Further Education Engagement in SEN Reforms
Gloucestershire College
Case Study

Working with schools towards effective transition planning into college

Gloucestershire College is dedicated to supporting learners who have additional learning support needs and disabilities and is committed to enabling its learners to become independent and autonomous in their learning and lives. In 2012, the college signed the College Autism Inclusion Charter to show its commitment to ensuring it works towards an inclusive and autism-friendly environment where all learners have high aspirations and staff are aware of how best to support them to achieve.

Key points from the new legislation

Young people entering college should be accessing provision that supports them to build on achievements at school and helps them progress towards adulthood. Schools and colleges should work in partnership to:

• Share relevant information about the young person, preferably in the spring term prior to the new course, so the college can plan and develop a suitable study programme and the appropriate support.
• Provide opportunities such as taster courses, link programmes and mentoring to familiarise the young person with the college environment and experience college life and study.

For young people with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans, the local authority (LA) must ensure the EHC plan reviews should form part of the reviews from Year 9 and that schools and colleges co-operate in these reviews where necessary – for example, when young people express a form preference for a particular college. If the college is named in the EHC plan, then it must co-operate to help shape the EHC plan, define the outcomes for the young person, and start developing a person-centred study programme.

Planning for the reforms

Gloucestershire College found that working in partnership with local authorities and others, developing relationships with future learners and investing in staff development are essential to the success of effective transition planning from school to college.

1. Take time to build effective working relationships and partnerships with all stakeholders:

• Identify the key contacts in local authorities and work in partnership in order to build a transparent relationship with them to gain an understanding of their needs, expectations and strategic direction.
• Work with the nominated local authority SEN transitions team (for example, Case Responsible Officers) and listen to their requests and needs. This team are a pivotal link between the school, the young person and their parents and have first-hand experience of how the schools operate.
• Develop communication channels with all partners, including parents and carers.

“To get the transition journey right, you need to take a truly person-centred approach to identifying needs, planning resources and supporting the young person. If you get it right, their success is inevitable.”

Personal Tutor
To this end, Gloucestershire College has:

• Launched a termly e-bulletin to all secondary SENCOs to update them on key dates, information and news relating to the college and transition.
• Created a centralised transition email address to filter SEN queries and ensure a more efficient response.
• Become involved in the local authority work-streams set up to address and implement changes related to the SEND. The college has been part of the local offer and EHC plan work-stream.
• Gloucestershire College is one of four colleges that are part of a national development project, the Finished at School programme. The focus of the programme is to support the transition of young people with autism from school into college. As part of the project, college staff have had four days’ person-centred training with their local authority and partner schools. The training has also supported the college in their in-depth understanding and recognition of good practice in person-centred EHC plans and good practice in review meetings. It has helped them to transition SEN statement outcomes into EHC plans.

2. Start building a relationship with the learner and their parents and carers before they leave school - so they become familiar with the college and college staff get to know them.

The college holds link experience days which the young person can join at any time. At the end of each visit, the tutors and support team create an individual report for each young person that highlights what went well and areas for development at the next visit. The link experience visits work as follows:

• Year 10 pupils have a one-day link visit towards the end of the academic year.
• The young people return for a two-day link visit at the start of Year 11 and a further two-day visit in the second term before enrolling in July.

“We continually seek the feedback of students who attend link experience days. What did they enjoy? What could have been better? What excites and interests them? Evaluate and review your offer and the experiences that your perspective students receive.”

Entry Level SEN Course Tutor

3. Ensure the right staffing is in place to support the learners - and all staff are aware of learners’ needs and of the Children and Families Act:

• The college has a team of transition co-ordinators dedicated to SEND provision. Their role is varied and includes attending all school annual reviews from Year 9, hosting student and parent visits, managing the link experience process and working with external agencies to identify support.
• There is a staff development programme which includes a fact sheet that summarises the key points of the SEND Code of Practice; a SEND roadshow for each of the college campuses that gives all staff an opportunity to hear about key changes and reforms; and targeted training for specific teams within the college on topics such as writing outcomes and one-page profiles.

Avoiding potential pitfalls

• Allow plenty of time for planning and implementation.
• Lines of communication between all parties need to be open to pre-empt potential problems.
• Most colleges have to work with more than one LA, with a range of documentation. Communicate with each LA, seek out commonalities and agree on best practice and the most efficient ways to work.
• Parents/carers may be apprehensive and have questions about the young person coming to college, so make time to get to know them and answer any questions they may have. Information evenings and coffee mornings the college has hosted have been excellent for creating a ‘safe environment’ and a foundation of trust and open dialogue between the college and parents.

“I really enjoyed the link experience days. I felt better about going to college because I’d met some of the staff and knew what the building was like.”

Learner
The young person may also have concerns and anxieties, so enabling prospective learners and their parents to visit the college during the working day allows the college to challenge concerns and worries in a ‘see for yourself’ informal way.

“Always model and benchmark against what you might consider to be the most complex of need. If you can get the experience, support and outcomes right for the most complex, you’ve got a great best practice framework and model to support others.”

Head of Learning Support

Some next steps in working with schools towards effective transition planning into college. The college will:

- Start hosting coffee mornings/afternoons at key feeder schools to enable parents/carers to meet with college staff, ask questions and explore options.
- Host annual SENCO open events to update all SENCOs within the locality on our provision, additional learning support and transition cycle.
- Host individual transition and link experience visits for learners with autism, building a personalised transition pathway to meet the needs of each individual student.
- Develop more effective and accessible course information for entry level and SEN provision, available in a variety of formats.

The impact of working with schools towards effective transition planning into college for the college and learners

- Through partnership work the college is able to gain a holistic view of the learner.
- Parents are reassured about the college, having had the opportunity to visit it several times and ask questions about issues that concern them.
- Learners start their course feeling confident that they know the college and key members of staff.

“If a young person is happy and confident with their transition, you’re half-way to indirectly supporting their parents/carers in feeling confident and less anxious about the process.”

Transitions Coordinator