



scottish
consortium
for learning
disability

Building respect in the
Scottish community

**“If I don’t get a place next year, I don’t know
what I’ll do”**

**Joint SCLD Briefing on the impact of changes to the
funding of students with learning disabilities within
Scottish Further Education**



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Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability

The Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability (SCLD) is a Centre for Excellence that is made up of 12 partner organisations that have joined together, with funding from The Scottish Government, to help people make the changes set out in 'The same as you?' 'The same as you?' provides a national policy framework for supporting and transforming services for people with learning disabilities and their families in order that people are enabled to lead full lives in their communities. 2010 marks its tenth anniversary. SCLD's partner organisations are ARC, BILD, Badaguish Outdoor Centre, Capability Scotland, Down's Syndrome Scotland, ENABLE Scotland, KEY Community Supports, PAMIS, Quality Action Group, University of Dundee, University of Glasgow and the University of St Andrews.

Introduction

In summer 2011, a number of people with learning disabilities and/or on the autism spectrum, family carers and support workers raised concerns with SCLD and our partner organisations about cuts to their college courses for the 2011/12 academic year. People with learning disabilities told us that they had been given very little notice that their college place had been cut, making it hard for them to make alternative arrangements.

SCLD and our partners were very concerned about the potential impact of these changes. College courses form an important part of the lives of many people with learning disabilities, providing crucial opportunities to develop independent living skills, to build friendships and to develop skills for employment. We were also concerned that any cuts being made to colleges might disproportionately affect people with learning disabilities.

We wanted to find out if what people were telling us was typical of what was happening across Scotland. In order to achieve this, we issued a survey to people with learning disabilities and family carers asking them to tell us about their experiences, as well as inviting colleges to participate in an online questionnaire. We also undertook analysis of the eSAY statistics, which are the national statistics on adults with learning disabilities in Scotland and which include figures on adults with learning disabilities attending Further Education

courses. In addition, ENABLE Scotland issued Freedom of Information requests to each of Scotland's Further Education Colleges.

Background

Further Education is an important part of lived experience for many people with learning disabilities in Scotland. 'The same as you?'(2000) review of services for people with learning disabilities in Scotland emphasised that 'well-planned learning opportunities can have significant and long-lasting effects. They can improve the quality of life for people with learning disabilities and can help them to take advantage of other activities and employment. They can also help them to develop independent living skills so that they rely less on others.'¹

According to the 2010 eSAY statistics, 2,408 students with learning disabilities (13%)² were attending college. The majority of these students attended college on a part-time basis. 36 of Scotland's 42 FE colleges offer part-time courses for adults with additional support needs. 17 offer full-time courses.

Some people with learning disabilities will attend college straight from school. An important part of this process has been the links between schools and colleges, which enable young people with learning disabilities in the transition period to spend time at college before they enrol formally. This smooth transition has had important outcomes for people:

"My son, Keith, attended Dundee College full time for four years between 1990 and 1994. This followed a year long Link course between his school and the College. He blossomed there, and as a result of his College work placement, he secured employment in McDonald's and has worked there ever since."

However, it has come to our attention that some opportunities for this have been lost due to the elimination of a national target for this:

¹Scottish Government, 2000 'The same as you? A review of services for people with learning disabilities' Chapter 5, paragraph 16 available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/ldsr/docs/tsay-03.asp>

² 28 of 32 local authorities submitted data on college attendance to eSAY. The total population of people with learning disabilities known to services in these authorities is 18,504. 2,408 people represent 13% of this population.

“My son Andrew aged 16 is still at school in East Kilbride and goes to college for 4 hours a week. The pupils in the year below him had their college taster time cut so only half the class could attend. It is quite a worry.”

Many people with learning disabilities will continue as Further Education students during their later adult years. Few obtain accredited qualifications and employment rates among adults with learning disabilities remain lower than for both the general population and for other disabled people. According to the 2010 eSAY statistics, only around 14% of adults with learning disabilities are currently employed or on a work or training placement.

Adults with learning disabilities are likely to be considered as students with additional support needs. Students who are assessed as having additional support needs attract extra funding above the standard allocation, to cover the extra costs associated with higher support needs. The Scottish Funding Council funds a certain volume of activity in colleges, and defines this activity in terms of ‘SUMS’ - student units of measurement. Each SUM is roughly equivalent to 40 hours of study. Colleges are given a target number of SUMs to fulfil for a certain level of funding. Additional support needs is one area that is given extra weightings – i.e. a higher level of per-capita funding. Courses which are specifically designed for students with additional support needs (referred to as DPG 18), attract an additional weighting in the calculation of student funding. DPG18 attracts a SUM weighting of 1.8.

What we found

In the colleges that responded to SCLD’s survey, this year has seen a 34% cut in part-time places for students with learning disabilities, from 2,155 to 1,413. Some colleges have not made any cuts, while others have cut the entirety of their part-time places. The picture for full-time places is somewhat different, with a small increase of 3% in the number of full-time places, from 657 to 679.

In our survey to students with learning disabilities and their families, a third of students (17 of 52) had applied for a college place this year but had not been given one. 5 students were still waiting to hear in August whether they would secure a place. Of the 17 students who had not been given a place, the majority (14) had not been offered any kind of alternative provision. The 3

people who had been offered alternative provision said they would return to their day centre.

The survey also affirmed the importance of college to people with learning disabilities. Almost all the students (50 of 52) said they enjoyed college, even though only 37 said they were doing the courses they wanted to do. Students said that attending college benefitted them in a number of ways. The main benefits were qualifications and certificates, learning new things, and broadening their social horizons. For one person, college had been a route into work, for another it was a route into a drama group. Another had learned to travel independently:

“I learned things I could not have learned if I did not go to college.”

What is driving these changes?

SCLD and our partners also undertook some research into what might be causing the cuts to college places. We are concerned that recent changes may be putting courses for adults with learning disabilities in jeopardy. The first of these relates to funding and the second relates to the drive towards accredited courses aimed at employability.

Firstly, this year (2011/12) the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) received a reduction in revenue funding of 7% (Scotland's Public Finances, Audit Scotland 2011). Accordingly, the SFC has cut funding to each college by around 10%, reducing the number of SUMs (Student Units of Measurement) available to each college. This has led to pressure on colleges to rationalise what they can offer in terms of numbers of courses. Each college makes its own decisions about which courses are affected by these cuts. As each student on an additional support (DPG 18) course receives a weighted SUM of 1.8, there may be an incentive for colleges to reduce these courses. The results of the Freedom of Information requests by ENABLE Scotland show that half of the colleges (12 of 24) said their allocation of SUMs to students with learning disabilities had reduced, whereas 9 colleges said their allocation had actually increased.

Secondly, the SFC has also issued guidance to Further Education colleges that courses should have a greater focus on employability and more should be accredited. Although this meets many of the demands to ensure that people

with learning disabilities are gaining valuable employability skills, those courses which fail to meet these criteria, including many of the courses for adults with learning disabilities, are at risk from cuts. This is likely to affect disproportionately students with the most complex needs, since they are more likely to have applied for part-time courses that do not have an employability focus. The family of one student who responded to our survey told us that because they had lost their place, they were also losing access to careers advice which would have come with it:

“Because the course finished a year early, directions regarding jobs weren’t covered. There was no end of term discussion, very little warning that the course was finishing early, and no suggestions about D’s future. Not happy! D is very upset. Other students are in the same position. It’s putting a huge strain on local resources.”

Impact

The impact of losing a college place is likely to be significant, both at an individual level and for service providers. At an individual level, people will lose opportunities for learning, gaining qualifications, developing independent living skills and gaining employment skills. Social isolation is also likely to be a problem.

“If I don’t get a place next year I’ll be disappointed, and I don’t know what I’ll do. I’ll have to stay at home.”

Cutting college courses and places for adults with learning disabilities will lead to increased demand for other services, for example day services from the local authority or voluntary sector providers. However, this demand is unlikely to be met in full, since local authorities have very limited scope to meet new demand. Ultimately, it will be left to families to meet the need to support their relatives during the day. This increased pressure on families must be recognised as part of the impact of these changes.

We did hear that in three places there was effective multi-agency working between education and social work departments. However, we would expect to see much more evidence of local co-ordination to mitigate the impact of these changes, given that, under ‘Partnership Matters’ (revised 2009), local agencies including education, health, transport and social work should be

taking part in local forums to tackle the barriers to learning for students with additional support needs.

Summary of Issues

Further Education is an important part of the lives of many adults with learning disabilities, enabling people to develop skills and reducing social isolation. Across Scotland, part-time courses for people with learning disabilities have been cut by more than a third, while full-time courses have seen a slight increase. Most students had very little notice that their college place was being cut. There is little evidence of alternative provision being made for these students. The scale of the cuts means that many families have been and will be put under great pressure.

Furthermore, it is not clear if cuts to courses for people with learning disabilities have been equality impact assessed. The drive towards accredited courses which promote employability is welcome but may disproportionately affect those students who have complex needs.

There is also little evidence of the multi-agency planning that would enable students to make the transition both into and out of college a positive and worthwhile experience.

A number of colleges are taking the opportunity to reconfigure their additional support needs provision, so that it is more employability focussed and provides a clear progression for students.

Our questions

- The Scottish Government has an ambitious vision ('Opportunities for All') that all 16-19 year olds will have a place in post 16 education and training and support appropriate to their needs. How will the needs of young adults with learning disabilities be promoted in the implementation of this plan?
- There is also a commitment to ensure that FE students gain the skills they need to get a job. How can all the relevant agencies work together to ensure that the aspirations of those adults with learning disabilities who wish to work are not put at risk by changes to the further education sector?

- Given the commitment made by colleges to maintain teaching levels this year despite funding reductions, what provision is being made to protect adult learners with learning disabilities?
- For children with learning disabilities now at school what support can be expected as they make the transition to adult training or employment, given the changes currently occurring?
- What is the alternative lifelong learning offer for older adults with learning disabilities who have been attending non-accredited course at college and how can their learning outcomes be achieved?
- Have decisions to cut courses been subject to equality impact assessment processes?

This briefing paper was produced on behalf of SCLD and its Partners, September 2011. Our information came from:

- eSAY, the national statistical information gathering project
- Information from our Partner organisations including Down's Syndrome Scotland and Capability
- A survey to 42 further education colleges (17 responses)
- Freedom of Information request to 42 FE colleges (33 responses). Specific information related to each of Scotland's 42 colleges is available on request. If you would like further information about a specific college please contact Andrew Strong at ENABLE Scotland on 0141 226 4541 or by email at: andrew.strong@enable.org.uk.
- A questionnaire to students, including both students who have college places this year, and those who do not (52 responses)

For more information on the briefing and the issues it raises contact:

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