



**The value of developing the skills of independent living in an education rather than a care setting**

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# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1 Background

This small scale research project examined the value of developing the skills of independent living in an education rather than a care setting. It explored what colleges offer to develop independent living skills for adult life, that is measurable and of long term value, and is not available in all social care settings. The differences between education and social care, the benefits of attending college and learning outcomes were examined. Information on how colleges collected and used destination data was sought, as were examples of how colleges made the case for the value of college provision. An intended outcome of the research was to provide evidence to make the case for education and its added value, providing some key pointers for colleges to use in their discussions with local authorities (LAs).

## 1.2 Methodology and scope of study

Information was sought from Natspec members through questionnaire and telephone interview, followed up by email. As information was gathered directly only from staff in independent specialist colleges, the findings will have an inherent bias. This is important to bear in mind when considering the findings and the conclusions drawn. Reports from Ofsted and case studies from a Natspec consultation were drawn upon to confirm and supplement findings. Although the project is about value, this study does not attempt to replicate or extend research into value for money. It draws on the existing evidence base that uses the 'social return on investment' methodology and other published documentation.

## 1.3 Main findings

### 1.3.1 Skills for independent living

Although colleges described their **skills for independent living** in different ways, the core components were similar and it was very clear that it was so much more than a 'menu' of skills to be taught and learned, important as these are. Rather, it was about a culture of learning and a safe and supported environment in which learning would occur naturally through the experience of everyday life.

### 1.3.2 The learning environment

**Key features of the learning environment** defined the difference between college and social care provision. These were: a culture of learning in an educational context; a holistic, co-ordinated approach by a wide range of highly specialist staff with facilities and comprehensive services concentrated under one roof and the added value of learning in a residential environment. In colleges, the focus was on interpersonal skills learning, with opportunities to learn with and from peers, to make

friends and experience different types of relationships. Colleges enabled students to develop an adult identity and a 'sense of self'.

Unlike a care setting, colleges actively promoted important opportunities for young people to make a contribution to the wider community, rather than just being the recipient of others' services, with evident impact on their self esteem and self confidence. Colleges also offered access to relevant qualifications and accreditation together with systems for recognising and recording learning and achievement. They also provided opportunity to learn and develop vocational and employability skills in real working environments. Students developed their confidence and self-esteem as a result.

### **1.3.3 The main benefits of independent specialist colleges.**

Staff cited **the main benefits of attending college** as: a multidisciplinary approach to learning; learning with and from peers; developing an adult identity; and work placements and real work environments. The benefits of residential learning included: moving away from home, learning to live with other people, developing friendships with peers having extended opportunities over weekends and evenings to learn personal, social and independent living skills and work related skills in situ and at the appropriate time. The benefits of day learning were developing close links with families and with local authority day, care and housing services so students could learn and make links with services in their home environment. Students could maintain friendships from school days and gradual transition from home to residential and local work related settings could be managed seamlessly. Some residential colleges also developed satellite day provision in students' home areas for the same reasons.

The disadvantages identified included: lack of access to specialist expertise in home areas; lack of home area knowledge to inform programme planning; loss of skills over long holiday periods; loss of contact with friends; homesickness; over support and raised expectations. Some of these disadvantages related only to residential provision.

### **1.3.4 Learning outcomes**

**Learning outcomes** are statements of what a student is expected to know, understand and/or do as a result of learning at college and included both 'soft' and 'hard' outcomes. Colleges used different frameworks against which to map learning outcomes, which might vary considerably between individuals based on their aspirations and needs. Outcomes included the skills to live more independently and increased communication skills, confidence and autonomy, leading to improved resilience and reduced risk. Important learning outcomes related to developing the ability to understand and develop relationships with peers were frequently overlooked, although developing healthy relationships contributed to health and

wellbeing. For some students, learning outcomes included qualifications which enabled them to progress to further or higher education. For others, learning outcomes were increased independence and autonomy achieved through developing skills in using adaptive technology. Work related outcomes included having gained the employability skills, experience, and where appropriate, qualifications to obtain voluntary, supported or paid employment.

### **1.3.5 Transition**

Planning for **transition** on from college was a process that formed an integral part of students' programmes. It began before or on entry and continued throughout and beyond college. Students were centrally involved in and had ownership of their transition plans. The plans were monitored by everyone concerned with the young person and ensured that their individual learning plans were focused on their intended destination. Colleges used a wide range of ways of supporting transition: transition guides; transition passports; transition groups, events and making links with appropriate services such as careers advisers, job centre staff and social workers. Transition steps were planned for 'moving on' to achieve a seamless transition. However, there were barriers to be overcome. These included the lack of local authority personnel or services and lack of the local knowledge required to support transition back to the student's home area. In response, one college had developed locally based satellite provision. Other colleges offered added value where they had partner sections within their own organisation that provided supported living and/or supported employment schemes so they could work directly with staff responsible for the next step provision.

### **1.3.6 Measuring the long term value**

This was seen as a very difficult issue. Most colleges had informal, anecdotal feedback yet few had any formal, systematic methods for measuring long term value. Short term measures such as students' progress in developing certain skills provided evidence of distance travelled and long term value could be measured through gains in independent living skills, vocational skills and qualifications plus underpinning employability skills. These would be evident, in students' ability to communicate more effectively, their improved ability to make choices, growing levels of confidence while out in the wider community and reduced levels of challenging behaviour. Measurable long term value was also frequently linked to financial cost. Where students were more independent after college, required lower levels of support and were more employable, financial savings could be made.

### 1.3.7 Destination and learning outcomes data

Few colleges made good use of the **destination and learning outcomes data** they collected. It was identified as an area for further development. This was consistent with previous NAO<sup>1</sup> reports that stated that the data available on destinations and outcomes needed to be better, to enable the long term impact of college provision to be assessed. Destination data could also be used to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of provision, to inform planning and design of learning programmes and for marketing.

Data were most frequently collected on former students' current occupational, educational and residential status. Destination data were collected: on exit or during the summer after leaving college; after 6 months and after a year. Very few described any formal or systematic approaches to following up students after that time. Most colleges collected destination data on their former students' immediate placements and some quantified these in percentage terms. Various strategies were used to collect information from students over a longer timescale: invites to former students, parents and families to stay in touch, to attend social events, reunions and 'old' student associations.

Various issues emerged from the analysis of destination data: there was often a lag between students finishing their course at college and moving on to employment/day activity and residential or supported living. There was a general trend reported of a decline in social services and careers services involvement, with fewer students gaining work placements, paid employment, FE provision or supported living. This was consistent with Ofsted(2011).<sup>2</sup> It is of concern to the independent specialist college sector as a whole because if the outcomes for students are diminished by lack of available opportunities, then the overall value of college is similarly diminished. Other colleges reported high and increasing levels of positive outcomes and said they made use of the feedback they received to inform their provision.

Colleges are not in control of many of the factors necessary for securing successful outcomes in terms of destinations. Consequently any conclusions about the performance of the college must take this into account.

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<sup>1</sup> National Audit Office (2011) *Department for Education Oversight of special education for young people aged 16–25*. (Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General HC 1585 Session 2010–20124 November 2011)

<sup>2</sup> Ofsted (2011) *Progression post 16 for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities* August 2011, No 100232

### **1.3.8 Making the case to a Local Authority for the value of college**

Most colleges have **made the case for the value** of continuing learning for current students. Some also provided evidence for appeals against placement decisions. They reported varying degrees of success. As LAs were cost and outcome driven, providing evidence of successful outcomes was thought to be essential.

To make the case colleges would describe the value on an individual basis according to the benefits and learning outcomes the young person would gain, based on the assessment of need. Colleges would document: the courses students would take; detailed outcomes; recent progress and how this would be important for their future lives. Factors which were identified as important were: progression between qualifications, the 'quality' and 'appropriateness' of the specialist college environment in meeting assessed need and the lack of appropriate alternatives. Destination data and case studies were very effective tools in providing evidence of the value of the college provision when building a case. Also used were: Ofsted reports; testimonies from external agencies and employers; national and local awards for individual students and the college as a whole; and testimonies from funding commissioners. In successfully making the case to an authority for residential rather than day provision, a college compared the expected long term outcome, using their target cache of learning outcomes, to demonstrate the difference between a day and residential offer. They described the skills, social integration and personal development opportunities that would be missed in day only learning.

Colleges reported developing strategic relationships with Local Authorities, particularly those geographically close by. College invites LA staff them to events and had a regular dialogue about the future services the LA would need to provide and what the college could offer. Where LAs identified gaps in provision, colleges had made customised offers to fill the gap. Colleges provided evidence that where students had achieved good outcomes, future needs were reduced by the increased independence achieved. The attainment of awards and qualifications was another source of evidence and some colleges used the RARPA (recognising and recording progress and achievement) process to provide evidence for non-accredited outcomes.

Measuring value for money was seen as key to making the case for college provision. Although short term investment could lead to considerable long term savings, making the case to LAs was difficult in times of acute financial constraints. Reports using the social return on investment methodology demonstrated the financial value of specialist college provision, but colleges lacked sufficient data and expertise to use the methodology for themselves. Few colleges reported personal budgets being used to fund placements. As take up increases colleges would need to be well prepared to respond to individual approaches.

## 1.4 Implications for colleges

### 1.4.1 Extending the benefits of residential provision to day students

Colleges that offer residential provision might consider how they could extend some of the benefits to day students.

### 1.4.2 Overcoming the potential disadvantages of specialist college provision

All colleges need to be aware of the potential disadvantages outlined in this report: lack of access to specialist expertise in home areas; lack of home area knowledge to inform programme planning; loss of skills over long holiday periods; loss of contact with friends; homesickness; over support and raised expectations.

- What strategies have you planned to avoid these potential disadvantages?
- How might you prepare to counter those who use these potential disadvantages as arguments against placement at specialist colleges?

### 1.4.3 Improving learning outcomes and destination data

Improving learning outcomes and destination data collection and usage has been identified as an area that requires improvement by colleges and other agencies such as Ofsted<sup>3</sup> and National Audit Office<sup>4</sup>. A first step would be for colleges to consider their practice by asking the following questions when reviewing how they collect, analyse and use learning outcomes and destination data.

- What information do you collect on students' outcomes?
  - Does it include information about important learning not recognised by accreditation and awards? (for example, self confidence, ability to manage own behaviour or use assistive technology)
  - Does it include qualifications and awards?
  - Does it include qualitative data such as student testimony as well as data that are quantifiable?
- What destination data do you collect, do they include information on:

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<sup>3</sup> Ofsted (2011) *Progression post 16 for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities* August 2011, No 100232

<sup>4</sup> National Audit Office (2011) *Department for Education Oversight of special education for young people aged 16–25*. (Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General HC 1585 Session 2010–20124 November 2011)

- Occupational status: employment (paid, voluntary, part or full time, supported employment, supported internships); work placements; social enterprises; day care or other daytime activity; or at home/NEET?
- Education: further or higher education; training; full or part-time?
- Residential status: at home; in supported living or living independently, semi-independently or fully supported?
- When do you collect destination data?
  - On exit (intended destinations)? Immediately after leaving? After 3 months, 6 months and 1 year? Annually thereafter?
  - What is the longest duration over which you have data on individuals?
- How do you collect learning outcomes and destinations data?
  - Through questionnaires, video interviews, telephone interviews
  - Through responses on invitations to social events, Christmas cards
  - Through texts, emails, blogs and the use of social media, facebook etc
  - Through formal and informal discussion at reunions and 'old' student associations
  - Do you collect information from students? Their parents/advocates? External agencies including LAs? Receiving organisations including employers?
  - Who is responsible for collecting data?
- How do you analyse the data you collect?
  - Do you compare the aspirational goals for each student against their actual outcomes and destinations?
  - Do you analyse by occupational, educational and residential status?
  - Do you analyse data by diversity characteristics such as gender and race?
  - Do you analyse by day or residential attendance?
  - Do you compare results across years to identify trends?
  - How do you ensure the reliability of your data?

- Who is involved in the analysis of data?
- How is feedback on the results shared with staff?
- How do you use the analysis?
  - To inform curriculum planning?
  - To inform internal quality assurance and improvement and professional development?
  - To provide feedback to LA commissioners
  - To market the college?
  - To provide evidence to make the case for a placement or an extension to a placement?
- Do you use your data and analysis of data in any publications?
  - In your prospectus for external audiences such as potential students, their families/advocates, personal budget holders, LA commissioners?
  - In your self evaluation review?
  - In information provided to external agencies such as commissioners, Ofsted

Once you have reviewed your practice against these questions, consider

- Who will need to be involved in implementing any changes?
- How will they be briefed/informed?
- Are there any staff development implications?
- What are the data protection implications?
- What are the resource implications?
- How will you ensure that the time and resource devoted to this activity is proportionate the usefulness and return you will gain?

#### **1.4.4 Preparing to make the case for the value of specialist college provision**

Colleges may wish to answer the following questions when considering how to 'make the case' for the value of college provision.

- Have you developed a strategic relationship and do you maintain a dialogue with local authorities, especially those that are geographically close?

- Do you arrange visits for commissioners and offer invites to events at college?
- Have you analysed future demand, especially locally?
- Do you have a clear specification of what the college can offer to meet needs, both for commissioners and individuals with personal budgets?
- Do you have well evidenced case study examples of impact of college on students' outcomes and destination?
- What evidence can you provide to demonstrate that the college achieves good outcomes?
- Have you collected testimonies and case study examples to illustrate value from a wide range of sources including students, parent/carers, employers, commissioners, Ofsted and evidence of any awards?
- Have you elicited the support of students, former students, parent, carers, careers staff and others to advocate for the college?
- Have you considered using published research results on the social return on investment to prepare evidence to demonstrate how residential provision at an independent specialist college represents good value for money?

## 1.5 Implications for Natspec

Natspec could consider:

- working with colleges to share best practice and develop methods of collecting and using destination and learning outcomes data effectively;
- working with colleges to develop a tool, based on the Social Return for Investment methodology that can be used to demonstrate the potential benefits and financial saving for individuals;
- co-ordinating further research to demonstrate value for money using the social return on investment methodology for the group as a whole and deriving evidence from published results for individual colleges to use.

## 2. *Introduction and background*

This small scale research project aimed to explore how independent specialist colleges prepare young people for adulthood and independent living. Natspec believes that this is about more than acquiring daily living skills and being able to use

community facilities, important though these are. In its broadest sense, independent living is about having greater choice, control and autonomy over your life - where you live, who you live with, and how you live, and being able to direct and/or manage your care if necessary. It is about young people feeling empowered, having high self-esteem and achieving a better quality of life.

Achieving these goals is as much about developing a state of mind as a set of skills, having the confidence to try new things, to be assertive and to communicate needs, views and wishes effectively. The learning process will be active and often challenging: students will not be passive recipients of care but instead will be fully engaged with the activity.

This project investigated what colleges offer to develop independent living skills for adult life, that is measurable and of long term value, and is not available in all social care settings. The differences between education and social care, the benefits of attending college and learning outcomes were explored. Information on how colleges collected and used destination data was sought, as were examples of how colleges made the case for the value of college provision. An intended outcome of the research would be to provide evidence to make the case for education and its added value, providing some key pointers for colleges to use in their discussions with local authorities (LAs).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Methods**

The research methods included an initial stage of information gathering from two colleges to inform the development of a survey tool. The resulting questionnaire (Annex A) was distributed to survey all Natspec members. The questionnaire explored colleges' principles and practice in relation to skills for independent living, their views about the long term value of education that is measurable and is not available in social care settings and how they capture students' long term outcomes, destinations, benefits and value added. Twenty responses were received and analysed. Eight colleges were contacted by email to collect resources and other information. A further ten telephone interviews were carried out with colleges selected from responses to the questionnaire, to explore issues in greater depth and one additional college provided specific information.

#### **3.2 Scope**

This scope of this small scale study was necessarily limited. Information was gathered directly only from staff in independent specialist colleges. In drawing conclusions from the findings it is important to remember that evidence was not

collected from staff in care settings to provide a balance. The student feedback was collected indirectly through college staff and this has an inherent bias. In an attempt to mitigate these limitations, other sources of evidence were used to provide validation for the assertions made in the reported findings.

The first source was evidence from some staff who had also previously worked in community based local authority services, as well as independent specialist colleges. One person wrote, *“Prior to starting at [the college] I worked as a rehabilitation officer for visually impaired people for various local authority social services departments for over 25 years. I also became team manager for a sensory impairment service which gave me an overview of the availability of this specialist service within the context of the range of provision required from local authorities.”* The second source was feedback from students and others who had experience of both settings, reported by college staff. Relevant documents, Ofsted publications and inspection reports and two reports that indicate value for money were also drawn upon. In addition, case studies from a Natspec consultation response were used to supplement those collected through this project.

Another limitation of the study is that the concept of ‘value’ necessarily includes ‘value for money’ considerations. This study does not attempt to replicate or extend research into value for money but does draw on the existing evidence base that uses the ‘social return on investment’ methodology.

### **3.3 Output**

The intended output of the project was a general report that assessed the value of the educational approach and could provide guidance for colleges. The outcome would be that college staff would be enabled to be clear about their ‘skills for independent living’ offer, make the case to LAs for the value of college provision, consider students’ destinations and how to collect and use data effectively.

## **4 Findings**

This section reports the findings from the survey and telephone interviews in response to the questions below and identifies the issues and implications for Colleges and Natspec.

- What is the 'skills for independent living' offer and what do colleges generally provide that is not available in social care settings?
- What are the learning outcomes for students?
- How do you plan for transition on from college and how effective is it in securing sustained learning and improved quality of life?
- What are the main benefits of attending college?
- What is the measurable long term value of college?
- What destination and learning outcomes data do you collect and what does it tell you?
- How would you make the case to a Local Authority for the value of college provision?

### **4.1 What is the 'skills for independent living' offer and what do colleges generally provide that is not available in social care settings?**

This project sought evidence from colleges exploring their principles and practice in relation to skills for independent living. The rationale was based on the assumption that in its broadest sense, independent living is about having greater choice, control and autonomy over your life - where you live, who you live with, and how you live, and being able to direct and /or manage your care if necessary. It is about young people feeling empowered, having high self-esteem and achieving a better quality of life. Achieving these goals would be as much about developing a state of mind as a set of skills, having the confidence to try new things, to be assertive and to communicate needs, views and wishes effectively. The learning process would be active and often challenging.

What was very clear from the responses received to this question was that the 'skills for independent living' in specialist colleges was so much more than a 'menu' of everyday living skills and component sub skills to be taught and learned, important as these are. Rather it was about a culture of learning and a safe and supported environment in which learning would occur naturally through the experience of everyday life.

Key features of the learning environment defined the difference between college and social care provision. These were: a culture of learning in an educational context; a holistic, co-ordinated approach by a wide range of highly specialist staff with facilities and comprehensive services concentrated under one roof; a common set of goals, targets and outcomes and the added value of learning in a residential environment.

Colleges described their skills for independent living offer in different ways. Many colleges described their provision in terms of 'pathways', for example, a set of 5 'pathways' delivered as part of the curriculum offer. Each pathway had a bespoke set of skills for independent living that were applied to students working at different levels with different needs.

Independent living skills programmes would enable students to develop their knowledge of and skills in areas such as keeping safe, being healthy, looking after their own home, and dealing with problems. Students would also have the opportunity to take units of learning relating to aspects of the wider community such as getting out and about and going places, getting on with other people, rights and responsibilities, and encountering experiences.

The components of such programmes might include areas such as:

- Community Participation
- Dealing with problems in daily life
- Developing learning skills
- Developing Self
- Developing self-awareness
- Environmental awareness
- Healthy Living
- Leisure
- Managing money
- Managing Social relationships
- Parenting awareness
- Preparation for work and developing skills for the workplace
- Rights and Responsibilities

The independent living skills curriculum in one college was specified with 15 core areas:

- Communication in the Community
- Community Access
- Community Transport
  
- Cooking Skills
- Domestic Cleaning

- Healthy Eating
- Kitchen Safety
- Laundry Routines
- Managing Money
- Personal Awareness
- Personal Hygiene
- Safety in the Community
- Safety in the Home
- Social Awareness
- Social Skills

Another college described the core components of the 19-25 curriculum as: accredited education; life skills; occupational learning; and well being. The key elements of delivery were identified as: therapy intervention; community learning and participation; work related learning; extended curriculum; recreation; functional learning; and progression.

Skills for independent living would be assessed through the person centred planning process. Learning objectives, goals and targets would be set to develop the skills a young person needed to learn. These targets would then be embedded in a young person's timetable and worked upon by tutors across the curriculum. Skills would be learned in a variety of ways through:

- Specific subjects delivered on the timetable.
- Individual 1:1 personal development sessions with a very tailored response to the individual student. (Activities could include 1:1 cookery sessions, personal care routines, therapy type activity, community access work, health and wellbeing activity etc.)
- Real and relevant activity undertaken during evenings and weekends.
- Highly individualised protocol planning in the pastoral care aspects of students programme but in a way that actively encouraged learning.
- The opportunity to develop relationships with peers who had similar needs to themselves in a supportive environment that shared a common understanding of the needs of young disabled people. (B)

#### **4.1.1 A culture of learning in an educational context**

In a college the emphasis is on **learning**. This is a fundamental difference between education and care. Respondents reported how all staff had access to teaching and learning experts and to professional development in teaching and learning. This emphasis affects how staff worked. The culture of the organisation was about

challenging and enabling increasing independence. It was this culture that enabled young people with highly complex and challenging needs to learn and achieve clear outcomes leading to adult status. College was described as, “*A structured learning environment that focuses on learning and achievement; realising a young person’s potential in every aspect of their lives,*” (B) and “*The emphasis of the college approach is to stretch students, through meaningful targets, informed by assessment and monitored regularly through multidisciplinary team working.*”

Colleges explained that this shared focus on *learning* and the achievement of clearly specified outcomes was possible because there were highly specialist, well trained, experienced multi-disciplinary teams of education, residential, therapy and other staff. These teams collaborated bringing their different professional skills and expertise to find the best approaches to achieving clear learning goals. One of the critical factors identified in promoting successful, multi-disciplinary approaches to achieving outcomes, was that all staff, irrespective of profession, were trained in **teaching and learning**. This changed the way in which staff worked. One respondent pointed out that in college, “*Staff with a care role are also trained in teaching and learning. This enables them to offer support that encourages young people to become empowered, make decisions and choices and become increasingly independent.*” The emphasis in an educational context changed both the objectives and outcomes of certain tasks. For example, in a care context the objective would be to prepare young people for the day by helping them to wash, dress and feed themselves. In an educational context, the focus would be on how to teach the young person to **learn** how to wash, dress and feed themselves as independently as possible. The common learning objectives would include not just washing, dressing and feeding skills, but also knowing **what** they need to do, **how** to do it and **when**. Thus, a much wider range of more challenging learning objectives would be involved. Once progress had been made and newly learned skills were secure, new challenges would be set and the cycle of objective setting, teaching and learning, and monitoring would be repeated. As a respondent pointed out, “*The learning culture in colleges places an emphasis on monitoring, recording, observing and planning. Staff report not just on the support students require, unlike in a care context where this would be the primary focus, but on what they have learned and evidence of their capacity for future learning.*”

#### **4.1.2 A holistic, co-ordinated approach by a wide range of highly specialist staff/ the concentration of a comprehensive range of co-ordinated services under one roof**

Colleges described how independent specialist colleges offered access to a very wide range of highly specialised services under one roof. They reported that in addition to staff with specialist skills in teaching and supporting learning in day and residential settings, there were therapists, including speech and language therapists,

physiotherapists and occupational therapists. There were other education specialists included curriculum areas such as drama, dance and music. In preparing for working life, importantly there were vocational specialists in occupational areas such as hotel and catering, horticulture, agriculture and equine who promoted learning and working to industry standards. Health care professionals, counsellors, careers advice specialists and mentors were all essential members of the team.

#### **4.1.3 A common set of goals, targets and outcomes**

What singled out independent specialist colleges was that unlike other contexts, all staff across professions, shared in the assessment, planning and delivery of a common set of goals and targets for each student. In community based services each profession would have their own methods of assessment and goals. In college there was a co-ordinated approach to monitoring progress and achievement that enabled adjustments to be made, on a continuous basis, to short term targets or how they were to be achieved. The critical mass of students with particular requirements in one place meant that a level of specialist expertise could be achieved that was not possible in other settings. As one response stated, the college *“offers an extensive range of services “under one roof” that would not be found in social care provision; for example, the College has education, care enabling, mentoring, counselling, therapies, careers guidance, nursing etc. Students are individually assessed for these services and multi-agency teams can work closely together to maximise the benefits for the student. For example, education staff can work closely with care enablers to ensure students are able to practice skills that they are learning in the classroom.”*

College responses indicated that there was a difference between education and care settings in the way staff worked together. They described the collaborative and co-ordinated way in which the extensive range of enabling services work as a multi-disciplinary team to meet individual needs in colleges.

One college for students with sensory impairments offered both social care and education provision so had a clear understanding of the differences. *“The benefits of a formal education programme are that it is designed, delivered and monitored by specialist teachers. These staff have the skills to identify the learning potential and how learners with sensory impairment can maximise the use of their residual sense and skills to improve ability to communicate with others and engage with the world in a way that expands their autonomy and self determination. The programme is focused around an ILP which identifies a clear progression route to an agreed destination. This is monitored regularly allowing us to assess our performance and gives the learner a sense of distance travelled and of achievement. The education programme is subject to a robust quality cycle.”*

This was compared to the lack of availability of many of these services in care settings and the haphazard way in which they were delivered in practice in the community. *“The experience of those on social funded packages is not as planned. This programme is mostly community based and is not as structured as our formal learning programme. The expectations are not as great and neither is the level of challenge.”*

This holistic approach and access to multi-disciplinary teams, enabled the teaching and learning of a far wider range of independent living skills that went beyond the education and learning recognised through awards and qualifications. In addition to the staff and team approach, there were other critical factors that contributed to the supportive environment that enabled young people to develop, practice and reinforce the skills needed for independence. One of these factors was the residential environment, and the wide range of additional opportunities this environment offered.

#### **4.1.4 The added value of the residential learning context**

Questionnaire respondents who provided residential learning pointed to the significant advantage of the residential experience. They described how this provided students with more time and real life environments to develop, practice and apply social and life skills. *“Skills such as responsibility for arriving at work appropriately dressed, using public transport, communication, self medicating and diet, are enhanced by a residential provision.”*

Residential provision provided a continuum from day provision and a consistency in approach. Respondents pointed out that daytime only learning on 5 or fewer days per week limited teaching and learning. Many skills would need to be taught in a ‘mock up’ setting which was not the same as learning in their own home setting. For some students, transferring skills was difficult. Skills taught in college may still need further support to transfer successfully to the home environment.

Learning was reported to be much more effective when it took place in context. In a residential setting there were far more naturally occurring opportunities available for teaching. The amount of time available and number of opportunities to practice skills was also greater in residential learning. Some respondents reported that in day learning there was insufficient time to develop independent living skills and at least one college reported that they no longer offered day only provision because they have not found it to be effective. In terms of day students: *“although we aim to make the situations as meaningful and relevant as possible, it is better for students to practice their independent living skills in the residential setting where they are more likely to apply them in future.”*

Becoming a more independent, self-aware person, also brings responsibilities. For some students adjusting to these increased responsibilities could take time. A college described the multiple benefits of the residential setting in this respect.

*“Making relationship choices, managing diet and money can be challenging and needs a lot of initial staff support. Homesickness is also sometimes an issue, and parental control can lead to conflict in a residential setting where students are making real choices possibly for the first time. Being part of the College community where you are just one of many can be liberating. The life skills programme which includes evenings and weekends ensures that students put their newly acquired skills into practice and develop routines that are sustainable – progress with independence skills breeds confidence, which leads to greater independence. This is evident in the fact that learners often progress more quickly in their second and third years.”*

#### **4.1.5 Total immersion and the intensity of the 24/7 waking time experience**

Most responses indicated that over this extended period, students had far more time available to practice and apply their skills than were available in formal learning sessions. This presented multiple opportunities to utilise naturally occurring opportunities in a real environment and at an appropriate time. Students could learn skills then had repeated opportunities to continue to practice and apply them until they were secure. Progress would be continuously monitored until skills became firmly established. .

#### **4.1.6 The range of residential accommodation enabling progressive transition to greater independence in living, in a safe and supported way**

Many colleges described the range of residential provision they offered from more highly supported on-site living accommodation to community based housing, demanding greater independence. Every aspect of everyday living was supported by specialist staff who maximised learning opportunities in the real life context. This promoted the student’s independence in carrying out tasks in a safe and supported learning environment. Students developed their skills with specialised support from staff who focused not just on doing tasks safely and successfully but also on learning to do so with the maximum degree of independence. This included learning how to direct supporters who provided necessary assistance. One response described living environments as ‘transitory,’ that is, environments that enable students to learn and apply skills before moving to future residential accommodation where less support was available. An extended programme over 3 or 4 years offered the scope for working with different social dynamics, in different sizes and types of residences, in various locations, with a range of support levels. This progressive experience enabled colleges to specify the type and level of support necessary when the student moved on.

Respondents described how the impact of the residential college experience had been profound and life changing for some students. One college for students with visual impairments reported on the rapid progress made by students who were

previously completely dependent on others for all aspects of living and mobility. Within a matter of weeks students developed skills to complete domestic tasks and travel on and off campus independently. *“In our residential college, students learn independence skills in specialist one to one session but then practice the skills regularly day after day under the observation of residential staff. Students have to be able to function in their living environment. If independent and working on breakfast preparation, students have to tackle this for themselves, with the supervision of residential support staff. Learning to travel to timetabled destinations starts with specialist teaching, then with residential staff support and finally residential staff shadow them until the route is reinforced.”*

One interviewee had previously worked as a rehabilitation officer and team leader for visually impaired people. She provided an insightful analysis of the differences in the experience of young people in the residential college and community care contexts. She stated that it would not have been possible to deliver the same levels of independence and learning outcomes achieved through total immersion in a setting that supported progress towards independence in daily life and mobility. In a care setting, constraints of caseload and eligibility criteria would prevent such progress. Sensory impairment might fall ‘below the threshold’ for services and even when eligible, it might be seen as easier and quicker to provide a ‘minimal care package’ such as a weekly shop and home meals delivery rather than a longer term investment in developing independence skills. Pressures on budgets made it harder for service commissioners to justify the potential for long term savings over short term expenditure. Where enlightened commissioners recognised that long term independence would save money, the way in which community services were offered limited effectiveness. They did not promote the successful, quicker learning of the intensive college experience. She compared the total immersion of the college environment, to the community service that provided a once weekly visit to teach a mobility route and food preparation or cooking skills. There would be no opportunities for supported practice between visits and the time lag between meant that skills could be forgotten before they were internalised. The service provided though weekly visits resulted in slow progress in developing skills and confidence building was even slower. A further advantage of the college experience identified was the opportunity to combat the isolating effect of those confined to home with no or limited opportunities to meet with others and share experiences.

#### **4.1.7. The intensive extended learning environment enables the identification and teaching of interpersonal skills**

Important as the practical skills are what enable young people to function independently, it is the interpersonal skills they develop that makes the greatest difference to their lives. The intensive, extended learning environment was described as particularly important for certain groups of young people in enabling them to live a more inclusive and active life in society. A respondent pointed out that students with

autistic spectrum disorders do not 'pick up' skills which neurotypical people take for granted. Interpersonal skills may need to be taught, such as not sitting next to someone on a bus when other seats were available: this type of skill is generally learned instinctively. College staff were described as well trained, skilled and experienced not just in teaching these skills but also in recognising exactly what a young person needed to learn to function effectively.

#### **4.1.8 The importance of learning and applying that learning in a functional context outside of formal learning time.**

In terms of developing functional personal care skills, respondents pointed out the fundamental between day and 24/7 residential learning. There was a fundamental difference in developing a set of skills in a context which had been artificially engineered and actually learning and applying the skills in a functional context. For example, while it might be possible to teach students to clean their teeth in a classroom setting, there is a world of difference between developing competence in cleaning teeth independently and knowing to clean teeth in the morning and before bed and doing so competently without being reminded. The residential context allowed students not only to learn the appropriate time and context, but also to put this into practice every single day until learning was secure and became an established habit.

#### **4.1.9 Learning with and from peers**

The college environment offered young people a unique opportunity to share new experiences with their peers and to learn from and with them. As with any young people, they could learn much from their peers, yet disabled young people often experience social isolation. Sharing new experiences with peers allowed students to gauge other peoples likes and dislikes, as well as their own. It meant that they could develop a sense of belonging. Students, *"move from feeling marginalised and 'special' to being part of a crowd of young people who share the same desire to be independent enough to push the boundaries"*. Staff could assess their responses and aid them in developing their understanding of themselves and how they interact with each other. The residential setting allowed students to gain support from each other, as well as from staff, so they could experiment and challenge their fears in a safe and supportive environment away from family. This enabled the increased development of life skills, within peer groups and led to independence in the widest sense.

#### **4.1.10 Shared interests with peers**

In some colleges students were motivated by a specific, shared interest (in one case, horses). This enabled them to develop friendships with other young people with whom they have an interest in common. This contrasted with their previous

experience where they did not have peers with whom they could identify, work and enjoy shared activity.

One respondent pointed out that non-disabled young people in FE, chose courses depending on their particular interest and were not bound by geographical location. They asserted that students with learning difficulties and disabilities should be no exception. For these young people, *“The ‘all inclusive’ approach to teaching and learning must be available to those that do not learn from a peer group (because their disability precludes them from developing friendships without specific help and opportunity) and who need to be taught the skills and responses that many people do not even remember learning.”*

#### **4.1.11 The importance of social learning and the demands of living with others**

The demands of living in a shared living environment, away from the family home could offer a learning experience that could not be replicated elsewhere. It offered an invaluable chance for students to build their skills to develop social acceptance. Respondents indicated how residential colleges provided a concentrated programme for developing social life skills and coping strategies for living with others. The outcome was that students were better equipped for future supported living environments.

#### **4.1.12 Developing an adult identity**

As with any young person, the move away from home and school could provide a unique opportunity to develop a sense of self and to grow into young adulthood. Colleges provided a supported environment where they could try new things and think about their futures. *“Attending college provides an opportunity to break habits and develop a different identity. Students coming to a new educational provision can re-create themselves and have an opportunity to be who they want to be.”* In college students were expected to behave as adults and staff reported that they responded positively to this expectation. There were other peers who modelled appropriate behaviour. This could help them to develop age appropriate behaviours that they may not have previously acquired.

#### **4.1.13 Access to relevant qualifications**

Unlike social care settings, colleges have well established systems for recognising learning and achievement and offering accreditation and relevant qualifications.

Colleges varied in the range and extent of accreditation they offered. They wrote of the value of relevant qualifications which they described as those that act as a ‘passport’ to future learning, including HE, or to qualifications that are required for work in certain occupational areas.

#### **4.1.14 Learning in real working environments**

Colleges offered the opportunity to develop vocational and work related skills in different vocational areas, in real working settings. These ranged from work placements within the college where higher levels of support could be provided, through to placements with employers, working to industry standards. Work placements formed an important part of students' learning programmes.

One college pointed out that, *“The fact that students attend college seem to give employers confidence to support the students in placements as college staff who know the students well offer appropriate support.”* Another college emphasised the importance of work related learning within college provision *“Developing routes to employment and independence for disabled young people are central to preparation for adulthood so the benefits of work experience for our learners cannot be underestimated. The experience can only provide them with a better chance of finding work opportunities when they leave college. This in turn will continue to develop greater independence and foster personal self-worth and high self-esteem.”*

Where students attended college near their homes, work placements could be provided within the local area. PA support could then be provided to develop and maintain placements after college. This supported effective transition where dedicated job coaches could maintain placements leading to future employment.

#### **4.1.15 The main differences between colleges and social care settings**

In summarising the main differences between college and social care settings, the following points were made:

- a culture of learning with staff trained in teaching and learning;
- comprehensive, highly specialised, expert services under one roof;
- co-ordinated, collaborative multi agency working;
- robust baseline assessment which identified and sets aspirational and suitably challenging targets;
- structured, co-ordinated learning programmes to fulfil these targets via long and medium term goals;
- an holistic approach that is far broader than merely developing pre-specified sets of skills;
- monitoring of progress towards jointly planned, shared goals and targets for individuals;

- a collaborative approach to individual students, to move forward in a supported way but which still challenges them to explore/experience new activities and environments;
- immersion, intensity and multiple opportunities to develop and apply learning, in context, at a real time. In colleges, the residential setting provides the context for independent living skills and the vocational setting provides the context for leaning work-related skills;
- opportunities to capitalise on naturally occurring opportunities for learning;
- expert teaching and a safe environment to explore, learn, take risks and learn from mistakes to develop independence skills that underpin working and social lives;
- recognition of the importance and a focus on interpersonal skills learning, with opportunities to learn with and from peers;
- opportunities to make friends and experience different types of relationships with peers. Students were able to learn about the boundaries between different relationships and how to develop safe and healthy relationships and to meet the demands of living with others;
- opportunities to develop an adult identity, in college there was expectation of adult behaviour and peers modelled appropriate behaviour which led to the development of a 'sense of self' as a young adult ;
- the 24hr curriculum as part of the wider college community provided many different opportunities to develop skills and put them into practice within the college and within the local community;
- unlike a care setting, colleges actively promoted important opportunities for young people to make a contribution to the wider community, rather than just being the recipient of others' services, with evident impact on their self esteem and self confidence;
- access to relevant qualifications and accreditation together with systems for recognising and recording learning and achievement;
- the opportunity to learn and develop vocational and employability skills in real working environment which would be difficult to replicate in day college or social care settings.

Student feedback provided some evidence to confirm the differences between education and social care, based on their experiences, "*Some students have to access adult social care either in the community or in older people homes during*

*College holidays and are frustrated by the limitations and restrictions this can bring. These types of service can sometimes reduce independence and encourage dependence rather than allow confidence and skills to flourish.”*

## **4.2 What were the learning outcomes for students? What difference did college education make to their lives?**

Learning outcomes are statements of what a student is expected to know, understand and/or do as a result of learning at college. They are usually expressed in terms of knowledge (knowing that), skills (knowing how to), or attitudes (knowing the value of). Learning ‘outcomes’ can refer to degree of independence, employment status, education status and other health and wellbeing factors. They are the changes, benefits, learning or other effects that occur as a result of college activities. Learning outcomes can include both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ outcomes. Hard outcomes are more easily measurable as they tend to be clear and obvious, involving achievement of qualifications or external changes in a student's behaviour or circumstances. Hard outcomes can often take a long time to achieve and might include outcomes such as the skills to obtain paid or voluntary employment. Far harder to observe and measure, yet equally important, are soft outcomes which involve some form of change that occurs inside students, such as a change in the way they see themselves. Soft outcomes may be observed in changed behaviour or may be reported by students who recognise how they have changed.

### **4.2.1 Frameworks for mapping learning outcomes**

Colleges used different frameworks against which to map learning outcomes although all contained similar components. For example, one college for students with sensory impairments identified 5 domains: communication; conceptual and sensory development; movement, mobility and orientation; personal and social development and the world of work. Another college described learning outcomes as: self awareness; self esteem; ability to ask for help and support; ability to make and sustain healthy relationships; vocational skills; functional skills and independent living skills.

### **4.2.2 Learning outcomes varied between individuals, based on aspirations and needs**

Colleges reported that learning outcomes varied considerably between individuals. In some cases outcomes might include learning the skills for finding work, progressing to Higher Education, developing independence and employability skills, gaining confidence and self awareness.

This case study describes the outcomes for a former student with multiple learning difficulties and shows the difference that college has made to her life.

### **Case study**

#### **After leaving college the outcomes for this student are paid and voluntary employment plus supported independent living**

*A student wrote: "I love my job working in a garden centre cafe part-time and I know I am a valued member of staff. In my free time I like dancing, acting and watching soaps."*

This former student had multiple learning difficulties that did not prevent her from achieving educational qualifications and life skills that led to her pursuing supported independent living and meaningful employment on leaving college.

She achieved ELF (E2C) Oral Communications as well as ELF (E3) Leading to Work – Oral Interview Skills. This young person now shares a house with two other friends. She has paid work in the restaurant of a local garden centre and attends college to continue to improve her literacy. She also does voluntary work one day every week in her local cafe.

#### **Foxes Academy**

Learning outcomes were derived from assessments of need and elicited from the expressed views and aspirations of students, their families and others. They were linked to learning objectives and to what students needed to become more independent and to manage the next step in their lives. Some students had high aspirations and the college in the case study example below developed a programme to develop the social and underpinning skills that enabled this young person to achieve his sporting ambitions.

### **Case study**

#### **A student describes how college has helped him to realise his sporting aspirations**

*"The level of support I have received at Foxes has helped me make so much progress, and not just with my sport. I have made many friends here, we travel independently on public transport and I now like spending time socialising in the evening rather than being on my own in my room. Above all I've overcome my fear of making mistakes, I now realise they are just a part of the learning journey."* Daniel, learner aged 21.

By working effectively together to support one another and share information and

good practice, Academy staff and Daniel's parents have equipped him with the skills to achieve his personal, ambitious long-term goals. Daniel has been selected to represent Great Britain in the cycling team entering the Special Olympics European Summer Games to be held in Antwerp, Belgium in September 2014.

### **Foxes Academy**

#### **4.2.3 Independent living**

The learning outcome of independent living was defined as where the young person was able to move into accommodation that was more independent, offering less support than before college. For some young people college provided essential preparation for moving away from home and for looking after themselves. A respondent said that living at college "*breaks the cycle of dependency when living at home.*" Some students decided that they didn't want to go back to living at home, so the experience actually changed the outcome for them.

One college described the way in which the extensive life skills programme over evenings and weekends enabled students to develop and put their skills into practice. They were able to develop sustainable routines for personal care and peer relationships that were not present or possible in the home environment. As a result of the college programme their outcomes were that they became better equipped to lead more independent lives in their home communities. (D)

The following case study illustrates one young person's journey towards more independent living.

#### **Case study**

##### **A story of incremental progress towards supported living**

Ian is a young man with a diagnosis of autism as well as mild learning difficulties. Ian had some basic literacy and numeracy skills (entry level 1) and had messy handwriting. When Ian first attended college he appeared withdrawn and anxious, needing support in most tasks and gave one word answers. Ian's anxieties were so high that he disliked leaving the college building and a timetable was created comprising of sessions on campus. Ian chose to spend his free time in his room or on a communal college computer that he accessed in the evenings and at weekends, when the majority of the other students were out on trips. When using a computer he would spend his time reading up on his favourite subject, Harry Potter. Ian's parents had initially requested that he had internet access on his laptop in his room, which the college discouraged for fear of further withdrawal and having a detrimental impact on his learning experience. Ian needed constant prompts and guidance to complete his personal care tasks, he wore dirty clothes unless prompted to change them. He had little awareness of the importance of

his appearance and personal hygiene. Ian's timetable was mainly classroom based; he had a range of computer based sessions that included basic ICT, mini film productions and a radio session. The tutors used Ian's interests to help motivate him to participate and tasks were often based around his interests (e.g. Harry Potter). About half way through the first academic year Ian agreed to have one off campus session per week added to his timetable, using the local shops. Ian also began a relationship with one of his peers, whom lived off campus at one of the college's satellite houses. Ian became keen to learn to use email in his ICT session, as he could now see a purpose for learning this skill, to communicate with his girlfriend when he was not in the college. However, Ian initially became frustrated when his emails were not responded to immediately and on occasion would send emails that read as demanding. Some concern was raised when both Ian and his girlfriend appeared upset. Further guidance was given to all students at the college on cyber-bullying and netiquette to help them to understand and compose acceptable emails. In addition Ian and his girlfriend received discrete relationship support to help them to comprehend their own actions upon others.

In Ian's second year his timetable continued to contain IT based sessions such as Radio, TV and basic ICT. However one of these sessions was located at the college's eBay enterprise Sip & Surf, which was located in Loughborough town centre. Ian begrudgingly agreed to travel off-site, which enabled the incorporation of further skills such as learning to use public transport and to build on his confidence.

A few weeks into the new term of his second year Ian agreed to record his voice on the radio; this was shortly followed by his agreement to be filmed in HFC-TV and made a short e-safety video about meeting strangers on the internet ([which is available on the internet](#)). Ian's confidence continued to develop and he also was filmed interviewing a curator in a town library, with a small group of onlookers present.

In his third year at the college, his timetable had evolved containing a greater variety of sessions, such as a weekly session learning out in the community, a session at a bigger external college, as well as the Sip & Surf enterprise in Loughborough. Ian also spent his final year living off campus in a house with other students, where he further developed a wealth of independent living skills.

By the time of leaving, Ian had achieved an Entry Level 2 City & Guilds qualification in Functional Skills English and an Employability and Personal Development Qualification. Ian successfully moved in to supported living after Homefield, this was a huge achievement as it was originally anticipated that he would return home to live. His confidence had grown immensely; he was developing an understanding of relationships with peers, was able to talk to unfamiliar people and was more

comfortable in the community.

#### 4.2.4 Increased communication skills, confidence and autonomy

Most colleges stressed the importance of developing communication and self advocacy skills and the impact this had on self confidence and autonomy. They reported that their students developed the confidence to become effective self advocates, enabling them to have a voice and manage their own lives. The outcome of improved communication skills was that students were better able to make choices, have a voice and take greater control of their lives, rather than being the passive recipient of services. A college cited evidence from former and current students confirming that, *“Students develop increased confidence, increased communication skills and a greater ability to express opinions and to act on independent thought.”*

Students spoke of the ‘*sense of independence*’ that college has given them and how they had ‘*grown as a person*’. Confidence and self advocacy were described by a college as the greatest learning outcomes for their young people. The skills they developed lead to greater autonomy and underpinned their increased independence.

In developing a sense of ‘self’, an adult identity and becoming more independent, colleges explained that students also learned about rights and responsibilities. The outcomes were students becoming a part of their local communities and communicating effectively with those with whom they came into contact.

For some students with sensory impairments, such as the case study below, the college environment enabled the students to be challenged and to succeed resulting in increased confidence.

##### **Case study**

***“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**

(Natspec (2011) *Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability. Consultation response.*)

#### **4.2.5 Reducing risk**

Another outcome of increased communication, autonomy and the ability to self advocate was reduced risk. Colleges pointed out that this was an outcome that was of increasing importance in the light of recent well publicised cases of young people being subjected to abuse. Young people who understand what is and is not acceptable and are able to stand up for themselves will be less at risk. Developing resilience and understanding risk were described as important learning outcomes. This in turn contributed to improved safeguarding.

#### **4.2.6 Social skills and peer relationships**

An important learning outcome that was reported to be frequently overlooked, was the ability to understand and develop relationships with peers. "*While training for*

*independence can happen in supported learning settings, but making friends and feeling ready for adult life is best learned amongst peers”* Developing healthy relationships was also cited as contributing to health and wellbeing outcomes.

#### **4.2.7 Qualifications**

For some students, learning outcomes included qualifications which enabled them to progress, for example, to higher education. For others, qualifications were linked to their vocational area, such as the hotel and catering industry, where the food hygiene certificate was a requirement for working in the industry. Some colleges offered accreditation for aspects of their skills for independent living programmes although some were reviewing the appropriateness of some of these awards in recognising the progress and achievement of their students. Qualifications were thought to be of value where they represented a ‘passport’ for the future.

#### **4.2. 8 Adaptive technology**

College offered students the opportunity to try out a range of adaptive technologies and the outcome was their ability to use technology so they would be able to study independently in HE. The expertise of college staff was crucial, as demonstrated in this case study where the effective use of technology promoted the outcomes of independence and student autonomy.

##### **Case study**

***‘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**

(Natspec (2011) *Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability. Consultation response.*)

### **4.2.9 Employment**

Work related outcomes included developing the skills to obtain voluntary, self employment, supported or paid employment. One college wrote, *“Developing routes to employment and independence for disabled young people are central to preparation for adulthood so the benefits of work experience for our learners cannot be underestimated. The experience can only provide them with a better chance of finding work opportunities when they leave college. This in turn will continue to develop greater independence and foster personal self-worth and high self-esteem.”*

#### **Case study**

#### **A mother described the outcome for her daughter who has gained paid employment**

We also heard yesterday that Olivia has her proper, paid job at The University West of England (UWE) in the Catering Department as a Food Preparation Assistant/ Kitchen Assistant. She is attending a meeting on Thursday to confirm hours and start date etc. We are so proud of her! Also, she is now using the bus totally independently to get to her voluntary job on Mondays and Tuesdays. This entails catching two buses. She has been supported, but now has the confidence to go it alone. She will also be catching the bus to UWE when she starts.”

#### **Mother of ex-student**

Respondents said that in terms of getting a job the outcomes for young people would be that they were better able to obtain a job, having gained employability skills, experience, and where appropriate, qualifications.

Work experience was described as especially valuable in preparing students for occupation after their course. This case study shows how college has prepared a

student for training as a teacher and the important role of work experience in the process.

### **Case study**

#### **From hating school to teacher training: one learner talks about how a specialist college changed his outlook on education**

A Hereward College learner, Martin has spoken passionately about how a specialist college has changed his life. Martin admits that his school experience was poor, but Hereward College has had such a positive impact he wants to make a difference to others by teaching adult learners. Martin says that his school was unfortunately ill-equipped to support his needs. He was not always able to communicate well and to understand instructions from his teachers and the tuition he needed could not always be given. All in all, his educational experiences up until joining Hereward College had been very negative saying “I felt quite detached from everything”.

Upon starting at the College, Martin immediately sensed that Hereward was very different from his school environment. His new class contained only six other pupils, compared with over 25 at school. This provided a much better place for him to learn because he received more support from teachers “The staff were friendly, approachable and quick to offer a hand” and a calmer environment allowed him to focus on his work.

Like many learners at other Colleges across the country, Martin has also been given valuable work experience opportunities. Once a week he works in the Human Resource department at Hereward College and has received training from its technical staff for ICT. These placements will help him in landing his dream job in education, but in the meantime he has secured a place on the PTLLS course (Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector). Reflecting on his achievements on training to teach adult learners, Martin says “In a few short weeks, I will be doing a micro-lesson to a class. I’m nervous, yes, but excited. It is another achievement. I can’t believe I have come this far.”

Supplied by **Hereward College**, quoted from publication *February 22, 2012 - AoC West Midlands*

One college summarised the way they achieve their outcomes, “[*The College*] is a very special place where we achieve great things! It is a safe, caring and happy environment. People love being here. We have very high expectations for everyone

*who walks through our doors and foster a culture of, 'we can', providing learners with the best possible outcomes."*

### **4.3 How do you plan for transition on from college and how effective is it in securing sustained learning and improved quality of life?**

#### **4.3.1 Planning for transition is an integral part of programmes**

Planning for transition on from college was a process that formed an integral part of students' programmes and began before or on entry. One college described transition is a continuous process that started as far back as working with feeder schools. It included attending review meetings prior to admission, to ensure that student's aspirations and how they would benefit from college were clearly expressed. At this stage students and their families were asked about their own personal long term goals including where they would like to live and work. Another college stated that "*transition starts from the moment students arrive; the entire course is designed to develop the skills that are needed for the student when are no longer on the course and have made the next step*".

Another college described the different stages of transition as: into college, throughout the programme and out from college. Each student had a transition plan that belonged to the student and was monitored by their circle of support. The transition plan ensured that students' individual learning plans were focused on their intended destination. Although this may have changed as needs, circumstances and preferences changed over time.

#### **4.3.2 Ways of supporting transition**

##### ***Transition Guide and Transition Passports***

Many different ways of supporting transition were evident from college responses. In one college students were allocated a 'transition guide' and there was extensive work with external parties, culminating in each annual review. In another college there was a National Transition Officer who worked with students, parents and external agencies throughout the duration of the students programme to ensure that students expressed aspirations and desired outcomes were achieved. There were also specific planned sessions on 'moving on and transition' that were in addition to independent living skills courses.

Each student in one college had a 'transition passport' that included information about their likes, dislikes, strategies for working with them, their dreams and aspirations, the support they required and essential medical, health and other information. Another college said that their transition passports included information on the amount of support required during the night, unsupported nights, as well as independence, communication, support, and behavioural strategies that could be

used in both a living and working environment. Colleges also provided an individual 'person' picture of strengths and weaknesses. A college described their 'about me' passports that were developed with students and could be used to support them once they left college.

During the final years of their course, students were intensively engaged in preparing to leave. This included how to cope with the change, moving away from the family home and using services in the community. Support for transition included not only practical information and activity but also emotional support.

### ***Student involvement and ownership of transition***

There was a strong emphasis on student involvement in and ownership of the transition process. Students were supported to prepare for transition and make decisions. *“Transition planning is in place to enable students to make informed decisions about their future and to be active participants throughout the process.”*

Once future destinations had been identified, some colleges have described how they supported transition through visits to the future placement and visits from the receiving placement, sharing documentation, with the student's permission, and strategies to support the young person.

### ***Transition groups, events and services***

A number of different ways of supporting students was identified. Students had access to a number of groups, moving on events and specific groups such as the AimHigher group which supported students in making applications to HE. Some colleges described their independent advice and guidance services, which may have been subcontracted to careers advisers. Support provided was not just limited to residential placements but included activities such as accompanying students to meetings at their Job Centre.

### ***Transitional steps***

There were several references made to training for 'moving on' that offered further training for independence in a setting that was very much like the supported living setting into which students would eventually move. The advantage of this transitional step was that students learned to adapt in familiar surroundings, with familiar support. A college cited evidence of the feedback they had received from the students' future placements about how well the young person had subsequently settled and how well they functioned as confident members of society.

### **4.3.3 Seamless transition and the barriers to achieving it**

*“Working with external partners such as social workers, careers advisors and parent/guardians who receive annual progress reports and attend planning reviews, the college is able to support a seamless transition.”* However, a barrier to transition

identified occurred when local authorities did not have personnel in place to support the young person on their return home. Colleges pointed out that when they drew from a national catchment, college staff did not have the local knowledge required to support transition back to the student's home area.

Some colleges had developed approaches to address this barrier. One college has developed satellite provision in two local towns where the curriculum was geared towards using community based facilities, in the students own locality. This enabled students to continue their learning once they had completed their college course. Others colleges had partner sections within their own organisation that provided supported living and/or supported employment schemes. In these cases, college staff were able to work collaboratively on transition with colleagues who had a role in supporting or providing the next step provision. The capability to provide such future services within the same 'parent' organisation could be cited as added value for the college placement as an aid to seamless transition.

#### **4.4 What are the main benefits of independent specialist colleges and the disadvantages?**

When asked about the main benefits of attending college, all respondents offered suggestions which are summarised here. Many of these suggestions have been previously mentioned in the report. The numerous benefits identified have been grouped under the following headings: a multidisciplinary approach to learning; learning with and from peers; developing an adult identity; and the benefits of work placements and real work environments. The advantages of the residential experience were also specified together with some of the benefits of day provision.

Not all respondents identified disadvantages and those that did suggested the following: lack of access to specialist expertise in local areas; lack of local knowledge to inform programme planning; loss of skills over long holiday periods; loss of contacts with friends; homesickness; over support and raised expectations. Some of these disadvantages related only to out county residential provision.

##### **4.4.1 Benefits of independent specialists colleges**

Many more benefits than disadvantages were identified, but as all respondents worked within this sector, this was to be expected.

##### ***A multidisciplinary approach to learning***

- Students benefited from a learning environment with access to an extensive range of co-ordinated, expert, enabling services under one roof.

- There was a multidisciplinary approach in which all staff shared in the assessment, planning and delivery of a common set of outcomes, goals and targets to meet individual need

### ***Learning with and from peers***

- There was immense value from interacting with peers with similar impairments. Students who may have felt isolated or marginalised could become part of the crowd.
- Students were motivated by shared interests that enabled them to develop friendships with other young people with whom they had an interest in common. They had peers with whom they could identify, work and enjoy shared activity.
- Students benefited from an environment in which they could form and develop sustained relationships with other young people.

### ***Developing an adult identity***

- Colleges provided the opportunity to move away from home and school, to develop a 'sense of self' and to grow into young adulthood.
- In college students were expected to behave as adults and staff reported that they responded positively to this expectation.
- There were other peers who modelled appropriate behaviour. This could help them to develop age appropriate behaviours that they may not have previously acquired.
- Students also received support to develop mechanisms to deal with their own emotional well being and to develop healthy relationships with other young people.

### ***Benefits of work placements and real work environments***

- Students could develop work related skills in real work settings within college and outside. The benefit of the range of settings was that the level of support could be matched to student's needs and progressively decreased as their skills and confidence developed.
- Work placements formed an important part of students' learning programmes. One college wrote that, "*The fact that students attend college seem to give employers confidence to support the students in placements as college staff who know the students well offer, offer appropriate support.*"
- Work placements in the student's local area with PA support could ensure that placements were maintained after college.

### ***Residential learning***

Where colleges offered residential provision, they recognised the benefits and identified the following advantages:

- Residential students had the significant advantage of spending more time at college away from home, enabling skills to be developed leading to independence in the widest sense.
- Residential programmes had extended opportunities to learn, develop and practice skills during evening and weekends. Students practiced independent living skills routinely in the real life and real time context.
- Students did not have long, tiring journeys to college.
- Personal care requirements, essential to ensure dignity on arrival and before departure could be managed without having an adverse impact on day time learning.
- Students had opportunities to develop friendships and peer relationships through evenings and weekends. This was a major factor for many young people in developing a young person's self confidence, self-esteem and independence away from the home setting, where they could be socially isolated.
- There were greater opportunities to focus on choice and advocacy, both difficult concepts for certain groups of young people, particularly those on the autistic spectrum and/or with learning difficulties.
- Becoming a more independent, self-aware person, also brings responsibilities. For some students adjusting to these increased responsibilities could take time and the residential experience offered time for development.
- Weekends provided particularly good opportunities to structure individuals' days and encourage experiential learning that would otherwise not take place if the student was at home.
- Evening activity included enrichment, social activities and opportunities for learning personal and social skills.
- Some colleges offered the opportunity to develop vocational skills in a real working environment which would be difficult to replicate elsewhere.
- Transition information derived from in depth knowledge of the young person in all contexts in a residential college, was extensive. For example, it included information on the amount of support required during the night, unsupported

nights, as well as independence, communication, support, and behavioural strategies that can be used in both a living and working environment.

Where colleges offered residential provision, they might consider how they could offer some of those benefits to day students.

### ***Day learning***

The advantages of day only independent college provision were also identified.

- Within local day provision which was set up with experienced staffing and with the support of local authorities, programmes could be designed around individuals within their local contexts so that students could transfer their skills seamlessly from the college experience.
- Skills would be learnt in context and within the student's local environment.
- College staff could maintain closer links with home and develop skills within their local circles of support. Students could be encouraged to develop home living skills – cooking, budgeting and using familiar local shops and facilities. Thus learning would take place in the locality where they lived and would continue to live in the future.
- Close interaction and communication with families and others could be more easily encouraged and maintained, so programmes could be developed to improve students' skills within the home.
- Families benefited from support for their young person within the family home. This helped them to maintain contact through placement in local housing.
- The college worked with the local authority to develop home and care links as close as possible to each other so that travel time for students was minimised and learning could take place in context.
- Expert college staff enabled students to transfer their newly learned skills into work, health and living contexts seamlessly. They could manage the expectations of the family and monitor learning.
- College staff could work effectively with local authorities, local care homes and local PA networks so students could develop skills in the appropriate context, without the need for transference of skills between different locations.
- Students could experience work placements and a range of work related activities such as voluntary work, where they live. They could also be supported in making the transition into locally based FE colleges, if this was their preferred pathway. By experiencing local opportunities, students could make realistic choices about future options.

- Friendships which have developed over time at school could be maintained throughout the student's time at college.
- Students were able to interact with peers through local social groups that have been set up and maintained over time. They could continue to access social networks that had been built through their lives. One college wrote, *"The college is very passionate about maintaining friendship groups and developing learner interactions through in-house social networking site, Sharespace and the use of Skype between centres."*
- Students had work placements within the local area and PA support could be provided to develop and maintain placements after college. Through partnership working with dedicated job coaches, students' work placements could be maintained until students gained employment.
- Students living at home could be supported to make a gradual transition through respite care into residential accommodation. By working closely with local care managers and local authorities, college could provide continuity and support for families, young people and other professionals.

In summarising the benefits of provision that combined both day and residential provision, a respondent wrote, *"Day provision provides opportunities for gaining accreditation for learning and work experience. The residential provision provides opportunities to develop skills for independent living away from home. It bridges the gap between school and adult services."*

The benefits for individual students are evident from the following case studies:

***"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**

(Adapted from Natspec (2011) *Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability. Consultation response.*)

***“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. 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**

(Adapted from Natspec (2011) *Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability. Consultation response.*)

#### **4.4.2 Disadvantages of independent specialist colleges**

Although a number of respondents indicated that they could not think of any disadvantages, others identified the following potential disadvantages. Some of these disadvantages related exclusively to residential provision and/or provision that was removed from students' home localities.

***Lack of access to specialist expertise in local areas***

The advantage of having specialist expertise concentrated in colleges was countered by an equivalent disadvantage: the same level of expertise was not also available in students' home localities. College staff reported that the ability to support students effectively through local authority services varied. Access to therapy and other services was often patchy and this had an impact on the transition process back to the local community. One college described how they had established locally based satellite provision to address this issue. Another day college said that, "*With effective support from local authorities and the development of skills with local care homes of*

*staff and local PA networks learning can be extremely effective without the need for transference of skills between different locations.”*

### ***Lack of local knowledge to inform programme planning***

Lack of communication with the home area (family, local authority) was a disadvantage as colleges did not have the local knowledge that was of benefit in programme planning. Students would lack the experience of learning in and gaining knowledge of their home environment and would not have local contacts.

### ***Loss of skills over long holiday periods***

There was a risk that when students returned home for extended periods of time, they might revert to earlier more dependent patterns of living. Colleges said they encouraged open lines of communication with the family in an attempt to ensure that the skilled learned in college were also applied at home and independence learning continued throughout the holiday periods. On the other hand, feedback from family could provide a very clear picture of the sustainability of skills, which skills had transferred successfully and where further learning was required

### ***Loss of contacts with friends***

When students attended a college away from their home location, they might lose contact with friends from home. In day only provision, friendships which had developed over time within the school environment could be maintained at college, whereas in a residential placement those friendships and important peer interaction could be lost.

### ***Homesickness***

Some residential students might experience homesickness, although with time and support this was usually only a short term issue.

### ***Over support***

Students needed a realistic experience of college life and should not be ‘over supported’. Some ex-students described a ‘college bubble’ which they believed had not always prepared them effectively for the real world. College staff indicated that they had responded to this feedback and were working hard to avoid it.

### ***Raised expectations***

The favourable experience of college could raise expectations of students about life afterwards when similarly fulfilling opportunities were not readily available. One college noted that former students had not been able to move on to similarly fulfilling lifestyles to those they experienced while at college. It was particularly difficult to find a fulfilling social life. The lack of fulfilment could have a negative effect on their well being.

Some colleges have in place strategies to address these potential disadvantages. All colleges need to be aware of them, ensure that they take action to mitigate the risks and are prepared to counter those that use these disadvantages to argue against placement at specialist colleges.

In conclusion, there were undoubted advantages of residential provision for some students and some forms of learning. Colleges that offer residential provision, might consider how they could extend some of the benefits to day students. There were also disadvantages, especially where residential provision is some distance from the student's home. It was argued that it was the norm for many non-disabled young people to move away from home for their post-school learning and that young people with learning difficulties and disabilities should be no different.

There were also advantages of day provision when developed in partnership with families and local authorities. Programmes could then be, *“designed around the learner within their local context so that learners can transfer their skills seamlessly from the college experience. Learners need time in a specialist day provision to develop their potential in a supportive and focussed environment. This offers benefits to families to be able to support their young person within the family home of maintain contact through local housing placement. This has benefits for building and developing friendships within their local area and maintaining transition and provision set up during college placement into adult life.”*

This case study shows how a student who had experienced bullying and had challenging behaviour benefited from learning at an independent specialist college.

***“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**

(Adapted from Natspec (2011) *Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability. Consultation response.*)

#### **4.4.3 Implications for colleges**

All colleges need to be aware of the potential disadvantages outlined in this report.

What strategies have you planned to avoid these potential disadvantages?

How might you prepare to counter those who use these potential disadvantages as arguments against placement at specialist colleges?

Colleges that offer residential provision might consider how they could extend some of the benefits to day students.

#### **4.5. What is the measurable long term value of college?**

From the questionnaire responses, it was clear that measuring the long term value was seen as a very difficult issue and one that most colleges had not yet undertaken. A respondent pointed out that there are many qualitative factors that would need to be taken into account and this would require an extensive research project, although this would be a valuable exercise.

While many colleges commented on the positive informal, anecdotal feedback they have received, few have any systematic formal methods for measuring value. Some colleges cited short term measures such as: well being; achievement of course and individual goals/qualifications; attendance; success rates and diverse population gathered through case studies and anecdotal evidence.

Colleges described their clear curriculum structures which divided learning into certain domains. Within each domain there were phases or subsets of skills. From these it would be possible to provide clear evidence of learning and the distance travelled by each student, in each domain. One college suggested that long term

value could be measured through gains in independent living skills, vocational skills and qualifications plus underpinning employability skills. It would be evident, for example, in students' ability to communicate more effectively, their improved ability to make choices and growing levels of confidence while out in the wider community. Behaviour support programmes provided further evidence of reduced levels of challenging behaviour which had a direct impact in reducing the levels of support needed and was evidence of increasing independence. One college summarised their learning outcomes, *"students move on and use the skills they have learnt to live more independently, occupy their time constructively and to try to follow healthy lifestyles."*

One college cited the comparison of students' progress in developing certain skills as a measure of value. The college described how during last year 28 students moved to 'self-catering' status, when they had developed the skills to shop, store, prepare and cook their own food. They said that this year half the number had already gone self catering in the first term. This provided evidence of value that could be measured and would be of long term value to the students and also to the public purse. It also showed a measurable trend of students achieving the 'self catering' status outcome more quickly. This same college reported that several leavers were now living in their own accommodation with minimal or no support; further evidence of the long term impact.

A respondent pointed to the long term value of provision in two specialist colleges which was considered in published research on the 'social return on investment'. The research clearly demonstrated significant long-term savings from this type of investment on the public purse. Students were more independent after college and so required lower levels of support and were more employable, all resulting in financial savings. *"Where the outcomes for learners are improved (for example, by enabling a greater degree of independence) there will be lower levels of public funding needed to support them in adulthood. It is this reduced public expenditure in adulthood that can be measured and provides the positive financial outcome for the state. The financial benefits for the learners and their parents are less easy to measure, but nonetheless are real and additional..."* (p5 Baker Tilley, September 2012)<sup>5</sup>

Measurable long term value was also frequently linked to financial cost. The implication of the long term value of students' increased independence was spelt out by one college. *"When students' independence increases and they have a reduction*

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<sup>5</sup> Hereward College & Linkage College: Social Impact Evaluation using Social Return on Investment (2012) Baker Tilley

*in support, this allows them to have a greater choice for a future placement, and also reduces the financial impact for LAs.”* Another college pointed out that where colleges were successful in supporting students to self-regulate their behaviour and in learning to deal with their own anxiety, the long term measurable value could be determined by the level of support for behaviour reducing over time and consequently in reduced cost. An example cited was a young person who came to college from a secure unit and required 1 to 1 support. By the end of his programme his support level had reduced to 1 to 2.

A college also suggested that one area that could be measured was the extent to which young people subsequently made a contribution to society, as opposed to ‘*just draining resources*’ and were able to live more independently.

The case study below demonstrates how the outcome of independent travel, developed through a partnership approach, led to considerable savings.

### **George 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**

(Adapted from Natspec (2011) *Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability. Consultation response.*)

## **4.6 What destination and learning outcomes data do you collect and what does it tell you?**

Learning outcomes, as previously mentioned, are defined as statements of what a student knows, understands and is able to do after completion of learning. Destination data form one of the core indicators of learning outcomes. In this study, the collection and use of destination and learning outcomes data produced considerable variations in responses. Few said they made very good use of data. Many commented that it was an area they needed to develop further. Some colleges noted that completing the questionnaire had prompted them to review and formalise their arrangements, especially for following up the progress of former students. This was consistent with previous NAO<sup>6</sup> and Ofsted<sup>7</sup> reports that stated that the data available on destinations and outcomes needed to be better, to enable the long term impact of college provision to be assessed.

As well as providing accountability, destination data can also be used to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of provision. It can be used to inform planning and design of learning programmes and help colleges to determine if their programmes are preparing students to progress towards their desired pathway and ambitions. Ofsted inspection reports state that some colleges do not analyse sufficiently the

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<sup>6</sup> National Audit Office (2011) *Department for Education Oversight of special education for young people aged 16–25.*

<sup>7</sup> Ofsted (2011) *Progression post 16 for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities* August 2011, No 100232

destination data they hold on students that have left the college to contribute to future planning.

Destination data can also be used as a powerful tool for promoting colleges and the provision they offer. The use of aggregated data, as well as good news stories about 'star' students can be collected and used to market the college.

The collection of reliable destination data requires a sound, systematic and consistent approach. Once collected, the way in which the data are analysed and used requires careful consideration.

In this study two colleges described well established systems for collecting and using destination and learning outcomes data effectively and their responses have been drawn on extensively in this section.

#### **4.6.1 What destination and outcomes data were collected**

Most frequently data were collected on former students' current occupational status in terms of: education (part or full time), NEET, employment (paid, voluntary, part or full time, self employment, supported employment), work placements, supported internships, social enterprises, day care or other daytime activity. Data were also collected on lifestyles and where former students were living; whether at home, in supported living or living independently, semi-independently or fully supported. Qualification outcomes data were also collected and reported.

Similarly those colleges that reported how they analysed and used data did so broadly by: residential circumstances outcomes; occupation and by diversity characteristics such as gender and race. Colleges also described how they compared the aspirational goals for each student against their actual outcomes and destinations.

#### **4.6.2 When and how destination data were collected**

Key points at which colleges most commonly reported collecting destination data were: on exit or during the summer after leaving college; after 6 months and after a year. Very few described any formal or systematic approaches to following up students after that time. In colleges where there were staff with a dedicated transition role, more systematic data collection tended to be reported.

Most colleges collected some destination data on their former students intended or immediate placements and some quantified these in percentage terms e.g. *"75% of leavers did not return to the parental home; securing supported living placements within the community."* Student exit questionnaires were used by some colleges to collect information from leavers. For example, a student said *"I believe that my time*

*at [College] has helped me to believe in myself and gave me skills that help me in my day to day life now and in the shop I work in voluntarily.”* These colleges said they gathered rich qualitative data which they could use to inform provision. In some cases they quantified data and analysed it in percentage terms. This does of course rely upon sufficient number of students to generate valid and reliable data. *“98% of students agreed that they were gaining the skills to help them to get a job when they left college.* Another college described how video interviews with students before they came to college and afterwards provided evidence that they required less support.

When collecting information from students over a longer timescale, various strategies were described. One college welcomed former students, parents and families to contact the college at any time after they had left. The reported that some former students did so 10 or more years later. This allowed them to collect information on the success of the young person’s post-college placement and how well they had coped in the subsequent lives. Former students were invited to social events at college such as Christmas, summer fairs and bonfires. Other colleges described how former students kept in touch through annual reunions and ‘old’ student associations. They pointed out how useful information could be gathered from these reunions directly from former students and also from family and other supporters who also attended.

Although very few colleges specifically mentioned technology, Skype and methods such as social media including Facebook to keep in touch were more widely used in practice. One college described their approach. *“We collect destination data relating to employment and living arrangements. This enables us to produce statistics regarding transition into to work, and living arrangements. We track data over a period of time to enable us to produce statistics to evidence sustainability of our learners’ outcomes. It provides us with a tool to measure the effectiveness of our provision. It also provides the learner and parents with a mechanism to feedback to the college with regards to success, achievements and long term outcomes. We collect this data via a range of innovative sources such as reunion weekends, sending Christmas cards that include destination questionnaires, parental feedback, and feedback from external agencies, Facebook and liaison via the National Transition Officer.”*

Extracts are shown below of how two colleges presented the quantitative data on actual rather than intended destination data. The first example covers independent living; employment and further education. It specifies a timeframe for gaining employment (within three months). This information is particularly relevant where there are known time lags between leaving college and securing positive outcomes. The second example shows how data across different years were compared to identify trends.

### **College 1**

95% of learners progressed to living semi independently

18 of the 21 leavers found either paid or voluntary employment within three months of leaving

Twelve leavers undertook further education at college or training

### **College 2**

Planned destinations and actual outcomes:

Ninety-four per cent of students who left in 2007/08 went into employment or enrolled on to further education programmes, and 60% moved into supported or independent living. All students who left in 2008/09 progressed into either employment or further education or training. An increased number, 82%, moved into supported or independent living.

#### **4.6.3 Issues emerging from the analysis of destination data**

College analyses of data suggested that there was often a lag between students finishing their course at college and moving on to employment/day activity and residential or supported living. Social services many not become involved until six months or so after the young person had left college. Those most affected by this were reported to be out of county residential students.

A general trend was noted by some colleges that social services and careers services were attending fewer reviews than previously. They indicated that there was a decline in some positive outcomes. One college also reported that most students now moved on to day care provision as there were few appropriate learning programmes at GFE colleges. Another stated that on leaving college, more students attended some form of day care combined with limited FE. There was also an increasing proportion reported to be moving back home rather than into supported living. These findings are consistent with the Ofsted (2011), report on transition which also found that opportunities for transition to independent living were reducing and it was becoming more difficult to find suitable supported living accommodation for students at the end of their programmes. The criteria for supported living had changed and less suitable accommodation was available. Similarly options for work related destinations including employment and voluntary work were reduced as a result of the down-turn in the economy. Some respondents in this study reported that fewer students had gained work placements and very few had found paid employment. *“Our evidence suggests that in recent years there has been a significant decline in the number securing any form of employment.”* This trend is of concern to the independent specialist college sector as a whole because if the

outcomes for students are diminished by lack of available opportunities, then the overall value of college is similarly diminished.

In contrast, other colleges reported high or increasing levels of positive outcomes and said they made use of the feedback they received to inform their provision. A college noted that day students were moving into local supported living or residential care after college. They cited this as evidence that students had learned the skills at college to make the move to more independent settings. From the responses to this survey, those colleges with a strong vocational focus and real work environments seemed to be more successful in securing work related destinations for their students. The sample is far too small to draw any firm conclusions, but the match between outcomes and destination and college vocational offer might be an area for further investigation.

Colleges are not in control of many of the factors necessary for securing successful outcomes in terms of destinations. Consequently any conclusions about the performance of the college must take this into account.

#### **4.6.4 Implications for colleges**

Improving learning outcomes and destination data collection and usage has been identified as an area that requires improvement by colleges and other agencies such as Ofsted and the National Audit Office. A first step would be for colleges to consider their practice by asking the following questions when reviewing how they collect, analyse and use learning outcomes and destination data.

- What information do you collect on students' outcomes?
  - Does it include information about important learning not recognised by accreditation and awards? (for example, self confidence, ability to manage own behaviour or use assistive technology)
  - Does it include qualifications and awards?
  - Does it include qualitative data such as student testimony as well as data that is quantifiable?
- What destination data do you collect, do they include information on:
  - Occupational status: employment (paid, voluntary, part or full time, self employment, supported employment, supported internships); work placements; social enterprises; day care or other daytime activity; or at home/NEET?
  - Education: further or higher education; training; full or part-time?

- Residential status: at home; in supported living or living independently, semi-independently or fully supported?
- When do you collect destination data?
  - On exit (of intended destinations)? Immediately after leaving? After 3 months, 6 months and 1 year? Annually thereafter?
  - What is the longest duration over which you collect data on individuals?
- How do you collect learning outcomes and destinations data?
  - Through questionnaires, video interviews, telephone interviews
  - Through responses on invitations to social events, Christmas cards etc
  - Through texts, emails, blogs and the use of social media, Facebook etc
  - Through formal and informal discussion at reunions and 'old' student associations
  - Do you collect information from students? Their parents/advocates? External agencies including LAs? Receiving organisations including employers?
  - Who is responsible for collecting data?
- How do you analyse the data you collect?
  - Do you compare the aspirational goals for each student against their actual outcomes and destinations?
  - Do you analyse by occupational, educational and residential status?
  - Do you analyse data by diversity characteristics such as gender and race?
  - Do you analyse by day or residential attendance?
  - Do you compare results across years to identify trends?
  - How do you ensure the reliability of your data?
  - Who is involved in the analysis of data?
  - How is feedback on the results shared with staff?
- How do you use the analysis?
  - To inform curriculum planning?

- To inform internal quality assurance and improvement and professional development?
- To provide feedback to LA commissioners
- To market the college?
- To provide evidence to make the case for a placement or an extension to a placement?
- Do you use your data and analysis of data in any publications?
  - In your prospectus for external audiences such as potential students, their families/advocates, personal budget holders, LA commissioners?
  - In your self evaluation review?
  - In information provided to external agencies such as commissioners, Ofsted

Once you have reviewed your practice against these questions, consider

- Who will need to be involved in implementing any changes?
- How will they be briefed/informed?
- Are there any staff development implications?
- What are the data protection implications?
- What are the resource implications?
- How will you ensure that the time and resource devoted to this activity is proportionate to the usefulness and return you will gain?

#### **4.6.5 Implications for Natspec**

- Natspec could consider working with colleges to share best practice and develop methods of collecting and using destination and learning outcomes data effectively.

#### **4.7 How would you make the case to a Local Authority for the value of college provision?**

Questionnaire responses indicated that most colleges have made the case for the value of continuing learning for current students. A few also described how they

provided evidence for appeals against placement decisions. They reported varying degrees of success. One college that offers both education and social care and has had frequent dialogue with local authorities, commented that, *“We have had to become very clear about the difference between formal and informal learning and to provide honest guidance and support. I would say our success is varied. We work with a number of local authorities and often it depends on their philosophy and values.”* Another college pointed out that LAs were very much cost and outcome driven and so providing evidence of successful outcomes was essential. It was telling that one respondent, when asked for examples of where the case had been made successfully, wrote, *“Each student is a case of success but they are largely ‘fighters’ or their parents are!”*

#### **4.7.1 How colleges make the case**

Most colleges said that to make the case they would describe the value on an individual basis according to the benefits and learning outcomes the young person would gain. The students would be central to this process, contributing through the person-centred planning process. The ‘assessment of need’ was critical in making the case for appropriate provision to meet that need. One college described how they prepared an assessment of needs document which outlines the course they will undertake; detailed outcomes; recent progress they have made and what how this will be important for their future lives. Colleges report that they had been successful in securing additional funding for an education programme that demonstrated progress for a particular student. For example, a student who had completed a Diploma in Life Skills then gained additional funding for a Level 1 Equine studies.

One respondent cited cases where young people and their advocates appealed against the decision of the LA not to fund a specialist placement, when challenged on the ‘quality’ and ‘appropriateness’ of young peoples’ packages, *“the specialist college environment was found to be more suitable in meeting assessed need.”* In some instances the case was made due to the lack of appropriate alternatives available. This suggested that stressing the appropriateness of the provision to meeting assessed need, the quality of the offer and comparisons with alternatives are all factors to consider when making the case.

A college pointed out that their destination data was a very effective tool that was often used to make the case for the value of college. This college provided ‘case study’ examples of students and evidence from parent and carers. They also used a variety of external sources to give evidence the value of the college provision. These included:

- Ofsted’s recognition that their outcomes that are outstanding - they signpost local authorities to their Ofsted report;

- numerous testimonies collected from other professionals in hospitality and catering that demonstrate the value of their vocational training in preparing young people for working in the industry;
- national and local awards for individual students and the college as a whole;
- testimonies from funding commissioners

For all colleges, collecting well written student case studies can provide powerful evidence of the impact college has had on individual's lives.

#### **4.7.2 Making the case for residential provision**

A college described how they had successfully made a case to an authority recommending residential over day provision. They did this by comparing the expected long term outcome. The college used their target cache of outcomes to demonstrate the difference between a day and residential offer. They described the sorts of skills and learning that happened in extended curriculum time in residential provision, along with all the social integration and personal development opportunities that would be missed in day only learning. The college's National Transition Officer outlined what the likely outcome would be if the young person was not able to access residential provision and develop the skills required to live more independently; the alternative being very expensive full time residential care.

#### **4.7.3 Developing relationships with local authorities**

Some colleges reported that they had worked very hard at developing more strategic relationships with Local Authorities, particularly those were geographically close. They regularly invited LA representatives to events where they could market the college. Colleges described how they have a regular dialogue about the level and type of services the LA would need to provide for an individual (and groups of individuals) in the future and how they specified the personalised learning opportunities the college could offer.

##### ***A customised offer***

The offer for individuals would specify the intended outcomes in key areas including: independent living skills; communication skills; personal and social development; vocational and employability skills. Other outcomes for individuals included developing specific individual skills in using ICT, adaptive technologies and enhancing mobility to increase independence. Some colleges also outlined the specialist inputs that the college would provide in terms of staff and facilities ranging from therapists and health care specialists, to mobility trainers, adaptive technologies and industry standard working environments. Where an individual was seeking a placement, some colleges commented that arranging a visit for a representative from

the funding agency with the young person to confirm (or otherwise) the appropriateness of the placement was invaluable.

There were examples of where dialogue with the LA revealed a gap in provision. The college had then made a customised offer to fill the gap and used the successful outcomes to 'sell the college'. The college described how they, "*agreed to take a small number of 14-16 students from one LA; these students has been excluded from mainstream school but we were able to successfully integrate them into full college life with excellent results*".

### ***Providing evidence of attainment and outcome***

There were examples of colleges providing evidence to demonstrate that they achieved good outcomes and how future needs were reduced by the increased independence achieved. One college cited the example of a tangible outcome, "*We have a number of residents that after 20 years in residential care we have now helped move on to supported living.*" In another example, the college quantified the difference that college had made to students' outcomes. They were able to demonstrate how students who came to college needing 1:1 support required quantifiably less support after they left.

Some colleges quoted the attainment of awards and qualifications as an important source of evidence and a least one college reported that it was currently reviewing the awards it uses. Other colleges used the RARPA (recognising and recording progress and achievement) process to provide evidence.

### **4.7.4 Making the case of value for money**

Although not the focus of this study, measuring value for money was seen as key to making the case for college provision. The argument colleges said they needed to make to LAs was that short term investment can lead to considerable long term savings. Making the case is difficult in times of acute financial constraints. The decision that LAs need to take when assessing their financial priorities is based on their answer to this question: 'is it better for us to make a significant investment now to increase independence to make longer term savings, or are we prepared to make a lower level of investment that will continue year on year over the whole lifetime of an individual?'

Some studies were referred to that used the recognised and respected social return on investment methodology. These studies (Baker Tilley 2012<sup>8</sup>, NAO 2011<sup>9</sup>),

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<sup>8</sup> Hereward College & Linkage College: Social Impact Evaluation using Social Return on Investment (2012) Baker Tilley

although slightly different in approach and findings clearly demonstrated that college was the most cost effective way of meeting the educational needs of young people resulting in considerable lifetime savings. Another example was cited of parents who carried out a cost comparison exercise using the Social Return on Investment methodology from the National Audit Office report. They were able to demonstrate the financial value in terms of £'s that specialist residential college provision was able to offer versus the day option. However, individual colleges did not consider that they had access to sufficient data (or econometric expertise) to produce valid results to demonstrate value for money using the social return on investment methodology. Some asked if Natspec could organise this for the group as a whole.

#### **4.7.5 Using personal budgets**

There were few references to personal budgets being used to fund placements although at least one respondent indicated that the use of personal budgets was increasing. In one case the personal budget was used to purchase supported employment. Although take up of personal budgets has yet to have universal impact, there are clear implications for colleges to be well prepared to respond to approaches from individuals who do have personal budgets.

#### **4.7.6 Implications for colleges**

Questions to ask when preparing to 'make the case' for the value of college provision

- Have you developed a strategic relationship and do you maintain a dialogue with local authorities, especially those that are geographically close?
- Do you arrange visits for commissioners and offer invites to events at college?
- Have you analysed future demand, especially locally?
- Do you have a clear specification of what the college can offer to meet needs, both for commissioners and individuals with personal budgets?
- Do you have well evidenced case study examples of impact of college on students' outcomes and destination?
- What evidence can you provide to demonstrate that the college achieves good outcomes?

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<sup>9</sup> National Audit Office (2011) *Department for Education Oversight of special education for young people aged 16–25*. (Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General HC 1585 Session 2010–20124 November 2011)

- Have you collected testimonies and case study examples to illustrate value from a wide range of sources including students, parent/carers, employers, commissioners, Ofsted and evidence of any awards?
- Have you elicited the support of students, former students, parent, carers, careers staff and others to advocate for the college?
- Have you considered using published research results on the social return on investment to prepare evidence to demonstrate how residential provision at an independent specialist college represents good value for money?

#### **4.7.7 Implications for Natspec**

- Consider working with colleges to develop a tool, based on the Social Return for Investment methodology that can be used to demonstrate the potential benefits and financial saving for individuals.
- Consider co-ordinating further research to demonstrate value for money using the social return on investment methodology for the group as a whole and deriving evidence from published results for individual colleges to use.

## **Annex A**

### **The value of developing the skills of independent living in an education rather than a care setting**

This questionnaire is designed to gather information about your principles and practice in relation to skills for independent living; your views about the long term outcomes and value of education that is measurable and is not available in social care settings. It also asks about how you capture data on students' destinations, long term outcomes and the benefits and added value of the educational programme you provided. Based on the responses some providers will be contacted and asked for further information.

Please complete and return this questionnaire to **Sally Faraday** at [sallyfaraday@hotmail.com](mailto:sallyfaraday@hotmail.com) as soon as possible and by **Friday 8<sup>th</sup> November** at the latest.

A briefing about the project is also attached for information. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact Sally Faraday of Alison Boulton.

#### **College name:**

*(Roughly what proportion of your provision is residential? day?)*

#### **Contact name, role, email address and phone number:**

1. What is your 'skills for independent living' offer? If relevant, how much of this is deliverable in day only provision? *(Describe briefly your principles and practice. You may also attach relevant supporting documentation)*
2. What do you (and colleges generally) offer that is not available in social care settings? *(How do you know? What evidence is there?)*
3. What are the learning outcomes for your students? *(What do they learn and achieve that they would not have done anyway? What difference does college education make to their lives?)*

4. How do you plan for transition on from college? How effective is this in securing sustained learning and improved quality of life? (*What evidence do you have?*)
  
5. What are the benefits of attending college? (*What are the disadvantages? How can they be overcome? Are there any additional benefits/disadvantages of the day vs residential context?*)
  
6. What is the measurable long term value? (*How do you measure it? How does college provision add value?*)
  
7. What destination data do you collect and what does it tell you? (*At what points do you follow up former students? What do they say? What information do you collect and how?*)
  
8. How would you make the case to a Local Authority for the value of college provision? (*Do you have any examples of where this has been done successfully?*)
  
9. Do you have any other comments?
  
10. Would you be willing to provide further information and /or be interviewed?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Please email it to [sallyfaraday@hotmail.com](mailto:sallyfaraday@hotmail.com) by **Friday 8<sup>th</sup> November**

## References

Hereward College & Linkage College: Social Impact Evaluation using Social Return on Investment (2012) Baker Tilley

National Audit Office (2011) *Department for Education Oversight of special education for young people aged 16–25*. (Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General HC 1585 Session 2010–20124 November 2011)

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## Contributors

We are grateful to the staff from the following organisations who contributed to this study.

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Lifeworks College  
Lufton College  
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National Star College  
Orchard Hill College  
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Royal National College for the Blind  
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Sense College  
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