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**Evaluation of the Succeeding at College Project for
Ambitious about Autism, 2015-2016:
Final Report**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Ambitious about Autism (www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk) is the national charity for children and young people with autism. It provides services, raises awareness and understanding, and campaigns for change. Its vision is, 'to make the ordinary possible for children and young people with autism' and its mission is, 'to help them to learn, thrive and achieve'.

Ambitious about Autism, with its partners, **nasen** and the **Association of Colleges**, was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to run the **Succeeding at College project** from April 2015 until March 2016.

The Succeeding at College project **aimed** to support more young people with autism to move from school into further education and improve their prospects of positive life outcomes in adulthood. The Succeeding at College project built on the earlier Department for Education sponsored **Finished at School Programme** which ran from April 2013 until March 2015 and involved four college-led partnerships ('hubs') supporting around 110 young people with autism to make a successful transition to post-school education^{1,2}.

The Succeeding at College project involved the development and delivery of **new face-to-face training** hosted by colleges in all regions across England. The training was based on the learning from the Finished at School Programme. Additional **online training on person-centred thinking tools** was offered to all the professionals who took part in the face-to-face Finished at School training. The Succeeding at College project also involved monitoring the learner progress of the young people involved in the previous Finished at School Programme Cohort 1 (transitioned to post-school education in September 2014) and Cohort 2 (transitioned to post-school education in September 2015).

This executive summary relates to the final report of the project.

¹ Cullen, M.A., Cullen, S., Lindsay, G., & Hastings, R. (2014). *Evaluation of the 'Finished at School Programme' for Ambitious about Autism, 2013-2015: Interim Report*. Coventry: University of Warwick.

² Cullen, M.A., & Cullen, S. (2015). *Evaluation of the 'Finished at School Programme for Ambitious about Autism, 2013-2015: Final Report*. Coventry: University of Warwick.

Key findings

- The one-day Finished at School training was viewed very positively. Participants reported that the training was effective in supporting the development of local partnerships, improving staff knowledge and understanding and inspiring improvements to the transition to post-school education of young people with autism.
- The majority of the young people from the Finished at School Programme who left school in Summer 2014 and Summer 2015 (Cohorts 1 and 2 respectively) made successful transitions to continuing education (62 out of 88 (70%) young people in Cohorts 1 and 2). This compares to data from 2011 showing that fewer than one in four young people with autism continued their education beyond school³.
- More than half of the young people who were part of the two Finished at School Programme cohorts went to general further education colleges (51%). This demonstrates that, when the right support is provided, a mainstream FE environment can be one of the post-school options for young people with autism.

Detailed findings

Views of the host training college leads (N = 10) about the training

- There were six stated reasons why these colleges decided to become involved in hosting the Finished at School training in their college: existing good working relationships with Ambitious about Autism, to promote recognition of their college in the region, to improve local partnerships, to improve existing transition practices, to learn more about enhancing facilities and developing the curriculum and to respond to the increase in the number of learners with autism enrolled in their college.
- A number of different approaches were used by these colleges to plan and facilitate the transition to post-school for pupils and the majority reported a tailored approach around students' individual needs.
- The main issues in relation to transition for the colleges were: the college environment, the increase in independence for young people, relationships

³ Ambitious about Autism, 2011. *Finished at School. Where next for young people with autism?* The Pears National Centre for Autism Education, London. Ambitious about Autism, 2012. *Finished at School. Creating inclusive colleges for learners with autism. Showcasing good practice.* The Pears National Centre for Autism Education, London.

with parents, information sharing, funding and the changing needs of young people entering FE.

- Networking and developing partnerships and sharing information as well as the development of staff understanding and knowledge were reported as the two main hopes for the Finished at School training.

Views of the training

Views of the Finished at School training were very positive. At the end of the training day, the majority of the delegates were very positive about the value of the training and about how it had been delivered. At that time, the responding participants (N = 513; 90% of total) felt that the training:

- Was worthwhile (85%⁴).
- Was successful in giving them ideas about ways to working effectively with parents and young people with autism and/or SEND to support successful transition to FE (83%).
- Enabled them to understand the importance of using person-centred approaches (75%).
- Increased their understanding of the current SEND policy context and the implications for their work (74%).
- Supported their understanding of the importance of training and staff development in order to meet the new duties for colleges (73%).
- Enabled them to explore and identify local and regional partnerships that could support the development of more effective school to college transition for young people with autism (70%).

The training had been effective in inspiring almost all to reflect on at least one positive change they planned to make to improve the transition process for learners with autism in their organisation. Most of these plans centred on using the resources provided at the Finished at School training and establishing better links with supporting services, other colleges and schools in order to aid transitions.

At follow-up one month later, the views of the participants (N = 125) about the training remained strongly positive, although slightly less so than immediately after the training. Participants reported that the training:

⁴ The percentage given in brackets combines the percentage 'strongly agreeing'/'agreeing' or 'strongly disagreeing'/'disagreeing' (as appropriate) with the relevant statement.

- Was worthwhile (78%).
- Has increased their understanding of the current SEND policy context (69%).
- Supported their understanding of training and staff development needs (65%).
- Enabled them to explore and identify local and regional partnerships (62%).
- Gave ideas of how to work more effectively with parents and young people to support successful transitions (61%).

There was clear evidence that the majority of respondents had shared with their colleagues what they had learnt at the training and that these transition practices had been generalised to other groups of young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Views of two of the four Finished at School Programme College Hub Leads about the legacy of the programme

- Robust transition practices, developed as a result of the Finished at School Programme, were reported as the main learning that had lasted in these two colleges.
- The Ambitious about Autism template, designed to track the learner progress of the first two Cohorts from the Finished at School Programme, was felt to be a useful tool.
- Regular contact between the two Finished at School Programme college hub leads and respective participating partner schools was maintained. Changes of staff roles had prevented working relationships from continuing in some cases for colleges and the participating schools. Very positive working relationships with the parents of the young people were reported, alongside developments in the way these two colleges worked with parents.

Analysis of the Learner Data

- The great majority of young people from Cohorts 1 and 2 moved on to positive post-school destinations.
 - From Cohort 1, 96% of the young people initially identified successfully transitioned to post-school education, and 68% of them moved on to attend general FE colleges.
 - From Cohort 2, 53% of the young people moved to post-school education of which 39% transitioned to general FE colleges; 29%

chose to stay on in school possibly reflecting the national context of Raising Participation Age (RPA) to encourage more young people to stay in education, training or apprenticeships for longer⁵.

- These numbers clearly highlight the success of the Finished at School Programme.

Conclusions

It is clear from the evaluation data collected that the Finished at School training was largely welcomed by the training participants. The views of the participants were that the training was effective in identifying ways of working effectively with parents and young people to support successful transition. The training also inspired positive changes in practice, including the use of the resources provided at the Finished at School training and the recognition of the need to establish better links with supporting services, other colleges and schools in order to aid transition. These practices have been generalised to other groups of young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Analysis of the learner data showed that a great majority (96% from Cohort 1 and 53% from Cohort 2) of the young people from Cohorts 1 and 2 successfully transitioned to post-school education. Most importantly, the Finished at School Programme has demonstrated that, with locally coordinated person-centred transition planning, reasonable adjustments, and appropriate tailored support, many more young people with complex autism can access general FE colleges successfully.

Recommendations

Based on the data collected for the evaluation of the Finished at School Programme, we make the following recommendations.

Recommendations to Ambitious about Autism and its partners

- Work to promote positive, person-centred, outcome-focused transition planning for young people with autism should continue across the Education, Health and Care sectors.
- The work should expand to encompass, not only the transition pathways from school to college or training for work, but also from college or training to a fulfilling adult life.

⁵ Participation of young people in education, employment or training. Statutory guidance for local authorities. Department for Education (September 2014).

- Ambitious about Autism and its partners should encourage relevant staff in all secondary schools and general further education colleges to access the Finished at School training as well as further training in person-centred approaches.
- Ambitious about Autism should also continue to encourage access to general training such as the Autism Education Trust training in understanding the implications of autism - for learners and for educational providers.

Recommendations to Local Authorities (including commissioners) and partners

- Local authority staff should seek to access the Finished at School training in order to successfully engage with local schools and colleges in supporting the transitions of young people with autism to further education.
- Local authorities should support the creation of Finished at School-style partnership hubs to enable a strategic focus on successful transition to further education or training for local young people with autism.
- Local authorities, working with relevant partners including parents and young people, should ensure that the Local Offer includes post-school provision to support the aspirations of all local young people with autism, across the full autism spectrum, and to enable them to lead fulfilling lives in their local area.

Recommendations to general Further Education colleges

- In relation to young people with autism, the general further education sector, *'must use their best endeavours to secure the special educational provision that the young person needs'*⁶ - as part of this duty, the sector should learn from the good practice approaches to transition from school to college, as exemplified in the Finished at School Programme.⁷
- Further education colleges should work with Local Authorities to ensure that specific information about courses and facilities for potential and existing learners with autism is part of the Local Offer.
- Each further education college should, as far as possible, enable young people with autism to have opportunities to find out about the range of

⁶ Paragraph 7.3 of the *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0-25 years* (July 2014)

⁷ For details of such approaches, see O'Brien, A. (2015). *Supporting Young People with Autism to Move from School to College. Learning from Ambitious about Autism's Finished at School Programme*. London: Ambitious about Autism.

courses offered at college, recognising that the young people may need support from parents or school and/or college staff to take up these opportunities. College staff should be aware of and act upon the requirement to have a bespoke transition plan in place for each young person with autism wishing to attend a college.

- Further Education colleges should develop outcomes-focussed personalised study programmes based on the aspirations in individual's Education, Health and Care plan.
- As far as possible, each college should plan alongside feeder local authorities and schools to ensure that a college representative is invited to attend, and attends, annual reviews from Year 9 onwards for any learner with autism (including those with complex autism) who would like or is able to transition to college.
- To support the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, and the Children and Families Act 2014, every general further education college should make 'best endeavours'⁸ to include in its Quality and Improvement Plan and Equality and Diversity policies a commitment to staff training on autism awareness and to embedding effective practice supporting learners with autism. All staff in general further education colleges should have access to at least awareness-raising training on autism from a credible provider.

Recommendations to senior leaders in secondary schools

- All secondary schools should adopt as far as possible the good practice in transition planning recommended in the *SEND Code of Practice 0-25 years* and highlighted by the Finished at School Programme.
- All secondary schools should ensure that, from Year 9 onwards, young people with autism and their parents are supported to be involved in person-centred planning for transition to further education or training after the end of schooling.
- All secondary schools should allocate time to the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) or another appropriate staff member to work with the local authority and relevant partners, including local further education colleges, to support strategic and operational planning for successful post-

⁸ Paragraph 7.3 of the *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0-25 years* (July 2014)

school transitions for young people with autism, including passing on information to colleges about young people's educational achievements, areas for development and autism-specific support needs.

- All staff in secondary schools should have access to at least awareness-raising training on autism from a credible provider, such as the Autism Education Trust, and time to embed new or enhanced learning into practice.
- All relevant staff in secondary schools should have access to the Finished at School training and training in person-centred ways of working with young people, including those with autism, and time allocated to embed new or enhanced learning into practice.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Ambitious about Autism

Ambitious about Autism (www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk) is the national charity for children and young people with autism. It provides services, raises awareness and understanding, and campaigns for change. Its vision is, ‘to make the ordinary possible for children and young people with autism’ and its mission is, ‘to help them to learn, thrive and achieve’.

1.2 The Succeeding at College Project

Ambitious about Autism, in partnership with the **Association of Colleges** (AoC) and the **National Association for Special Educational Needs** (nasen) was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to lead on the Succeeding at College project.

The Succeeding at College project **aimed** to support more young people with autism to move from school into further education and improve their prospects of positive life outcomes in adulthood. The Succeeding at College project built on the earlier Department for Education sponsored **Finished at School Programme** which ran from April 2013 until March 2015, a period that covered the lead up to and early implementation stage of the Children and Families Act 2014. The Finished at School Programme involved four college-led partnerships (‘hubs’⁹) supporting around 110 young people with autism to make a successful transition to post-school education^{10, 11}.

The Succeeding at College project involved the development and delivery of **new face-to-face training** in all regions across England, based on the learning from the Finished at School Programme (this aspect of Succeeding at College was therefore called the Finished at School training programme). Sixteen colleges acted as hosts

⁹ A hub comprised a college, secondary schools, some Local Authority representation and input from other relevant agencies.

¹⁰ Cullen, M.A., Cullen, S., Lindsay, G., & Hastings, R. (2014). *Evaluation of the ‘Finished at School Programme’ for Ambitious about Autism, 2013-2015: Interim Report*. Coventry: University of Warwick.

¹¹ Cullen, M.A., & Cullen, S. (2015). *Evaluation of the ‘Finished at School Programme for Ambitious about Autism, 2013-2015: Final Report*. Coventry: University of Warwick.

for the training. They had been selected by Ambitious about Autism to ensure cover across the nine English regions. Initially, 18 training events were scheduled to take place, but due to high demand for the training, 3 additional training events were scheduled. Table 1 below shows the host training colleges involved in the project.

Table 1 List of host training colleges

National Region	Name of College	No of Training events hosted
South East England	Abingdon and Witney College	1
	East Kent College	1
South West England	City of Bristol College	2
	Gloucestershire College	1
	City College Plymouth	1
East of England	Oaklands College	1
	City College Norwich	1
Greater London	City and Islington College	1
	Lambeth College	1
East Midlands	Grantham College	1
	Derby College	1
North East England	Newcastle College	2
North West England	Tameside College	2
Yorkshire and Humberside	Leeds City College	2
West Midlands	South and City College	2
	Birmingham	
	Warwickshire College Group (Rugby Campus)	1

Note: All colleges are referred to in the report by randomly assigned code numbers; for example, College 2.

Each host training college was responsible for hosting the training and inviting professionals from FE colleges, schools and local authorities through their local and regional networks.

The Succeeding at College project also involved **monitoring the progress** of the young people involved in the previous Finished at School Programme: **Cohort 1**

(transitioned to post-school education in September 2014), **Cohort 2** (transitioned to post-school education in September 2015) and **Cohort 3** (transitioning to post-school education in September 2016). The Succeeding at College project aimed to seek follow-up evidence for learner progress for the Finished at School Programme Cohorts 1 and 2 as Ambitious about Autism were interested in learning more about 1) the long term value of partnership working between schools, colleges and Local Authorities as a tool to improve the participation of young people with autism in FE; and 2) how effective the Finished at School Programme model has been on improving participation on a self-sustaining basis.

1.3 The evaluation of the Succeeding at College project

The **evaluation of the Succeeding at College project**, commissioned by Ambitious about Autism, focused on the impact of the project's training programme and the evidence of learner progress for the Finished at School Programme Cohorts 1 and 2¹². The evaluation also sought to capture key learning from the project in order to support further developments.

The evaluation used combined methods (that is, qualitative and quantitative approaches) to gathering evidence of progress and impact. The data collected covered three phases:

- i) Phase One (June 2015 to August 2015)
 - Interview with the training programme developers from Ambitious about Autism.
- ii) Phase Two (September 2015 to December 2015)
 - Telephone interviews with host training college leads.
 - Questionnaire survey of training participants attending the one-day face-to-face training on supporting transitions.
 - Follow-up questionnaire survey of the training participants a month after attending the face-to-face training.
 - Telephone interviews with two of the Finished at School Programme college hub leads.

¹² Although data for learners in Cohort 3 was gathered, no formal evaluation took place since at the writing of this research report they are still at school.

- iii) Phase Three (January 2016 to March 2016)
 - Telephone interview with the online training module developer from Helen Sanderson Associates.¹³
 - Analysis of data on learner progress for Finished at School Programme Cohorts 1 and 2.

1.3.1 The data collected

The evaluation data on which the Final Report was based were:

- From developers of the Finished at School training programme and online module:
 - Interview with staff from Ambitious about Autism
 - Interview with the developer of the online module from Helen Sanderson Associates.
- From training participants:
 - 513 questionnaires returned after the day training.
 - 125 online follow-up questionnaires returned a month after the training.
- From the host training college leads:
 - 10 interviews with leads from the 16 host training colleges
- From the Finished at School Programme college hub leads
 - Interviews with two college hub leads
 - Learner progress data sheets completed by the four Finished at School Programme college hub leads.

All interviews were semi-structured and recorded with permission. All of the interviews with professionals were conducted by telephone and lasted up to 95 minutes. The interview with the training programme developer from Ambitious about Autism was conducted face-to-face.

¹³ The training organisation commissioned by Ambitious about Autism to develop the online module on person-centred thinking tools.

All interviews were transcribed in full and analysed thematically by collating answers to each question by interviewee type and then grouping together any similar views, as well as paying attention to unique views.

1.4 The structure of the report

The rest of this report is structured around the evaluation of the training programme and the progress of learners identified through the Finished at School Programme. Chapter 2 describes the views of the host training college leads about their current transition practices and expectations in terms of the Finished at School training. Chapter 3, the longest in the report, focuses on the evaluation of the training programme and the online module on person-centred thinking tools. In Chapter 4, the views of two of the four Finished at School Programme college hub leads are reported, alongside the evidence of learner progress of Cohorts 1 and 2 from all four hubs involved in the Finished at School Programme. We give our Conclusions in Chapter 5 followed by our recommendations in Chapter 6.

1.4.1 Presentation of the data

In presenting numerical data, responses are given as numbers as well as percentages. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer and so may not sum to exactly 100%. To preserve confidentiality, all interviewees have been given a unique random code, as have the four Finished at School Programme college hubs leads. These were used in the analysis process and are used where possible in the text but identification even with a random code is avoided where the content of a quotations or example would identify the person interviewed.

2 SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE FINISHED AT SCHOOL TRAINING

In this chapter, we report the views of the 10 host training college leads interviewed regarding their existing transition practices and their hopes for the Finished at School training. To set the scene, we first report on how and why the colleges became involved in the Succeeding at School project as host training colleges, and how they organised and marketed the training to local schools, local authorities and other organisations. Then we report on their existing transition practices, the challenges they face around transition to college for young people with autism, and expectations about the aspects of transition that could be improved through the Finished at School training, as well as any other related training received.

2.1 Interviews with host training college leads prior to the training

Ten out of 16 host training college leads who took part in the Succeeding at College project were interviewed prior to the Finished at School training taking place. Their roles were varied within the college but they all had responsibilities related to supporting students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in their college.

2.2 Decision to become a host training college

The host training college leads were firstly asked about **how and why their organisation had become involved in the Succeeding at College project to host the Finished at School training**. All interviewees had very similar reasons for wanting to host the Finished at School training: essentially, they wanted to improve their transition practices and address the growing need for support for students with autism spectrum conditions. The reasons reported by interviewees are listed below:

- Existing good working relationship with Ambitious about Autism.
- To promote recognition of their college within the region.
- To improve partnerships with schools, other colleges, local authorities and local organisations and strengthen local partnerships.
- To improve existing transition practices and support provided to young people with autism in their college.
- To respond to the increase in the amount of learners with autism enrolled in their college.

- To enhance facilities and the curriculum to make these suitable for students with autism and complex needs.

2.3 What the colleges brought to the training

The host training college leads were each asked **what their college brought to the Finished at School training**. Responses are centred around three themes:

- Sharing their good practice in terms of providing for students with autism across the spectrum of abilities and supporting their transition from school.
- Being a regional centre, or located centrally in the region, meant that they could bring staff from local schools, colleges and organisations together.
- Commitment to improving transition to post-school destinations for young people with autism.

As interviewee C6 explained:

“I don’t think everybody’s aware of everything we do and what we can offer so for me personally it was good to get that across during the training and also link into other areas and just make the link with local authorities and secondary schools”.

Finally, one interviewee felt that their college, which had recently been renovated, had positive accommodation to offer for people attending the training.

In short, all the interviewees thought their organisation had something to bring to the training to share with others, as well as plenty to learn from and develop their existing transition practices by networking and making local partnership links.

2.4 Enrolling training participants and encouraging local partnerships

Interviewees were then asked **how they engaged participants to attend the Finished at School training**. Their answers could be grouped into two main themes:

- Through their existing contacts (that included SENCos’ network and Head teachers’ forums, LA links, people with similar roles in other local colleges).
- Through college websites and social media, such as Twitter.

All interviewees felt that the information provided by Ambitious about Autism in the form of interactive flyers was very useful and worked well in terms of promoting the training events and explaining what the training was about.

2.5 Current transition practices

To provide a context, host training college leads were asked **how planning and facilitating the transition to post-school for pupils was currently done in their college**. Figure 1 lists the different approaches used by colleges.

Figure 1 College existing transition processes

- Attend schools' transition fairs.
- Invite schools in to college for a tour and/or taster sessions.
- Use school links for the special schools, including visiting prospective students' in their schools and spending time observing them in the school setting and collecting information about their needs.
- Attend prospective students' annual review meetings.
- Invite parents in for a visit and a tour of the building.
- Offer a specific 14-16 course which schools pay for and which students attend one day a week.
- Offer tasters whereby students visit the college for between 2-4 days during the Easter break and then again at Summer Term or during the Summer holidays when the college was quieter.
- Offer opportunities for students to participate in lessons so as to get used to the class environment as well as the college environment.
- Work closely with the Local Authority's transition officers and the local special schools around transitions.

Source: interviews with host training college leads, September 2015-February 2016

The majority of the interviewees reported that they **tailored their transition practices** around students' individual needs. As the interviewee from C15 explained:

"We have a co-ordinator plus five other tutors and they go to the schools to visit the young people in situ, see them in their familiar environment, identify which class we feel will best meet their needs. Parents come in and have a look round prior to any assessment visit. Sometimes the young person themselves comes over because they've got to get used to the idea they're

going somewhere else so it could be literally for a drive round the campus, they could stop for 10 minutes for a cup of tea, so if they need a gradual introduction to the environment that's fine, even if it's just walking through the building. It's really taking into account individual needs. Some may need 1 or even 2 years transition and that's fine."

All of the interviewees stressed the importance of maintaining regular contact throughout Year 9 to Year 11 and then intensifying the transition support in the Spring and Summer Terms before the students were due to start at college.

When asked whether these transition practices were any different for young people with autism, all but two interviewees responded that none of these were specific to students with autism but tailored to meet individual needs. The two interviewees who responded that they **had** developed additional transition practices for students with autism talked about offering:

- a different starting date from the rest of the college so as to make the transition easier and minimise the effect of a very busy college environment.
- more opportunities for parents/carers and young people to visit and familiarise themselves with the college environment prior to them starting at college.

2.6 Transition to college

Interviewees were asked their views about the issues they face around the transition to college of young people with autism. Figure 2 below summarises the challenges reported by the interviewees.

Figure 2 Issues around Transition for the colleges

<p>Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Busy college environment and difference in the size of the buildings. <p>"In terms of environment, it's incredibly busy, that's putting it mildly." (Interviewee C7)</p> <p>"The sheer difference in the size of the buildings and finding their way around and being worried about getting lost. It is a massive change in comparison to what they're used to, especially if they've come from a specialist unit or smaller special school." (Interviewee C16)</p>

Increase in independence for young people

- **Difference in the levels of independence students have at college.**

“Further education is quite different from schools in as far as the schools very much seem to hold the hands of parents and students perhaps a lot more tightly than we do, so they do have more freedom and independence when they come to us, and for some of them that’s a challenge.” (Interviewee C1)

Relationships with parents

- **Setting up communication channels with parents and building relationships.**

“Sometimes the parents we work with have had to fight so hard to get the support they’ve wanted; they are so used to having to shout and rant to get what they want so when they come to us it’s a bit different. So it takes them a long time to adjust as well and to learn to trust us.” (Interviewee C16)

“Parents are used to regular communication with staff when the young person is still at school and obviously this is not something that we can do.”
(Interviewee C4)

Information sharing

- **Ensuring information is shared prior to students starting at college.**

“It’s particularly challenging where we’ve had some quite late Education, Health and Care Plans come through for students with whom we’ve had no contact and it’s very difficult to make some of the judgements that we need to make about students based purely on a piece of paper, so that can be particularly challenging. We have tended to find that people will either overstate or understate what student support needs are. Or sometimes they may have chosen not to share things with us.” (Interviewee C1)

“This year we’ve just had a massive breakdown in communication. I think this really needs to improve, transferring of information and networking.”
(Interviewee C5)

Funding

- **How Local Authorities fund FE students.**

“How Local Authorities are funding students; that’s a massive issue for us. We seem to do a lot of battling with Local Authorities trying to get money just

in order that we can support students effectively while they're here.”

(Interviewee C6)

- Braided funded students.

“Some of our students are dual funded, they're half coming to us and half going somewhere else, and we get a lot of complications there.” (Interviewee C5)

Needs of young people entering FE

- The increase in the number of learners and their changing needs.

“I think over the last 5 years we've gone I'd say from 50 to 101 students [meaning students with autism].” (Interviewee C15)

“Their needs [meaning the needs of students with autism] are much more complex including mental health problems requiring more of a 2:1 support, more physical challenge which of course requires additional training for our staff.” (Interviewee C15)

Source: interviews with host training college leads, September 2015-February 2016

2.7 Hopes about aspects of transition that could be improved through the Finished at School training

Interviewees were also asked **how they hoped the Finished at School training could improve their transition practices**. Interviewees' responses could be grouped into two main themes listed below:

- **Networking and developing partnerships and sharing information**

Each of the 10 interviewees talked about their hope to make links with schools and other services in order to improve information sharing, share good practice and success stories.

“I think mainly I want to meet people, put a name to a face, encourage that networking, explain to people how difficult it's been to not have that information and also making sure that information comes through”
(Interviewee C5)

“Because we are such a large college we work with lots of different local authorities, we hope that if we get everybody together and just create that partnership and make that link with other services, it’d be good” (Interviewee C6)

One interviewee mentioned their hope to get information and ideas about good practice from the trainer.

“...and of course bring back strategies from the trainer who has many years of experience” (Interviewee C11)

- **Development of staff understanding and knowledge**

Seven out of 10 interviewees also talked about their hope to further develop staff understanding and knowledge on how to support transitions for young people with autism through the Finished at School training. They also talked about the need to increase that knowledge base across a broader set of people within the college and the need to disseminate the training to the rest of the college.

“At the moment that’s pretty much what knowledge I have in terms of transition arrangements and a couple of others. This training will hopefully give us the opportunity to share that with others within the college” (Interviewee C7)

2.8 Previous training received

Finally, interviewees were asked whether they had received any previous training in the area of supporting transitions for young people with autism. From the 10 host training college leads interviewed, only two reported transition-specific training whereas the remaining eight reported a varied amount of training related to supporting the needs of young people with autism.

“I’ve already done the Helen Sanderson training, so I did a week’s training session several years ago. Other than that I haven’t done an awful lot on transition.” (Interviewee C16)

“I have done quite a lot of training around transition and specifically autism itself obviously with my Master’s degree.” (Interviewee C10)

“Our Additional Learning Support Team have all been through autism awareness training. It hasn’t been specifically around transitions though.” (Interviewee C7)

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the views of 10 leads from the 16 host training college who were interviewed prior to the Finished at School training took place in their college. Ten out of 16 host college leads were interviewed and asked about their decision to become involved in the Succeeding at College project to host the training; three themes emerged and these were: to promote recognition of their college within the region, improve partnerships with schools, other colleges and local organisations and improve their existing transition practices.

When asked what their college brought to the Finished at School training, all interviewees felt that their organisation had something to bring to the training to share with others, as well as plenty to learn from and develop their existing transition practices by networking and making local partnership links. Interviewees also talked about a number of different existing transition processes and reported that they tailored their transition practices around students’ individual needs.

The main issues around transition to college faced by colleges were related to the college environment, the increase in independence for young people, relationships with parents as well as challenges around information sharing, funding and the increase in the number of learners with autism and the changing profile of students with autism with complex needs. All ten interviewees talked about their hope for networking and developing partnerships and sharing of information and that there would be development of staff understanding and knowledge as a result of the Finished at School training.

3 EVALUATION OF THE FINISHED AT SCHOOL TRAINING: FACE-TO-FACE TRAINING AND ONLINE MODULE

This chapter reports on the evaluation of the project's training programme which includes two elements: the face-to-face Finished at School training and the online module provided to all training participants around person-centred thinking tools. The two elements of the Finished at School training (face-to-face and online module) were designed to complement each other. The chapter commences with a description of the training materials. It continues with the evaluation of the training events based on analysis of responses to questionnaires completed at the end of the training day and follow-up questionnaires completed a month after the training.

3.1 Face-to-face Finished at School training materials

The Finished at School training was a whole day training session, aimed at professionals from FE colleges, schools and local authorities. The Finished at School training was developed by Yola Jacobsen, Head of Projects from Ambitious about Autism, and Allie O'Brien, an independent consultant. The Finished at School training was based on the learning from the two-year Finished at School Programme completed in March 2015 by addressing the following key areas:

- Building successful partnerships with learners, parents and other providers.
- Developing staff awareness, knowledge, skill, confidence and roles.
- Using person-centred ways of working.
- Developing curriculum pathways and services to support progression and transition.

The **purpose** of the Finished at School training was to further disseminate the learning from the Finished at School Programme through a regional programme of face-to-face training across England and was seen as a continuation, or the next phase, of the Finished at School Programme. The **aim** of the training was to provide participants with 'clear actions and ideas which will enable them and key partners to

work together to improve transition from school to college for young people with autism and/or special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)¹⁴.

The **objectives** of the training were:

- To consider the implications of the current SEND policy context for their role in improving transition and outcomes for young people with autism and/or SEND.
- To explore and identify local and regional partnerships and the Local Offer with a view to extending and developing networks that can support transition from school to college for young people with autism and/or SEND.
- To identify ways to work effectively with parents and young people to support successful transition.
- To recognise the importance of using person-centred approaches and understand how the online person-centred training module can support them to do this.
- To understand the steps they need to take to review and evaluate their curriculum offer.
- To encourage trainees to consider the implications of the training for action planning and staff development.

The target audience for the training was:

- Professionals from FE colleges.
- Professionals from schools.
- Professionals from Local Authorities.

The 16 colleges hosting the training were identified either through pre-existing links with Ambitious about Autism or from contacts suggested through the Association of Colleges.

3.2 Online Module Training Programme materials

In the Finished at School Programme, 2013-2015, each of the hubs had undertaken three to four days face-to-face training on person-centred reviews; learning how to use person-centred thinking tools had been a core part of that training. The

¹⁴ Source: Finished at School training handouts

evaluation of the Finished at School Programme¹⁵ highlighted how much this training was valued and how it supported staff to develop effective practice around transitioning from school to college. As this training played a significant role in the Finished at School Programme, Ambitious about Autism was keen to include it as part of Succeeding at College and so the decision was made to offer online training on person-centred thinking tools to all the professionals who took part in the face-to-face Finished at School training. The licence to access the online module would last for one year after the training.

The online module was developed in association with Helen Sanderson Associates and its **aim** was to help participants understand and use 12 person centred thinking tools. The case studies included in the online module were about young people with autism, including those with complex needs. The case studies were contextualised within the SEND policy reforms, allowing training participants to think how they could use the person-centred thinking tools to gather information for Education, Health and Care Plans.

The online module was structured in 16 different sections:

1. Person-centred thinking
2. Person-centred thinking skills
3. One page profile
4. Good days and bad days
5. Relationship circles
6. Communication charts
7. What is working/not working?
8. The perfect week
9. Community mapping
10. Doughnut
11. Matching support
12. Decision making agreement
13. Ongoing learning and review
14. Learning log
15. 4 plus 1 questions

¹⁵ Cullen, M.A., & Cullen, S. (2015). *Evaluation of the 'Finished at School Programme for Ambitious about Autism, 2013-2015: Final Report*. Coventry: University of Warwick.

16. Conclusion

Training participants accessing the online module could work through the module from start to finish, or jump to a specific tool that interested them by selecting the relevant title from the main menu. Each section included top tips and tasks panels that summarised key learning points and allowed participants to practise using certain tools.

3.3 Evaluation of the Finished at School Training Events

3.3.1 Face to face training events delivered

Sixteen colleges hosted 21 training sessions between September 2015 and March 2016. In total, 573 participants attended. Of these, **513 (90%) completed the post-training questionnaire.**

3.3.2 The range of people attending the training

The 513 delegates who provided information about their role worked in a range of different organisations, mainly, but not exclusively, in schools or colleges. The list below breaks down the delegates' answers¹⁶:

Schools¹⁷: 26% (N=134)

Mainstream School: 10% (N=53)

Special School: 6% (N=29)

College: 50% (N=258)

FE General College: 44% (N=227)

Independent Specialist College: 3% (N=14)

Sixth Form College: 3% (N=17)

Local Authority: 13% (N=67)

Connexions: 1% (N=6)

Voluntary Sector: 2% (N=10)

Work based learning: 0.4% (N=2)

Other: 5% (N=25)

¹⁶ The percentages are calculated of the overall number of delegates (N=513).

¹⁷ From the 134 delegates who worked in schools, 39% (N = 52) did not indicate whether they worked in a mainstream or special school.

(Other category includes the following organisations: Charities (N=6), Day Activities Centre (N=4), Mencap (N=3), Training Provider (N=3), IAG Service (N=2), self-employed (N=2), enterprise consultant, NHS Foundation Trust, study programme, Specialist Teaching Team, Independent ABA/PBS provision)

Missing: 2% (N = 11)

Delegates were also asked whether they had attended the training with a colleague. This question was asked, based on learning from FaS Programme evaluation, where training in partnership with colleagues from other organisations was highlighted as a key positive outcome for delegates. From the 500 delegates who replied to the question, **68%** (N=347) did and **30%** (N=153) said they attended alone. From the ones who attended the training with a colleague, **65%** (N= 333) said that they attended with a colleague from the same organisation and **3%** (N=16) said that they attended with a colleague from a different organisation. The organisations listed were:

- A colleague from a different college (N = 7)
- A colleague from a different school (N = 2)
- A colleague from a Local Authority Service (N = 2)
- A colleague from the NHS (N= 1)

3.3.3 Delegate views of the training

Closed responses

After the training, participants were asked to indicate, on a five-point Likert-type scale running from 1('Strongly Disagree') to 5 ('Strongly Agree'), how much they agreed or disagreed with 13 statements about the training. The statements and results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Views about the training (%)

<i>(On a scale of 1 to 5, please tick one box in each row to show how much you agree or disagree with each statement.)</i>	Strongly Disagree 1 ☹	2	Neutral 3 ☺	4	Strongly Agree 5 ☺
1. I found this training worthwhile.	2	3	11	39	46
2. This training has increased my understanding of the current SEND policy context and its implications for my role in improving transitions and outcomes for young people with autism and/or SEND.	2	5	20	40	34
3. My confidence in relation to working with colleagues in my local and regional area to support transitions of young people with autism and/or SEND has been boosted by this training.	1	4	25	45	25
4. This training improved my understanding of the importance of having accessible and useful information related to our services for young people with autism and/or SEND included in our Local Offer.	2	3	15	41	38
5. This training gave me ideas of different ways I can work effectively with parents and young people with autism and/or SEND to support successful transition to college.	1	3	13	44	39
6. Because of the training, I have a better understanding of the training and staff development needed in the provision I work for.	2	3	22	40	33
7. The training gave me ideas of which tools to use to undertake a training needs analysis in the provision I work for to inform future training and staff development activities.	2	4	20	44	31
8. This training has increased my appreciation of the importance of understanding autism.	3	6	19	32	40
9. The training gave me ideas of how to use the self-audit tool and the guide from the FaS Programme to improve curriculum pathways for young people with autism and/or SEND to college.	2	3	15	43	38

10. The training will help me to be more effective in my role in supporting transition post school of young people with autism and/or SEND.	2	3	13	46	37
11. This training improved my knowledge of how to get access to the person-centred planning training module.	2	3	20	38	37
12. Because of this training, I have a better understanding of good practice in transition of young people with autism and/or SEND.	2	3	17	43	35
13. I think this training will help me to be more effective in supporting young people with autism and/or SEND in the provision I work for.	2	2	13	45	38

Table 2 shows that views about the training were **very positive**. Looking specifically at the items linked to the objectives of the training:

- The level of positive response was **high at 85%** (combining 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses) for whether **the training was worthwhile**.
- The level of positive response was high (**83%**) for identifying ways to **work effectively with parents and young people** to support successful transition.
- **75%** reported that the training enabled them to recognise the importance of **using person-centred approaches** and understand how the person-centred planning training module can support them to do this.
- The level of positive response in relation to whether the **training has increased participants' understanding of the current SEND policy context** was also high at **74%**.
- **73%** of the delegates reported that they have a better understanding of **training and staff development** and **75%** reported that they have a good idea of the tools they can use to undertake a **training needs analysis**.
- **70%** of the delegates felt that the training enabled them to **explore and identify local and regional partnerships** with a view to extend and develop networks that can support transition.

Open responses

As part of the post-training questionnaires, delegates were also asked three open questions:

- Please state, **what**, if anything, **you plan to do differently because of the training**

- Please state, what, if anything, **disappointed** you about this training
- Please state what was the **most effective** for you about this training

What do you plan to do differently because of the training?

There were **417 responses** to the first open question asking the delegates **what they planned to do differently because of the training**. Most delegates included more than one suggestion in their action plan and so the numbers in the brackets are an indication of how many people suggested that particular action plan.

The most popular suggestion in terms of planned changes was for delegates **to start using the resources provided at the Finished at School training** (N=126). These included the use of the self-audit tool¹⁸ and the Finished at School Programme Guide¹⁹ in order to review the curriculum offered (N=33), the One Page profiles for both students and staff (N=47), the person-centred planning tools (N=28) as well as implementing the action plan devised at the training day (N=18). As one delegate suggested:

“I think my college has to change some of our support documentation to reflect the learner voice and the One Page profiles are brilliant” (Delegate 20065)

The second most popular suggestion for change was **the need to establish better links with supporting services, other colleges and schools** in order to aid transition (N=114). The majority of the delegates also talked about the need to further research information about what services are available in their local area. A large number of delegates also talked about their plans to **represent parents’ and young people’s voice more** (N=97). Delegates reported plans to spend more time in thinking how best to facilitate parents’ and young people’s active participation in decision making. They also wrote about their plans to create resources, develop appropriate forums and workshops that would enable this to happen. Twenty-one delegates suggested that involving past students and their parents in supporting younger students and their parents, by highlighting issues around transition and also

¹⁸ Finished at School Programme Self-Audit Tool. <http://creativesunite.co.uk/FaS%20Self-Audit%20Tool.pdf>

¹⁹ Finished at School Programme Guide. https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/sites/default/files/Finished_at_School_guide.pdf

talking about success stories, would be a powerful way to make parents' and young people's participation in decision making more active.

A number of delegates reported that they plan to **review their organisation's transition processes** and create a more robust and more structured transition programme (N=73). A part of this plan would be to review and develop more appropriate transition resources (with more visuals and through the use of technology). Finally, delegates talked about their plans to focus on **staff development and additional training** (N=61). Specific suggestions for change included a planned dissemination event of the Finished at School training as well as further autism awareness training and familiarisation with the current SEND policy context.

What disappointed you about the training?

There were **260 responses** to the question asking delegates to state **what they were disappointed with about the training**. As for the first open question, some delegates mentioned more than one thing they were disappointed about and so the numbers in the brackets are an indication of how many times a particular issue was mentioned.

Delegates' responses can be grouped in five different themes:

- Content of training.
- Applicability of training to delegate's professional role.
- Style of delivery and timings.
- Venue.
- Poor representation of some services.

A small number of delegates (N=28) talked about the fact that they were disappointed with some aspects of the **content of the training**. From those, some delegates (N=17) expected more general autism awareness information and others (N=7) expected to hear more strategies or tips on how to support students to cope with the transition to and post FE. Six delegates would have welcomed more information on the local support services who did not attend the training.

In addition, a group of delegates talked about **some aspects of the training being less applicable to their role** (N=31). Five delegates suggested that this type of

training was more suitable for members of the management team in their organisation. For example, one delegate said:

“We need authority to make changes. I am going to suggest our management team attend the next one” (Delegate 50122)

Another group of delegates were disappointed with **the style of delivery** (N=24) with some preferring a slower pace and others a faster and more interactive pace. For example, one delegate felt that:

“A lot of listening was required. It could have been faster, more interactive, out of our seats if there were less slides and it was faster”. (Delegate 10031)

Nineteen delegates talked about **the timings for the training**. For example, three delegates thought that the training could be condensed into one single morning, while 16 other delegates noted that there was not enough time to cover the training properly and network with other delegates as much as they wished.

“A bit swamped with information, too much to take in during the time period” (Delegate 10029)

“Follow up session will definitely be needed” (Delegate 120294)

The majority of those comments were about delegates wanting more time to discuss issues arising from their own settings.

“A bit more time to have the chance to have a little more reflective discussion on personal experiences but would require the day to be longer or extended” (Delegate 70165)

Finally, 19 delegates mentioned the fact that there was poor representation at the training of some services. For example, one delegate mentioned:

“It was positive to network with some individuals present but services which are struggling to support our young people are not represented here today. Those present are already providing good service”. (Delegate 10005)

What was the most effective part of the training?

For the final open question, asking for details of **what was the most effective part of the training for the delegate**, there were 422 responses. The **opportunity to network and discuss practice, ideas and experiences with other colleagues from different organisations** was welcomed and mentioned 269 times, identifying

this as the most useful aspect of the training. The provision of **high quality practical resources** that could be used in a variety of different organisations was mentioned 115 times. Amongst others, delegates mentioned the person-centred approaches, the self-audit tool and the Finished at School Programme Guide²⁰.

The **expertise, knowledge and delivery skills of the tutors** were also valued, with 56 delegates noting this as an important aspect of the training. For example,

“Very professional, knowledgeable and inspiring tutor” (Delegate 150369)

A number of responses (N=54) were also **highly positive in terms of the content of the training**. Some for example talked about the fact that the content of the training could be applied to learners with a variety of needs and others valued the fact that the training covered the SEND policy context which was considered very important by some delegates.

Finally, a large number of delegates (N=51) made general, **highly positive comments about the overall value of the training**. Examples included:

‘This training is absolutely amazing!’

“It’s been fabulous and invigorating”

3.3.4 Follow-up online questionnaire

From the 513 delegates who completed the post-training questionnaire, 369 (72%) consented to follow up and were sent an online follow-up questionnaire a month after receiving the initial training. Of these 369 people, **125 (34%)** returned completed questionnaires.

3.3.5 The range of people completing the follow-up questionnaire

As for the post-training questionnaires, the majority of the professionals completing the follow-up questionnaires were from colleges and schools.

Schools: 26% (N=33)

Mainstream School: 18% (N=22)

Special School: 9% (N=11)

²⁰ Finished at School Programme Guide.
https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/sites/default/files/Finished_at_School_guide.pdf

College: 49% (N=61)

FE General College: 47% (N=58)

Independent Specialist College: 1% (N=1)

Sixth Form College: 2% (N=2)

Local Authority: 11% (N=12)

Connexions: 1% (N=1)

Voluntary Sector: 3% (N=4)

Work based learning: 2% (N=2)

Other: 10% (N=12)

3.3.6 Views of the training

Open questions on any positive changes made because of the training

Respondents were firstly asked whether the training led to any **positive developments or changes in their practice** to support the transition of young people with autism in their setting and the practice of person-centred planning. From the 125 respondents, 115 said they have made changes and a small group of participants (N=10) reported that **they have not made any changes** yet to their practice but **they are planning to**.

From the 115 respondents who reported that they have made changes, the majority (N=67) were related to how they have **revised their transition policy** in consultation with the organisation's senior management team with an emphasis on **starting transition work earlier** and by adopting a **more individualised approach**, tailored to each young person's needs. Within this group of responses, some delegates mentioned how they started organising more transition events and taster sessions or planning changes to their **provision** (in terms of curriculum, staffing and accommodation) and how they had **advocated more for parents and young people's voices to be heard**. For example:

"We are in the process of designing surveys for both parents and students, as well as getting our supported students into the Student Council" (Respondent 32)

A number of delegates also mentioned how they have **developed partnerships** with support services, schools and colleges as the most positive development resulting from the training (N=28). For example:

“The day was extremely positive resulting in us exchanging details with other providers. We are now working closer with other providers and looking at ways to improve transition” (Respondent 15).

Fifteen delegates talked about how they **disseminated ideas and tools from the training** to their organisation or how they delivered further autism training to team members. For example:

“The training has allowed me to cascade ideas and information to my team”
(Respondent 102)

Another 14 delegates talked about their own **raised awareness of transition needs** of young people with autism as being the most positive development and change in their practice as a result of the training. Others reported **use of the self-audit tool**²¹ and **introduction of the person-centred planning tools** in their practice, including one-page profiles (N=26) as well as **development of resources** that could further facilitate transition of young people with autism and/or SEND (N=7). For example:

“I am presently developing an audit tool for transitions and preparing for adulthood to be used with young people from YR9. We have included specific questions which will act as prompts for professionals working with all young people with SEND (not just autism) to evidence how they are meeting outcomes as required by the Code of Practice linked to Children and Families Act 2014 and Care Act 2015. The self-evaluation tool used at the training was very beneficial in development of our local tool” (Respondent 95).

Open responses on any generalisation of new learning or practice

The second open question asked the respondents to report whether **these practices have been generalised to any other groups of young people with special educational needs and disabilities**. The majority (N=107) reported that they have generalised the learning to other SEND groups. For example, respondent 95 reported that:

“I have applied the information and learning from the training day to all the young people with SEND. This includes young people with life limiting conditions, looked after children and other vulnerable groups”

²¹ Finished at School Programme Self-Audit Tool. <http://creativesunite.co.uk/FaS%20Self-Audit%20Tool.pdf>

The remaining 18 respondents reported that they had not generalised the practices because they work in organisations that only catered for children or young people with autism or because they had not had the time to do so but they were planning to in the future.

Open responses on maintaining contact with other professionals

A further open question asked respondents whether **they have maintained contacts with the professionals they met at the Finished at School training.**

Ninety-eight of them reported that they have maintained the contacts, for example:

“Contact through email has been maintained and a meeting is being planned to look at transition within the settings staff are working in”

(Respondent 6)

Others already had good contacts with professionals with whom they had attended the training. They highlighted how the training had made it easier to have ongoing conversations about transitions:

“Already had professional links with many delegates due to the nature of my role but was good to spend a significant amount of time with colleagues to discuss some of the issues involved. The training also gave us a ‘shared language and understanding’ we can use in future conversations.”

(Respondent 8).

The remaining 27 respondents reported that they have not maintained contact. Some of the respondents, who said that they have not maintained contact with professionals they met at the training, explained that this was because they were the only professionals from the local area on the training day. Others indicated that they hadn’t maintained contact but this was because of time pressures and that they were planning to renew contact in the future. One person suggested that it would have been helpful to share the contact details of all the delegates. Finally, two respondents replied that contact with other services was not applicable to their role and not a part of their job.

Open responses on what had been shared with others

The next open question asked respondents to identify **what they have shared, from the training they had received, with colleagues from their organisation.** The majority (N=78) reported that they have shared **all of the training** at a team meeting or with the relevant members of staff, including the SEND policy context, the

importance of parental and students' involvement in decision making and the importance of senior management teams' full participation. Others (N=29) reported that they have shared the **resources** (Finished at School Programme Guide²², self-audit tool²³, one page profiles, person-centred planning tools) and eight respondents reported that they had shared the details of **the action plan** they had begun creating at the training. Some respondents shared **information about courses and training** available (N=5) or the **details of other professionals** they met at the training (N=9). Eight respondents reported that they have not shared anything.

Responses to other open questions

To the open question about whether the Finished at School training has stimulated **any further related training**, 62 respondents replied yes, 31 replied no and 4 replied that this was not applicable to their role.

The remaining four open questions asked about the **online person-centred thinking module**. Please note that the training events started in September 2015 and the link for the online person-centred thinking module was sent to all training participants in November 2015 which meant that some of the respondents had not had access to the module when they filled in the follow-up questionnaires. Indeed, from 110 respondents to this question only 13 said that **they have accessed the module** and the remaining 97 had not. From the 13 who had accessed the module, 9 reported that the module had **added to their understanding of what being person-centred means** and they have subsequently **continued using person-centred thinking tools in their practice**.

Closed questions

An additional 12 closed questions were asked for the participants to indicate again, on a five-point Likert-type scale running from 1 ('Strongly Disagree') to 5 ('Strongly Agree'), how much they agreed or disagreed with statements about the training they received a month before. The statements and results are shown in Table 3 below.

²² Finished at School Programme Guide.

https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/sites/default/files/Finished_at_School_guide.pdf

²³ Finished at School Programme Self-Audit Tool. <http://creativesunite.co.uk/FaS%20Self-Audit%20Tool.pdf>

Table 3 Views of the training from the follow-up questionnaire (%) – the second line of data in parenthesis in each cell represents views immediately after the training

<i>(On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means Strongly Disagree and 5 means Strongly Agree, please tick one box in each row to show how much you agree or disagree with each statement.)</i>	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I found this training worthwhile.	5 (2)	1 (3)	16 (11)	40 (39)	38 (46)
2. This training has increased my understanding of the current SEND policy context and its implications for my role in improving transitions and outcomes for young people with autism and/or SEND.	3 (2)	5 (5)	21 (20)	49 (40)	20 (34)
3. My confidence in relation to working with colleagues in my local and regional area to support transitions of young people with autism and/or SEND has been boosted by this training.	3 (1)	5 (4)	30 (25)	43 (45)	19 (25)
4. This training improved my understanding of the importance of having accessible and useful information related to our services for young people with autism and/or SEND included in our Local Offer.	3 (2)	3 (3)	17 (15)	50 (41)	26 (38)
5. I have used idea/s from the training to work more effectively with parents and young people with autism and/or SEND to support successful transition to further education.	5 (1)	4 (3)	30 (13)	46 (44)	15 (39)
6. Because of the training, I have a better understanding of the training and staff development needed in the provision I work for.	3 (2)	4 (3)	27 (22)	43 (40)	22 (33)
7. I have used the self-audit tool suggested in the training to undertake a training needs analysis in my organisation to inform future training and staff development activities.	13 (2)	18 (4)	35 (20)	21 (44)	10 (31)
8. This training has increased my appreciation of the importance of understanding autism.	5 (3)	5 (6)	27 (19)	34 (32)	29 (40)
9. Since the training, I have used the self-audit tool and the guide from the FaS Programme to improve curriculum	18 (2)	22 (3)	34 (15)	18 (43)	6 (38)

pathways for young people with autism and/or SEND to further education.					
10. Because of the training, I think I am more effective in my role in supporting transition post school of young people with autism and/or SEND.	5 (2)	5 (3)	32 (13)	42 (46)	15 (37)
11. Because of this training, I have a better understanding of good practice in transition of young people with autism and/or SEND.	4 (2)	6 (3)	18 (17)	48 (43)	24 (35)
12. This training helped me to be more effective in supporting young people with autism and/or SEND in the provision I work for.	5 (2)	2 (2)	26 (13)	45 (45)	22 (38)

Table 3 shows that the views about the training have remained **very positive** at follow up.

- The level of positive responses has high at **78%** (combining 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses) for whether **the training was worthwhile**.
- The level of positive response in relation to whether **the training has increased participants' understanding of the current SEND policy context** was also high at **69%**.
- **62%** of the delegates felt that the training enabled them to **explore and identify local and regional partnerships** with a view to extend networks that can support transition.
- The level of positive response was high (**61%**) for having used ideas from the training to **work effectively with parents and young people** to support successful transition.
- Finally, **65%** of the delegates reported that they have a better understanding of the importance of **training and staff development** and **24%** reported that they have used the tools suggested in the Finished at School training to undertake a **training needs analysis**.

Further open questions

A further two open questions were asked at the end about whether participants would be interested in attending **additional training** and, if yes, what further training would they like. Seventy-seven respondents (62%) replied that they would like further

training, 41 (33%) replied that they would possibly like some additional training and seven (6%) replied that they wouldn't like any additional training.

A number of respondents (N=28) talked about **additional training in relation to transitions** (including transitions out of further education and into higher education or employment and transitions for more able young people with autism or for young people with more complex needs). Others (N=12) reported that they would like more **general training** in relation to managing young people with autism in their class and there were three respondents who talked about training in relation to the **mental health needs** of young people with autism. Seven respondents reported that they would like some training on **how to better work in partnership with parents** or how to support vulnerable parents. Finally, four respondents reported that they would like some training on **Education, Health and Care Plans** and in particular target setting when it comes to transitions.

Additional comments

In the additional comments section, most of the comments reinforced how much the respondents **valued the training** they received, highlighting the networking opportunities and the opportunity to attend with colleagues. For example:

“A very good course and very good value for money allowing me to attend with a colleague. This is important when implementing change into your existing practice” (Respondent 2).

“The day was an excellent opportunity for us to meet with other providers and share good practice” (Respondent 15)

“Great to listen to others and realise we are all in the same boat with the same challenges” (Respondent 96)

There were also some comments that stressed the need to better advertise the training in order to target people in managerial positions or to staff in everyday contact with young people with autism. For example,

“I feel this training is better for management as they are the only ones that can implement changes that we know are needed” (Respondent 51)

“The training should be made compulsory for all teaching staff and not just offered to those that already have a clearer understanding of autism and SEN” (Respondent 97)

Finally, some respondents highlighted that changes in transition practices take time to implement and that they expect that the value of the training they received will be seen long-term. For example,

“I already knew well how important it is to understand autism so gave a more neutral reply to this [follow-up questionnaire]. I gave more neutral replies to questions where I don't feel the final outcome is played out yet i.e. I anticipate change that hasn't happened yet. I think there may be a longer lead time to get some progress so hope to have positive outcomes a full year after the training.” (Respondent 37)

“We would be better placed to complete the questionnaire 6 months after the training as these things take time to implement” (Respondent 20)

3.4 Chapter Summary

Chapter Three reported on the evaluation of the project's training programme. In total, 513 participants (90%) completed post-training questionnaires and they worked mainly, but not exclusively, in schools and colleges. Participants' views about the training were very positive, with 85% agreeing or strongly agreeing it was worthwhile, 83% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it helped them identify ways to work effectively with parents and young people to support successful transition.

Participants also reported that the training enabled them to recognise the importance of using person-centred approaches (75%) and has increased their understanding of the current SEND policy context (74%). Many reported their wish to make changes in their practice and the most popular suggestions in terms of planned changes were for delegates to start using the resources provided at the Finished at School training and the need to establish better links with supporting services, other colleges and schools and to represent parents' and young people's voice more. In general, participants felt that the opportunity to network and discuss practice and ideas with colleagues from other organisations as well as the provision of high quality practical resources were the most effective part of the training.

A month later, views remained positive. A month after receiving the initial training, 125 delegates (34%) returned completed follow-up online questionnaires. The great majority of the respondents reported positive changes made because of the training they received a month ago. The changes related to how they revised their transition policy and how they have developed or strengthened local partnerships. The majority of the respondents also reported that they have generalised the learning from the training to other SEND groups. A great majority of the respondents (78%) reported that they have maintained contacts with the professionals they met at the Finished at School training. When asked to reflect about the training they received a month ago, 78% continue to feel that the training was worthwhile. Stimulated by the 'Finished at School' training, 95% of respondents reported that they would like or possibly like further training in relation to supporting transitions of young people with autism.

4 EVALUATION OF THE FINISHED AT SCHOOL PROGRAMME LEARNER DATA

This chapter focuses on the second strand of the Succeeding at College project which relates to the evaluation of the Finished at School Programme learner data. The first section of the chapter reports on the views of two of the Finished at School Programme college hub leads on lessons learnt from the Finished at School Programme and monitoring learner progress. The second section evaluates the data collected by the four Finished at School Programme college hub leads on learner progress.

4.1 Views of the Finished at School college hub leads

Two out of four Finished at School college hub leads were interviewed in relation to the current situation in their colleges since completion of the Finished at School Programme and the different ways they measure learner progress. Due to staff role changes, it was not possible to interview the other two hub leads.

4.1.1 Learning from the FaS Programme

College hub leads were initially asked to reflect on the learning from the Finished at School Programme that has lasted in their college. Both interviewees felt that they have continued using the **robust transition practices** they developed as a result of the Finished at School Programme. As Interviewee 1 explains:

“We insist on this really strict transition regime. The transition arrangements that we developed form part of our 3 year plan prior to any learner coming to us from any school and that’s a direct result of the Finished at School Programme”

They also talked about acknowledging the need for **further provision** in the form of development of specific **accommodation** within the college for students with autism but also changes in **staffing** and recruitment of additional autism support workers.

‘We’ve put a sensory room which is specifically for students with autism but also built a brand new space in the campus which previously didn’t have anything....It’s like a multi-purpose space which

is specifically designed for students with autism so no other students are able to access it”

“We had one autism co-ordinator and then we’ve got these 2 additional posts now.”

One interviewee felt that the lasting impact of the Finished at School Programme was reflected in the support of the college’s senior management team.

“I just think there’s an acknowledgment right from the top and all the way down that actually it’s on the agenda, it very much matters. Within our LA it’s the biggest growing need of area for learners that have got EHCP, social interaction and autism, and so I think there’s a real nod to the fact that we’ll do whatever it takes to make sure that learners with autism are supported within our college”.

4.1.2 Tracking progress of young people from Finished at School Programme

The Finished at School Programme college hub leads were then asked about the systems they use to track the progress of learners. Both colleges use **Pro Monitor**, a bespoke tracking system for all learners in their college. Pro Monitor tracks learners’ attendance, punctuality, attitude, learning and behaviour. Both interviewees reported that they find this system very useful. As Interviewee 2 explained:

“It’s responsive in being able to see what’s going on across the college. I can always monitor exactly where they are at any point, how they are progressing academically, how they are being supported pastorally.”

Interviewees were also asked to comment on the **template** provided by Ambitious about Autism to track the learner progress of the two Cohorts from the Finished at School Programme. Both interviewees felt that the template was good and useful in terms of tracking the Finished at School Programme learners. They also both talked about the difficulty in developing a template that could easily be used across all four college hubs.

"I think from their [meaning Ambitious about Autism] point of view it was very difficult to find a one size fits all because of course all of the colleges involved

in the project had probably got their own methods of tracking and internal forms so I don't think they could have made it any more intuitive”.

In addition to the tracking systems they had, interviewees were asked to talk about any other information they collected about Finished at School Programme learner progress. Both college hub leads reported that they frequently use One Page Profiles and Learner Passports, which are both person-centred thinking tools they were trained to use as part of the Finished at School Programme.

4.1.3 Learning progress of Finished at School Programme Cohorts

Finished at School Programme college hub leads were also asked about the learning progress of learners from two Finished at School Programme Cohorts: **Cohort 2014** (who finished their first year in college in Summer 2015) and **Cohort 2015** (who finished school in Summer Term 2015). Detailed numbers from the two Cohorts from all four Finished at School Programme college hubs are reported in Section 4.2.

- **Learning progress of Cohort 2014**

The majority of learners in Cohort 2014 in those two colleges progressed into the second year of college.

“They've all progressed as we would have expected them to progress...they've all been stretched upwards, so to the next level, apart from one young person who although started their second year in college, sadly could not continue....”

Both interviewees reported continuous involvement in supporting the learning of the young people in Cohort 2014 but the form of the support had been adjusted to meet their existing needs.

“Obviously the support, as we would hope, has been reduced because we would hope that they would have strategies to become more autonomous and more independent so the support around them has adjusted but contact with them hasn't.”

In addition, colleges had requested an EHCP for the majority of those learners who came into college with a Learning Difficulties Assessment (Section 139A)²⁴, and therefore a lot of those learners have had input from Local Authority services such as the Educational Psychology Service for an updated assessment of their needs.

- **Learning progress of Cohort 2015**

A great number of learners in Cohort 2015 transitioned into college. This was the first cohort of learners arriving in college with an EHCP. There were also a great number of learners who remained at school and did not transition into a different provision. As one interviewee mentioned,

“Some schools they’ve got this provision up to 19, they’re probably retaining young people that should be let loose and to go into FE provision more mainstream.”

When asked what has been put in place in supporting their transition of the young people in Cohort 2015, both interviewees reported continuous transition support for the young people and regular engagement with their parents.

4.1.4 Working Relationships

College hub leads were asked to comment on the **working relationships between and among the four Finished at School Programme college hub leads**. Both interviewees reported that they have maintained regular contact with each other and one other of the college leads and that changes of staff roles had prevented working relationships to continue with all three leads. For example,

“The distance is difficult because it’s such a long journey from us up to [the college name] but it’s been easy enough to drop an email or pick the phone up so it’s been really valuable to have insight with colleges that are in completely different areas. You understand what things look like from a different angle, that’s really invaluable”.

Interviewees were also asked about **working relationships with the respective participating partner schools**. Both interviewees mentioned that there were differing relationships but they were still very much in contact. They continued to see

²⁴ Section 139A refers to the Section of the Learning and Skills Act 2000, which requires local authorities to assess the needs of all pupils for whom they maintain a Statement of SEN who plan to enter post-16 education or training.

the Finished at School Programme as a catalyst for building those bridges with the schools. Two challenges were reported in sustaining the relationship with the schools: distance between college and school and the changing roles of staff. As one interviewee mentioned:

“We would have termly meetings to keep the thing going afterwards. It fell away a little bit because of change of roles in staff.”

Both interviewees reported that over the last year since the Finished at School Programme had ended, they had developed relationships with further schools, although none of these schools catered only for young people with autism. For example, one interviewee said:

“They are not necessarily autism-specific but there are a lot of complex needs in there and all we done is transferred the knowledge across. And obviously the book that came out of the project is shared widespread” [i.e the Finished at School Programme Guide²⁵ is shared widespread].

Finally, when asked to comment on the **working relationships with the parents of the young people**, both interviewees reported very positive relationships and developments in the way colleges work with parents. For example, interviewees reported the development of Parent Carer Forums, Meet the Head of School sessions, Parents’ Evenings to meet the tutors early on in the term, regular coffee mornings and parent representations on steering groups.

The changing nature of the working relationship between parents and college staff was mentioned as one of the ongoing issues. For example,

“I think one thing that parents struggle with is the difference between how they’ve been supported in the school, particularly special schools, where they’ve had a lot of contact, they can come into school at the start or the end of the day, they can always be on the phone, and actually college life just isn’t always that responsive in terms of the fact that staff are heavily timetabled, we’re trying to promote greater independence of learners and prepare for adulthood.”

²⁵ Finished at School Programme Guide.
https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/sites/default/files/Finished_at_School_guide.pdf

Additional comments

Both interviewees were very complimentary about Finished at School Programme and its legacy. They talked about supported internships and how they prepared young people to move into employment and increase their independence. As one interviewee said:

“The aspirations are big, expectation is huge. We don’t let go. It’s all about the stretch and challenge every day”

4.2 Analysis of the Learner Data

The four Finished at School Programme college hub leads were asked by Ambitious about Autism to complete a template with basic information about the three Finished at School Programme Cohorts. Table 4 below provides detailed information on all three Cohorts including their destinations. The figures shown in Table 4 are testimony to the **success of the Finished at School Programme** demonstrating that the great majority of young people from Cohorts 1 and 2 moved on to positive post-school destinations.

Thirty-five out of 37 young people from Cohort 1 (**96%**) have **successfully transitioned to post-school education**, and 25 of those **transitioned in general FE colleges (68%)**. From Cohort 2, 27 out of 51 young people **have successfully transitioned to post-school education (53%)**, and 20 of those **transitioned to mainstream FE colleges (39%)**.

A number of young people from Cohort 2 (15 out of 51; 29%) chose to stay on in school possibly reflecting the national context of Raising Participation Age (RPA) to encourage more young people to stay in education, training or apprenticeships for longer²⁶.

²⁶ Participation of young people in education, employment or training. Statutory guidance for local authorities. Department for Education (September 2014).

Table 4 Finished at School Programme Learner Data

Cohort	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3
Transition Year	Sept 2014	Sept 2015	Sept 2016
Number of young people from the four Finished at School Programme College Hubs	37	51	38
Support Needs			
Number with a statement of SEN	31	9	30
Number with an EHCP	-	28	7
Number with LDA/Section 139A	6	2	1
Number in School Action Plus	-	1	-
Number in School Action	-	1	-
Missing information	-	10	-
Year group from which transition to post-16 was made			
Year 9	-	-	17
Year 10		11	8
Year 11	11	29	-
Year 12	16	-	12
Year 13	1	8	1
Year 14	3	3	-
Missing information	6	-	-
Post-school destination			
FE General College	25	19	9
Specialist Post-16 Provision	9	7	7
Specialist Residential College	1	-	-
Sixth Form College		1	
Remained in school	2	15	7
Left education, no information about next step	-	7	15
No information	-	2	-

4.3 Summary Chapter

The last chapter focused on the second strand of the Succeeding at College project which relates to the evaluation of the Finished at School Programme learner data. Two of the four Finished at School college hub leads were interviewed and both felt that they have continued using the robust transition practices they developed as a result of the Finished at School Programme. They acknowledged the need for further provision in the form of development of specific accommodation within the college for students with autism but also changes in staffing and recruitment of additional autism support workers.

Both colleges use Pro Monitor to track the progress of their students and both interviewees reported that they find this system very useful. In terms of the template provided by Ambitious about Autism, both interviewees commented on how useful it was to track the Finished at School learners but also talked about the difficulty in developing a template that could easily be used across all four college hubs. They both reported that they have maintained regular contact with two college leads and respective participating partner schools and that changes of staff roles had prevented working relationships to continue in some cases. In addition, both interviewees commented on very positive working relationships with the parents of the young people and developments in the way colleges work with parents.

Analysis of the Learner Data provided information that the great majority of young people from Cohorts 1 and 2 moved on to positive post-school destinations. From Cohort 1, 96% of the young people initially identified successfully transitioned to post-school education, and 68% of them moved on to general FE colleges. From Cohort 2, 53% of the young people moved to post-school education and 39% of them transitioned to general FE colleges. These numbers clearly highlight the success of Finished at School Programme.

5 CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from the evaluation data collected that the Succeeding at College project was a success. The Finished at School training was largely welcomed by the training participants demonstrating the need for training of this nature. The views of the participants were that the training was effective in identifying ways of working effectively with parents and young people to support successful transition and using person-centred approaches to support them. Data from the follow up survey questionnaire show that the training is having an impact longer term. It inspired positive changes in practice, including the use of the resources provided at the Finished at School training and development of better links with supporting services, other colleges and schools in order to aid transition. These practices had been generalised to other groups of young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Analysis of the learner data showed that a great majority of the young people from Finished at School Programme Cohorts 1 and 2 successfully transitioned to post-school education. Most importantly, the Finished at School Programme has demonstrated that, with locally coordinated person-centred transition planning, reasonable adjustments, and appropriate tailored support, many more young people with complex autism can access non-specialist FE colleges successfully.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the data collected for the evaluation of the Finished at School Programme, we make the following recommendations.

Recommendations to Ambitious about Autism and its partners

- Work to promote positive, person-centred, outcome-focused transition planning for young people with autism should continue across the Education, Health and Care sectors.
- The work should expand to encompass, not only the transition pathways from school to college or training for work, but also from college or training to a fulfilling adult life.
- Ambitious about Autism and its partners should encourage relevant staff in all secondary schools and general further education colleges to access the Finished at School training as well as further training in person-centred approaches.
- Ambitious about Autism should also continue to encourage access to general training, such as the Autism Education Trust training in understanding the implications of autism - for learners and for educational providers.

Recommendations to Local Authorities (including commissioners) and partners

- Local authority staff should seek to access the Finished at School training in order to successfully engage with local schools and colleges in supporting the transitions of young people with autism to further education.
- Local authorities should support the creation of Finished at School-style partnership hubs to enable a strategic focus on successful transition to further education or training for local young people with autism.
- Local authorities, working with relevant partners including parents and young people, should ensure that the Local Offer includes post-school provision to support the aspirations of all local young people with autism, across the full autism spectrum, and to enable them to lead fulfilling lives in their local area.

Recommendations to general Further Education colleges

- In relation to young people with autism, the general further education sector *'must use their best endeavours to secure the special educational provision that the young person needs'*²⁷ – as part of this duty, the sector should learn from the good practice approaches to transition from school to college, as exemplified in the Finished at School Programme.²⁸
- Further education colleges should work with Local Authorities to ensure that specific information about courses and facilities for potential and existing learners with autism is part of the Local Offer.
- Each further education college should, as far as possible, enable young people with autism to have opportunities to find out about the range of courses offered at college, recognising that the young people may need support from parents or school and/or college staff to take up these opportunities. College staff should be aware of and act upon the requirement to have a bespoke transition plan in place for each young person with autism wishing to attend a college.
- Further Education colleges should develop outcomes-focussed personalised study programmes based on the aspirations in individual's Education, Health and Care plan.
- As far as possible, each college should plan alongside feeder local authorities and schools to ensure that a college representative is invited to attend, and attends, annual reviews from Year 9 onwards for any learner with autism (including those with complex autism) who would like or is able to transition to college.
- To support the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, and the Children and Families Act 2014, every general further education college should make 'best endeavours'²⁹ to include in its Quality and Improvement Plan and Equality and Diversity policies a commitment to staff training on autism awareness and to embedding effective practice supporting learners with autism. All staff in

²⁷ Paragraph 7.3 of the *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0-25 years* (July 2014)

²⁸ For details of such approaches, see O'Brien, A. (2015). *Supporting Young People with Autism to Move from School to College. Learning from Ambitious about Autism's Finished at School Programme*. London: Ambitious about Autism.

²⁹ Paragraph 7.3 of the *Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0-25 years* (July 2014)

general further education colleges should have access to at least awareness-raising training on autism from a credible provider.

Recommendations to senior leaders in secondary schools

- All secondary schools should adopt as far as possible the good practice in transition planning recommended in the *SEND Code of Practice 0-25 years* and highlighted by the Finished at School Programme.
- All secondary schools should ensure that, from Year 9 onwards, young people with autism and their parents are supported to be involved in person-centred planning for transition to further education or training after the end of schooling.
- All secondary schools should allocate time to the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) or another appropriate staff member to work with the local authority and relevant partners, including local further education colleges, to support strategic and operational planning for successful post-school transitions for young people with autism, including passing on information to colleges about young people's educational achievements, areas for development and autism-specific support needs.
- All staff in secondary schools should have access to at least awareness-raising training on autism from a credible provider, such as the Autism Education Trust, and time to embed new or enhanced learning into practice.
- All relevant staff in secondary schools should have access to the Finished at School training and training in person-centred ways of working with young people, including those with autism, and time allocated to embed new or enhanced learning into practice.