

About Natspec

Natspec is the membership association for organisations, including colleges and independent providers, which offer specialist further education and training provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Natspec's vision is that all young people with learning difficulties or disabilities can access quality education and training which meets their individual needs and supports their aspirations for skills, work and life.

Our mission is to promote specialism and personalisation within a diverse range of further education and training provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that broadens their choice, supports their aspirations, represents their best interests and provides a social return on investment.

Our policy priorities 2019 to 2020

During 2019 and 2020, we will be focussing on work that we believe will have **the most impact** for further education for young people with complex needs.

Our policy priorities and calls to action fall under four themes:

1. **Continuous Improvement** to achieve high quality education in all settings, including a relentless focus on staff development and sharing of expertise.
2. Effective **communication** with partner organisations, government departments, funding agencies and local authorities to develop a shared vision for specialist further education, listen to concerns, dispel myths and misperceptions and build productive relationships.
3. Planning to create **clear patterns of provision**, which defines universal services for every local area, and the more specialist expertise that it is more efficient and effective to provide at regional or national level, investing in centres of expertise to support and train the wider workforce.
4. Working with local authorities to achieve effective **commissioning** practices, including research with the LGA, lobbying to prevent poorly planned new provision, and working nationally with DfE to achieve more uniformity of contracting processes.

What we are calling for: specific recommendations

Our specific recommendations for 2019 to 2020 are shown below, together with the link to the relevant generic theme.

1. Planning for specialism: Universal or specialist?

We call for the production of clear national guidance defining the universal SEND provision that local authorities should commission in every local area, and the more specialist services that it is more cost-effective to provide regionally or nationally. This guidance would need to recognise the differences between schools and FE in terms of catchment areas, patterns of provision, transport, programmes, funding systems and trends. **(CLEAR PATTERNS OF PROVISION / COMMISSIONING)**

2. Workforce development

We call for national investment into centres of specialist expertise. These centres would act as central “hubs”, enabling specialists to come together and maintain and develop their expertise in particular types of SEN, or undertake innovative research. The centres would also reach out and develop training and education programmes to upskill the workforce and support local and mainstream providers. **(CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT)**

3. Value for money

The high needs budget is limited and stretched, and inefficiencies at all levels should be minimised. The adversarial system results in a great deal of resource being used for appeals, disputes and tribunals. We call for more efficient and longer-term planning, with research identify the specific demographic or cohorts of the small numbers of young people that require highly specialised and/or residential provision, particularly post-19. Further value for money and return on investment studies should be undertaken to acknowledge the long-term economic and social value of the outcomes achieved for this group. We also call for the creation of a mechanism for local authorities to enable them to off-set the short term expenditure on education against the longer term savings to health and social care budgets, and which also enables them combine their budgets at regional or sub-national level to secure provision for the small numbers of young people identified. **(COMMUNICATION / CLEAR PATTERNS OF PROVISION)**

4. Funding for FE

Even with the more effective use of resources proposed above, the total amount in the high needs budget is not sufficient to meet demand. We call for an increase to the funding in the HNF system for post-school education (16 to 25), particularly post-19, to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of young people coming through the system. **(COMMISSIONING/ CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT)**

5. Increase regulation to ensure quality

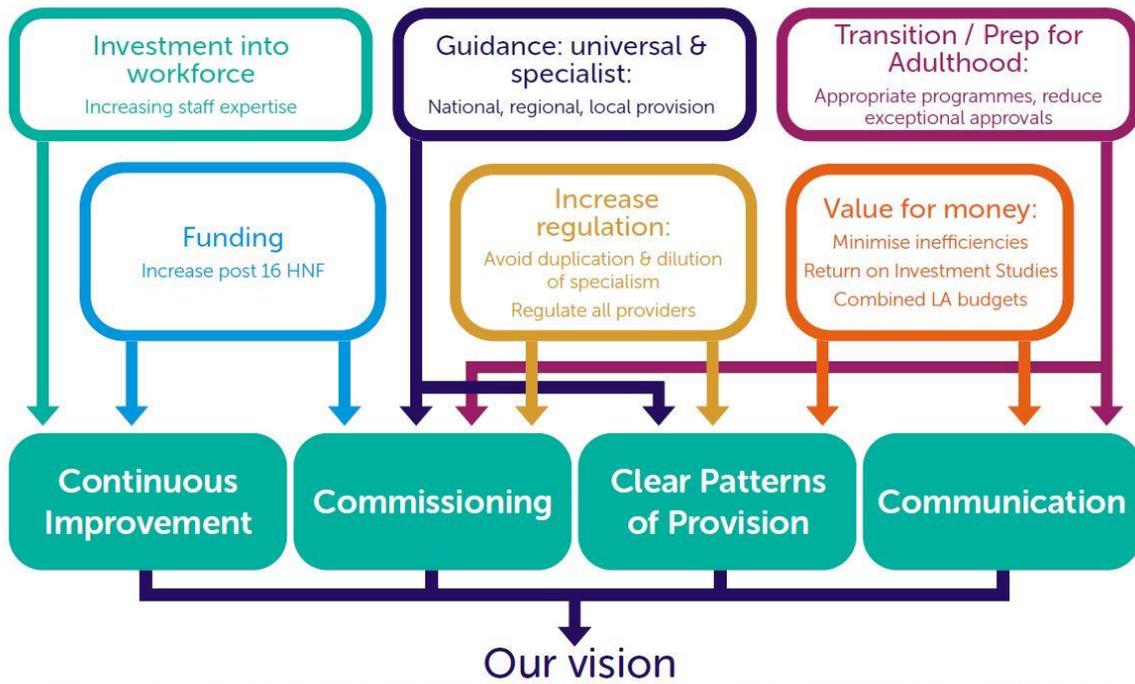
Changing patterns of provision and an increase in the number of local providers risks diluting specialism and reducing quality. We call for an extension of regulation so that all organisations that provide specialist post-school education, not just those providers funded by the ESFA, are identified and inspected. **(COMMISSIONING/ CLEAR PATTERNS)**

6. Transition to college / Preparing for Adulthood

Leaving school and moving to college is a key transition, helping young people to prepare for adult life and giving them an opportunity for a fresh start. There should be a marked difference between school and post-school settings, with the focus on an adult learning environment, with age appropriate high-quality provision with a philosophy and curriculum based on preparing for adulthood. We call for the Department of Education to reduce the number of exceptional approvals given to schools to retain students past the age of 19, and for tighter controls on establishing new provision that emerges from schools to ensure they are not an extension of the school provision. **(CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT / COMMUNICATION / COMMISSIONING)**

The diagram overleaf summarises how our vision, policy priorities and recommendations link together.

What are we looking to achieve?



All young people with learning difficulties or disabilities **can access** quality education and training which **meets their individual needs** and supports their aspirations for **skills, work and life**