

**Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i weithredu diwygiadau addysg](#)**

**This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) inquiry into [Implementation of education reforms](#)**

**IER 68**

**Ymateb gan: ColegauCymru**

**Response from: ColegauCymru**

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

We are an education charity which promotes the public benefit of further education in Wales. We believe that all learners have the right to world-class education, delivered in a safe, diverse and inclusive setting and within a sector which supports the wider community, employers and the economy.

We also convene the Further Education Principals' Forum, which represents the interests of further education (FE) providers.

We undertake research and policy development and provide practical support to the FE community. Working closely with Welsh Government and their agencies, Medr and other stakeholders, we help shape policies affecting the FE sector, their learners and staff.

**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 some 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 undertaken significant measures to increase staffing in preparation for their new responsibilities. This initiative has been implemented despite the constraints of limited additional short-term funding and the absence of guaranteed long-term support.

The estimated costs associated with the new Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNET) duties are currently projected at approximately £2 million for the academic year 2024/25. Furthermore, these costs are anticipated to be £3.27 million for 2025/26, assuming that the percentage of full-time learners requiring ALN support remains at approximately 6.6%.

The financial constraints pose a significant challenge to maintaining adequate staffing. Following recent meetings with all college ALN leads, the ALN Implementation Lead does not expect the majority of colleges to meet all requirements of the ALNET Act next year. They do not have the staffing capacities in place to manage the increased workload needed to meet the demands of the new ALNET duties.

### 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 September 2023 was varied and often problematic. In many cases,

colleges did not receive 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 6<sup>th</sup> forms), concerns over GDPR 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 and there will always be some young people whose needs they are unable to meet. As partnerships between local education authorities and FEIs develop, it is hoped that they will achieve a shared understanding of current post-16 provision, what might be possible in the future and what alternatives LAs must consider for the young people within their communities.

### Travel for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

Although travel is mentioned within the ALN Act, there are no requirements identified for post-16 travel. The Individual Development Plan (IDP) has a box in section 3 to include information about travel arrangements for a learner, but it is not challengeable through a Tribunal. Travel is not classed as Additional Learning Provision (ALP). Learner travel is mentioned within the Learner Travel Measure (2008) where it states that the amount of funding is governed by the Local authority areas and the colleges themselves.

The offer of ALN travel for learners is therefore highly dependent on the college, local authority area and also the amount of funding and / or specialist equipment needed to transport the person.

Some ALN learners need specialised vehicles where they need additional support or training to be able to drive these vehicles, some ALN learners use bus travel, or their families provide transport or pay for taxis.

It is important that there is greater transparency and communication in regards to ALN learner applications for specialist transport to the local authority. We know that some applications are rejected without communication with the college, the cost then lies with the families of the learners.

Some colleges have also called for a more structured and uniformed approach by schools and local authorities, prior to learners attending colleges, so that learners to gain skills and coping mechanisms for when they use public transport on a daily basis, and so that colleges can adapt and put mechanisms in place.

Colleges are facing increasing pressure to provide ALN travel, because of the higher numbers of learners coming into college with ALN, and the rising cases of learners with anxiety and mental health issues. However again funding is dependent on the local authority and the amount they are willing and able to provide to colleges, and how much colleges can subsidise this cost. For example, Pembrokeshire College has 113 learners who qualify for assisted travel funding – some of this cost is met by the local authority and some is met by the college depending on the learner's age. Elsewhere in Wales, other colleges receive no local authority funding for ALN learner travel, unless there is a verified Individual Development Plan (IDP). This puts greater pressures on the families with children who have mental health conditions but without an IDP. For example, not all learners who have a learning difficulty and/or disability (under the Equality Act) have ALN. From August 2025, all learners who are in education/training and are 0–25 years old, have a right to an IDP. The only post-16 learners who have ALN but do not have an IDP, are those who do not give their consent for one to be maintained.

This especially affects the more rural areas where there are fewer public transport options, with families relying on and self-funding taxi services to take learners to and from college.

Some colleges report instances of an ALN learner choosing to go to a school sixth form rather than a college, solely due to them being more likely to receive ALN transport and funding for transport in comparison to attending the college. This is due to many local authorities offering free travel to school sixth form students, but they do not offer the same for colleges.

This is a stark disincentive for ALN learners from going to college, even though a college learning environment may be best suited for their needs and ambitions.

There is guidance within the Learner Travel Measures which requires local authorities to treat young people of the same age in a similar way, whether they are in sixth form school or FE college. We want to ensure parity for young people, whether they attend a school or college.

## 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 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.
- 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. There are clear benefits of training young people within their communities, where they can develop independence within the settings they will eventually live, and where they can continue to benefit from 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	@ 5% of FT cohort	@10% of FT cohort	@15% of FT cohort
2024/25	£1,569,675	£3,139,350	£4,709,025
2025/26	£2,089,663	£4,179,338	£6,269,001