

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in the post-16 sector

December 2024

Further Education Institution (FEI) Transformation

The Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act (ALNET) and ALN Code became live for some learners in colleges in September 2023. This followed five years of transformation work where colleges have sought to make enhancements to their provision, train staff and develop partnerships with Local Authorities (LAs), health boards and others. Learner experience has already improved in several ways:

- Enhanced transition arrangements for many learners moving from school to college.
- Improved access to information, including that provided by the [ALN Pathfinder](#).
- Staff expertise, particularly around conditions such as Autism and Specific Learning Difficulties.
- A focus on inclusive practice in the classroom with training via INSET and through initial lecturer training programmes.
- ALNET-focused training for all staff with a strong focus on 'ALN is everyone's business'.
- An increased 'person-centered' focus through individual reviews and improved discrete provision.
- All colleges have created a local 'Universal and Additional Learning Provision' offer that provides schools and local authorities with a clear picture of their provision.

Challenges facing FEIs

Staffing

Colleges have increased staffing to prepare for their new duties, despite limited additional short-term funding and no guarantee of longer-term support. This poses challenges for FEIs, particularly if ALN numbers reach 7% or higher. The 'flow-through' approach for post-16 learners has reduced the initial workload for colleges. However, the capacity of FEIs to fully meet their duties over the next few years will depend largely on the numbers of ALN learners requiring an Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Transitions

Effective transition is key to young people's success in college. FEIs have been working with their local schools and LAs in a bid to improve the experience for young people and to encourage partners to provide accurate, up to date information in a timely way. **Inviting FE staff to key transition reviews can help ensure a smooth transition but not all schools encourage this.** Reports from FEIs suggest that the experience of young people moving to post-16 education and training in 2023 has often been less than seamless. In many cases, colleges have not received any information about a learner prior to starting college. College staff have not been invited to transition reviews in schools, and this will negatively impact the experience of young people with ALN. Many of these problems may be a result of early 'teething troubles' within schools and LAs. They are adjusting to their new duties under the Act and Code while a new curriculum is being introduced. However, protectionism (where schools are concerned to retain learners for 6th forms) and capacity issues may continue to limit information sharing if post-16 is not made a priority.

Facilities

FEIs have the expertise and facilities to meet the needs of most young people who have ALN. However, they are not 'specialist' organisations therefore there will always be some young people whose needs they are unable to meet.

Wider challenges

Concerns over the term 'universal provision'

The ALN Act and Code provide a two-part definition in identifying a learner who has additional learning needs. The first part of this requires that they have a learning difficulty and/or disability as defined by the Equality Act. The second part states that the learner has to require 'additional learning provision' (ALP) in order for them to make reasonable progress. Schools, LAs and FEIs have worked to clarify what is classed as ALP and what, as the Code puts it, would be provision 'made generally for others of the same age in mainstream [provision] in Wales. The term 'universal provision' has been widely used to describe the latter, and while not used within the Act or Code, is as good as any term might be for the purpose.

There have been concerns expressed by parents and some organisations about the use of this term to deny learners an IDP. The thirteen colleges have worked together to agree what constitutes provision 'made generally for others...' and what would be classed as ALP. This means that college learners across Wales should experience a consistent approach to supporting them.

Other Concerns

There is a mistaken belief amongst some parents that the new Act provides a guarantee of full-time education and training until a young person reaches 25. This, coupled with raised expectations brought about by ALN Implementation, is likely to create an increase in disagreements and tribunals over the next few years.

There have been concerns expressed over the reduction in the numbers of children on school Special Education Needs (SEN) registers over the last few years. However, most educational psychologists believe that the numbers of learners who have a need for support that is *different from* and *additional to* that which is required by other learners should not be much greater than 10%. We would expect this number to reduce further as learners move on to college, many having developed strategies to overcome their difficulties, and with FEI universal learning provision meeting most learner needs.

From 2023/24, the Welsh Government has started the process of devolving the specialist college budget and responsibility to LAs. The Act and Code creates significant new duties for LAs in assessing and meeting the reasonable education and training needs of young people. **There are opportunities for LAs and FEIs to work together to improve the local offer for young people, but this is a complex issue and will require both partners to commit both time and finances.** These changes may also create some tensions between LAs and FEIs unless both have a shared understanding of further education and training provision.

For some parents, the transfer of this duty will create uncertainty. A two-year placement at an Independent Specialist Post-16 Institute (ISPI) is seen by some as the preferred option, mainly because it provides:

- Five-day provision (when most FEI full-time courses are only three or four days) which, for many working parents, allows them to continue with their careers.
- Residential options which provide respite for parents and additional opportunities to develop independence for young people.
- Access to a wide range of specialist therapies and expertise not available at an FEI.
- The removal of transport barriers - **home-to-college transport has become an issue in most LAs over the last few years.**
- The ALN Code is clear that if needs can be met locally at a maintained school or FEI, this should be the first choice. **If LAs (Education and Social Care departments), FEIs and health boards can work in partnership, it may reduce the need for young people to leave their communities and local services.**

Cost of ALNET changes to FE institutions

ColegauCymru has worked with the sector to establish the true cost of ALNET changes to FE institutions. This has involved each of the colleges providing time and cost details per learner for staff activity that would not have been required before ALN Implementation. This activity includes:

- Increased workload associated with transition events and activities
- Attending school reviews to ensure additional learning provision (ALP) needs are interpreted effectively for an FEI environment
- Requesting, obtaining and scrutinising learner information
- Increased numbers of meetings with prospective learners to adjust ALP and the IDP before and after they start college
- Additional correspondence required to meet ALNET duties
- Organising and delivering person-centred meetings to include stakeholders as learner consent allows
- Administration of the electronic IDP systems and managing data required for evaluation and reviews

ColegauCymru has collated and summarised this data in the table below. This provides projected additional spending based on three epidemiology scenarios: ALN cohorts of 5%, 10% and 15% of full-time learners. These costs relate only to additional ALN activity.

Year Cost @ 5% ALN Cost	@ 10% ALN Cost	@ 15% ALN Cost
2025/26 £2,089,663	£4,094,327	£6,098,99

Further Information

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