

Lifestyles and Choices



Introduction

A group of College, School, Local Authority and 3rd sector providers worked together to develop individualised programmes for young people with profound and complex requirements in the Forest of Dean.

Background

We share the aspirations of the Green Paper, Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability” (March 2011) and the subsequent Children and Families Bill development.

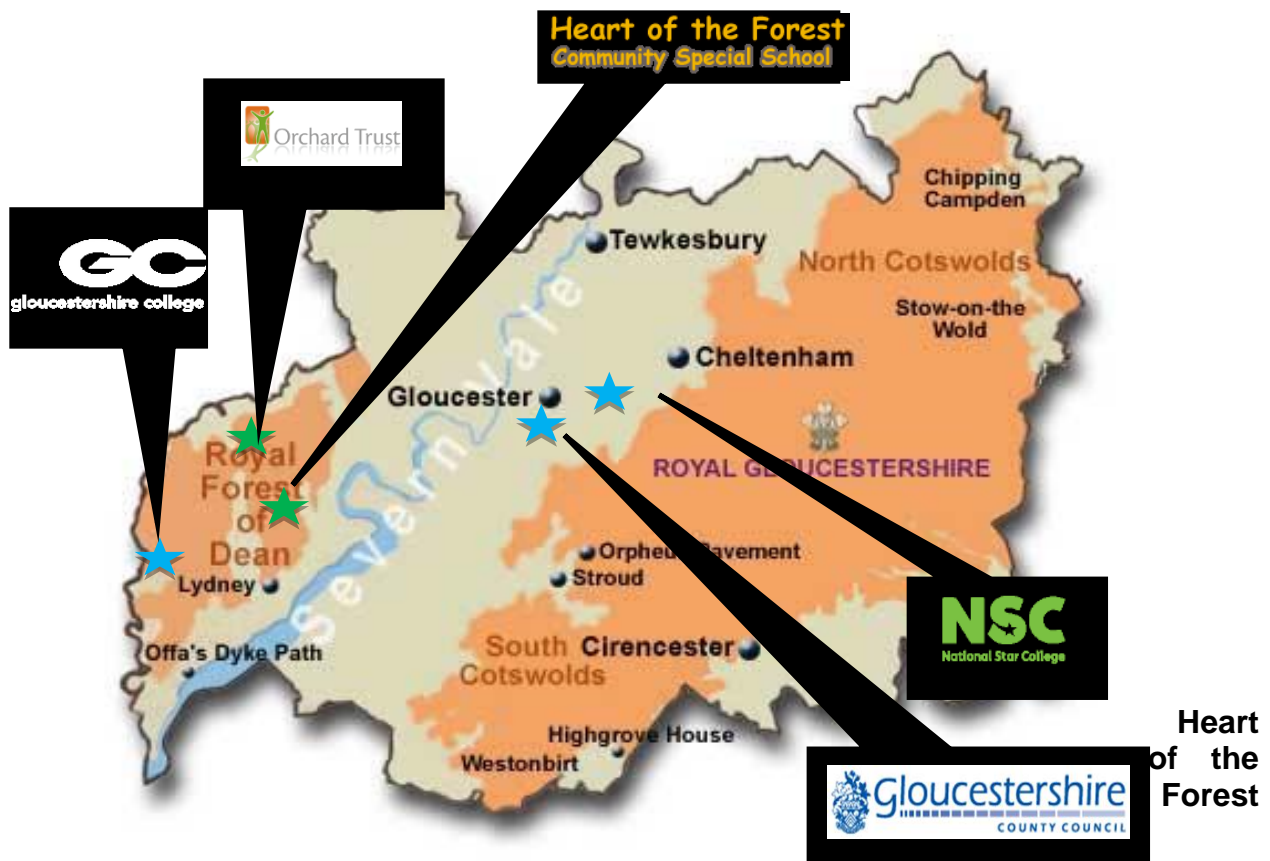
The Green Paper identifies a commitment to encourage;

“partnership working between independent specialist colleges, special schools and colleges. This will help spread knowledge, improve expertise, build capacity, and share delivery arrangements so that colleges and training providers can respond effectively to the needs of learners, employers and communities, to whom they are increasingly accountable.” (para 3.18)

We wanted to develop services in our locality.

- To create a greater shared understanding of how providers in the sector can work together collaboratively and not competitively to spread knowledge, improve expertise, build capacity and share delivery arrangements in order to support learners prepare for adulthood
- To evidence and model progression pathways for learners

Background - Gloucestershire



Community School is the only school in the Forest of Dean serving children and young people who have severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties and complex needs aged between 3 – 19 years.

Gloucestershire College is a large general further education college offering further and higher education across 3 main sites and a number of satellite bases.

The National Star College is a large independent specialist further education college working with people with a wide range of disabilities.

Gloucestershire County Council is the local authority with responsibility for young people with special educational needs across the county.

Orchard Trust is a charity based in the Forest of Dean providing a range of integrated services for people with learning disabilities.

Lifestyles and Choices

Gloucestershire is a large county with predominately good and outstanding pre and post 16 provision for young people with a range of learning difficulties and disabilities. The county has a history of “importing” young people with a range of disabilities which has made longer term planning more difficult.

We wanted to develop innovative practice in bringing together schools, mainstream and specialist further education, 3rd sector and the local authority to design and deliver programmes which meet need and develop choice and aspiration. This is the first time that pre and post 16 providers had worked together and with the local authority to ensure appropriate transition routes alongside curriculum development. Our aim was to enable seamless transition arrangements and provision which were focused on identified learner outcomes.

Unmet Need

The cluster was designed around the development of co-delivered provision to meet the needs of people with severe learning difficulties and / or profound and complex disabilities.

Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD)

Pupils should only be recorded as severe learning difficulties if it is the pupil's primary or secondary SEN and they are at School Action Plus or have a statement.

Pupils with severe learning difficulties have significant intellectual or cognitive impairments. This has a major effect on their ability to participate in the school curriculum without support. They may also have difficulties in mobility and coordination, communication and perception and the acquisition of self-help skills. Pupils with severe learning difficulties will need support in all areas of the curriculum. They may also require teaching of self-help, independence and social skills. Some pupils may use sign and symbols but most will be able to hold simple conversations. Their attainments may be within the upper P scale range (P4-P8) for much of their school careers (that is below level 1 of the National Curriculum).

Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty (PMLD)

Pupils should only be recorded as PMLD if it is the pupil's primary or secondary SEN and they are at School Action Plus or have a statement.

Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties have complex learning needs. In addition to very severe learning difficulties, pupils have other significant difficulties such as physical disabilities, sensory impairment or a severe medical condition. Pupils require a high level of adult support, both for their learning needs and also for their personal care. They are likely to need sensory stimulation and a curriculum broken down into very small steps. Some pupils communicate by gesture, eye pointing or symbols, others by very simple language. Their attainments are likely to remain in the early P-scale range (P1-P4) throughout their school careers (that is below level 1 of the National Curriculum).

We understood that this provision was required because there is over demand for local special school places, there are limited mainstream opportunities post 19 and the travelling distance to other specialist providers is inappropriate for some young people.

We intended to design and develop education (with integrated care and health provision) based in the Forest of Dean locality (and also access in county specialist facilities where appropriate) meeting the needs of a cohort of young people with profound and multiple disabilities and / or severe learning difficulties. The programmes curriculum / aims would be based on improving learners' community participation, increasing their autonomy and enabling them to take a more active part in the delivery of their care and support.

This provision would be funded through the high needs funding budget (new arrangements 2013/14) as part of local commissioning arrangements and also through arrangements with local health and social care providers.

Outcomes

We intended to develop a new service which:

- ✓ combined the skills, facilities and services of the local providers, with the specialism of a local specialist college
- ✓ builds on learning and knowledge from school
- ✓ is flexible and matches learners needs
- ✓ avoids the need for learners with complex disabilities to travel long distances
- ✓ combines funding streams to enhance the learner experience

Individual partners identified the reasons they had decided to join the project and included:-

- ✓ To ensure equity of provision for post 19 learners in the Forest of Dean with severe/profound learning disabilities
- ✓ Geographically students from the Forest of Dean were travelling huge distances to educational provisions at a time when residential funding is getting scarce. A getting together of providers was required in order to establish what was available in the county.
- ✓ To develop effective partnership to enable post 19 learners to have their needs met effectively in their local communities as part of a successful transition into adults.
- ✓ To explore provision for post 19 PMLD/SLD provision in the Forest of Dean, building on and improving the provision that is already there.
- ✓ To ensure there is a local Forest of Dean offer for people with profound and multiple disabilities
- ✓ To build closer relationships and improve communication between all providers and stakeholders
- ✓ Sharing of knowledge, expertise and effective practice between providers
- ✓ To create provision for young people with Profound/Severe Learning Difficulties who lived in the Forest of Dean
- ✓ To ensure that learners got the best possible provision without the need to travel for long distances

The perception of "need" changed throughout the project. Initially it was felt there was a large cohort of learners whose needs were not being met appropriately. However after extensive mapping it was recognised that the numbers were much

smaller. This was partially due to students attending special schools in the Forest of Dean area although they lived in other parts of Gloucestershire. This was also due to students moving across county borders or in some cases looked after children who had moved into the locality.

Lifestyle and Choices - Reflections and Analysis

What outcomes did we want to achieve?

- ✓ Bespoke packages for these learners eliminating the need for excessive travelling and using the expertise of a number of settings to deliver a holistic learning experience to best meet their needs.
- ✓ A balanced, quality, shared education for students that was nearer to their homes.
- ✓ To have a greater awareness of what provision looked like from other providers.
- ✓ Learning outcomes: appropriate skills & qualifications for the learner.
Destination outcomes: moving on to supported employment in the local community
- ✓ Sustainable ongoing provision & effective partnership within the community
- ✓ Successful transitions to post 19 placements that could provide for each student pooling resources from individual providers.
- ✓ Individual packages that would give each student the best opportunities in an inclusive environment, playing to their individual strengths and interests.
- ✓ Progression, achievement, successful placements.
- ✓ To forecast and plan for the future number of people that may require this provision
- ✓ To ensure closer partnership working in order to meet the needs of learners
- ✓ Partnership working and new approaches to best meet the needs of the young people. Outcomes for learners to include improved choice and decision making, reduced support levels and greater community participation.

The group initially thought there was a need to develop core provision in the Forest of Dean. However due to the range of needs and aspirations of learners identified and the size of grouping (which did not allow for appropriate peer group models) the group quickly recognised the need to “mix and match” provision through a range of providers to create more effective provision.

The group recognised the need to include social care into discussions (particularly due to changes in study programmes) and also recognised they should have better involved parents and carers.

The group initially made assumptions purely based on locality whereas many learners and their families made decisions based on their previous schooling location, friendship groupings and perceptions of quality provision opportunities. The group balanced the desire for local provision with the need for effective peer groups, specialist expertise and facilities and learner / parent wishes to develop combined programmes. One size definitely does not fit all!

Considerations

- ✓ Learner needs/Aspirations.
- ✓ Current offers from settings.
- ✓ Funding issues.
- ✓ Relevant outcomes.
- ✓ Needs of the students.
- ✓ Honesty in what we can or can't offer.
- ✓ Data Sharing.
- ✓ Parental/ learner views.
- ✓ Student numbers/needs/views/levels and progress data.
- ✓ What the providers offered: - courses / life skills/ vocational activities/ leisure activities /therapies/medical support.
- ✓ How split placements might work.
- ✓ How training could be provided.
- ✓ Residency issues
- ✓ The likely number of people that may require this provision over the next 3 years and what their specific needs are.
- ✓ How funding mechanisms might work for a 'collaborative and joint approach' between 2 or more providers.
- ✓ Travel, needs and wishes of learners and their parents
- ✓ Existing strengths and weaknesses of providers

The group spent a lot of time developing shared terminology and expectations in order to have a coherent approach to the development work.

They also shared the strengths / weaknesses and offer. This proved challenging as providers had different perceptions of their offer and different views around the expectations of programmes for this learner group. The group found it useful to concentrate on outcomes which helped to identify what providers could offer.

One of the key issues was around funding mechanisms – particularly at a time of change (high needs funding reforms). There was limited knowledge from all parties which led to concerns being raised about how to fund joint programmes and innovative development / capacity building work.

Stages and Processes?

- ✓ Mapping of offer, needs, wants, attainment levels
- ✓ Discussion of individual packages to optimise outcomes
- ✓ Practical issues re transport, funding to be discussed
- ✓ Data on the cohort of learners.
- ✓ Data sharing protocols.
- ✓ Advised on funding.
- ✓ Liaised with social care.
- ✓ Residency of learners & responsibilities.
- ✓ Named students, looking at names for future years
- ✓ Mapping provision.

- ✓ Views of parents on what the students need
- ✓ Views of school on what the student needs
- ✓ Views of students on what they would like
- ✓ Creating a grid with all the information
- ✓ Looking at how the needs could be met, while taking into account parents' wishes.
- ✓ Split placements, deciding who would be the main provider
- ✓ Funding.
- ✓ Getting to know each other. Mapping of needs and interests and matching with provision.

The stages identified in the initial bid were deliberately flexible in order to accommodate the development activity. The longest stage was focused on the mapping of provision and also the needs / aspirations of learners. The group shared information honestly and openly in order to build a true picture.

The stages identified initially were based around the development of additional provision whereas most of the work was in fact based on building bespoke provision for individual students. Although this has proved effective and personalised programmes have been developed, the huge input from cluster providers must be recognised both in terms of planning and funding. Much of the work undertaken would not be sustainable under proposed new funding systems.

Additional information

- ✓ Information to support assessment / funding for matrix.
- ✓ Shared matrix of what providers could offer students.
- ✓ Sharing of student information
- ✓ Sharing of practices, views and ideas
- ✓ Parental/learner views & consultations.
- ✓ Clarification around SLD/ PMLD definitions.
- ✓ How achievement and progress could be evidenced.
- ✓ Clearer information regarding funding mechanisms from 2013-14 onwards (which is now available)

The high needs funding reforms being introduced pre the Children and Families Bill led to huge destabilisation across pre and post 16 sectors. Therefore much of the planning was done without clear information on how funding could be achieved against the aspirations of the cluster group and the Bill.

The group also invested a large amount of time developing shared outcomes models based on the three aims for learners.

Key Challenges?

As identified above the key challenges were based around:

- ✓ Remaining focused on students' needs
- ✓ Sharing openly and honestly
- ✓ Keeping on track
- ✓ Working with funding arrangements.
- ✓ Reassuring parents & managing uncertainty around new provision for parents/carers & learners.
- ✓ Funding uncertainty.
- ✓ Not having enough in a group to make it viable to deliver. E.g. Communication Joint provision – who does what
- ✓ The time commitments to meet regularly were difficult at times
- ✓ Funding differences across providers
- ✓ Term dates/weeks of year