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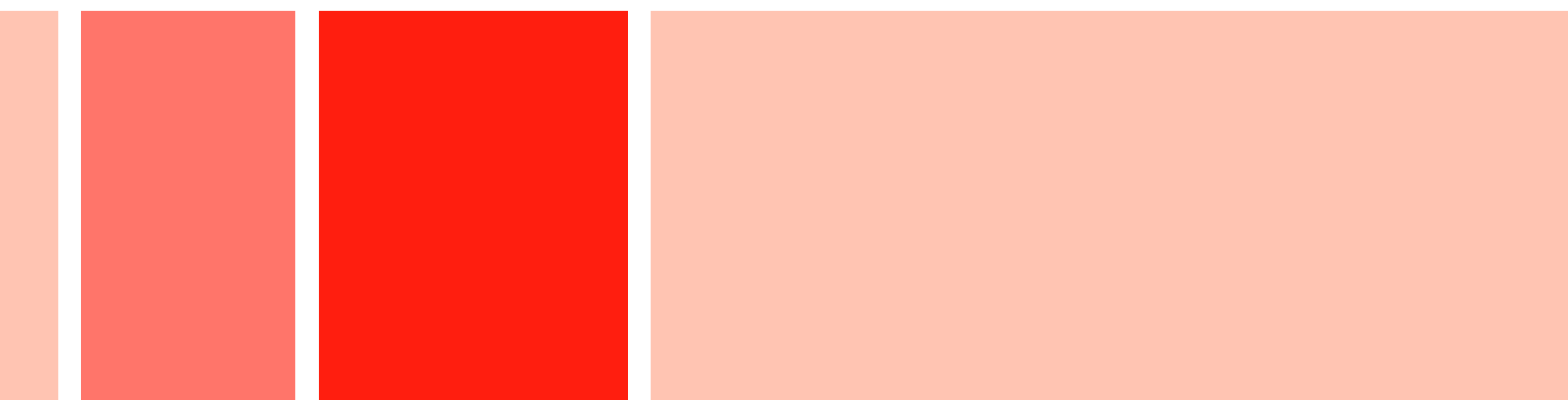
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Post-19 Education Provision for Young People with Complex Learning Difficulties Living in Wales: levels of need and current provision

Summary report



Post-19 Education Provision for Young People with Complex Learning Difficulties Living in Wales: levels of need and current provision

Summary report

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Summary report

Introduction

1. Young people with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) form the core of young people described by the Welsh Government as having 'complex learning difficulties'. Typically, young people with complex learning difficulties receive secondary education in special schools until the age of 19 (Year 14). Although relatively small, this group has become the focus of concern for policy makers, practitioners, family members and voluntary sector groups because their post-school choices are significantly limited compared to other young people with additional learning needs (National Assembly for Wales, 2009).
2. In response to these concerns, the Welsh Government commissioned independent research to identify levels of need and provision of post-19 education for young people with complex learning difficulties living in Wales and to assess how unmet need can be provided for.
3. The researchers collected detailed information from post-19 education providers, special schools, local authorities, family members, and young people with SLD and PMLD. They focused on the post-19 education destinations of a cohort of 138 young people with SLD and PMLD who left Year 14 of secondary education in July 2011. The researchers investigated the post-19 education provision available to these young people, their access to this, the support available and the costs of the provision to the individual agencies involved. Case study material was also collected from outside of Wales relating to other models and packages of post-19 education provision. Data were collected between April and July 2012 and relate to provision available for the academic year 2011/12.

Existing provision of post-19 education for young people with complex learning difficulties

4. For the academic year 2011/12 there were 20 further education (FE) colleges¹ in Wales, of which 15 were offering post-19 education provision to young people with complex learning difficulties. Of the 14 colleges that took part in the research, 12 were offering learning programmes that could potentially be accessed by young people with SLD, and 11 colleges had some provision available for young people with PMLD. For the academic year 2012/13, two colleges were planning to expand their provision to include learners with SLD and one was planning to run a programme suitable for learners with PMLD. Each FE college typically enrolled six to 12 new students with SLD and/or PMLD per year. The amount of direct contact time varied greatly between programmes with some courses offering less than one day a week of teaching time, whilst others offered up to five days per week.
5. For the academic year 2011/12 there were five independent specialist colleges (ISCs) in Wales, of which four were offering post-19 education to young people with complex learning difficulties. Of the three Welsh ISCs that took part in the research, all offered learning programmes to young people with SLD, but just one offered provision to young people with PMLD. Some young people with complex learning difficulties from Wales were accessing ISC provision in England. The academic year in the Welsh ISCs ran for 38 weeks but one college offered residential placements which were 52 weeks long. ISCs offered day and residential learning programmes and these ran from five to seven days a week. Each ISC in Wales typically enrolled 12 to 30 new students with SLD and/or PMLD per year.

¹ Two colleges have since merged, however at the time of the research they were still operating as two separate providers.

Support to access post-19 education

6. For the academic year 2011/12, learning support was available to students with SLD at 12 of the 14 FE colleges and at three of the Welsh ISCs included in the research. For young people with PMLD, learning support was available at 11 FE colleges and at just one of Welsh ISCs that took part in the research. Support for personal needs was available to students with SLD at 11 FE colleges and all three Welsh ISCs, and for students with PMLD at 10 FE colleges and one of the Welsh ISCs. Support for complex health care needs was available at six FE colleges, but at none of the Welsh ISCs included in the research. Young people could continue to access therapies at eight FE colleges and at all the ISCs included in the research.

Challenges to accessing and providing post-19 education to young people with SLD and PMLD

7. This research highlighted a number of significant practical, organisational and financial challenges which restricted (a) access to existing post-19 provision by young people with SLD and PMLD; and (b) the ability of colleges to provide suitable and appropriate provision to meet the needs of these young people.
8. Not all FE colleges or ISCs were able to accept applications from all young people with SLD or PMLD. Of the 12 FE colleges interviewed which had received applications from the target group for 2011/12, three had accepted all the applications made, whilst nine colleges had been unable to accommodate all those who applied. All of the ISCs interviewed had received applications from young people with SLD or PMLD and 52% of these applications had led to an admission. However, three of the 14 FE colleges and two of the three ISCs interviewed in Wales were not able to accept applications from any young people with PMLD for the year 2011/12 (although one FE college was planning to for 2012/13). The most frequently cited reason by FE colleges and ISCs for not accepting certain applications was that the applicant had needs that the college could not meet or

accommodate, such as complex health care needs, behavioural issues or specific communication needs. This factor was often linked to lack of staff with appropriate training on site (e.g. nursing staff) and the limitations of the physical environment.

9. Some FE colleges were unable to offer access to the support for complex health care needs and on-going access to therapies that this group of learners often need. This may mean that families and young people are not able to consider their local college as a viable option for post-19 education.
10. For most FE college provision, full-time learning programmes are not equivalent in time to a full-time day in school and typically involve 16 to 25 hours direct contact time per week. Many courses aimed at young people with SLD and PMLD were part-time and ranged from as little as two hours up to 12 hours per week. The short amount of time that young people are actually in college can make life very difficult for families and may lead them to suggest their son or daughter opts for another post-19 option (e.g. an ISC or day service) rather than take a place at the local FE college.
11. The research confirmed that there is a lack of choice of learning programmes overall for young people with SLD. This includes very limited opportunities to access mainstream provision (other than as part of a discrete programme) and a lack of vocational courses or opportunities to access supported employment or to continue work experience placements that had been started at special school. Respondents also highlighted a lack of local, residential educational options for this group of learners.
12. For young people with PMLD, the research highlighted that some FE colleges found it difficult to offer the level of individualised curriculum and learning support needed by this group within the current funding system. There is a distinct lack of sensory learning environments available at FE colleges and the accessibility of college and classroom

environments can be problematic for people using wheelchairs. There is a lack of access to on-going therapy and in some cases, lack of space for using and storing specialist equipment. Very complex multi-agency and administrative arrangements are needed to establish the funding and infrastructure for meeting the personal care and complex health care needs of many young people with PMLD. In some colleges, becoming involved in this level of complexity and risk may be viewed as 'a step too far' by senior management.

13. Transport to and from college can be difficult to source and fund. Different arrangements exist between local authorities and between colleges. Decisions about funding for transport are often made late and there appears to be very little clarity, or information, about the choices available, if any. Currently there is lack of equity within and between geographical areas of Wales, where some young people are able to access transport and others are not. In areas of Wales where transport and/or supported transport to and from FE colleges is not available, or may be withdrawn, young people with complex learning difficulties may be unwilling to consider local FE options or be unable to take up places on courses they have been offered.
14. The current funding system for supporting learners with SLD and PMLD to take up FE and ISC placements is characterised by its complexity, uncertainty, fragility and lack of agreed timescales for decision making. Many FE colleges are relying on the discretionary exceptional funding system to support the learning and support needs of some learners with SLD and PMLD, despite the expectation from Welsh Government that provision for these young people should be largely funded through colleges' core budgets. Application-based bids for exceptional and specialist funding are often not agreed or made available until after the start of term, the associated burden of risk and stress that this entails being shouldered by colleges, families and young people. Understandably, many families are not prepared to accept this level of risk, stress and uncertainty and may opt for other

post-19 options, or, may be persuaded to do so by other professionals (e.g. transition workers, head teachers, etc).

15. Young people's right to a choice of provision from within a local offer of post-19 education options may be significantly limited by a lack of robust, comparable, transparent and objective information about the range of choices available. This includes a lack of outcome data for all pre-entry level provision, a lack of published Estyn inspection reports for some colleges, and, where Estyn reports are available, a lack of detail about the quality of FE discrete provision. Budgetary restrictions and policies about what type of placements to fund at the local level may also mean that the choices available to families are restricted from the outset.

Demand for post-19 education from young people with SLD

16. For the 99 young people with SLD who left Year 14 in 2011, 72 went onto some form of part-time or full-time post-19 education for the academic year 2011/12. According to their families and/or schools, four of those not in post-19 education would have liked to have gone to college; one young person to an ISC in England and three to their local FE colleges. Thus, total demand for access to post-19 education by Year 14 leavers with SLD was 77% (n=76) for 2011/12, of which 95% (n=72) was met, and 5% (n=4) was unmet.
17. Sixteen (22%) of the 72 young people with SLD who were accessing post-19 education had FE-related needs or wishes that had not been met. Areas of unmet need included:
 - Mainstream, vocational programmes (instead of discrete, generic, independent living skills provision).
 - Local, residential, education options.
 - More, locally provided, post-19 education options.
 - Provision closer to home.
 - More full-time learning opportunities (as opposed to part-time).
 - Support for medical or behavioural needs.

- Suitably trained staff to meet specific communication needs.

Demand for post-19 education from young people with PMLD

18. For the 39 young people with PMLD who left Year 14 in 2011, 10 went onto some form of part-time or full-time post-19 education for the academic year 2011/12. According to their families and/or schools, four of those not in post-19 education would have liked to have gone to college; two to an ISC in England, one to a residential placement in Wales and one to a local FE college. Thus, total demand for access to post-19 education by Year 14 leavers with PMLD was 36% (n=14) for 2011/12, of which 71% (n=10) was met, and 29% (n=4) was unmet.
19. Four (40%) of the 10 young people with PMLD who were accessing post-19 education had FE-related needs or wishes that had not been met, including: lack of local provision, insufficient hours of provision per week and lack of space for specialist equipment and therapy.

To what extent does current provision of post-19 education meet the needs and demand of young people with complex learning difficulties (SLD and PMLD) living in Wales?

20. The research findings indicate, that out of the cohort of 138 young people, there was met and unmet demand for access to FE from 76 young people with SLD and 14 young people with PMLD, totalling a demand of 90 young people who were accessing, or wished to access, post-19 education for the year 2011/12. The mapping data collected from FE colleges and ISCs indicated there were at least 124 FE places and up to 109 ISC places in Wales potentially available to young people with SLD and PMLD (aged between 16 and 25) for the academic year 2011/12. Clearly, however, only a proportion of these places would have been available to the project target group (Year 14 leavers with SLD/PMLD) as most learning programmes were open to young people of all ages and also to some young people with mild or moderate learning difficulties. Moreover, this research has highlighted that access to, and take-up of, potential FE and ISC places by young

people with SLD and PMLD was hampered by significant practical, organisational and financial challenges for providers, families and young people. Nonetheless, if solutions to these challenges are found, in theory, there appears to be sufficient provision available nationally within Wales to meet current demand. However, the extent to which this provision can be delivered locally to all young people who require it is unclear.

What do young people with SLD and PMLD want from post-19 education and how would they like that education delivered?

21. The research findings confirmed that young people and family members wanted the following things from post-19 education:
 - A wider range of post-19 education providers to choose from, and access to clear and comparable information about how these different providers can meet their needs.
 - The option to choose a 24-hour, residential curriculum, if desired.
 - The chance to learn a range of practical, interpersonal and communication skills that will help them in the future.
 - A wider range of learning programmes to choose from at college, including access to locally provided vocational and mainstream programmes.
 - Opportunities to learn alongside and socialise with their disabled and non-disabled peers.
 - Access to good support for learning, personal care, complex health care and behavioural needs.
 - Access to therapies (e.g. speech and language therapy, physiotherapy) on college premises if needed.
 - An individualised learning plan which is focused on wider life goals beyond college.
 - Access to reliable, supported transport and clarity about how this will be funded.

22. In terms of modes of delivery, families and young people did not highlight any one approach more than any others, but talked broadly of the need for a wider offer of education options from more than just one provider.

What is the existing cost of providing post-19 education for young people with complex learning difficulties?

23. From the project cohort of 138 young people with SLD or PMLD, 82 were accessing some form of post-19 education. This included:
- Fifty-three young people who were enrolled on some or all of the first year of a discrete FE learning programme for the academic year 2011/12.
 - Twenty-nine young people enrolled on discrete day and residential learning programmes at specialist colleges (one FE offering specialist provision; eight ISCs) in Wales and England.
24. The data used for estimating the costs of discrete post-19 education provision at FE colleges for young people with SLD and PMLD was not sufficiently robust to establish an actual average total cost per learner. However, using costs data supplied by the Welsh Government, by research respondents, and with reference to additional (missing) costs on the basis of National Audit Office (2011) calculations, the researchers estimated that the total cost of FE discrete provision for 53 learners with complex learning difficulties for the academic year 2011/12 was likely to have been at least £503,977 and potentially as much as £1,457,977 (a mean average of £9,509 - £27,509 per learner).
25. It is important to highlight that the estimated costs for FE discrete provision include only the costs of the education provision, an estimated element for transport, an estimate for the costs of providing care and therapy in a community or college setting, and an estimate of two weeks per year of community day care to cover some of the time when young people are not in college. They do not include any other element of costs for accommodation, residential provision, or support to young people during evenings, weekends, overnight, or other times when they are not attending college.
26. The data used to calculate the costs of discrete, post-19 education provision at ISC colleges were more robust. Information about the actual costs of specialist day and residential placements were available

for all of the 29 young people with SLD or PMLD from the project's cohort who were attending ISCs in Wales and England for the academic year 2011/12. Using costs data supplied by ISCs and the Welsh Government, the researchers calculated that the total actual cost of ISC discrete provision for 29 learners with complex learning difficulties for the academic year 2011/12 was £2,054,763 (a mean average of £70,854 per learner).

27. The actual costs for ISC discrete provision covered the costs of the education provision and learning programmes attended by the young people, additional learning support, 24-hour support for personal care (where needed), 24-hour support for complex health care needs (where needed), access to therapy (where needed), some social activities during the evenings and at weekends, and accommodation, food and transport during college term-time.

How can value for money be achieved in the provision of post-19 education which meets the needs of young people with complex learning difficulties?

28. In order to assess how value for money can be achieved in the provision of post-19 education for young people with complex learning difficulties, two key areas of information are needed:
 - Transparent, consistent and comparable data about actual costs of provision.
 - Robust and comparable data on learning programme outcomes.
29. The researchers found that information about costs, outcomes and post-college destinations was rarely available and where it was, it was not comparable or consistent across provider settings. This limits the ability to demonstrate value for money and to assess the quality and relative benefits of different types of post-19 education provision for young people with complex learning difficulties.
30. Such data are needed by Welsh Government and local authorities as the basis for informing funding decisions for different placement types.

Currently, this level of outcome and destination data is not available, but plans for collecting it are being piloted as part of the proposals for reform of the legislative framework for SEN (Welsh Government, 2012a). The proposals include an intention to improve the quality-assurance processes relating to children and young people with additional learning needs by introducing a mapping system which would track pupils' outcomes and the resources allocated to meet their needs. At present, this quality-assurance system only covers the school sector. However, local authorities and FE colleges are working together to trial the extension of the system to the FE sector. It is unclear whether the proposals will also include the ISC sector. It will be important to ensure that the implementation of this quality-assurance system allows for the individual goals and outcomes of learners with SLD and PMLD to be recorded and tracked.

What other options/models exist for delivering post-19 education to young people with complex learning difficulties?

31. The research investigated a range of options and models that exist outside of Wales for delivering a wider choice of local, post-19 education to young people with complex learning difficulties. These include:
 - College-based FE hubs - where a FE college develops as a regional provider of specialist education.
 - School-based FE hubs - whereby local special schools work in partnership with FE colleges, or ISCs, to deliver school-based, specialist post-19 education to young people from the surrounding local area.
 - Community-based FE hubs - where a FE college and local authority work in partnership to jointly provide specialist education for young people from a local area in a purpose-built, community-based building.
 - Residential learning bases - for young people attending local FE provision, to enable them to receive a 24-hour learning experience through learning support at home and through access to learning programmes in college.

- Personalised, individual packages - which include access to FE, other daytime activities and all supported living costs, through the use of direct payments or individual budgets.
32. The models have a number of key features in common, which it would be prudent to consider in any new developments concerning post-19 education for young people with SLD and PMLD in Wales:
- Active, multi-agency working.
 - Partnerships with families.
 - A focus on post-college outcomes and progression.
 - The importance of staff skills, experience and commitment.
 - The ability to offer an individualised curriculum which can meet young people's wider life goals, as well as educational targets and qualifications.

Developing post-19 education provision to meet the demand and needs of young people and families in Wales

33. Interviews and focus group work identified five key areas whereby post-19 education provision might feasibly be developed and increased:
- Support FE colleges to enhance, develop and extend their current range and level of provision.
 - Consider the potential for special schools to develop a role as post-19 providers.
 - Develop more local, residential learning opportunities in Wales.
 - Maintain, and where appropriate, develop independent specialist day and residential options for those who need them.
 - Develop and broaden the range of other post-19 opportunities available for young people with SLD and PMLD, including more access to individualised support using direct payments.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Welsh Government should lead a cross-sector debate to clarify definitions relating to young people 'with complex learning difficulties'

34. For the purposes of this research, we were given a working definition of young people 'with complex learning difficulties' by the Welsh

Government which encompassed the categories of SLD and PMLD as defined by guidance for returns to the Pupil Level Annual Census (PLASC). The framing, and use in practice, of this definition was a challenge throughout the research and interpretation of the definition was inconsistent across all groups of respondents. The proposed legislative changes (Welsh Government, 2012a), will give a statutory footing to the concept of additional needs (AN), and propose a move away from impairment-specific definitions of need, to definitions that focus on levels of need for support. However, new definitions will not necessarily mean clearer understanding. The experience of this research has identified the need for cross-sector debate and greater understanding about who this group of young people represents, what their needs are and how these needs are best met. It will be important for the Welsh Government to ensure there is agreement about the new definitions and their impact on the young people involved, in advance of the implementation of the new legislative framework.

Recommendation 2: Local authorities, as future funders and commissioners of post-19 education, should ensure that they are aware of the problems inherent in the current system of exceptional and specialist funding, and should put in place arrangements to address these as a matter of urgency

35. The Welsh Government (2012a) has proposed that local authorities take responsibility for the assessment, commissioning and funding of specialist FE placements, and responsibility for the management of exceptional funding provision. This provides an opportunity for addressing some of the structural barriers inherent in the current system which restrict access to post-19 education provision for young people with SLD and PMLD. The additional proposal (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010), that the timing of assessments for specialist residential funding should be brought forward from the final to the penultimate year of compulsory schooling, is welcomed. This could be strengthened through guidance to local authorities on the minimum timeframe for making decisions about the type of support and specialist placement that they intend to offer an individual young person. It is important for local authorities, as future commissioners and funders of

post-19 education, to be fully aware of the problems inherent in the current system, and the (negative) impact of these on providers, young people and families. New assessment, commissioning and funding arrangements at local authority level will need to ensure that local solutions adequately address these problems as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 3: The Welsh Government, local authorities and Careers Wales should establish systems for recording the post-19 destinations of young people with SLD and PMLD

36. Currently, post-19 destination data are not collected in Wales for young people leaving Year 14. Nor are data published to indicate how many young people with complex learning difficulties (SLD and PMLD) in Wales go onto post-19 education, or what sort of placement choice they make. Consideration should be given to extending the Careers Wales pupil destination survey to include Year 14 school leavers and also to publishing data on the impairment status of school leavers. In addition, Careers Wales should consider collecting data on the number of young people who are unable to access their chosen post-school destination. The Welsh Government should work with local authorities to establish systems for recording post-19 education placement choices at a local, and all-Wales level. Monitoring of these data should help to highlight inequality of access to post-19 education between local areas and may also highlight the extent to which demand is being met.

Recommendation 4: The Welsh Government and local authorities should establish systems for monitoring, recording and analysing the costs and outcomes of individual post-19 placements in order to assess value for money and to ensure placements adequately meet the needs of young people

37. The research identified that basic monitoring data about the costs, outcomes and post-college destinations for young people with complex learning difficulties are rarely available and, where they are available, they are not comparable or consistent across provider settings. The new local commissioning and funding arrangements will need to establish systems for monitoring, recording and analysing the costs

and outcomes of individual post-19 placements in order to assess value for money and to ensure placements adequately meet the needs of young people.

38. Individualised and person-centred goal-setting is central to ensuring learning programmes meet the needs of individual young people. The proposal (Welsh Government, 2012a) to implement Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for all young people with additional needs from age 0 to 25 is a significant step forward as is the recommendation that section 140 assessments should include consideration of the aspirations of the individual. These proposals acknowledge the importance of post-19 education and training which enables young people to move towards the wider goals they have set themselves in life.
39. As part of its proposals for reform of the legislative framework for SEN, local authorities and FEIs are currently extending the system for tracking costs and outcomes to young people in FE. (Welsh Government, 2012a). It will be important to ensure that the implementation of this quality-assurance system is flexible enough to allow for a person-centred approach to tracking and recoding the individual goals and outcomes of learners with SLD and PMLD. The Welsh Government should also consider how the proposed tracking system might be extended to the ISC sector.

Recommendation 5: The Welsh Government and local authorities should establish systems for monitoring, recording and analysing the post-college outcomes and destinations of young people with complex learning difficulties

40. The research identified that very little information is available about post-college outcomes and the destinations of young people in the short, medium and longer term. Such data is important in assessing the relative benefits and value for money of different types of post-19 education placements for individual young people. In order to support young people's post-college learning and progression, more emphasis is needed on the exit strategy that is identified at the start of the

learning programme as a part of the IDP. This will ensure that reviews concentrate on movement towards the next stage of transition into adulthood and allow for the development of potential pathways necessary to support the young person in future environments. For young people with complex learning difficulties, planning for the future should start as early as possible to improve outcomes and co-ordination.

Recommendation 6: All local authorities in Wales should clarify the post-19 education options available to young people with complex learning difficulties

41. The research identified that few, if any, local authorities were able to clearly state the post-19 education choices on offer to young people with complex learning difficulties, or to articulate this to families and young people. This was exacerbated by a lack of clear, consistent and comparable data about the costs and outcomes of different types of placements.
42. The Welsh Government proposals, to reform the statutory framework for children and young people with SEN, include the intention to develop Provision Pathways to define minimum standards for service provision relating to each level of need. It will be important that these Pathways capture all types of provision choices that are potentially available to ensure transparency and equality of opportunity for all young people with SLD and PMLD in Wales.

Recommendation 7: Further work is needed to strengthen the costs base for calculating the actual costs of FE and ISC provision in order to make informed and adequately comparative judgements about value for money

43. The research highlighted some of the problems and complexities inherent in trying to collect and analyse costs data relating to individual post-19 education placements. Adequate and comparable data on the costs of different types of provision are an essential component of decision making in relation to individual post-19 placements by local authorities and the Welsh Government. Currently, the costs base for decision making is very limited. Virtually no data are available to

determine the full costs of supporting a young person with complex learning difficulties who is living at home and attending a local FE college. Without access to these data it is impossible to compare the true cost difference between FE placements and ISC placements for this group of young people, let alone conduct a cost:benefit assessment even if sufficient and comparable outcome data were available.

Recommendation 8: The Welsh Government should provide adequate resources and practical support to enable FE colleges to extend, develop and enhance their current range and level of provision for learners with SLD and PMLD as well as those with other additional learning needs

44. The Welsh Government has a policy commitment to local, inclusive education for all young people. However, the research identified a number of areas where capital resources and support are needed to enable the FE sector to extend, develop and enhance its current post-19 provision to increase access to young people with complex learning difficulties. These include:

- Curriculum development – to develop a wider choice of learning opportunities and inclusive pathways that enable young people to access more mainstream, vocational and sensory programmes.
- Development of individualised learning programmes that are needs-led rather than provision-led.
- Staff development and training opportunities which encompass the specialist teaching and support approaches appropriate for engaging with learners with SLD and PMLD.
- Better engagement between the FE sector and health and social care trained professionals - attending training alongside professionals from health and social care could be one way for college staff to develop inter-disciplinary networks as the foundation for developing packages of education and support for this group of young people.
- Improvements to the physical environment of FE colleges to enable them to accommodate wheelchair users, those with complex health care needs and young people with a range of other needs such as need for regular physiotherapy or behavioural support.

- Considering ways to extend hours of provision so that more full-time options and after-hours learning opportunities are available to learners with SLD and PMLD.
45. We welcome the introduction of the ‘Unlocking the Potential of Special Schools and Further Education’ (UPOSS FE²) scheme which commenced in September 2012. The UPOSS FE scheme aims to increase access to FE for learners with complex needs by making funding available to special schools, local authorities, FE colleges and ISCs in order to build local capacity and support staff training and development. The emphasis on sharing learning and expertise between the specialist education sector (special schools and ISCs) and the FE sector has much to commend it. Nonetheless, significant additional resources may be needed to deliver the level of support needed to enable young people with SLD and PMLD to access locally provided learning programmes.

Recommendation 9: The Welsh Government should issue clear guidance to local authorities about the organisation, funding and provision of transport to and from FE colleges, in the light of the extension of IDPs to age 25 for young people with complex learning difficulties

46. Access to transport is critical to increasing access to local provision and the current postcode lottery is unacceptable. Currently, there is no expectation for local authorities to fund transport for learners with additional needs beyond the age of 19. The proposal for IDPs to extend until the age of 25 for some young people provides an opportunity to resolve this issue; if there is an expectation that young people with SLD and PMLD should be able to continue their education to age 25, then funding for travel should be made available by local authorities to support this.

² Unlocking the Potential of Special Schools and Further Education (UPOSS FE) is a Welsh Government scheme established to improve transition arrangements by promoting collaboration between local authorities and FE colleges on a regional basis. It aims to improve capacity in FE by increasing local choice for learners aged 16-25 with complex learning difficulties.

Recommendation 10: The Welsh Government should issue clear guidance about the organisation, funding and provision of support for personal care needs, complex health care needs and on-going access to therapies in FE settings

47. The research confirmed that access to support for personal care needs, complex health care needs and therapies (such as physiotherapy, and speech and language therapy) was complex to source and fund, and presented huge administrative and organisational challenges for post-19 providers. The research highlighted the difficulties experienced by providers and families in seeking and providing support for personal care and complex health care needs in FE settings.
48. Currently, there is no obligation for local health boards, or local authorities, to meet the personal care and health care needs for those young people who have secured an appropriate post-19 education placement, unless they have a 'continuing need for NHS health care', as defined by the adult continuing health care guidance (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010). Consequently a number of young people requiring personal care and health-related support are unable to access further education.
49. The new local commissioning and funding arrangements for post-19 exceptional and specialist funding may support better integration of independence and social care goals with educational goals. The proposed legislative reforms of the statutory framework for children and young people with SEN (Welsh Government, 2012a) aim to extend the remit of the current guidance on continuing care for children and young people (Welsh Government, 2012b) up to age 25.
50. Nonetheless, NHS funding and input into the transition process needs to be reviewed, to ensure that health for independence and well-being is provided in the right place at the right time. Young people's needs for health care and therapy must be included as part of an integrated and on-going person-centred plan, or IDP in the proposed legislation

(Welsh Government, 2012a). For people with PMLD in particular, the goals of education are likely to be broad and focus on the development of sensory, motor, social and communication skills, which can require a high level of integration of health care, medical input, social care and effective teaching approaches, which is currently difficult to achieve in many further education settings. Clear guidance from the Welsh Government to local authorities in their new commissioning role will be needed to ensure that access to post-19 education is a right for all young people including those with the most complex support needs.

51. The Welsh Government proposals to reform the legislative framework for SEN are underpinned by a duty on relevant bodies to collaborate in respect of provision for children and young people aged 0 to 25 with the highest levels of need. This duty will be operationalised through multi-agency Support Panels, and representatives from health, education, social care and third sector agencies **may** be required by law to attend these panels to agree specialist service provision and any placement. This research highlights the importance of making inter-agency collaboration a statutory requirement for this group of learners.

Recommendation 11: The Welsh Government, local authorities and the education sector as a whole should continue to maintain, and where appropriate, develop, specialist day and residential FE options for those who need them

52. The research has highlighted that the ISC sector has a huge amount of specialist knowledge and resources to offer, not least from its experience in providing individualised curricula to young people with SLD and PMLD. The Welsh Government has stated that some young people do, and will continue to, benefit from an ISC placement. Moreover, given the geography of Wales, access to **local** post-19 education options may actually be best served by ISCs in Wales or even just across the border in England. With the proposal to localise funding and commissioning of post-19 education placements, there will be a need (for Estyn or the Welsh Government) to monitor the effect of individual local authority decision making on the 'financial health' of

ISCs to ensure that this is a choice that continues to be available to those who need it and want it.

53. In terms of development of ISC provision, it is well established that there are issues of continuity of support and loss of skills when young people return to their local areas from ISCs (Heslop et al, 2007). Calls for joint working between ISCs and young people's home local authorities need to be reiterated and reinforced by clear directives from the Welsh Government.
54. There may be also be a need for cross-sector discussion about the appropriateness of land-based vocational learning programmes at rural ISCs for young people with limited mobility or those who may be returning to town or city localities. Similarly, the continued emphasis on specialisation, and restriction of placements to certain groups of young people, may not be sustainable if it means that the opportunity to access a 24-hour learning environment is not available to some young people who would benefit from it.

Recommendation 12: The Welsh Government and local authorities should work with stakeholders to develop and broaden the range of post-19 education opportunities available for young people with complex learning difficulties, including more access to individualised support using direct payments

55. The research confirmed that a range of other options and models exist, mostly outside of Wales at present, for delivering a wider choice of local, post-19 education to young people with complex learning difficulties. Respondents taking part in this research also identified a number of potential ways that Welsh providers might develop post-19 FE. These suggestions, and consultation with other stakeholders during focus groups, confirmed that the following delivery models could feasibly be considered for the Welsh context:
 - College-based FE hubs.
 - School-based FE hubs.
 - Community-based FE hubs
 - Residential learning bases.

- Personalised, individual packages through the use of direct payments.
56. The Welsh Government proposes to assess the potential for central post-16 provision in a small number of specialist centres across Wales, using funding from within the existing post-16 budget (Welsh Government, 2012a). There may also be potential for the proposed changes to the funding system for post-16 additional learning needs (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010; Welsh Government, 2012a) to enable new and existing local provision to be developed. These proposals provide opportunities to consider the views of families, young people and other stakeholders presented in this report about how they would like to see post-19 FE developed in Wales. The Welsh Government should ensure that a range and choice of post-19 education options are available for young people with complex learning difficulties, including more access to individualised support using direct payments.

Recommendation 13: The Welsh Government should lead or commission solution-focused, cross-sector consultation work to reach agreement about how current structural barriers can be best overcome to increase access to post-19 FE for young people with SLD and PMLD

57. The research has highlighted the structural barriers that currently restrict access to post-19 education for many young people with SLD and PMLD and explored how some of these barriers might be overcome. The research has recommended a number of key actions, in order to meet current and future levels of need and demand for post-19 FE by young people with complex learning difficulties.
58. There is now a need for further work to identify potential solutions and 'next steps' for action, in consultation with young people, families, FE providers, local authorities and other key stakeholders such as Careers Wales and voluntary sector organisations. The Welsh Government should lead, or commission, cross-sector, solution-focused consultation work to discuss and agree the changes and reasonable adjustments to

current FE provision that are achievable in the short, medium and longer term.

Concluding thoughts

59. The focus of this research was to explore levels of need and provision of post-19 education for young people with complex learning difficulties. In commissioning the research, the Welsh Government took it as axiomatic that access to further education for young people with SLD and PMLD is both a need and a right. Certainly young people's right to local, inclusive education is supported in policy and the proposed reform of the statutory framework for children and young people with special educational needs will enact legislation to enshrine this right to the age of 25 for some young people.
60. The research clarified that a large proportion of young people with PMLD, including those with complex health care needs, were not accessing further education provision. Whilst 77% of young people with SLD were accessing or wanted to access FE, only 36% of those with PMLD did so, indicating a much lower demand for FE provision from people with PMLD. The data indicated that most young people with PMLD were in local authority or voluntary sector day services, but that for very many young people this had not been their first choice of post-school destination.
61. What, then, would be the first choice of post-19 provision for this group of young people and their families? Families in particular raised the issue of age-appropriate, local provision for their sons and daughters with PMLD. They expressed a desire for individualised packages with a range of daytime options built in, including access to FE and the option of 24-hour supported living environment with opportunities for community-based and home-based learning. Families also highlighted the importance of a whole-life approach to post-19 provision, education or otherwise, and stressed that continuity of support for complex health care needs, therapy and communication input were essential

components for any post-19 option. Depending on the local provision available, further education in a FE or ISC setting may not be the best way to help this group of young people be as independent as possible, to develop and maintain their communication and to have a good quality of life.

62. In conclusion, if the Welsh Government wishes to ensure that access to post-19 education up to the age of 25 is a right for **all** young people with additional needs, then the importance of a well-resourced FE sector which can respond to the individual needs of young people and their families, is paramount. With an inclusion agenda that actively addresses barriers to access, further education has the potential to become a truly universal route for ensuring the continued development of young people's progression to adult life.

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