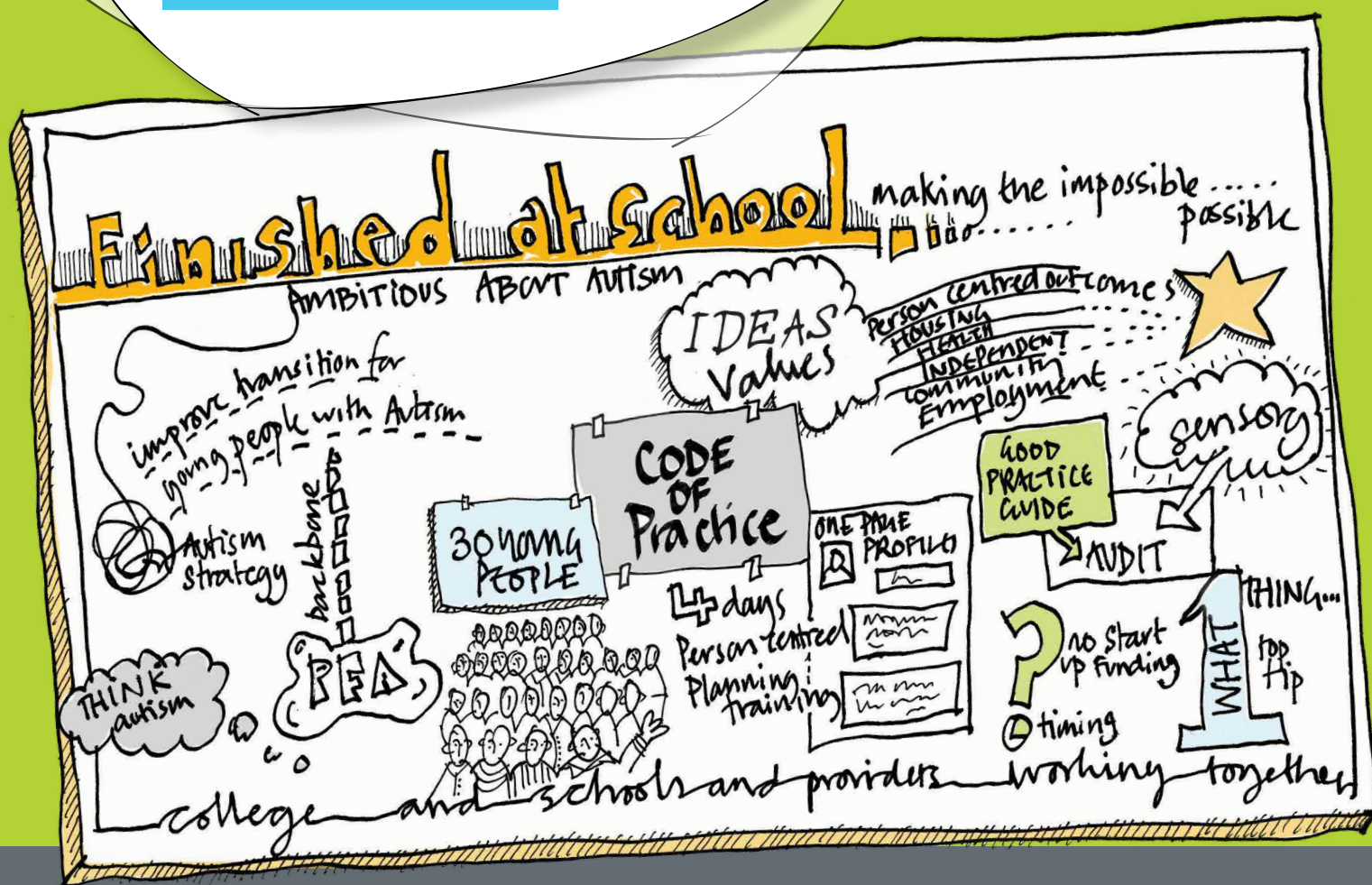


Finished at School



Supporting young people with autism to move from school to college

Learning from Ambitious about Autism's Finished at School Programme

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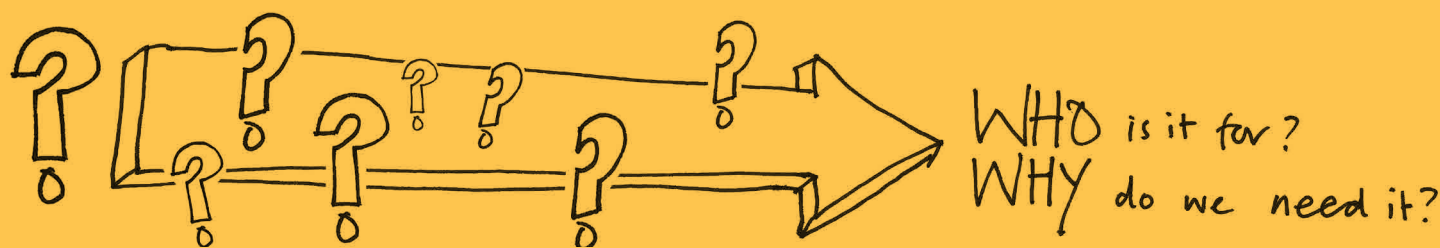
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1: Introduction



Foreword

This guide is designed to identify and exemplify the factors which support effective transition for young people with autism when they leave school. It has a particular focus on what general colleges of further education can do to increase the number of young people with autism making a successful transition into their provision. The guide draws on the lessons learned from the Finished at School Programme (FaS Programme), a two year Department for Education funded project led by Ambitious about Autism in partnership with the Association of Colleges and the National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen), operating from April 2013 until March 2015.

At the core of the FaS Programme were four college-led hubs, each working in partnership with local secondary schools and their local authority (LA) transition lead. Each hub worked with an identified group of young people with autism and their families. The focus of programme activity was on improving practice and provision to support the young people to prepare for and make a successful move from school to college.

The work each FaS hub has developed will have commonalities with what other colleges are doing across England, particularly in response to the new duties for further education providers in the Children and Families Act 2014. The FaS Programme has provided the support, resources and opportunity to have a specific, concerted focus on improving transition for learners with autism. It has also enabled this work to be embedded at an operational and strategic level.

We hope that the learning captured in this guide will support colleges in their work to further develop effective practice to support learners with autism (and other learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities) to achieve their potential and make a successful transition from school to college and into adult life. It provides examples, resources and information about the approaches applied within the programme that can be usefully replicated. A self-audit tool accompanies this guide and is available to support work to improve transition planning and college provision for young people with autism.

What is autism?

Autism is a term used to describe a lifelong neurological difference in brain development that affects approximately 1 in 100 people in the UK. Autism affects the way a person communicates and how they experience the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, which means that it affects people in different ways. The following four areas of difference will have an impact on the lives of most young people with autism:

➤ **Communication and interaction**

Differences in understanding and using communication and language, with skills ranging from individuals who are highly articulate to others who may be non-verbal.

➤ **Social understanding**

Differences in understanding social behaviour and the feelings of others, which informs the development of friendships and relationships.

➤ **Interests and information processing**

Differences in how information is processed can lead to a strict adherence to routines and rules and/or difficulties in planning and personal memory.

➤ **Sensory processing**

Differences in the way sensory information is processed, often resulting in over and/or under sensitivities, can lead to extreme levels of stress and anxiety, particularly in unfamiliar or over-stimulating environments.

Currently around 70 percent of children with autism are educated in mainstream schools and the remainder in special schools. Some people with autism are able to live relatively independent lives but others may face additional challenges, including learning disabilities, which affect them so profoundly that they need support in many areas. Given the right support, young people with autism can, and do, thrive and succeed. Early intervention, education and support are critical in enabling them to lead fulfilling lives.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for all types of secondary schools and colleges, including general further education, specialist and independent colleges. It is a practical guide and will therefore be of interest to all practitioners and professionals working with young people with autism and/or involved in supporting transition, including:

- college curriculum managers
- learning support teams
- special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs)
- LA transition leads
- educational psychologists
- careers and Information and Advice Services.

The guide highlights the strategic implications of providing effective support for transition and, as such, contains useful information for managers who are seeking to meet their new responsibilities under the Children and Families Act. In addition, it will be of interest to parents and young people with autism who are considering their future options, as it identifies what they should expect in relation to effective support in transition and in preparing for adulthood.



Code of Practice

‘The National Audit Office report “Oversight of special education for young people aged 16–25” published in November 2011, estimates that supporting one person with a learning disability into employment could, in addition to improving their independence and self-esteem, increase that person’s income by between 55 and 95 percent. The National Audit Office also estimates that equipping a young person with the skills to live in semi-independent rather than fully supported housing could, in addition to quality of life improvements, reduce lifetime support costs to the public purse by around £1 million.’

Code of Practice, Section 8.2

Why do we need this guide?

‘Fewer than one in four young people with autism continue their education beyond school.’¹

We know that young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in general do less well than their peers at school and college and are more likely to be out of education, training and employment at 18. Outcomes for young people with autism are particularly poor. Ambitious about Autism’s Ruled Out campaign² identified that children with autism are disproportionately affected by both formal and illegal school exclusions and its Finished at School campaign³ found that fewer than one in four young people with autism continue their education beyond school.⁴

The Finished at School campaign and subsequent programme were developed to address these inequities by securing more and better educational options for all young people with autism aged 16–25. Access to education beyond school will enable young people with autism to develop skills, gain employment, live more independently and, ultimately, live the life they choose. This will have benefits not only for the individual, but for society more widely.

The national context

The FaS Programme took place against the backdrop of the most comprehensive reform of special educational needs in a generation. The Children and Families Act, and associated SEND Code of Practice,⁵ which came into force on 1 September 2014, aims to ensure that children and young people with disabilities achieve well, have choice and control over their support and are enabled to progress from education into happy and fulfilling lives, including employment.

The Act enshrines the importance of ensuring that young people and their families are fully involved in decisions about their support and the outcomes they want to achieve. The legal framework is designed to join up support across education, health and care, from birth to 25 by bringing about key changes to the way in which departments, providers and practitioners work together to facilitate this. The expectation is that these changes will result in improved outcomes for young people and ensure that their experiences will be of a system which is less confrontational and more efficient than in the past.

The FaS Programme, which brought key partners together in local hubs with the shared aim of improving transition for young people with autism, was perfectly placed to explore how providers could best address these responsibilities.

A brief summary of the key changes for learners post-school from the Children and Families Act include:

- the introduction of the integrated Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessment and plan, which should reflect the child or young person’s aspirations for the future, as well as their current needs
- a requirement on health services and LAs to jointly commission and plan services for children, young people and families
- a duty for LAs to publish a ‘Local Offer’ of services across education, health and social care. Children, young people and parents must be involved in its preparation, development and review
- a stronger focus on preparing for adulthood, enabling young people with SEND to achieve the best outcomes in employment, independent living, health and community participation.

¹ Ambitious about Autism (2012), *Finished at School: Creating inclusive colleges for young people with autism: Showcasing good practice.*

² Ambitious about Autism (2014), *Ruled Out: Why are children with autism missing out on education?*

³ Ambitious about Autism (2011), *Finished at School: Where next for young people with autism?*

⁴ Office for National Statistics (2001), Census Report and UK Data Service (2011), MI Reports – Regional Learning Disability/Difficulty Report.

⁵ Department for Education and Department of Health (2015), *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years. Statutory guidance for organisations who work with and support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.*

When work on the FaS Programme commenced, the Children and Families Act, and associated Code of Practice, was still a Bill going through Parliament. The Act places significant new duties on further education colleges to meet the needs of young people with SEND up to 25 years. This guide is well-placed to explore the early impact of these changes and to share the practice developed as the FaS partners sought to meet – and, indeed, surpass – these new responsibilities.

The new duties from September 2014 for further education colleges, sixth form colleges, 16–19 academies and independent specialist colleges approved under Section 41 of the Children and Families Act, which differ slightly from overall school duties, are to:

- have regard to the SEND 0–25 Code of Practice
- admit a young person who has their institution named in their EHC plan
- use their best endeavours to secure the special educational provision the young person requires, whether or not they have EHC plan
- fulfil their duties under the Equality Act 2010
- cooperate with the LAs.

The FaS Programme charted the progress of FaS partners in getting ready to meet these new responsibilities, focusing on learners with autism in transition. The lessons learned as a result will be of value to others as they seek to implement the reforms and have implications for practice for all learners, not just those with autism.

Other important developments which had implications for the work of the FaS Programme include:

➤ **The Care Act 2014**⁶

The Care Act has a similar focus to the Children and Families Act on person-centred practice and outcomes and the importance of putting people in control of their care and support.

These two pieces of legislation will have a significant impact for disabled young people aged 18–25 and it is vital to consider them together. The partnerships formed as a result of working in the FaS hubs will facilitate more effective joining up of education and care services where relevant for an individual.

➤ **The Autism Strategy**

Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives (2010)⁷ set out a clear framework for all mainstream services, across the public sector, to work together with adults with autism. Local Autism Partnership boards were established to lead on the development and implementation of strategy at a local level. Representatives from these boards were included as partners in the FaS hubs, and were instrumental in supporting programme activity as well as sharing information about related developments across the region.

Think Autism, a refresh of the strategy, was published in 2014.⁸ Its priorities include improving the experience for young people and their parents or carers of the move from school to college and on to leading fulfilling lives.

➤ **Raising the participation age**

Since 2014, young people in England are required to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday. This has significant implications for young people with autism who, data suggests, are more likely at age 18 to be out of education, training or employment than their peers.

Useful Links

SEND Code of Practice:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

PfA Factsheet: The Links Between the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act:

<http://tinyurl.com/PFAfactsheet>

Think autism: an update to the government adult autism strategy:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/think-autism-an-update-to-the-government-adult-autism-strategy>

16 to 19 study programmes: advice on planning and delivery:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-study-programmes-advice-on-planning-and-delivery>

Ofsted Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012>

Better inspection for all: A report on the responses to the consultation:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/400625/Better_inspection_for_all_consultation_response_FINAL_2_.pdf

The Preparing for Adulthood Review: A Good Practice Toolkit: How person-centred practices and reviews can help transfer Statements and Learning Difficulty Assessments to Education Health and Care Plans:

<http://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/resources/pfa-resources/the-preparing-for-adulthood-review>



Pause for Thought

How will you raise awareness of the implications of the Children and Families Act for staff working in all areas and roles within your provision?

> Study Programmes

Introduced in 2013–14 for all 16–19 year olds and 19–25 year olds with an EHC plan, study programmes are intended to offer students breadth and depth and enhance their employability skills by providing access to real experience and knowledge of the workplace. Their introduction has given further education providers new freedoms to develop more outcome–focussed and personalised learning, tailored to the individual’s prior attainment and future education and career aspirations.

Funding for study programmes is now provided on a per–student, not per–qualification basis, which means that study programmes for students with profound and/or complex learning difficulties may concentrate on work experience or other non–qualification activities in preparation for adult life. This new flexibility, which should enable students to take subjects and activities that support their educational and career ambitions, will be invaluable for young people with autism, who are likely to have an uneven profile of abilities.

> Ofsted

A focus on outcomes is a key aspect of The Common Inspection Framework for Further Education and Skills (2014),⁹ which evaluates the extent to which the acquisition of qualifications, skills and knowledge facilitates progression. Progression can be to further learning and employment or, for learners with severe and complex learning difficulties, to increased independence in their everyday life.

At the time this guide was published, Ofsted had just published the outcomes from a consultation about proposed changes to inspection from 2015.¹⁰ This includes a proposal to introduce a new Common Inspection Framework for all early years settings on the Early Years Register, maintained schools and academies, non–association independent schools and further education and skills providers. It is important to keep up–to–date with any developments in inspection processes and understand the implications for practice.

The introduction of the Children and Families Act and related legislation, combined with study programmes and the Ofsted focus on outcomes, means there is now a consensus about the importance of delivering programmes which will improve a young person’s life chances. This provides a framework, which, although not perfect, is at least serious in its intent to secure better outcomes for young people with SEND.

Gloucestershire College has created a staff development programme which includes a fact sheet that summarises the key points of the Code of Practice and an SEND roadshow for each of the College’s campuses that gives all staff an opportunity to hear about the key changes and reforms. There is also targeted training for specific teams within the College on topics such as writing outcomes and one–page profiles.

⁶ *The Care Act 2014*

⁷ Department of Health (2010), *Fulfilling and rewarding Lives: the strategy for adults with autism in England*.

⁸ Department of Health (2014), *Think Autism: Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives, the strategy for adults with autism in England: an update*.

⁹ Ofsted (2014), *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills: for use from September 2014*.

¹⁰ Ofsted (2015), *Better inspection for all: A report on the responses to the consultation*.

Finished at School

What was the Finished at School Programme?

The aim of the FaS Programme was to deliver an innovative, integrated model of transition support to enable more young people with autism, complex needs and/or learning disabilities to access further education and training beyond school, ultimately enabling them to transition to life and work as part of their home community. To do this, the project established four college-led hubs, each consisting of a general further education college, three local mainstream and special secondary schools and a LA transition lead.

As the project progressed, the FaS hubs developed wider partnerships with other relevant agencies with a shared aim of improving transition from school to college. Further details about the project can be found in [the annex](#).

The four college partners involved were:

> Askham Bryan College (Yorkshire and Humberside)

ASKHAM BRYAN COLLEGE Askham Bryan College is a land-based college operating at sites across Yorkshire and the north of England. It serves 5,000 students and offers a curriculum that ranges from traditional land-based subjects, such as agriculture and horticulture, to animal care and adventure sport.

The College runs courses from entry level and Apprenticeships through to degrees. It also has provision to support learners with autism.

> Bromley College (Greater London)

Bromley COLLEGE OF FURTHER & HIGHER EDUCATION Bromley College of Further and Higher Education is based across two campuses at Bromley and Orpington in south east London. It offers courses ranging from entry level to higher education qualifications, spanning professional and vocational courses.

The College serves around 10,000 young people aged 14 upwards, and has recently redeveloped its facilities for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, including autism.

> Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College (Greater London)



Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College has campuses in Acton, Ealing, Hammersmith and Southall in west London. Its curriculum offer includes eight Apprenticeship pathways.

The College has approximately 20,000 learners in all. Its facilities include the Gatehouse provision, which has been specifically designed for learners with autism.

> Gloucestershire College (South West)



Gloucestershire College has a number of campuses, with its three largest located in Cheltenham, Gloucester and the Forest of Dean in south west England. It offers a wide range of courses to its 20,000 students.

The College has a dedicated learning support department that provides a range of services and assistance to learners with learning differences, disabilities or medical conditions.



Additional Information

Sources of additional relevant information are signposted throughout the guide under 'useful links'. In addition, a self-audit tool based on the key learning points from the FaS Programme is provided in the [resource bank](#), which is available in the digital version of this guide. This practical tool has been created to support providers and practitioners to evaluate current practice, identify areas for further development and, drawing on the contents of the guide, plan actions to improve preparation for adulthood for young people with autism.



Self audit
Tool

Download our Self audit tool

In each FaS hub, the school partners identified a number of pupils with autism (over 100 in total across the four FaS hubs), the majority with a Statement of Special Educational Needs, to take part in the project. The young people would be making the transition from school to their next placement in 2014, 2015 or 2016.

The FaS Programme's aim was to improve the transition from school to whichever placement the young person and their family chose. It was, however, hoped that project-related activity would increase the number of young people with autism able to make a successful transition to their local college. Parents of those involved were provided with information about the project and confirmed their willingness for their son or daughter to take part. It was made clear from the outset that there was no expectation that participants should go on to attend one of the colleges if it turned out not to be the most appropriate placement for them.

This guide summarises the lessons learned as a result of FaS Programme activity, which focussed on improving transition for young people with autism by addressing the following key areas:

- building successful partnerships with learners, parents and other providers
- developing staff awareness, knowledge, skills, confidence and roles
- using person-centred ways of working
- developing curriculum pathways and services to support progression and transition.

What does this guide cover?

The FaS Programme has proved highly successful in forging effective partnerships between local secondary schools and other relevant agencies with the shared aim of improving transition from school to college.

In [Section 2](#), we explore the factors contributing to this success, starting by identifying approaches used to listen to learners and secure their active involvement in making decisions about their future.

In [Section 3](#), we consider approaches for working in partnership with parents to explore post-school options for their son or daughter. This includes drawing on their knowledge of the young person to develop a shared understanding about the young person's aspirations, priorities for learning, support needs and the implications for successful transition.

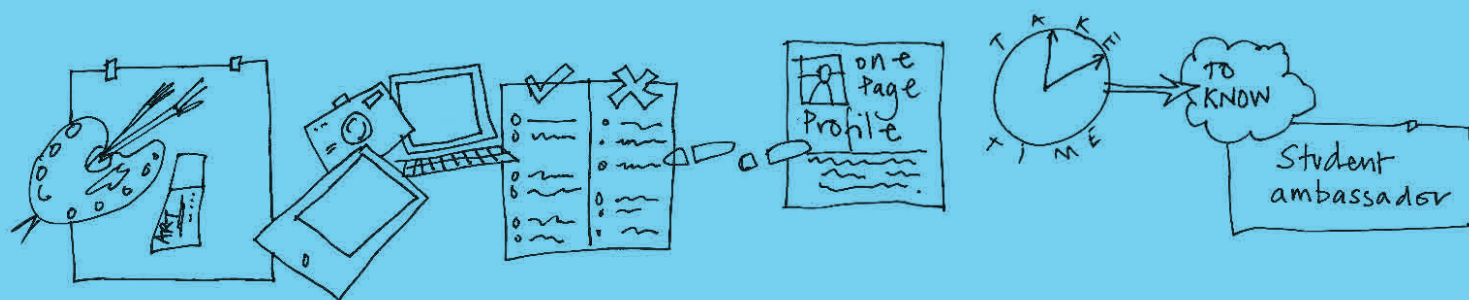
In [Section 4](#), we explore the approaches used by the FaS partners to identify and build partnerships with other organisations and agencies. These partners can play a key role in supporting transition for young people with autism.

In [Section 5](#), we consider the implications of effective transition working and the Children and Families Act for developing staff awareness, knowledge, skills and confidence. Recognising that the quality of learners' experiences is determined by the skills of the staff who work with them, we examine the training and development undertaken as part of the FaS Programme to facilitate the creation of a capable and well-trained workforce.

In [Section 6](#), we explore the ways in which the FaS partners successfully implemented person-centred ways of working in order to improve transition from school to college for young people with autism. This included the introduction of person-centred reviews and the development of one-page profiles.

In [Section 7](#), we summarise the key learning from the FaS partners' review of their offer. We outline the adaptations and developments made to both curriculum and services to support learners to transition successfully, access an appropriate curriculum, thrive and succeed.

2: Listening to the voices of young people with autism



Building successful partnerships was a central element of the FaS Programme, since this is crucial if the experience of transition is to be positive and the outcome successful. It is also a duty within the Children and Families Act. We start by exploring the most important partnership of all: that with the young people themselves.

The voices of young people were at the heart of the FaS Programme. The need to place the young person and their family at the heart of all decision-making is enshrined in the Children and Families Act, which expects local authorities, schools and colleges to: (code to left)

The Children and Families Act gives young people with an EHC plan a range of specific decision-making rights about their plans directly from the end of compulsory school age.¹¹ Whether or not a young person has an EHC plan, it is expected that as children approach the transition point (i.e. from Year 9), schools and colleges should help them and their families explore their aspirations and consider how different post-16 education options can help meet them.

Young people with autism have areas of difference relating to 'communication and interaction' and 'social understanding'. They are also likely to have difficulty imagining a future they have yet to experience. Enabling them to communicate their needs and aspirations and to understand how to achieve a good outcome requires significant skills on the part of those who work with them.

Involving learners meaningfully in making decisions about their future is key to successful transition, but there is no 'one way' of gathering views which will suit all young people with autism. Within the FaS Programme, the college and school partners used a range of approaches. These included:

Using graphic art

All of the FaS hubs undertook four days' person-centred planning training as part of the project. On day one, the trainers, working with young people, used graphic art very effectively to explore and record young people's feelings about the transition to college. Young people with autism are often visual learners, and therefore the use of graphics can be a particularly powerful tool in empowering them to express their views, including dreams and aspirations. The resulting information was used to improve the transition experience and also taken back to schools for use in lessons, person-centred reviews and transition planning.

Using technology

The availability of technology such as smartphones, with their capacity to film, and internet platforms such as YouTube, has made it much easier to capture and share information across a broad audience. The FaS partners used technology creatively to produce and share resources which support young people with autism to:

- express their views
- evidence their skills and the contribution they can make to the work place
- raise awareness amongst peers and staff about good support at college.

Bromley College is involving young people in the process of creating a virtual tour of their Nido Volans Centre, a specialist centre for young people with complex learning difficulties and disabilities. Their facilities include hospitality and catering facilities, speech and therapy rooms, and a range of information and communication technology. This will give prospective learners and their families an idea of what to expect prior to a visit, and afterwards, enable them to



Code of Practice

'...support that young person to communicate their needs and aspirations and to make decisions which are most likely to lead to good outcomes for them.'

Code of Practice, Section 8.15



¹¹ Code of Practice, Section 8.14.

reflect on their experiences and/or familiarise themselves with the environment before they start. The College is also developing an accessible online prospectus, blog and radio podcast.

Learners at the Gatehouse at Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College have made use of a range of technology, including films, podcasts and Twitter. This has played a key role in supporting young people to develop an understanding of themselves and their autism, as well as enabling them to create individual video profiles to share with employers or tutors when they move onto their next course, job or Apprenticeship. The films created are typically filmed on smartphones, hosted on YouTube and made available to both new and existing learners via the Gatehouse Podcast channel. *(quote to right)*

Learners at the Gatehouse have also created films and resources exploring the impact of autism-related areas such as sensory differences and 'theory of mind', which provide a useful source of information for peers and staff.

One of the main barriers to successful transition for young people with autism can be a lack of awareness and understanding amongst their peers. Young people with autism are particularly susceptible to bullying because of their difficulties in understanding social interactions.¹² Resources made by – and about – young people with autism are a powerful tool in promoting understanding, tolerance and respect, and are valuable in preventing incidents of bullying (including cyber bullying).

Parents and young people attending an information evening at Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College were given the opportunity to voice any anxieties about the transition from school into post-16 provision. The College filmed their views and staff were able to watch it again in order to reflect on what was said, tease out key issues and consider what should be done to address those concerns.

Finding out what existing learners felt was good about their transition to college and taking steps to make it better

All the colleges involved in the FaS Programme consulted with existing learners to draw on their experiences of transition. They wanted to find out what worked and what could be improved for future learners. This was done in a number of ways, including face to face interviews and using questionnaires. At Gloucestershire College, this research was done by transition officers, while at Bromley College a local educational psychologist undertook this research. An example of a questionnaire developed for this purpose can be found in the [resource bank](#).

The resulting learner feedback has been instrumental in shaping future provision. At Bromley College, the learners identified that they needed a space to 'settle' before class started. In response, the College has provided base rooms with their tutor groups for 30 minutes before classes start, ensuring there are only a few students in each room. The system has proved very successful in reducing learners' anxiety.

Questionnaires from all four FaS hubs indicated that attending a college open evening and/or link course prior to starting college was highly effective in supporting transition. The information gathered also identified some key concerns with which young people would appreciate support once on programme. These were:

- anxiety about not getting work done on time
- fear of bullying
- anxiety regarding timetable changes.



Quote

'I find these videos useful because people with autism sometimes can struggle to communicate with other people, especially new people, and these videos can help us to express ourselves to key people.'

Niall (Student at the Gatehouse, Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College)

Useful Links

Gatehouse Podcast channel:
<http://gatehousechannel.blogspot.co.uk/>

An autism awareness film made by Niall (a learner at the Gatehouse):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YI7bwEPRJH8&feature=youtu.be>

Enhancing Employability:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5Wo0ylpaMM>

Disability Awareness:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8czAR28hqGw>

¹² The National Autistic Society (2006), *B is for Bullied: the experiences of children with autism and their families*.



Top Tips

- Engage young people with autism in using technology creatively. You will find examples of how this can be done in the useful links on page 12.
- For those who find it particularly hard to express their views, work through people who know the individual well and can best elicit their views, securing their involvement in the whole process.
- Be prepared for – and accepting of – any negative views expressed. Young people with autism may not be as guarded as their peers when expressing their views.
- Remember that learners' views change over time, so listening to what they have to say is a continuous process. Any documents, such as one-page profiles or 'All about Me' statements should be regularly updated in both school and college.
- Ensure that staff working with young people have the necessary skills to elicit their views and to deal appropriately with any sensitive issues which might emerge. You can find out more about this in Section 5.
- Once you have listened to learners, it is important to act. Young people need to know that their concerns will be taken seriously and addressed as far as possible.
- Remember that implementing some of the strategies listed here will benefit all young people, not just those with autism.

Developing one-page profiles

The four days' person-centred planning training enabled the FaS partners to engage young people in creating their own one-page profiles, with real control over the content and nature of information shared about them as well as an opportunity to identify how they like to be supported. A one-page profile captures what the young person says about what motivates them and what good support for them looks like. Some young people with autism find it very hard to express their views, so the opinions of parents and others in their circle of support will be important too. Information about how the profiles were developed can be found in Section 6, and an example from the FaS Programme is available in the [resource bank](#).

Taking time to get to know an individual, particularly those with the most complex needs, is essential if the profile is to be accurate. The Entry Level Course Manager at Askham Bryan College learned more about how to motivate one young man with autism in class by playing pool with him during break. One school partner, in recognition of the depth of understanding a college would need about a young person in order to support him properly, commissioned a clinical psychologist's report. The resulting report, which described a 'good day/bad day' proved invaluable in creating a profile and developing appropriate support strategies.

Appointing a student ambassador

Askham Bryan College appointed a student ambassador, a young person with autism, to play a key role in supporting other young people with autism with their transition to the College. Additional information about the work of the student ambassador can be found in a case study in the [resource bank](#).



Summary

This section has underlined the importance of listening to young people, considered the implications of the Children and Families Act for practice and explored approaches used effectively by the FaS partners to engage learners meaningfully in making decisions about their future. [Part 1 of the Finished at School self-audit tool](#) can be used to evaluate your organisation's current practice in this area of work and identify ways it can be further developed.

In the next section, we will consider approaches for working in partnership with parents to explore post-school options, drawing on their knowledge of their son or daughter to develop shared understanding about aspirations, priorities for learning, support needs and the implications for successful transition.

3: Working in partnership with parents and carers





Code of Practice

'Local authorities, schools, colleges, health services and other agencies should continue to involve parents in discussions about the young person's future.'

Code of Practice, Section 8.15



Key Learning Point

Parents are likely to know their child better than anyone, and, as such, have a greater understanding of their needs, skills and dreams. Whilst it is important to enable the young person to advocate for themselves, working in partnership with parents to identify aspirations for the future and to secure shared understanding about what matters to – and for – the young person is instrumental in ensuring a successful outcome. It is also an effective means of reassuring parents about next steps.

At Askham Bryan College, one student's parents supported their son to practice the bus journey to and from the College so that when he started, he could travel safely and independently.

The aim of the FaS Programme was to develop effective processes, including those for working in partnership with parents, to support young people with autism to make a successful transition from school to their next placement and, ultimately, into adult lives.

The Children and Families Act makes it clear that young people must play a key role in making decisions about their future. They must have choice and control over the implications of this for education and support. Whilst the final decision will rest with the young person, there is within the Code of Practice an expectation that in most cases their family will be involved in the decision-making process: *(code to left)*

The importance of working in partnership with parents is illustrated in this quote from a tutor from the Gatehouse at Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College:



Quote

'I'm not just taking in the learner; I'm taking on a family too. I'll be dealing with them for two years. The most successful students have a good network of support around them.'

Tutor of learners with autism

The tutor takes advantage at the initial interview of the opportunity to clarify expectations about parental involvement and methods of communication:



Quote

'We have an open door policy and so we want parents to communicate with us... so we talk about the importance of replying to any e-mails from college and attending review meetings here.'

Tutor of learners with autism

Parents of young people with autism often experience significant anxiety about how their child will cope with transition from school to college, particularly if the move is from the relative safety of a small, familiar school to a much larger college of further education. The FaS Programme aimed to improve the transition experience of young people with autism in general, but was also keen to support colleges to meet the needs of more complex young people who in the past might not have been viewed (either by themselves, their family or the college) as natural candidates for attending a local college.

Working in partnership with parents to support transition was a central aspect of this aspiration. Some of the approaches successfully used by the FaS partners are identified below:

Sharing information about the provision with parents

It is crucial that parents have the knowledge they need to arrive at an informed decision about whether a proposed provider is the right choice for their child. Acknowledging and working with parents to explore and address any concerns is essential if the local college is to be considered a realistic option. Whilst parents will obviously be keen for their son or daughter to achieve, often their first and more immediate concern is safety and well-being.

Here are some of the ways the FaS college partners have successfully shared information with parents to raise awareness of the college offer and alleviate anxieties:

➤ Working with parents from Year 9 onwards

Providing an early opportunity for parents to find out about possible education and training options for their son or daughter when they leave school can help alleviate some of the anxiety parents experience around transition.

Year 9 is the stage when schools encourage children to think about their aspirations for the future in terms of work, independent living and life in their local community. As part of the FaS Programme, college staff went into schools to meet and talk to parents with children in Year 9. This meant parents were introduced to college staff in a familiar environment, surrounded by school staff they knew well and trusted, who they could talk to after the meeting.

Following one such Year 9 information evening, several parents who had initially expressed a strongly-held view that the local college was not a suitable option were willing to visit the college and find out about what was on offer. As a result, they were better able to make an informed judgment.

➤ Holding college open evenings and information events

All four FaS college partners held events aimed at giving parents an opportunity to tour the facilities, find out more about their offer, meet key staff (including not only tutors and learning support assistants, but also speech and language therapists, course coordinators and staff working in specialist roles related to autism and/or transition), discuss transition and have any questions or concerns answered.

These proved invaluable in increasing parental confidence in relation to the safety of their children. It gave them the chance to find out more about procedures to ensure safety and supervision within the environment, such as support levels between sessions.



Quotes

'One of the big pieces of feedback was that parents really valued coming in and actually seeing what a college environment looks like on a normal day, having a look around and seeing students engaged and working in lessons. A lot of the legwork and the preparation that happens for young people is at home. Parents are often the make or break in terms of advocacy of where students are going to go. If we can crack it with the parents all things are possible...'

FaS Programme hub lead

The potential of a tour to influence future choices is confirmed by the following quote from a parent following a college visit:

'...it had a huge impact on our decision to come to the college.'

Parent of learner with autism

Gloucestershire College produced a questions and answers leaflet to provide a written response to concerns and questions raised at a parent/carer information evening, which proved very popular. A copy of the questions and answers leaflet can be found in the [resource bank](#).

The opportunity to tour the college was also valued by young people:

'I came and I found a lot of info to help me to make my choice.'

Learner with autism

For some young people, a personalised approach to touring the college and meeting staff work best, as this letter from a parent following a tour confirms:

'Thank you so much for your excellent tour of the College. We were very impressed with the facilities and the support available for students like Luke. Luke especially liked the campus and would definitely like to apply for a place, but I wondered if it would be possible for us to come in and talk to someone from the IT department, as you suggested, before putting the application in? We could come to an open evening, but I think it would be less stressful for Luke if someone could see us at a quieter time.'

Parent of learner with autism

Parents of prospective students have particularly valued the opportunity to hear current and former learners' parents talking about their experiences, and that of their son or daughter. This is a very powerful way of allaying concerns, as the parents can relate to the initial fears these parents typically describe, and take comfort from the fact that these anxieties were ultimately either unfounded or successfully addressed.

The FaS college partners participated in local information events related to transition. Askham Bryan College, for example, hosted the City of York Council Opportunities Fair. This event is specifically designed to enable parents and carers to gain information and advice from sources across the county on transition-related issues, such as transport and taster sessions. Students participated in the event, with some learners with autism acting as ambassadors.

➤ **Organising coffee mornings for parents**

Bromley College and Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College both found holding simple drop-in coffee mornings (or evenings) at local special and mainstream schools was an effective way of meeting parents of prospective students.

Parents felt comfortable in a familiar setting, surrounded by school staff they knew and trusted. College staff brought information with them for parents to take away. More importantly, however, they spoke to parents informally, dispelling myths about college, providing contact details and becoming a 'known face'. These events were also used to introduce parents to the concept of person-centred working.



Quote

'Vital learning around person-centred planning has taken place through the information evening and through coffee mornings instigated with SENCOs and parents.'

Some of the parents and carers are nervous about the prospect of their child attending college provision; the coffee mornings have been an excellent platform for us to build confidence in the Local Offer.'

FaS Programme hub lead

➤ **Hosting learner-run coffee mornings**

Regular coffee mornings, facilitated by young people themselves, were also held at the colleges. The primary purpose of these was not to showcase the college, but to create networks of support for families of young people with autism.

Bromley College holds drop in coffee mornings once a month, which are deliberately kept informal. Talking to other parents in a relaxed setting, and seeing young people with autism operating confidently in a college environment, has done much to alleviate parents' concerns.

Existing learners with autism at the College have also benefitted from the social skills and confidence developed through planning and hosting an event. These include identifying and inviting external agencies, showcasing work and acting as role models for potential new students.



Key Learning Point

Giving parents of prospective students the opportunity to hear from the parents of current learners is a very powerful way to alleviate concerns.

➤ Recognising and addressing the difference between school and college

College programmes do not typically provide the five-day offer available in schools. Also, summer holidays may be longer than in school. The FaS partners found it was important that these differences were flagged up early with parents, with discussions and plans put in place for what their son or daughter would do in those times.

The college partners have adapted their offer in response to parents' views:



Quote

'We had feedback from parents and through the project we have acted on this and developed more taster days and a summer school when the young people finish school.'

FaS Programme hub lead

(Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College)

➤ Providing accessible information

While there is no substitute for meeting directly with parents and young people, it is also useful to provide alternative sources of engaging and accessible information about potential options.

In 2013, Bromley College produced a frequently asked questions leaflet to address common concerns that parents had about sending their son or daughter to their local college. The leaflet provided parents with information about the facilities available at the then-new provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In addition, it 'busted myths' – for instance, that a young person has to be able to travel independently to be eligible to attend college.

The College is now planning to make a film showing post-16 options. It will allow parents to 'view the provision from a safe distance'. This could be instrumental in supporting them to make a visit, or meet a member of staff to discuss options.

Gloucestershire College produced a FaS Programme newsletter to keep parents up-to-date with project activity. This newsletter was well received and included details about forthcoming events, such as link programmes and coffee mornings, as well as a brief explanation about the purpose and format of one-page profiles. A copy of the newsletter can be found in the [resource bank](#).

➤ Gathering parental views

The FaS college partners have used a range of approaches to explore parental concerns regarding their child's transition to college and how best to alleviate them.

At Bromley College, the second part of the open evening was used to enable parents and carers to voice their concerns and worries over transition of young people from school into college. Questionnaires were also used to learn from the experience of parents of existing learners. Examples of these questionnaires can be found in the [resource bank](#).



Pause for Thought

How effectively do you use the views of parents and learners to help you shape your transition pathways and your curriculum offer?



Key Learning Point

Communication with parents should not focus solely on providing information about what is available. Parents play an important role in preparing students for the move to college, working in partnership with the college to deal with any initial difficulties.

Useful Links

FAQs for learners and parents – Bromley College:

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/eg6777>

Post-16 provision in the London Borough of Havering:

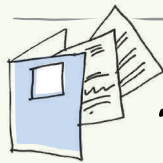
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SL_KDrKonko



Top Tips

- Make sure parents know that they can make an initial visit to the college without their son or daughter should they wish to do so.
- Once it is confirmed that a young person will be joining your provision, ensure you provide parents and learners with a timetable and photos of key staff well in advance of their start date.
- Give parents a direct way to communicate with relevant college staff. Askham Bryan College provided parents with contact details for the course manager as soon as a place was offered. The option to discuss issues such as transport and support levels substantially allayed concerns. This open communication with parents continued when the learner started college, helping to resolve early issues.
- Remember, sometimes parents' fears can present more of a problem than a young person's anxiety. Be sensitive when dealing with this. School staff, who have experience of dealing with specific cases of parental anxiety, could be useful allies here and share tips for managing this. Young people need to know that their concerns will be taken seriously and addressed as far as possible.

Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College has introduced a very successful college-based 'parents' forum' aimed at supporting parents to understand the College's offer and plans for the future. Parents found this event extremely useful and requested it be held termly as opposed to the once a year initially envisaged. The Head of Inclusive Learning used the forum to explore parents' views about what they would like to see as part of the new curriculum offer.



Summary

This section has explored approaches used by the FaS partners to work in partnership with parents to successfully share information about provision, alleviate concerns, reflect upon the curriculum offer and improve the experience of transition. Part 2 of the Finished at School self-audit tool can be used to evaluate your organisation's current practice in this area of work and identify ways it can be further developed.

In the next section, we will explore the approaches used by the FaS partners to identify and build partnerships with other organisations and agencies who can play a key role in supporting transition for young people with autism.

4: Working in partnership with other providers



Partnership was a key element of the transition model developed by the FaS hubs.

The FaS Programme methodology involved the development of a college-led hub, consisting of local mainstream and special secondary schools, the LA transition lead and other key partners. This hub was tasked with working to improve transition from school to college by developing and strengthening pathways for young people with autism which would enable them to continue their education, develop their skills and access work.

The requirement for LAs, health and social care services to work collaboratively for the purposes of strategic planning and joint commissioning is enshrined in the Children and Families Act. At an organisational level, there are some very specific expectations, which include:

- schools and colleges must cooperate with their LA in the development and review of EHC plans. This involves helping to shape the EHC plan, define the outcomes for that young person and develop a post-16 study programme tailored to their needs
- schools and colleges should work in partnership to provide opportunities such as taster courses, link programmes and mentoring which enable young people with SEND to familiarise themselves with the college environment and gain some experience of college life and study
- schools should share information about the individual's previous SEND provision with the further education or training provider. This should be done before the young person takes up their place, so that the provider can prepare appropriate support and develop a suitable study programme that builds on previous learning
- colleges should use any information they have from the school about the young person. They should seek clarification and further advice when needed from the school (or other agencies where relevant) to ensure they are ready to meet the needs of the student and that the student is ready for the move to college
- schools and colleges should agree a 'tell us once' approach so that families and young people do not have to repeat the same information unnecessarily.¹³

The FaS Programme provided a framework in which key partners could come together, prior to the Act coming into force, to consider how best to meet these new responsibilities. The lessons learned as a result will be of interest to all providers involved in implementing the reforms and preparing young people with SEND for adulthood.



Quotes

'Working together has opened schools' eyes about how important transition is. It's got to be about everybody pulling together. When that happens, it works – brilliantly.'

Entry level one course manager

'Our partnership with the LAs has been a real achievement of our work on the project. We feel confident that we can get the information sooner and trust has built up with them. We can discuss what else we can offer for personalised packages. The project has opened doors and it has been galvanising. The timing with the SEND reforms means that it was the right time.'

**FaS Programme hub lead
(Askham Bryan College)**

¹³ Code of Practice, Section 8.23.

Identifying potential partners to improve transition

The FaS hubs enrolled a key representative from each school partner, including special and mainstream schools with specialist autism or speech, language and communication provision. To increase the project's impact and range, the school representatives were given responsibility for sharing effective, up-to-date practice with colleagues from other local mainstream schools who may only have one or two students with autism in Year 8 or above. The FaS college partners also identified the main referring local authorities, enrolling key representatives from each, such as transition officers and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) professionals (i.e. those who used to be Connexions). Local autism partnership boards were also invited to join the hubs.

Bromley College included the Burgess Autistic Trust as a local partner. It was able to use its networks to identify and draw into college both young people with autism who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) and others in mainstream schools who were highly unlikely to succeed in college without an enhanced transition process.



Building a partnership to support transition

Gloucestershire College drew on campus demographics and catchment areas to identify three secondary schools to be part of the FaS Programme: two special schools and a mainstream academy with a LA-funded autism provision (Enhanced Provision for Interaction and Communication).

In addition to the three school partners, the FaS hub led by Gloucestershire College recruited a varied selection of external agencies, which included:

- a senior educational psychologist from the LA
- the Autism Lead from the Advisory Teaching Service
- an assistant principal from a local independent specialist provider
- a parent (a governor of a school partner, whose son with autism had successfully transitioned to college in 2013)
- the Case Responsible Officer for learners with SEND from the Youth Support Team (Prospects)
- the chair from the Gloucestershire Adult Autism Strategy Board.

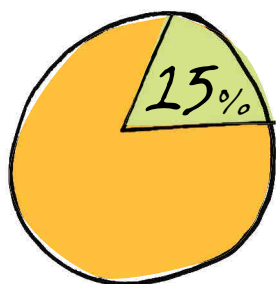
A more detailed case study around working with partners to support transition can be found in the [resource bank](#).



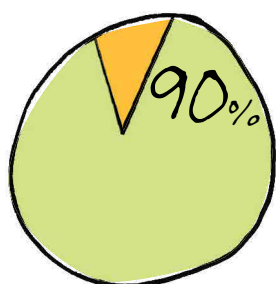
Key Learning Point

Lessons from the FaS hubs clearly indicate that having partnerships with local schools is not in itself sufficient. If your partnership is to have the power it needs to improve transition and truly influence post-college outcomes, it should also include representatives from:

- the LA transition team
- health and social care, in order to appropriately plan and provide for the needs of more complex young people who may need support with health or independent living
- local autism partnership boards
- IAG professionals who specialise in working with young people with SEND and those who serve mainstream schools
- supported employment organisations



Of adults with autism
in full-time paid
employment



Of adults with autism
who depend on their
families or full-time care

Establishing a shared vision

The success of the FaS hubs was partially determined by the extent to which the various parties understood and signed up to the purpose and aims of the FaS Programme.

This is about more than establishing a generic agreement to work in partnership. The FaS hub leads found an element of awareness-raising was needed in order to galvanise partners and develop a shared understanding of the 'moral purpose' of the improving transitions agenda.

To achieve this, the FaS hubs drew on statistics concerning the exclusion from mainstream life of young people with autism:

- children with autism are disproportionately affected by both formal and illegal school exclusions
- fewer than one in four young people with autism continue their education beyond school
- only 15 percent of adults with autism are in full-time paid employment¹⁴
- 90 percent of adults with autism depend on their families or on full-time residential care.¹⁵

The FaS hubs' experience indicates that these shocking statistics are a powerful tool in harnessing a genuine commitment to improving the life chances of individuals with autism amongst partners.

Developing effective partnerships

The FaS hubs learned a great deal about developing effective local partnerships to support the work of the project. It was important to establish:

➤ Principles to underpin partnership activity

Collaborative working is now a requirement under the Children and Families Act, but it is also essential if we are to achieve better outcomes for young people, and arguably it carries a 'moral imperative'. Consequently, there is merit in agreeing the principles which underpin your partnership approach. These principles should include working in person-centred ways and underpinning all planning for the move from school to college for young people with autism on the four Preparing for Adulthood pathways.

You might also want to articulate a commitment to focusing on difference and not deficit, having high expectations, promoting positive attitudes to autism and, above all, working in partnership to secure positive life outcomes that are meaningful to the young person.

All partners will need to be willing to critically reflect on the strengths and areas for development of current transition processes, at both individual organisation level and within the local context in order to identify and deliver improvements needed.

There will have to be a commitment to sharing information gained from attending partnership meetings with relevant colleagues within and beyond their organisations and with parents and carers. In the FaS Programme, this involved schools and colleges cascading information to practitioners. LA representatives were entrusted with informing senior managers and securing support to enhance transition for young people with autism and provide appropriate high quality provision within local college settings.

¹⁴ The National Autistic Society (2009), *Don't Write Me Off: Make the system fair for people with autism*.

¹⁵ Patricia Howlin et al (2004), Adult outcomes for children with autism, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Volume 45, Issue 2, pp212–229.

➤ **A purpose and plan for the partnership**

Be clear about the purpose and outcomes of the partnership and establish a shared plan and timeline for transition. In order to prioritise action, an early task for the FaS hubs was to find out from partner representatives what was already being done, what worked well, what was a problem and what should be done to improve this – by whom? How? When?

The FaS hubs had set outputs and activities to work to. They included: attendance at regular hub meetings; joint training on person-centred reviews, followed by the introduction of the reviews and one-page profiles for young people with autism starting at college; identifying young people with autism making a transition from school to their next placement in 2014, 2015 or 2016; and the establishment (or further development) of taster sessions, link courses and autism-specific courses to support transition.

➤ **Clarity around roles and responsibilities**

It is important to establish clarity about roles and responsibilities early amongst partners, to ensure all parties (both individuals and the organisations they represent) understand the time and activity commitments they are signing up to. For schools, this might involve a commitment to releasing school staff to accompany the learner to college to support transition link activities.

➤ **The nature of commitments for organisational representatives**

Be clear. Is it the expectation that this person will just attend partnership meetings, and possibly some training, or will it involve time to undertake other activities, such as setting up and running person-centred reviews?

➤ **The logistics involved in the partnership**

Establish where, when and how often the meetings or training will take place. Is one of the partners best-placed to host because it can meet requirements in terms of room size, availability of parking or convenience due to a central location?

Time meetings to suit your partnership. The FaS hubs found late afternoon, after the school day ends, worked best for schools. Will you rotate locations as a means of raising awareness of partners' offers and sharing expertise? How will you cover costs – will each organisation represented make a fixed contribution? How will you facilitate communication between meetings?

➤ **The target learners**

It is important to know which learners you are seeking to support. The FaS partners worked together to identify young people with autism from Year 8 upwards, creating a database of learners, institutions and year groups to inform planning. They also identified the person currently responsible for/involvement with their transition planning and made sure they either attended hub meetings or had direct contact with someone who did.



Key Learning Point

Work with partners to establish a shared plan for action. The plan should include not only general agreement about the key points at which transition planning should take place, but also the details, such as sharing person-centred review dates well in advance to facilitate the attendance of college staff and other key personnel, including representatives from health and social care services.



Quote

'Our working group meets every six weeks here at the College. It's all about the students – discussing how best to meet their needs. It's the linking up and working together that galvanises things and ensures we follow things up.'

**FaS Programme hub lead
(Bromley College)**

➤ **Methods of communication (formally and informally)**

Allocate roles within group meetings to facilitate communication. Identify who will chair, how will it be recorded, who will produce and share minutes, etc.? Who will take responsibility for organising meetings and how will meeting information be shared?

One FaS hub found it useful to use Doodle polls as a tool for scheduling meetings. If e-mail is the main means of communication, draw up a list of contacts for circulation, ensuring all parties are willing for their details to be shared. It can help to agree e-mail ground rules: specifically ask for your e-mails to be acknowledged, or agree to use the option that tells you an e-mail has been read by a recipient; agree to use the subject line to help busy colleagues prioritise. Ask each provider representative what kind of communication works best for them and be understanding when things do not go to plan.

➤ **Contributions to the partnership**

All partners are likely to bring different strengths to a partnership. In addition to securing jointly agreed outcomes, partners may have specific benefits they hope to gain through participating.

The FaS hubs asked each organisation to identify what it could offer and any related areas of practice with which it would appreciate support. This included practical offers, such as the space and facilities to host meetings and training events, and particular skills or expertise relevant to the hub purpose. In one FaS hub, a school partner provided the college access to its occupational therapists, the college autism tutor provided training for school staff, and college and school partners commissioned and jointly attended training.

➤ **A jointly-facilitated training needs analysis**

In the FaS Programme, this was undertaken in preparation for the four-day person-centred planning training and proved highly effective in identifying common areas for development and gaps in the provision of services, as well as individual organisational issues to support transition locally. Parents and young people with autism who were included in that training provided a unique insight into the development activities required to improve the transition process from their perspective.

➤ **Senior leadership buy-in**

The FaS hubs' experience has shown that leadership understanding of commitments is essential to a smooth running and effective partnership.

The college partners used their own Quality Improvement Plans (QUIP) to embed and implement an action plan to take forward the work of the project beyond March 2015.

In one hub, this process provided the hub lead with the opportunity to meet with their college principal to discuss the impact of the FaS Programme and agree how to embed the action plan at a strategic level and ensure its sustainability.

The Deputy Principal at Askham Bryan College attended both the person-centred planning training and some partnership meetings.

As lead partners, colleges were well-placed to understand programme expectations, but securing this level of commitment from schools was equally important. The introduction of person-centred reviews and one-page profiles, for example, required significant changes to existing documentation and processes.



Quote

'You need the right person to lead who can feed into senior management. It is important that I know that I am backed and supported by senior management.'

**FaS Programme hub lead
(Gloucestershire College)**

Although the head of one school partner had signed up to the project, the school's representative in the FaS hub was unable to progress this aspect until she had received agreement from both the head teacher and school governors. This process, whilst ultimately successful, took time, causing delays which could have been either avoided or substantially minimised with improved communication at the start.

➤ **How college processes can be used to embed strategic change**

In at least one of the FaS hubs, project activity resulted in the inclusion within the college's strategic plan of a commitment to develop more effective transition pathways and provision for learners with autism.

Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives (2010), the adult autism strategy, recommended the setting of local autism partnership boards that bring together local organisations and stakeholders to support the implementation of the strategy at a local level. Gloucestershire College joined the local autism partnership board for Gloucestershire:



Quote

'This has ensured that our offer as a college can support the strategy and that the outcomes from the project align with key elements of the strategy. This involvement has enabled us to develop close links and contacts with other external agencies working with young people and adults across the county.'

FaS Programme hub lead (Gloucestershire College)

Askham Bryan College's links and relationship with the York Local Education Authority were strong before they became involved in the FaS Programme. However, the project has further strengthened these links – and, indeed, expanded them:



Quote

'Being involved in the hub has now led to me being invited to join the two other local strategy groups concerned with transition. Although it is sometimes time consuming attending these groups, being involved has given me opportunity to understand the new SEND legislation. It has also helped to extend the College's reputation for being autism friendly and on a personal level, has further developed both my confidence and knowledge.'

These strong partnership links with the LAs will help us identify learners earlier so that their transitions can take place sooner. This should benefit the students and relieve anxieties about moving out of school to college.'

FaS Programme hub lead (Askham Bryan College)

The manager of discrete provision for learners with SEND at Bromley College has joined their LA's post-16 SEND group, enabling her to work in a strategic partnership with local special schools and mainstream schools.



Key Learning Point

Summarise the outcomes of partnership discussions in a 'terms of reference' document which outlines your agreed approach in terms of scope, purpose, principles, composition and operation, including logistics and communication. Members could be asked to sign and return a copy as an indication of their commitment to delivering the agreed outcomes and operating in line with the terms and expectations outlined, including any specific responsibilities.



Top Tips

- **Take local leadership of the transition agenda.** Prior to getting involved with the FaS Programme, Gloucestershire College signalled its commitment to improving outcomes for young people with autism by signing up to [Ambitious about Autism's College Inclusion Charter](#).
- **Be clear about what you need to address.** Conduct research in your own organisation using person-centred approaches to find out from learners with autism and their parents what has worked well, what did not work well and what could be better.
- **Use what you learn to**
a) create an action plan of improvement for your own college and b) to enrol partners in improving the local system.

➤ **Ensure your organisation designates and empowers an individual in a relevant leadership position to take the lead in building a FaS Programme-style partnership (or developing existing partnerships) with other important stakeholders in the process of transition. Start with existing key contacts, then reach out to others who can contribute to improved transition for young people with autism.**

➤ **In building your partnership, think strategically and operationally. Strategically, it may work well to get yourself or another committed college representative onto relevant local strategic groups. Operationally, be clear which partners, learners and staff you need to involve.**

➤ **Consider how you might use/expand the remit of existing groups. For example, would your existing SENCO forum consider widening participation to include post-school providers?**

➤ **Involve any local autism groups. If you have not done so already, make contact with your local autism partnership board, and invite them to join your hub.**

➤ **Keep the core external partnership working group small enough to enable strong working relationships to be built. A wider group of useful and interested others can be kept informed without requiring their attendance at regular meetings.**

➤ **Work with your partners to identify opportunities for joint training operationally and make the most of these to share expertise, minimise costs and, above all, build effective working relationships.**

Working together within hubs has substantially increased colleges' understanding of the world of special schools and vice versa. This has resulted in an increase in joint activities, many of which were previously accessed by one sector only. For example, both Askham Bryan College and another local college have been invited to attend the LA secondary SENCO forum, a long-standing LA facilitated group, to which colleges have previously never been invited. The forum is attended by SENCOs from all the local schools, providing a mixture of discussion and formal training related to their role including:

- training from speech and language therapists on a variety of topics
- EHC plan implementation
- how to write long and short term outcomes
- raising awareness of autism and other conditions.

College inclusion in the SENCO forum is a significant development, providing an ideal forum for facilitating shared understanding regarding good practice in transition planning. It has also enabled the hub lead to ensure that all SENCOs have up-to-date information about the college, including curriculum pathways and support for transition into and within college.

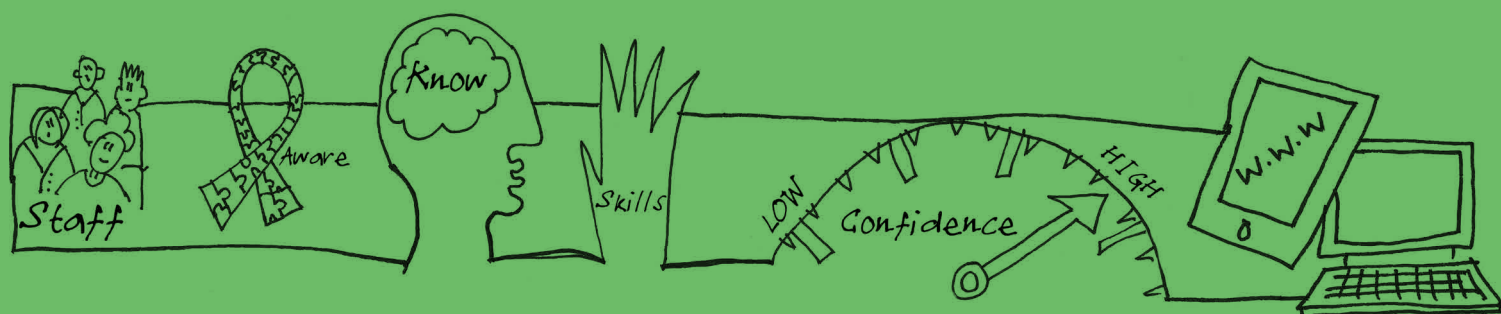
The personal contacts established through the FaS hubs have facilitated wider sharing of information and practice. For example, Gloucestershire College is currently exploring options for establishing cross-centre moderation for accreditation with a school partner. It has also shared practice in assessing skills relating to a functional skills qualification used by both organisations.



This section has underlined the importance of effective partnership working in supporting transition and explored the lessons learned by FaS partners through their experience of being a hub. Part 3 of the Finished at School self-audit tool can be used to evaluate your organisation's current practice in this area of work and identify ways it can be further developed.

In the next section, we will consider the implications of effective transition working and the Children and Families Act for creating a capable, effective and well-trained workforce.

5: Developing staff awareness, knowledge, skills, confidence and roles



The quality of learners' experiences is determined by the skills of the staff who work with them. Training and development was therefore a central element of the FaS Programme, which recognised that preparing young people for adulthood and delivering improved outcomes required the creation of a capable and well-trained workforce.

This is also a key feature of the Children and Families Act, which requires that:



Code of Practice

'Schools and colleges must use their best endeavours to ensure that such provision is made for those who need it. Special educational provision is underpinned by high quality teaching and is compromised by anything less.'

Code of Practice, Section 1.24

Providing best endeavours for young people with autism has profound implications for the training and development of staff at all levels of the organisation, and should include:

Specialist autism training for practitioners

When asked what matters to them, young people and their families are clear that having an understanding of autism and being able to respond appropriately to individual need are crucial for educational success.¹⁶ It is important, therefore, that the staff who work directly with these young people have a deep understanding of autism, see it as a difference, not a deficit, and understand that the impact autism has will vary from person to person. This understanding is essential if staff are to work effectively with each individual, enabling them to develop the skills they need to interact successfully with the world around them and achieve their potential.

Specialist staff effectively act as 'cultural interpreters' for young people with autism, enabling them to develop as independent learners and succeed. They also work with tutors on level one courses and above, to develop their skills and confidence in providing more inclusive curriculums, activities and environments.

The FaS hubs have used the Autism Education Trust (AET) post-16 tier two training to develop specialist autism skills and confidence amongst key staff.

Awareness-raising training

Whilst specialist skills are important, there is also a need for awareness-raising training across the provider. Young people with autism coming into a busy college of further education, for example, will inevitably encounter a wide range of staff. A negative experience resulting from a lack of understanding in an encounter with a receptionist, or a misunderstanding in the canteen, could have a significant impact on how comfortable a young person feels about being at college. The FaS hubs used the AET post-16 tier one training very successfully to address this.

¹⁶ Ambitious about Autism (2011), *Finished at School: Where next for young people with autism?*

In Gloucestershire, a LA-developed online autism e-learning package is offered across the county. Links to the online package and login credentials were e-mailed out and over 150 college staff have now undertaken the online modules. Specialist autism staff have played a key role in providing awareness training:



Quote

'The autism coordinators have worked with teams across the College including the estates team and canteen/hospitality team to raise awareness of autism and how they can best support students within the College.'

FaS Programme hub lead (Gloucestershire College)

This awareness-raising training has significantly developed cross-college understanding of how to interact effectively with students with autism and support them to access college facilities.

Training for senior managers

Outstanding practice requires outstanding leadership. Senior managers have the power to build and drive partnerships and increase capacity. They access and control the resources, including funding, which can enhance provision. Understanding of autism and its implications at this level, plus a commitment to making a difference, is essential if we are to improve outcomes and transition experiences for young people with autism.

In recognition of this, at least two of the FaS college partners plan to undertake the AET post-16 tier three training for managers. They also plan to use the AET standards, which are designed to support providers to evaluate and develop organisational practice in working with young people with autism.

The Code of Practice identifies that colleges should:



Code of Practice

'...ensure that there is a named person in the college with oversight of SEN provision to ensure co-ordination of support, similar to the role of the SEN Coordinator (SENCO) in schools. This person should contribute to the strategic and operational management of the college'.

Code of Practice, Section 7.22

The Code of Practice also identifies specific responsibilities for college governing bodies:

'The governing bodies of colleges should ensure that all staff interact appropriately and inclusively with students who have SEN or a disability and should ensure that they have appropriate expertise within their workforce. They should also ensure that curriculum staff are able to develop their skills, are aware of effective practice and keep their knowledge up to date.'

Code of Practice, Section 7.22

Useful Links

The AET post-16 training programme:

<http://www.aetraininghubs.org.uk/post-16/>

The AET post-16 competency framework (to support practitioners to develop and evaluate their practice):

<http://www.aetraininghubs.org.uk/post-16/cf/>

The AET post-16 national standards (to support organisations to develop and evaluate their practice):

<http://www.aetraininghubs.org.uk/post-16/p16as/>

Helen Sanderson Associates:

<http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/>

Nasen's SEND Gateway:

<http://www.sendgateway.org.uk/>

There should be a governor with specific responsibility for leading on SEND to whom the lead person in the college reports.

Providing specialist autism training for governors and staff in leadership roles is key to enabling colleges to meet their responsibilities in providing 'best endeavours'.



Case Study

Using the Autism Education Trust post-16 training resources for professionals working with young people with autism

Gloucestershire College, Bromley College and Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College all used the AET post-16 training programme. This consists of a three-tiered suite of training resources developed by the AET to support staff working with young people with autism across the post-16 sector. It comprises:

Tier one: Making sense of autism: raising awareness, which takes one and a half hours and is typically delivered on site, provides basic autism awareness training for everyone involved in a post-16 setting who would benefit from an understanding of autism. This includes teaching and support staff, office staff, caterers, caretakers, transport staff, governors, employers and careers advisers.

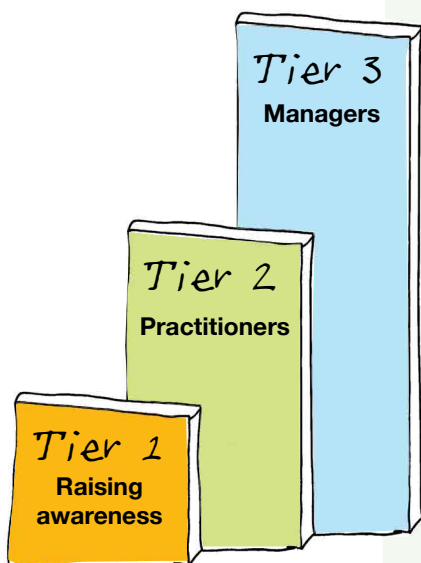
Tier two: Making sense of autism: for practitioners, two days of training providing practical approaches to developing teaching, learning and support strategies for all staff working directly with young people with autism. This includes tutors, learning support practitioners, assessors, trainers and job coaches.

Tier three: Making sense of autism: for managers, one day of training for all staff who may take a leadership role that includes responsibility for developing provision for young people with autism within a post-16 setting. This includes lead practitioners for autism, inclusion and/or curriculum managers and those who manage additional learning support.

'More than 60 learning support assistants have completed the Autism Education Trust post-16 tier one training, which was really valuable and I am delighted to have the commitment from the college management team to undertake the AET tier three training.'

FaS Programme hub lead (Gloucestershire College)

The AET has also produced two free tools to support evaluation which link directly to tiers two and three. These tools are available online and include a wide range of relevant links and resources. Details can be found on page 30 titled Useful Links.



Person-centred training

One of the most significant training and development aspects of the FaS programme was the four-day person-centred planning training, provided by Helen Sanderson Associates, which was attended by all the providers in the FaS Programme. Details of this are provided in Section 6.

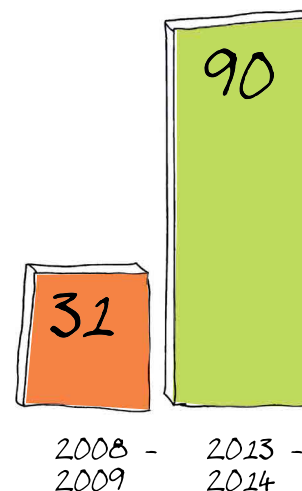
Other FaS Programme training and development outcomes

Joint training opportunities

Being part of a hub proved very worthwhile for members, as it provided opportunities for joint training in specialist areas. Not only does this have cost saving benefits, but more importantly it provides opportunities to share best practice, and supports shared understanding and consistency of approach. The FaS partners found it was also a really good way to build partnerships.

Having a skilled member of staff to take the lead on developing effective autism practice can be instrumental in driving forward the quality of the provision. In recognition of this, Askham Bryan College has trained 20 'autism champions', including a member of senior management, to level two in supporting learners on the spectrum. This role has been instrumental in improving the quality of the programme offer and increasing access to appropriate support for young people with autism. A case study about the role and impact of the autism champions can be found in the [resource bank](#).

In addition to undertaking autism training as part of the induction process, and delivering INSET for a partner special school, the newly-appointed Autism Coordinator at Gloucestershire College plays a key role in supporting individual learners with accessing the environment, courses and external accreditation. He also provides guidance for learners and to staff about reasonable adjustments and appropriate strategies.



Numbers of young people with autism attending Askham Bryan College - see case study in the resource bank

Providing additional related expertise



Code of Practice

'Colleges should make sure they have access to specialist skills and expertise to support the learning of students with SEN. This can be through partnerships with other agencies such as adult social care or health services, or specialist organisations, and/or by employing practitioners directly.'

Code of Practice, Section 7.22

In addition to increasing staff knowledge in relation to autism, the FaS partners have identified and addressed gaps in related areas. Bromley College identified a need to improve support for communication, and addressed this through the provision of two part-time speech and language therapists based at the College for two days each week. *(quote to right)*

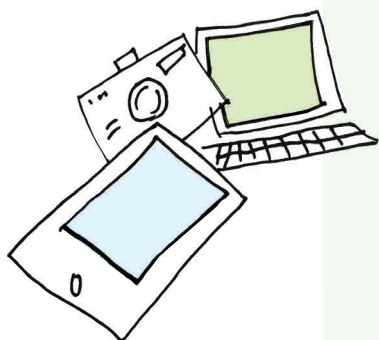
The speech and language therapists attend sessions in order to observe and assess students, support staff in developing one-page communication profiles for learners with autism (and other complex social and communication needs) and offer communication training to college staff. This combination of developing effective strategies to support young people to communicate more effectively, and providing training to enhance staff skills, has been instrumental in supporting transition. More importantly, by improving the communication environment, it has enhanced the learning and social experience provided for young people with implications for long term success, including outcomes.



Quote

'Early engagement with the LA in planning meetings leads to better resources being commissioned. Learners with autism who started at Bromley College in September 2014 have access to speech and language therapy; one learner has had occupational therapy input and staff in the discrete provision for learners with SEND have had two days' comprehensive training around managing behaviours that challenge, related to autism. This has enabled the identified needs of learners with complex issues to be addressed.'

FaS Programme hub lead
(Bromley College)



Newly-arrived learners with autism are likely to experience high levels of anxiety, which may result in behaviours which challenge. In recognition of this, Bromley College, with financial support from the LA, also enlisted the speech and language therapists in delivering training in behaviour management. This proved highly effective in developing staff skills and confidence in understanding and responding appropriately to behaviours which challenge. The College has also introduced clinics with occupational therapists to inform staff about support for students with specific sensory needs.

Training to support the use of technology

As noted previously, technology can be a highly effective tool in engaging young people and reflecting their views and skills. As a result of their engagement in the FaS Programme, one of the school partners in the hub led by Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College is piloting a multi-media advocacy programme. It is working to develop staff skills in capturing young people's views through film and helping students to use different methods to say what they want.

Involving young people and their parents in the delivery of training

Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College includes young people with autism as co-deliverers in the autism training it provides. Delegate feedback has indicated that having the opportunity to hear young people talk about their autism, how it affects their learning, what helps and what hinders is a very powerful tool for changing practice. The College has also created opportunities for parents to speak at transition-related events which include both practitioners and other parents in the audience, in order to demonstrate the impact of effective joint working on outcomes.

Review of staff skills and roles in relation to the process of transition

The FaS partners have reflected on the skills, roles and responsibilities of staff across their organisation through a 'transition lens', resulting in significant changes in training and development for existing staff. In addition, it has led to the creation of new roles to address identified gaps related to transition. In some cases, these roles are explicitly linked, such as the appointment, in November 2014, of a dedicated Transition and Support Coordinator at Bromley College. The role includes going into mainstream and special schools from Year 9 and being part of the process to ensure that transitions are managed more effectively.

Successful transition is, however, about more than moving from one organisation to another. It is about ensuring that the designated next step provider has the skills and understanding required to make the new placement a success. The FaS college partners have secured this additional expertise through the appointment of more or new autism specialists, which has proved highly effective in facilitating successful transition.



Case Study

The role of specialist support workers in facilitating successful transition into college

'One notable development has been the improvement in the quality of support for transition into college offered for young people with high functioning autism who wish to access vocational qualifications at levels one, two and three.

The work undertaken by two designated transition support workers and the autism specialist support workers has included meeting with the young people for an initial visit and taking the time to really understand each individual's concerns and support needs. Most valuable of all is the liaison role they undertake with the specific vocational departments within the College to facilitate arrangements for individuals to have trial sessions/whole mornings within their chosen course. They then provide specialist support during these trial sessions. Students with autism can find it very difficult to "imagine" what a new experience will be like, so linking into courses helps them understand and prepare.

The knowledge and understanding of the autism support staff has helped subject tutors to welcome the young people on to their courses. It takes a great deal of time, effort and autism experience to set up and support such individual "tasters". This work has been done willingly, even when there is no guarantee that the young person will ultimately choose to enrol.

One-to-one support with the College's application and assessment processes is provided from an autism support worker, who manages the process at an appropriate pace, taking into account the individual's support needs including considerations such as environment and flexible timings.'

FaS Programme hub lead (Gloucestershire College)

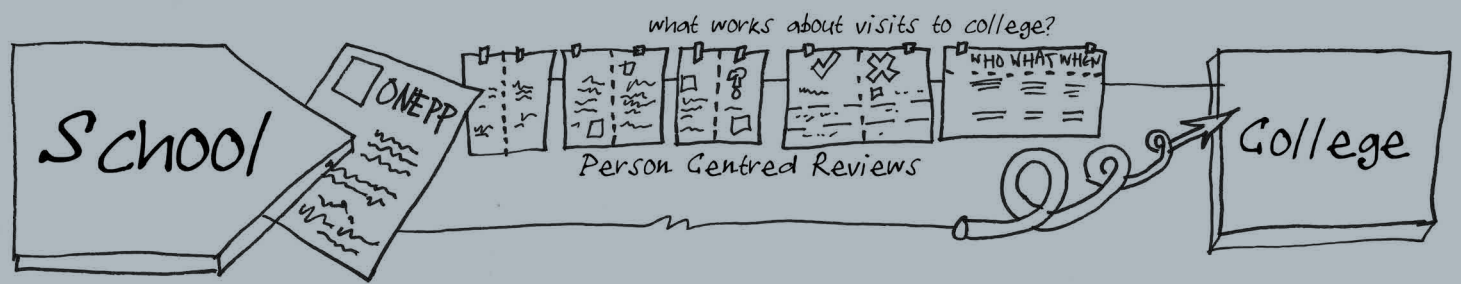


Summary

This section has underlined the importance of training and development for staff working at all levels in supporting successful transition and outcomes for young people with autism, and identified the key training undertaken by the FaS partners. **Part 4 of the Finished at School self-audit tool** can be used to evaluate your organisation's current practice in this area of work and identify ways it can be further developed.

In the next section, we will explore the implementation of person-centred working within the FaS hubs and consider its impact on improving transition for young people with autism.

6: Person-centred working to support the move from school to college



The Code of Practice has an expectation that schools and college will work together to share information to support transition as the young person moves from one organisation into another. Within the FaS Programme, a common approach to this process was developed through the four-day person-centred planning training undertaken by the hub partners.

Person-centred training

The duty to provide 'best endeavours' must be fulfilled for all young people with SEND, whether or not they have EHC plans.¹⁷ Furthermore, the review of EHC plans, for those who have them, must be undertaken using person-centred approaches:



Code of
Practice

'Local authorities must ensure that the EHC plan review at Year 9, and every review thereafter, includes a focus on preparing for adulthood... Planning must be centred around the individual and explore the child or young person's aspirations and abilities, what they want to be able to do when they leave post-16 education or training and the support they need to achieve their ambition.'

Code of Practice, Section 8.9

Colleges must cooperate with the LA to formally review EHC plans in person-centred ways. This will require significant staff training.

To support this, all the providers in the FaS Programme attended a four-day person-centred planning training programme. The first three days of the training focused on person-centred approaches to transition for young people with autism, specifically:

- the use of a person-centred approach to working in general and to planning ahead in particular
- the development of one-page profiles for each young person with autism
- the use of person-centred review meetings.

This was preceded by a training needs analysis day, which was designed to help each FaS hub reflect on what was a strength in their locality (in terms of services and practice to support transition) and identify where there were gaps.

This process helped decide the focus of their fourth day of training. For Bromley College, this resulted in training for learning support assistants about providing effective support for young people with autism on level two courses and above. For course leaders of provision for learners with autism and complex needs, it entailed training about the use of intensive interaction. Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College's training included the use of intensive interaction and information on how to develop a person-centred curriculum.

The FaS hubs were encouraged to include parents and young people in their training analysis day, focusing particularly on what was good about their transition to college and what would have made it better, generating useful information to inform future developments. This allowed managers, practitioners, parents and young people themselves to jointly consider what matters for young people's success and the training implications of this.

¹⁷ Code of Practice, Section 7.3.

The person-centred training was clearly valued by participants, and feedback from young people, parents and staff would suggest that the introduction of person-centred reviews and one-page profiles in particular have been particularly powerful developments in improving transition. An assistant head teacher at a school partner described the person-centred training as 'the single most useful piece of training' he'd had in many years. His comments powerfully capture the positive impact that the introduction of person-centred reviews has had:



Quote

'Our parents and carers feel much more included. We provide tea and coffee and we have the 'prompting questions' displayed around the room. This year, we've done 20 annual reviews and in each case parents and carers have taken part really enthusiastically. The questions have helped to shape the conversation. Parents are less intimidated – they look at the prompt questions around the room and feel more confident to join in. Students contribute and even write on the sheets. There is now no grey area about their views – it's up there in black and white.'

Assistant head teacher (FaS Programme school partner)

Feedback from the FaS Programme clearly indicates that adopting person-centred approaches has provided an effective framework to enable staff, young people and those who are important to them to have meaningful discussions about future options.

A school transition coordinator has identified that involvement in the training has not only improved the quality and experience of reviews for young people, but had a fundamental impact on wider practice:



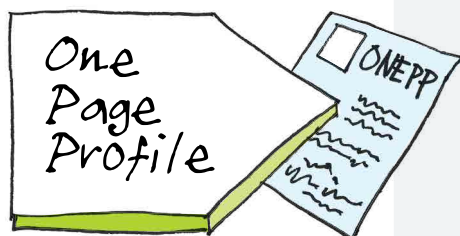
Quote

'The project has changed my practice. For example, having that quality time with the student as the starting point. We always did it, but this was so much more thorough. Now I have a long list of questions I go through – what are you good at? What do you like? And we keep coming back to them every so often in the curriculum, for example in Social Skills, in PSHE, in Community Skills. Even when people aren't quite sure, you can offer them options to help them think it through example, do you want to be living with your parents? Or living with other young people? It's all about the learners finding themselves and their strengths, that shift to helping people to understand what their strengths are because you spend that quality time with them... and so then they want to come to their reviews.'

School transition coordinator (FaS Programme school partner)

Developing one-page profiles

Developing the skills to work with young people to produce one-page profiles was a key aspect of the four-day training. The resulting profiles were valued by learners, parents, school and college staff alike. Indeed, they have proved so successful that many of the FaS partners have extended their use to include not just those with autism but other young people with SEND.



Typically, the profiles were developed by exploring with the young person, and those who know them well, key information in relation to three core questions:

- what do people like and admire about me
- what is important to me
- how to support me.

An example of a profile created for a young person with autism participating in the FaS Programme, who has now successfully made the transition to Gloucestershire College, can be found in the [resource bank](#).

An additional example can be found in Transition and Progression: Supporting young people with autism on vocational courses and training. This is a free online training resource that was created to support mainstream vocational tutors working with young people with autism. A copy can be found in the [resource bank](#).

A school partner in the FaS hub led by Gloucestershire College decided to embed the development of one-page profiles into the curriculum. Each week, the class selected one individual and then worked together to discuss what they liked and admired about him or her. The individual in question was then able to use the ICT class to take photos and develop an electronic profile which reflected his or her views.



Quote

'Having this information in advance is very useful as it enables us to have a better idea of how to support the learner during their transition process and deliver a package that suits them. It also supports us to put effective strategies into place based on how to best support the young person in a classroom or social situation.'

FaS Programme hub lead (Askham Bryan College)

'The one-page profiles were a good idea. They were all done by the students, so not giving their tutors' or head teachers' views, which we can get from elsewhere. They gave us an insight into the rest of the learner's life. It helped us to pick up on the type of course structure and support that would benefit the learners and we were able to negotiate that with our learning support team. The profiles gave me information about how the learner sees the world.'

Level one course manager

Profiles need updating regularly to ensure they are accurate and current. The Autism Coordinator at Askham Bryan College holds regular one-to-one meetings with each learner with autism. This is used to update their one-page profile, ensuring that it always reflects the learner's views, but also to explore views about their college experiences, enabling problems to be picked up and dealt with quickly.

At Gloucestershire College, profiles were not only developed for learners, but also for managers, tutors and learning support assistants. This proved invaluable in supporting young people to gain some understanding of the person they would be working with, and also in matching staff interests to learner interests. The College used two person-centred tools to support this process, including the 'doughnut tool' and the 'matching tool'. Examples of staff profiles can be found in the [resource bank](#).



Key Learning Point

One-page profiles are highly effective in supporting the process of transition as they provide college staff with a useful insight into the young person prior to their visits to college or their interviews.

Useful Links

Film clips

Empower and Enable: A people-led approach to support planning:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkZK2UuazO4>

Just Enough Support:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O21el-V0z-Aj>

Learning Logs and One-Page Profiles:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDzrmTlxAl4>

Important to and for:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDqERlXm4HM>

Ten videos on person-centred planning:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VA2O8gVaWao&list=PL1C1FBDFCA90FAAEF>

Person-Centred Reviews: A guide for schools:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B64x3v9ZEME>

Nasen online:

<http://www.nasen.org.uk/onlinesendcpd/>

Resources

100 one-page profiles:

<http://onepageprofiles.wordpress.com/>

The 'doughnut tool' and the 'matching tool':

<http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/person-centred-practice/person-centred-thinking-tools/doughnut/> and

<http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/person-centred-practice/person-centred-thinking-tools/matching-support/>

Developing Outcomes: 8 Step Process:

<http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/8-steps-good-outcomes>

A Step-by-Step Guide to Support Planning:

http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/SP_05_Step-by-Step_Guide10Q.pdf

Support planning tools and cards:

<http://www.hsapress.co.uk/search.aspx?q=support+planning+tools+>

Online resources and tools:

<http://www.thinkandplan.com/>

Planning live:

<http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/planning-live-whats>

Implementing person-centred reviews

A key element of the four-day person-centred planning training involved supporting staff to develop the skills and confidence to host person-centred reviews. This included having the opportunity to role play reviews in order to gain an understanding of the process from the young person's perspective. This practical engagement proved very powerful:



Quote

'Role playing a person-centred review was the light bulb moment of the training I guess, because that was when we got to grips with, "Well, this is what it looks like, this is how it feels and this is what your responsibility is going to be."

On day two, we got to carry out a live review. So the training facilitator facilitated a person-centred review and, although the issue was fictitious, it was based on somebody in the room. We actually set the room out as it would be, really had a go, got involved, and I think for the first time the school partners finally felt that they knew what a person-centred review looked like and how it might feel. I think that had a lot of value, because they are going to be the ones that are actually implementing it in their own setting. And then on day three, we had a go at facilitating our own.'

FaS Programme hub lead (Askham Bryan College)

Like one-page profiles, person-centred reviews use key questions to gain the views of the young person, and those who know them well, about what is important to the individual now and in the future, what support he or she needs and what is working and not working in their life in order to support effective transition planning. The questions may include:

- what do you like or admire about the young person?
- what's important to the young person now?
- what's important to the young person for their future?
- what help and support does the young person need to stay healthy and safe?
- what's working?
- what's not working?



Key Learning Point

The Code of Practice is clear that from Year 9 schools have to plan for preparing for adulthood outcomes. In planning reviews, this means you should reflect on key questions in relation to 'learning and skills' and the four preparing for adulthood areas of home, friends and relationships, community, and health and well-being.

The FaS Programme was designed to improve the transition of young people with autism from school to college. The creation of the hub partnerships enabled all participants to openly and honestly evaluate current practice to explore how well it was currently working. Partners were able to agree, both individually and collectively, what should be done to improve it. Feedback suggests that introducing person-centred approaches to planning and reviewing learning and support needs across the FaS hubs has been transformational.

Here are some of the outcomes arising as a result:

A college staff member attending the school reviews of potential students

Whilst this was something that all parties were aware is effective practice, prior to the FaS Programme, the reality was that it was not happening consistently. In developing the hub, colleges and schools have come together to plan transition earlier in the process than was previously the case, with a much clearer focus on likely future destinations (in terms of both next steps and long term aspirations).

In the past, schools had planned transition reviews independently and then sent invitations through to key college staff. As a result, the notice periods did not necessarily work for college personnel. The links established through the hub, both formally and informally, have allowed for the development of an agreed timeline. This supports improved diary planning. In addition, through the experience of attending reviews, college staff have come to appreciate the merit of giving time to this, in a way they had not previously.

Increased clarity about the information needed and the way it is shared

Information about an individual has always been shared as part of planning, but historically there was no discussion and limited agreement about the nature or format of that information. Jointly undertaking the four-day person-centred planning training has enabled the FaS partners to develop shared understanding and common approaches which place young person at the centre of the process.

One-page profiles are developed with the young person in relation to common key headings, which both school and college agree are useful in identifying the best way to support an individual. Whilst these have largely been developed with the specific purpose of supporting transition, in future, profiles will be developed and used as part of the support assessment within the school, and updated regularly as the learner progresses through college.

Useful Links

The Preparing for Adulthood Review: A Good Practice Toolkit: How person-centred practices and reviews can help transfer Statements and Learning Difficulty Assessments to Education Health and Care Plans:
<http://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/resources/pfa-resources/the-preparing-for-adulthood-review>



Key Learning Point

Undertaking joint training in person-centred planning has had wide ranging and positive implications, over and above the commonality of the documentation used. Schools and colleges now have a shared understanding about the methodology, purpose and value of this approach in planning and delivering truly personalised and outcome-focussed learning, as well as a common language with which to discuss it.

A joint focus on developing a programme which will meet aspirations and secure improved post-college outcomes, combined with substantially increased dialogue between schools and colleges, has resulted in the provision of an offer which now spans both sectors, offering a much more coherent pathway into successful adult life.

A school partner in the hub led by Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College reported the following positive changes:



Case Study

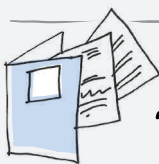
The impact of introducing person-centred ways of working: A school's experience

- Students have been more involved in their reviews. Time has been spent with individual students developing their aspirations, producing visual paths, mind maps and 'All about Me' statements prior to their reviews.
- The young person's ideas of what they want for the future, what they would like to change about school, home and what is working well, are all beginning to have a direct impact, not only on the overall planning of the curriculum but also on specific individual timetables. For example:
 - two students have asked to learn specific instruments. A music teacher is being employed to offer one-to-one tuition
 - a student has asked for a Signalong qualification in order to achieve their goal of becoming a special needs teaching assistant. We are now offering a Signalong mentoring programme for older students to teach younger ones.
- We are beginning to replace our current transition plans, which are very wordy, with a more appropriate person-centred transition plan.
- We have piloted the one-page profile for some students, which we will be disseminating throughout the school over the coming year.
- Students are beginning to have a genuine say in what support they may need in a future placement, including the level and nature of support they will need in order to make a successful transition to college.



Top Tips

- Start planning early. You need to be planning for transition at least two years in advance of the move.
- Organise local training on person-centred planning with local schools.
- Make sure transition workers, school staff, parents and students are aware of all their local post-school choices.
- Begin to build up knowledge with – and about – each new learner from the point of first contact with them.
- Be proactive in gathering assessment information. Form strong working relationships with the feeder school and make contact with the careers/Connexions/transition worker for each learner.
- If possible, have a college representative attend review meetings in school.
- Make sure college staff read and apply all prior information received from those who know the student well, such as the Section 139A assessments, 'All about Me' statements and one-page profiles.

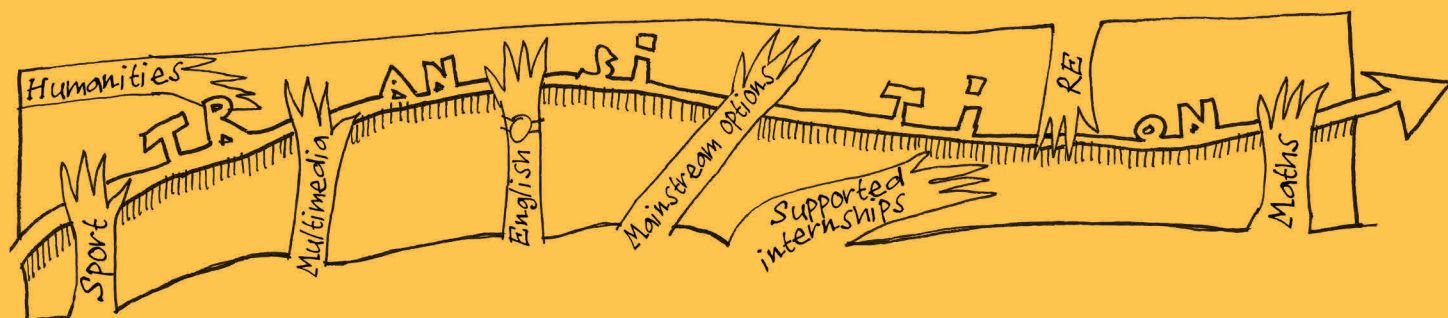


Summary

This section has explored the person-centred approaches successfully implemented by the FaS partners to improve transition from school to college. Part 4 of the Finished at School self-audit tool can be used to evaluate your organisation's current practice in this area of work and identify ways it can be further developed.

In the next section, we will explore the nature and impact of actions taken by the FaS partners to develop an appropriate curriculum offer which effectively prepares young people with autism for adulthood.

7: Developing curriculum pathways and services to support transition



The aim of the FaS Programme was to deliver an innovative, integrated model of transition support to enable young people with autism to access further education and training beyond school.

This required the FaS partners to review and develop their offer with a focus on delivering a curriculum to facilitate successful transition and prepare young people with autism for adulthood.

The section which follows will summarise the key learning in relation to:

- the approach taken by the FaS partners to reviewing their offer
- improving transition into college by increasing opportunities to experience college in the run-up to transition
- the adaptations and developments made to the curriculum
- related developments to support learners to access the curriculum, thrive and succeed.

Reviewing the offer

Each of the FaS hubs undertook a critical review of their offer under the 'Preparing for Adulthood' lens in order to identify key issues to be addressed. They drew on information provided from parents and learners, consulted with staff and referred to key information such as achievement and progression data. Here is a summary of some of the challenges identified by the FaS partners at the start of the project, some of which may be familiar to you:

- despite clear progression routes from entry level onto mainstream courses, internal progression remained poor due to barriers with differing entry criteria and expectations course by course
- progression to level one programmes was often good, but, for many learners, achievement levels for English and maths remained at entry level or just above, so progression to level two was not an option
- issues and inconsistencies existed in the triangulation of prior learning of learners transitioning from special schools into entry level college courses. Because the courses prioritised social and independence skills, the level of the main qualification of some young people with autism was at a lower level than their assessed ability in English and maths, with insufficient opportunity to develop these skills at the appropriate level
- all programmes of study were fully accredited and all contact hours had awarding body qualifications attached. In practice, this meant that the programme offer was determined by the requirements of the accreditation, rather than identified priorities for learning to address the needs and aspirations of the individual
- although many providers already had dedicated spaces for learners with autism there were issues with access, sufficiency and wider concerns relating to the suitability of the learning environment
- no dedicated autism coordinator
- insufficient opportunities for new learners to familiarise themselves with the college environment, resulting in poor transition experiences for many young people with autism.

Improving transition into college by increasing opportunities to experience college beforehand

The Code of Practice recognises the importance for transition of developing opportunities for young people with SEND to familiarise themselves with the college environment. Such opportunities are particularly important for young people with autism, who are likely to experience significant difficulties with change and coping with the unknown.

In recognition of this, the FaS partners made a number of specific changes aimed at improving transition experiences and outcomes for young people with autism. These included:

➤ Increasing the number and quality of timetabled taster sessions

The FaS Programme has resulted in both a significant increase in the number of taster sessions offered to young people with autism and an improvement in the quality of those sessions. This was made possible by a much greater awareness of – and attention to – factors which affect their ability to learn and thrive. For one young person, it provided an opportunity to identify and address a particular area of concern, significantly alleviating anxiety in the run up to transition:



Quote

'We had a taster session and I asked if we could come back to do things like use the canteen. This student has a nut allergy so we took photos of the medical room and were able to assure him that he'd be able to take in his own packed lunch. We spoke to staff in the canteen and he was reassured that they knew how serious his allergy is. He used the photos over the summer to remind and reassure himself about starting in September.'

School transition coordinator (FaS Programme school partner)

The taster sessions have been valued by learners, who found it eased the transition into college:



Quotes

'They showed me how the college worked.'

'They gave me a chance to meet people before starting the course.'

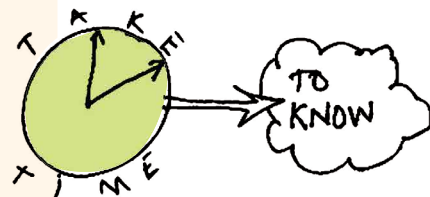
Learners with autism



Code of Practice

'Schools and colleges should work in partnership to provide opportunities such as taster courses, link programmes and mentoring which enable young people with SEN to familiarise themselves with the college environment and gain some experience of college life and study.'

Code of Practice, Section 8.23





Case Study

Askham Bryan College's sensory taster sessions

To enable young people with autism to make a successful transition to a land-based college, the hub led by Askham Bryan College has undertaken preparatory work to equip them to anticipate, understand and learn to cope with the sensory challenges in the environment – challenges which, unless sensitively managed, could prove potentially overwhelming.

'Sensory taster sessions' have been used to gradually introduce and de-sensitise young people with sensory differences to challenges such as farm smells and mud. During these sessions, the young people have the opportunity to visit the farm or animal care unit, experience wearing steel toe capped boots and overalls and generally 'get a feel' for the college environment. Autism-specific strategies, such as Social Stories™, have been used to support young people to know what to expect and how to respond.



Quote

'More and more now, we support learners to have taster sessions. Even if the learner is transitioning to a different course after they've started college, we run tasters sessions for them to get to know that bit of the building and to meet the staff.'

Students come in and try out courses at a pace they are comfortable with. They come with a support worker from school. Depending on the student, we can add in all sorts of bits and pieces to the familiarisation process. For example, the parents or a support worker bring them to college and they have a wander around and maybe they build up coming in to a class from just half an hour to start with.'

Entry level one course manager



➤ The development of autism-specific link programmes

The college partners in the FaS Programme have realised that because young people with autism are much more likely to experience difficulties with change than many of their peers, they need more time to transition. Accordingly, they have worked with their school partners to establish specific link programmes for students with autism. These run over a longer period of time than traditional link programmes. Time spent in college 'starts small and builds up' as appropriate, going from as little as an hour once a week to half a day and then a full day. This graduated introduction to college has proved very effective.

In order for a link programme to be successful, however, the colleges first needed to undertake preparatory work, as this quote from a hub lead starting out on the FaS Programme clearly shows:



Quote

'Part of our action plan will be to develop an autism-specific link programme so that autistic students from around the local area can come into college on a link programme. But I think there's work to do before that.'

If we are talking about transition as a whole journey, then, even before you start looking at coming into college for a two-day or a one-day link course then, what is it we're doing as a college in terms of best practice to make that transition easier? So things like the team having one-page profiles to share with prospective new learners, having a picture diary of accommodation, interactive 360-degree video tours of the campuses. How can we start preparing the young person for the transition even before they walk through the door? We're at the stage of gathering feedback on that from parents and from Year 9 students with autism on the existing link programme.'

FaS Programme hub lead

Bromley College developed an enhanced link programme with local special schools. Each school visited college once a week, teaching their own curriculum in a designated room which included good access to information technology. This enabled the students to become familiar with the college environment over the period of one school year. Former pupils, now college learners, knew when their former school peers were at college and often dropped in to see them. The link programme has substantially contributed to building learner confidence, both for those already at college and those planning to move to college in the future.

Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College already had a successful link programme established with a number of special schools, which included young people with autism. Previous attempts to provide a link programme for more complex young people with autism had, however, proved unsuccessful, despite willingness from both parties. There was increasing recognition of the need to do something differently to support effective transition for these more complex individuals. This has resulted in the development of a transition programme. During the last year of their schooling, young people now spend between two and six hours, one day per week, undertaking a range of activities in a specifically allocated and adapted classroom, accompanied by a school member of staff.



Key Learning Point

Arrangements whereby school staff accompany young people on transition into college for however long it takes for them to feel comfortable have proved very effective in the FaS hubs. This strategy has been instrumental in enabling young people to transition successfully and is strongly valued by parents, who reported it significantly improved their confidence in the likely success of the placement.



Quote

'For the College, the FaS Programme quickly underpinned the thinking that our transition process was not nearly robust enough for young learners on the spectrum. Some learners will attend link courses and from these will transition into the Department or some will attend our taster days early in the year and be offered a place in the following September. At the moment however there is no work done on "keeping learners warm" and supporting them with a much more robust transition process. Incidents with two new college learners (both with autism) at the start of the academic year further embedded our thinking that much more work needs to be carried out on transition.'

FaS Programme hub lead
(Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College)

> The introduction of a summer programme

Learning from the FaS Programme indicates that there is a need to punctuate the long gap for young people with autism between leaving school in May and starting college in late September. The FaS hubs addressed this in a range of ways, including arranging interim visits to the college and taster programmes during the summer holiday, and ensuring young people have photos of key places and people they can refer to.

Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College has introduced a summer programme for young people with autism.



Key Learning Point

It is clear that the development of 'autism friendly' link programmes, taster sessions and summer programmes has substantially improved the experience for young people with autism and improved the likelihood of them making a successful transition to college.



Quotes

'Because of the improved transition the FaS Programme learners had, they were a lot more confident than others... They became key members of the class from day one. They were a lot more at ease with the people here and the curriculum area.'

Level 1 course manager

'I visited quite a few times before I started and that made me feel a tiny bit less stressed.'

Robert (Student participating in the FaS Programme)

> Using increased opportunities to sample college to improve the quality of assessment

The introduction, extension and/or improvement of taster days, links courses and autism-specific courses has had a significant impact on the quality of assessment undertaken. It has provided more opportunities for staff to get to know the young person and see them in the college setting. It has also substantially increased the level of dialogue between college staff and school staff who know the young person well. Link courses or other opportunities for school staff to accompany the young person into college have been found to generate particularly useful information.

Bromley College invited the transitions coordinator from a local special school to accompany one young person for a full day in order to gain her assessment of the learner's support needs in the College.

Developing the curriculum

All the FaS college partners have piloted new approaches as part of their project activity, designed to address some of the challenges outlined earlier, and support young people to develop their skills in relation to the four preparing for adulthood outcomes: employment, independent living, health and community participation.

Parents and carers have been involved in the review and design of the curriculum, with providers committed to making changes in response to any feedback. Some common themes have emerged in their work. All four colleges have:

- introduced more 'personalised progression pathways'. This has involved recognition that young people with autism are particularly likely to have an uneven – or 'spiky' – profile of skills, meaning they could be at different levels in different curriculum areas
- improved links with local employers to enable more work experience and Apprenticeship opportunities. They have also reviewed their curriculum to make it more vocationally-based
- an increased focus on employability, which has resulted in the appointment of new job coach positions designed to enhance learners' employment prospects after college
- encouraged learners to give much more thought to the range of jobs their current qualifications could lead to and the skills they need to develop to support their next steps.



Pause for Thought

How do you ensure that programmes for young people with autism are truly personalised and will meet their needs and long term aspirations?

Bromley College identified that providing more personalised progression pathways for a wider range of learners would require additional support and resources. Accordingly, it employed additional support staff to support access to mainstream college and facilitated tutor time to create new resources to support teaching and learning at entry levels one and two.

The College has also introduced a new tracking system to reflect the spiky profile of learners with autism and ensure that each learner is progressing at an appropriate rate.



Key Learning Point

Enhanced contact with feeder schools has had a positive impact on transition, because it has increased the colleges' awareness of the needs of the learners and enabled them to put in place appropriate support.



Top Tips

- Set up link courses and taster sessions that allow young people with autism to try out different options and courses.
- Use taster days and interviews to get to know new learners' needs. You might wish to consider allowing parents to come along too.
- Ensure you continue assessment once the learner is in college and make any adjustments required to support them to achieve and thrive.
- Encourage school staff to observe the learner in the college environment and to provide an assessment of their support needs.
- Plan ahead for how each student will travel to and from the local college (or other post-school provider):
 - Practice journeys over time.
 - If students will be using public transport, include some coaching as to how to deal with potential challenges, such as cancelled or late buses, and the possibility of bullying or unpleasant remarks from other passengers.

Askham Bryan College has learned:



Quote

'...how to plan better transition pathways for an effective curriculum. The vision includes addressing how the five key messages identified by the SEND reforms, (personalise approach, develop a shared vision, improve post-16 options and support, raise aspirations and plan services together) are crucial in improving life chances in the four outcomes.

The courses are built around improving life chances in the four outcome areas: good health, employment, independent living and community inclusion regarding friends, relationships and community participation.'

FaS Programme hub lead (Askham Bryan College)



Case Study

Reviewing the curriculum

In response to its curriculum review, Gloucestershire College has undertaken a range of key actions to improve the offer and outcomes for young people with autism. These changes have included:

- redesigning entry criteria and progression routes for the entire college curriculum to ensure that learners are able to access a course that is relative to – and supports – their starting point and enables them to progress upon successful completion of their course
- undertaking a pilot of non-accredited individualised timetables within entry level provision to enable learners to choose their own timetable and units. This pilot has a reduced accredited learning aim to enable flexibility within the curriculum to develop wider skills within the preparing for adulthood pathways
- designing a one-year transitional course specifically for learners with autism to prepare them for a main course in the College.

The transitional course is being piloted in 2014–15. The curriculum appropriately focuses on addressing personal and social development needs and enabling young people to acclimatise to college life and the expectations of college, whilst developing communication and interaction skills, confidence accessing the community and developing independent travel skills. It is also timed to start later than other courses to avoid busy times.



Quote

'Students work with specialists and are assigned a personal tutor and teaching assistant, working in a small group to learn about their autism, how to study, plan and organise along with communication and interaction skills, maths and English. The aim of this course is that students then progress onto a mainstream course the following academic year, with reduced support and greater independence and autonomy.'

**FaS Programme hub lead
(Gloucestershire College)**

Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College spent considerable time reviewing the curriculum offer and identified that there was a need to increase programmes that offered clear pathways to vocational areas of the curriculum and into work. The curriculum has been restructured to ensure it is accessible and demonstrates clear progression for students with autism.



Case Study

Developing the curriculum

Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College's revised curriculum for students with autism was implemented in September 2014 and includes the following vocational pathways:

- sports
- retail
- multimedia
- hospitality and catering
- performing arts.

In addition to dedicated pathways, there is also a 'Pathway to Employment' programme which provides access for students to a range of internal and external employment situations throughout the year. This is supported by job coaches and the College's Employment Coordinator.

To access a vocational pathway, students will spend one year on a programme designed to develop confidence, independence and identify vocational aspirations. Typically a student will complete a 'vocational carousel' programme before progressing onto a dedicated vocational pathway. From 2015–16, the curriculum is planned to enable streaming of English and maths with students studying in a group where levels of ability are similar (pre-entry, entry one, entry two and entry three).

An anticipated added benefit of streaming will be greater opportunities for the students to mix with other students outside of their established tutor group, developing wider social circles. Additionally, skills and knowledge development will be more closely monitored, enabling registration for functional skills assessments at the appropriate levels.

The curriculum should include the development of independent living skills and the social and practical skills required to take an active part in the community, for example, by engaging in leisure pursuits. At Askham Bryan College, planning for life after college included working with parents of a young woman to ensure she had access to her local bowls club as this game had been discovered to be one of her particular talents. She is currently training for the next Special Olympics.

The schools partners also reviewed their curriculum to consider how they might adjust it to better support transition. One school partner in the hub led by Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College is going to draw on the services of a dance therapist, teaching expressive arts, to offer transition workshops aimed at supporting young people to explore what it means to move on from school.



Key Learning Point

In further education, the curriculum is all about preparation for life after college, and in that respect is essentially a transition curriculum, with a clear focus on progression.

Some young people with autism will have such significant learning difficulties that they will require support throughout their lives. It is essential that planning for life after college starts early and that the curriculum offer prioritises the development of the skills they will need in their future lives.



Key Learning Point

In talking about assessment, it is important to distinguish between the transition assessments coordinated by the LA to develop the EHC plan, and the ongoing assessments undertaken by those working in college with the young person on a daily basis to adjust and inform the planning and delivery of learning.

Planning for the former will start in Year 9 and include summative assessments in relation to aspirations, special educational, health and social care needs. It will identify long term outcomes and the provision required to address these. It will name a school or college, and provide details of any personal budget and/or advice and information. The named provider will undertake a more detailed assessment, to include initial, ongoing and ultimately summative assessment. This will be used to plan, deliver and chart progress towards the achievement of the outcomes identified in the EHC plan.



Quote

'All of the high functioning students I have placed at the college have been given a comprehensive support plan. This is currently drawn from their Learning Disability Assessment, but crucially with additional negotiation with the students. Should issues arise after the start of the course the college is very proactive in engaging with my service to try and maintain the placement or, if needed to give the student support to consider alternative options.'

Local authority transition adviser

Mapping the curriculum with schools

A significant aspect of the FaS Programme has been the partnership working with local schools. This has resulted in much greater understanding between colleges and schools about one another's current offers and, more importantly, increased coordination and collaboration for ongoing and future developments. This has brought about provision mapping of the curriculum going from school into college to create greater coherence in the offer overall and in relation to the use of qualifications.

Partnership working has also facilitated the sharing of expertise. For example, in order to make best use of the new sports hall at the College, a course leader of provision for learners with SEND at Bromley College spent a day with a sports and fitness expert at a school partner to consider how best to deliver sports to learners with learning disabilities and autism.

Supporting learners to access the curriculum, thrive and succeed

The curriculum itself is a core aspect of the offer, but for transition to be successful, the FaS partners have also had to consider the wider context within which the curriculum is delivered.

This has included:

➤ Developing staff skills and confidence

To ensure that staff have the knowledge required to adapt the curriculum, making learning accessible for those with more complex needs and helping learners with autism adjust to college life. It is also an important element of ensuring staff working in common areas across the college such as the canteen, library or reception have some basic awareness training to inform and improve their interactions with young people with autism.

➤ Improving the nature and use of assessment

However good the quality of assessment prior to starting at college, there is a need to continue to assess skills within the new setting. This is necessary to verify the accuracy of assessment information, create a baseline against which to measure progress and to confirm that the study programme and support levels are working and appropriate.

Askham Bryan College has introduced a 'right course review' process to engage the student and the College in a two-way discussion about the course, the level and the College being the right choices for each individual.

Effective use of information gleaned from improved assessment has also been used by the FaS partners to adapt the curriculum delivery style to suit the specific cohort of students in each course, including learners with autism.

At Askham Bryan College, for example, a level one course was adapted to enable more practical, hands-on and visual learning styles to be used. This made theory lessons much more relevant to the learners' day-to-day lives, helping learners with autism, including one with an otherwise very short attention span.

In addition, the outcomes of assessment have been used across the FaS hubs to ensure the effective identification and provision of support to meet need – not only in class, but at other key times in the day such as arrival, breaks and during free time to support the development of friendships. This improved awareness of the needs of young people with autism, combined with improvements in assessment has resulted in an increased ability to respond to student needs flexibly and promptly and a willingness to work in partnership with others to address those needs.

➤ **Changing induction practices**

Effective transition is not just about familiarity with the college and getting the support needs right. It is essential to ensure that young people are enrolled on a study programme that meets their needs. Askham Bryan College has adjusted their assessment and induction process to include:

- two interviews with each learner to decide on which course level they should enrol, and the introduction of a six-week period at the start of each year during which programme choice changes can be made where appropriate
- a choice-related 'taster morning' in the summer term prior to starting
- development of a one-page profile.

In addition, it has involved the FaS partners making substantial adaptations to the environment in order to address some of the challenges that young people with autism face.

These have included:

- **working with school partners** to explore the college accommodation offer for learners with autism and consider how to adapt the environment to support the needs of learners and reduce barriers to successful transition
- **identifying ways of addressing the sensory needs** of young people with autism in the college environments. For example, in one college partner, the key challenge for young people with autism relates to the smells and mud involved in being on an agricultural college campus; in another, the sensory issue relates to the noise and bustle of the main entrance. In response, both colleges have set up sensory taster days for learners with autism (building up from one hour of exposure to start with) and a quieter route in to the college with the busy entrance has been identified
- **the introduction of keypads and/or locks** on key access points to make identified areas of the site safer and more secure. This is particularly important to support the safety and well-being of more complex young people who perhaps are unaware of dangers and may need a secure environment
- **undertaking a sensory audit**, such as the one identified in the useful links section above. This has resulted in a range of changes to the environment, some of which are identified in the next bullet point
- **provision of autism-friendly rooms and spaces**, such as 'chill out rooms', low arousal environments and the provision of a safe place for vulnerable learners to go to enjoy their free time at lunchtime and breaks.

One of the college partners has developed a designated autism classroom, in partnership with a local school which is used for college taster sessions.

Relatively simple adaptations have substantially increased access to common college areas, such as the canteen, for young people with autism. Askham Bryan College now staggers lunchtimes to ensure the canteen is less busy. Similarly, Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College has set up a safe space which overlooks the canteen so learners can gradually build up the confidence to use it.

Useful Links

Preparing for Adulthood:

<http://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/what-we-do/pfa-outcomes>

Supported internships for young people with learning difficulties:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supported-internships-for-young-people-with-learning-difficulties>

Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms:

<http://www.aetraininghubs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/37.1-Sensory-audit-tool-for-environments.pdf>

Preparing for Adulthood's Project SEARCH: A model for supported internships:

<http://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/resources/stories/supported-internships-project-search-model>



Key Learning Point

The FaS college partners have worked closely with schools, learners and parents to identify challenges within the college environment and relatively simple steps that can be taken to reduce sensory challenges and improve the safety and security of the site.

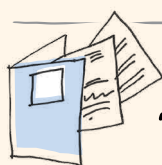


Pause for Thought

How could you adapt the learning environment to make it more accessible for young people with autism?

Gloucestershire College has created a new social space on their Gloucester campus, complete with kitchen facility. It has also introduced a sensory space at the Cheltenham and Gloucester campuses which can be used by learners with either hyper- and/or hypo- sensitivities. The College has also reviewed accommodation across its sites; as a result, each campus now has a dedicated quiet work space in a more appropriate location, complete with computers and soft furniture.

The autism coordinators work across sites to provide support for students, including, where appropriate, one-to-one sessions. Each campus also has a designated toilet with paper handtowels rather than a loud automatic hand dryer. The automatic air freshener sprays have also been removed to reduce hypersensitivity where possible.



Summary

This section has summarised the key learning resulting from actions taken by the FaS providers to develop their curriculum in order to support successful transition into college and adult life for young people with autism. Part 6 of the Finished at School self-audit tool can be used to evaluate your organisation's current practice in this area of work and identify ways it can be further developed.



Quote

'The Gloucester Campus was a particularly challenging environment for students with autism. Now the premises have been adapted to offer specific quiet study/support room, quiet common area and most recently a sensory room.'

FaS Programme hub lead
(Gloucestershire College)

Conclusion

Lessons from the Finished at School Programme indicate that when providers work in partnership and listen to young people with autism and their families, the experience of transition can be personalised, positive and, most importantly, result in more and better educational options.

The implementation of the Children and Families Act provides a once in a generation opportunity to transform the system fundamentally and make a significant difference to young people with autism now and in the future. We hope that the experiences and practices described in this guide will support providers in meeting these new responsibilities and in developing provision which will enable young people with autism to develop skills, gain employment, live more independently and ultimately to live the life they choose and deserve.



Project methodology

The FaS Programme was established through a grant from the Department for Education (DfE) National Prospectus Grant Programme. It covered work across the period 2013–15.

The DfE invited proposals from charities, community groups and other organisations to improve outcomes for children and young people. In response, Ambitious about Autism, the Association of Colleges and Nasen submitted a joint bid for a grant under the theme of supporting the development of services for young people with SEND. The proposal was to work with education providers to identify learners who wanted to continue their education beyond school, improve the process of transition from school and help young people access more and better educational options in their local community.

Project team

The project team managed the FaS Programme. The team was responsible for supporting the work of the FaS hubs, monitoring and reporting progress to the DfE, managing the resources provided to project partners, disseminating information and administering the project.

Hub partners

Expressions of interest were sought from colleges interested in leading local partnerships (hubs) as part of the project. We asked that each prospective college partner identified three secondary schools in their area, mainstream or special, which they would work with, along with their local authority transition lead.

The four hubs selected were tasked with supporting a cohort of learners to move from school to college and making adaptations to their curriculum and services to deliver an improved experience for young people with autism. They committed to training in person-centred practice and to documenting their progress through regular progress reports. The hubs met together at termly meetings led by the project manager from Ambitious about Autism.

Programme board

A programme board was established to provide strategic direction and guidance to the project team.

With input from the DfE, Preparing for Adulthood programme, the Autism Education Trust and a local government representative, amongst others, quarterly programme board meetings were held in parallel with the hub meetings.

Person-centred training provider

Helen Sanderson Associates was appointed through a competitive tender process to deliver four days of person-centred planning training to each hub early on in the project. Staff from the college and school partners participated in the training, which took place on the premises of the college partner in each hub, along with parents of young people with autism and other stakeholders. Young people with autism were also included in the first day of the training at one of the hubs.

Evaluator

The Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) at the University of Warwick was appointed to research the project's progression and impact. The evaluator was required to produce an interim (2014) and final (2015) report on the project. This entailed collecting data from the project partners and making recommendations as to how to further develop and sustain the work of the FaS Programme.

The first stage of the project centred on building productive relationships.

The college and school partners in each hub met early on to agree an action plan. This provided a timetable around key activities: undertaking training, identifying learners and making adjustments to the existing curriculum and services available to young people with autism. Our learning from this process was captured through fortnightly progress reporting, the evaluation and the production of a Finished at School guide. A national dissemination event was held in March 2014 to share the learning from the first year of the project.

The second stage of the project involved supporting the first of three cohorts of learners to move from school and start at college in September 2014. The FaS hubs were also working with young people and their parents to prepare and plan the transition for the second and third cohorts of learners to start college, in September 2015 and September 2016 respectively. This work will continue after the formal end of the project in March 2015. During this stage of the project, the college partners reviewed their curriculum and services for young people with autism.

The third stage of the project focussed on sharing the challenges and successes of our work with the education sector. In addition, the Finished at School guide was launched at an end of project dissemination event in March 2015. This event, with a national reach, was supplemented with regional events led by the college partners.

College partner	School partners (mainstream or special school)
Askham Bryan College	Applefields School (Special) Fulford School (Mainstream) Joseph Rowntree School (Mainstream) King James School (Mainstream) Manor Church of England Academy (Mainstream)
Bromley College of Further and Higher Education	Glebe School (Special) Marjorie McClure School (Special)
Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College	Pield Heath House School (Special) Queensmill School (Special) Springhallow School (Special)
Gloucestershire College	Alderman Knight School (Special) The Dean Academy (Mainstream) The Milestone School (Special)



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