

Toolkit for supporting new and existing learners over the summer

We recognise that colleges, providers and stakeholders alike, have worked harder than ever to ensure that learners stay engaged during these challenging times. Over the summer, they will also be focusing on how new starters and returning learners are supported into settings in September.

We have collected examples from providers and local authorities who are putting in place innovative steps to support young people who are joining or returning to further education and to reduce the risk of learners becoming not in employment, education, or training (NEET).

This information is intended to provide an opportunity for colleges, local authorities and other providers to learn from each other's emerging practice and develop their approach to support new and existing students over the summer.

Case Studies from Further Education Providers

Virtual Open Days and Support for New Learners

Case Study: Cambridge Regional College

Cambridge Regional College swiftly moved its recruitment programme online, providing virtual open days for potential students and their parents. These included presentations with live Q&A, live access to support services, and virtual tours. Attendance has increased on previous years, and the college now intends to offer a combination of both physical and virtual open days next year.

The college is offering small group orientation tours of the college, so learners and parents can see the campus, and receive reassurance about Covid safety measures. These tours are so popular that they will probably continue into the summer. Students with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) can attend bespoke SEND orientation days.

The college has worked hard to keep in touch with all students whom they consider vulnerable. A wellbeing service will run for four days a week throughout the summer for vulnerable learners. This will include virtual lunch clubs for particular groups and those who would benefit from additional social interaction and peer support.

The induction period for those transitioning from schools will be lengthened this year, to provide extra time for catch up, and for initial assessments of support and transition needs.

Case Study: Carlisle College

Carlisle College has collaborated with 3 other Cumbrian Colleges, local schools, the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership and the Cumbria Career Hub to create the Cumbria Activate Your Future, sponsored by Hello Future. This is a new online portal, designed to signpost and prepare Y11 students for college, and ease the transition between school and further education.

Schools can refer pupils that have an interest in attending college to the portal. The student will then receive an invitation to register, and be able to access information, advice, guidance as well as taster modules in the 10 most popular college subject areas. Learning materials have been provided from the four participating colleges and utilising materials from the Blended Learning Consortium.

Case Study: Manchester College

Manchester College launched Connect2College in April 2020 to provide Year 11 students across Greater with an opportunity to continue to learn and work towards their next steps of education. Through Connect2College, students could meet their new tutor at college, do taster sessions, find wellbeing support and CV tips. Over 3,000 students have connected with the site. The programme can be accessed through the college website, but it was also shared with local schools to tailor and add their own branding before sending on to their pupils.

Alongside this, Manchester College launched Couch2College in July with 35 live events planned over 3 weeks on how to enrol, college safety and introductory talks on specific courses. All sessions are live streamed using Microsoft Teams and have the option for Q&A and live chat.

To ensure existing students remain engaged over the summer, students have been given work to complete and will still have access to Moodle, which features wellbeing tips and mental health support. Dedicated achievement tutors and mentors will stay in regular contact with the most vulnerable learners.

Case Study: New College Durham

New College Durham has been providing monthly open evenings as usual for potential students and their families, but in a virtual form. The Prospective Students and Parents evenings were also held virtually over three nights. Over 200 families attended each session to hear the principal's address, take part in a virtual tour of the college, and then enter breakout groups to find out more. The sessions included information for students and parents about the challenges of Covid-19 and how the college expects to operate from September. Live feeds are available in order to maximise reach.

In addition to this, the college will be offering a virtual contact centre from 3 August until the middle of September, with teams available on a rota basis right across the curriculum and from support services, and a link through to virtual enrolment. Staff will also aim to offer face-to-face advice for vulnerable

young people and any others who cannot engage remotely. The virtual summer contact centre builds on the college's tried and tested face-to-face model. The college believes that this contact and advice is key in maintaining student interest over the summer, ensuring that they end up on the right courses, and so keeping them engaged through the autumn term and beyond.

The college's unique selling point is its investment in wrap around support services for all students. A comprehensive start of term process ensures that every student has access to a range of support, including an assigned personal tutor and mental health coaches. Vulnerable young people receive particular attention, and Designated Safeguarding Leads have continued to liaise regularly with social workers and young people whilst the college has been closed.

Alternative Methods of Delivery

Case Study: Franklin Sixth Form College

Franklin Sixth Form College has a catchment drawn from a range of rural, town and coastal communities and partner schools. Some learners travel for more than three hours a day on public transport to get to school.

Franklin College is developing a collaborative model to create 'outreach centres' in local schools, where some of the most vulnerable college students would be able to engage with learning in a nearby, safe and constructive space whilst outside of the college setting. This will reduce travel time, encouraging engaging as well as reducing pressure on public transport. The college will provide, as appropriate, a member of staff to supervise and support students using the centre.

Students collecting their GCSE results on the 20 August 2020 and in the subsequent days could attend the outreach centre to make contact with appropriate college staff virtually in order to complete their study programme enrolment and ask any questions about transitioning to college. This will help to support the learners' transition into further education.

Summer Colleges

Case Study: Henshaws Specialist College

Henshaws Specialist College has organised a 10-day physical and online holiday club, with sessions delivered both on campus and through Zoom at the same time. Some learners that have not been able to attend the college physically during lock down will be able to attend the holiday club in person, where they can be supported by the staff that are available (around 15% of total learners). Other learners will be joining in the sessions virtually through Zoom. The holiday club will be focusing on personal development and wellbeing. There will be lots of outside activities, forestry school, crafting and social interaction.

In addition, the college has around 3 weeks of remote activities on their digital platform. Parents and learners will be able to continue to access therapy and mental health support over the summer including daily wellbeing activities on the college Facebook page.

For students transitioning into the college, Henshaws has planned an activity day in the summer to allow students to visit the site and meet teachers. For parents they have held Zoom 'Greet, meet and question' sessions with the principal and other senior staff in their care, education, therapies and clinical teams. Henshaws has also developed a virtual college tour with a teacher describing the layout and purpose of different areas.

Summer Catch Up Support

Case Study: Sunderland College

Sunderland College has put in place a series of measures over the summer to support learners to catch up on missed learning and help them to progress to the next level. All support is based on individual learner needs.

From the 6th July, students and apprentices in courses such as beauty therapies, construction and building services, electrical installation, carpentry and joinery will be coming into college to catch up on missed learning. Learners attending land-based provision will be in college every week over the summer to have face-to-face delivery and catch up support. Remote learning over the summer includes transition work to be completed at home (which will be handed in at enrolment), as well as live careers advice and guidance. Personal Development tutors will continue to support the most vulnerable learners, and virtual counselling sessions will be ongoing. Catch up sessions in Maths and English are planned for early delivery in August before the academic year commences.

To support those transitioning into the college from school, Sunderland College has opened up the college's digital 'Get Ahead' platform so new learners can access activities, online resources and projects in all A levels and vocational subject areas to ensure they are ready to study again. The college has been working with schools to engage pupils that haven't applied for post-16 education and are at risk of becoming NEET, through individual guidance telephone calls and regular school sessions on the college's campus. Some who have missed face-to-face interview and enrolment processes will be invited to college campuses over the summer, potentially for the first time, for familiarisation ahead of start of term.

Ellen Thinnesen Chief Executive said "The staff and I are clear, this is no ordinary summer and we have a moral duty to go the extra mile to support pupils transitioning from school to college, as well as our own students too. No matter how good remote and on line learning has been, it is simply not right for everyone, especially the most vulnerable. And of course technical students need to be in our industry standard workshops to apply their theoretical learning into practice and embed competence".

Support for Specific Vulnerable Groups

Case Study: Leeds City College

Leeds City College has 182 young people with experience of Local Authority care studying with us and a dedicated care experience team committed to improving the outcomes for these young people.

The College's strong relationship with the Leeds Virtual School has provided resource and expertise to develop understanding of the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences on people with care experience, which helps the College to better meet learning and emotional support needs, improving retention, achievement and progression. The College has worked with the Virtual School to identify young people with care experience that are applying to Leeds City College. The College has put in place transition support for these learners, including dedicated pre-entry guidance sessions, engagement activities in their curriculum departments, early enrolment if needed, support and guidance in applying for the Priority Fund. Designated teachers that have received training from the Virtual School have made early contact with learners to help them prepare.

To support care experienced students to transition back into education settings, the care experience team has been working closely with social workers and personal advisers to make them aware of the college offer and to help to engage every student. The college has provided students with access to IT Chromebooks and / portable WiFi for access to online learning, as well as staying connected with tutors and peers.

Pastoral staff maintain contact with all care experienced students as well as regular contact with Social Workers and PAs, updating them on engagement and support available in relation to study, mental health and wellbeing and progression onto their next programme of learning. A key focus has been on preventing isolation. This has led to close working relationships and more regular information sharing and communication to support young people with care experience.

Case Study: Leeds City College

There are 29 young parents receiving Care to Learn funding at Leeds City College, 90% of whom are aged 18-20 years old, having returned to learning after taking time out for maternity and childcare responsibilities. Most of the students are following full time courses at level 2 and level 3.

The college's welfare team has a dedicated childcare adviser to provide targeted support to young parents, ensuring smooth transition into college by helping them find childcare places, manage relationships with childcare providers and provide advice and support with a range of social, economic and wellbeing issues to improve remove barriers to education and enrich the young parent's experience of college, raising aspirations to progress into further study, apprenticeships and work. The welfare team has enhanced its

support during the pandemic, with online resources covering study skills, finances and emotional wellbeing and targeting resources specifically at young dads.

The college also works closely with other stakeholders involved including teenage parent midwives and health visitors, feeder high schools, local authority parent adviser, children's centres, the Virtual School, social workers and Student Bursary Support Service.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Case Study: Langdon College

Langdon College is an Independent Specialist College based in Manchester and London serving the Jewish Community, and offers both residential and day provision, for students aged 16-24 with learning difficulties, disabilities, social anxiety, or autistic spectrum disorders.

Langdon College has been taking steps to support new learners transitioning into the college from school, including ensuring that all learners have remote access to ensure they feel part of their new placement, introducing a buddy system and putting in place dedicated transition face-to-face sessions.

To support learners over the summer and reduce the risk of learners becoming NEET, Langdon college are planning on maintaining 3-4 online sessions per week, focused on fun social activities and wellbeing. Music sessions will continue, as well as speech and language therapy. Fun activities will be added to the online college site for learners to do over the summer. There will be a staff rota to pick up any urgent concerns and to ensure our families continue to feel supported.

Jane Baker, principal of Langdon College, "The college aims to ensure our new and current students have continuing access to our supportive community to make sure they remain excited and engaged. Developing friendships and confidence through education is even more vital than ever"

Case Study: Weston College

Weston College aims to work collaboratively to create and embed a multi-faceted mental health and wellbeing agenda into all areas of the college. The aim is improve how learners feel in every aspect of their FE journey.

This starts with learners transitioning into Weston College. Once the college receives information that a learner will require mental health support, the learner is allocation to specialist staff. A transition toolkit is complete by the learners prior to coming into college, which is reviewed by a specialist who decides the next steps based on the individual learner need. An individual support package is then built, incorporating a Summer Mental Health toolkit, Zoom support, and teacher introduction. New learners are also able to watch 3D tours to alleviate anxiety.

Weston College has also designed highly individualised 'Going Forward' Transition programmes for those vulnerable/SEND learners who will be transitioning into College for the first time, support that will continue over summer. This includes personalised one to one support, pre-campus visits, virtual tours, socially distanced 'open space' tutorials, specialist SEND support and mental health and wellbeing support. Support is also being offered to parents and carers.

For existing students, mental health and wellbeing support will continue over the summer. There will be wellbeing videos, including videos on mindfulness tips. In addition, social distanced 'open space' tutorials have been introduced for around 40 vulnerable learners, who are struggling with the isolation associated with loneliness in the lockdown period.

Case Studies from Local Authorities

Case Study: Achieving for Children

Achieving for Children (who deliver children's services in the Royal Borough of Kingston and the London Borough of Richmond) has a range of activities targeting young people who are at risk of NEET. As learners have not been in school during the summer term, the 14-25 team and Education Business Partnership have worked together to contact learners in Year 11 and 12 much earlier than usual to offer support if needed.

This could involve sign up to the Positive Directions project - or just advice and mentoring. The Positive Directions project involves an initial assessment, followed by online learning tailored to each learner. This is accompanied with virtual mentoring to ensure learners stay on track and can reach their next destination.

The team has also contacted all Year 11 learners in local special schools whose pupils have mild learning difficulties, to offer support with their transition to post-16. Also, to support transition for Year 11s, the team has ensured that schools are aware of local Colleges' transitional programmes, so they can raise awareness with their learners and their families.

Once GCSE results are known, the team will work with colleges to signpost young people through their enrolment processes.

Case Study: Blackpool Council

A Blackpool partnership made up of the Council, Blackpool Opportunity Area, the Pupil Referral Unit, schools, colleges and local employers, led by Right to Succeed, is running a Pathways for All Project aimed at collectively tracking and supporting young people at risk of becoming NEET. The project sees engagement coaches working intensively with young people aged 14-19 to identify and overcome risk factors and support young people to achieve and sustain aspirational destinations. Early impact of the project has shown that if the most vulnerable learners are effectively supported to navigate the first 6-7

month period of transition to post-16 provision, the risk of them becoming NEET is significantly reduced.

The 3 engagement coaches are currently focusing principally on year 11 pupils, making contact with young people that are considered to be most at risk. Engagement coaches are also currently conducting research around the gaps between education resource provision and levels of engagement of the cohort in order to co-design an online recovery curriculum and to identify skills gaps exacerbated by Covid-19.

In addition to the above, the project has conducted a review of the current NEET data sharing systems, to identify structural barriers to engagement and understand where the system can be simplified and streamlined to better track, monitor and provide a responsive safety net for young people.

Case Study: Gloucestershire County Council

Gloucestershire County Council has set up Year 11 transition panels to bring together schools, Alternative Provision (AP) settings and colleges to discuss their most at risk young people, check they have somewhere arranged for the next academic year and share how best to work with the young person and what support they will require. These panels are made up of local providers and local authority support staff.

The aim of the Year 11 transition panels is to improve the outcomes for those students who are at highest risk of not progressing into post-16 provision. The panels occur once a term, with the aim of identifying learners at high risk of becoming NEET and scoping support required in the Autumn, monitoring the progress of post-16 applications and scoping additional support required in the Spring, and finalising intended destinations as well as putting in place interviews for those without destinations in the Summer.

During the lockdown period, Gloucestershire County Council held transition panels virtually with 25 schools, enabling students that might need additional support to be identified, particularly if they are at high risk of becoming NEET. The overriding theme from the panels was an increase in anxiety amongst young people and an exacerbation of any pre-existing mental health issues due to lockdown. Disengagement with schools has increased over the lockdown period and numbers of young people who are hard to reach have increased. In response, the Council have commissioned a programme of transition support, using a youth worker approach, for those learners who have a destination identified but are considered at high risk of becoming NEET. This work will start immediately and will continue into November to ensure that the young person is settled into their post-16 placement.

Case Study: Merton Council

Merton Council have had to adapt hugely the way they are interacting with their cohort of young people, while offering full support in reducing NEET and those at risk of becoming NEET.

They are continuing to track young people through phone calls, text blasts, letters and emails to confirm September guarantees are in place. Those who are without any options are offered support straight away via the Council triage service.

Those referred into the Council triage service requiring more specialist support are each allocated a Keyworker, who are supported into an Education, Training and Employment placement. During Covid, the Council has been running virtual 1-1 sessions, using online toolkits and resources to prepare young people for the world of employment or starting Further Education in September. This is in addition to running online careers events to inspire young people into career paths, having direct videos from industry experts explaining their pathways into their chosen careers and indicating the importance of undertaking work experience while studying the correct courses post-16. During the summer months the Council are planning a number of careers events (risk assessment pending regarding Covid-19), linking young people onto traineeships and apprenticeships, and working closely with businesses to help bridge the gap between vulnerable young people and employment pathways available.

Throughout the summer Merton Council will also be undertaking 1-1 individual activities, aimed to support vulnerable young people to be in a position to be ready to return to college in September. After the long period out of education due to Covid-19, these sessions will focus on mental health, self confidence and self-esteem to help the learner to be fully prepared to access FE colleges in September.