

Achieving our potential?

A report on the current further education provision for students with learning disabilities

“...at the heart of our ambition is the principle that everyone in Scotland has the right to access high quality learning to meet their needs and aspirations”

‘Adult Learning in Scotland Statement of Ambition’,

The Scottish Government

June 2015

Summary of Main Points

- Further Education provision for students with learning disabilities is more focused on employability than it was two years ago.
- Some colleges have entered into local partnerships that are effective in supporting students with learning disabilities into work.
- Progression within the colleges has improved. Fewer students are repeating courses or moving sideways to study different courses at the same academic level.
- Change in provision has not been uniform across colleges. In some colleges the number of courses and/or number of places has increased, while in others it has decreased. Regional Outcome Agreements have not yet brought about consistent quality or quantity of provision for this population.
- Coordination with social work and other agencies is variable in quality. Colleges that intentionally follow Partnership Matters Guidance, or did so in the past, seem to have the best interagency agreements. The refreshed Partnership Matters Guidance has not yet been published.
- Improved focus on employability has not yet resulted in more jobs for this population. However, where there is strong partnership working between colleges, supported employment agencies and employers, positive employment outcomes can be evidenced.
- The lack of an agreed definition of learning disability across organisations makes it difficult to track individuals from school, through college and beyond.

Aim

This report follows on from previous work undertaken by SCLD in 2011 to establish the impact of a number of social and educational policies on further education provision for students with learning disabilities. In this second phase of work we wanted to answer the following questions:

- How has provision for this population changed since 2011?
- Are there local variations in provision?
- Can the progress of students with learning disabilities be tracked effectively into, through, and beyond college?
- How good is the progression into and through college for these students?
- How good is the multi-agency working that is required to support the participation of students with learning disabilities?
- How effective is the progression into employment for these students?

This work also ties in with Recommendation 40 in Scotland's learning disability strategy 'The keys to life'¹:

‘...that by the end of 2014 SCLD in partnership with Colleges Scotland, Skills Development Scotland and ADSW consider how people with learning disabilities and carers can access educational activities and training at college and other learning environments’¹

The main findings of this work are listed on page 1. Rather than making recommendations (which the scale of this work would not warrant), we present a number of further questions which we hope will be addressed by the appropriate bodies:

¹ The Keys to Life, The Scottish Government (2013) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/06/1123>

- How can regional and national monitoring and tracking systems ensure that the progress of people with learning disabilities is tracked from school, through college, and beyond?
- How can regional outcome agreements be used more consistently to ensure positive outcomes for students with learning disabilities as well as the wider population of students?
- How can the agencies named in ‘The keys to life’ recommendation above, along with the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council, work together to implement this recommendation?
- What is the alternative lifelong learning offer for older adults with learning disabilities, and how can their learning outcomes be achieved?
- How can colleges be supported to implement the partnership working identified in “A Natural Progression” as being critical in the transition of students with learning disabilities from college into employment?

Information Sources

This report was produced on behalf of SCLD and its partners in June 2014. Our information came from:

- Learning Disability Statistics Release 2013 (2014), Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability
- School Leaver Destination Information (2012), Scottish Government
- Baseline Report for Academic Year 2013/14 (2015), Scottish Funding Council
- Learning for All: Measures of Success (2015), Scottish Funding Council
- Survey responses from college staff (12 responses) and four follow up phone interviews. SCLD sent a survey to all college principles and heads of Additional Support For Learning departments, with the intention that these should be distributed to and completed by college staff who had knowledge of current college provision to students with learning disabilities. We carried out follow up phone surveys to staff who volunteered to elicit more detailed responses
- Survey responses from social workers (30 responses) and four follow up phone interviews. SCLD sent a survey to social work representatives in each local authority area to ascertain information about partnership working with colleges and demand for social care day opportunities from people with learning disabilities. We carried out follow up phone surveys to staff who volunteered to elicit more detailed responses
- Information from Freedom of Information requests made by ENABLE Scotland. The requests were made in 2012, and attempted to establish changes in levels of provision for students with learning disabilities
- Four individual case studies of individuals attending college

It must be stressed that information from all these sources has still only produced a partial picture, and therefore, the intention of the report is less to draw firm conclusions and more to raise questions.

The number of responses that we received from colleges and from local authorities, and the data from the Scottish Funding Council, LDSS and the School Leaver Destination Information, does not allow us to draw firm conclusions about how FE provision for people with learning disabilities has changed and will change over the next few years. Partly because of the regionalisation process, some colleges found it difficult to make accurate comparisons in provision between academic years. However, what this information does do is indicate a number of issues and areas of concern for all those with an interest in the educational opportunities people with learning disabilities living in Scotland.

Introduction

In 2011, SCLD produced a report entitled ‘If I don’t get a place I don’t know what I’ll do’. This briefing presented the main findings of research carried out to identify the impact of changes in funding introduced in 2011 on students with learning disabilities and their families. It highlighted a number of concerns about both reduction in provision and how *Putting Learners at the Centre*² would affect this population of learners.

Since then, *Putting Learners at the Centre* has resulted in comprehensive changes to the FE sector. This follow up report revisits the questions raised in 2011, and highlights a number of issues that need to be addressed to ensure that students with learning disabilities enjoy the same access to, and benefits of, further education as the rest of the population.

“If I don’t get a place...” (2011)³ described a situation where colleges had received a cut in Scottish Funding Council (SFC) funding of around 10%, resulting in a significant reduction in part-time courses, and a third of respondents to a survey of young people with learning disabilities reported an unsuccessful application for a college place. At that time, it was unclear what level of provision would be offered to students with learning disabilities in future years. Since then, the wider landscape for this population has been a cause for concern. Cuts in local authority social care budgets have resulted in reduced day service provision for adults with learning disabilities.

² Putting Learners at the Centre, The Scottish Government (2011) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/09/15103949/2>

³ “If I don’t get a place...” SCLD (2011) <http://www.sclld.org.uk/library-publications/colleges-report>

Background

The population context within which this report is set is taken from the 2013 Data Release⁴ of Learning Disability Statistics Scotland (LDSS). LDSS publishes information on adults (those aged 16-17 who are not in full time education and those aged 18 and over) with learning disabilities known to Scotland's local authorities; regardless of the services they are currently receiving (if any). Individual level data is derived from 32 local authority administrative datasets and collected across a number of demographic and service variables. It is likely the figures published by LDSS are an underestimation of the true numbers owing to differing levels of data missingness between authorities and across variables.

The 2013 Data Release⁵ includes the following information:

Adults with learning disabilities known to Scottish local authorities

- In 2013, 32 local authorities provided information on 26,236 adults across Scotland. This equates to 5.9 people with learning disabilities per 1000 people in the general population.
- 5,797 of these (22%) are aged 16-24

Further education

- There were 2,224 adults (8.5 %) known to be enrolled in further education in 2013.
- The number of adults with learning disabilities attending further education for 2.5 days per week or fewer stood at 994.
- The number of adults with learning disabilities attending further education for 3 days a week or more totalled 915 .

⁴ LDSS Stats Release 2013

http://www.sclد.org.uk/sites/default/files/statistics_release_learning_disability_statistics_scotland_2013_0.pdf

⁵ LDSS Stats Release 2013

http://www.sclد.org.uk/sites/default/files/statistics_release_learning_disability_statistics_scotland_2013_0.pdf

Employment

- 13.1% of adults with learning disabilities known to local authorities were known to be in employment or training for employment in 2013.
- 1,529 (5.8%) are recorded as being in training for employment.
- 1,915 (7.3%) are recorded as being in employment.

Day centre and alternative opportunities

- 9,250 adults were recorded as having social care day opportunities, of whom 5,287 attended a day centre at least some of the time

A policy overview

A range of national policies and legislation have all influenced further education provision for people with learning disabilities. This section offers a brief summary of these policies in order to understand the key drivers that are informing the ongoing development of FE provision across Scotland:

A focus on employability

Putting Learners at the Centre states that the main aim of changes to the further education sector is to build Scotland's workforce. It asserts that colleges should "...improve people's life chances by setting them on the road to sustainable employment."⁶ It guides colleges towards providing vocational and employability related courses. This paper also states the importance of aligning these education reforms with the provision of employment support.

The Wood Commission's Report in June 2014, reinforces the employability message and states "...we must ensure that young people at college pursue studies with an expectation that they will lead successfully to employment"⁷.

⁶ Putting Learners at the Centre, The Scottish Government (2011) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/09/15103949/2>

⁷ Education Working For All! Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce Final Report, The Scottish Government (2014), <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/06/4089>

The report has a strong equalities focus. It argues that improving employment figures for equalities groups “requires action and clear targets to address existing under representation and segregation within vocational education”⁸.

A focus on younger learners

Opportunities for All⁸ represents the Scottish Government’s commitment to offer a place in learning or training to all 16-19 year olds, including those with a learning disability. This offer is universal and specifically includes students with additional support needs.

A focus on outcomes

Outcome agreements are the means by which the SFC now links funding for colleges directly to the delivery of national priorities. Through this reciprocal arrangement the SFC has stated its intention to “...shift from historically-based to needs-based funding; from individual colleges to regional groupings; and from activity to outcomes”⁹

Each year colleges must record their performance against National Performance Measures defined by the Scottish Funding Council. Two of these measures are:

- Volume of credits relating to learners from different protected characteristic groups and care leavers (where data is available)
- Volume of credits relating to learners with profound and complex needs enrolled on courses involving formal recognition of achievement

A focus on widening access

Learning for All (2005)¹⁰ emphasized the financial and social importance of

⁸ Opportunities for All, The Scottish Government (2012) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00408815.pdf>

⁹ Overview of College Regional Outcome Agreements 2013/14, Scottish Funding Council (2013) <http://www.scotlandscollleges.ac.uk/Download-document/5079-Overview-of-College-Regional-Outcome-Agreements-2013-14.html>

¹⁰ Learning for All Measures for Success 2013, Scottish Funding Council (2013) http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Access/2013_LFA_full_report.pdf

widening access to further and higher education across a range of marginalized groups, including disabled people. The SFC publish annual update reports on Learning for All measures of success, which include for example the number of enrolments on additional learning support.

A focus on personalising learning

Putting Learners at the Centre articulates the Scottish Government's intention to broaden access to further education. One mechanism for this is the development of an Individual Learning Plan for all students which should enable colleges to tailor provision and put appropriate additional support in place. 'People with profound and complex needs' are specified as a group who might benefit from this. The paper acknowledges that the challenge for colleges is to support the rapid progress of these students through vocational courses leading to qualifications.

What we found

1. Has provision changed?

When Putting Learners at the Centre was published a common opinion was that FE provision for students with learning disabilities or autism might be severely affected:

'Some people thought Putting Learners at the Centre meant the days of the student with a learning disability were numbered' (college lecturer)

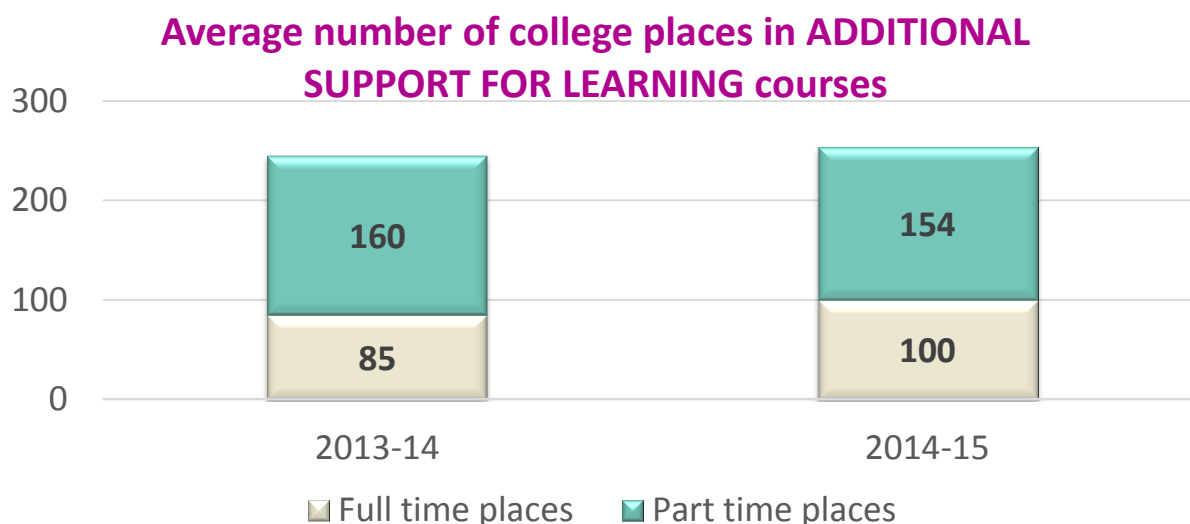
Information gathered from a range of sources suggests that the situation is not as critical as this, but is still a cause for concern.

In 2013-14, 5.8 million hours of learning was delivered to students requiring additional support - 7.5% of all student learning hours. This is similar to the

figures for the previous two years, and down from the 2010/11 figure of over 5.9 million hours.¹¹

In 2011/12, 24,868 students were enrolled on Additional Support for Learning programmes, a reduction of nearly 30% from 2008/09. In the same period, enrolment of students requiring extended learning support (ELS) in mainstream courses increased by nearly 10%. These numbers include all Additional Support For Learning students, not just students with learning disabilities¹². The difficulties of categorisation and definition are discussed below.

Responses from our college survey indicate that provision for students with learning disabilities or autism may have stabilised or even started to increase slightly. Respondents stated that the number of places in Additional Support For Learning courses is likely to stay remain roughly the same or increase, as indicated in the table below (again, this figure does not just indicate places for students with learning disabilities, but for any Additional Support For Learning student):



¹¹ 'Students with a disability or additional learning needs' SFC, Baseline Report for Academic Year 2013-14, January 2015, Edinburgh,
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical_publications_SFCST012015_BaselineReportforAcademicYear201314/SFCST012015_Baseline_Report_for_Academic_Year_2013-14.pdf

¹² Learning for All Measures for Success, Scottish Funding Council (2013)
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Access/2013_LFA_full_report.pdf

College responses to FOI requests from ENABLE Scotland showed an ambiguous picture. In the nine colleges that responded, the average number of courses for students with additional support needs fell by 14% between 2011/12 and 2012/13, with the number of full time equivalent staff in Additional Support For Learning departments falling by 8%. However, the amount of SFC funding allocated to Additional Support For Learning courses over the same period actually rose by 19%. The most significant point about this rise in funding is that it came almost entirely in two regions. The other regional colleges reported either a very small increase or a slight reduction.

At best these FOI responses paint an incomplete picture: in SCLD's survey of colleges only one out of twelve colleges reported a reduction in teaching or support staff for students with learning disabilities since June 2012. However, one college has an aspirational target in their Regional Outcome Agreement for Additional Support For Learning students on accredited courses which is 30% lower than the 2010/11 level. School leaver destination figures produced by Skills Development Scotland show a rise in the number of school leavers with a learning disability or autism going into further education between 2009/10 and 2011/12 (from 635 to 725). Most survey respondents stated that provision was led by demand. However, in at least one area this did not seem to be the case:

“The current situation is that lots of people who want to go to college are being turned down for a place.” (Social worker)

There is sporadic evidence that further education provision for students with profound and complex needs is being compromised. Indeed, sometimes the justification for this is the Scottish Government's priorities for improving educational standards: we heard of one college that has cut its Level 1 courses on the grounds that students at this level are 'not capable of progression' (college lecturer). Another college set progression targets in its

Regional Outcome Agreement for Level 3 students and above, but not for Level 1 and 2 students.

A third college decided that it could not continue to offer its Independent Living Skills course because it was not employment focussed (see Case Study 1 below). We do not believe that the Scottish Government's focus on employability and improved progression should result in poorer provision for students with profound and complex needs, nor that this was the intention of the policy focus. However, it appears to be the unintended consequence in some instances.

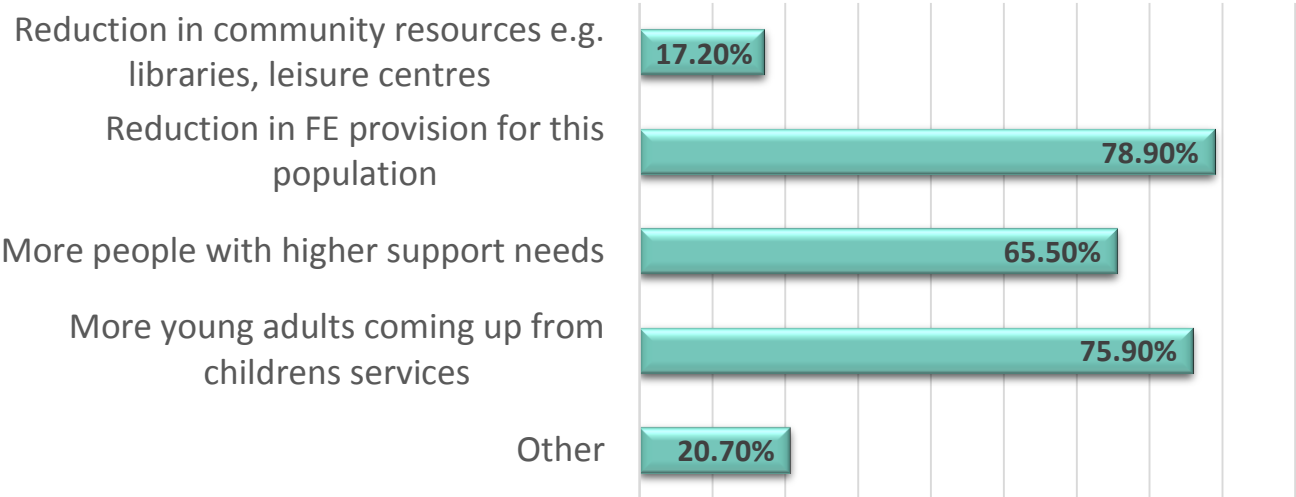
Government policies described above declared a clear intention to change the range of courses offered to people with learning disabilities or autism. Nearly 60% of respondents to our college survey agreed that there were more accredited courses for students with learning disabilities than there were two years ago, and that progression within college was better. 33% agreed that more employability focussed courses were being provided.

We recognise that this transformation will be challenging to colleges and other stakeholders. However, it is vital that these changes are communicated to young people and their families, and this has not always happened, as Case Study 1 below shows.

There is a wider social question about opportunities for adults with learning disabilities. As stated above, rates of employment for adults with learning disabilities are extremely low compared to the national average. In addition, cuts to councils' social care budgets have led to fewer social care day opportunities. We asked social workers in our survey whether they had seen an increased demand in day services and, if so, whether they attributed this to cuts in further education provision. 97% agreed that demand had increased since June 2012.

Although three quarters of these respondents gave a reduction in further education provision as a reason for this increase, other factors were also thought to be responsible, as the Diagram below shows:

Named Factors in Increasing Demand for Social Care Day Provision



All the social workers we interviewed stated that continuing to meet an increasing demand for social care day opportunities will be a significant challenge.

Case Study 1

I have an 18 year old son with complex needs who attends a special school and who has applied for a place on a two year Independent Living Skills college course. He has just completed his link course, which entailed him going to the college one day a week. He really enjoyed this: it has had a very positive effect on his confidence, and he was looking forward very much to starting the course after the summer. This experience convinced me that the course would help further improve his abilities and confidence and provide the next step in enhancing his skills towards leading as independent a life as he is able.

However, we only recently discovered that the college intended to withdraw this course. This was very unfortunate as it was the only course suitable for my son to enrol onto: students on this course receive a level of support that my son needs, and transport is available to allow my son to get there. So even though the campus is some distance from where he lives, we were relying on his being able to take up a place (the other campuses in this regional college do not offer an equivalent course). His school were unaware that this course was to be discontinued and parents had not been informed.

I have written to my local councillors and to MSPs, who in turn have written to the college Principal. The Principal's reply made it clear that college provision must be employment focussed, and this course did not meet that criterion. Case Study 1 (continued)

Discussions have been held about the local authority developing suitable alternative provision for this population. However, they have not managed to develop anything in time for this year, so we now know that the college will run this (two year) course for one year only, in the hope that the local authority will be able to offer something suitable in 2015/16. Also, the link course at the school has been cut.

Several things about this situation worry me:

- I still haven't been told any of this by the college, and I don't know if my son has a place on this course (as of June). Communication between the college and students and their families has been woeful
- I don't think it's right for the college to run one year of a two year course: what does this say about how highly they value the course?
- If the local authority does offer some alternative provision, how will it meet the same educational standard as a course offered by the college, in terms of certification and progression? Is this group of learners being treated less well than all other learners?

I just feel that the college is using the employment stuff to hit these students over the head with and say 'You'll never get a job so you can't come to college.' The college runs a large number of employment focussed courses for a range of abilities. My son has only one course and they want to take it away. I read with some interest Mr Russell's recent "Adult Learning in Scotland - Statement of Ambition" document where he states "Every adult in Scotland will have the right to access learning to meet their educational needs and their aspirations" and I am left shaking my head at once again what sounds great on paper doesn't percolate down to real life!

2. Is there local variation in provision for students with learning disabilities?

The national figures quoted on page 9 mask a wide local variation. In 2013/14 the percentage of students with a disability varied from 11.5% in one region to 27.0% in another.¹³

Analysis of the Scottish Government data indicates that in two local authorities the number of school leavers with learning disabilities going to college increased by 420% and 233% between 2009/10 and 2011/12. On the other hand, in two other areas the number of this population of school leavers going to college reduced by 43% and 56%. In one local authority 73% of all school leavers with a learning disability go to college. In another local authority, that figure is as low as 33.3%. The Learning Disability Statistics Scotland data, ENABLE Scotland's FOI data and the college survey responses also indicate a significant variation in levels of provision.

Leavers with Autism or a Learning disability entering Further Education, 2009/10 -2011/12



¹³ SFC , Learning for All: Measures of Success, March 2015, Edinburgh
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical_publications_SFCST062015_LearningforAllMeasuresofSuccess/SFCST062015_Learning_for_All_2015_Measures_of_Success.pdf

Explaining this variation is not straightforward. Each Regional College has developed its own Regional Outcomes Agreement (ROA) with the SFC that specifies a number of performance targets.

Some of these ROAs specify levels of provision for students with a learning disability or autism. The SFC's Guidance states¹⁴:

'The SFC wants to improve people's life chances by ensuring learners in Scotland, regardless of their background, are able to access the highest levels of educational provision and reach their full potential.'

Nevertheless, the guidance colleges receive from the SFC does not require specific levels of provision for students with learning disabilities. It also allows for local variation in levels of provision for Additional Support For Learning students.

One college lecturer identified local leadership as a key factor in protecting and developing provision for students with learning disabilities or autism:

"If you don't have people fighting for this area, it's an easy target"

(College lecturer)

Significantly, over a third of colleges do not offer courses to people with learning disabilities on every campus. This may be more of an issue for this population of students than for others, because of the difficulties some would face in travelling large distances independently.

¹⁴ College Outcome Agreement Guidance, Scottish Funding Council (2013)
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/GuidanceOA1415/College_Outcome_Agreement_Guidance_2014-15.pdf

3. Can the progress of students with learning disabilities be tracked effectively into, through and beyond college?

There is no agreed definition of 'learning disability' that is understood and applied across schools, colleges and adult social care services. The national learning disability strategy 'The keys to life' offers one definition¹⁴. In their Guidance for developing ROAs, the SFC state their intention to develop a Leavers' Destination Survey that will show graduates' first destinations. Colleges will be required to track the progression of students who have 'Protected Characteristics'. However, although 'Learning Disability' falls within the Protected Characteristic of Disability, it is not a Protected Characteristic in itself. Unless the survey is specifically designed to identify students with a learning disability, it will not be able to track this particular population of students from college to their first destination.

As stated above, the SFC publishes annual update reports on Learning for All measures of success. These measures include numbers of students disclosing a disability, the number of students enrolled on Additional Support For Learning courses, and the number of students receiving extended learning support within mainstream courses. However, within these measures, the number of students with a learning disability is not identified. Skills Development Scotland collect school leaver data, which includes data for pupils with additional support needs. 'Learning disability' is one of the categories under the main heading of 'Additional Support Needs' (ASN) which schools are required to record. Pupils are given this label if they have had a diagnosis from an educational psychologist. However, the national learning disability strategy, 'The keys to life', has a broader definition, not just based on IQ. It is likely that this latter definition would produce a larger population of pupils with learning disabilities.

In addition, it is not clear whether all pupils with a learning disability are formally assessed and diagnosed before they leave school. In March 2014, the Scottish Children's Services Coalition (SCSC) wrote to the Scottish Government about the issue of inconsistent recording of pupils with additional support needs.

They claimed that both the Scottish Government's school population statistics¹⁵ and pupil census supplementary data evidence an inconsistency between local authorities in the assessment or recording, or both, of ASN categories, including learning disabilities and autism¹⁶. The SCSC asked the Scottish Government to ascertain what measures are being put in place by the Scottish Government to ensure that there is greater guidance in delivering a consistent approach by local authorities in identifying and recording those with additional support needs.

In partnership with colleges, the Scottish Funding Council is developing and refining a monitoring system to track the progress of individual students into, through and beyond college. All these factors of definition, assessment and recording that we have discussed make the task of accurately identifying and tracking the progress of young people with learning disabilities and autism a significant challenge.

¹⁵ The Keys to Life, The Scottish Government (2013) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/06/1123>

¹⁶ Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland, No.1: 2010
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/04154230/11.7>

Case Study 2

I went to college after leaving school in 2012. I was seventeen at the time. I wanted to learn more about social skills and life skills, not anything specific. I wanted to go to a college a bit away, but I couldn't get the support I needed to get me there. So in the end I went to the nearest college. It means my mum takes me in the morning and I get a lift back from my support worker at night.

But there's a problem with that. My support worker changes and I don't always know them. This is difficult for me. My mum had to come and pick me up at the end of college recently as I refused to get into the support worker's car. She had been with me all day but I had never met her before, she was a stranger. I was told never to get into a stranger's car.

It's good that I get 1:1 support at college, but they often give me different information from the information I get from College staff which confuses me and my mum.

Before I started I got help to choose my course from a Transitions Project. That was good. This year I'm doing Pathways 1 and next year I'll do Pathways 2. I'll get a qualification at the end of it. I liked learning about Scotland and local history, but when we go out on community visits we just go to supermarkets or cafes.

What I like about college is getting to know new people. But staff at the college have told me to stay with the people in my class when on lunch break. I'm not allowed to mix with other people who aren't on my course.

I don't know what I want to do when I leave college, other than being a professional wrestler. But I'm working with the local Transitions project to help me think about this.

4. How good is the progression into and through college?

The transition from childhood to adulthood is well recognised as being complicated. A number of localities across Scotland have transitions teams to support young people with learning disabilities or autism to plan their transition from school to the next phase of their lives. These organisations offer effective support to schools and colleges as well as pupils and students (see Case Study 2 above). Many colleges have increased the number of certificated courses that they offer to students with learning disabilities. This helps to lay out a clear progression path for students. In their response to our survey, 7 out of 12 colleges reported both an increase in accredited courses and better student progression over the last two years.

This development is to be welcomed. A feature of some Additional Support For Learning provision over the years has been that students with learning disabilities could spend years returning to college, without progressing towards a national qualification or into employment. Despite the developments stated above, there is still anecdotal evidence that this issue has been not been consistently addressed across the country. We heard from one student who has gone to college for four years and was been offered a place again for 2013/14. We heard from another student who has gone to college for ten years, and was given encouragement by staff to apply for a place this year.

For students with additional support needs, enrolment on non-recognised qualifications has decreased by 64% since 2007-8. 76% of enrolments of students with additional support needs are now onto courses with recognised qualifications, a 17% increase over six years. (However, the absolute numbers of enrolments on recognised qualifications has declined since 2007-8)¹⁷

¹⁷ 'Recognised qualifications and additional support needs', SFC, Baseline Report for Academic Year 2013-14, January 2015, Edinburgh,

5. How good is the multi-agency working that is required to support the participation of students with learning disabilities and autism?

Partnership Matters¹⁸, written in 2005 and revised in 2007 is the Guidance from the Scottish Government that lays out the responsibilities for each agency that has a role in supporting students with additional support needs to access further and higher education. Partnership Matters pre-dates both the regionalisation of colleges and the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013. Both these and other changes mean that the further education landscape has been transformed since this inter-agency guidance was written.

In 2011 the Scottish Government stated its intention to review Partnership Matters¹⁹. However, as of June 2014 it had not completed this, and was still carrying out consultations. It is now due to be published in the spring of 2015. In our phone interviews, all 4 college staff we spoke to cited Partnership Matters as a factor in the quality of their joint working with social work. Across Scotland, the quality of partnership working between colleges and other agencies seems variable. Also, the perspective of social work staff differs from that of college staff: 8 out of 12 colleges (67%) report good communication with other agencies; 58% agree that good personal care is available at college; and 42% agree that good co-ordinated support is in place to support students to travel. However, in our survey of social workers only 28% agreed that good transport is available, 39% of agreed that there is good communication with other agencies, and only 32% agree that good personal care is available for students that need it. More than 50% of respondents had not heard of Partnership Matters.

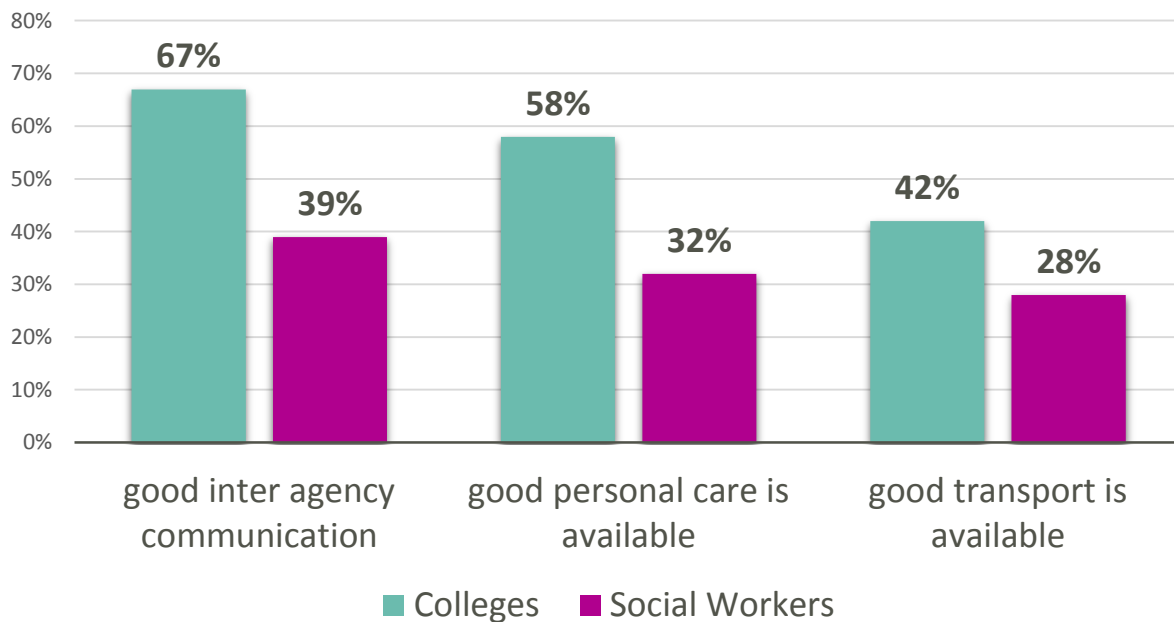
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistical_publications_SFCST012015_BaselineReportforAcademicYear201314/SFCST012015_Baseline_Report_for_Academic_Year_2013-14.pdf

¹⁸ Pupil census supplementary data, 2013 -

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/dspupcensus>

¹⁹ Partnership Matters, Scottish Government (2005), revised 2007. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/06/1123>

How Partnership Working is Rated By Each Partner



More than 50% of respondents had not heard of Partnership Matters. One social worker identified significant concerns where he worked:

“There is very poor communication (between the social work department and the college), which hinders cooperation and coordination.”

This variable partnership working can have a significant impact on students. As the Case Study below illustrates, poor partnership working can have a significant impact on students’ education.

Case Study 3

D is 44. She was accepted onto a Communications course for 2012/13. Because D has mobility difficulties, she needed someone to support her from the classroom to the dining room, and to the toilet (though she did not need personal care). Her mother offered to come in to the college to help, but was told that support staff based in the college could do this. After a few weeks, one of the support workers told her that pushing D's wheelchair fell outwith their responsibilities. Rather than speak to the college about this, the family bought D a motorised scooter, which allowed her to move around without support.

Later in the year D had to go into hospital for an operation, and missed a few weeks of college. After she had been back for a few weeks, the college phoned her mother to say that they could no longer meet D's needs, because they could not guarantee that she would not fall, and she would therefore have to leave. A community nurse who knew D contacted the social work department, who contacted the college to offer support. The college then got back in touch with the family to say they would like to consider ways that D could continue at college, and suggested doing a risk assessment. D's mother decided not to take up that offer, although she acknowledges it was well intentioned. In her view, if there is one thing that would have made the difference for D, it would be better communication between the college, social work department, support provider and family.

6. How effective is the progression into employment for these students?

As stated above, numbers of adults with learning disabilities in employment remain very low - only 7.3% in 2013 compared to the national rate of 72.8%²⁰ The policies that describe the role colleges should play in moving young people towards and into employment clearly apply equally to all students. The SFC's Outcome Agreement Guidance states that a priority for each ROA is to:

“Provide meaningful further education for students with learning disabilities, and help such students get into employment”

Colleges have taken this guidance seriously: in our survey 33% report a higher proportion of employability courses for students with learning disabilities or autism compared to 2012. The Wood Report lists a number of key performance indicators to track progress. KPI number 4 states:

“The number of young college students moving into employment or higher level study”

The Wood Report states that the Scottish Funding Council was piloting the collection of this information. This is very welcome. From an Equalities perspective, as espoused by the Wood Report, it is to be hoped that this system is designed to effectively track the progress of young college students with learning disabilities into employment or higher level study. A number of colleges report establishing local partnerships with supported employment organisations. These agencies can complement the work of college staff by arranging work placements and providing support at these placements etc.

²⁰ LDSS Stats Release 2013

http://www.scl.d.org.uk/sites/default/files/statistics_release_learning_disability_statistics_scotland_2013_0.pdf

Some approaches are tailored to increasing job outcomes for students with learning disabilities or autism, for example Project SEARCH (coordinated by SCLD) and ENABLE Scotland's Transitions to Employment.

Scottish Government funded guidance²¹ clarifies activities that lead to positive job outcomes. The extremely low levels of employment for this population, coupled with this clear guidance about what factors are crucial in enabling students to move from education into work, means that colleges have a perfect opportunity to have a significant impact in this area.

In 2011 Education Scotland produced a report called "Preparing learners in Scotland's colleges for employment or further study"²². This report has informed the Scottish Funding Council's approach to employability. It also contains a number of recommendations for colleges, including:

'Ensure that learners understand fully the extent of their development of employability skills and that they can discuss these skills with potential Employers' (p.25)

These recommendations are intended to be implemented in Additional Support For Learning departments as well as other college departments.

²¹ A Natural Progression: A good practice handbook for colleges on supporting students with learning disabilities and autism into work (2014) <http://www.sclد.org.uk/news-events/news/2013/a-new-handbook-colleges-supporting-students-with-learning-disabilities-and-aut>

²² Preparing learners in Scotland's colleges for employment or further study, Education Scotland (2011) http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/Images/FINALPLSCE_tcm4-712952.pdf

Case Study 4

S is 19. When he left school, he really wanted to work but there is no supported employment service where he lives. He was told he had to go to college, and given two course options, neither of them vocational – S reluctantly chose a Life Skills course.

During his first year, S started volunteering at a children's nursery. Over the summer he was taken on as a sessional worker and hoped that this would lead to a permanent post. However, as the nursery's summer programme came to an end, so did S's post, as the nursery could not afford to keep him on. He reluctantly decided to return to college, seeing this as the best route into employment. When he applied for a place on the Child Care programme, he was offered a place on the Retail course instead. The college explained that funding was not available for a scribe, which S would need for the Childcare programme.

Although he wasn't interested in other vocational courses, S was told that he couldn't do Catering in any case because his wheelchair would be a Health and Safety hazard in the training kitchen. So the only option he had in the end was Retail.

By this time a number of agencies working in partnership, had produced an incentive programme that gave financial support to employers to employ people with additional needs. The nursery got back in touch with S to offer him an eighteen month full-time position as an Assistant Support Worker. He accepted, left college and is currently working towards his SVQ 2 in Customer Development.

Conclusion

We conducted this work during a time of great change for Scotland's further education colleges and their students. These changes have started to produce some clear improvements – there is clear evidence that college provision for students with learning disabilities is more structured, with improved levels of progression and accreditation of courses. It appears that after a decline in provision for these students, over a number of years, provision is now levelling off, and in some colleges is increasing. More courses are employability focussed, with the recognition that disabled students should be seen as part of Scotland's future workforce. Colleges and national education bodies should be recognised for making these achievements in a challenging landscape.

However, these improvements have been made inconsistently across colleges. Students with profound and complex needs remain in a vulnerable position. They may be seen as less able to progress through employability courses into work, or even to progress at all.

College ROAs have the potential to be powerful tools for enabling colleges to focus on outcomes and improve students' experience and performance. However, it is important that these ROAs make more explicit the targets and outcomes for students with learning disabilities.

The development of a national college leaver destination survey for full-time leavers is welcome. However, our concerns as stated above are that this survey should be:

- Accessible to students with learning disabilities
- Able to identify (former) students with learning disabilities as a discrete group
- Part of a wider monitoring system that can track young people with learning disabilities as they move from school, through college and on into work or other destinations

Some colleges have established effective partnerships with supported employment agencies and employers to address this. Scottish Government funded guidance²³ clarifies activities that lead to positive job outcomes. The extremely low levels of employment for this population, coupled with this clear guidance about what factors are crucial in enabling students to move from education into work, means that colleges have a perfect opportunity to have a significant impact in this area.

A wider issue is the question of what life holds for older adults (24+) with a learning disability. With further education provision focussing on younger learners, the reduction of social care day opportunities and the continuing low rates of employment, there is a real fear that this population may become isolated and disengaged from society, with their families coming under greater pressure. Of course the further education sector is only a part of this picture, and rightly has a focus solely on the provision of learning opportunities: any positive response to this global picture would need to be made in partnership with a number of other sectors.

The updated Partnership Matters guidance is long overdue. It is hoped that its imminent publication will support effective working arrangements in a changing environment for colleges and social work departments. Coordinated working between colleges and local authorities will be especially important where councils are taking over responsibility for delivering learning, as described in one of the Case Studies.

As the case studies and other evidence show, when elements of good practice are absent, the impact of poor educational provision on individual students can be significant.

Many of these issues will require a multi-agency response to resolve. 'The keys to life' Recommendation 40 names SCLD, Colleges Scotland, Skills

²³ A Natural Progression: A good practice handbook for colleges on supporting students with learning disabilities and autism into work (2014) <http://www.sclld.org.uk/news-events/news/2013/a-new-handbook-colleges-supporting-students-with-learning-disabilities-and-aut>

Development Scotland and ADSW (now Social Work Scotland). These agencies, along with others including the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council, should work together to address this recommendation and the specific issues raised by this report.

Regionalisation of colleges and the implementation of Putting Learners at the Centre mean that colleges are in a state of flux. Levels of staffing, staffing structures and course provision are all changing. Some useful initiatives are still in early stages of development. We therefore cannot draw firm conclusions about recent changes in, and the current quality of, provision. However, if there are issues to be addressed it is important that these are identified at an early stage, when opportunities for embedding good practice are greater.