

What are specialist colleges doing to support home learning?

In the last month, life at specialist colleges has changed rapidly. Colleges have adapted to the situation, taking measures to keep learners safe. Some learners remain in college, often on new, adapted timetables, as this is the safest place for them. But many are safest at home, which has meant new challenges as colleges look to adopt home based learning, often for the first time.

The nature of learning in specialist colleges is often highly experiential, sometimes with 1-1 teaching and support available. The work specialist colleges do cannot be fully replicated online. But specialist colleges have sought to provide continuity of provision where possible, through a variety of means.

Natspec is supporting our members in doing so. We've been putting together [resources](#), working with our colleges on how we ensure quality at this time, and our TechAbility service is offering [technical guidance](#) and [webinars on putting technology in place to support remote learning](#). We are working on a formal project to produce high quality resources on a range of themes, which will be published in the coming weeks, but in the meantime we've collected some examples of college approaches here.

Online learning



Colleges are using a variety of means to help students access learning online, with some sending laptops or iPads home, as well as assistive technology equipment.

At Hereward College, a virtual college has been set up. Sitting within Hereward's main website, the page is easy for anyone and everyone to access, providing support beyond Hereward's own students. The Hub provides links to a variety of resources, with

suggested timetables for the day as well as activities to fill it. Resources are organised handily into sections, making it easy to identify activities and tasks depending on learner skill and need.

Students at Foxes Academy are taking part in functional skills lessons at home by, for example, taking a virtual city break to Paris, visiting a museum and sending an e-postcard. Replicating the vocational, hotel-based training has required the education team to get creative – but students are now using their skills to wine and dine their families, instead.

It's easy to see that learners at Derwen College are engaging with their online learning, through the college's multiple social media accounts. Students are showing off their independent living skills by baking, cooking meals, and cleaning their homes. Tutors have been posting regularly to the accounts with task ideas for the students.



Physical/hard copy learning packs

Home learning does not always rely on technology or online learning. For students who are used to the predictable routine in college, adjusting to home learning has been a huge transition and a challenge for many learners. All students in specialist colleges have Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans, with targets for learning set out within



them. All specialist colleges have used these to set work within hard copy home learning packs, a method that enables greater opportunities for different formats. Often, they can include materials that students have been working on, or are already familiar with from college.

Parents or carers are getting involved, for example by recording the work achieved, and colleges are collecting examples of work sent into college and monitoring when targets are being met.

Leap College and Landmarks Specialist College are two of the many colleges that have supported this transition by providing learning-from-home packs for their students. At Leap, staff have sent out hard copy work packs including daily activities, structured routines, targets, visuals, Preparation for Adulthood resources and functional skills activities adapted to be transferable in the home.



At Landmarks, packs contain a variety of information and ideas for parents and carers. There's information on how targets and functional skills development can be embedded into daily routines. For students taking recognised qualifications, the packs include practice qualification papers. There's also accessible and easy-read information about the coronavirus and why students are working at home.

The packs are supplemented with close contact and support from Learning Support Assistants. Phone, emails and Zoom meetings are being used by LSAs to support learners working through their packs. Tutors and LSAs at the college have embraced

Zoom to continue learning in the face-to-face format, providing art sessions and weekly tutorials.

Remote therapy

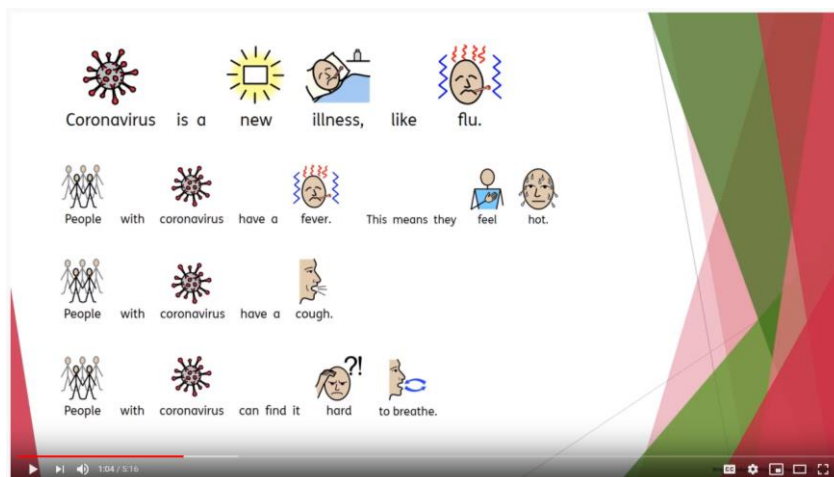
Colleges are also being inventive with their approaches in ensuring continuity of provision for therapy. A number of colleges are providing speech and language therapy sessions using video conferencing software. Some are sending out exercises and programmes for learners to complete at home. Therapy staff are embracing a collaborative approach with parents and carers to make therapy work for young people.

Remote wellbeing support

In these challenging times, colleges are also stepping up to provide pastoral support throughout the crisis. Perhaps the hardest challenge has been in communicating why everything is happening.

All colleges are checking in with students and their families regularly, by phone, email or video chat as appropriate. Counselling staff and tutors are available for students as needed. Chadsgrove Educational Trust have sent students birthday and Easter cards to keep their spirits up.

Staff at Homefield College have developed a programme called "Homefield from home" and have put together a range of resources including an accessible, easy-to-read video aimed at young people with learning disabilities.



Social media is being put to good use for keeping in touch with students. On Facebook, Communication Specialist College Doncaster is hosting daily mindfulness sessions. The sessions, signed in BSL, provide an opportunity for students to take a break from their day and recentre themselves.