



Specialist Further Education Colleges in Wales – A Guide

Specialist further education colleges in Wales

This document is for professionals with responsibility for further education and training for young people with complex additional learning needs (ALN) whose additional learning provision (ALP) may be a specialist further education college. It outlines what specialist further education colleges do and how they differ from mainstream further education colleges and social care providers. It also includes a list of colleges in Wales and on the border with England.

The ALN legislation refers to specialist further education colleges as independent post-16 institutions (ISPIs) and mainstream further education colleges as further education institutions (FEIs).

Most young people with complex ALN will progress from school to programmes at their regional further education colleges. For some young people with complex ALN, an FEI will be unable to meet their needs, and their additional learning provision will be identified as a specialist further education college.



What do specialist colleges do?

Specialist further education colleges specialise in meeting the needs of young people aged 16 – 25 with complex additional learning needs. They provide a valuable stepping-stone between school and adult life representing a staged progression from the highly supportive environment of school into their lives 'in the real world' and beyond full-time education. For some young people, specialist FE can be a stepping stone between school and a move into FEIs.

Some colleges specialise in supporting students with a particular type of need, e.g. autism or vision impairment. All have multi-disciplinary teams including tutors, support staff, therapists and care professionals who plan and deliver students' programmes and monitor their progress. Some specialist colleges offer residential places or supported living options on site, with placements of between 36 and 52 weeks per year; all offer day places.

Reflecting the needs of the particular student groups they serve, specialist colleges provide a high degree of personalisation. Some specialist colleges have a partnership arrangement with a local FEI, enabling students to access a particular course at the partner college (e.g. a BTEC or an A level) while undertaking the rest of their programme in the specialist setting.



What types of courses do colleges offer?

Within the ALN code, all courses for 16–19-year-olds and 19–25-year-olds in specialist FE colleges are known as 'study programmes'. They may or may not include qualifications.

Courses – or study programmes – may focus primarily on preparation for employment, building skills to increase independence or on a combination of these. Colleges plan a broad and balanced curriculum for each individual tailored to ensure the inclusion of desired outcomes in learning plans such as Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and Individual Development Plans (IDPs).

Study programmes that focus on preparation for employment will include an element of work experience, usually with an external employer, and there will be a strong focus on developing skills and behaviours for work.

All study programmes are designed to build independence and are highly personalised to match the specific needs of the individual. There will almost always be a strong focus on communication skills, including expressing preferences and making choices and decisions, to enable the young people to become more active agents in their own lives. Programmes might also include the development of personal skills such as developing self-reliance and managing anxiety. They may also focus on independent travel, looking after yourself and home, healthy eating and exercise, making friends and managing relationships, online safety, and using community facilities.



What types of courses do colleges offer?

While students will typically have a classroom base, they will usually spend a proportion of their learning time out in the community or in other settings on the college site, such as in a college shop, café or social enterprise. They will typically be engaged in group activities with a strong emphasis on learning through doing. Some of these programmes may lead to qualifications at Entry Level, for example in skills for independent living.



How long is a college course at a specialist FE college?

Most further education courses last for two years. The complexity of some individuals' additional learning needs may sometimes result in them requiring three years to complete their programmes.

What are the key differences between school and college for young people with complex ALN?

- Courses at college focus very strongly on preparing students for adult life, including employment or the development of work-related skills. The content of their study programme will be determined by their post-college progression goals. Much of their learning may take place out of the classroom, e.g. in a workshop, a social enterprise, the workplace or the wider community. The variety of subject areas on offer at college is usually much greater than at school.
- College students are treated as young adults. For example, they may be supported to assess risks for themselves, rather than simply be protected from them. There is a more equal relationship between teacher and student. For example, students will typically address staff by their first names.
- There will be a strong emphasis on working towards making each young person as independent as possible. This will happen in a gradual way, with support being reduced over time, wherever possible, as the young person's independence grows.
- Schools cannot keep young people after the age of 19. However, specialist and mainstream further education colleges have no upper age limit. Almost all young people who remain on a course beyond the age of 19 complete their further education by the age of 23, with many finishing aged 20 or 21.

What are the key differences between a specialist college and social care?

- Young people at specialist colleges are students enrolled on adult-orientated destination-led study programmes and have a full range of desired outcomes they will be supported to achieve to best prepare them for post-college adult living.
- Each student's programme of study includes comprehensive and multi-disciplinary baseline assessments against which progress is assessed and recorded. Study programmes combine therapeutic and learning outcomes to support students to build the necessary skills for wellbeing in adult life e.g. learning to self-regulate and manage anxiety-related behaviour. Students may work with speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists and physiotherapists, behavioural and communication experts to achieve their goals.
- Students at specialist colleges are supported to develop and maintain independent peer friendships and to grow social skills through interactions with other learners; for example through working together in project-based learning activities, interest groups or specific disability and learning difficulty environments. In preparation for their post-college lives, students are supported to understand their interests and hobbies and manage their own time.
- Students in specialist colleges within their programmes of study will be supported to develop their understanding of sex and relationships, PREVENT, digital literacy and internet safety.
- Specialist colleges focus on the continued growth of individuals' independent life skills including communication, self advocacy and identifying post-college aspirations and goals.

Specialist further education colleges in Wales and on the English border

Aspris College North & Aspris College South

Wrexham & Cwmbran, Torfaen

Working in partnership with Coleg Cambia and Coleg Gwent offering day programmes for young people aged 16-25 years with autistic spectrum and associated conditions Aspris colleges provide safe and supportive specialist learning environments. With specialist therapeutic support young adults can explore their own experiences, helping them to develop strategies for managing their condition as part of their lives. The colleges also provide accredited independence training covering transport, access to benefits and services, financial assistance and confidence building.

Contact:

North Wales: Principal Rachel Devine racheldevine@asprisCS.co.uk

South Wales: Principal Kath Lawler kathlawler@asprisCS.co.uk

Beechwood College

Ludlow Street Healthcare, Sully, Cardiff

Beechwood College offers inspirational education for young people with an Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) and other associated conditions. Beechwood aims to unlock potential by delivering individual programmes of study that are based around a clear assessment of each student's primary needs. Beechwood's vision and philosophy is based upon the principles of TEACCH, PECS and Makaton. They provide 24 hour, 7 days-a-week care and support for every residential student in every aspect of their daily lives.

Contact:

Principal Rachel Newman rachel.newman@lshealthcare.co.uk

Specialist further education colleges in Wales and on the English border

Coleg Elidyr, Elidyr Communities Trust

Rhandirmwyn, Carmarthenshire

Judged as 'Excellent' by Estyn in all five inspection areas, and with advanced accreditation by the National Autistic Society, Coleg Elidyr ensures young adults with moderate to severe learning difficulties and disabilities are given every opportunity to increase their post-college life chances. A multi-disciplinary therapeutic team, a 24 hour curriculum and Total Communication ethos all ensure care and education staff work closely together to progress individuals' skills for life and work.

Contact:

Head of Education and Training Geraint Wadley
geraintwadley@elidyrct.ac.uk

Derwen College

Gobowen, Shropshire

Awarded Ofsted 'Outstanding' at three consecutive inspections, Derwen provides rich learning environments for young people with many conditions including: learning and physical disabilities, autism, medical needs and behaviours of concern.

Derwen's specialism is building employability skills through authentic work opportunities in their commercial outlets and off-campus with partners in the wider community.

Contact:

Admissions Manager Penny Perry penny.perry@derwen.ac.uk

Specialist further education colleges in Wales and on the English border

National Star College

Mamhilad, Pontypool & Ullenwood, Cheltenham

National Star are specialists working with young students with disabilities and learning difficulties, enabling them to achieve their aspirations in life. This includes young people with very complex needs and those who aspire to get a job. National Star offer full- and part-time, residential and day courses in campuses in Gloucestershire and Torfaen.

Personalised learning programmes incorporating therapy (physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech, drama & music therapy) and life skills (residential experience) are delivered at the level most appropriate for the young person.

Contact:

Pontypool: Principal John Mann jmann@nationalstar.org

Cheltenham: Director of Funding Dave Dalby ddalby@nationalstar.org

Pengwern College, Cambian Group

Rhuddlan, Nr Rhyl, Denbeighshire

Pengwern College provides day and residential programmes for young people aged 16-25 years with autistic spectrum and associated conditions. A team of highly skilled tutors and multi-disciplinary support staff support the achievements of young people with autism, moderate to severe learning difficulties and complex needs including medical needs. All students follow an individualised programme of practical life skills development within real-life supported living and community environments.

Contact:

Assistant Principal Karen Ford karen.ford@cambianguroup.com

Specialist further education colleges in Wales and on the English border

Plas Dwbl & Ty'r Eithin, Ruskin Mill Trust

Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire

Part of the Ruskin Mill Trust, Plas Dwbl and Ty'r Eithin offer person-centred and holistic land-based day and residential programmes for young people aged 16-25 years with autistic spectrum and associated conditions. The college offers young people its unique Practical Skills Therapeutic Education, learning through meaningful real-life activities and accredited courses. The colleges provide a range of full nutritional, therapeutic and medical support.

Contact:

Principal Barry Wilkinson barry.wilkinson@rmt.org

The Royal National College for the Blind (RNC)

Hereford

RNC is the UK's leading specialist residential college for people aged 16+ who are visually impaired. The college offers a wide range of GCSEs, A1 and A2 Levels, BTECs, NVQs and OCRs. It is home to the UK's first Sports Academy for blind and partially sighted players of football, goalball, golf and judo. It also offers the first VI Cisco Networking Academy in the northern hemisphere. Support and teaching are provided by a dedicated and highly skilled team of specialist staff using first class resources and facilities. The college also offers a comprehensive work experience programme, together with full transitional support for students wishing to progress into work or university.

Contact:

Director of Learning Nicola Smith nicola.smith@rnc.ac.uk

Specialist further education colleges in Wales and on the English border

Weston House, Bridgend College

Weston House is a purpose built fully inclusive residential centre within the grounds of Bridgend College for young adults between 16 and 25 who have complex additional learning needs and disabilities. We offer a residential education programme for all of our learners in conjunction with a full-time academic course on offer at the college from pre-Entry to HE Level depending on individual ability and aspiration. We are able to support learners with a wide range of needs including learning disabilities, medical conditions, physical disabilities, autism and sensory and communication difficulties.

Contact:

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This guide was produced by Natspec

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