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**Response to the Estyn thematic review on  
learner progress and destinations  
in independent specialist colleges**

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

**OGI**

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**Report title: Learner progress and destinations in independent specialist colleges**

**Report details**

The review was commissioned by the Support for Learners Division of Welsh Government's Education Directorate to advise on arrangements in independent specialist colleges (ISCs) for measuring learner progress and the extent to which learners are prepared for transition to further education or employment.

**Summary of main findings**

In most ISCs pre-entry assessment is well defined with clear aims and objectives. ISCs place emphasis on obtaining a thorough understanding of any barriers to learning and what areas of learning learners enjoy. However, too often, ISCs do not receive the full range of information they need before the learner starts.

Most ISCs use a wide range of data to measure learner progress. However, a majority of ISCs do not have targets for small steps of learning or a clear focus on the learner's long term destination.

Most ISCs review learner progress weekly and their use of data goes beyond achievement of qualifications and units of credit to include broader skills and learner progress against Individual Learner Plan (ILP) targets. However many ISCs do not make sufficient use of staff expertise and specialists to establish a 'skills baseline' for each learner in areas such as communication and behaviour.

In two ISCs learner reviews are not robust and progress is difficult to identify or measure. These ISCs are also unable to collate sufficient information needed to meet Welsh Government requirements.

Most ISCs plan programmes of learning that are tailored to meet the needs of individual learners and contain a good balance between work and leisure activities.

Nearly all ISCs review their learning programmes termly to make sure they remain relevant to the learner. However, learning programmes do not take enough account of a learners' desired destination or possible future employment opportunities.

In general ISCs do not strike the right balance between the number of qualifications a learner takes and their general skills development. Many ISCs rely too much on qualifications as a means of assessing and measuring

learner progress.

All ISCs use a range of baseline information well to set literacy and numeracy targets on ILPs and most teach literacy and numeracy skills through contexts that the learners can relate to easily. However a few of these literacy and numeracy targets are too general and can therefore be difficult to achieve; thus progress against them cannot be measured easily. In a few ISCs there is an over-reliance on worksheets in skills classes.

All ISCs make the most of opportunities for learners to develop their social skills and encourage learners to take responsibility for areas relevant to independent living. However, ISCs do not set targets, assess progress and record evidence of this learning that could help them evaluate the effectiveness of their work and meet Welsh Government requirements.

Many learners across all ISCs benefit from work experience opportunities. However, tracking the value of work experience is underdeveloped and many work placements are not specific enough to learners' desired destinations.

Most ISCs plan well for a learners' transition out of college once their preferred destination is established. However, arrangements for transition out of college are based too often on what is available rather than where the learner would wish to be.

Around a half of learners in ISCs do not have secure destination goals when they start their course. Communication between stakeholders is slow and delays occur where there have been changes to social worker or where learners are from a different local authority to the site of the ISC.

### **Recommendations 1–5**

Independent specialist colleges should:

R1 Make sure all pre-entry assessments are relevant to learners' full range of needs including communication and behaviour

R2 Make sure all Individual Learning Plans:

- recognise the learners' desired destination
- briefly identify short, medium and long term measurable targets and set out plans to achieve these targets
- are regularly reviewed.

R3 Develop clear processes to set targets and to assess, track, monitor and evaluate learner progress in independence skills.

R4 Develop processes to measure the value and outcomes of work

experience.

R5 Reduce the reliance on generic worksheets to teach literacy and numeracy skills.

Response:

Welsh Government will discuss the findings of the Estyn review with ISCs and work with them to ensure an agreed set of actions are developed to address the recommendations made. Any actions developed should be incorporated into ISCs self-assessment processes.

### **Recommendations 6 and 7**

Local authorities should:

R6 Co-ordinate the information that travels with learners between providers and at transition points

R7 Make sure that plans and processes for learner destinations beyond the ISC are in place early enough for there to be a positive outcome and a smooth transition.

Response:

The Welsh Government will write to local authorities to draw attention to this report and request that they consider these recommendations as part of their SEN transition planning arrangements.

### **Recommendation 8**

The Welsh Government should:

R8 Review the information requested from ISCs to make sure that it is clear and specific and includes a focus on learner progress and the learner's desired destination, as well as achievement of qualifications.

Response:

The Welsh Government have been engaging with relevant stakeholders, including ISCs, during the 2015/16 academic year to improve their understanding of our information requirements for the post-16 process and ensure the proper transfer of information to meet these needs. This has included clearer information on individualised programmes of study, learners' progress against their agreed programmes and a focus on destination data. However it has been recognised that further work is needed.

As a result the Welsh Government recently commenced a policy review of the process for securing places at independent specialist colleges which includes information requirements of ISCs and their learners. This review aims to improve policy and practice, reduce bureaucracy and tighten controls in this area. This policy review is expected to conclude shortly. Key stakeholders have been consulted as part of the review and the findings will be shared with ISCs through the National Association of Specialist Colleges Wales prior to any process changes being made.

The Welsh Government is also seeking to reform the existing legislative frameworks for Special Educational Needs and Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities. The findings of our policy review and the Estyn report will feed into our considerations for the draft Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Bill (ALN) and our wider policy reform programme.

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**Publication details**

The report was published on Estyn's website on 26 May 2016.