Further Education Engagement in SEN Reforms
Weston College
Case Study

Transition out of college: independent living, friendships, relationships and community living

Weston College's Foundation Learning division provides a number of programmes for learners aged 16-24 with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Foundation Learning comprises programmes of study, which range from learners with profound and complex learning disabilities to learners completing Level 1 vocational options.

Key points from the new legislation

All young people, whether or not they have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, should be supported to make the transition to life beyond college. This includes preparation for adulthood and the information needed to make this transition – including information about local employers, further training and where to go for advice and support.

For those with an EHC plan, the final annual review should agree the support and specific steps needed to help the young person engage with the service and provision they will access when they have left college. The college should contribute to this review. Information about preparing for adulthood must be set out by the local authority in the Local Offer and include preparing for and finding employment, finding somewhere to live and participating in the community.

More information can be found in chapter 4 and Chapter 6 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 – 25 Years.

Planning for the reforms

Weston College focuses on a person-centred approach to learning, supported by a flexible curriculum delivered by dedicated staff. This, together with effective partnership working with stakeholders, parents/carers and learners, has formed the basis of a successful programme that enhances the learner's experience and provides an excellent preparation for work, higher-level courses, independent living and community involvement.

1. A person-centred approach to provision

   • From the outset the college ensures that all providers work together for the best interests of the learner. Referrals and introductions to the learner's circle of support are made early on, very often before the learner starts college. This process has been made easier through partnership work with schools using link programmes. Changes to the young person's life are shared between members of the circle of support through reviews and constant correspondence. Personal tutors are key in forming the hub of all information and communication.

   • Clear negotiated outcomes are provided from the outset for the young person and their circles of support, such as parents/carers, social workers, Learning Partnership West, healthcare professionals and other significant people that the learner has identified.

   • By attending school reviews, parent meetings and open evenings, the college staff familiarise themselves with the learner and their circles of support and map these to the outcomes set out in the Preparation for Adulthood agenda.
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- Clear negotiated outcomes are provided from the outset for the young person and their circles of support, such as parents/carers, social workers, Learning Partnership West, healthcare professionals and other significant people that the learner has identified.
- By attending school reviews, parent meetings and open evenings, the college staff familiarise themselves with the learner and their circles of support and map these to the outcomes set out in the Preparation for Adulthood agenda.

“Just wanted to say thank you to all the college tutors for inviting me to reviews recently, which I have been very impressed to see are being run in a person-centred format. They have been really positive and have hugely improved our joint working relationships making our support outcomes much more joined up.”

HS Transition Social Worker, 2011

2. Providing a person-centred curriculum

- A person-centred approach to study is provided by Preparation for Work and Life, a flexible 1- to 3-year programme where learners follow individualised programmes of study making use of the Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) framework for non-accredited learning.
- The curriculum is delivered in a flexible manner including community-based sessions, travel training, work placements and supported internships.
- Where appropriate, the curriculum may be delivered in the learner’s home environment (including supported living) to enable them to learn life skills in context.
- Friendships are encouraged both inside and outside the college and the college works with parents, carers and other support agencies to arrange after-college and weekend activities.

“The best part of Prep for Work and Life is seeing my friends. The staff have been fantastic!”

Year 3 Student, 2013

3. Transition from college

The college believes partnership working is crucial to successful transition out of college and that the most successful partnerships are built on personal relationships rather than systems and processes:

- The college has links with specific people within the Community Team for People with Learning Disabilities (CTPLD) including the transitions social workers, learning disability nurses and housing officers.
- Transitions social workers and housing officers attend learner-centred reviews and the transition evening – and this approach both reinforces partnership working and
informs all parties of the young person's current needs.

- The college works closely with their local authority, for example by hosting transition evenings for learners and parents/carers and all relevant service providers across the LA and by attending the local transitions sub-group of the LA Learning Disability Partnership Board.
- College staff work closely with both employers and other service providers both during the learners time at college and also during the transition process to ensure a smooth handover of responsibilities.
- When learners are at college, parents/carers are encouraged to support friendships during out-of-college time. This year tutors have set up a database of learner contact numbers with the permission of parents/carers to support the continuation of friendships when the learners leave college. This has been very successful and learners have made directories of contact numbers and email addresses. They are also supported in using social networking sites including learning how to keep safe online. Finally, the college offers an alumni service which learners can sign up to.
- In order to ensure the voice of the learner is listened to in the transition process, if it becomes apparent that the aspirations of parents/carers are different from those of the learner, an advocate is appointed to work with the learner.

4. Staff training which supports good transition practice

Staff training is crucial to providing high-quality SEND provision:

- College staff have worked with LA leads on the SEND Code of Practice.
- The college provides person-centred planning training for the team and personal tutors.
- Staff are offered a progressive career framework linked to the college's Beacon Award-winning Foundation Degree in Inclusive Practice that is delivered in partnership with the University of the West of England.

Avoiding potential pitfalls

- Working in partnership with a range of organisations can be challenging as there are different organisational cultures and it takes time to develop a shared vision. To help make this a smooth process, the college trains and mentors its staff in partnership working both across the college and with external agencies.
- Ensuring a person-centred approach to learning means that job roles have had to become far more flexible in order to meet the needs of individual learners. The college has developed a model of specialist support which enables highly-trained staff to implement the challenging reform agenda.
- Parents and carers may have different opinions from the young person, which may limit the young person's choices. The college ensures that the learner attends all learner-centred reviews and college staff have received training in the implications of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. In addition, the college has links with external advocacy organisations, all of which helps the young person make informed choices about their future.
- The college has worked in partnership with the CTPLD to plan the transition from education as early as possible through the learner-centred reviews. This ongoing partnership is very important in establishing the ongoing level of support the young person will need as they move on from college.

Some next steps

The college will:

- Continue to contribute to the local offer for all the local authorities it works with, and liaise with the representative from each LA to promote the offer and ensure it meets the LA's needs. The college has already produced an LDD prospectus outlining all aspects of its offer.
- Implement study programmes based on the RARPA framework to ensure they are flexible and include relevant certification where appropriate.
- Implement the recently-developed specialist Sensory Learning Base and Curriculum to ensure outstanding provision locally for learners with profound and complex learning disabilities.
- Ensure that all SEND Code of Practice priorities are included in the strategic plan.
- Increase the focus on staff development and provide a career structure for all those working with SEND provision.
The impact of the programme

- College staff have embraced the changes and are pleased these are now on a legislative footing as it enables forward planning and encourages management support at a strategic level.
- A person-centred ethos has been developed and maintained which underpins all provision.
- Effective partnerships have been built both internally and externally and there has been effective sharing of best practice which has saved time and money, thus freeing up time to focus on provision.
- There is a recognition and celebration of achievement in success, which motivates the learners, their families and staff.
- Learners are being facilitated to move into appropriate supported living provision and there are support packages which include provision for maintaining and nurturing friendships and which encourage the use of community facilities.

“Learners with learning or physical disabilities make outstanding progress and can live more independent and enriched lives through the support, education and training they receive at college.”

Ofsted report, 2014