

putting learners with SEND at the centre of FE provision:

a partnership approach

How partnership-working between specialist and general further education colleges can improve provision for learners with special education needs and disabilities (SEND)



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# Executive summary

## Introduction

Learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in further education typically attend either a specialist or a general FE (GFE) college.

This project set out to

* test whether partnership-working across the two different types of college could result in a better quality of provision for learners with SEND.
* determine what makes for effective partnership-working between specialist and general FE colleges and where the barriers lie.

13 partnerships, each including a specialist FE college and a general FE college, worked on a shared project with the support of a facilitator and a small amount of funding which was largely used to free up staff time.

**Making a positive difference for learners with SEND through partnership-working**

A number of distinct areas in which partnership-working can benefit learners with SEND have emerged through this project. These include:

**Extending or enriching learning opportunities for young people**

Examples include colleges combining forces to increase the range of work placements available, specialist college sports and fitness learners running enrichment sessions for GFE learners; colleges opening up access to their sites and facilities to both sets of learners including for work experience; and two colleges ‘sharing a learner’ with some aspects of provision delivered by one and some by the other.

**Enabling learners to progress further or more fully reach their potential**

Several partnerships are focused on transition from specialist FE to general FE for learners who might not otherwise have been able to access higher levels of learning. These include learners with high support needs or at risk of early drop-out from a GFE setting. The projects variously involve on-site taster sessions for the specialist college learners, liaison between support staff in both settings to develop the GFE’s capacity to meet the learners’ needs, and coordinated curriculum planning to aid sequential learning across the two settings.

**Upskilling the current and future workforce to better meet learner need**

Over half the projects include some focus on continuous professional development (CPD). Activities include building communities of practice across the partner organisations, opening up planned CPD sessions to each other’s staff, and exchanging in-house training that reflects their different expertise. Two projects involve specialist college learners designing and delivering training, on autism to GFE staff and on supporting people with a learning disability to GFE learners on a degree course.

**Supporting greater inclusion**

One specialist college is providing advice, guidance and support services to a neighbouring GFE to enable them to enrol students with high-level health needs onto mainstream courses. Two colleges are working together to enable learners returning from out-of-area residential provision to transfer skills learned while away from home and become active citizens in their own communities.

## Critical success factors and challenges

The most effective partnerships in this project are based on shared values, vision and ethos; they are further strengthened by personal connections between key individuals. They are characterised by a lack of competitiveness between the two organisations and built on a realisation that the two colleges have complementary offers and strengths. Openness, honesty, generosity and trust have allowed partnerships to develop and more has been achieved where there is a shared sense of ownership and responsibility for making things happen. These partnerships have also made time to meet, plan together, work outside of meetings on project actions and crucially to actively build a relationship not just between project leads but more broadly between their two organisations.

## Challenges and barriers

Covid-19, staff shortages and lack of time have all been key challenges. Changing personnel briefly de-stabilised a couple of partnerships but they were able to recover after a short hiatus. Over-ambitious goals or a lack of focus on specific outcomes slowed down progress for some but refining their aims mid-project enabled them to work effectively thereafter. Several projects have realised they can only go so far without involvement from other stakeholders including parents and carers, employers and critically local authorities; engaging these partners has been challenging for some.

## Conclusions

This project has demonstrated that partnership-working has the potential to benefit learners with SEND and the staff who support them. To realise these benefits, colleges need dedicated time and space to explore approaches that are workable in their specific circumstances and build the necessary relationships. While much can be achieved without any change to the status quo, systemic changes are likely to be necessary (for example to sub-contracting rules or commissioning practice) to maximise the opportunities afforded by partnership-working and to extend this way of working across the sector. It will also require local authorities to appreciate the distinct contribution to the local offer of each college and see them as providers of services which could be combined to create provision designed around the young person – rather than provision types into which a learner must be pigeon-holed.

## Recommended next steps

Most of the partnerships have focused to date on exploring possibilities, investigating different options, and doing the groundwork needed to drive forward their joint initiatives. They intend to launch planned new ways of working from September 2022. To achieve sustainability for their new practice, they will be considering how to build it into existing cycles, frameworks, policies or job descriptions, as appropriate, so that it becomes the norm. This will also mean committing ongoing funding and resources, both to the shared practice and to maintaining their relationship, and bringing other stakeholders onboard.

AoC and Natspec recommend that

* the partnerships now consider how to engage local authorities in their projects in order to achieve sustainability, and what changes in perception and commissioning practice by local authorities will be needed to make partnership-working part of a new normal in the further education of learners with SEND.
* the Education and Training Foundation provides continuing funding and facilitator support to help the partnerships maintain momentum. Following their progress into the implementation stage will enable the Foundation to understand how the exciting plans described in this report can be put into practice, scaled up or turned into ‘business as usual’, and to share this learning with the sector.
* the Education and Training Foundation specifically analyses the systemic barriers to partnership-working identified by the partnerships as they implement their plans and makes recommendations to the appropriate bodies for systemic changes to support this way of working.



# Background

Further education (FE) for learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is currently based on a binary system where most young people are placed in either a general or a specialist FE college. This system makes it very difficult for learners to benefit from a combination of the services or opportunities that each type of college can offer, despite the fact that it is not always easy for a single setting to meet all of the needs of a young person or support them to achieve all of their planned outcomes.

A paucity of existing relationships between specialist and general FE colleges, and limited staff time and capacity to invest in establishing new ones, has made it difficult - until now - to test out the hypothesis that partnership-working could result in better provision for learners with SEND.

In the spring of 2021, Natspec and the Association of Colleges (AoC) began to shape an exploratory project to test out the potential of partnership-working to benefit learners with SEND, better understand the barriers to working in this way, and identify systemic changes that would be needed to facilitate sustained effective partnership-working. They were also interested in identifying whether collaboration of this nature might lead to more efficient use of the over-stretched high needs budget. Interest levels in joining the project were high from both specialist and general FE colleges. A successful bid for funding from the Education and Training Foundation in autumn 2021 allowed Natspec and AoC to fully implement their project plans.

# AIMS

The core aims of the phase of the project sponsored by the Education and Training Foundation were to

* establish where partnership-working between specialist and general FE colleges has the potential to lead to enhanced experiences and better outcomes for learners with SEND
* test out what needs to be in place to make partnerships effective and long-lasting
* enthuse colleagues across the sector about the potential gains of working in partnerships for learners with SEND by engaging senior leaders in strategic conversations, involving managers, practitioners and learners in operational activity and sharing their learning, progress and achievements across the sector.

# METHODOLOGY

15 partnerships involving 26 different colleges were recruited to the project through an invitation issued to members by Natspec (specialist FE colleges) and AoC (general FE colleges). While some colleges - one general and one specialist - applied together, others expressed an interest in being paired up with a college of the opposite type with similar ambitions for partnership-working. These pairings were organised by AoC and Natspec staff.

Partnerships were selected on the basis that they were

* interested in testing out a range of different ways of working together
* focused on achieving different benefits for learners and staff
* situated in a range of different geographical areas
* of different sizes, with varying learner cohorts and with a range of different specialisms or expertise.

Two partnerships left the project in the early stages, one due to lack of time to commit to the work and one because they were unable to establish a shared vision for the project. More information on their circumstances is provided in the section on partnership-working below.

The colleges attended an online briefing session in which the overall project aims were shared and the individual partnerships described their nascent plans. Emails were sent at the start of the project to the home local authority of each of the colleges involved, explaining the nature of the project, and recommending that local authority representatives engaged with the partnership in their area. The colleges involved were each given a small amount of funding and the partnership provided with six days of support from an experienced facilitator with a good knowledge of SEND in FE. They were required to submit an action plan, monthly progress reports and a progress summary including reflections on partnership-working which they produced with the support of their facilitator.

Facilitators attended regular meetings with the project coordinator and took part in a focus group to gather their reflections on the effectiveness of the partnerships.

By March 2022, the partnerships reported that

* 48 senior leaders within the specialist and general FE colleges had engaged in strategic conversations with the intention of taking forward partnership-working.
* 212 managers, practitioners and learners across the colleges had been involved in operational activity related to their project plans, of whom 21 were learners.

# MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

**Where might partnership-working be the solution?**

Across the thirteen partnerships, a number of distinct areas in which partnership-working can benefit learners with SEND have emerged. These include:

### Extending or enriching learning opportunities for young people

Harrogate College and Henshaws College have combined forces to create a wider range of work placement opportunities for their learners with high needs, with a view to improving their post-college employment prospects. Harrogate College has brought an extensive set of employer contacts to the project, while Henshaws College has brought its expertise in supporting learners with SEND in the workplace through the use of trained job coaches and an understanding of job-carving, which they have been able to articulate to employers. By combining resources and expertise, they hope to secure high-quality, tailored work placements – and routes to employment – for learners who might not otherwise have had this opportunity.

Plans are in place for Derwen College sports and fitness learners to run enrichment sessions for learners at Hereford, Ludlow and North Shropshire College, giving them an authentic experience of sports leadership, which will count towards their qualification. This is one of a series of joint activities planned by this partnership which see learners from both colleges, with and without SEND, being brought together to break down barriers and expand their understanding of one another.

Bournemouth and Poole College (BPC) and The Sheiling College have identified ways in which they might enrich learning opportunities by sharing facilities. The Sheiling College has an extensive rural site which they will be opening to BPC learners for forestry work placements in the summer term. In return, BPC is identifying vocational experiences it could offer to Sheiling learners on its site.

St Piers College has ambitions to offer short-term residential experiences to East Kent College learners to enhance their independence skills programme. This would involve learners from the general FE college spending time away from home in the specialist college’s residential accommodation. They would be able to practise their household skills and get a taste of what it would mean to live independently or in supported accommodation in the future. While both colleges are keen to achieve this aim, further work with the local authority is needed to secure the additional funding and commissioner commitment that would make this possible.

National Star College and the Warwickshire College Group have been exploring the concept of ‘sharing a learner’, so that individual learners are able to access a broader range of subject areas and specialist expertise than could be provided by a single college. They have drafted an ‘operational blueprint’ to track the learner journey through collaborative provision. A range of funding and commissioning issues remain to be resolved in order to make the approach fully operable, but it has the potential to open up new opportunities for learners beyond those possible in the current binary system.

### Enabling learners to progress further or more fully reach their potential

Works4U and Tameside College are developing a progression pathway where a learner starts their FE journey in the specialist college, building up their skills and confidence and addressing barriers to learning, before moving onto the general FE college with its wider range of vocational courses and more specialist vocational staff. By working together on curriculum planning they intend to create a well-sequenced programme across the two settings which prepares the learners to move smoothly from one stage to the next and avoids repeat learning. They are targeting learners who might otherwise have held no aspirations to enrol at a general FE college or would be at risk of early placement breakdown.

The Heart of Birmingham Vocational College (HBVC) and South and City College, Birmingham (SCCB) project has a similar aim – to enable those learners with the potential to progress in their vocational learning to do so by moving from a specialist to a general FE setting. They are designing a transition programme that will see HBVC learners spend part of their week at SCCB, accessing taster courses to help them determine a suitable vocational route and allowing them to adjust gradually to the larger, busier GFE environment. They believe this will result in more successful transitions and, for some learners through having a period of combined rather than sequential experience of specialist and general FE, a speedier route into the GFE college.

Queen Alexandra College (QAC) and South and City College, Birmingham (SCCB) are collaborating on a carefully managed handover to enable learners with the cognitive ability to access more advanced vocational learning to move on from the specialist college to the GFE college. Currently, the inability of the GFE college to meet their complex needs is acting as a barrier to this type of progression. The handover involves QAC learners accessing a range of taster opportunities at SCCB for 12 hours per week over their final term. They will be supported by QAC support staff during this period, with opportunities for the QAC staff, experienced in working with the learners, to upskill SCCB staff so that they are able to support the learners effectively once they progress the following year. This arrangement should result in the learners being able to achieve at a higher level than would have been possible in the specialist setting *and* to continue to have their support needs met.

### Upskilling the current and future workforce to better meet learner need

Most of the partnerships, whatever their core aim, include some sharing or exchanging of expertise between general and specialist FE colleges. For some partnerships, however, partnership-working to achieve a more skilled and hence more effective workforce is central to their project.

Canto Learning, Moulton College and Northampton College, the only three-college partnership in the project, are developing a ‘bottom-up’ approach to up-skilling staff through building a community of practice across their organisations. They are bringing together support staff from the three settings to identify and create solutions for common challenges when working with learners with SEND. The partnership has held a pilot event, which they have termed a ‘Collabo Café’, where staff in support roles from each college met in a semi-informal environment to discuss effective ways to support learners with autism. They shared case studies and exchanged strategies for providing high quality support. In order to capture the challenges and solutions discussed and the impact of the subsequent changes made to practice, the partnership is developing ‘Collabo cards’. These at-a-glance resources will be used in future staff development activity. Opening up these events to support staff from all three colleges is bringing an increased range of experience and perspective to their peer learning approach. This partnership has produced an audit tool to help colleges work together to plan a shared approach to continuous professional development. See Appendix 1.

West Thames College is drawing on the ‘expertise by experience’ of learners from its co-located partner, Ambitious College. Ambitious learners have designed a training module to help teachers in the GFE to develop effective practice when working with autistic learners on mainstream courses. West Thames College was motivated to seek out their support when it became apparent through learner feedback that their current approach could be improved. The module includes advice on delivery, environment and the setting of appropriate tasks. It will be delivered by the learners, giving them an excellent opportunity to practise their communication skills, and should result in a more inclusive learning experience for learners in the GFE.

Newcastle College and Hedley’s College are looking further ahead to the future workforce. Newcastle College approached Hedley’s College, which is part of the broader Percy Hedley Foundation, as an employer, to ask for their assistance in identifying skills gaps that they could address for learners aiming for careers in the health, social care and education sectors. The Principal at Hedley’s College suggested that the learners needed to develop their understanding of learning disability and in particular recognise that while care is needed for this population, so is support to develop and maintain independence. The specialist college principal is now acting as an adviser on the GFE’s new Integrated Health, Social Care and Wellbeing degree course and Hedley’s students are co-creating a module for the course on supporting people with SEND, including what they want to see in future professionals in the sector and what it is like to live with a disability. Graduates from this course are therefore more likely to beskilled in providing support in a way that fosters increased independence, rather than over-supporting which can result in limited agency for people with learning disabilities.

A number of specialist colleges are offering work placements to GFE students on health and social care courses. Five level 3 health and social care learners from Hereford, Ludlow and North Shropshire College are currently on placement in the student residences at Derwen College for one day per week. The principal of The Sheiling College has twice met with learners on a level 3 health and social care course at Bournemouth and Poole College (BPC) to outline the challenges of working in care and ways to make the service user’s experience more positive. He is now considering how they could offer work experience to BPC students on the Sheiling College site. These experiences are likely to result in graduates not only being better prepared to support young people with SEND but also being more aware of further education colleges as a potential future employer; this could be very beneficial at a time when recruitment and retention of support staff is a key challenge for the sector.

Where partnerships include shared approaches to continuous professional development as one of a number of strands, this is sometimes being achieved in a fairly informal way through learning visits to each other’s sites, observations of each other’s practices or discussions between colleagues. Some projects have engineered very specific learning opportunities to support achievement of the broader aims of their project: Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group (NSCG) has invited Newfriars staff to ‘shadow’ previous Newfriars learners who have progressed to NSCG to more fully understand life at NSCG and hence better prepare future transferring learners for a successful move to the GFE.

Partners have also run or are planning training sessions for one another. Specialist colleges have shared practices that are relatively well-established in their settings, and for which there is an increasing need in GFEs. Examples include using RARPA (provided by Heart of Birmingham College for South and City College, Birmingham); positive behaviour support (planned as an offer by Derwen College for Hereford, Ludlow and North Shropshire College) and de-escalation and physical restraint techniques (planned as an offer by Newfriars College for NSCG).

Several colleges have opened up their CPD programmes to staff from their partner college. For example, NSCG has provided details of a comprehensive online CPD offer to Newfriars College, where staff have already expressed an interest in attending sessions on mental health, autism, and behaviour management. Learning alongside colleagues from different settings should result in a richer learning experience and greater exchange of effective strategies and techniques. It may also prove financially efficient to share training in this way.

### Supporting greater inclusion

While general FE colleges already cater for 90% of FE learners with an EHC Plan, there is a small number of learners who face barriers to accessing a general FE college because of the complexity of their needs, despite their having the cognitive ability to succeed on a mainstream course. Learners with complex health needs are one such group. Orchard Hill College (OHC) has been working with Crawley College (part of the Chichester Group of Colleges) to provide the specialist input to make it possible for young people with complex health needs to access courses alongside their non-disabled peers. They have produced [a short video explaining their work](https://youtu.be/X4KNX0STJ4M). They have also developed a checklist of requirements needed to provide support effectively to individual learners.The checklist covers risk assessment, care plan, competency sign-off and specialist training. Crawley College will use it at the consult stage to determine whether they are able to meet an individual’s needs and what additional services they would need to buy in, in order to do so. The two colleges are currently working on an arrangement whereby Crawley College will be able to purchase specialist health services from OHC as and when they are needed. As a result, more young people will be able to make the choice to go to a GFE alongside their peers. The checklist and a sample breakdown of nursing services chargeable to the GFE are included at Appendix 2 and 3.

Where learners’ needs are such that they need specialist residential provision, one of the challenges is to ensure that the progress they have made in this setting is not lost when they return to their home area. They need support to transfer skills and to become active citizens in their own communities. East Kent College and St Piers College are working together to each broaden their understanding of the other’s provision with a view to creating processes and protocols, underpinned by a transition guide, to enable the general FE college to ‘pick up where the specialist college left off’ and so secure a successful re-integration into local provision for the young people. The guide should be useful to any pair of colleges supporting such transitions.



# CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS AND CHALLENGES

## Critical success factors

The experiences of the different colleges in this project make it clear that there is no set formula for successful partnership-working. The partnerships have had different starting points and taken different approaches, but all have developed relationships, inevitably some stronger and deeper than others. However, feedback from the participants and the facilitators supporting them suggests that there are some ‘common ingredients’ that have contributed to the effectiveness of the partnerships and which are particularly evident where these have been most successful.

**Shared values, vision and ethos**

Participants described a shared desire to do their best for learners and to support them to achieve to their potential as the bedrock on which their partnership is based. One of the partnerships that broke down early in the project cited a lack of shared understanding of what constitutes high quality provision for high needs learners as a factor in their withdrawal.

Where individual leads had been able to establish a personal connection on top of shared values and vision, relationships were even stronger.

Shared values also appear to ‘trump’ existing relationships. While some partners attribute their progress to being able to build on an existing relationship between the colleges or the individuals, where values are shared, absence of a relationship – or even previous negative experiences of one another - have not got in the way.

One specialist college principal reflected, *“Before this project started the only time when the two colleges ever met was in learner tribunals in an adversarial format. The project is an exciting step forward in relationship-building for the benefit of learners and teaching staff in both colleges.”*

**Lack of rivalry**

Participants referred to their partnership being facilitated by the absence of competitiveness between the two organisations. One described the premise on which they have worked:

*“We are not two settings ‘in competition’ but each have an offer that provides different opportunities. By starting with the young person, the focus is what is the right option or pathway for that young person.”*

Another explained,

*“There was no conflict of interest between the two colleges as we both recognised what we did well and what we could learn from each other.”*

One college noted that this absence of rivalry was in stark contrast to a different partnership project in which they were involved, and which was significantly more challenging as a result.

**Openness, honesty, generosity and trust**

Participants valued each other’s willingness to acknowledge weaknesses and discuss areas of challenge. This was further enhanced when combined with a mutual desire to share expertise, resources, or ideas and support one another. One of the two partnerships that withdrew early on did so because one party felt that the level trust needed could not be established; they were not confident that the other college was being entirely open about their long-term plans and the role of the partnership within them.

**Equal commitment**

The most effective partnerships have benefited from a shared sense of ownership and responsibility for making things happen. For example, those partners who jointly developed their action plans (rather than it being drafted by one party and signed off by the other) have made more progress not just with the project but in developing their relationship.

Interestingly, it does not appear necessary for equal commitment to translate into equal input or benefit. While many of the projects are based on an even exchange, in some of the most effective partnerships one partner is giving more than the other – but this was being done willingly where both parties could see how much the learners are gaining.

**Putting in the time**

The most successful partnerships have made time to meet, plan together and work, whether together or separately, on project actions. This included project leaders freeing up the time of operational staff so they could contribute to the work. This was particularly important where delegation of elements of the work to others was essential to the project’s success.

The partners have also put time into relationship-building, specifically into getting to know each other’s provision, learner cohorts, challenges and constraints, through site visits and staff exchanges at different levels. This has allowed them to identify differences but also many similarities. Several specifically noted the importance of gradually building up this understanding and trust rather than throwing themselves straight into a joint project.

One of the partnerships that left the project did so because they were unable to commit the time needed to develop the partnership and deliver on their action plan. This was due to a number of reasons including staff shortages and sickness.

**Other factors**

Particular starting points or ways of working have clearly benefitted some of the partnerships, although they have not been critical to the success of all.

Some colleges developed a partnership agreement or terms of reference to underpin their joint working. They have found these helpful in clarifying responsibilities and in ensuring they were working to a shared set of aims. Two different examples are included at Appendix 3 and 4.

Several partnerships have found it useful to have, from the outset, a very clearly defined project that was small in scale and clearly ‘viable’. They believe that achieving these objectives together will give them a secure basis on which to move forward to tackle bigger issues together.

However, a small number entered into partnership with a far less developed sense of any specifics they wanted to achieve. Instead, they came with a shared hypothesis that partnership was likely to bring benefits to learners and staff. They have then explored together different ways in which pooling resources, expertise and facilities could be helpful, before identifying a range of initiatives to take forward.

One college involved in this type of approach commented,

*“What each setting (and by association learners and staff) has and will gain from the project has far exceeded expectations. This is because we have approached the project looking for all possible opportunities rather than a narrow focus on one aspect.”*

In contrast, another college attributed the success of their partnership so far to its being seen by both parties as solving a specific challenge already identified as in need of a solution.

A willingness to take risks together was cited by another partnership as central to their approach.

Several partnerships explicitly cited involvement in a national project as giving them the impetus to take forward a way of working they had previously considered but never prioritised sufficiently to get off the ground. It has given them an opportunity to be pro-active at a time when they are having to be constantly reactive or firefighting, as one described it. They also referred to the value of having facilitator support and some external accountability in terms of justifying the project funding and providing monthly progress reports.

## Challenges and barriers

This project is taking place during a time of enormous challenge for the further education sector. The pandemic has severely restricted face-to-face working and staff shortages have made it very difficult to find the time to focus on any activity that is not ‘core business’. All colleges identified Covid, staff shortages and lack of time as key challenges. One college noted that lack of staff availability has left the project sitting firmly with the two project leads without the benefit of the operational experience and different perspectives of a wider team who might have been able to identify potential pitfalls to planned approaches more easily.

Changing personnel has caused a couple of colleges to ‘wobble’ but they have survived; sharing their experience with other partnerships in the project prompted some to mitigate against this risk by appointing deputies who would be able to take over the leadership of the work if necessary.

Two partnerships noted that they were over-ambitious to begin with or overwhelmed by the sheer number of possible initiatives they could work on, making it difficult for them to select and focus on achieving realistic goals. Over time, they have refined their aims and are now working on smaller-scale, more viable outcomes. Participants have felt empowered to make these changes because of the way in which the overall project has been set up as an exploration of possibilities. From the outset, colleges understood that failure to achieve some project outcomes does not represent a failure of their project and that learning about what doesn’t work and why is as important as finding out what does work. This has been a powerful factor in enabling the project to retain the thirteen partnerships through such a challenging period.

A number of partnerships have realised that they can only progress so far without involving other stakeholders or getting their buy-in. Queen Alexandra College (QAC), for example, has identified as a possible barrier parental reluctance for their young person transfer to a general FE college. Some have fought hard to gain the levels of support and therapy their young person is now receiving in the specialist college; they worry this may diminish in a GFE. QAC is putting in bespoke support to reassure families that the GFE will be able to meet their young person’s needs and represents the most appropriate next step for them. The ambitions for an extended range of local supported internship options held by Newfriars College and Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group will only be realised if more local employers can be persuaded to offer internships. Work will continue to encourage the major supermarket chain, in particular, to participate.

Several partnerships have expressed concerns that their projects may stall if local authorities are not prepared to offer their support, change commissioning behaviour or recognise the different but equally valuable contributions to the local offer of both colleges. See the section below for further details.

# WHERE NEXT FOR THE PARTNERSHIPS?

## Realising their project aims

For most of the partnerships, this phase of the project has been about exploring possibilities, investigating different options, building up the relationship and doing the groundwork needed to drive forward one or more joint initiatives. Plenty of activity has already taken place particularly in relation to sharing of expertise. However, for many, the aim has always been to launch new ways of working from September 2022. This is particularly the case where the project will result in changes to the curriculum or approaches to transition between colleges. Largely, the partnerships describe themselves as on track to implement some but not necessarily all of their original project aims.

Some partnerships realised that they had been over-ambitious in their plans and have scaled them back to more achievable outcomes. Others have extended their timescales to enable further work to be done, particularly where that involves bringing others – especially local authorities – on board. East Kent College and St Piers College, for example, have recognised that it may take considerable time to convince their local authority of the value of offering residential learning experiences to general FE college learners. An initial meeting with the local authority revealed that the colleges’ proposals would need to be reviewed by a number of strategic and operational teams within the local authority to gain agreement - all at a time of major restructure for the council. National Star and Warwickshire College Group similarly need to influence their local authorities to consider commissioning provision from two education providers to achieve their aim of sharing a learner with minimum bureaucracy.

## Achieving sustainability

Participants were asked about their plans for ensuring the lasting effectiveness of their achievements within their projects and for continuing their relationship into the future. They cited the following:

* building the new practice into existing cycles, frameworks, policies and plans, curricula, or job descriptions, as appropriate, so that it becomes ‘the norm’; where relevant embedding it into self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans
* committing ongoing funding, resources, and staff time to the approach
* consciously shaping the approach throughout the project so that it is not dependent on project funding or external facilitator input
* extending and formalising their existing partnership agreement to cover the next five years so that the commitment goes beyond the good intentions of existing staff
* informing and influencing other stakeholders, especially local authorities, so that they are aware of the new approach and factor it into their own ways of working.

Factors which are likely to contribute to sustained partnership-working include:

* establishing links between staff in the two settings at different levels and in different job roles so there are multiple connections between the organisations and not just a reliance on two senior individuals
* focusing on relationship-building between the two organisations and not just on achieving the specific aims of the project
* recognising and celebrating the role of partnership-working in what has been achieved to date.

# CONCLUSIONS

This project has demonstrated that partnership-working has the potential to benefit learners with SEND and the staff who support them. Specialist and general FE colleges can increase the expertise of their staff by learning from one another. They can better meet learner need by sharing expertise across organisational boundaries. They can extend the range of opportunities and experiences of their learners by sharing resources and facilities. They can achieve shared goals more effectively by combining forces.

Colleges, however, need dedicated time and space to explore approaches that are workable in their specific circumstances. They will not be able to exactly replicate the work of other partnerships such as those described in this report. Senior leaders will need to prioritise partnership-working and put in the groundwork needed to build the strong, trusting relationships between staff in different roles across their organisations that must underpin the joint initiatives they choose to tackle.

If colleges are prepared to work in this way, much can be achieved on the ground to improve provision for learners with SEND. To date, fewer than half the partnerships have identified that systemic changes, for example to funding rules or individual learning record (ILR) requirements, will be needed to ensure the success of their initiatives. It is worth noting that this is partly because a significant proportion are focused on up-skilling staff, while others may yet find such barriers do exist, but they have not identified them at this stage because their plans are not yet set in motion, nor have they tried to turn them from a one-off project to business as usual. When they reach this point, more systemic barriers may emerge.

The achievements of the partnerships in this project so far are a series of successful instances of partnership-working within and/or despite the current binary system. They have begun to create slightly more porous boundaries between their two provision types. Much more work, with local authorities in particular, will be needed to break down the binary system itself. For the system to change, local authorities will need to recognise each FE provider in their area as part of a *single* FE system. They will need to appreciate the distinct contribution to the local offer of each college and think of them as providers of services which could potentially be combined to create provision designed around the young person – rather than provision types into which a learner must be pigeon-holed. The combination of services may happen in sequence or in parallel for a learner. In some cases, this may be managed entirely by the colleges themselves but in others, it may require a change in commissioning behaviour.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

AoC and Natspec recommend that

* the partnerships now consider how to engage local authorities in their projects in order to achieve sustainability, and what changes in perception and commissioning practice by local authorities will be needed to make partnership-working part of a new normal in the further education of learners with SEND
* the Education and Training Foundation provides continuing funding and facilitator support to help the partnerships maintain momentum. Following their progress into the implementation stage will enable the Foundation to understand how the exciting plans described in this report can be put into practice, scaled up or turned into ‘business as usual’, and to share this learning with the sector
* the Education and Training Foundation specifically analyses the systemic barriers to partnership-working identified by the partnerships as they implement their plans and makes recommendations to the appropriate bodies for systemic changes to support this way of working.

# Appendices

**Appendix 1**

## Resource - Mapping of SEND-related expertise and training/CPD

*Produced by Canto Learning, Moulton College and Northampton College as part of an ETF project led by Natspec and AoC*

This document is designed to enable individual colleges involved in a shared CPD initiative to map their current SEND-related CPD/training and to identify gaps. The information gained can then be shared with other colleges in the partnership and discussed and analysed collectively.

This will help identify where

* staff from more than one college might come together to participate together in training currently delivered separately
* one college might offer training to another, including as part of an expertise exchange
* two or more colleges might explore together how to address a gap in expertise, including through jointly commissioned external training.

**Name of College:**

**College contact:**

**Current staff training and CPD**

**For each that you list, mark as (I) for in-house where it is delivered by a member of your staff team and (E) where it is externally sourced**

|  |
| --- |
| **Training/CPD that staff undergo as a part of induction** |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Training/CPD that staff undergo regularly, e.g. yearly updates/refreshers** |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Specialist training/CPD you currently provide to meet specific learner needs, e.g. health needs, sensory impairments**  **(If already entered as part of induction or regular training no need to enter again, just add ‘as above’)** |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Other types of SEND-related CPD/training for managers, teachers or support not covered above** |
|  |

**Gaps in training/CPD**

|  |
| --- |
| **Current gaps in staff training and CPD (mark priorities with an\*)** |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Anticipated training/CPD needs in areas not currently offered (plus brief evidence of why they will be needed, e.g. predicted changes in student cohort or new facility opening)** |
|  |

**Strengths and expertise**

|  |
| --- |
| **Current strengths and areas of expertise that could be shared with others in the partnership** |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Emerging expertise currently being developed related to learner needs** |
|  |

**Other useful questions to consider**

|  |
| --- |
| **Are there any patterns of retention, progression or achievement that indicate that certain learner groups might benefit from staff with more expertise to meet their needs? This might be based on a ‘hunch’ or from data analysis.** |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Can you give an example of staff training/CPD that worked really well in your college? What made it so good and what was the impact of the training/CPD on staff and learners?** |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Do you have any other insights, comments or questions around staff CPD and training you’d like the partnership to consider as we analyse these responses and plan our next steps together?** |
|  |

**Appendix 2**

## Resource - Accessibility Checklist

*Developed by Orchard Hill College, working with Crawley College, as part of an ETF project led by Natspec and AoC.*

This checklist needs to be completed based on information obtained from the consultation paperwork, highlighting student needs and the action required to enable them to attend the college. The following information must be in place prior to the student commencing.

**Medical**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes | No | Comment/Action required |
| Updated medical care plan/risk assessment |  |  |  |
| Medication information and training requirements |  |  |  |
| Staff training needs |  |  |  |
| Accessible room for someone to safely administer insulin if Type I diabetic and to maintain privacy & dignity |  |  |  |
| Sharps bin and a sink for use by anyone administering insulin |  |  |  |
| First aid box |  |  |  |
| Medical cabinet if storing BM/ Emergency medication etc. |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes | No | Comment/Action required |
| Accessible documents – need for specialist software |  |  |  |
| Assistive technology to support communication |  |  |  |
| Additional space required |  |  |  |

**Physical/accessibility/communication/environmental**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes | No | Comment/Action required |
| Care plan to include mobility and access needs |  |  |  |
| Accessible bathroom (including hoist and changing bed) |  |  |  |
| Accessible building including lifts/corridor space |  |  |  |
| Trained staff in Manual handling |  |  |  |
| Accessible lunch area |  |  |  |
| Accessible tables in classroom |  |  |  |
| PEEP |  |  |  |

**Appendix 3**

## Resource - Example Cost Breakdown of Orchard Hill College Nursing Service

*Developed by Orchard Hill College, working with Crawley College, as part of an ETF project led by Natspec*

*and AoC.*

Date(s) services delivered:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Service:** | **Hours:** | **Cost (£51.20 per hour + VAT):** |
| 1-hour training session per subject– Anaphylaxis & Allergies/Asthma/Epilepsy/  Buccal midazolam and VNS information. |  |  |
| Service offered to all year one student 5 care plans per student - information collection and writing |  |  |
| Attendance to MDT meetings once per term |  |  |
| Additional services as required will be invoiced separately as and when services are required such as: Transition reports, EHCP report writing and first aid training or further 1 hour training sessions |  |  |
| Total cost: |  |  |

**Appendix 4**

## Resource - Partnership Project Agreement

*Produced by Bournemouth and Poole College and The Sheiling College to underpin their partnership-working as part of an ETF project led by Natspec and AoC.*

**Background**

Young people in our local area are usually placed within either a General Further Education (GFE) setting or a specialist college; the current system makes it very difficult for them to benefit from a combination of the services that each can offer. Indeed, in the recent past the main times that providers have come together is at tribunal hearings, as adversaries rather than partners.  **Bournemouth and Poole College** and **Sheiling College** want to work together for the benefit of young people - whoever is providing their main education, to ensure better opportunities and outcomes for young people with SEND.

**Intent – this partnership project will**:

* Build relationships between the organisations across all levels as a fundamental prerequisite to joint working, and key to understanding each other’s provision
* Develop methodology for CPD via observational visits and potential coaching/mentoring programme for teaching staff across the organisations
* Expand the learner experience by providing the opportunity for students to access different facilities and equipment at each other’s sites
* Facilitate activities and/or work experience opportunities across settings to provide benefits for students from both types of college to embed improved community integration and opportunities for developing friendships outside of direct peer groups

**Implementation – key actions:**

* A member of Bournemouth and Poole College leadership team to join the board of trustees at Sheiling College. A member of Sheiling College leadership team to join the Equality Advisory Board of Bournemouth and Poole College.
* Bournemouth and Poole College Head of Inclusion and Head of Sheiling College will facilitate a programme of observations, practise exchanges and supported experiments with clearly identified outcomes for respective teaching staff with a particular focus on development of inclusive curriculum.
* Identify and agree the use of particular facilities to enable staff to bring students together from across the colleges for regular social, health and wellbeing activities.

**Impact – this partnership project will achieve:**

* Sustainable on-going joint working between both colleges to offer greater flexibility and improved aspirations for young people with SEND
* Improved staff confidence and skills; delivery of an improved curriculum offer
* Improved learner outcomes, leading to positive and sustainable destinations.

Signed and agreed: …………………………………………………………………………………..

Head of Sheiling College

Signed and agreed: ……………………………………………………………………………………

Head of Inclusion, Bournemouth & Poole College

**Appendix 5**

## Resource - Terms of Reference

*Produced by Harrogate College and Henshaws Specialist College to underpin their partnership-working as part of an ETF project led by Natspec and AoC.*

**Harrogate College and Henshaws Specialist College** **SEND Partnership - Terms of Reference**

**Overview**

Harrogate College and Henshaws Specialist College are collaborating on a programme to increase work placement opportunities for SEND Students by engaging employers in job carving in their places of work.

The concept is to have several employers employing the equivalent of 1 student for one day a week on placement. Each employer offers 1-day employment in one task-based job, with students completing up to 0.5 day on placement at the setting. Student carousels around (up to 5) employers equating to 16 hours of employment per week becoming very proficient at the role given.

We undertake to support one another to provide the best opportunities for students and employers to create sustained employment opportunities for students.

**Membership and Quorum**

Each college will have a representative who is eligible to attend on behalf of their Principal/Senior Leader. Each Principal/Senior Leader  will decide the scope of responsibility of their representative, for any joint action proposed.

**Frequency**

To meet virtually every 2 weeks throughout the project.

Quoracy will require one representative from each college.

**Terms of Reference**

* 1. Intent

1. To develop our collective action plans create work experience opportunities for students with SEND and High Needs, leading to sustained employment.
2. To deliver a learner centred work placement.
3. Support employers to understand how job carving can be used in their organisation.
4. Build relationships between Harrogate College and Henshaws Specialist College.
5. Implementation
6. Harrogate to use employer network and other stakeholders to raise profile of job carving.
7. Henshaws to create a skills assessment for learners, to align the learner with potential employers/sectors/roles.
8. Harrogate and Henshaws to co create an employer induction for support students to job carve roles in their organisation.
9. Impact
10. Sustainable joint working between both colleges to offer greater opportunity for work placements for SEND students in both colleges.
11. A sustainable model for supporting employers to use job carving to increase employment opportunities.
12. Increased job opportunities for people with SEND and high needs in Harrogate District.
13. Impact
    1. Sustainable joint working between both colleges to offer greater opportunity for work placements for SEND students in both colleges.
    2. A sustainable model for supporting employers to use job carving to increase employment opportunities.
    3. Increased job opportunities for people with SEND and high needs in Harrogate District.

Signed and agreed:   Principal, Harrogate College

Signed and agreed:  Deputy Director - Education, Quality and Training, Henshaws Specialist College

## Appendix 6 – Partnership Participants

**Names and contact details of leads in the colleges involved in this project**

**College                               Lead                                   Email**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Ambitious College | Dale Parsons | [dparsons@ambitiouscollege.org.uk](mailto:dparsons@ambitiouscollege.org.uk) |
| Bournemouth and Poole College | Paula Lock | [lockp@bpc.ac.uk](mailto:lockp@bpc.ac.uk) |
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| East Kent College | Jo Campbell | [Jo.Campbell@eastkent.ac.uk](mailto:Jo.Campbell@eastkent.ac.uk) |
| Harrogate College | Danny Wild | [danny.wild@harrogate.ac.uk](mailto:danny.wild@harrogate.ac.uk) |
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