



Gogledd Cymru **Gyda'n Gilydd**
North Wales **Together**

Gwasanaethau ddi-dor i bobl ag Anableddau Dysgu
Seamless services for people with Learning Disabilities

North Wales Together: seamless services for people with learning disabilities

Life after school: the onward journey for young people with learning disabilities in North Wales

Executive Summary
November 2021

INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the findings from research that was undertaken as part of the North Wales Together Learning Disability Transformation Programme in preparation for the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET (Wales) Act 2018 ('Act')). The Act makes provision for a new statutory framework for supporting children and young people with additional learning needs and replaces existing legislation on special educational needs (SEN) and the assessment of children and young people in post-16 education and training.

The research explores how well the region's current transition pathway from secondary school education to post-16 options is meeting the individual development needs and aspirations of young people with learning disabilities, with a particular focus on those with more complex needs.

The report is especially timely as the region prepares for the implementation of the Act starting in September 2021, phased over the next three years.

We should be aspiring to much more than smoother systems and processes.

At heart there is the need to ensure that people with learning disabilities are able to take their place as full and active citizens.

This period from the mid-teens to the mid-twenties is a crucial window to ensure that young people are fully equipped and supported for life.

We need to have much greater expectations that as a society we are prepared to find ways to reduce the stigma and social exclusion of disability and welcome children and young people with learning disabilities as equal citizens in our schools, workplaces and communities.

(Don't Hold Back Report, p.5, Children's Commissioner for Wales)

THE PROJECT

The research was funded by the North Wales Together Learning Disability Transformation Programme and undertaken in 2020-21 on behalf of the North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group. Activities were overseen by a steering group consisting of representatives from Conwy County Borough Council Social Services, ALN Transformation Programme, Conwy Connect, parent/carer, and the North Wales Together Learning Disability Transformation Programme.

The research used qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyse data from stakeholders. Data on post-school and post-further education outcomes was collated from local authority learning disability teams, Careers Wales, specialist secondary schools and further education institutions, and analysed to provide a snapshot of the transition destinations of young people with learning disabilities leaving specialist secondary schools in the region.

Findings from the data analysis, alongside awareness and familiarity with the Act, were explored in semi-structured qualitative interviews across the following groups:

- Young people with learning disabilities
- Parents
- Professionals and service providers, including schools and colleges, health, and social care
- Careers Wales

A total of 86 people were interviewed in the project, including 26 (30%) young people with learning disabilities and six parents. Interviews were conducted online or over the phone and audio-recorded for qualitative analysis.

Key findings

Post-school destinations of children and young people with learning disabilities

Careers Wales data from 2019 show that the majority of SEN learners, including those with a learning disability across specialist and mainstream education, either stay on in secondary school until Year 14 or transition to further education predominantly in Year 11 or Year 13. The majority of children from special secondary schools transition to local colleges, with a minority moving to specialist college provision. No young people were recorded as “entering employment outside of work based training” but a small proportion of young people in Year 13 in all regions were recorded as unemployed.

This destination data from Careers Wales (2019) is shown in the tables below.

Chart 1: Destination data Year 11: SEN Learners, Careers Wales Annual Survey of School Leavers, 2019

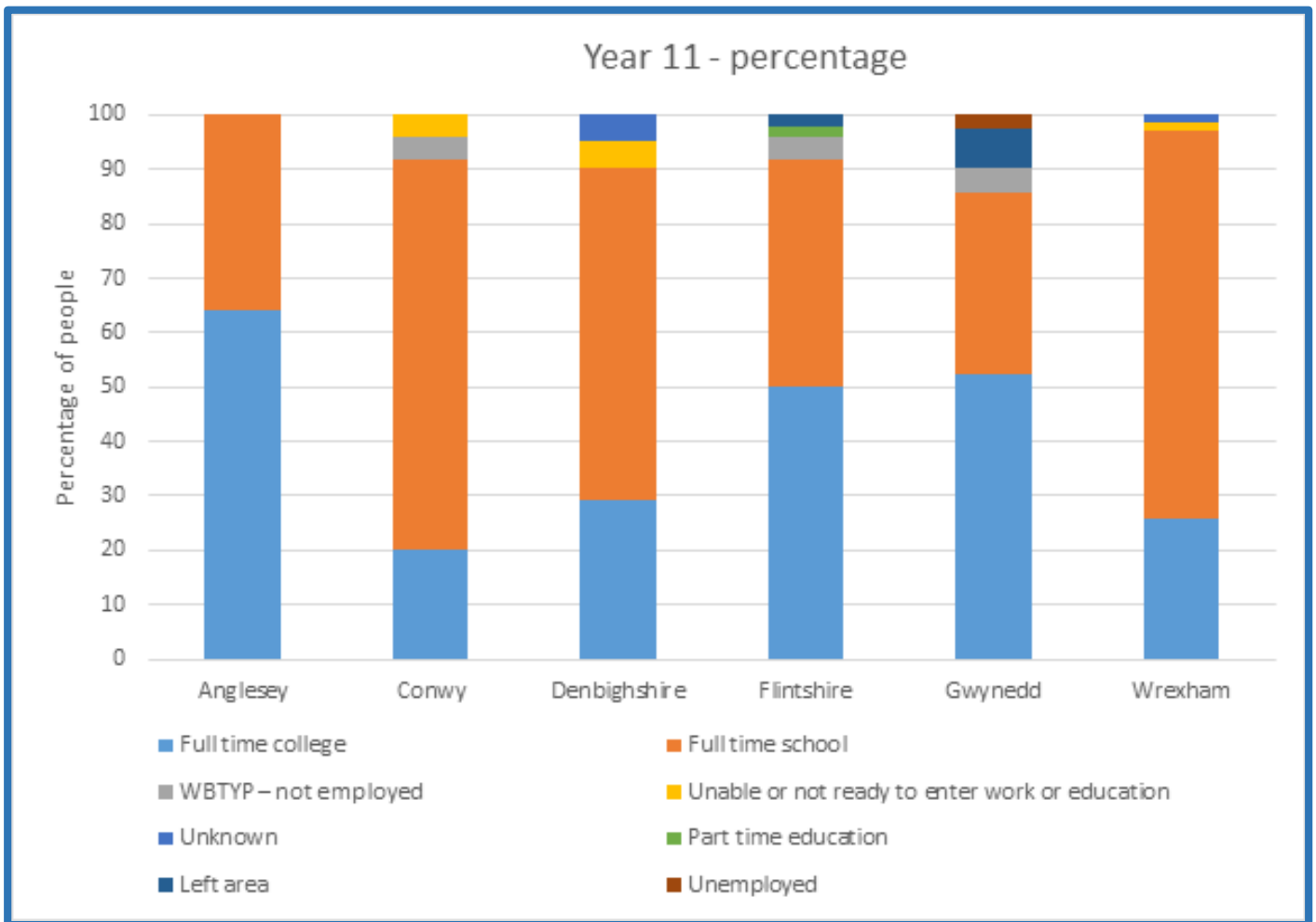


Chart 2: Destination data Year 12: SEN Learners, Careers Wales Annual Survey of School Leavers, 2019

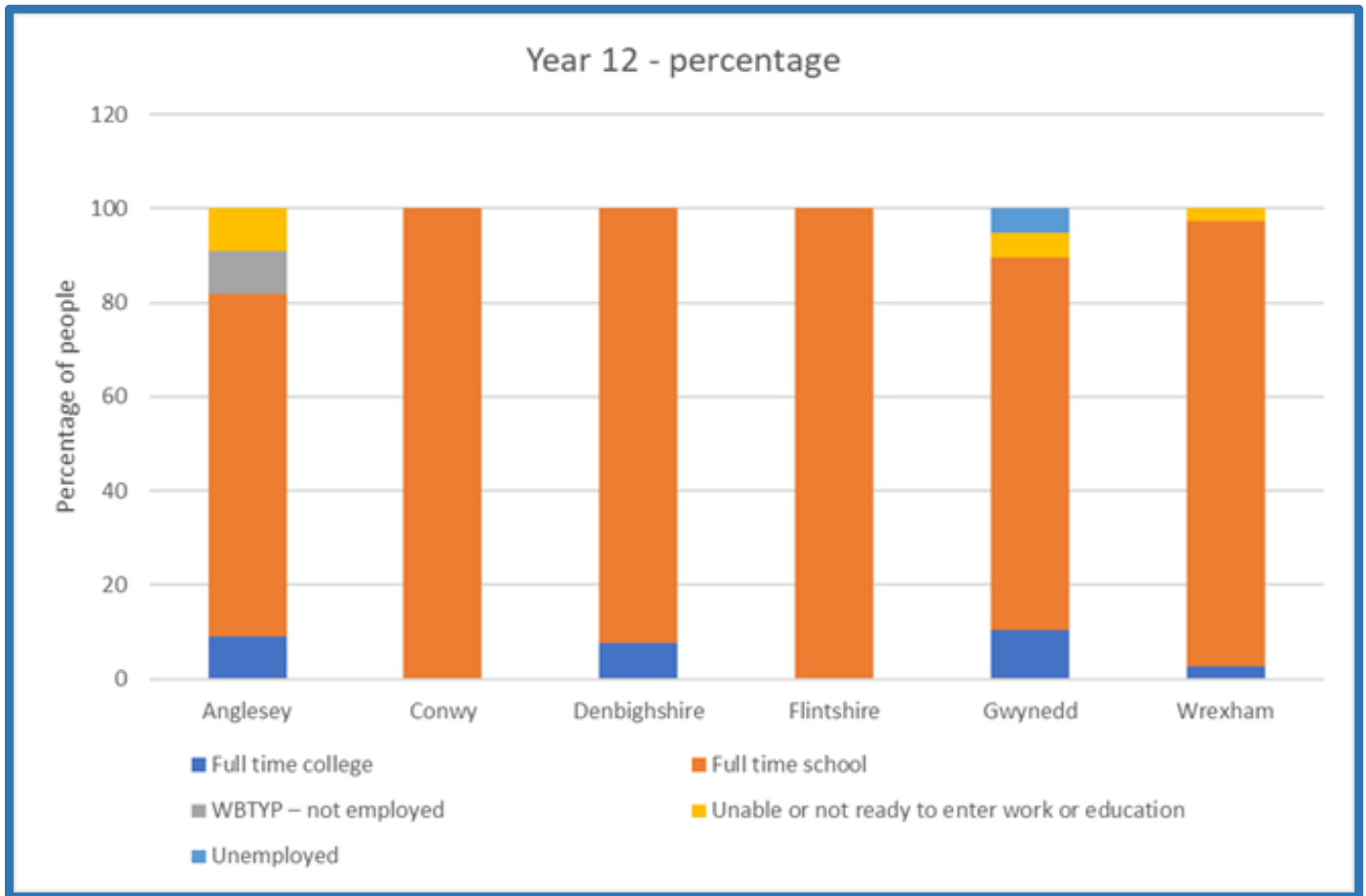
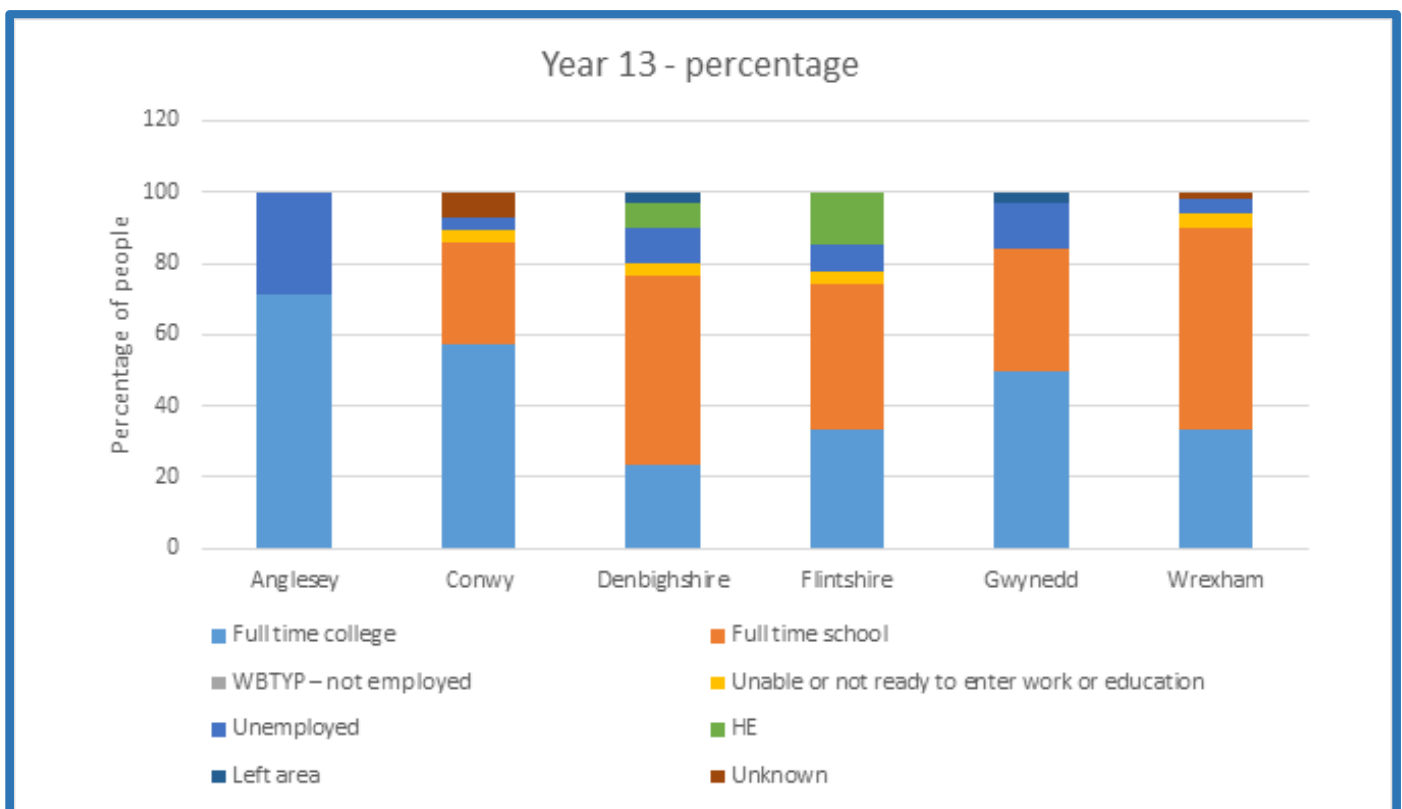


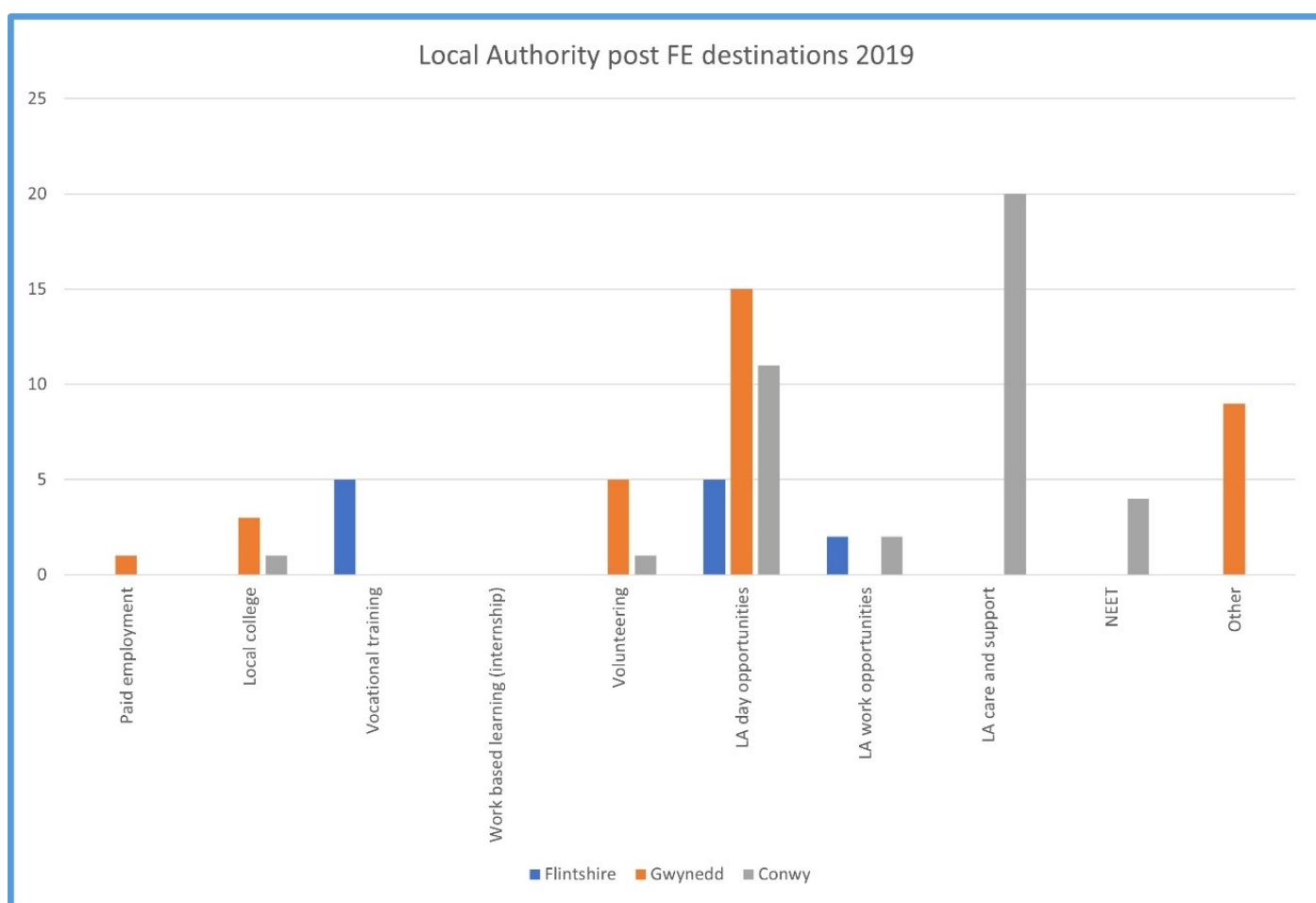
Chart 3: Destination data Year 13: SEN Learners, Careers Wales Annual Survey of School Leavers, 2019



Data from local authority learning disability teams across the region for the 2019/20 school year show that the main destinations for young people were day and / or work opportunities, with the exception of Flintshire where five young people were recorded as moving into vocational training and specifically, Project Search. Only one young person was recorded as moving into employment in the whole region. Meanwhile, there were very few local opportunities for young people with profound and multiple learning disabilities and this was identified as an area requiring improvement.

Data received from local authority learning disability teams is shown in the table below.

Chart 4: Post-FE destination data: young people with learning disabilities, Local Authority Social Services, 2019 to 2020



The destination indicators used by the two colleges who shared data could not be analysed due to differences in definitions and methodology.

In conclusion, the availability of data on the post-school destinations of young people with learning disabilities is limited in scope and fragmented across the region. Trends for this group of young people do not seem to be monitored and analysed by Careers Wales and the six local authorities in the same way they are for other young people at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

STAKEHOLDER VIEWS ABOUT CURRENT PATHWAYS AND EXPECTATIONS AROUND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACT

The main findings from the semi-structured interviews highlighted:

- The transition pathway is fragmented for young people with learning disabilities in North Wales. It is made up of a series of 'stop-gaps' with limited consideration of long-term destinations and outcomes. Young people are often 'channelled' into further education without a longer term plan in place and the lack of a realistic pathway into (paid) employment or to pursue other interest or aspirations. This is highlighted in quotes from interviewees.

'FE is the expected pathway for their children' (*Families*)

"Unless you are in college, that's it you're finished" (*Professional interviewee*)

"College isn't for everyone but there is not a strong enough pathway if you choose not to go". (*Professional interviewee*)

- The overall consensus was that transition planning should have a holistic focus on all the areas of life that are important to young people including and not be limited to further education. This is also the view of the Welsh Government as set out below:

"The intended outcomes should have a strong focus on enabling children and young people to move towards long-term aspirations, be that employment or further or higher education, independent living and/or community participation. To this end, it is essential to consider what is important to the child or young person and what they want to achieve....IDPs can also include outcomes with a wider focus, such as positive social relationships and emotional resilience and stability" (*The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales, p.278*)



Sacha, project interviewee from Anglesey, with her art work

- The majority of young people with learning disabilities can only access provision set up for those with additional learning needs and are thus segregated from their peers. Many of the young people and families interviewed wanted more inclusive options and more creative approaches to doing this from the local colleges. This aspiration is supported by a literature review by the European Agency for special needs and inclusive education which found a strong link between inclusive education and inclusion in the areas of education, employment and living in the community.

According to the review, attending inclusive education settings increases the possibilities for participating and interacting with peers at school, obtaining academic and vocational qualifications, being employed, being financially independent, and so on. At the same time, the research findings indicate that attending segregated settings minimises the opportunities for social inclusion and is correlated with poor academic and vocational qualifications, employment in sheltered workshops, financial dependence, fewer opportunities to live independently and poor social networks after graduation. https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/Evidence%20%E2%80%93%20A%20Review%20of%20the%20Literature_0.pdf

A parent complained that she wanted more inclusive options for her son and not just those aimed at people with a learning disability.

- There are substantial differences in the perception of the benefits and disadvantages of specialist residential college versus local colleges among young people and their families, and professionals. The former tend to overemphasise the positives of residential college education, while professionals view longer term challenges (e.g. the “cliff edge” after college). This often results in heightened expectations from families and pressures on local authorities. However, the new Act will provide an opportunity to local stakeholders to work closer together to meet the needs of young people, including those with more complex needs.

“ Best two years of my life Derwen gave me confidence and helped me believe in myself ”
(Young person interviewed for research)

- The need to improve the post-16 local offer for young people with more complex needs was raised by the majority of stakeholders. Examples of innovation were found in Conwy and in other areas of Wales but for the most part the offer is patchy. The related issue is that the region currently lacks suitable accommodation/homes for life for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities and complex behaviour who require bespoke approaches. This means that young people with these needs may be 'placed' in out of area/ out of county placements and/ or residential college.
- A placement at a residential college still amounts to a 'stop gap' however, thus the importance of looking at accommodation needs as part of the transition planning from specialist secondary school alongside other life areas, as already highlighted.

As one interviewee commented -
"The more complex your needs the more limited the options."

- A clear need for awareness raising and preparation emerged in relation to understanding the implications of the Act for roles and responsibilities. This appears to be particularly urgent for frontline staff and staff in specialist secondary schools who will be key to its delivery.
- Families interviewed had little or no knowledge of the 'Act' highlighting the need for more to be done to engage families and provide them with information that is engaging and accessible. One parent called for young people to be

educated about the new Act, stating "they should be included and know their rights" and questioned how and what information schools are sharing with young people about the changes it will bring.

- There were positive expectations expressed by those with some knowledge of the Act around improved focus on the needs and wishes of the young person in the transition process and planning for post-school destinations, including apprenticeships, employment and meaningful, age-appropriate day opportunities. Project Search and the on-going supported apprenticeship pilot by the National Training Foundation for Wales is a promising step in this direction; however it is important that they are accessible for people with more complex needs and are part of a broader set of available options to support pathways into employment.
- There were various concerns about implementation, particularly funding and financial responsibilities for post-16 education, resources, the risk of administrative divergence across local authorities, and uncertainty around the future of independent careers advice and guidance (currently provided by Careers Wales). It is important that the new system is simple to navigate for stakeholders, and more options and opportunities are opened up for young people including those with complex needs, beyond a narrow focus on further education.
- The research found little evidence of young people with learning disabilities having access to independent advocacy or self-advocacy to support them to have a stronger voice and more control during transition planning.

When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower (*Alexander den Hiejer*)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report puts forward 18 recommendations addressed at a wide range of stakeholders in the region, including young people with learning disabilities and their families, local authorities, primary and secondary schools, further education colleges, Careers Wales, the Health Board, North Wales Advocacy Services, All Wales People First, third sector partners, and the Welsh Government.

Key

 **Short Term = achievable can be completed within 1 year**

 **Medium Term = achievable within 2 to 3 years**

 **Long Term = achievable within five years**

North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group

Recommendation	Lead partner	Others	Timescales
1. Ensure that frontline staff are adequately prepared for the implementation of the Act.	Local Authority and BCUHB leads for learning disability services.	Learning Disability Transformation Programme ALN Transformation Programme Specialist Secondary Schools/ Secondary Schools with special units	Short Term
2. Examine the business case for replicating and upscaling the local approaches implemented in Conwy and Ceredigion for young people with profound and multiple learning disabilities or complex needs across North Wales.	North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group	Learning Disability Transformation Programme Local Further Education Institutions	Medium Term

Recommendation	Lead partner	Others	Timescales
3. Local Authorities should review their travel policies especially in the more rural areas of North Wales and ensure that young people with special educational needs have the opportunities to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to use public transport independently.	North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group	Learning Disability Transformation	Short Term
4. Local further education colleges should explore opportunities and ways for including more young people with learning disabilities within mainstream courses based on their career aspirations, for example by the provision of specialist teaching assistants and mentors.	North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group	Learning Disability Transformation Programme Local Further Education Institutions	Medium to Long Term
5. Establish a peer-led regional advice and support forum for families and young people with additional learning needs approaching and going through transition from secondary school.	North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group	Learning Disability Transformation Programme North Wales Advocacy Services, All Wales People First and families/ carers	Short to Medium Term
6. Co-produce guidance and criteria to help all stakeholders understand when specialist college provision is in fact the best option to meet the individual development needs of young people with learning disabilities.	North Wales Learning Disability Partnership Group	Learning Disability Transformation Programme Specialist Secondary Schools Further Education Institutions Careers Wales	Short to Medium Term

Learning Disability Transformation Programme on behalf of Learning Disability Partnership Group

Recommendation	Lead partner	Others	Timescales
1. Develop a career planning toolkit for young people with learning disabilities within specialist secondary education to raise aspirations and awareness of employment options.	LD Transformation Programme/ Employment & Transition Workstream	Specialist Secondary Schools Secondary Schools with special units Careers Wales Local Authority Education Services	Short to Medium Term
2. Support the development of a national job coaching service which draws up the expertise of indigenous supported employment providers.	LD Transformation Programme/ Employment & Transition Workstream	Welsh Government North Wales Employment Strategy Implementation Group	Medium to Long Term
3. Co-produce a 'local employment offer' for young people with learning disabilities to support progress into paid employment.	LD Transformation Programme/ Employment Workstream and Transition workstream	Learning Disability Partnership Group	Short to Medium Term
4. Explore the role that technology could play to support the independence of young people during the transition phase and also with issues such as independent travel and personal safety.	LD Transformation Programme Transition and Assistive Technology Workstreams	Specialist Secondary Schools Local and specialist Further Education Institutions Local Authorities	Short Term
5. Improve availability and access to independent and impartial advice and guidance about post-school options and opportunities for young people with disabilities.	Learning Disability Transformation Programme Transition, Employment and Communities Workstream	North Wales Advocacy Services, All Wales People First Local Authorities Careers Wales	Short to Medium Term

ALN Transformation Programme

Recommendation	Lead partner	Others	Timescales
1. Using the Individual Development Plan as a tool, ensure that a wider range of life areas are considered when planning transition from specialist secondary schools.	ALN Transformation	Mainstream and specialist secondary schools	Short to Medium Term
2. Improve recording and tracking of the destinations of young people at two key transition points: Year 14 of specialist secondary school and on completion of further education.	ALN Transformation	Mainstream and specialist secondary schools Local Further Education Institutions Independent Specialist Colleges	Short to Medium Term
3. Ensure that young people and their families are aware and informed about the statutory changes the implementation of the Act will bring.	ALN Transformation	BCUHB DECLO Local Authority Education Services Mainstream and specialist secondary schools	Short Term
4. Local authorities should develop accessible and co-produced information sources (e.g. websites) to help young people and families during transition planning.	ALN Transformation	Local authorities, Young people and families and/or carers. North Wales Advocacy Services	Short to Medium Term
5. Supporting young people to maintain and develop new friendships and social connections should be embedded as a core element of transition planning.	ALN Transformation	Local authority learning disability services Young people and families	Short to Medium Term

Recommendation	Lead partner	Others	Timescales
6. Improve understanding of how the interests and aspirations of young people in transition match to the actual provision available to them.	ALN Transformation	Local Authorities Secondary Schools (all) Local Further Education Institutions Careers Wales	Medium to long Term

Welsh Government

Recommendation	Lead partner	Others	Timescales
1. The region should aim to improve inclusive education for all children with disabilities. A first step could be the implementation of disability and equality training across all school provision in North Wales to combat hidden bias and support effective inclusion strategies.	Welsh Government	Local Authorities Primary, Secondary and other school provision Local Further Education Institutions and Higher Education Institutions Self-advocacy	The first step is medium term with the transition to a fully inclusive education system being longer term.

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