occurred through initial assessment completed at the time of enrolment. All the colleges had flexible learner support arrangements, whereby learners could refer themselves to support services or could be referred, with the learners' consent, by a member of staff. Resources were allocated appropriately to make provision for late referrals. The following examples illustrate the actions taken to support successful transition to further study at a college.

A learner, with elective mutism and high levels of anxiety, was supported in her transition by the health authority's speech and language therapist. The therapist had completed the learner's transition documents and worked with the college during the year before the transition to prepare her. She had not been attending school and became highly anxious in any social setting. The college and the therapist prepared her for the transition by using a staged approach, so that her visits became gradually longer and she could stay for longer periods of time without getting anxious. She became familiar with all of the college's services and a member of the college's staff was identified to accompany her as soon as she arrived on the campus. The learner was gradually introduced to her tutors and the support staff. The therapist worked with the staff, and trained them in the use of strategies to assist the learner's communication. A support plan was developed and it was agreed with the learner that she would attend at first for one session a week and gradually build up her confidence. This enabled her to increase her attendance which is now almost full time.

A learner who was approaching the end of her foster care placement was expected to move into independent living accommodation. She had been attending the agricultural college as part of a special school link programme, where she had been studying horse care. Social services were fully involved in the transition process, which included planning for her to learn to live more independently. The early links with the college helped to smooth the transition and after several interviews, a range of possible pathways was identified, starting with entry level provision.

The college arranged for her to prepare for the transition by learning to find her way around the extensive campus. Social services were fully involved in helping the learner to become familiar with the residential provision at the college by finding out about the residential facilities and explaining about the practical aspects of residential provision and meeting other learners in residence.

This was a very successful transition as the learner was fully prepared by social services and the college to transfer to residential provision. This would also prepare her for moving into independent living accommodation when she left college.

27. Despite the requirements for a planned transition programme, not all learners transferred straight from school. In 24 of the case studies examined during the survey, learners had been disengaged from formal learning since leaving school and only one had gone into work. Personal advisers had only maintained contact with three of them. Instead, those who had been disengaged had followed a range of different routes into post-16 settings, which included contact with a Job Centre, with voluntary groups such as the Prince's Trust, or time spent at home or in a hostel. Eighteen of the 24 learners had chosen to enrol with independent providers of work-based learning as they preferred the relatively smaller-scale context for learning. Nine of these 18 learners had

applied to the provider themselves and the others had been referred by the Job Centre or other community providers.

28. All six of the independent providers of work-based learning who offered foundation learning had well-developed links with Job Centres and community providers to identify learners who were not in employment, education or training, and many of their learners were recruited through this route. This reflected the fact that applicants for Entry to Employment needed to be referred through the former Connexions service. One independent learning provider was chair of the disability group in a local 14 to 19 partnership, and through extensive contacts had increased the number of enrolments from local schools.
29. The recruitment arrangements in all of the colleges visited included a range of local partnerships. Two had particularly successful formal partnerships, involving working with local authorities and other community groups to re-engage learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. One of these involved a joint programme which included the local crime prevention team.¹¹ In this case, the project workers contacted and supported learners who had been disengaged from learning and who were particularly vulnerable in the community. The learners had taken part in informal learning activities and, following a summer recruitment event, had enrolled on college courses.
30. In the adult and community learning programmes seen, the transition arrangements varied with the type of programme offered. For those learners who transferred directly from school to the adult provider who offered a two-year pre-college course, or to the provider who offered work-based learning, the process was similar to that of those transferring straight to a college. Learners were identified early and followed an induction process. For the adults in the case studies who were resident in care homes, referral had been from the care home staff, who worked in partnership with the local authorities' adult education services to identify those who could benefit. This transition had been successful for these learners who were following short courses at entry level that enabled them to continue in learning.

Initial assessment arrangements

31. In the provision seen, the most effective assessments of need included, as appropriate for individual learners:
 - the learner's self-evaluation of any support requirements

¹¹ Department for Education analysis in *Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability*, notes that young people with statements of special educational needs are over-represented in the population of young offenders: *Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability*, DfE, 2011; www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM%208027.

- detailed consideration of any documentation provided by previous providers, and previous levels of attainment
 - the perspective of parents/carers about the type of provision they felt would be most appropriate
 - the involvement of specialists such as speech and language therapists
 - specialist assessments where required, to identify specific adjustments such as enabling technologies, communicators and access to facilities
 - consideration of support/adjustments needed to meet any specific course requirements such as oral presentations or residential fieldwork.
32. The most effective outcomes of the assessment process included, as appropriate for individual learners:
- an individual support plan which identified periods of review and possible adjustments to support
 - an indication of training required for tutors and support staff working with the learner
 - a profile of the learner's strengths and needs and guidance for staff about effective strategies and ways of working with the learner
 - guidance for staff working in service areas of the college, such as the refectory or learning centres.
33. All of the colleges visited, including the independent specialist colleges, had developed their own assessment procedures for identifying the adjustments required for learners. These were working well. All had specialist staff available, or knew how to access specialist assessments for adults and young people who used their provision. All except one had well-qualified dyslexia specialists and most could provide comprehensive specialist assessments to meet a wide range of specialist needs. Three of the colleges offered provision for learners with very high levels of need; they employed staff who were well qualified, and had developed significant areas of specialism, particularly in the use of communication strategies.
34. Independent learning providers and adult and community learning providers were able to assess and support the learners who attended, but their range of specialist staff was more limited, reflecting the historically lower levels of funding for these remits. One private training provider had built up considerable experience of assessments for dyslexia, with very detailed information provided about the adjustments required for the learners. The independent learning providers visited were particularly responsive to the needs of individuals. In one case, previously undiagnosed hearing loss was identified and the local authority hearing impairment service was contacted to provide guidance for staff in the hairdressing salon where the apprentice worked.

35. The following example shows how one apprenticeship provider had responded very flexibly in meeting the needs of a learner who had a combination of needs.

The apprentice had previously received support at school to help with her mobility difficulty and elective mutism. She transferred to college to begin a full-time childcare course but left after two days as the promised support worker was not provided and she could not cope with the course or getting around the building. She also found the college very large compared to school and was not comfortable with the environment. When she left college, she stayed at home and became very reclusive.

Her mother contacted the independent learning provider because her daughter had previously completed work experience there, and enquired about the possibility of her starting an apprenticeship in childcare. The learner was invited for an interview and they discussed the apprenticeship and how it would work. The apprentice's specific mobility and communication difficulties were assessed and support was arranged. The provider had not experienced this type of need before, and adapted the health care plan that they used in the nursery. The support plan had a clear set of actions attached to it, including adjustments made to assist the apprentice when working with the children. This provided guidance for everyone and worked well. The learner had found ways to communicate with the very young children and was making good progress on her programme.

36. Evidence from focus groups and discussions with stakeholders indicated that learners on apprenticeship programmes, and sometimes on the foundation programmes, did not always initially declare a disability if it was 'invisible', such as dyslexia. This situation was attributed to fear that admission of a difficulty might lead to a rejection of the application. This was borne out by the case studies. Thirteen of the learners, attending the work-based learning provision visited, had had their disability identified after enrolment. Most of these learners were found to have dyslexia, but late identification also included sensory impairments that were not mentioned in the transition documents. Two apprentices were found to have a visual impairment and had registered as blind after starting at the placement. Two learners were found to have a hearing impairment which required support. Providers were very effective in identifying and responding to these needs.
37. In reviewing learners' individual learning plans, a common area for improvement identified by inspectors was that, although the plans identified support needs clearly, the goals for learners on the foundation programmes were frequently expressed solely in terms of qualifications. The generic goals that learners might develop as a result of taking different units, such as social skills, were not clearly identified or tracked.

The provision

Foundation learning

38. Introduced in September 2010, the foundation learning programme is based on the achievement of units of accreditation and applies to all provision funded below level 2, apart from Skills for Life and English for speakers of other languages. Providers are mainly funded for qualifications that are listed on the Qualifications and Credit Framework¹². Functional skills qualifications have to be achieved if a learner is to gain a full qualification and progress to a higher level.
39. Members of the focus groups expressed reservations about the design of the foundation programme and its appropriateness for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This message was further confirmed through discussions with stakeholders and staff in the providers visited. While the opportunity to gain qualifications was seen as positive for those wanting to progress to higher levels, and in helping to build learners' confidence, they found that the programme had significant disadvantages for those learners whose aspirations were focused on finding some form of employment or developing greater skills of independence.
40. The main concerns raised by providers about the design of foundation learning were that it:
- focused on accreditation rather than practical activity
 - did not provide adequate funding for job coaches and employment opportunities such as internships
 - could only fund activities for three days a week, which did not allow sufficient time for practical activities in realistic settings
 - used a competence-based model of accreditation which did not allow for development at each level, as units were all at the same level of difficulty and the achievements were all of the same value
 - was much more expensive than the previous arrangements, particularly where providers wanted to offer a programme of units selected from a number of different qualifications in order to reflect learners' choices and interests; some awarding bodies required providers to enter learners for a minimum number of their units, so this limited choices, particularly for small providers
 - included inappropriate accreditation for learners with profound learning needs for activities such as smiling to indicate pleasure or approval, and, for more able learners, activities such as using a public convenience

¹² www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-assessments/89-articles/145-explaining-the-qualifications-and-credit-framework.

- created artificial barriers to progression in practical subjects by requiring accreditation of functional skills at one level before being able to take full vocational qualifications at a higher level.
41. Inspectors found that all of the providers visited had, despite reservations, worked hard to meet the new requirements and had offered foundation programmes that enabled learners to progress through the different levels of accreditation. All of the 49 case-study learners on foundation provision had gained units and 35 had progressed from entry or pre-entry levels the previous year. Success was defined as achieving units of accreditation, and by this measure learners were successful.
 42. Providers had used the initial assessment and the induction period to identify the units that the learners could achieve and which reflected their interests. The most effective programmes took advantage of the full range of accredited options, and learners followed a mixed programme of units, including some at level 1 in mainstream classes, which was a positive progression for those individuals. These programmes were most effective in meeting the needs of learners who required qualifications at foundation level in order to progress to a level 2 qualification which would be recognised in the workplace, or as the basis for progression to level 3.
 43. The following is a typical example of the gains made by learners on discrete programmes seeking to progress to study at a higher level.

One learner with an autistic spectrum condition had been home tutored for many years. His mother wanted him to go to college when he reached 16, and made an application. The learner's records did not show prior achievement of any qualifications, and no reviews of previous progress were available. The college carried out an assessment of need, and after an induction he started on an entry level course, with one-to-one support in the classroom.

The learner's levels of anxiety reduced as he participated in his programme, and he no longer wanted one-to-one support. After a few weeks, it became evident that he was very able in information and communication technology (ICT), which was a new subject for him. With his agreement, the programme was adjusted to enable him to develop more skills in this area. He achieved his entry level qualifications and at the time of the visit was successfully following a level 1 programme in ICT, with minimal support in the classroom, but regular reviews of his programme. The expectation was that he would progress to a level 2 programme in ICT the following year.

44. Learners and their parents or carers identified the gains from participating in the foundation programmes in terms of self-confidence and attitudinal change; in particular attendance. Rather than the achievement of units, they identified social gains such as the improved capacity to communicate effectively, engage

in lessons and speak to adults unfamiliar to them. This was confirmed where learners, who had been identified at their initial assessment as requiring significant support for communication, were very articulate when speaking to inspectors. They could describe well the gains they had made, such as using the canteen independently and attending regularly.

45. Staff in all of the providers worked creatively within the foundation level framework. Good or better sessions were seen across all types of provision. In the most effective sessions observed:
- the focus was clear and content of the sessions was challenging
 - the support staff were briefed about what was expected of them
 - activities were planned on an individual basis so that each learner could achieve within the session
 - the sessions built on learners' capabilities and learning activities were matched well to the identified goals of the learners
 - the teacher/trainer planned the session carefully so that support needs could be met
 - regular checks were made on learning and the degree to which learners were making progress.
46. The following is an example from an adult and community learning provider of good practice in building on learners' strengths and experiences. This was a part-time entry level course about self-advocacy and self-awareness. The group of learners was appropriately challenged to develop skills in communication and working in groups, and the session built up learners' confidence in engaging in the community.

The group was planning to deliver a disability awareness training session at the local university for trainee clinical psychologists. The teacher had planned very carefully for the needs of the group, including those with Asperger's syndrome, so that the sequence of the day and what needed organising were very clear. The focus on working together effectively in the group, as well as working in the wider community, provided a good balance of personal development and employability skills.

The teacher showed considerable skill in working with this group. She had a respectful relationship with them and demonstrated just the right balance between working alongside them as one of the team, but also leading where appropriate to stretch them and further develop their skills and understanding.

The group had delivered this training session before to employees of the council. By evaluating this previous session the tutor was able to discuss with the learners what would be the best way to deliver the training to the new audience. The learners had good ownership of this work and

contributed appropriately and well. The teacher took their literacy levels into account by adapting the email about the event that had come from the University into a format where the information was easier to read.

47. However, this example also demonstrates that the use of levels within foundation learning as 'proxies' for capability is unhelpful. Despite the fact that their formal literacy skills were low and they were therefore described as 'entry level' these adult learners could prepare and make a presentation to a challenging audience, and contribute well to the community, demonstrating capabilities well above entry level.
48. Seven of the 14 sessions observed had areas for improvement that included one or more of the following:
- insufficient focus on meeting identified individual needs and evaluating learning
 - inappropriate support, or preparation for support, including in one case the inability of the support staff themselves to complete the confusing task prepared for the learners
 - lack of challenge, with repetition of previous work
 - insufficiently high expectations of learners, by not requiring them to work to professional or industrial standards in the vocational tasks being carried out.
49. Inspectors found that a focus on accreditation meant that programmes did not provide sufficient opportunity for the development of skills in realistic settings. In order to complete units of accreditation, learners had to complete prescribed work books to evidence skills such as employability. Providers reported, and inspectors observed, that the completion of work books was not adequate preparation for work and resulted in too much time being spent in the classroom. Some of this time would have been more appropriately spent in practical work activity as preparation for employment.
50. The following example illustrates the way in which the foundation learning model did not benefit a learner, as the focus was on gaining units of accreditation, with no opportunity for work experience.

One learner with an autistic spectrum disorder was following a vocational preparation programme at entry level. He had been tutored at home for the two years prior to attending the college, as he had been bullied at school and had had poor attendance. He and his mother were very positive about his attendance and his social progress at the college, and these were very significant gains. However, his programme had not involved any type of work experience, even though he described his next step as starting an apprenticeship the following academic year.

None of the units on his programme prepared him for an apprenticeship and he had not been invited to explore the occupational areas he might

consider. He described his recent experience with the careers service as unhelpful and he was not at all certain where he would be the following year. Although he had been able to choose units and had made progress by achieving them, it was not clear where this 'pick and mix' approach was leading. The learning plan focused on achieving units of accreditation and did not identify any generic skills that he was developing as a result of taking different units, so it was not clear how he had benefited in terms of developing the skills required for employment.

51. The programmes seen by inspectors that were most effective in preparing learners for employment were not typically funded under the foundation learning arrangements. They were funded separately as part of specific projects such as those identified below, or took place in settings where individual learners were funded at a much higher level, such as independent specialist colleges. Such circumstances, where providers are reliant on additional sources of funding to enhance their programmes, also pertained under the arrangements prior to the introduction of foundation learning in 2010. However, some of the sources of funding that providers had previously called upon for provision that did not lead to qualifications, such as the Learning and Skills Council's development fund, were no longer available to them.
52. The following are examples of programmes that are designed to meet other goals, which may, where appropriate, include aspects of accreditation.
53. One independent specialist college, where learners are funded for five days a week, specialised in programmes for learners with autistic spectrum conditions. In the following example, a learner had transferred from special school to the independent specialist college. He had applied to the college because of its specialism and record in enabling students to find employment.

The learner had an extensive interview day at the college which included a thorough multi-disciplinary assessment and identification of need. He had individual funding based on his identified needs, including specific funding for speech therapy, and one-to-one tuition where needed. His programme was focused on preparing for employment and he participated in the college's own social enterprises, which included floristry and the provision of stationery supplies. He developed his communication skills over three years, supported by a speech and language therapist and highly trained support staff. He gradually built up his skills while working in the social enterprises. These skills included contact with members of the public, something he had previously found caused high levels of anxiety, as well as practical skills which involved the use of money and other administrative tasks. At the time of the visit, he had successfully started a supported internship at the local hospital, which he was hopeful would lead to permanent employment.

54. In another example, a general further education college had used a combination of the higher level Young People's Learning Agency placement

budget and local partnership working to enable students with complex needs to progress to employment. This funding was part of the 'Improving Choice' approach used in the east of England, whereby learners are funded for five days a week.¹³

The learner spent two days a week at the college learning how to work within a commercial kitchen doing food preparation, two days on supported work-experience in the kitchens at the local university and one day supported in the kitchen at the local café run by the local branch of a national charity. This enabled him to put his catering skills into practice. During his two-year course, he was also encouraged to learn how to respond appropriately in situations where he was anxious. He commented: 'I now know how to control my temper and I have ways of helping myself.' The structured approach from staff, as he gradually learnt how to behave in a professional context, helped him to recognise the consistent demands of a job. He learnt to use local transport independently. He was given practice interviews and support to write his curriculum vitae, and now has a part-time job in catering.

55. One general further education college visited had just started to offer Project Search, which is a national programme to identify opportunities for work experience and employment, endorsed by the government's Office for Disability Issues.¹⁴

The two learners on the Project Search programme had a thorough preparation assessment and induction programme which included self-care skills, communication, transport, employability skills and practical skills. They had formal interviews with the sponsoring local authority which offered six internships in the library, children's services, leisure centre, café, and a care home for the elderly. The learners were coming to the end of their first 10-week internship at the time of the survey visit. The learners were required to keep diaries of their work which was a useful way of practising their writing skills and reflecting on what they had learnt and their changing attitudes to work. They were supported by trained job coaches and their work-placement mentor. They attended one session each week with the college tutor. Both learners reported that they had learnt new skills and that they had developed their confidence enormously. One learner, who was working in the library, read books to

¹³ Improving Choice was an LSC-funded project to develop local post-16 provision in the east of England for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities whose only alternative if they wished to continue in education would be to attend a specialist, residential college.

¹⁴ Project Search is a national programme to find work opportunities and employment for young people with high levels of need, for whom employment is identified as a realistic goal. Projects are small, with around 12 learners, who spend up to a year with a host employer that offers work placements with a mentor (internships), together with support from a job coach. Funding depends on local initiatives and partnerships. There is no national funding stream.

small groups of young children and engaged with them. When she started the course she had very little confidence and rarely gave eye contact.

56. One of the three providers that offered programmes for learners with high levels of need did not provide discrete pre-entry level programmes, or focus on units of accreditation but developed individual programmes of activities for individual learners to prepare them for their transition to the community. The following example illustrates this.

The learner was in her third year of an individual study programme. As part of the transition process to the college she had had an extensive assessment of her mobility requirements and communication needs. In preparation for the start of her programme, three members of staff were trained to use the facilitative communication methods and approaches that were most helpful for the learner. The support plan included detailed guidance on ways to facilitate communication, with arrangements made for individual personal care and feeding. Her individual programme enabled her to access the practical aspects of mainstream courses.

Textiles and jewellery-making was the course that she enjoyed most and she also attended the gym and group sessions to improve her communication. She had one-to-one support at all times. Materials in practical classes were adapted for her. During her time at the college she started to use her right hand, no longer needed a wheelchair in college and improved her communication strategies. She had a transition plan which was preparing her well for her transition to the community, where arrangements had been made for her to prepare for engagement in arts-based activities and part-time voluntary work once she left the college.

57. The new foundation learning funding arrangements did not readily accommodate the development of independent living skills in a realistic environment. For many learners the transference of skills to new environments can be challenging. In the provision seen, learners were offered programmes that included activities, such as cookery and shopping, to develop aspects of independence, but there were insufficient opportunities for their development in a total environment that reflected the reality of living with greater independence.
58. Providers, focus groups and stakeholders interviewed identified that the possibilities for practical experience that included realistic residential opportunities were very limited. Of the providers in the survey, the two agricultural colleges and one of the specialist residential colleges were able to accommodate learners on entry level programmes and provide them with opportunities to experience living more independently. Both independent specialist colleges had links with supported housing trusts or similar organisations. One general further education college had an arrangement with a housing association, and worked with the local social services to prepare learners whose future accommodation was planned to be in supported living.

59. One of the independent specialist colleges interviewed by telephone had arrangements with further education colleges, whereby their residential facilities could be used for short residential stays. Another residential specialist college prepared learners by working with social services in the learners' home area. The specialist college's transitions staff visited the new accommodation and carried out a familiarisation exercise so that learners could use the actual facilities available.

Additional support for individuals on mainstream programmes

60. The support provided for learners in the 62 mainstream programme and apprentice case studies was designed to meet a wide range of medical, physical, sensory, emotional and learning needs. The provision observed by inspectors was found to be good overall, with examples of outstanding practice in the colleges and in the provision of independent providers of work-based learning.
61. The best provision included some or all of the following features, depending upon the needs of learners:
- planned reviews of the adjustments made and support provided to evaluate their effectiveness and make any changes
 - flexible arrangements so that learners could identify when they required more or less support
 - a focus on capability, and building on what learners did well
 - opportunities for in-class support on a one-to-one basis, or one-to-one support outside the classroom, or for group support that focused on specific learning needs
 - a mentor/key worker to remain a constant point of contact throughout a learner's programme year-to-year
 - use of technological devices such as digital recorders that enabled learners to become independent
 - arrangements to ensure that employers understood fully what adjustments were required for learners.
62. All of the supported learners in the 62 case studies, for whom it was appropriate, had had their levels of support reduced over time as they became more independent in their learning. Planned reductions in support enabled learners to become more confident and develop their own strategies for managing their behaviour or their approach to learning. This was particularly evident where learners had a specific reading or numeracy difficulty, or autistic spectrum conditions.
63. The progress of supported learners in achieving qualifications and moving through the levels of learning was good. In the colleges visited, 30 of the 41 supported case-study learners were in their second or subsequent year of

training, and in some cases had progressed from foundation level to level 3 or higher. On apprenticeship programmes, 14 of the 21 learners sampled had progressed from foundation level programmes to apprenticeships.

64. The learners and parents/carers in the case studies were overwhelmingly positive about the support provided. All of the case studies confirmed the main benefits as one or more of the following:
- increased confidence, often resulting in improved social contacts
 - improved attendance
 - greater independence over time, as support was adjusted
 - knowing someone is there to listen to concerns.
65. The following examples illustrate good support provided in two different settings observed by inspectors.

In an off-the-job training session with an independent provider of work-based learning, apprentices with dyslexia were observed in a hairdressing theory session. The session content prepared the learners well for the practical aspects of hairdressing. They had good opportunities for reflection and discussion about skin conditions and salon hygiene. The teacher used a range of study skills, such as skimming and scanning, that had been identified to support those with dyslexia but were also useful study skills for all the learners. Information was presented in small components that were discussed by learners and reinforced by the tutor, who created opportunities during the session to check learning and monitor the learners' progress.

The support arrangements were good. The register listed the support needs of individual learners and the aids and adaptations required, and these were observed in use. One learner, for example, used a yellow overlay on the computer to enable her to see the text more clearly. The member of staff met learners' needs well. Her experience and training in dyslexia enabled her to present materials and tasks in ways that unobtrusively supported the learners with dyslexia.

A learner with hearing loss, who used British Sign Language (BSL) and with English as a second language, was observed in a level 2 bakery class in a college. He planned to progress to a level 3 professional cookery course. In a class of 10, the learner was supported by a communication support worker, who had a very high level of signing skills and was also able to make cultural adjustments if required.

The tutor provided a highly effective interactive session that was well-paced and managed to include all learners. He adapted a mixed theory and practical session through a model of staged demonstrations, each followed by questions where he made sure all learners were involved and

provided time for responses. This was then followed by practical work. All the learners reviewed their completed products with the tutor and other learners. The deaf learner received information in a timely manner so that he kept at the same pace as other learners. The interpreter's positioning was good in relation to the tutor and the learner. The learner demonstrated a high level of practical bakery skills and a good understanding of theory.

The support documentation included a very clear summary of support needs and a detailed assessment of the impact of the learner's deafness on learning, excellent recommendations for tutors and for work placements. The support plan included access to the college facilities and identified the need to identify technical signs relevant to the vocational area.

66. Of the 62 case studies, only 10 were found not to be receiving a good quality of support. The reasons for less effective support included one of the following:
- insufficiently qualified communication support workers for learners who used BSL
 - insufficient technical expertise to cope with the adjustments required for learners with visual impairments
 - insufficient specialism in support for learners with specific literacy difficulties
 - failure to implement agreed strategies or to review progress effectively
 - the use of literacy materials that were intended for children and were not vocationally relevant
 - too little continuity of support over time, particularly when moving to a different course.
67. Those learners whose disability had not been previously identified, or who had ceased to attend school, or where the onset of illness had started after leaving school, found they had been given a 'second chance'. Examples of this were seen in all types of provision visited and two examples are provided here.

A learner on an early-years apprenticeship scheme was given a 'second chance' when provided with support to meet her needs. The provider had received no information from the school about the learners' areas of difficulty and the learner declared that she had developed strategies to cope as her condition slowly deteriorated. She did not at first declare any disability, but it became evident very early in the course. A specialist assessment confirmed that she had a visual impairment and she became registered as blind. The provider further identified possible dyslexia, which at the time of the visit had just been formally assessed and confirmed. The provider and employer had made appropriate adjustments in the workplace, and guidance provided for the tutor and mentor was being implemented in the classroom. The learner was coping well with the

course and at the time of the visit she had just received confirmation that she was to be fast-tracked to the level 3 apprenticeship programme.

One learner had a poor attendance record at school; she left school with no qualifications. She attributed her poor schooling record to undiagnosed dyslexia, and the transition documentation confirmed this. She had found employment in a local garden centre and spent much of her leisure time helping out at local farms, and was particularly interested in working with horses. Her employer recognised her ability and suggested that she consider returning to study.

She attended an open day at a local agricultural college and after discussions with tutors applied for a course leading to horse management. Although she did not have the required qualifications, the college was impressed by her obvious knowledge and understanding at interview. The college identified her dyslexia. Her support plan included opportunities for one-to-one support to help to develop her writing skills.

After three years, she is preparing for a veterinary career, using the college's foundation degree as a first step. She drops in to the open access support centre for help if that is needed, but she has developed strategies to enable her to cope with the written work and is now mostly an independent learner.

68. All the providers visited had invested in staff training, and in colleges the roles of the support staff on mainstream courses had gradually evolved into specialists who enabled learners to develop strategies for learning, rather than primarily assisting in the classroom. Two of the apprenticeship providers in the survey had developed specialisms, one in dyslexia and the other in visual impairment. The provider that had developed visual impairment as a specialism had done so because the company specialised in ICT training and it wanted to ensure that apprentices would be able to continue to use their skills once the apprenticeship was over. The other provider had responded to the very high numbers of learners applying for apprenticeships who either had, or were found to have dyslexia. Providers could support the learners currently on their programmes, but the range and availability of specialist training for staff were variable in the providers visited, with colleges able to offer the widest range of opportunities for specialist support.
69. Although support staff had taken qualifications relevant for classroom assistants, the needs of the service were changing, with less support being provided in the classroom. Focus groups and stakeholders interviewed identified that the sector lacks an appropriate national qualification, although one is planned. Colleges funded staff to take specialist qualifications relating to specific needs such as enabling communication, rather than general support qualifications. Much of the training was developed locally and focus groups and providers identified a need for a national website to keep them informed of courses and resources available.

Local availability and funding of provision

70. Historically, the pattern of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has varied considerably and inspectors found that it continues to do so, being very much dependent on local circumstances. The Young People's Learning Agency confirmed that regional offices of the former Learning and Skills Council had taken differing approaches to developing provision. Their regional plans and strategic documents show that, for example, some regions identified one or two colleges as the main providers of specialist provision, and built up their total capacity. Other regions sought to involve all providers in capacity building and agreed with them the type of specialism they would develop, so that learners could travel to learn as appropriate. The level of funding for work-based and adult and community learning providers has historically been much lower than that for colleges. Learners in the localities visited in the survey faced significant variations in provision available locally, as well as in the level of funding available for different programmes.
71. Of the 32 providers visited in the survey, all offered provision for learners with moderate and sometimes multiple needs, including medical needs. Three colleges offered provision for learners with high levels of need, and one further education college and one specialist college offered provision for a small number of learners with the highest level of need. This reflects the findings from stakeholders and local authorities that provision for those with the highest level of need was subject to local variation.
72. The senior managers of the 12 local authorities spoken to confirmed the historic lack of local provision for learners with the highest level of need. They identified the need to improve local capacity significantly so that learners had a wider range of options, including working with third sector organisations. They found that sending learners out of the local area only postponed the issues, as they still required specialist provision when they returned, and in some cases had to be taught skills of independence again.
73. At a local level, all of the providers visited had developed partnerships or local arrangements to disseminate good practice and share the specialist strengths of their provision. Private training providers shared expertise with each other and with colleges to maximise specialist knowledge. In particular, providers worked with specialist colleges to increase their capacity. Members of focus groups identified ways in which other specialist colleges had been involved in activities to develop capacity. These included:
- training college staff in topics such as enabling technologies and in specialist communication techniques
 - carrying out specialist assessments where a provider does not have specialist expertise
 - making short-stay residential facilities available to learners studying in colleges.

74. Both of the specialist colleges included in the survey were involved with training locally, using their specialist knowledge to train staff working in other settings. One of the adult and community learning providers visited had a productive relationship with a local specialist college which provided for learners with profound and complex communication needs.

One adult and community learning provider worked with a local specialist college which trained its own staff of enablers in inclusive learning up to foundation degree level. They were trained to work in community settings in adult and community learning and in work-based learning. The staff also followed a systematic instruction training programme designed for job coaching. The central aspect of their training was in enabling young people and adults with severe communication difficulties to communicate effectively, using enabling technologies. The training for the adult college's support staff was carried out by the specialist college and they conducted joint lesson observations.

This collaborative way of working developed the skills of the staff in the adult college, enabling them to work with learners with significant communication needs on their own programmes and also provided education and progression opportunities for the learners in the specialist college.

75. The foundation learning programmes visited were mainly offered over three days and funding was based on the achievement of accredited programmes. This contrasts with school sixth form provision, special schools and independent specialist colleges, where learners are funded on an individual basis for five days a week. Participants in the focus groups and the stakeholder and local authority senior managers interviewed reported that one of the main reasons that learners applied for residential provision or for day placements in independent specialist colleges was in order to access programmes offered over a full week.
76. The providers visited identified that the arrangements whereby learners transferred from the Young People's Learning Agency to the Skills Funding Agency at 19 did not always work effectively. This was particularly an issue for work-based learners where two providers were not able to access funding from the Skills Funding Agency for individuals or for cohorts of learners who wanted to progress to a new course which had not previously been part of the provider's contracted provision.
77. Of particular impact for adult and community learning and for college learners has been that from September 2010 learners became liable to pay fees if they were not on 'active benefits' and seeking work; this included those with mental health needs. Although guidance changed in February 2011, this situation had already had adverse effects on recruitment. In addition, the focus groups and stakeholders identified that the charging of fees for some courses had limited

choices for learners. In two of the six case studies on part-time adult provision, this was mentioned by the learners as a reason for not attending other courses.

78. Focus groups, stakeholders and providers reported that the national funding arrangements for apprenticeships were not helpful for potential apprentices with disabilities. The standard funding is related to an expectation of achievement of an accredited level within a specified time. The requirements for 'timely completions' on apprenticeship programmes, and the significant amounts of work to be covered in the off-the-job training one day a week, acted as a disincentive to participation, as employers and training providers perceived that supported learners may need more time to complete their programmes successfully.
79. Funding for adult and community learning providers had become extremely challenging. Members of focus groups and the stakeholders interviewed identified significant reductions in this provision. All of the adult and community learning providers visited had experienced reductions over the last three years in funding of at least 30%. Although they had protected learners with disabilities wherever possible, the impact on staffing numbers was having an adverse effect on the number of classes that could be run. Applications were increasing as availability of provision was reduced. Providers described how other reductions in local services also affected the provision; for example, local authority project funding for vulnerable adults was no longer to be provided.

Participation and outcomes

80. The national data show a steady increase in the proportion of enrolled learners on further education and skills programmes who declared a learning difficulty and/or disability, rising from 8% in 2002–03 (371,920 learners) to 12% in 2009/10, (560,860 learners).¹⁵
81. Nationally, the proportion of learners who started an apprenticeship in 2009/10 who declared a learning difficulty and/or disability was around 9% (26,390 apprentices) and has declined slightly since 2007/08. The providers visited indicated that although the number of declarations was low, their experience was that not all apprentices declared a disability if it was not visible.
82. In 2009/10, only 12% of learners (87,400) nationally on Adult Safeguarded provision disclosed a learning difficulty and/or disability.¹⁶ There are no separate national data for learners on entry and level 1 programmes in adult and community learning provision, or for non-accredited courses.

¹⁵ Source of data used in this and subsequent sections: the Data Service Statistical First Release, March 2011; www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_current/.

¹⁶ Adult Safeguarded Learning includes a range of community based and outreach learning opportunities, primarily taking place through local authorities.
<http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/programmes/asl/>.

Success rates

83. National success rates show that learners in colleges who declare a disability achieve as well as their peers. In 2009–10, the success rates across the provision as a whole for learners who had declared a disability were the same as their peers at 81%. However, although improving, they are lower than their peers on apprenticeship programmes, where the success rates of those who declared a disability were 70%, compared with 74% for their peers. The data from the colleges visited reflected the national pattern. However, on the apprenticeship programmes visited, the success rates of learners with a declared disability compared well in all but one of the providers.
84. The data analysis exercise carried out for the survey analysed data from the providers visited and a sample of 54 other learning and skills providers. The research showed that ways of collating information varied significantly. All looked at overall success rates and were using these to evaluate the provision. A third used the data to evaluate success rates in respect of particular types of disability. Although the sample was small, it indicated that success rates for those with mental health issues were generally higher for this group than others but for those learners with a sensory disability, success rates were generally lower. This was reflected in the survey visit findings, where the providers reported that their capacity for support was lower in these areas and examples of insufficient support for sensory impairments were found in a few of the case studies.

Destinations

Employment

85. Data about the destinations of learners with a learning difficulty and/or disability once they leave post-16 provision are not collated nationally. All of the providers visited kept local information about the destination of learners, but this information was collated, presented and analysed in different ways.
86. The survey visits identified that all providers had started to collect data about destinations, although very few could provide year on year comparisons about sustained employment. Employment outcomes were relatively low from entry level provision. The data analysis exercise for the survey showed that providers maintained information about progression, and the great majority of these learners, over 85%, progressed to other courses. On work-based learning courses the proportions varied from 25% to 75%.
87. In the two independent specialist colleges visited, routes to open employment or supported employment were developed as destination routes. For one college this was the main learning goal for all of the learners. All 11 learners who had left this college in the last two years had transferred to supported employment. In the other college, 11 of the 16 leavers in 2010 progressed to a specialist link project to assist learners to find employment.

88. Evidence from the survey visits, the focus groups and the providers telephoned, indicated that the recent down-turn in the economy had acted adversely on learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In particular, it had reduced opportunities for voluntary work, as more young people without disabilities were seeking this route to employment. The examples in this report of programmes effective in preparing young people for employment illustrate that successful outcomes are more likely to occur where learners spend significant amounts of time gaining work experience as part of their learning programme.
89. Two adult and community learning providers identified employment as a destination from their courses. One adult provider of work-based learning did not record numbers moving eventually into employment, but all learners had the opportunity to join the pool for possible employment as apprentices, organised by the local authority. Learners with the other adult and community learning provider were preparing for progression to a social enterprise. The following case study reflects the findings of providers in relation to the impact of significant reductions in allocations for adult and community learning.

The local authority had worked in partnership with the adult learning service to plan and establish a catering social enterprise. The aim was to provide progression routes for adults and to equip them with realistic work experience. Shortly before it was due to open, the service was transferred to another department, and just at the point of opening the local authority decided to end the project. The eight learners who had been prepared for the enterprise by developing catering skills had no warning of its closure, so had no transition plans. At the time of the survey visit, a month after the decision, the provider had not found suitable alternative progression routes for these learners.

Transition to higher education

90. As reported in Ofsted's Special Educational Needs and Disability Review, 2010, the application system for disabled students allowance (DSA) continues to be found cumbersome. Where colleges had higher education provision on site, the transition was often eased, and providers were able to maintain continuity of support for learners.
91. Four learners in the case studies had successfully progressed from a college's further education to its higher education provision. Four others were in the process of applying. The survey showed that although the providers collated information about all learners who had progressed to higher education, they did not routinely identify the proportions of supported learners who did so.
92. Although they show positive eventual outcomes, the following case studies illustrate some of the barriers that learners had to overcome in progressing to higher education.

One supported student who used a wheelchair and required adaptations in order to access a computer, had progressed from level 2 in a college to a level 3 course, and then transferred to a higher education course to study digital imaging. All seemed to go well in applying for the disabled students allowance and the significant adjustments, involving personal care, a note taker and adapted equipment were apparently agreed. However, what had not been fully understood was that the student was required to find his own personal care enabler, and because that had not happened when he started the course, his family and friends had to provide this for the first weeks. At the time of the visit, the arrangements were effectively in place as an enabler had been found. The student was enjoying the course and making good progress, including preparing to go to Barcelona with the group as part of the course.

Two deaf learners, who were BSL users, entered the college initially to gain level 2 qualifications in English and mathematics. From there they progressed to an access to higher education course and then on to the BA in Social Work provided by the college. They were supported throughout their time on the higher education course, in class, and on three different work placements. The college responded to their needs by employing communication support workers qualified to level 4 who could provide the level of BSL needed. This could have been problematic, since not all communicators, even if trained to the appropriate level, would know some of the technical signs required. The college's specialist support team included a qualified teacher for the deaf who assisted the learners through language modification of assignments and examination papers, and one-to-one out of class support. Both adults recently graduated and one has already found employment in a social work setting

Access to independent living

93. Providers, focus groups and stakeholders reported that the opportunities for transition to independent living were reducing and that it was becoming more difficult to find suitable supported living accommodation for learners at the end of their education programmes. The criteria for supported living were changing and the availability of suitable accommodation was reducing. Providers gave examples of accommodation offered and withdrawn at the last moment, or found to be in locations where learners would be vulnerable.

Progression to apprenticeships

94. Inspectors found that there were not enough progression pathways for apprenticeships. The Entry to Employment programme was withdrawn in 2010 with the introduction of foundation learning. The programme-led apprenticeship programme has also been withdrawn. Private providers included in the survey had found Entry to Employment programmes and programme-led apprenticeships particularly effective in preparation for full apprenticeships, as they provided the opportunity to offer work experience. One private provider

had its own training hotel, which provided excellent opportunities for learners to try out different aspects of the hospitality industry, and progress to an apprenticeship having gained relevant experience. Others had their own early years' nurseries. The following is an example of a learner who had successfully progressed to an apprenticeship scheme after taking an Entry to Employment programme with a small specialist provider.

This learner was following a horticultural apprenticeship with a land-based college and was interviewed on the private training provider's premises, where he had previously taken the Entry to Employment course. He had previously been in a special school and a mainstream school, but had been a poor attender, and had left school with no qualifications. He had done little since then. He then found out about the Entry to Employment programme from the Job Centre and was referred by the Connexions personal adviser. He applied to the small specialist private training provider which specialised in horticulture, and attended some taster days, which he spent working in the gardens.

He liked the specialist centre because he could spend time on practical tasks out of doors. As he had no qualifications, he needed to have his funding extended to 18 months in order to complete this programme. His initial assessment indicated that he had very low levels of literacy and numeracy and had specific learning difficulties. Adjustments were made for him and he had one-to-one support with a specialist tutor. He explained that during the programme he had achieved his level 1 qualifications in literacy and numeracy. He had spent part of his time working for the specialist provider's gardening company, which was a social enterprise where the participants worked as small teams and were contracted to do gardening in venues such as care homes.

The learner identified that having his specific difficulties with literacy and numeracy recognised by the specialist centre had been very helpful, as he now understood why he had been having difficulties. He liked the centre because it was small and friendly and had made lots of friends and he had attended well. The provision was practically based, non-threatening, very supportive and encouraged greater independence and good skill development. The practical nature of the course and his work experience, together with his literacy and numeracy qualifications, had helped him to secure the apprenticeship place where he was making good progress.

Monitoring and evaluation

95. The national performance indicators currently used for learners are participation rates and success rates. These show a largely positive picture and an improving trend for the majority of learners who declare a disability. However, outcomes for learners on entry level provision are incorporated within the published level 1 data and are not published separately, so it is not possible to evaluate their

performance separately from those at level 1. No national data are published about outcomes from independent specialist colleges.

96. The research exercise showed that providers varied in the extent to which they presented data about this area in their self-assessment reports. Very few providers included comprehensive information about the extent to which learners met their long-term destination and aspirational goals
97. The providers visited monitored the progress of their supported learners well overall. They were developing ways of analysing the effectiveness of their provision in enabling supported learners on mainstream programmes to become more independent, with less reliance on support staff for activities such as note taking in lessons. Providers were flexible in their approach to additional learning support, although they did not routinely report on these aspects in their self-assessment reports.
98. The evidence from this survey showed that comprehensive arrangements to monitor the progress of learners from leaving school up to the age of 25 were not yet in place. Little information was maintained by local authorities once learners reached the age of 20.
99. The reliance on qualification success rates as the sole indicator of the effectiveness of provision is not appropriate for learners on entry and pre-entry level programmes. It is also not appropriate as the sole indicator for supported learners at levels 2 and 3, where the support required may relate to enabling a young person to manage social situations as well as the academic aspects of a course.
100. The survey found that insufficient consideration had been given at local and national levels to a comparative evaluation of the value for money of post-16 provision in the different settings or to monitoring the performance of providers in terms of their effectiveness in securing the outcomes of employment and independent living for their learners.

Notes

Between October 2010 and March 2011, inspectors visited 32 providers of post-16 education and training to evaluate the arrangements for transition from school and the quality of provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities up to the age of 25. Inspectors evaluated discrete provision for groups of learners who were mainly studying programmes at foundation level and assessed the quality of additional support provided for individuals on a range of education and training courses up level 3.

This small sample comprised 14 colleges, including two agricultural colleges; two independent specialist colleges; 11 independent training providers and five local authority providers of adult and community learning. The providers were chosen to feature a range of post-16 settings and geographical locations. They were selected

either because previous inspection evidence had identified that the foundation provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities formed an established part of their work; or the number of apprentices with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enrolled was in double figures; or the provider was involved in specific projects for post-16 learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Of the independent specialist colleges visited, one was a day college for learners with autistic spectrum conditions, and the other a residential college for learners who are deaf. The providers' overall effectiveness judgement ranged from outstanding to satisfactory and none had been judged inadequate at its last inspection.

During the visits, inspectors interviewed staff and carried out 111 case studies of young people and adults with a range of needs and facing different circumstances. The case studies were selected by the providers, drawn from across their provision. In all of the case studies, participants had completed the transition from school to further education and training successfully. Forty-nine were on foundation programmes, 41 were on mainstream full-time programmes receiving additional learning support and 21 were apprentices.

The case studies included meetings with the young people and adults and the teaching and support staff who worked with them. Inspectors evaluated the information held in their personal files. Sessions were observed and learners' work evaluated. Depending on the circumstances, inspectors also conducted interviews with parents or carers, specialist staff, the headteacher and other staff from their former schools, and in some cases, including the apprentices, their current employer.

In order to plan the survey and to capture a wider range of evidence than was possible from the small sample of visits, inspectors conducted telephone interviews and held focus groups. Telephone interviews were conducted with senior managers in 13 local authorities and with senior staff in nine colleges involved in specific projects, including four independent specialist colleges. Inspectors held four focus groups. One group comprised adults in their 20s and their parents or carers who were part of the 'Getting a Life' project; a second involved a group of practitioners who were members of the Association of Colleges LDD forum; and the remaining two were groups drawn from post-16 practitioners attending the Skill conference in November 2010.

In addition, a desk-based research exercise was carried out which looked at national recruitment and success rate data published by the Data service, and data from providers taking part in the survey. The self-assessment reports from the providers included in the survey visits and 54 other learning and skills providers were also analysed in order to identify trends in participation and outcomes. Post-16 survey evidence compiled for the SEND review was also drawn on.

Further information

Publications by Ofsted

Current provision and outcomes for 16–18-year-old learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in colleges (HMI 2371) Ofsted, 2007;

www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/current-provision-and-outcomes-for-16-18-year-old-learners-learning-difficulties-and-or-disabilities.

Greater expectations: provision for learners with disabilities, Adult Learning Inspectorate, 2006; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/greater-expectations-provision-for-learners-disabilities.

Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training: what works and why (090236), Ofsted, 2010;

www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/reducing-numbers-of-young-people-not-education-employment-or-training-what-works-and-why.

The special educational needs and disabilities review: a statement is not enough (090221), Ofsted, 2010; www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/statement-not-enough-ofsted-review-of-special-educational-needs-and-disability-0.

Other publications

A guide to funding foundation learning, YPLA, 2011;

www.ypla.gov.uk/publications/latest/Detail.htm?id=b19e39a4-51dd-459a-b890-bc7428607687.

Inclusive learning: the report of the committee of enquiry into the post-school education of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, in England, 1996, HMSO, 1996. www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0885625970120302.

Learning for living and work: improving education and training opportunities for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LSC-P-NAT-060523), Learning and Skills Council, 2006;

www.transitionfonetwork.org.uk/resources/policy_and_guidance/education/learning_for_living_and_work.aspx.

Making it work: embedding a supported employment approach in vocation education and training for people with learning difficulties, NIACE, 2010;

<http://shop.niace.org.uk/makingitwork.html>

Review of vocational education – The Wolf Report, Department for Education and Skills, 2011;

www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-00031-2011.

Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability – a consultation, Department for Education, 2011.

www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM%208027

Annex: Learning providers, local authorities and other organisations involved in this survey

Further education colleges

Provider	Location
Askham Bryan College	York
Blackburn College	Lancashire
Chichester College	West Sussex
Huntingdonshire Regional College	Cambridgeshire
Moulton College	Northamptonshire
North East Surrey College of Technology (NESCOT)	Surrey
Norton Radstock College	Bath and North East Somerset
Sussex Downs College	East Sussex
Thanet College	Kent
Thornbeck College – North East Autism Society	Sunderland
Tresham College of Further and Higher Education	Northamptonshire
Westgate College	Kent
Wirral Metropolitan College	Wirral
York College	York

Additional providers contacted in relation to specific projects

Provider	Location
Beaumont College – A Scope College	Cumbria
Bolton College	Bolton
Fairfield Farm College	Somerset
Foxes Academy	Somerset
Hackney Community College	Hackney
Havering College of Further and Higher Education	Essex
National Star College	Gloucestershire
New College Durham	Durham
North Hertfordshire College	Hertfordshire

Independent learning providers

Provider	Location
The Harington Scheme	London
HTP	Hampshire
Indigo Training	Staffordshire
Jace Training	Surrey
Key Training	London (various)
Nova Training	West Midlands (various)
Nuneaton Training Centre	Warwickshire
Skillbuild	N/A
Training Plus Merseyside	Liverpool
YMCA Derbyshire	Derbyshire
Zenos Ltd	Oxfordshire

Adult and community learning providers

Blackburn & Darwen
 Kent County
 Lancashire County
 Leicestershire County
 Northamptonshire

Local authorities contacted

Cambridgeshire
 Cumbria
 Derbyshire
 East Sussex
 Gloucestershire
 Hackney
 Hull
 Northamptonshire
 Sheffield
 Suffolk
 Sunderland
 Surrey
 York City Council

Stakeholders interviewed

Local Government Association

Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership Limited

NATSPEC: The Association of National Specialist Colleges

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

SKILL: National Bureau for Students With Disabilities*

Skills Funding Agency

Young People's Learning Agency

* Closed since April 2011