

# Education, Lifelong learning and Skills Committee

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**fforwm evidence to the ELLS Committee  
Policy Review of SEN Part 3: Transition  
22 November 2006**

## **Introduction**

fforwm is the national organisation representing the 23 further education (FE) colleges and two FE institutions in Wales. It is an educational charity and a company limited by guarantee. fforwm's Board comprises college principals and chairs of corporations, appointed by member colleges. fforwm provides a range of services to its members including networks, conferences, research, consultancy and the sharing of good practice. It also works closely with a wide range of partners in post-16 education and training. Through fforwm, colleges are represented on various committees, working parties and other groups influencing and shaping policy in post-16 education and life-long learning.

fforwm is delighted to have this opportunity to provide written and oral evidence to the Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee investigating Special Educational Needs. The focus of this paper is on transition from school to college and from college to employment.

This paper provides some data on the number of learners with special educational needs, explores the transition between schools and colleges in respect of SEN learners and draws on recent inspection reports on the quality of learning in colleges. Of particular significance is the overall support and guidance given to learners. It is noted that Estyn has already presented evidence to the Committee. There have been 15 college reports from Estyn commenting on SLDD provision and two key reports Estyn Reports - Choosing the Next Steps and Success for All, published in 2004 and 2005 respectively.

The paper complements that provided by Coleg Sir Gâr which sets out one college's high quality experience covering transition from school to college and transition from entry level. The paper from Coleg Sir Gâr emphasises the benefits of a multi-agency approach.

## **Colleges in Wales**

Colleges in Wales can be broadly categorised as: general further education colleges, tertiary colleges, a Catholic sixth form college and specialist colleges. Each college varies considerably in its provision. Some general FE colleges specialise in vocational subjects to adults while others offer a

range of academic and vocational courses to young people and adults. Around 80% of learners attend part-time programmes.

In the same way, each college varies in the number of SEN learners it enrolls and the provision available. Most learners with special needs attend full-time.

## **The Legislation: SEN provision in FE Colleges**

All 23 FE colleges provide study opportunities for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. This is a requirement of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 amended by the Learning and Skills Act 2000. This legislation sets out the legal requirement on the Further Education Funding Council for Wales (subsequently the National Council-ELWa) to provide funding for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. These responsibilities transferred to the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) on 1 April 2006.

## **Disabled persons**

The National Council (ELWa) under section 35 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 had the power to make conditions in respect of funding for disabled persons and to require the college to publish at specified intervals statements about the facilities for education or training provided for disabled persons.

## **Learners with learning difficulties**

Section 41 of the 2000 Act required the National Council (ELWa) to pay particular regard to the needs of people with learning difficulties when performing its duties to secure facilities for education and training, when providing resources for education and training and when exercising its power to secure facilities for work experience. For those aged between 16 and 19, ELWa must provide boarding accommodation where it is satisfied that it cannot make arrangements for an individual which are sufficient in quantity and adequate in quality. For those aged between 19 and 25, the National Council must provide boarding accommodation where it is satisfied that it cannot secure the provision of reasonable facilities for individuals.

Under Section 41 (5), a person has a learning difficulty if

- [he] has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than a majority of persons of his age
- [he] has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of faculties of a kind generally provided by institutions providing post-16 education or training.

## **Background: SEN Provision in Colleges**

For compulsory education up to the age of 16, students with special educational needs have either been integrated into mainstream provision (following the Warnock Report, published in 1978) or, if they have severe learning difficulties or are severely disabled, attend special schools. Baroness Warnock's report did not cover children beyond compulsory education.

In post-compulsory education, school sixth forms generally do not retain learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. Learners with severe difficulties may attend specialist residential colleges or day centres. Colleges are funded to support learners with moderate and severe learning difficulties. This provision is either in a discrete programme area called independent living skills (programme area 16a – moderate; 16b – severe) or integrated into college programmes.

There is a clear distinction between the needs of disabled learners and those with learning difficulties:

Disabled learners may need specialist support such as signers and note takers but with this support are able to be integrated on to mainstream courses.

Those with learning difficulties may require specialist teaching support in subjects that are geared to their ability. In 2003/04 there were 7,645 enrolments on independent living skills (ILS) – 1% of total enrolments.

## **Data**

The most recent Welsh Assembly Government data on SEN in FE colleges provide the information in the following bullet points. This information is, however, qualified, in that the disabled status of 25% of learners and the learning difficulty of 52% of learners is not known.

## **Disability**

- 1,900 learners aged 18 and under (3.9% of total students of that age) and 10,765 learners aged 19 and over (5.4% of total students of that age) describe themselves as ‘disabled’; making a total of 12,665 (5.2% of total learners)
- 171,000 (68%) describe themselves as "not disabled".

## **Learning difficulty**

- 2,410 learners aged 18 and under (4.9% of total students of that age) have a learning difficulty
- 3,820 learners aged 19 and over - or 1.9% have a learning difficulty
- Overall a total of 6,230 (2.5% of all learners) have a learning difficulty

## **Total numbers**

There is a total of 4,310 learners aged 18 and under and 14,585 learners aged 19 or over with either a disability or a learning difficulty – a total of 18,895 or 7.7% of total learners attending college.

## **Guidance for Colleges: SEN Code of Practice for Wales**

The Welsh Assembly’s first SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2004) provides guidance on transition from Schools to Colleges, in particular the following:

- **Transfer of Information (9.61/9.63):** the guidance states that the head teacher is responsible for ensuring that a transition plan and review information is passed to Post 16 providers. Careers Wales has the lead role in ensuring transition into further learning or employment. Local Authorities should seek the agreement of students and parents to the transfer of information (including statements) from school to the continuing education sector. The Head teacher should ensure that where a young person has a statement of special educational needs, a copy of the statement together with a copy of the most recent annual reviews and the Transition Plan, is passed to the social services department and any post 16 provider that the young person will be attending, in sufficient time for appropriate support to be put in place.
- **Involvement of Social Services Departments (9.58):** LEAs must seek information from social services departments under section 5 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, as to whether a young person with a statement under Part IV of the Education Act 1996 is disabled (and may require services from the local authority when leaving school).
- **Involvement of Health Services (9.60):** Health professionals involved in the management and care of the young person should advise on the services that are likely to be required and should discuss arrangements for transfer to adult secondary health care services.
- **The role of Careers Wales in providing information (9.56):** on post-16: Careers Wales is responsible for ensuring the delivery of the elements of the Transition Plan that relate to the young person's transition into further learning or employment. This is highlighted in the statutory Young Person's Learning and Skills Plan.

## The Practice in Colleges: Estyn Inspection Reports

Not all reports in the inspection cycle comment on SLDD or ILS discrete provision but all comment on colleges' support and guidance provided to learners.

There have been 15 Estyn college inspection reports that have commented on and graded ILS. As can be seen from the table below, 80% of colleges were awarded a grade 1 or grade 2 in ILS.

Inspection grades on independent living skills

Grades	Number	%
1	4	27%
2	8	53%
3	3	20%
4	0	0%
5	0	0%
Total	15	100%

## **Comments on Transition**

The Estyn reports focus mainly on the standard of provision in colleges and not on transition.

The summary below includes the context of SEN provision as well as the specific issues surrounding transition.

## **Outside Agencies**

Good links with outside agencies, especially voluntary organisations

Complementary awards / interests available and encouraged as part of the individual learning process (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh Award)

## **Work-based learning/training**

Colleges liaise with employers and support is provided on an individual basis in the workplace

Where employers are unable to provide for SLDD, colleges utilise their own facilities, providing realistic work-based learning in the college environment

Students are involved in their own assessment, the setting of learning objectives and in behaviour management

Many students develop confidence by building on complementary awards as well as academic achievements, and often move on to higher level courses

Students are encouraged to relate the skills they build at college (e.g. communication, planning, confidence), to their later life, and thus, recognise the benefits. Students are encouraged to plan for independent living (this could be literal, or simply taking control of their decisions, objectives, enabling them to take on a more active role in the community)

Basic and key skills (English/Maths, including personal or living skills / raising expectations) is a focus in all colleges, making students more attractive to employers and preparing them for independent living

Similarly, though links with external specialist agencies are generally excellent, mental health organisations are identified as difficult for staff to access and slow to respond

Where shortcomings were found, it was in relation to students with profound learning difficulties, although some colleges do well in this area

A recurrent point was that employers are not given enough information on SLDD specific achievements and needs, and thus, sympathetic employers were not being utilised to their full

potential

## **Other Estyn Reports**

Estyn has produced two important reports on SEN provision – Choosing the Next Steps (2004) and Success for All (2005). A summary of the key points emerging from these reports are attached as an annex.

### **Support for teachers and managers of SEN provision**

Dysg (now part of DELLS) runs a network on equality, diversity and disability. This mainly is concerned with legislation impacting on disability such as the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005.

fforwm is re-establishing a network to bring together practitioners who work with learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. This network will enable practitioners – managers and lecturers - to share good practice and receive updates on current developments. It will also ensure that issues in teaching and learning are raised and discussed.

Issues that the fforwm network is likely to discuss and share good practice include:

- formalised taster/link programmes
- planning with partner agencies
- accessible information
- leadership and management of SEN at a senior level in colleges
- liaison meetings between college co-ordinators and schools' Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs)
- ensuring that the Code of Practice is used as a guide for colleges in developing protocols and procedures in relation to community and multi-agency working in order to facilitate successful transition
- ensuring that colleges have sufficient resources to put appropriate support in place.

The ELLS Committee's review of SEN will also inform the network's discussions. The FE colleges will then be in a more informed position in considering appropriate ways forward for the different institutions across Wales with their various partners locally.

The fforwm network alone is unlikely to be able to solve all issues regarding SEN transition, however. Transition, by its very nature, requires recognition of the issues, the will to tackle the issues within individual organisations, and the will to collaborate with partners and stakeholders in other institutions and across sectors, backed up with adequate resourcing (both time and money) of the various partners and agencies.

## **Conclusion: The Way Forward**

This paper has drawn out some key points with respect to the transition of SEN learners (also

described as students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities - SLDD).

Colleges are effective in the provision of learning opportunities for SEN. It is crucial that there is effective liaison between the colleges, schools, other agencies and employers to ensure that SEN learners receive the best available support and to make a smooth transition from one organisation to another. fforwm strongly supports the multi-agency approach adopted by many colleges, including Coleg Sir Gar.

The network that fforwm is in the process of re-establishing for college managers and lecturers should help gather best practice and facilitate its dissemination. The ELLS Committee's Review of SEN will further inform those discussions. However, tackling the issues surrounding transition will require all agencies together to work together in each locality to ensure that best practice is implemented across the whole of Wales for the benefit of the learners.

## **ANNEX**

### **Summaries of two Estyn Reports on SEN**

#### **Estyn Survey Report – Choosing the Next Steps (2004)**

- Students placed in Independent Living Skills (and Communication Skills) programme areas are often stigmatised. This includes provision for those with mental health difficulties. Students are often aged between 16-25. This is not solely about living independently, but also about taking control by making decisions, taking on responsibilities, developing confidence.
- Providing opportunities for progression for those with profound learning difficulties presents more difficulties (something college reports also seemed to be saying) – though some do well in this area.
- Part of the problem is that employers often do not recognise the contribution people with learning difficulties can make – particularly small firms who may not have the same policies and provisions as national companies
- Success in student transition is dependent upon close monitoring and evaluation of the student's needs – tailoring work experience and training to build on abilities, experience, and achievements
- Basic and key skills are central to making students employable – all colleges seem to recognise this. Colleges also recognise that confidence with IT is a useful area, not only in helping learners develop their skills, but as a skill for the workplace
- College Partnerships with voluntary agencies is a positive step in ensuring that support for students continued after leaving college and entering the workplace
- Transition planning from day one of college life is important
- Welfare benefits often lost if student progresses to work and training
- Transportation difficulties – LEA provision stops at age 19
- Where students are difficult to place in work experience, work experience at college is offered as a useful alternative. However, this perhaps masks the difficulties and attitudes that students might encounter on leaving the college environment.
- Not giving employers the same information as teachers about students' abilities is mentioned

as a negative point – thus, not taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by the firms that are able to provide support.

## **Estyn – Success For All: 2005**

- Links with parents/carers, voluntary organisations and social services are good – links with work-based providers and Careers Wales less effective
- Other agencies are not linked - Community Consortia for Education and Training, and Young People's Partnership
- Funding constraints can have a negative impact on work-based training programmes. Provision becomes guided by money available, rather than what is best for the student. This imposes limitations on effectiveness of such programmes
- Statementing lapses at college – colleges reassure parents/student about lower level of support – same problem happens when students leave college, and level of support is lowered again – reassurance more difficult, because of lack of continuity/communication between employers/colleges?
- Unlike colleges, work-based providers do not make enough use of voluntary organisations
- Health Services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health services difficult to access
- Some colleges offer programmes allowing students to learn through the medium of Welsh/English, but this is rare in work-based training
- FE colleges are resourced by WAG partly by the number of learners who achieve qualifications. However, working towards a qualification may not always be in the best interest of the learner. Learners may only need parts of a qualification in order to become competent at work, for example. The funding criteria works against those who leave at an earlier stage – similar to the welfare benefits issue. Equality of opportunity aims on the one hand do not necessarily point in the same direction as targets and criteria that external agencies need to fulfil.
- Development of social activities is good at colleges. Work-based learning is more geared towards qualification/work and has fewer multi-agency links with the community.
- Colleges often do not have adequate access to school records of students' specific needs/progress etc. – competition mentioned as one reason for this lack of co-operation/communication – leads to duplication of diagnostic testing – also means funding cannot be applied for immediately