

Lead Scotland's response to Glasgow City Council's Call for Evidence: Colleges and Lifelong Learning Policy Commission

September 2016

The Commission would like to ask for your views, and any available evidence that will help to better understand:

- Barriers to participation in College and Lifelong Learning
- Who is most affected by these
- Solutions to remove these barriers

Lead Scotland is a charity that enables disabled adults and carers to access inclusive learning opportunities. At a local level, we do this by providing direct support to learners through flexible person-centred learning opportunities and individualised guidance and support to help them plan their learning journeys. At a national level, we provide information and advice on the full range of post-school learning and training opportunities, as well as influencing and informing policy development.

Disabled people account for a significant proportion of Scotland's population, and make a vital contribution to our economy, culture and public life. Yet, they experience considerable inequalities in relation to education, employment and overall life chances. In comparison with their non-disabled counterparts, disabled people are around twice as likely to be unemployed¹, around three times as likely not to hold any qualifications² and twice as likely to live in poverty³.

Removing the barriers to inclusive learning and employment is therefore vital in terms of improving educational attainment and earning potential, reducing reliance on welfare benefits and facilitating access to life-enhancing experiences.

The Scottish Government's refreshed Employability Framework recognises the effect of recent developments on individuals' employability and life chances, including:

- The difficult economic conditions
- The ongoing effects of welfare reform
- The reform of public services and recent spending cuts
- Measures being introduced through the reform of post-16 education

¹ The Annual Population Survey, March 2013

² Labour Force Survey, Quarter 2, 2012

³ Employers' Forum on Disability, 2012

Many of these developments disproportionately affect people with additional support needs, making it imperative to work towards improving learning and employment outcomes for a group already facing significant barriers to fully participating in society.

Barriers to participation in College and Lifelong Learning and who is most affected by these barriers

Disabled learners in particular can face increased barriers to participating in college and lifelong learning in comparison to their non-disabled counterparts. The reasons for this are varied and complex, however Lead Scotland undertook research commissioned by the Equality Challenge Unit in 2015 to identify ways to improve disabled learners' progression in college. Lead Scotland surveyed a total of 227 disabled learners/families of disabled learners and carried out 29 follow up qualitative telephone interviews and received additional input from a number of professionals and voluntary sector organisations. At least 9% of respondents lived in Glasgow City and 14% of respondents attended either Glasgow Kelvin College, Glasgow Clyde College or the City of Glasgow College.

The aim of the research was to identify why disabled learners were not progressing through the SCQF levels as well as non-disabled learners, as well as to identify ways to improve disabled learners' progression. One of the outcomes of the research was to inform the way in which the Equality Challenge Unit worked with colleges to support them to develop relevant policies and practices to effectively meet the needs of disabled learners.

Key findings from our survey of learners and parents/carers highlighted that:

- 43% of learners didn't receive any support to help them prepare for the transition to college
- 40% of learners didn't move up to the next SCQF level when moving between learning levels
- The majority of learners (43%) didn't progress to the next level for reasons relating to their impairment (primarily lack of appropriate learning support)
- Younger learners, part-time learners, and those who have come to college straight from school are least likely to progress to the next learning level
- The majority of learners (65%) who left college early did so for reasons relating to their impairment (primarily lack of appropriate learning support)
- There is a perception that those who are confident enough to challenge decisions receive the most effective support.

Common themes that emerged from the survey included a lack of appropriate and thorough transition and pre-entry support, a lack of understanding and awareness about the impact of specific impairments from staff (especially teaching staff), a lack of appropriate impairment specific support as well as understaffing of disability specific support staff. There were also issues about disagreements between agencies around who was responsible for paying for support, a reluctance from colleges to involve parents/carers in learner support plans and an insufficient range of non-employability related courses at the lower SCQF levels. [Click here to read the full Lead Scotland report on Supporting Disabled Learners to realise their Potential.](#)

These themes are echoed through our national helpline, our frontline services as well as throughout the various cross sector advisory groups we sit on which include:

- Scottish Transitions Forum Think Tank
- College Development Network Access & Inclusion Group
- Enquire (Children in Scotland) Advisory Group
- Scottish Government Disabled Students Advisory Group
- SQA Equality & Inclusion Key Partners Group

We have supported a number of parents within the Glasgow City Council area by providing them with information and advice about their children's rights in accessing post-16 education. A recurring theme we pick up on the helpline is around who is responsible for funding 'in-class support' within the Glasgow City Council area. There appears to be a lack of consistency around the policy and practice from within Glasgow City Social Work Department in reference to who should be providing 'in class support' – i.e. a one to one worker to provide social care support within the classroom.

[Partnership Matters](#), a Scottish Government guidance document which describes the roles and responsibilities of all agencies supporting people with additional support needs who wish to study, or are currently studying at Scotland's colleges or universities, clearly states that Social Services are responsible for providing any personal care support required within the classroom. Despite this guidance, Glasgow City Social Work department have repeatedly told parents who contact the helpline, that it is a Glasgow-wide policy to not fund personal care support within the classroom as it is an 'educational outcome' rather than a social care one.

Conversely, colleges have refused to provide or pay for this support as they do not deem one to one support to manage behaviour, keep learners safe and support with toileting, medication and feeding as an 'educational' responsibility. Consequently, learners and families are caught in the middle of these disputes, and learners are left without the appropriate funding and support they require in order to attend college. Additionally, colleges are refusing to let these young people attend their courses without the appropriate social care support being put in place. Families are left with

no choice but to try and pay for the support themselves, withdraw their child from the course, or in one case we know of, physically provide the support themselves.

This issue is further compounded by parents being made aware that other young people in their children's classes are receiving personal care in-class support from Glasgow social services. Data protection, confidentiality and varying individual needs were cited by Glasgow city council as the reason for this, but ultimately it still contradicts the premise that they do not fund in class support at all. In one particular case we are aware of, an agreement was reached 'behind closed doors' whereby the social worker reversed the decision to fund in class support, but they asked the parent to sign a care plan that specified the money was being used for a different service. While this was ultimately a positive outcome for the family and the young person, it seems totally counterproductive to enforce a policy that discriminates against disabled people, when the social workers themselves are not even upholding it.

We are aware of another young person who was prevented from attending college as their family could not afford to pay for a support worker themselves and the college refused to allow them to attend on the basis it presented too much of a safety risk. The social worker in this case suggested the young person use the budget that had been allocated to access leisure facilities in the community instead, but the suggested activities did not allow for any social interaction with peers, nor did they take into account the views or interests of the young person themselves. This young person went from attending school as part of structured, supported routine with clear learning outcomes, to being offered a few hours support a week to go to the local sports and swim centre, meanwhile their peers were all attending college. Lead Scotland has suggested social services and the colleges involved meet to try and find a suitable compromise agreement to allow these young people to attend college, but Glasgow City Council have so far refused, stating their position on this policy is clear.

We have also picked up a concerning trend from the helpline that suggests young people with complex health needs and profound learning disabilities are entering negative destinations after leaving specialist school provision. The current Opportunities for All offer which guarantees a suitable place in learning or training for all 16-19 year olds does not provide appropriate provision for this group. The rationale behind the offer was to support youth unemployment and aligns with the Developing the Young Workforce agenda, but it does not consider young people with more complex needs who may never be able to move into employment. We have received calls from parents of young people with complex needs advising they have a personal care budget in place, but it does not allow for achieving any learning outcomes. Lead Scotland provide learning services to disabled people in their own home, but we are a small charity with a limited reach and rely on volunteers to

support learners. One parent of a young person we supported asked why they can't use part of their social care budget to pay for a literacy and numeracy tutor within their own home for a few hours per week. It certainly begs the question as to why learning is not considered as an appropriate outcome worth funding to support an individual's wellbeing when other educational provision is not suitable or appropriate.

Disabled people can face multiple barriers in accessing lifelong learning in their own communities including limited mobility, agoraphobia and low confidence. Our local services work with those individuals who would have otherwise not had access to the support they need to learn, but our reach is limited to only eight out of the 32 local authority areas across Scotland including North Lanarkshire, Fife, Dundee, Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Moray, Perthshire and Highlands & Islands.

Suggestions for improvements

The research we did in 2015 with the Equality Challenge Unit produced a number of suggestions for improving disabled learner's progression.

Our key recommendations included:

- Offer a broad range of courses at all SCQF levels
- Put the learner at the centre of all processes and decisions affecting their learning journey
- Recognise that parents often have a key role to play when identifying the learner's support package. One parent said,

"I do think one of the areas of difficulty is that when young people over 18 are expected to speak and act for themselves but are still not really fully independent. I want my son to be independent but it didn't just arrive like magic on his 18th birthday! It's a process and I think the parents should still be involved if possible into young adulthood".

- Ensure that all disabled learners have access to a named staff member/keyworker
- Aim to anticipate a wide range of reasonable adjustments which disabled learners may require, while still responding to individual requests for support
- Put in place a wide range of pre-entry support measures. We often receive calls on the helpline advising needs assessments have not taken place until after the learner starts the course, which is often too late. Colleges and local authorities need to work together to ensure disabled learners are engaging earlier with the network of support systems available to them to prepare for the transition.
- Aim to develop and improve partnership working with relevant agencies

You can read the [full list of recommendations both for colleges and for public bodies in the report](#) from Page 34 onwards.

In terms of the issues surrounding funding for in-class support, Lead Scotland recommends Glasgow City Council undertake a full review of the practice and policy of paying for in-class support across all social work departments in the city, as well as carrying out an equality impact assessment to determine the degree to which disabled people are disadvantaged by this policy. We would like to see improved partnership working between the colleges and local authorities and a commitment to learn from best practice examples where funding and staffing are shared in order to improve outcomes for disabled learners. With one case we supported, a small budget was allocated to provide a few hours of in-class support per week, however this had to include travel to and from the college so it became impractical to utilise it. If colleges were able to employ a pool of social care workers, part/fully funded by the local authority, they could be based on campus and support multiple disabled learners throughout the academic week.

We would also like to see increased commissioning of adult learning services in Glasgow that offer flexible learning opportunities for disabled people who may not be able to access community facilities or who require additional support and adjustments put in place in order to facilitate access to lifelong learning.