



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

**Response to the Estyn thematic review on  
Learner progress and destinations  
in independent living skills learning areas in FE**

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.



Digital ISBN 978 1 4734 9132 8  
© Crown copyright June 2017  
WG27868

**Report title: Learner progress and destinations in independent living skills learning areas in further education colleges**

**Report details**

The review was commissioned by the Support for Learners Division of Welsh Government's Education Directorate to advise on arrangements in independent living skills (ILS) areas within further education institutions (FEIs) for measuring learner progress and destinations.

**Summary of main findings**

Most FE colleges collect a wide range of relevant information about the abilities, needs and prior achievement of learners before they join the college. This helps to ensure that most learners make a successful transition from school or other providers into the ILS learning area of the college. In a few cases, the quality of information provided by previous providers varies widely. In addition, a few colleges report difficulties in capturing the full range of needs when learners move from children's social services to adult social services because of the quality of information provided.

Most colleges do not use a wide enough range of data to measure learner progress, particularly for learners with more complex needs. This is because they do not have arrangements in place to assess or track learners' skills in important areas such as independence, wellbeing, employability or communication. In addition, very few colleges have enough in-house specialists to assess the full range of learners' more complex needs and rely on the information provided by previous education providers, local authorities and Careers Wales. As a result, teaching and support staff within colleges have limited opportunities to develop their expertise and understanding in these important areas.

All colleges have individual learning plans (ILPs) in place for learners. However, ILPs vary considerably in how well they set a clear direction for learners that extends beyond the completion of the course or programme of learning. Very few ILPs set coherent short-term, medium-term or long-term targets that take account of all learners' likely destinations when they leave the college.

Most colleges review learners' progress against the targets on their ILPs regularly, but few colleges track learners' progress against their targets over time. In addition, in many colleges the quality of target setting is too variable for ILPs to serve as an accurate record of learners' progress. Many targets do not relate sufficiently to the outcomes of initial assessments and are not specific enough to capture small steps of learning.

In many colleges, systems of tracking and monitoring the progress of learners on ILS courses are too reliant on the achievement of qualifications. For many

learners with complex needs, this approach does not provide an accurate or relevant measure of progress.

In most colleges, staff plan the ILS curriculum carefully to support learners' progression within college. Most learners complete their courses successfully and many learners progress onto further courses at either the same or a higher level. In many colleges, programmes of learning do not take enough account of learners' destinations or make suitable provision for developing learners' independence, employability and life skills. As a result, in many cases, programmes of learning fail to prepare learners effectively for the challenges they will face in their future lives.

In most colleges, learners have opportunities to take qualifications at a level that is generally well matched to their abilities. In many cases, qualifications do not address the broad range of learners' needs or reflect their destinations well enough. Overall, there is too much emphasis on qualifications as a measure of achievement or progress when this is not relevant to learners' needs, abilities or future destinations.

Nearly all colleges have a clear focus on developing learners' literacy and numeracy skills. They use the results of initial assessments in literacy and numeracy to check that learners are placed on courses at the appropriate level. However, baseline assessments do not capture the strengths and areas for development for many less able learners well enough and only a very few colleges focus sufficiently on developing learners' communication skills.

Many colleges do not focus well enough on developing learners' life and independence skills. Although most programmes include units that develop skills in relevant areas, such as cooking or independent travel, learning activities generally do not provide learners with suitable opportunities to acquire practical skills or apply these in realistic contexts. Most colleges do not evaluate the progress learners make in developing these skills over time.

Most colleges have arrangements to ensure that learners on vocational programmes benefit from relevant work experience. Provision for work-related education for learners who are not on vocational courses is more limited, particularly for lower-ability learners. Around half of colleges lack a clear rationale for developing learners' work-related skills when this is not a requirement of the qualification.

Many learners who completed their ILS programmes of learning in 2015-2016 progressed onto appropriate courses within the ILS learning area at the same or a higher level. A few learners progressed onto higher-level courses within the mainstream provision of the FE college. A very few learners entered employment on completing their course, around the same proportion of learners who were not in employment, education or training when they left the college.

Most colleges provide regular advice and guidance to learners about their

futures, but the data they collect on learners' destinations following the completion of their programmes of learning and how well they evaluate this data is too inconsistent.

Many colleges do not place enough emphasis on learners' likely destinations throughout their time at the college. As a result, the destinations of many learners are mainly determined by what is available locally, rather than as an outcome of co-ordinated planning.

Overall, the destinations of learners completing ILS courses vary too much across local authorities. This variation reflects differences in local provision for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities, as well as differences in the way in which colleges have configured partnerships locally to secure reliable progression routes for their learners. In particular, there is a lack of suitable employment opportunities in many local authorities, including supported employment, to allow learners to continue to develop and apply the skills they have learned in college.

### **Recommendations 1 to 5**

Further education colleges should:

R1 Identify learners' wider skills and abilities during initial assessments and include a suitable focus on communication, independence, employability and wellbeing within these.

R2 Make sure that individual learning plans reflect the outcomes of initial assessments and that they include specific, measurable targets that link clearly to learners' long-term goals and likely destinations

R3 Design independent living skills programmes of learning that:

- are sufficiently challenging
- include opportunities to develop skills that are relevant to learners' needs and likely destinations when they leave the college
- have an appropriate balance between completing qualifications and learning activities

R4 Implement reliable systems to track the progress of all learners in relation to their individual starting points

R5 Track learners' destinations when they leave the learning area or college accurately

Response:

Welsh Government will discuss the findings of the Estyn review with FEIs and

work with them to ensure actions are developed to address the recommendations made.

£250k is also being made available to the FE sector for the 2017/18 academic year for a Creative Solutions project to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the ILS learning area.

The funding will provide an opportunity for FEIs to undertake specific pilot activity aimed at addressing the recommendations highlighted in the recent Estyn inspections and in the Thematic Report. The intention is that funded activities will result in specific outcomes that will improve the quality of teaching and learning in the ILS learning area and be of benefit to the sector as a whole.

### **Recommendations 6 and 7**

Local authorities should:

R6 Provide colleges with relevant information about learners' needs when they start college

R7 Develop a broader range of partnerships with the post-16 and voluntary sectors to develop and improve progression routes in the local area

Response:

The Welsh Government will write to local authorities to draw attention to this report and request that they consider these recommendations as part of their SEN transition planning arrangements and their preparations under the wider Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reforms.

### **Recommendation 8**

The Welsh Government should:

R8 Review the collection of information on the outcomes of learners on independent living skills programmes to ensure that this provides an accurate picture of learners' destinations across Wales

Response:

The Welsh Government is currently developing new performance measures for further education institutions and sixth forms, including learner destinations. This will establish the use of data matching to identify learners'

progression into further learning and employment. As this develops, we will consider how best to measure outcomes for learners on independent living skills. We consider that attempting to collect comprehensive data on destinations via the Lifelong Learning Wales Record would not give an accurate enough picture of the range of possible learner outcomes, would not be robust enough, and would impose an additional administrative burden on institutions.

**Publication details**

The report has been published on Estyn's website:

<https://www.estyn.gov.wales>