

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in the post-16 sector

September 2023

Colegau Cymru briefing note for Senedd Members and Local Authority Leaders.

Further Education Institution (FEI) Transformation

The Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act (ALNET) and ALN Code will go live for some learners in colleges from September 2023. This follows five years of transformation work where colleges have sought to make enhancements to their provision, train staff and develop partnerships with Local Authorities (LAs), health boards and others. Learner experience has already improved in a number of ways:

- Enhanced transition arrangements for many learners moving from school to college.
- Improved access to information, including that provided by the [ALN Pathfinder](#).
- Staff expertise, particularly around conditions such as Autism and Specific Learning Difficulties.
- A focus on inclusive practice in the classroom with training via INSET and through initial lecturer training programmes.
- ALNET-focused training for all staff with a strong focus on 'ALN is everyone's business'.
- An increased 'person-centered' focus through individual reviews and improved discrete provision.
- All colleges have created a local 'Universal and Additional Learning Provision' offer that provides schools and local authorities with a clear picture of their provision.

Challenges facing FEIs

Staffing

Colleges have increased staffing in order to prepare for their new duties, despite limited additional short-term funding and with no guarantee of longer-term support. This poses challenges for FEIs, particularly if ALN numbers reach 7% or higher. The Minister's decision to plan a 'flow-through' approach for post-16 learners has reduced the potential initial workload for colleges. However, the capacity of FEIs to fully meet their duties over the next few years will depend largely on the numbers of ALN learners requiring an Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Transitions

Effective transition is key to young people's success in college. FEIs have been working with their local schools and LAs to improve the experience for young people and to ensure that accurate, up to date information is shared in a timely way. **Inviting FE staff to key transition reviews can help ensure a smooth transition but not all schools encourage this.** Protectionism (where schools are concerned to retain learners for 6th forms) and capacity issues are the most common causes of failure in this area.

Facilities

FEIs have the expertise and facilities to meet the needs of most young people who have ALN. However, they are not 'specialist' organisations therefore there will always be some young people whose needs they are unable to meet.

Wider challenges

There is a mistaken belief amongst some parents that the new Act provides a guarantee of full-time education and training until a young person reaches 25. This, coupled with increased expectations brought about by ALN Implementation, is likely to create an increase in disagreements and tribunals over the next few years.

There have been concerns expressed over the reduction in numbers of children on school Special Education Needs (SEN) registers over the last few years. However, most educational psychologists believe that numbers of learners who have a need for support that is *different from* and *additional to* that which is required by other learners should not be much greater than 10%. We would expect this number to reduce further as learners move on to college as the universal learning provision should be broad enough to meet most learner needs. However, an increase in parental pressure may push this figure up.

From this year, Welsh Government has started the process of devolving the specialist college budget and responsibility to LAs. The Act and Code creates significant new duties for LAs in assessing and meeting the reasonable education and training needs of young people. **There are opportunities for LAs and FEIs to work together to improve the local offer for young people, but this is a complex issue and will require both partners to commit both time and finances.** These changes may also create some tensions between LAs and FEIs unless both have a shared understanding of further education and training.

For some parents, the transfer of this duty will create uncertainty. A two-year placement at an Independent Specialist Post-16 Institute (ISPI) is seen by some as the preferred option, mainly because it provides:

- Five-day provision (when most FEI full-time courses are only three or four days) which for many working parents, allows them to continue with their careers.
- Residential options which provide respite for parents and additional opportunities to develop independence for young people.
- Access to a wide range of specialist therapies and expertise not available at an FEI.
- The removal of transport barriers – **home-to-college transport has become an issue in most LAs over the last few years and the current Learner Travel Wales Operational Guidance does not guarantee free or even subsidised travel for young people.**

The ALN Code is clear that if needs can be met locally at a maintained school or FEI, this should be the first choice. **If LAs (Education and Social Care departments), FEIs and health boards can work in partnership, it may reduce the need for young people to leave their communities and local services.**

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