

The Association of National Specialist Colleges



Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 30 June 2011

Your comments must reach us by that date.

Department for
Education

Name Alison Boulton

Organisation (if applicable) Association of National Specialist Colleges: Natspec

Address: Derwen College
Oswestry
Shropshire
SY11 3JA

Please mark ONE box which best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Parent/Carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Child/Young Person	<input type="checkbox"/>	School/College
<input type="checkbox"/>	Headteacher/Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	SENCO	<input type="checkbox"/>	Governor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Local Authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	National Voluntary Organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Local Voluntary Organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Children's Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	Professional Association/Union	<input type="checkbox"/>	Educational Psychologist
<input type="checkbox"/>	Parent Partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consultant/Professional	<input type="checkbox"/>	Academic
X	Other (please specify)				

Please Specify:

Natspec is the membership association for 73 Independent Specialist Colleges, 59 funded by the YPLA and a further 14 that are predominantly FE units attached to schools. Eight associate members represent organisations with an interest in specialist provision. These colleges promote equality of opportunity and access to further education for young people with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities who need a specialist environment in which to learn successfully and achieve their aspirations. Approximately 3,700 learners are funded by the YPLA and a further 400 learners are supported by other funders, including LAs. Management and governance arrangements are varied, including colleges which belong to local or national charities, and colleges owned privately or by healthcare organisations. Parent organisations, both charitable and private, have invested heavily in the infrastructure and estate over many years, adding considerable value to the work and impact of the colleges. Most

member colleges offer residential provision; a few are exclusively day providers while others offer additional day places and extended specialist services.

Note re case studies

We note that post-16 provision is barely mentioned in the Green paper, and in order to redress the balance and ensure that the work of FE is fully understood and represented, we have included a wide range of case studies to illustrate our response. We welcome the ambition in the foreword to the Green paper that young people should become 'the author of their own life story'. However, we note that the voice of disabled children and young people is absent from the document, and to that end we have sought to include the views of learners as often as possible. Many thanks to the young people, their parents and college staff who have shared their stories in this way. Some students' names have been changed.

Chapter 1: Early Identification and Assessment

1 How can we strengthen the identification of SEN and impairments in the early years, and support for children with them?

Comments: We do not wish to comment on this specific issue, except to agree that early identification is important. We do wish to draw attention to a related concern, outlined below.

- Our concern is for the many children and young people whose disabilities, learning difficulties or mental health needs do not manifest themselves until they are much older. This may be due to a late onset condition, the severe worsening of an existing condition, accident or illness. Some disabilities become exacerbated at puberty, for example Asperger's syndrome or mental health needs. Some of these young people may have struggled at school with undiagnosed problems such as dyslexia, whilst others may have had successful mainstream experiences but suddenly require specialist support and expertise.

“Being at the college has tremendously developed my confidence as somebody who has been more recently registered as partially sighted. It has enabled me to gain a wide variety of skills - both socially and academically, and enabled me to adapt to life with a visual impairment” Danielle

Before attending a residential, independent specialist college for students who are blind or partially sighted, Danielle's congenital visual impairment had caused her few problems, and she achieved excellent 'A' levels in a mainstream school. She then experienced further, severe sight loss and did not know how she could move forward as a visually impaired person. She researched the college herself on the internet and approached her Connexions Advisor who supported her application. She wanted to acquire an efficient working medium and to build her confidence as a person with a visual impairment.

In Danielle's year at the college she has benefitted from specialist support to learn how to access computers using speech software, has had mobility and living skills training and learnt Braille. She is now a confident user of assistive software and prepares meals independently.

She challenged herself to take part in music performances to gain confidence on stage. Through her BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Business Studies she has established a realistic career goal to work in Human Resources and has an interesting and challenging work placement at a major company. She is confidently moving on to Higher Education next year to study Human Resource Management. There she will have specialist equipment for accessing information, electronic copies of hand-outs, extra time for exams and perhaps take the exam on a PC. A member of the specialist college staff will visit her accommodation and make any adaptations that are needed, such as tactile markings on kitchen appliances.

Danielle found both the specialist support and the residential elements of her time at

college extremely valuable. Living and working alongside other students and staff who have a visual impairment has enabled her to develop her self-confidence and start to look forward to moving on in her adult life.

Royal National College for the Blind, Hereford

- It is essential that all such learners, as soon as it is clear that they have additional needs, are given prompt support and guidance, and made aware of the full range of options available to them. Failure to diagnose and offer timely support can have negative consequences for the individual. We would suggest that specialist colleges have particular skills in understanding and responding to the emotional factors associated with late onset or newly acquired disability.

“I have learned that I have a voice, that I can use it to benefit others in my situation, and that I am not worthless. My life has been transformed - I have gone from convict to counsellor and public speaker” Bekki

Prior to attending a residential, independent specialist college for students with autism spectrum condition, Asperger’s syndrome and associated difficulties, Bekki struggled in education. She had poor understanding of social skills and by the time she was diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome, she was in prison for antisocial behaviour. She became institutionalised and addicted to the routine of prison life, seeing it as safe and secure. On release, her family applied for her to attend the college. Initially she remained bitter towards authority, blaming it for the way her life had gone and unable to believe the college could help her.

She received support for social and emotional awareness, learning skills, confidence and assertiveness, anxiety management, anger management and basic skills. She was helped to cope with the sensory issues she experienced, for example, struggling to concentrate against background noise. As she began to understand the world around her and learnt about Asperger’s syndrome, her social skills improved as did her ability to interact appropriately with peers. She became a peer mentor, and joined the equality & diversity and student committees. She was helped to integrate into the community and understand ‘how people worked’, which gave her an interest in counselling. She had support to attend a day release course at the local college, until eventually she felt confident to attend alone.

After leaving the specialist college she continued her studies, and returned as a student counsellor on a work placement. She is now nearing the end of her foundation degree in counselling, is working at the college and runs a social group for ex-students. She does occasional public speaking events where she talks about her experiences, how she was diagnosed and the support that helped her to get back on her feet. She is seeking permanent employment in the counselling field.

Espa College, Sunderland

2 Do you agree with our proposal to replace the statement of SEN and learning difficulty assessment for children and young people with a single statutory assessment process and an 'Education, Health and Care Plan', bringing together all services across education, health and social care?

X Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments: We agree that a joint plan is a positive way forward and welcome the proposal. However, we believe that legislation is essential if all parties are to be effectively engaged in this process. We suggest a national committee to consider the responses to the Green paper and to inform the way forward; this would need to have broad representation across departments, agencies, providers and disabled people.

Below we outline some of the challenges inherent in this proposal, and some of the skills and practice in specialist colleges that could point the way to useful approaches.

- We agree that a plan with these components would be beneficial for a number of reasons. In particular, it will ensure a more rounded view of the individual and clarity about the role of each service in meeting their needs. There must be a genuine desire to work together, not just to 'be at the table'. However, we are aware of the challenges involved in achieving this and suggest that without some form of statutory duty to participate and fund, this will not be effective. We therefore suggest that this assessment and planning process is introduced as part of a strong legislative framework for this work.
- It must be recognised that assessment is not a science – rather it is a complex process, conducted differently by different agencies for different purposes; it is not always conclusive and it can be subject to different interpretations that will impact on the planning element. Our case study below shows how effective inter-disciplinary assessment focuses on the individual learner rather than each of the disciplines.
- We believe there are a number of factors that could impact on the success or otherwise of an EH&C plan, and in particular to ensure that the effectiveness of the plan does not depend on post-code
 1. There must be commitment at the most senior level across every agency, both nationally and locally, to enabling this process to go ahead
 2. All the agencies that are to be involved are experiencing reduced resources and budgets, which may put at risk the comprehensiveness and quality of the assessments. A significant factor is the expertise that is being lost as a result of reduced budgets. We are particularly concerned about the expertise that is being lost in the cuts being experienced in Connexions services.
 3. There will need to be a national programme of training to ensure that the EH&C is produced to a similar, high quality across the country, so that there is transparency and fairness for children and families regardless of where they live. This training will need to include the voluntary/community providers who will be involved
 4. There will need to be national guidance and a set of quality indicators against which plans can be monitored, to ensure that all children/young people are being given

similar opportunities and options. This guidance will also need to address the issue of differences of opinion, between professional, between parents and professionals and between parents and the children, and best practice in addressing these different views.

5. The roles and responsibilities of each agency will need to be clear, in terms of undertaking the assessment and planning and in acting upon the recommendations
 6. The plan will have to be a 'working document' and therefore of a length which is manageable to complete and then act on
 7. There are major issues linked to storage and data sharing if the process is to be shared across agencies locally, with providers and most importantly with the children/young people and their families. Similar procedures for encryption and storage will need to be in place not just across local agencies but nationally if the plan is to be transportable
- Uncertainty about the health service currently is a further factor. The commissioning roles remain unclear. Furthermore, many children with complex medical needs are referred to specialist paediatric services rather than their GP. We have said more about this issue under Q37.
 - We are aware that some LAs have 'no-statementing' policies, so there would need to be clarity about the duty to undertake the new plan and to establish clear criteria for eligibility.
 - We are concerned that there will be many children and young people who fall outside the eligibility criteria for the EH&C plan, yet who will still need elements of support if they are to succeed in their education. It is not clear how their needs will be picked up, met and monitored under this new approach. In post-16 provision, the majority of these young people will self-declare. We believe that this group is most vulnerable to becoming NEET on leaving school or college.
 - Specialist colleges epitomise the inter-disciplinary approach, working with teams of specialist teachers, learning support assistants, a wide range of therapists and health professionals, to produce a genuinely holistic and personalised learning and support programme.

'The integrated approach using intensive therapy, specialist teaching and expert support for learning is what makes this work – a clear programme of daily therapy, support and reinforcement of skills learned and understanding. Only in a specialist college would all of these professionals be on one site and working together to make huge and profound differences to young people's lives.' Therapist

Hester has a diagnosis of cerebral palsy; she uses an electric wheelchair and requires support with practical tasks and eating and drinking. She had been unable to make progress with her communication aid at a local FE college and moved to a specialist day college for learners with Learning difficulties, physical disabilities, communication disorders and Autism Spectrum conditions. She is a sociable and active young lady but found it difficult to communicate – she has no speech, but can make sounds. HC also

lacked confidence and skills in using her wheelchair independently.

With intensive and regular support from Physio, Occupational and Speech and Language therapists, Hester has become a confident and skilled communicator using her electronic aid. Over time she has learned to control her body movements and make better use of sounds. She has progressed to using up to 4 buttons to express excitement, and is working on a 'high five' action. Her increased confidence in using her communication aid enable her to be more spontaneous in communication with peers and staff; she is keen to complete tasks for herself and is able to pass messages to others and contribute to group discussions. She is increasingly independent as she can explain her needs to others.

The physiotherapy team has used hydrotherapy and standing and walking frames to develop Hannah's leg and arm strength, increasing her independence in personal care as she now requires only 1 person to support her, improving her access to a wide variety of community facilities. From being rather unpredictable in speed and accuracy of her movements, Hester's use of her electric wheelchair has improved in technique, independence and safety. She has successfully completed her wheelchair driving licence and is a confident and competent user in college and out and about in the community.

Hester had little expectation of work experience, but after an internal placement stock taking in the college kitchen, she is now working at a local café kitchen; with support from occupational therapists she is able to prepare and cook dishes such as fruit crumble and savoury pies.

Bridge College, Stockport

- This integrated approach is not only cost-effective, but ensures that the learner is the focus, rather than the individual disciplines. The impact on learners' educational progress and behaviour is also greatly improved when the inter-disciplinary team is employed by the same educational organisation, as this focuses holistic support on value added outcomes, including living and work.

'Her ability to make and communicate reliable and relevant choices has enabled Kirsty to reach her potential to identify and access those things that bring both enjoyment and satisfaction and enable her to live an enhanced and fulfilled life in the future'. Senior lecturer

Kirsty is a young woman with Cerebral Palsy, cortical blindness, epilepsy, scoliosis, communication difficulties and mobility difficulties. When she started at a college for students with severe, profound and multiple learning and physical disabilities, her goals were to live in a small group home, enjoy leisure and further education and make and communicate choices and decisions about everyday life. Kirsty also wanted to feel comfortable receiving care from people other than her family, and to make new friends.

Initially, because of her complex physical challenges, Kirsty often appeared distressed. She could not communicate her needs and had difficulty controlling her emotions; she found it difficult to trust those supporting her, so she was not really benefiting from college life. An inter-disciplinary team, including an occupational therapist, speech and language

therapists, tutor, named nurse, physiotherapist, relaxation therapist, key support staff, an aromatherapist and a music therapist, undertook a joint assessment and developed a range of strategies for Kirsty. Alternative positioning made her more comfortable, the use of a consistent staff team and approach, giving her personal space and allowing her to integrate gradually into the group.

A communication strategy which encouraged Kirsty to develop clear 'yes' and 'no' responses was implemented by all staff. Key words, supported by signing, and consistent objects of reference were used, and Kirsty was encouraged to use facial expression, body language and vocalizations to communicate. A deliberate look up for a 'yes' response and a look away to either side for a 'no' response" began to emerge. This was then modelled by staff during interactions around choice making - each time she was asked to give a 'yes' or 'no' response, which over time consolidated this expressive communication. She progressed to using a jelly bean head switch and Bigmack reliably, and was then able to relay simple messages alongside 'yes' and 'no'.

Over time Kirsty began to interact more effectively and developed the confidence and maturity to communicate her needs to staff. Kirsty was performing beyond expectations, so increasingly challenging targets were set; she continued to achieve and overcome the barriers to learning she had previously encountered. She made significant progress in her communication, literacy, numeracy and self-advocacy skills and was able to direct her own care needs effectively, knew her own mind and had the confidence to convey this.

Kirsty is now happily settled in a small residential home, following an initially difficult placement and subsequent period back at home with her parents. She is enjoying taking part in a range of community activities.

Nash College, Bromley

- Providers and potential providers must be included in the assessment and planning process. Support needs can only really be properly assessed in context; for example, the support required for numeracy in the classroom is quite different from the support required for applied numeracy in a retail setting or in other practical activities (see also Q4 below)

3 How could the new single assessment process and 'Education, Health and Care Plan' better support children's needs, be a better process for families and represent a more cost-effective approach for services?

Comments: we agree that families will welcome the potential flexibility of this approach and that there should be clear benefits from all stakeholders sharing responsibility for the plan and its implementation.

- We believe this approach will reduce the number of duplicate assessments children/young people and their families undergo and it is therefore a positive development. However, the plan will only be welcomed by children/young people and their families if it leads to timely action.

- We would envisage that this approach would allow for assessment as required, rather than at set chronological stages which do not always reflect an individual's needs. It will allow for assessment to be more responsive to the development of an individual, regardless of their age, and to be undertaken in the context of their specific changing requirements.
- The joint plan should ensure that all stakeholders have a shared interest in its successful delivery and will work together to achieve the desired outcomes. For example, if a young person's goal is to live independently, successful transition into independent living is more likely if all parties are held accountable for the outcome.
- It is important that the resources required to make this work are acknowledged and made available (see Q2 above). There will be significant set-up costs to ensure consistency and quality across the country
- Specialist colleges would wish to engage locally with the pathfinders, in order to ensure that the potential role(s) of specialist colleges is fully explored.

4 What processes or assessments should be incorporated within the proposed single assessment process and 'Education, Health and Care Plan'?

Comments: we feel strongly that the assessment and plan must engage with the young person as soon as possible and offer below some suggestions about how this can be done effectively.

- It is important that the process is an organic one which grows with the child/young person. In particular, it should incorporate the views of the child/young person as soon as this is practicable, and skilled support should be available to enable their views to be gathered. In terms of engaging with young people, the process needs to be dynamic and interesting, rather than dull and paper-based. Young people create their own plans in a variety of formats – DVD, web-based, scrapbook – whatever is meaningful to them, and the statutory plan will need to take account of and incorporate these, not just pay lip service to being learner centred.

***'We were very impressed. Everyone came together to formulate a tailor made plan for our son'* Parent talking about the experience of person centred planning**

Adam has Cerebral Palsy, global developmental delay and severe learning & communication and behaviour difficulties. He uses a wheelchair for long distances. School reports indicated physical aggression such as kicking and biting, and severe anxiety in unfamiliar places, for example refusing to eat, inducing vomiting and refusing to get in or out of vehicles. He could be overly affectionate with strangers. The college's Functional Assessment and Analysis confirmed that non-familiar environments induced severe anxiety and behavioural responses.

Following interdisciplinary assessment, the team worked with Adam and his family to develop a person centred plan for him. The plan was presented in a bright style with

clear steps marked out leading towards his goal (see annex 1). The learning programme included support and intervention to enable him to accept change, with a long term goal of moving to a supported living environment. The programme also included strategies to empower him and give him control over his environment, in particular by ensuring he could access items that calmed him, such as his Elvis mask. He was encouraged to communicate his needs through signing or single words.

Beaumont College, Lancaster

Person centred plans may look very different for another learner. For example, John has an autism spectrum condition, and experiences impairments of social interaction, social communication, imagination and social understanding. He also has dyslexia, learning difficulties, diabetes and epilepsy, which can be barriers to learning. John created an electronic person centred learning plan to identify his aspirations, which allowed him to imagine his future and communicate his long term goals through a visual rather than a verbal approach. He wanted to gain confidence handling money, be able to make himself snacks, learn how to travel using public transport and improve his reading, writing and IT skills. He also wanted a qualification in retail to gain open employment. He received support from a multidisciplinary team including his parents, key tutors, learning support assistants, connexions, employers and a speech and language therapist. A personalised programme was devised, with tailored support and clear targets linked to John's goals and aspirations.

Thornbeck College, Sunderland

- Assessment over time needs to reflect the settings in which the child/young person is living and learning; support needs can only be properly identified in context and so will change accordingly. For example, the kind of support needed in a school classroom will not be the same as that required to work in a vocational department in college, or to begin to live independently in a residential setting. Colleges tend to be much larger organisations than schools, so getting around is, initially at least, more of a challenge. Therefore the plan must acknowledge that needs do not remain static, and can increase as well as decrease over time, with additional support being especially important at times of change and transition.
- Technology is developing and changing all the time and can often support greater independence for young people, so needs to be assessed at times of change. Important that assessment acknowledges costs of training in the use of technology and on-going maintenance, both for the learner and supporting staff
- The plan must allow for growth and maturity. In particular, young people who may take longer to mature, or who have limited knowledge and information on which to base their choices, cannot be expected to make long term choices, or be committed to them, too soon. Good IAG is vital, offered regularly by people with knowledge and experience both of disability and of the range of options available.
- Potential students visiting ISCs are excited by the opportunities and role models offered. They see young people like themselves greeting them on reception and serving the public in social enterprises; they meet young people living independently

and taking responsibility for their day-to-day needs; they see their peer group forming friendships and engaging in a wide range of social activities. For many, it opens their eyes to a whole new world and gives them a sense of optimism about their future adult lives.

5 What is the potential impact of expanding the scope of the proposed single assessment process and plan beyond education, health, social care and employment?

Comments: Clearly the young person's needs and aspirations will change over time and the planning needs to be managed in a way that acknowledges this.

- As the young person approaches adulthood, it will be important to involve a wider range of services. Depending on the needs of the individual, these might include housing, employment, access to Higher Education and long term medical support. This will be on an individualised basis, so will not require the same level of statutory duty, but will be essential if the inter-agency approach in the earlier part of the plan is to result in positive outcomes for the individual.
- Joined up planning, and with it joined up budgets, would be better placed to provide on-support to learners in all kinds of work and in independent living. Sometimes, people need some additional support beyond college just to get them onto the next step, and specialist colleges can be part of providing such support.

'I wanted to be able to live more independently but I wasn't ready when I finished last year, even though I learned a lot. On the Bridge Programme I got chance to get more confident and be able to plan my time better and realise that I can do more things than I thought I could. I am now looking forward to getting a job in a cafe. My mum and gran are really proud of me'. Carla

A specialist college for students with sight loss and/or other disabilities is working with the local social services to enable people to develop the skills to live in supported living/independent living.

Carla has a visual impairment, learning difficulties, and some physical difficulties. At the specialist college, she achieved Level 2 in Childcare but was not able to progress any further academically, and there was no possibility of more YPLA funding. She wants to progress to supported living and employment and whilst she had made some progress towards this, it was not felt that she was ready to make this move without further targeted support.

Carla's key worker has helped her to move from having her day mapped out for her to planning her own week and managing her own time and support. She is not on a formal education programme, but chooses her own activities with the support of her key worker, using her funding to buy support. The college has organised external work placements for her and she participates in the college catering enterprise. Carla has made good progress and has an interview for a job in a national coffee shop chain; she is also considering housing options.

RNIB Loughborough College

6a) What role should the voluntary and community sector play in the statutory assessment of children and young people with SEN or who are disabled?

Comments: We agree that there could be a role, but it must be high quality and monitored effectively

- The plan as it is envisaged will require skilled co-ordination, both for the child/young person and their family, and for the participating agencies. We believe that voluntary or community sector organisations could play a valuable advocacy role for families and a key role co-ordinating assessments and plans as required. However, these are skilled activities which will require proper training and resourcing if families are to have confidence in the process. It will also be important to ensure some continuity for families, which may not be easy if using the voluntary sector - families do not want to find themselves repeating their story to a stream of newly engaged 'volunteers'.
- High level skills will be required when managing disagreements. These could result from parents and young people holding understandably different views about the future, and sometimes it will not be possible for the same person to represent both the family and the young person. Again, this needs to be part of any training programme that is developed.
- If they are to be able to influence, inform and support the assessment and planning process, it will be important that the voluntary/community organisations have some authority and are respected by all other parties.

6b) How could this help to give parents greater confidence in the statutory assessment process?

Comments: parents will only feel greater confidence if it works – the mere presence of the voluntary sector will not be enough, they will want to see real improvement and implementation

- If this is well managed, it could improve confidence in the system as it will be seen to have an independent focus and put the best interests of the child/young person at the centre. However, there are risks inherent in this approach as outlined in Q6a) above

Chapter 2: Giving Parents Control

10 What should be the key components of a locally published offer of available support for parents?

Comments: we believe the local offer must include the widest range of provision that is available to the child or young person – the local offer does not always have to be locally delivered, particularly when considering low incidence needs

- We think that the locally published offer should include:
 1. the contact details of key, named people who can support the learner and the family
 2. details of services and support available **locally** and how to access them, including local FE colleges and ISCs
 3. details of services and support available **regionally** and how to access them; this should include post-16 options including FE colleges and ISCs
 4. details of services and support available **nationally** and how to access them; this should include post-16 options including FE colleges and ISCs
 5. details of mediation and appeals processes and who to contact to initiate them
- On a more general point, post -16 provision is rarely really 'local' to students in the same way that school provision is. Students often travel considerable distances to their 'local' college, which is both costly and tiring for those with disabilities. They do not learn their independent living skills in their own neighbourhoods. Therefore the concept of local provision is not quite the same.
- ISCs have a strong presence in the communities in which they are based. They use local amenities, run social enterprises, open their facilities to the local population and participate in community events. The important thing is for students to develop a range of transferable skills and the confidence to use their skills in a variety of settings.

When asked about the college, Justin gave the "thumbs-up" sign

Justin is 21 years old and has severe learning difficulties and communicates verbally using some symbols and Makaton signing. Justin has asthma and dermatitis and he has a medication bag in the room at all times. In his first two years at a specialist college for students with sight loss, Asperger's syndrome, Autistic Spectrum Disorders and moderate learning difficulties, Justin has completed the City & Guilds Entry 1 level Certificate in Personal Progress

Justin has one to one support at all times although he is beginning to be more independent. He enjoys joining in-group activities, is a keen sportsman and joins in at college with swimming, football, attending the fitness centre or walking, as well as more relaxing activities in the students centre.

He feels uncomfortable with change and can need time to adjust. He needs to be told of any changes to his timetable cover or issues within the room. As part of his classroom manager role, he answers the telephone and will direct the call to the person required.

In his final year, Justin is going to undertake more practical skill activities within the current

PFL RED sessions. This would allow Justin to test out and develop his personal and social skills further with different, less familiar staff and peers, but in a known location. He will be able to transfer his underpinning knowledge of practical vocational activities and build on new skills in an area that will maximise his potential.

Queen Alexandra College, Birmingham

13 In what ways do you think the option of a personal budget for services identified in the proposed 'Education, Health and Care Plan' will support parents to get a package of support for their child that meets their needs?

Comments: we do not have a great deal of evidence about this, but our comments are below

- We agree that some parents might welcome having greater control over aspects of the budget, but we do not think this will be the case for all parents. Having to ensure the best for a child with complex needs can be stressful enough, without the added anxiety of managing a budget. Putting additional support in place to help them manage this seems to be adding yet more layers of bureaucracy and more people for parents to engage with. We know that some of the parents in our colleges have expressed their concerns about this additional burden.
- A budget for specific services, such as the ability to buy respite care, might be welcomed, although it will depend on the availability of high quality respite services
- We agree that some young people would be interested in managing a personal budget, but again for many of them this will just add to their concerns at a time of transition and challenge. These budgets could be liberating for some but an added worry for many

14 Do you feel that the statutory guidance on inclusion and school choice, *Inclusive Schooling*, allows appropriately for parental preferences for either a mainstream or special school?

Yes

No

X Not Sure

Comments: aspects of the guidance remain useful, but we have some observations below. In particular, if this guidance is to apply across the timespan of the EH&C plan, it needs to take account of the much wider range of provision on offer to young people post-16.

- We agree with much of this guidance, which promotes the importance of mainstream settings adapting their provision and approach to meet the educational needs of a wide range of children and young people with SEN or disabilities. It includes some

helpful examples on making reasonable adjustments to accommodate these children and young people.

- The guidance rightly promotes the voice of the young person and states that ‘The views of the child should be given due weight when considering whether or not he /she should be educated in a mainstream school’.
- The guidance also emphasises that ‘Special schools have a continuing and vital role to play within an inclusive education system’ and expects that ‘All special schools must be outward looking centres of excellence working with their mainstream partners and other special schools to support the development of inclusion.’
- However, we feel that this guidance has an over-emphasis on mainstream education as the default position and could strengthen some sections about the parents’ and young person’s choices. We do not believe that inclusion is the same as integration, and find the Tomlinson definition more helpful, where inclusive learning is that which provides ‘the greatest degree of match or fit between the individual learner’s requirements and the provision that is made for them.’ *Inclusive Learning; the report of the Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities Committee of the Further Education Funding Council (HMSO 1996)*. We feel that this guidance should acknowledge the benefits and value of a specialist placement for those who need it.

“Tom has been able to escape from the social isolation that his difficulties imposed upon him and can now anticipate an active role in society and the very real prospect of employment and independent living”. College tutor

Before attending a further education college that specialises in national inclusive education Tom, who has an Autism Spectrum Disorder, lived at home with his parents and did not socialise outside his family or engage with peers. Unable to initiate conversations, very withdrawn and vulnerable, he was in danger of becoming socially isolated, requiring an escort in the community for safety. He had received one to one support at his special school, achieving GCSE Maths (D), Science (D), Entry 2 English and ICT.

At initial assessment he did not interact with other students and without support would have remained in his room. His disability impacts on language, listening, attention skills and social development. He finds it hard to express his feelings or ask for help when needed, has difficulty in making links and in transferring knowledge, tending instead to compartmentalise learning with rigid outer structures and routines.

At college Tom has made extraordinary progress, benefitting from the extended curriculum and the specialised, integrated approach to learning and personal development. He is now confident working at Level 2, is gaining office skills and developing personal qualities and competencies to make this a realistic employment goal. His attendance is excellent; he is well motivated and completes work to a good standard. A successful internal work experience in the college Credit Union is preparing him for external work experience. Significantly, he is developing a supervisory role for

himself in the team.

He has made very good progress with social and independence skills including cooking, laundry, appearance and personal grooming. He is gaining markedly in social interaction skills and is mixing more with students and staff. The skills and confidence he has developed place him, increasingly, in a strong position for realistic employment and for independent/supported living and engagement with his local community.

Hereward College, Coventry

- The Green paper says little about choice in relation to post-16 provision, but we have assumed that the same principle will apply. We believe that real choice can only be a reality if there is a mixed economy of provision to meet a wide range of needs and circumstances. For most young people, there will be a 'local' provider that is able to meet their learning and support needs. However, specialist provision will be the first and right choice for some young people, whose learning and support needs require a level of expertise that cannot be met locally. This should not be an option of last resort; rather it should become apparent through assessment and planning over time that this will be the best choice. We do not accept that specialist provision is always an expensive option and would wish to see the evidence on which this frequent claim is based. Costs for specialist provision take account of education, care and health needs, making it both economical and well integrated for the student. In order for a proper comparison to be made, care and health costs need to be added to the costs of local education.

16 Should mediation always be attempted before parents register an appeal to the First-tier Tribunal (SEN and Disability)?

X Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments: on balance we support this, with some reservations below

- We agree that mediation will be less stressful for parents and that it is the correct way forward for resolving many disagreements. We support the involvement of an independent party in mediation, but would stress the skills required to undertake this role effectively, requiring both training and resourcing.
- It is important that the mediation process is monitored nationally for outcomes, to ensure that it is a fair process and does not put undue pressure on parents
- It is important and right that the First-tier Tribunal remains an option for all who wish it.

Chapter 3: Learning and Achieving

19 How can we ensure that we improve SEN expertise, build capacity and share knowledge between independent specialist colleges, special schools and colleges?

Comments: we agree that there is further scope to extend and develop existing partnership working and below offer a number of models that have proved to be of value. In order for partnerships to work effectively, we feel that all providers need to be clear about the needs they can and cannot meet – the current system is not only adversarial for parents, but it sets college against college through the assessment requirements. No single organisation is likely to meet all the diverse learning difficulties and disabilities to a consistently high standard, as the range of skills required is vast. Partnerships work best when each partner contributes different and complementary skills

- There is no doubt that ISCs have a wide range of skills that could be usefully shared with other providers in order to enhance their work. There is a role for ISCs as centres of excellence, which could be developed on a regional basis, as no one ISC could offer expertise in all areas. ISCs work closely together across regions and could therefore cover a wide range of specialisms between them. However, one of the greatest challenges to successful partnership working is the time it takes to establish and maintain. It would be useful to allocate some capacity building funds to enable ISCs and other partners to work together effectively in their localities and to establish partnerships on a sound and long term footing.
- Whilst specialist colleges are willing to share their expertise, it is expertise that has been developed over many years, and not an ‘off the shelf’ manual that can just be handed over. It relies on team work, up-to-date knowledge of developments relating to the area of specialism, and on-going review of effectiveness and quality. It therefore follows that ISCs must maintain their core business if they are to retain and grow their expertise and specialism, and that their partnerships with other colleges must be long term in order to be truly beneficial
- There are already many existing partnerships between specialist colleges and local providers, in particular local FE colleges; these partnerships have been consistently praised by Ofsted as a key ISC strength for the way in which they benefit learners. The combined opportunities of the mainstream setting and the specialist preparation and support lead to positive outcomes for individuals

“I am now more outgoing and confident, travelling independently, taking driving lessons and shopping independently. Before, I was mainly staying in my house, achieving nothing” Jay

Before attending a residential, independent specialist college for 90 learners with a diagnosis of Asperger’s syndrome and association conditions, 19 year old Jay had not been out of his house for four years as a result of Asperger’s syndrome and acute social phobia. Prior to this he had a history of being bullied at school and did not achieve any formal qualifications. He was referred by his Connexions adviser, and attended

admissions day with his parents, but due to his severe social anxiety was unable to participate. He agreed to meet one member of staff, and although initially anxious to the point where he was unable to speak, after reassurance he wrote down some responses. His father was pessimistic and stated 'that the college would not be able to do anything with his son'.

By following a flexible, individualised programme with a high level of support, staff gradually restored his self-confidence and introduced him to a variety of social situations. At the residence, staff worked on developing his independence skills, using local amenities, shopping and cooking with one to one support. Like many individuals with autistic spectrum disorders, Jay needs to know exactly what will be happening, and see the places that he might go to, in order to mentally prepare himself.

After one year of studying six GCSEs in the college's learning centre he achieved 5 B grades and 1 C grade. He is now enrolled on a level 3 creative media course at a mainstream partner college and has one to one support from the specialist college's highly trained support workers. Knowing there was somebody in the room who he could turn to when he felt anxious, really boosted Jay's confidence and he is looking forward to gaining a place at university to study media. As part of his preparation for moving onto university, support will gradually be reduced in his final year. He now travels by public transport without support and he is looking forward to taking his driving test in the near future.

Farleigh FE College, Frome

- There are a number of ways in which ISCs can use their expertise to support learners, colleges and LAs. Central to long term independence is the ability to travel, and in particular to use public transport with confidence. This has positive impacts on the ability to live and work with minimal support. The case study below shows how one specialist college developed their skills in training their own students to travel independently to benefit a wide range of other learners in their locality.

"He is set to maintain his independence and social opportunities through into his adult life".

George, a 16 year old with moderate learning difficulties and speech and communication difficulties, was socially isolated. His family, known to the police and social services with both parents long term unemployed due to alcohol dependency, experienced social agoraphobia and isolation. Supported by school, connexions and family liaison, he gained a place at the local FE College four days a week to study life skills and work related qualifications. Living eight miles from college he needed post-16 transport from the local authority and was referred to the travel training programme which enables disabled, disadvantaged and vulnerable people to independently access education, employment and positive activities through a range of transport services.

George was given the chance to undertake a travel training programme at an independent specialist college for learners with a range of complex needs and both physical and learning difficulties/disabilities. Initially he wanted to travel independently to a work

experience placement at the local supermarket. George made quick progress and his confidence grew at college. He then started to learn the bus route from home to college, doing the journey once a week with his travel mentor; this involved safely navigating a busy dual carriageway and overcoming communication barriers. The travel mentor gradually withdrew support until they were shadowing him from a distance.

After 16 weeks he was travelling independently to college every day. Family engagement was fundamental to the success of the training, with the travel mentor working weekly with the family to gain their trust, confidence and consent. He is now on a specific work skills course aiming to move into open employment and, after three additional sessions, travels independently to the new course.

His lifelong social benefits are clear and the programme also saved the local authority £30 per day, £3,780 over the college year. Since 2007 the programme has worked with over 350 individuals with 90% progressing to independent travel and £400,000 being saved from home to school transport budgets, demonstrating how specialist colleges as centres of expertise are delivering value for money outcomes through flexible partnership programmes.

National Star College, Cheltenham

- It is disappointing when the expertise of specialist colleges is ignored. For example, one local authority as part of its SEN/D review, has established priority actions around additional resources for hearing impaired learners – yet it has done so without any reference to a specialist school and college for the hearing impaired in its own authority. This must inevitably lead to duplication and increased costs.
- ISCs also work together to improve provision. A ‘Collaborative Improvement Project’ in 2010 involved a series of partnerships between ISCs, where satisfactory colleges worked on their quality improvement planning process with brokered support from mentor ISCs that had been graded good or outstanding. One of the participating principals noted, *“ISCs work well together. They are keen to improve and develop practice. There is an openness to embrace new ideas and developments and a genuine willingness to share and develop best practice. Trust, professionalism, diplomacy and sensitivity are all skills that are required when taking part in any collaborative work and these were evident in this partnership”*. Of the 12 satisfactory colleges that participated and have subsequently been inspected, six are now good and one is outstanding.
- Natspec recently led a national LSIS funded project, the Enhancement of Learning Support (ELS), in partnership with AoC, to explore new approaches to learning support and the training and development needs of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). This is significantly under-researched in post-16 settings. The project model was based on action research and development in regions, with pairs of colleges, one ISC and one GFE, working together on aspects such as innovative CPD, auditing the training skills of LSAs and working with managers.

The evaluation report notes that: 'The whole project methodology has been designed to promote effective partnership working and in that respect it has been very successful. The lead colleges have worked effectively together and through the regional events developed effective regional networks, which will support practice and communication in the future. An agreed outcome of the East of England regional work, for example, was a commitment to continuing meeting beyond the life of the project to share practice and experience'. Over 650 individuals from 270 organisations, including GFEs, ISCs, LAs, WBL and ACL providers attended regional and national project events. The reports and resources are available on the Excellence Gateway and the Natspec website

- We welcome the emphasis on training and development and the role for LSIS in supporting this. Natspec and specialist colleges have worked in partnership with LSIS on a wide range of projects and initiatives, many of which are reflected in this response. We hope that the current issues about LSIS funding for specialist colleges will be resolved so that they can participate fully in this important work.

21 What is the best way to identify and develop the potential of teachers and staff to best support disabled children or children with a wide range of SEN?

Comments: We agree that there needs to be a comprehensive programme of training and development for teachers and other staff working with children and young people with learning difficulties or disabilities. In post-16 provision, there is already a good framework for this in the specialist National Occupational Standards and application guides. Specialist colleges have a range of expertise they already share with local providers. In non-specialist providers, a strong commitment from senior managers is essential

- As noted in Q 19 above, many partnerships are in place. Natspec has undertaken work to explore the nature and impact of these partnerships (Partnerships for quality improvement, 2010). Although their main focus tends to be on extending opportunities for learners, as Jay's story above shows, there are many positive benefits for staff from both organisations.

The following examples of training offered to partner organisations by ISCs is taken from the **Partnerships for Quality Improvement** report, Natspec 2010

- Developed and delivering a suite of accredited training materials for learning support practitioners in collaboration with partners
- Delivered bespoke training to GFE staff about augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) equipment and offered speech and language training to FE colleges on INSET days.
- New staff dual-trained at the GFE and the ISC and work-shadowing is undertaken.
- Specific training in British Sign Language as well as a more general course in deaf awareness
- Visual impairment awareness.
- Makaton and Autism training is offered to all partner providers; this partnership was set up initially to train staff and there is a 92% achievement rate at present.

- Autism awareness to partner colleges, which has so far reached between 800 and 1000 people.
- *'A range of GFE staff attend our Professional Resource Centre training events and some of our staff are engaged in mentoring GFE staff. A broad range of training has been identified and implemented, including Observation of Learning and Teaching training, and specific teaching approaches'*
- *We run an annual joint conference with our partner to review potential for increased joint working'.*

- There is a wealth of untapped expertise in many providers, and especially among LSAs who are particularly hard to reach in terms of their CPD. The initial research for the Enhancement of Learning Support project identified the importance of involving LSAs in planning their training and professional development. LSAs have clear views about their training and development needs and also about the most effective ways to support and work with them. To ensure that LSAs were able to guide and inform the work, a LSA reference group was established and had an important role in reviewing resources and steering the work.

There is more to training and development than courses and qualifications. Creative solutions have to be employed for staff whose role is essentially student focussed at all times and who want training that is clearly focussed on their day-to-day needs. One region explored alternative approaches, such as buddying, mentoring and shadowing. "Learn and share" meetings are an invaluable way of formalising the sharing of relevant information to support effective practice. In discussion it was clear that there was significant support for shadowing and that practitioners clearly see the value. As a result of the project, one college has introduced a shadowing system and another, which already had a shadowing system in place, will be using some of the paperwork to formalise the process.

These alternative approaches to CPD can be both cost effective and relatively easy to implement. For example, mentoring is most effective when staff are provided with time to undertake the role, but the cost are for staff time rather than external course costs or travel expenses. Activities such as a 'learn and share' meeting can be built into the day and is highly effective at cascading effective practice, and providing a forum to discuss and agree strategies, issues and concerns.

- Clearly there is a place for qualifications and LSAs do want to be recognised professionally and valued; gaining a qualification is one way to achieve this. However, the early research revealed that although there is a galaxy of qualifications and accreditation routes, there was not a clear rationale why providers chose one route over another. Often the only route open to LSAs is a teaching qualification and/or a literacy/numeracy qualification.

Lifelong Learning UK developed, in consultation with the sector – including Natspec - overarching teaching standards and National Occupational Standards for Learning Support staff. Associated Application Guides were produced, setting out the extension of skills, knowledge and understanding required of staff who predominately

teach and support learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These standards and application guides should inform the content of initial teacher training, and provide a framework for accredited CPD and non-accredited CPD.

24 How helpful is the current category of Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development (BESD) in identifying the underlying needs of children with emotional and social difficulties?

<input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Helpful	X Not very helpful
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

Comments: although this categorisation is not an issue in post-16, it has implications for our work and for the learners we support

- We are not sure that this is a very helpful term, partly because it encompasses such a wide range of causes and therefore children with very diverse needs. Some of the causes might be linked to disabilities, learning difficulties, medical conditions or underlying mental health needs. However described, these children are at high risk of becoming NEET as young adults.
- The term is also unhelpful because it is not used or recognised by young people in post-16 provision, or by providers. However, there are young people in FE who challenge services for a number of reasons and who need specialist input and support to make progress. Some of these young people will have autism spectrum conditions.

***'I never believed I would see my daughter do anything like this – and it could not have happened without the skills of her specialist college team. And now she has the chance of an independent and happy life.'* Kate's mother after watching her perform in the college dance team**

Kate is on the autistic spectrum, and attends a specialist day college for learners with learning difficulties, physical disabilities, communication disorders and Autism Spectrum conditions. On Kate's link visit into college, she was supported by three members of staff to provide reassurance and ensure her safety. At her previous placement she had major behavioural episodes every day, typically banging her head, screaming and upturning furniture. Kate presented as an energetic young woman with minimal communication skills, using mainly echolalic two word phrases; she had good practical skills when copying, and a love of the outdoors, but little awareness of privacy or social skills. She wore ear defenders all the time to block out noise.

At college, Kate's levels of anxiety were reduced by the TEACCH method, using low stimulus environments and minimal language. The team of therapists, tutors and support staff who supported Kate are highly trained in autism specific teaching methods, using everyday real-life situations as vehicles for teaching communication and social skills. Kate

learned to organise her activities by following a symbolic work list, and soon removed her ear defenders. Using a symbolic recipe book, Kate became a confident cook, exchanging symbols for equipment with her peers. With the support of an OT, Kate shops at supermarkets using a symbolic list.

Her accomplishments have had a tremendous impact on Kate's family, as she has generalised her skills and goes to restaurants, the leisure centre, or a doctor's appointment - visits that would have been unthinkable just two years ago. She is still the active outdoor woman who loves sport and hiking, but now she can recognise footpath signs, pick up litter and ask for help if she is lost. Through music and yoga, Kate has learned forms of relaxation which she uses to great effect. Her behaviour episodes are now very occasional and inversely proportional to Kate's increased communication skills and raised self-esteem. Kate has been on a supported work placement at a small farm and will undertake a variety of work experience in her final year.

Bridge College, Stockport

- Equally there are young people, both with and without LDD, who have mental health needs. Some of these needs may not emerge until later in childhood, and often at adolescence, and it is important they are recognised and met (see also Q1).
- We also know that many people with a dual diagnosis of disability or learning difficulty and mental health needs are not well served and often fall between the two services. They need specialist input and support to achieve their full potential

"Bethany likes to work; she likes to be involved with everything." Café manager

Bethany had a breakdown prior to attending a residential, independent specialist college for students with learning difficulties, communication difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. She has a complex diagnosis of ASD, Down's syndrome, severe learning difficulties, and coeliac disease and is prone to depression and anxiety. At special school, she showed little academic development. She came to college wishing to increase her independence in everyday living and her long term goal was to move on to supported living.

Initially at college she was very oppositional, giving an aggressive "No" when she didn't want to do something, withdrawing herself, refusing to communicate or attend sessions. She would sit down at any opportunity, often on the pavement. She used the bin in her bedroom as a toilet and refused to get up or wash in the morning.

Gaining confidence to trust staff was her first learning step. She had on-going support from the college's behavioural support team, an individual behaviour plan and consistent care and support staff assigned to support her. She also had speech and language therapy and relaxation therapies. After a year of consistent delivery in a supported residential learning environment, Bethany was significantly more engaged, and ready to participate in further learning. She has progressed from only interacting with key staff to someone who is eager to greet everyone she knows and can speak to members of the

public confidently.

Bethany's excellent progress has enabled her to live in a house with other students. She takes great pride in her appearance and personal hygiene and gets herself ready and to sessions on time. She has a day's work placement at a café where she interacts with the general public, independently greeting them, taking their orders, carrying trays and clearing tables. She assists in meal preparation and cake making and has learnt basic hygiene rules and work routines, including loading the commercial dishwasher. She listens to her peers and follows instructions. She has a second day's placement at an Internet café, demonstrating that she can transfer her skills to a different working environment. She is working towards a City & Guilds entry level 1 qualification in personal progression.

Bethany enjoys work and has demonstrated her employability capabilities in real working settings. She hopes to gain paid employment when she leaves college at the end of the year and move to a house within the local community, with residential support provided by the College.

Homefield College, Leicestershire

25 Is the BESD label overused in terms of describing behaviour problems rather than leading to an assessment of underlying difficulties?

X Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

- While many young people with mental health needs are able to attend their local college with appropriate support, sometimes only a specialist assessment can determine the best approach

"I have made friends at college and my confidence is growing each day"

Hannah has moderate learning difficulties, cerebral palsy, uses a wheelchair and was diagnosed with epilepsy. Her difficulties coping with her seizures, and consequent poor attendance, led to the termination of her place at the local further education college. She had been unhappy at the FE college, saying she found it too busy, and the enforced absence from education and an appropriate peer group had affected her morale and self-esteem.

Prior to starting as a day student at an independent specialist college for students with mild to severe learning difficulties linked to autism, epilepsy and other neurological conditions, a referral was made to the college's Adult Assessment Unit for a two week EEG and neuropsychology assessment. This demonstrated that she did not have epilepsy but NEAD – a non-epileptic mental health disorder that results in seizure type behaviours. From the outset the benefits of attending this specialist centre of expertise were clear.

Hannah's first year individual programme included vocational, independence and life

skills learning and work experience with accreditation at entry level 2, plus a volunteering award. She has begun to flourish, displaying effective self-advocacy skills and a significant improvement in her desire to express herself in all areas of college life. She has developed a positive relationship with her peer group, making friends who encourage her and communicate with her as any other young woman of her age. Her progress has been achieved by the support she has received from the college's multi-disciplinary team approach.

Hannah wishes to live independently like any young person of her age, and hopes to have a residential placement for the second year of her programme. Currently she does not have a social life outside of college, with her only relationships being immediate family. Becoming a residential student will enable her to benefit from a network of friends of her own age and similar outlook, helping her to establish a supported independent lifestyle. She will be given the opportunity to make choices and increase her independence and self-confidence through a rich and varied extended curriculum, in a setting which is focussed on optimising life and social skills.

David Lewis College, Cheshire

Chapter 4: Preparing for Adulthood

33 What more can education and training providers do to ensure that disabled young people and young people with SEN are able to participate in education or training post-16?

Comments: we are concerned at the lack of representation of post-16 provision in the Green paper; it is a large and complex sector and we feel that this is a serious omission. Post-16 provision is covered by three departments (DfE, BIS & DWP) and we believe that better collaboration and unified approaches between these departments must also be tackled as part of the move towards a more streamlined and joined up system. We understand that this may be in part due to the current review of LLDD provision by Ofsted and the NAO value for money study. Natspec has contributed to both pieces of work and we look forward to the findings.

Nearly 300,000 young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are in general further education colleges and many more are in work based learning and in adult learning, none of which has been properly recognised in this green paper. 4,000 young people with more complex and additional learning needs are in ISCs. Below, we indicate a number of ways in which ISCs can contribute to ensuring an improved offer for young people post-16:

- There needs to be a much greater awareness of what is available in further education; it is surprising that the Green paper has no examples of this significant phase of a young person's life, which covers a third of the timespan in the 0-25 plan
- This is not the responsibility of post-16 providers alone. Schools must understand the value of progression into new learning environments and the transition into a more adult setting. Those offering IAG must acknowledge this too, and be able to help young people understand the benefits and tell them about the full range of

opportunities available to them. A new setting and a new approach can often make a real difference and help a young person to take the next step on the road to adulthood.

“Kieron has grown up since he came to college. I can now leave him on his own when we go to a football match, while I go to fetch coffee for us”.

Kieron is 19 years old. He has moderate learning difficulties, dyslexia, challenging behaviour, communication difficulties and social, emotional and behavioural needs. He finds it difficult to sit for any length of time and has a short concentration span, which resulted in a very low attendance at his previous school. This had fallen to one or two half days a week and he needed to develop confidence and self esteem through a range of vocational skills which would eventually enable him to access a main stream college. He joined a specialist day college for students with learning disabilities, Autistic Spectrum difficulties and behavioural difficulties. When he arrived he had no direction or ideas of where he wanted to be in the future.

It was agreed that a full 5 days a week would not be appropriate at the start, so a timetable was put in place to get him back into full time gradually. Although two terms were envisaged for this, by the end of term one he was attending full time and has an excellent attendance record, only having the odd day off through ill health. Kieron needed 1-1 support to enable him to make progress. This was originally with the same member of staff, a male learning support assistant who he felt able to trust; gradually he accepted support from others, initially on a one-to-one basis, but recently he has been able to work with group support only.

When Kieron arrived, he never used the first person and every conversation he attempted was littered with ‘Mr Bean says----’. Now he speaks as himself and not through a third party. He had a short spell as a learner rep and even though he decided it was not for him, he gave it a try and did a good job. His confidence is such that in some groups he ‘buddies’ other learners to help them settle in. He has achieved in all of his vocational areas and is currently working at entry level 3. At two work placements with a local garden centre he was highly praised by the management, and they asked for him to have some extra days with them. When he leaves, he will start at the local college on an essential skills programme leading to a course in construction, as he would ultimately like to be employed as a painter and decorator.

Landmarks College, Worksop

- One of the most important benefits is the development of adult status through the ethos and approach of FE. This is just as important for those who may never achieve all the characteristics of adulthood, such as economic independence and personal autonomy, as it is for those who can achieve them over time. Making the transition into a more challenging environment is also a helpful stepping stone into the world of work and citizenship

Moving into the flat has *“Made me happy, made me feel settled. I can take out my own money from a bank, do my own shopping, and choose where to have a drink, order my own food”* Vikesh

Vikesh is diagnosed with ASD, echolalia and moderate learning difficulties, and has completed a 3 year residential placement at a specialist college for learners with learning difficulties, ASD, communication and behaviour difficulties. In specialist education from an early age, he gained an Entry level 1 qualification in Personal Progress, and came to college wishing to move on to supported living and supported employment.

Initially Vikesh displayed severe challenging behaviour, punching people and ripping out labels in people’s clothing, including members of the public. His future outlook was poor and his behaviour risked a placement in a secure unit. His personalised programme focussed on his behaviour, literacy, numeracy and vocational skills and included specialist support from the college’s behavioural team and a visiting psychiatrist. The use of social stories proved a useful approach for enabling Vikesh to learn how to interact in social situations. His social stories helped him to manage his own behaviour with regards to not threatening and hitting others, managing repetitive communication and to listen to and accept advice. .

Initially he refused to engage, taking extraordinary lengths of time to carry out basic daily routines. A personal timetable, with timed steps, was used to help him to get up in the mornings and complete everyday routines. Being residential enabled a consistent approach from all staff and incidents dramatically decreased in his second year. He worked towards entry level 2 in literacy, numeracy, communication and vocational qualifications, which he successfully achieved. In 2009 he took part in the Special Olympics.

Vikesh now lives in his own flat, in a supported living setting with another person with learning difficulties. He needs minimal support with day to day tasks, does his own shopping and cooking with just a little supervision, and self-medicates. He enjoys a varied social life, mixing with members of the public as well as his peers. His behaviour is appropriate at all times. He works one day a week in the grounds of Loughborough University, unsupported, and they are looking to make his placement a permanent paid position. He also works unsupported at two of the college’s enterprises – a high street café and horticultural enterprise. He is soon going to be ready to travel independently to both of these.

Homefield College, Leicestershire

- Many of the young people who will have an EH&C plan will need to be allowed sufficient time to develop and practice a range of skills; they will often start to make progress later and need longer than their peers. The reasons for this will vary, but could include their maturity and readiness to learn, a learning difficulty which impacts on cognitive ability, the time taken to undertake tasks because of a physical disability, the need to learn through an alternative format such as signing or braille or issues around confidence and self-esteem. Funding constraints have led to a prevalence of part time courses in FE colleges, which is not always helpful in allowing young people the time they need to achieve and practice their skills.

One parent noted about her daughter with complex Down's syndrome, "*Research suggests that cognition in people with Down's syndrome has not sufficiently matured for optimum benefit to be gained from any investment made during the conventional period when children attend school and that increased investment in such individuals at a later stage in their development will bring about disproportionate benefits, perhaps because individuals are more receptive as speech and language skills develop and brain processing patterns become better established.*"

Specialist colleges can offer a comprehensive learning programme that enables learners to build up their confidence and their skills at a pace that suits them. It also allows them the chance to try out different vocational areas, in order to be able to make an informed choice about the future.

'3 years here. Leave July. I like Link. I'm confident, I write more. On bus on my own. Excited new college September'. As signed by Joe

Joe has Down's syndrome, sensory impairment, (severe, high frequency bilateral sensorineural hearing loss) and a history of disruptive and at times aggressive behaviour. Before attending an independent specialist college for deaf and hearing-impaired students and those with communication difficulties, he had a statement of SEN, support from social services and regular respite care.

Initial assessments identified that he was emotionally and socially immature, very vulnerable and functioning at pre-entry level. He began his education and personal development by following the Life Skills course where his individualised learning programme included daily living skills, independent travel, communication skills, managing money, ICT, music for the deaf, swimming and sports activities, plus emotional literacy and pastoral support.

He made steady progress and in year two joined the construction department, doing brickwork for half a day a week, which increased to two mornings and has carried on into his third and final year. He is on target to complete practical units from the City & Guilds Brickwork qualification at level 1, plus City & Guilds Personal Progression through Life skills at Entry 2. He has responded exceptionally well to behaviour management strategies and the consistent specialised support he has received. His outbursts are seldom, and for the majority of his time in college he is a sensible, cooperative young man who enjoys every aspect of college.

Following his involvement in a gardening enterprise at college, which led to the opportunity to show at the Chelsea flower show, Joe has decided to attend a local FE college's horticulture, painting and decorating and conservation course. He will take his own support staff from a specialist support agency that supports deaf young adults with learning disabilities. He will also do some supported employment at a farm once a week and is hoping to do some voluntary work at a disability sports group assisting the coaches who run the sessions.

Doncaster College for the Deaf, Doncaster

- The current post-16 system is funding driven and forces people into routes that are linked to accreditation when this may not be appropriate, relevant or meaningful. This has a particular impact on FE colleges where it is closely linked to funding. Qualifications should be used to support a young person to move successfully into the next phase of learning, work or life. This could mean vocational skills at a level which has currency in the work place or 'A' levels for entry into university. The accreditation of independent living skills is not appropriate in most situations, particularly as the rest of the population is not accredited in this way. This does not negate the importance of recognising and celebrating achievement, for example through a quality assured RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in non-accredited learning) process, the development of an on-line CV such as In-folio and through college certification. We therefore welcome the review of Foundation Learning, recommended in the Wolf review and accepted by the government in its response.
- It may be possible to offer more collaborative approaches to programmes for learners, perhaps with a mix of provision at a local FE college and a specialist college. The specialist college strengths here would include the inter-disciplinary team, assessment skills, residential opportunities and on and off-site vocational training, for example in social enterprises. From the point of view of the learner, such programmes must always have consistency and coherence at their heart and not merely offer a pic'n'mix approach which leads nowhere. It is therefore important that such developments are part of a planned strategy, not ad hoc approaches to short term budget savings. Flexible approaches to funding and audit would need to be in place in order to facilitate this approach
- There is a particular role for ISCs in offering short courses to support aspects of the local offer around residential experience – if employment skills are best learnt in work, then independent living skills are best learnt when living independently
- Some ISCs have particular skills in preparing young people with sensory or physical disabilities and conditions such as Asperger's syndrome for moving on to higher education.

“College has helped me to adapt to things I wouldn't normally do, like take the bus by myself as well as learning to cook. I don't think I'm so shy any more, before I came I was going through rough times”. Marcus

Marcus, who has Asperger's syndrome, had no formal qualifications, and was referred by his Connexions adviser to a residential, independent specialist college for learners with a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome and associated conditions. During his initial assessment he presented as much younger than his chronological age of 17. He had been bullied in the past, his odd communication style and apparent vulnerability marking him out as an easy target.

Focussed learning support enabled him to manage his difficulties with social behaviour including rigid behaviour patterns, inability to adapt to unpredicted situations and extreme

anxiety in crowded noisy environments. The first year proved to be challenging for him, but he responded well and was able to take time out from lessons when anxious. He made steady progress, continuing to require support with social skills, particularly group work, asking questions, staying on task and with planning and organisational skills. In his first year he completed a progression award course at a local mainstream partner college and in his second successfully passed a level 2 media course, gaining an overall merit pass. He has continued to surpass original expectations and is now progressing well on a level 3 media course at a mainstream partner college. His tutors fully support his application to study media at university.

Marcus also worked hard with support staff to improve his independence and social communication skills. He was extremely anxious about using public transport but recently started to travel by bus to his mainstream college. He is able to initiate conversations and maintain friendships and now has a small circle of friends with similar interests. At college, he regularly had to leave the classroom when other students became too noisy; however, over time and with gentle encouragement, he is managing to tolerate other students' noise. Marcus and his parents are delighted with his progress and acknowledge that being away from home and learning to become more independent have been crucial to achieving his goal of going to university.

Farleigh FE College, Frome

- ISCs with these particular skills could offer short courses in access to HE for young people both in their locality and regionally, particularly over the summer period when they have residential spaces.
- In the more adult setting of post-16 education, learners need effective support that promotes independence, rather than support that makes them different and does the work for them. Students who took part in the focus groups for the Natspec Enhancement of Learning Support (ELS) project told us very clearly that they do not like the 'velcro' model of support, being "*followed around all day*". Rather they want support which is enabling and "*allows you to make decisions*". Learners are skilled in understanding their own support needs and do not want to be assigned support without consultation. They also want to be challenged, "*Support workers should know what I am capable of and push me further, and they should boost confidence*".

Teachers and other staff need to listen to learners in order to find the support that works best for them. After listening to the learner panel speaking about their support at a national conference, one delegate said "*I have never been to anything like this before. It is both very powerful and inspiring listening to you talking about your experiences, and it makes me recognise that we need to completely review the way we organise and review our learning support*"

One parent noted the way in which her daughter was held back in a mainstream setting because of the nature of the support she was given, "*as she progressed through the school years, it became apparent that the price for this "inclusive" setting*

was in fact an increasingly isolated learning environment with the only constant being the ever present “minder” in the form of a full time ancillary support assistant”.

“I have truly enjoyed my time at college; I can cook and travel independently as well as learn in my own way. Being around other people with similar disabilities has also given me the confidence that regardless of my disabilities I can achieve to the best of my ability and go on to living independently and having a job” Emily

“The distance she has travelled is enormous. Her commitment to learning is inspiring” Emily’s tutor

Emily has Mucopolidosis type 2/3, a rare endocrinological condition which affects sight, joints and musculature, plus acquired Carpel Tunnel Syndrome and a shunt. Her condition has a severe impact on her physical health, resulting in limited mobility (she is a wheelchair user), poor fine motor control and varying degrees of constant pain.

Throughout her schooling she reports having “very close support” from Teaching Assistants, such as a scribe and reader in all lessons. Whilst she achieved some GCSEs, she did not have the opportunity to learn effective reading skills or achieve any ICT qualifications.

When Emily went to a residential, independent specialist college for students who are blind or partially sighted, she knew she wanted to become an independent learner with an effective working medium, but was unsure of her future goals and aspirations. She received specialist support to learn how to use assistive technology to access computers independently, using speech software, and has benefitted from mobility training and support for independent living skills. It was also evident she had considerable ICT ability and in her first year she studied ECDL, progressing to Level 2, including GCSEs and BTEC Level 2 ICT. On completion of her second year she progressed to BTEC Level 3 Subsidiary Diploma in ICT and AS Sociology. Her future aspirations now include a desire to go to University.

Throughout her time at college she has been determined to succeed, both academically and residentially. From being fully dependent upon support she has learnt to travel independently by bus and train and to prepare meals. She has participated in many activities and events and is working toward the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award. She now has the skills to live and study independently and has applied to her local housing authority for appropriate accommodation. She intends to complete A2 study at her local FE College, then progress onto to University.

Royal National College for the Blind, Hereford

- The NE region’s contribution to the ELS project was to develop a range of approaches and case studies to help providers work more creatively with learners to promote independence. It addresses the issue of “unsticking the Velcro”, challenging the notion that effective support is always about one to one direct contact with an individual. The report provides a series of case studies exploring ways in which providers and practitioners involved in the project activity have adjusted their

approaches to increase learner independence. The case study below is another example, demonstrating the importance of expert assessment in identifying ways in which technology can promote independence and learner autonomy.

***'Before I came here I didn't know I could do speech recognition. I can now type with my talker and I can use my wheelchair as a mouse. I love college as I actually get stuff done.'* Sophie**

Sophie attends a specialist residential college for students with a visual impairment, learning difficulties & physical disabilities. She has a Mitochondrial disorder and a mild learning difficulty. She has been left with limited arm movement, no mobility and speech problems after developing chicken pox in her early life.

Prior to coming to college, Sophie had a very keen interest in ILT, having used a Lightwriter communication aid as her primary means of communication for most of her adult life. The college has nurtured this interest in technology and introduced two new developments with regards to her accessing a computer.

Initially Sophie was using a standard keyboard with a rollerball mouse which, whilst she was very adept at using it, was difficult to set up due to her limited movement. On investigating other ways of accessing computers, it was discovered that Sophie's wheelchair was Bluetooth enabled and we were therefore able to have it act as a mouse. This instantly increased her independence in using ICT, as she no longer has to rely on someone else to set her up with equipment, it is all done through her wheelchair control stick. Additionally, as Sophie's typing was more effective using the Lightwriter communication aid than the PC keyboard, a method to interface the Lightwriter with a PC was developed using speech recognition; the computer listens to the audio output of her Lightwriter and then writes what is being said, allowing her to operate the computer and type into documents independently.

Henshaws College, Harrogate

- There should be a role for ISCs as local providers, which is not always considered as an option by some LAs who see specialist colleges as only 'out of county' placements. At the same time, it is not appropriate for LAs to use specialist colleges for all their hard to place learners, regardless of their disability, as has happened in some instances; over time this will have a negative impact on the specialism and expertise of the college. These local arrangements could also be made in collaboration with others
- Technology has opened up many opportunities for disabled people, as Sophie's story above shows. Natspec and specialist colleges work closely with JISC TechDis to ensure that the most up-to-date technologies are there to support access to the curriculum and personal autonomy, as well as making the most creative use of high street technology.

“It’s good to see him on Skype and know that he is happy and working. It’s difficult for us because he doesn’t tell us anything...” Matt’s parents

Specialist colleges use assistive and enabling technologies to support communication, motivation and skills development. One college for students with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities believes in using simple, readily available technology which has high impact on learners.

Matt, a student with severe learning and communication difficulties who uses Makaton signs and symbols but struggles to make himself understood, needed support to maintain contact with his family. He learnt to use Skype videophone, using a series of expressions and hand movements to convey his messages. His family can now communicate directly with him and the visual aspect allows them to make a judgment on his general wellbeing. The use of this free and simple technology has transformed his experience of being away from home and it is heartening to witness him laughing and joking with his family.

Two young women, Jenita and Tammy, both use communication aids and are comfortable using Makaton to overcome their speech impairments. In their final year and anxious about leaving, the speech and language department encouraged wider communication using video conferencing as a means of linking with students from other specialist colleges. The videoconferencing removed many of the difficulties both students were experiencing and gave them opportunities to communicate with similar learners using their communication aids and signing.

“I like listening to my parents on my MP3 and I let them know what I’m doing”

Anthony

Anthony needed support with reading and writing, and had difficulty using the computer to email his parents. He listens to music on an MP3 player and is familiar with the technology, so he was supported to record messages to attach to an email. He now records a series of short messages throughout the day to send to his parents in the evening. He could listen to the replies from his parents through screen reading software, but wanted to be able to return to the messages whenever he chose without having to rely on support to access his e-mails. The email content is now copied to DSpeech and saved as an MP3 file which he can listen to at any time he chooses.

Derwen College, Oswestry

- The growing use of technology, especially mobile technology and social networking, requires vigilance and clarity on the part of providers, and Natspec colleges with JISC TechDis have undertaken a range of work around e-safety issues. The approach is built around enabling learners to use technology and social networking confidently, safely and securely, rather than restricting its use, so that they are better prepared for managing independently.

- There are some young people who for a variety of reasons are unable to learn in any of the usual settings. Technology opens up a range of opportunities for these learners to study on line.

'Because we design our programmes around the needs of each learner on an individual basis, the results achieved by the students we support are described as outstanding'. Nisai Director

Some young people unable to attend traditional educational placements for a variety of reasons are receiving education through an innovative on line 'virtual academy' that also provides on line contact with other young people studying with them. Every programme includes a timetable of live, real-time lessons. Learning is supported by self-paced work and individual and group assignments.

Students who might otherwise be totally isolated can interact socially in a completely safe online environment, take part in group activities and projects and use a range of social networking tools.

One 19 year old young man who has no movement below the neck and some speech difficulties completed AS level ICT despite a twelve month stay in hospital. In his second year he completed his full A level ICT and this has given him a good start towards his ambitions to become an accountant. **"As soon as I heard about the academy I knew I had another chance to continue my education and help me in life"**.

Another 19 year old young man who had suffered a severe injury to his neck which left him paralysed, whilst spending a year in hospital and unable to complete written work was able to use the grades he achieved for his mock exams to achieve GCSEs and is now studying towards an A Level in ICT with the virtual academy. He found being able to watch recordings of his timetabled live lessons very helpful when illness meant he missed them. **"Not attending school could be isolating so having a group of friends online is very important to me. This is the perfect choice if you can't get to school on a regular basis"**.

An 18 year old young man who had been diagnosed with ME at age seven has faced significant barriers in accessing education for most of his life. Now aged 18 he is studying GCSEs at the virtual academy. Finding attending mainstream school exhausting, the flexibility of the virtual academy is helping him to pace himself. He has also made many friends, something he has wanted for a long time. **"The virtual academy brings me as close to the classroom experience as I can imagine"**.

Nisai Virtual Academy

34 When disabled young people and young people with SEN choose to move directly from school or college into the world of work, how can we make sure this is well planned and who is best placed to support them?

Comments: We welcome the acknowledgement throughout the green paper that work is a legitimate and desirable outcome for many young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. We do have concerns that for many, this will not be an achievable outcome, at least not as a next step from college. We would want to celebrate a wider range of successful outcomes, including living more independently, directing your own care, participating in community activities, volunteering and going on to further education or training, as shown in this case study.

“Naomi likes being as independent as possible and only receives support when using computers because of the levels of Assistive Technology she can access. Naomi says that she likes having a work placement one day a week at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital where she can use some of knowledge from her Health & Social Care course” Tutor

Naomi has severe sight problems and moderate learning difficulties and has a lot of support in place. In order to work independently, she has to receive detailed guidance for each task of each unit; she is then able to consolidate a lot of information and use this as evidence for her assignments.

Despite her severe sight problems, Naomi manages to type her assignments with the use of a strong magnifying glass. She has a specially modified zoom text screen in order to read the text on her assignment tasks, which are enlarged to 24font.

She has just completed 3 units from the BTEC Level 2 Certificate and the BTEC Diploma in Health and Social Care. She arranged a work placement herself at the local hospital where she has made excellent progress. Next year Naomi is moving onto complete a Level 3 Health and Social Care course at Hereford College

Queen Alexandra College, Birmingham

- If more young people are to achieve their goal of moving into work, this needs all parties – providers, employers, local authorities and government – to work together to promote issues around the rights of people with learning difficulties and disabilities to work and the responsibility of employers to take positive steps to recruit them. Support can come from a number of agencies, and all providers should be ensuring that their learners are aware of the support options available to them, such as Access to Work funding. It is also the case that when innovative approaches to models of employment, such as supported employment, are developed, they are often subject to short term funding which does not allow them to consolidate their work, realise their full potential or that of the young people they work with. In the current economic climate, and with the very low baseline of, for example, only 7% of people with learning difficulties in paid work, it is necessary to put in place a national programme

to significantly improve opportunities and ensure that disabled people are ready to take advantage of the economic upturn when it comes.

- Independent Specialist Colleges offer a good example as employers of disabled people themselves. A recent survey of ISCs (A Short Study on the Employment of Disabled Staff in Independent Specialist Colleges, Natspec 2011) established that they employ on average 8% of staff who declare a disability, significantly higher than the FE colleges' average of 2.9%. Not only is this an important contribution to the employment of disabled people generally, but it provides a range of positive role models for students. The report shows that although it might be perceived that it is 'easier' to employ disabled staff because of the nature of the colleges, there still has to be a positive commitment to doing this and a range of approaches in place to encourage disclosure and to support and retain staff.
- Specialist colleges already do a great deal to engage with employers, linking with them as providers of work experience and more generally promoting to them the benefits of employing disabled people. They have a range of staff with roles that have a specific focus on vocational training and work experience, such as vocational studies co-ordinator, work experience tutor and careers and work experience co-ordinator. The Natspec Employment Forum provides this group of staff with an opportunity to share ideas and effective practice.
- However, it is important to emphasise that work around employability and vocational learning must be integral to the curriculum, not an "add on", as the case studies in this, and other sections demonstrate. Specialist colleges take a student-centred and personalised approach to learning for progression, not only to provide the most appropriate personal support, but to ensure the progression pathway is the preferred and realistic option for each student and also reflects their high expectations of the students. Work experience must also take account of student's changing ambitions and revised goals.

"Sonia has progressed at QAC due to first grade support that has enabled her to excel and achieve to the highest potential and gain a range of qualifications that would not be possible in mainstream education." Tutor

Sonia attends a specialist college for students with sight loss, Asperger's syndrome, Autistic Spectrum Disorders and moderate learning difficulties. She has received overall support for her Asperger's Syndrome and dyslexia, as well as personal tutoring, counselling and mentoring whilst at the college. Sonia experienced bullying whilst in mainstream education and has received much support to ensure that this does not happen again, so that she can learn to her full potential in an environment where she feels safe and where her disability is not an issue.

Sonia is now in her final year at QAC where she has been studying BTEC First Diploma in Performing Arts, Level 2 Literacy and Level 1 Maths and Entry Three IT Functional skills qualifications. She has progressed well, having studied at Entry Level when she first joined the college.

Sonia has achieved many personal development goals whilst she has studied at the college – mostly centred on understanding the needs of others and strategies to help her manage her behaviour to gain employment skills.

Sonia is currently undergoing a work placement in a local Library so that she can gain the skills to work full time in a Public Library, which is her goal after moving on from QAC. Her future plans were originally to gain a job in the Performing Arts industry, but she now wants to work full time in a library due to her love of reading and books.

Queen Alexandra College, Birmingham

- Colleges have to work hard to ensure that they can offer a wide range of work experience that reflects the diverse goals and interests of learners. This includes linking with large national employers, who can often be helpful in providing opportunities in the learner's home area – this can be especially beneficial for learners who find change difficult, for example learners on the autism spectrum. However, smaller employers can often provide a more supportive setting for more anxious learners, or for specific vocational areas, so building up a wide range of contacts locally is crucial.
- Colleges use innovative approaches to support both learners and employers in work experience placements. This includes offering training, an immediate point of contact, clear guidance about the purpose of the placement and relevant information about each learner. Natspec recently piloted a survey of employers providing work experience to ISC learners, the results are below.

Collated responses from Natspec pilot survey of work experience employers

Question	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Un-satisfactory
Health and Safety information	38.69	54.27	6.53	0.50
Information and training regarding requirements for children and vulnerable adults	35.90	48.21	13.85	2.05
Information and resources provided to give you an awareness of the students' disabilities	46.57	40.69	11.27	1.47
Individual student's details and their support needs	44.00	40.50	13.50	2.00
Details of the work placement (e.g. days, times, travel arrangements etc.)	45.41	46.86	7.73	0.00
Support the college could offer to you (review meetings, etc.)	37.25	48.53	14.22	0.00
Effectiveness of support provided by college to the students	52.48	39.11	8.42	0.00

Efficiency of college staff when problem solving/ dealing with issues that arise	50.25	44.72	4.52	0.50
Effectiveness of communication with college staff in monitoring students' progress	46.80	44.83	7.39	0.99
Promptness of communication with college regarding any student's absence or sickness	44.72	43.72	10.05	1.51
Average responses	44.20	45.15	9.75	0.90

Totals: 18 colleges, 207 employers

- Specialist colleges are often working with students who are away from their local area but wish to find employment in their home locality. One successful approach is to build on work experience opportunities. The college described below has 2 full time Employment Liaison Officers and 1 part time Employment Liaison Support Worker, with a remit to:
 - Deliver job preparation sessions.
 - Complete transitional interviews with students.
 - Attend student annual reviews and department meetings.
 - Maintain links for the Employer Forum.
 - Arrange work experience both locally and nationally.

“Natalie worked hard to achieve her goals. At times it was not easy for her but she is a very driven person. She worked hard to complete her courses and went on to gain employment in a 5 star hotel as a pastry chef.” Catering lecturer

Natalie is a profoundly Deaf BSL user, who had been working in a local pub kitchen and catering for events. She decided that she wanted to up skill within the catering and hospitality trade and attended a residential, independent specialist college for deaf and hearing-impaired students and those with communication difficulties. When she started her long term goal was to achieve a Level 2 qualification in catering and hospitality.

Natalie attended the local college to complete Level 1 & Level 2 Food Preparation & Cooking, with support from specialist college staff for communication, theory and practical work. This included interpreting information given by the tutor in class into BSL (British Sign Language) and modifying language and sentence structure in text books, sometimes signing the text to help understanding.

It was during this time that Natalie found her passion for desserts and pastries. The college employment liaison department arranged work experience at a local pub. During her time there, the pub landlord allowed her to put her dessert on the menu as a special. It was well received and encouraged her to concentrate on the Patisserie side of catering, completing her level 2 course at the specialist college.

The employment liaison department arranged a 2 week work experience at a 5 star hotel in her home area. The hotel had never worked with a Deaf person before but took the

challenge and it went exceptionally well for all parties involved. Natalie returned to the same hotel a further 3 times for work experience ranging from 2-4week blocks. Soon after her final placement, the kitchen manager at the hotel contacted the employment liaison department to explain that they had a position available and would like to know if Natalie would like to take it. She was thrilled and the college team assisted with the transition from student to employee by attending meetings, interpreting and making notes to ensure Natalie understood her contract and terms of employment. In March 2010 she took up her employment as a Commis Chef.

Doncaster College for the Deaf, Doncaster

- In addition to specific vocational skills, learners need to develop good employability skills. These are skills that will stand them in good stead not only for employment but in many other aspects of adult life. Employability skills can be developed across a range of curriculum areas, but for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, they are best learnt in practical settings. Many specialist colleges run a variety of enterprises to support the development of vocational and employability skills; these include both on site enterprises and community based enterprises, such as cafes, farm shops and print studios. In one region, specialist colleges have worked together using LSIS funding to produce a best practice guide to enterprise. An extract from the guide is below.

Extract from *Best practice guide: Enterprises in the curriculum*

Learners

- Ensure learner involvement in all the initial and on-going decision making, including the setting up of the enterprise, purchasing stock and the image you wish to project e.g. décor, uniforms and enterprise name
- Match opportunity to learner needs and abilities using their long term goals and targets
- Make goals/targets realistic and challenging
- Don't forget

**Have high expectations of learners
Raise the bar ~ the learners will meet it!**

Teach transferable work skills to ensure learners are work ready, as well as learning skills specific to the vocational area i.e. personal effectiveness skills such as personal hygiene, time management and mobility skills.

- Establish some pre-training, such as feeder sessions which provide learning in a college setting before working in the community
- Model best practice by learning assistants or more able learners demonstrating how to work/complete tasks
- Provide induction packs for learners which include Health and Safety information and work rights with advice about what to do if they encounter bullying and harassment in the work place

- Conduct thorough baseline assessments which are then used to provide individualised objectives for learners
- Devise application forms and interview learners for positions at the enterprises
- Recognise learner achievement

East Midlands ISC PRD group: Hinwick Hall College, Homefield College, Landmarks, Linkage Community Trust, Portland College & RNIB College, Loughborough

- We also believe that there should be more support available to enable disabled people to become self-employed. This is often a good option for someone whose disability may result in varying levels of tiredness and who might find regular hours or rush hour travel too exhausting. In the same vein, employers should be encouraged to support disabled employees to work from home if this is an appropriate way of meeting their needs. The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities has published a useful guide, which notes that ‘The **In Business** programme set out to open the route to self-employment to people with a learning disability and those that support them. We have found that, for some, self-employment offers a natural and comfortable route to work and that with the right support; it is not only possible but indeed desirable to do so’. (In Business: Developing the self-employment option for people with learning disabilities, FPLD 2009)
- However, alongside the importance of encouraging the aspiration to work, must be an awareness of the challenges, which colleges have to manage carefully. Learners must have realistic expectations, especially in the harsh economic climate, and in the context of current employment rates of disabled people, with for example, only 7% of people with learning difficulties in work and 33% of those with a visual impairment. It is important to help students to find ways of retaining their vocational and employability skills, for example through voluntary work.

“He is one of our best volunteers. He completes his required tasks, has learnt basic radio skills and language, is always on time and we can rely on him to get the jobs done”.

Before attending a residential, independent specialist college for learners with learning disabilities, epilepsy and other neurological conditions, Zac, who has epilepsy, severe learning difficulties and a visual impairment, was unsuccessful in getting a place at a local Further Education college. When he started at the specialist college, his wish list for the future was to get a job, to be a DJ or help out in a shop, to learn how to look after his own money, to buy clothes and go on holiday.

During his first term he lacked motivation, often refusing to get up, shouting, swearing, threatening others and indicating suicidal ideation. A range of strategies was devised and implemented through multidisciplinary working with the behaviour and psychology team. They included role modelling positive behaviour, timetabling evening activities, providing tasks with responsibility, not responding to threatening or offensive language whilst responding to his underlying messages, and providing praise for appropriate

interactions. The residential placement provided structure and consistency, enabling him to increase his confidence, self-esteem and independence. He acquired skills in money management, personal care, independent living, social interactions and community participation.

He is now a very different young man and has made excellent progress in relating to peers and staff, showing respect for others and improved communication. He has developed a mature stance on life, and has learnt to control his emotions, assess what is happening and take a step back; he thinks about his actions and responses and the impact of them upon other people. He is confident when following more complex instructions, takes responsibilities well, and recently took centre stage in a learner panel at a major conference, providing valuable input for the delegates.

However, one of the key motivators for Zac has been his involvement as a volunteer at the local community radio station, where he does housekeeping and photocopying, and makes drinks for other volunteers and radio station staff. With other volunteers, he is planning a radio show which they will record for broadcast over the internet. He has worked on live radio broadcasts, learning to use the 'fader equipment' and has also been interviewed on air by the professional presenter about his experiences. He has achieved a 50 hour V Award from this volunteering work, and one of his early goals.

Back at college, Zac is a key member of the radio club, producing broadcasts over the college intranet. When he leaves, he is planning to continue his volunteering at Tameside Radio 103.6 FM. Here he will be able to build on his V Award as they offer a volunteering scheme of Bronze (100hours), Silver (200 hours) and Gold (500 hours) – something else for Zac to aspire to.

David Lewis College, Cheshire

- Volunteering may be a stepping stone into work for some learners, or the achievement of a personal goal for others. There are huge personal benefits from volunteering, including increased self-esteem and a sense of achievement. In the Big society, disabled people should not always be seen as 'recipients' but as people participants who themselves have a great deal to offer to others.
- Innovative employment schemes are often subject to the vagaries of funding, which means that they constantly have to seek new funding sources, are endlessly submitting bids or reluctantly abandon the project. This is often a particular challenge for work undertaken in partnership, where funding restrictions do not allow flexible use of money.

Fast Track was established by **National Star College**, an independent specialist college, in 2007 as a collaborative employment programme for adults with learning disabilities in Gloucestershire day services delivered by Gloucestershire Colleges, Gloucestershire Industrial Services, a supported employer and Gloucestershire County Council. The programme used Learning and Skills Council "Investment for Change" funding. All 20 learners in 2007-8 completed the programme with 85% moving into

employment against a 50% target. In addition these learners were able to travel independently, use a mobile phone to maintain safety and alert changes to travel arrangements, shop and budget and prepare themselves a meal.

This work had to end in 2009 as the development funding dried up and the partners were unable to work out how to use mainstream funding across all the parties / providers to continue to provide this cohesive provision.

- However well ISCs and other post-16 providers prepare learners for employment, they cannot be judged against employment, or other destinations, which are outside of their control to deliver. They can be judged against their ability to prepare students for moving to the next step, by monitoring the achievement of skills outcomes against agreed learner goals.

35a) Do you agree that supported internships would provide young people for whom an apprenticeship may not be a realistic aim with meaningful work opportunities?

Yes

No

X Not Sure

35b) How might they work best?

Comments: we are not sure that it is the most helpful approach, when there are other, possibly more proven options available.

- We are not sure that this is necessarily a helpful term, as it has become politicised, resulting in confusion about what an internship actually means. Internships are traditionally associated with graduates, and it may well be that this route is helpful for disabled graduates.
- The internship model operated through Project Search is just one of many approaches to supporting young people with learning difficulties or disabilities into work. It remains fairly limited in coverage and would require a massive infrastructure if it was to be repeated countrywide. In particular there are issues about on-going funding and management – is it a work or FE programme?
- It is important to be clear about what constitutes a successful outcome for the young person under this proposal. Is success a job with that employer, another employer, or is it really more work experience? The model would not be successful if it became just another way to keep disabled people 'busy' without leading to proper, paid, meaningful employment
- The Project search internship model would not be appropriate for all groups of people with disabilities; as indicated above, more conventional internships might be more suited to disabled graduates

- We believe that it is too inflexible just to have one model. There are many examples of different approaches to employment, including job coaching, supported employment, social enterprises, etc. All of these are legitimate and may fit better with different types of employer. Job coaches provide the support for both employer and student, but the on-going 1:1 work is intensive to start with and adequate funding is not currently in place, although in the longer term it helps to ensure that the employer is well placed to pick up the support within the workplace.

36 How can employers be encouraged to offer constructive work experience and job opportunities to disabled young people and young people with SEN?

Comments: Importantly, we believe that the social model of disability places a high degree of responsibility for this onto employers, who should take seriously their role in employing a diverse workforce. This should be supported by government, which should lead by example in all its departments.

- We believe it is important to provide training and good support to employers as this can often give them the confidence to have a more inclusive approach to recruitment of disabled employees. Having a coherent approach to this can have very positive results, as the project outlined below shows.

The Employability Project (EP) is managed by the Percy Hedley Foundation, a NE regional charity that works to promote the rights, needs and aspirations of disabled people through the provision of high quality personal, specialist services. The EP works across the region to develop employability opportunities for disabled people.

In phase 1, EP achieved the following:

- 230 employers engaged (with a majority of small/medium enterprises)
- 20 training sessions
- 25 events
- 170 successful work experiences

Now in phase 2, and funded by the NHS NE/Strategic Health Authority Innovation Fund, the project team contacts appropriate employers to discuss openings in the form of visits, work experience, placements or employment. The project engages with employers and builds a relationship with them by using a number of creative and innovative methods such as:

- hosting a number of free events over the year for employers, supported employment organisations and disabled people to consider topical employability issues
- offering free networking opportunities to the above groups
- developing projects that directly involve employers with disabled people (mystery shopping, access audits, enterprise competitions, community projects etc.)
- developing an awareness package for employers to look at accessible recruitment in their organisations
- offering free, user led awareness sessions to every employer engaged with the

project

- introducing employers to supported employment and linking them with contacts in their area
- offering a signposting service

Northern Counties College is a specialist college run by the Percy Hedley Foundation, and as part of the project has recently partnered with Newcastle City Council's supported employment service to develop a pilot for Newcastle learners within the College. The aim is to develop a system to assist the smooth transition of learners into supported employment services using the specialist knowledge and skills of all three partner organisations. This integrated approach enhances the learner's opportunities to develop educational and work based employment skills, in a variety of realistic employment roles.

The EP breaks down the barriers that employers envisage exist to employing disabled people. It encourages regional organisations to be socially responsible and proactive by acting as a link between employers, supported employment organisations and disabled people.

- Through work experience, employers begin to understand that young people with LDD can be very good employees and that making reasonable adjustments is not always costly or difficult to implement. One way in which Natspec is approaching this is to work with UK Skills to explore ways in which their competitions can be more inclusive, so that the vocational skills of disabled young people can be celebrated. The work on this has been led by Derwen College, based on the belief "*that our learners can and should benefit from the opportunity to excel in their vocational field*". They ran an internal restaurant skills service competition, judged by local restaurateurs, and recently entered a team in a national cleaning competition hosted by Asset Skills, whose director of R&D said, "*I am very impressed by the teams' work skills, this is the first time in the 4 years life of the competition that we have had entrants with learning difficulties or disabilities*".
- Many employers are very good at supporting disabled people into work, but more could be done to celebrate and promote this. The government could showcase examples of those employers which are inclusive for employees with disabilities and learning difficulties, in order to promote the benefits of a diverse workforce.
- Technology can often offer a solution to support in the workplace, providing a way forward for employers and employees, but employers need to develop greater confidence about this approach. One specialist college is using its expertise in enabling technology to support disabled people in their local workforce.

National Star College is currently setting up a county wide Enabling Technology Assessment centre – the Gloucestershire Accessibility Support Service (GASS). This is currently providing assessments and support for 50 disabled people in the local area to access living, learning and work.

Referrals are followed by a workplace meeting with the employer and the employee seeking an Enabling Technology Solution. An assessment is then conducted at the college and equipment is loaned to the person to try at work. A follow up support visit is made by the enabling technologist to make sure the equipment is meeting their needs and to ensure they are able to secure Access to Work funding to purchase the equipment. This is having a significant impact on those disabled people who are currently in work, ensuring their job is sustainable and keeping them employed.

One social worker suffered a stroke and incurred acute memory loss. Following a GASS Enabling technology assessment, she now uses a Dictaphone for telecom and meetings and with the use of a specialist screen reader she is able to continue in her role.

- ISCs have a range of different governance models, but they all seek to ensure that local employers are well represented on their Boards or as Trustees.

37 How do you think joint working across children's and adult health services for young people aged 16 to 25 could be improved?

Comments: One of the key problems is that children with more complex needs end up in specialist paediatric services and the GP tends not to know them very well; they are not always subject to the usual health checks undertaken through the GP surgery. At 19, they lose access to the specialist services and find themselves in a system not well equipped to cope. The UK charity Contact a Family has recently surveyed 1,000 families with disabled children and found that 76% have no GP involvement in the care of their child's condition (GP involvement in disabled children's healthcare, May 2011).

- The Foundation for People with learning difficulties, in its response to the Kennedy review, notes that children 'may get excellent treatment and care from these services, and many parents would say they have great confidence in these staff' But it goes on to recommend that 'Regular contact and relationship building with the family GP should be a part of every child's access to NHS care - even more so if a child has high associated health care needs.' We support this suggestion which would improve the confidence of GPs in managing the health care needs of these children into adulthood.
- We welcome the proposal in the Green paper that there should be annual health checks for young people from the age of 16, again to improve the understanding of their needs as they move into adult services and to ensure their general health and wellbeing (rather than the needs associated with their disability).
- We agree with the FPLD proposal for national standards for the transition from childhood to adult healthcare services
- We have concerns that there is insufficient appropriate respite care for young people, so that they are placed in inappropriate elderly persons' accommodation
- Natspec will continue to engage with the Healthy FE programme, now managed by LSIS. The health and wellbeing of our learners is a high priority, as is the importance

of enabling learners to take responsibility for their own good health. Where appropriate, this includes giving them the skills to manage their own medication and to use the GP surgery confidently

- We note that there are examples of excellent practice in some health services, for example: 'In Bristol there is a team of health trainers who have learning difficulties. They are employed by the PCT, on permanent contracts, on the same bands as the other trainers, and work in enabling people with learning difficulties to access health care. They are trained walk group leaders and help in health promotion such as smoking cessation, weight management, attending health screening. They have graduated from university having completed an adapted health trainer course. They are employed in real jobs supporting other people with learning difficulties in getting their health needs met'.

39a) Do you agree that our work supporting disabled young people and young people with SEN to prepare for adulthood should focus on the following areas: (please tick those with which you agree)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ensuring a broad range of learning opportunities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moving into employment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> independent living
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transition to adult health services	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> not sure

Comments: we broadly agree with these areas, but we want to ensure that those with the most complex needs are not excluded. We also believe that developing each learner's communication skills and developing self-advocacy should be at the heart of this work.

- The first three areas are central to the curriculum in specialist colleges, and with regard to health, where appropriate, colleges enable learners with complex medical needs to manage their conditions – so we broadly agree with this offer. However, we are concerned to ensure that good provision for those with more complex needs remains within the post-16 education system and beyond.
- The residential aspect of provision enables learners to develop and practise a range of independent living skills in realistic settings, improving their chances of living as independently as possible in the future. Learning to get along with others is another key social skill that is developed in the residential setting

"It's good because it helps you learn and I can get on without being told what to do." Student

A key part of the extended curriculum for students with learning difficulties and disabilities attending residential independent specialist colleges is the development of independent daily living skills. It is well recognised that learning is most effective when it takes place in the appropriate environment and the residential setting allows these skills to be developed in the right setting and at the right time. Specialist colleges have a good track record on increasing independence and successful supported living

outcomes.

One independent specialist college, featured on the Ofsted Good Practice website, has developed an innovative approach for the development of independent living skills, whereby areas of responsibility are allocated to each student to allow them to make decisions about how and when they carry out their duties, rather than using the more traditional rota system. Students choose an area of responsibility in their house each week and then decide what needs to be done and when to do it. In addition to developing independent living skills the students gained in other areas such as:

- developing time management skills
- learning to identify what needs to be done
- developing a realistic approach to housekeeping
- learning to use their initiative
- learning to make appropriate choices
- increased confidence

The students developed a positive approach to household tasks as they were responsible for their own area and took pride in their home and their abilities to keep it clean and tidy whilst practising their daily living skills. The impact of the scheme is evident. Students have greater ownership of their responsibilities and they have developed wider transferable skills beyond daily living skills. One student has transferred her skills to her home environment and now cooks and cleans for her mother. Staff have got to know their students better, as they now work more meaningfully with them and there are increased opportunities for incidental learning. For example, when a student began vacuuming whilst others were watching television, discussions ensued about the appropriateness of the timing and the impact on other students.

Fairfield Farm College, Wiltshire

- Very often students need time to determine their goals and feel optimistic about their future. Their achievements in independent living can often lead to increased self-esteem and self-confidence, enabling them to consider a broader range of options in the long term. When learners challenge services in particular, the consistency of approach that can be offered in a residential setting is likely to have the most impact.

“As parents we are so impressed with the progress she has made, developing into a confident, articulate young woman. We feel that this wouldn't have been achievable without the full range of services and support offered by a specialist College” Jemma's parents

“Being the lead on the student Council has made me more confident, I have learnt how to manage my behaviour, I have become more independent at administering my own medication and travelling on buses” Jemma

Jemma has right-sided hemiparesis, epilepsy, moderate learning difficulties and

challenging behaviour. She attended a residential, independent specialist college for learners with learning disabilities, epilepsy and other neurological conditions. When she started college, she lacked confidence, was nervous and had little idea of her potential; her aims were to develop daily living skills, communication and social interaction.

Jemma had a difficult start, which included inappropriate verbal and physical aggression, but then she began to flourish, taking responsibility and seeking help for her behaviour, and working with the Behaviour Support team to develop appropriate strategies. She became more independent in her learning, setting realistic goals and striving to achieve them. Her communication improved as her confidence levels rose and she began to develop friendships, soon becoming highly respected amongst the wider student body. She was elected Chairperson of the Student Council and proved herself able and committed, organising social events, liaising with council members and the staff team and helping to implement new initiatives. She has become a confident young woman who is not afraid to speak passionately about issues she cares about; as a member of the learner panel at a recent major conference she successfully shared her views with an audience of over 100 professionals.

She is now working towards a number of qualifications at entry level 3 and has made significant progress with independence skills in a residential setting. She is successfully managing her own medication, has a good knowledge of health and safety and is able to take care of a home. She has made outstanding progress on her independent travel skills, now travels to the local disco by bus and knows how to get to her work experience placements by using public transport. She is moving onto a shared living adult placement and feels optimistic about the future.

David Lewis College, Cheshire

- The development of communication and self-advocacy skills is central to success for individual learners. Access to the support to develop their own voice is crucial for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities, as is the willingness of services to listen to them. It is a priority for those with significant communication needs, who require specialist support to find their voice.

'The girls are doing really well; we were particularly impressed with the development in respect of photographs. We will try and introduce some of this in their personal care routine at home. They both generally appear to have a greater grasp of what's actually going on and what is expected of them in many different situations' H&L's parents

Helen and Lucy are twin sisters with severe learning difficulties, significant autistic features and a diagnosis of Retts Syndrome, who use eye contact, facial expression, gesture and body language to communicate. They require a multi-sensory approach to learning. They attend a specialist day college for learners with learning difficulties, physical disabilities, communication disorders and Autism Spectrum conditions, and live in the family home.

The sisters had previously used objects of reference (OOR) to develop their

understanding of what was happening in relation to drink, lunch and toilet. At college they have progressed rapidly to understanding the meaning of a wide range of OORs, and have developed the skills to understand what is happening next, rather than just being supported to complete the next activity. When presented with an OOR, they show their understanding both of the OOR and the action they need to take, and independently stand and move towards the correct destination. Their parents report that this has significantly improved their independence at home.

Helen and Lucy made such swift progress that the college introduced photographs as a strategy to develop their receptive communication skills, with a view to further developing this for expressive communication. With intensive support from communication specialists, the twins are beginning to make choices and requests using photographs; for example, they are learning to choose their meal at lunchtime from a set of pictures. They are becoming more independent in their personal care by using indicative photographs when they are being helped (receptive language), and to indicate when they need personal care (expressive language). Eventually this will lead to using a voice output communication aid (VOCA) to inform others of their needs.

They have achieved a great deal in a short time, and already interact more confidently with staff and peers, understand and manage the challenge that change poses to them, and make basic choices that are consistently understood by others. The ability to indicate a need or desire will provide Helen and Lucy with increased personal autonomy and their on-going learning programme focuses on communicating an even wider range of needs, wants and preferences.

Bridge College, Stockport

- Developing communication skills is equally important for those who lack the confidence or self-esteem to put forward their own views. If disabled young people are to be involved in the Big Society and play their part as citizens, for example by contributing their views to the newly established HealthWatch body (Green paper 5.13), then the development of communication skills must be seen as a priority across the curriculum
- LSIS will shortly publish a set of case studies demonstrating the approaches to listening to learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties in post-16 settings, including ISC and FE colleges. It shows how team work and creative approaches enable **all** learners to have a voice. It is also crucial to ensure that this approach permeates all facets of college life and underpins the ethos of the college. ISCs employ a wide range of strategies to engage with their learners, from involving them in their assessment and learning programme through to surveys and student councils.

'The best thing about my job is seeing the transformations in students themselves. They grow from shy, new students into confident, assertive young people'. Learner voice coordinator

The strong ethos of Derwen College puts the learner at the heart of everything and everyone embraces this culture - everyone believes that students 'can'. The approach is very person centred and there is a big focus on the learner voice, underpinned by a programme of staff development to embed this across the college. The college has a learner voice coordinator who speaks passionately about enabling the learners to grow in confidence and independence.

In 2010, the college won the Learning and Skills Improvement Service Learner Voice Representative Organisation award and the current president of the Student Union was shortlisted for an individual award. The president has a strong working relationship with the staff and learners. She is in her second year in the role and she is making a big difference to the college.

Her skills in encouraging other students to assert their own voices and make choices and decisions are not only the outcomes of the very good professional development of the staff who support her, but they are also the outcomes of the strong ethos that places the learner at the heart of this college. She says, *"I never had confidence to talk to anyone before; now I do it every day. I have respect from the other students. At meetings I sit with the secretary and treasurer on either side. I read the minutes of the last meeting and the three of us are involved in presenting."*

I was bullied at school. Here bullying is not tolerated. Students have a more mature approach. I have much more support from students and staff here. I am involved with making big decisions with our Principal. Even if other students have different opinions to me, I listen to them. I like to support students too when they have a problem. The student council works closely with people and we see another side to each other."

- For learners with specific communication needs, speech and language therapists work with staff across the team promoting a range of strategies to support the acquisition of skills to enable basic interactions, communicate needs and where possible indicate preferences. Many of the case studies in this response include communication as an integral aspect of the personalised programme. The case study below shows how for some learners this will be the key to all other learning.

'As Harry's receptive and expressive communication has increased, this has reduced his need to communicate via challenging behaviour and enabled him to move into a residential placement to further develop his living skills and his ability to interact with those around him'. Deputy Education Service Manager

Harry has Down's syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder and a severe learning disability; he is ambulant around familiar environments, but sometimes uses a wheelchair in community environments due to his lack of understanding of road safety and challenging behaviour. He has a slight left convergent squint and nystagmus which can affect depth perception and can be tiring because it takes extra effort to look at things. He appears to have some functional hearing but needs to be motivated to use it effectively, by stimuli that he enjoys. His response to sound may also be attributed to

communication and processing difficulties associated with ASD and Down's syndrome.

Harry attends an independent specialist college for students with multi – sensory impairment and profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities as a day student, and initially was easily distracted by environmental factors and had a limited concentration span. He had few life skills, and although an intentional communicator had no formal means of communication. Multi-Sensory Impaired (MSI) trained staff used their knowledge of intensive interaction to develop and support his progress in the areas of communication, anticipation and shared focus. His behaviour has challenged the service on occasions, but with his increased communication skills and the support of trained staff these challenges have been recognised, interpreted and responded to appropriately.

During his second year he started a gradual transition into a residential home linked to the college, successfully moving in full time by the end of the first term of his final year. He has continued to follow an education programme leading towards his long term goals of increasing his independence skills and controlling his environment. Over three years at college he has developed an understanding of the meaning of signs and can use a few single signs expressively and in context. His attention span has also increased and he is now able to focus and participate in both individual and group activities for longer periods.

When he leaves he will be accessing a specialist resource centre and a social and recreational day service which focuses on offering lifelong learning programmes. This transition reflects his progress at college and will support his continued development of independent living skills.

Sense College, Peterborough

- All learners with learning difficulties or disabilities need to know that the full range of learning opportunities will be available to them. This includes further training at higher levels, Work Based Learning, apprenticeships, Higher Education and access to lifelong learning as adults.

39b) What else should we consider?

Comments: whilst we applaud the ambition that all young people should have high aspirations, we are concerned that the reality for many young people may turn out rather differently. We also feel that those with more complex needs must have a range of high quality opportunities to participate in meaningful activity

- There is a long way to go to ensure that opportunities are in place for everyone and in the interim, many young people will not be able to fulfil their dreams. Providers supporting young people about to leave college have to work hard to find the most positive outcomes for them, and often have to focus on one option over another – finding a job, or somewhere to live, or another course, rather than being able to find the complete package. We also know that in some instances, a successful outcome is that the young person has, for example, developed strategies to manage their

challenging behaviour and does not then end up in the judicial system or in very high cost secure care.

- Providers have to manage the expectations of young people who for a range of reasons do not/cannot achieve their aspirations, at least in the short term. This could link to economic climate, lack of housing options, or lack of support for whatever they hope to do.
- Not all learners will work, or be able to live independently, when they leave college, yet they still have a capacity to learn and grow, albeit at a slow pace, and to enjoy a high quality of life. The curriculum for these learners will include personalised progression planning, with success measured against a range of goals that indicate achievements for each student – small steps that are meaningful for them. In particular, many learners in this group will need good support to transfer their skills into different settings; the residential setting with built in opportunities to move into differing levels of independent living, is particularly helpful in achieving this.
- These learners will need high quality supported living options and a choice of meaningful activities; this implies significant time when they are not primarily with their family, when they are engaging in age and ability appropriate activity with others and are developing personal skills. If they live with their families, these families need support and encouragement to create opportunities for them to use and develop their independence skills, and promote their independence. Good quality adult respite care will be essential.

Chapter 5: Services Working Together for Families

40a) Do you agree with the following three core features of the role of local authorities in supporting children and young people with SEN or who are disabled and their families? (please tick those with which you agree)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> strategic planning for services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> securing a range of high quality provision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> enabling families to make informed choices and exercise greater control over services
<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> not sure	

Comments:

- We agree with these features, but under the third heading, we would wish to see a greater priority being given to enabling young people to make informed choices and exercise greater control over services. We also want to re-state the importance of LAs looking beyond their own boundaries in order to plan for and secure services.

- We have concerns about the capacity of LAs to undertake this role, bearing in mind the significant reductions across LA budgets. In addition, many of the services, including academies, free schools and colleges, are independent organisations outside of LA control; it is not clear how LAs will secure high quality provision and have a strategic overview in the context of the move towards a market led economy of provision.
- We welcome the emphasis on high quality, but we would like to know how this is defined, who will monitor it and how there will be consistent approaches to quality across a range of services that currently work to different quality regimes. All the services need to have a shared view of what constitutes quality provision for this group of children and young people; high quality as opposed to adequate must be about more than minimum levels of performance and compliance.

40b) Are there others? If so, please specify.

x Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure
-------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------------

Comments:

- Notwithstanding our concerns above, for LAs to plan anything they need accurate data which is regularly analysed. It should include good data about destinations over time, to ensure information on which to base evaluation of the effectiveness or value for money of the existing offer; this applies across social care, health and education and links back to the point above about defining high quality. Evaluation should be joined up across children’s services and adult services in LAs; the Wellbeing Boards could facilitate this process.
- The SEN “categories” of disability and learning difficulty are not necessarily a helpful way of collecting information. More usefully, LAs should think in terms of the support needs of the young people in the school cohort and what they will need post-16. This would immediately improve the quality of progression plans and of provision in schools and post-16.
- In the light of the intention to increase the use of individual budgets, LAs will need a different kind of role with a much greater focus on genuinely personalised services across health, social care and education. Their role will be a facilitating one, to ensure the family/student understands the choices, how to implement them and what can go wrong.

41 How can central government enable and support local authorities to carry out their role effectively?

Comments:

- Although a range of responsibilities lie with LAs, they will need to work in partnership with agencies beyond their own LA boundaries, and will be making use of provision across a number of other LAs. It will therefore be helpful to have some shared approaches to all the services they engage with, rather than 150 individual LA

approaches. This could include a consistent approach to commissioning places in specialist colleges, which is currently undertaken slightly differently across each authority, leading to increased administration and bureaucracy for colleges working with a great many different systems and requirements.

- With the loss of the statutory requirement for Children's' trusts, there is no longer the same incentive for organisations to work together locally. We welcome the LGA view that LAs should work 'in partnership with neighbouring authorities' and should 'build strong working relationships with providers and employers'. However, we believe the government should establish a statutory responsibility on agencies and providers to work collaboratively if the vision of the Green paper is to become a reality.
- There must be central monitoring of all aspects of activity - assessment, planning, provision, quality - to ensure there is not a post-code lottery of opportunities
- LAs and other partners must share responsibility for long term outcomes with providers

46 What more do you think could be done to encourage and facilitate local services working together to improve support for children with SEN or who are disabled?

Comments: See our response to 41 above; we think there needs to be a statutory requirement for all agencies to work together, which should be monitored for its effectiveness in terms of improved outcomes for children and young people with learning difficulties or disabilities.

52 What do you think can be done to facilitate and encourage greater collaboration between local authorities?

Comments: see also responses to 41 and 46 above

- Because of the different nature of post-16 education, with much longer travel-to-learn distances, it is essential that LAs work together to ensure that they understand the nature of the offer across a number of authorities. It is not practical to duplicate provision that is available over the border
- We welcome the approach in some areas where LAs are continuing to work together more collaboratively to ensure a sub-regional approach to planning and commissioning. For example, in the West of England authorities are working together around their LLDD strategy and approach to commissioning, and are doing so in partnership with local providers, including specialist colleges.

58 How do you think a national banded funding framework for children and young people with SEN or who are disabled could improve the transparency of funding decisions to parents while continuing to allow for local flexibility?

Comments: We are not clear exactly what is meant by this, but our experience of being funded in ISCs through the funding matrix suggests that there are a number of potential problems attached to this approach

- Anything based on formula funding is of necessity less than individualised and assumes a set of similarities; in practice, two learners in the same banding might have very different needs, which is acknowledged in the green paper proposal. However, as there is no tariff attached to the banding, so we are not clear about the purpose of this approach. If LAs were to attach their own tariff, which the local flexibility implies, far from improving the transparency of funding decisions, this could lead to a post-code lottery, with parents moving between authorities to secure the best tariff.
- It is potentially inflexible, as we have found when audited against the matrix. For example, it requires the rigid allocation of resources such as additional support/therapy, rather than promoting flexibility to allow better practice and cost efficiency. This means that a learner can be stuck with a support ratio of 1:2 at all times, even though in some situations this may not be required, whereas 1:1 may be more appropriate at other times. The methodology must allow for changing support needs, and for support that is determined in the context of the learning rather than in a different/context free setting. It is essential to build this flexibility into the system from the beginning, not to establish a rigid banding system which is constantly subject to negotiation
- There is the temptation to find ways of including someone on the lower band if their needs are at the bottom end of the next band

59 How can the different funding arrangements for specialist provision for young people pre-16 and post-16 be aligned more effectively to provide a more consistent approach to support for children and young people with SEN or who are disabled from birth to 25?

Comment: we agree that a system that is simple and unified throughout is a welcome ambition, but we have grave reservations about how achievable this is at present. Both the school and FE funding models are under review and subject to a great deal of uncertainty. It will be necessary for the Green paper recommendations to align with the respective funding reviews; even more desirable would be that the funding requirements for SEN/LLDD should inform and influence these reviews, so that funding for these learners is an integral part of the system, not a bolt on that is inevitably different. Pragmatically, it is probably better to try and get the pre and post 16 systems right independently of each other. There are many factors to consider.

- The starting point should be to establish a funding model that is easily understood by families and young people, and by all the professionals around them. It should be easy to operate, explain and administer. At present we are a long way from this.

- It would be helpful to have better join up between existing post-16 funding streams, managed through the YPLA and SFA. At present young people aged 19+ without a statement are disadvantaged, and it is not clear how the Green paper joint plan recommendations will address this. Fortunately for this group of learners, FE colleges are generally good at picking up those young people who have additional support needs, hence 190,000 learners with support costs below £5,000. It is also an issue for many young adults who need continuing access to learning beyond the age of 25.
- Over the last 4 years, there have been a number of attempts to find consistent models across post-16 provision; this work is on-going, indicating the degree of difficulty involved.
- Any new funding system should take account of the fact that the matrix funding levels for specialist colleges have had no inflationary increase for 4 years
- We do not believe that it will be helpful for elements of the budget to be allocated to LAs for onward distribution to colleges. This would be a very bureaucratic process, with individual colleges receiving funding from a large number of sources; we suggest that it would reduce the administrative burden if funding were to be channelled through the EFA, as happens for all other funding. In addition, it is difficult to determine the number of learners with low incidence disabilities from year to year, so it is hard to envisage a fair distribution of funds to each LA. All colleges, ISCs and FE, will be affected by this, as FE colleges also take learners from well beyond their host LA boundaries. We note that the AoC also proposes that the EFA should hold the contractual and funding responsibilities for providers.

61 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation (e.g. the number and type of questions, was it easy to find, understand, complete etc.)

Comments: this is a long, complex and sometimes repetitive consultation; it has not always been obvious where to make specific points. In particular, the lack of information in the Green paper about post-16 provision has resulted in very few appropriate questions. We hope that the time we have taken to produce this response will be reflected in the time given to read through the wealth of information we have included.

1

Adam's Dream

Accepting change both within and external to the college in order for Adam to access the wider community at a later stage. Accessing a wide range of social and leisure activities and a Creative Arts Curriculum to facilitate self-expression



Positive and Possible

Now	Enrol	Getting Stronger	First Steps	Next steps
<p>3 Charming Happy Caring Affectionate Funny - Also has a good sense of Humour Tactile Musical Positive Natural Performer Enjoys company and attention Has an intoxicating laugh Takes time to feel comfortable in a new situation Cautious</p>	<p>4 Andy Spencer Ian Jackson Malcolm Dow Anthony Ashbrook Beth Alderson Pam Murphy Steve Mount Katy Bowerman Jacqui Walker Tracey Lawther Alison Lawrence Lee Hilton Ross Wilson Ian Yates Martin Walsworth</p>	<p>5 Working with a wider group of people Accepting changes Calming Developing patience Broadening Experiences Maintaining Concentration Using a visual calendar</p>	<p>8 Participated in college experiences Staying in Sessions Becoming familiar with more people Knowing boundaries Spending more time with students</p>	<p>7 Join the library Play Tennis Investigate alternative communication methods Gradually trying to eat in different environments</p>

