

Supporting learners who are deaf or have a vision impairment

Guidance document for
Further Education Institutions

2026

Contents

Introduction	4
Key Principles	5
1. Terminology and background information	5
2. Person-centred planning	6
3. Involvement of learners who are deaf/learners who have VI	7
4. Consistency across Wales	7
5. Partnership	8
Duties	9
Equality Act 2010	9
ALNET Act	11
Welsh language	11
Transition into further education	13
Supporting learners	16
General support for learners who are deaf/have VI	16
Exam access arrangements	18
Support for learners who are deaf	19
Support for learners who have VI	21

Professional learning for staff	22
Further information and resources	24
Websites and resources for college staff	24
Learners who are deaf and learners who have VI	24
Learners who are deaf	24
Learners who have VI	24
Website and resources for learners	25
Learners who are deaf	25
Learners who have VI	25
Appendix A	26
Appendix B	28

Introduction

ColegauCymru states, “We believe that all learners have the right to world-class education, delivered in a safe, diverse and inclusive setting and within a sector which supports the wider community, employers and the economy.”

This guide has been produced to help Further Education (FE) professionals in Wales understand how to best support learners who are deaf and learners with a vision impairment.

The contents of this document aim to provide those working in FE with information and guidance in ensuring that learners who are deaf and learners who have visual impairment (VI) have an inclusive, positive and academically rewarding experience studying in further education, allowing them to reach their full potential.

The guidance outlines key principles and recommendations for supporting learners who are deaf and learners who have VI, along with sections covering duties, types of support, professional learning, and further information and resources.

This guidance document has been written and designed in collaboration between ColegauCymru and Arad Research following consultations with stakeholders including FE professionals, local authorities, and representatives from third sector organisations that work with learners who are deaf and learners who have VI.

Examples of points to consider, good practice and quotes from these consultations have been included throughout.

Key Principles

This section provides a **summary of some key principles** you will need to bear in mind when designing your support for learners who are deaf and learners who have VI.

1. Terminology and background information

Terminology and language are important, and each learner is unique and will have their own preferences. Some learners may or may not use some of the terms described below, or they may use others. Similarly, some learners may not consider themselves to have a sensory disability or may prefer not to refer to themselves in this way.

Rather than assume which term(s) and identifiers learners like to use, speak with them to find out their views and preferences.

Deaf: The term 'deaf' is used as an umbrella term throughout this guidance for all types of hearing loss. Within deaf communities, other terms are also used, such as 'hearing impairment'; 'Deaf' with a capital 'D'; or 'D/deaf' to show the use of a capital 'D' and a small 'd' at the same time. Terms are often connected to community and a sense of identity and may have different meanings for different deaf people. Deafness can be from birth or can occur in childhood or later in life. Hearing loss can be temporary or permanent.

British Sign Language (BSL) is the preferred language of many people who are deaf in the UK and is legally recognised as a language in England, Scotland and Wales. For many people who are deaf, BSL is an important part of their deaf identity and varies from place to place, the same as accents do.

Please see the further information and resources section for links to helpful websites and good practice guides for deaf awareness.

Vision impairment: Vision impairment is defined as a limitation of one or more function of the eye, or visual system. This can range from mild vision impairment to total blindness. It cannot be corrected to normal vision with prescriptive lenses.

A person with vision impairment may have some useful vision, referred to as functional or residual vision. However, the loss is severe enough to affect the ability to perform educational, vocational, recreational and/or social tasks.

Depending on the degree of vision impairment, individuals may access the world around them mainly through use of their residual vision or primarily via audio and tactile means.

Visual impairments can be from birth or can occur in childhood or later in life.

Please see the further information and resources section for links to helpful websites and good practice guides for visual impairment awareness.

2. Person-centred planning

'The quality and level of support is key and must match the needs and aspirations of the learner.' **Third sector representative.**

It is important that learners who are deaf and learners who have VI are at the centre of planning discussions about their support and needs. Person-centred planning ensures that individuals are treated with respect and dignity and enables a collaborative approach whereby **planning and decision making is done with the individual** (and, where relevant, their family) rather than to them.

Conversations with learners who are deaf/have VI should happen **as early as possible**. This may be pre-application while learners are still at school, or during the college's application process. Discussions should continue throughout the learner's time at your college, with regular reviews to check that the support being provided is still suitable or if needs have changed.

Conversations with learners who are deaf/have VI should prioritise honesty, flexibility and responsibility. Through person-centred planning **you are promoting learner independence** and understanding their needs and aspirations.

While you need to work closely with individual learners about their needs, there are some key areas where **support can be planned in advance** by you and your colleagues in collaboration with other providers if relevant (such as the local authority):

- Where possible, appointing a support officer/coordinator for learners who are deaf/have VI (if one does not already exist in your college) who can provide advice and guidance and act in an advocacy role can be a major benefit for learners to help with their provision. These individuals can then lead conversations with learners and respective staff members, such as lecturers, about support needs and be a first point of contact for any concerns. If suitable, they can also provide advice and guidance and act in an advocacy role or liaise with external agencies, such as specialists within the local authority.
- Learners who are deaf and learners who have VI may require specific aids to help them with their learning. For learners who are deaf this may include having equipment such as hearing loops or radio aids or being supported by staff such as BSL communicators/interpreters whose skill levels match the needs of the learner and their course. For learners who have VI this may include having academic materials provided in alternative formats, for example in large print, in electronic formats for use with assistive technology including screen readers, and/or with audio description. In either case, it will be helpful to liaise in advance with the

relevant staff teams within the college (lecturers, IT staff etc.) to discuss what arrangements are already in place that can be utilised or to identify gaps in support that may need to be addressed.

- Alongside the college staff who can help with academic support, your ALN team should consider the habilitation, orientation and mobility needs of learners who are deaf/have VI. Drawing on external support, such as guidance from the local authority, may help you with this. Important considerations to bear in mind are clear signage, appropriate lighting, and the removal of obstacles in classrooms, corridors, outside spaces and communal areas (such as toilet facilities and canteens).

‘When talking about environment there are different levels of support, there are things that can be done like where a learner who is deaf/has VI sits and lighting, which can be bespoke and staff have control over. The other aspect is assistive technology which is there to support a learner in places where acoustics aren’t good. It’s about ensuring there’s a consistency throughout and looking at it across different levels.’ FEI representative.

3. Involvement of learners who are deaf/learners who have VI

Individuals who are deaf/have VI should feel as integrated in college life as all other learners. Involving learners who are deaf/have VI in all aspects of college life is important for creating inclusive and equitable learning cultures and environments. For instance, if you are undertaking an inclusivity audit of your campus to check if spaces are accessible for learners who are deaf/have VI, include existing learners to assist you with these tasks.

In addition, when producing marketing materials or updating websites, think about if or how learners who are deaf/have VI are represented and whether you are illustrating the diversity of your learner cohort.

4. Consistency across Wales

While this guidance document encourages each college to build on their knowledge, expertise, and partnership working to deliver support to learners who are deaf/have VI, **ColegauCymru is aiming for a consistent and equitable offer across Wales.** This will improve the opportunities and experience of learners, support economies of scale, and encourage the exchange of good practice and expertise along with a formalisation of services to support this consistency. It is understood that some smaller colleges may not be in a position to provide the same level of support as larger ones. However, by working in partnership with others, such as with your local authority, there may still be ways to ensure all learner needs can be met.

In some areas, colleges will have provision spread across different campus sites with different staff teams, and some colleges will be working alongside several local authorities simultaneously. This can make achieving consistency a challenge, but there are networks you can utilise to assist with this.

A key network to support this drive for consistency is the **Heads of Service (Sensory) from all local authorities in Wales**, who work to support children and young people with sensory impairments across Wales. This network also brings together organisations such as the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Cymru and National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) to provide updates on recent research and good practice in Wales and at a wider UK level.

Another key network is the **third sector ALN Alliance, facilitated by Children in Wales**. This network promotes children's rights, ensures local and national governments address ALN needs, and provides a platform for policy development as well as promoting partnership working within the third sector. Amongst its partner organisations are RNIB Cymru, the NDCS and Guide Dogs Cymru.

5. Partnership

Partnership is an integral part of support for learners who are deaf/have VI. Key partners will include your local authority, national charities and other representative organisations who work with these learners.

Local authorities have specialist learner support structures in place and working with them can be formalised through service level agreements, or similar, to provide a consistent level of support for learners as they transition from school onto college and throughout their college experience. This can allow for a flexible, joined-up approach with practitioners who have the right skills and expertise.

'We have an officer who is looking at education as a whole and the ALN teams will be doing a gap analysis. Our forecasting is based on need and we may be able to link with other local authorities as we do have [deaf/VI] learners who cross county boundaries, so we could look at options to cover in this way.'

Local authority representative.

Local authorities may also be able to assist with the loaning or purchasing of specialist equipment to support learners and some offer additional training to tutors to use this equipment.

It should be noted that a key challenge for colleges is how learners enrol on courses. Partnerships should therefore be developed with schools to identify learners who are deaf/have VI and develop pathways at an early stage to support any future transition and learning needs. **Early communication, from Year 10 or Year 11 onwards, allows the learner and their parents and carers to make informed choices.**

‘The principle of the same model of support going from secondary to FEI enables learners to see continuity in their support, such as keeping the same key people involved.’ **Third sector organisation representative.**

Sometimes social services will have a role to play, such as advocacy, in supporting learners who are deaf/have VI and therefore partnerships should be considered where this will benefit the learner and your college’s understanding of their needs.

Internal college partnerships will play a key role in supporting the learner too. It may be necessary to work with colleagues, such as those in your IT department (for example, to assist with equipment and navigating IT security settings), specialist support staff such as a sensory team (if the college has one), ALN support staff, administrative staff, faculty staff and your facilities team.

There will be a range of college support services and internal policies which are intended to ensure equity between learners who are deaf/have VI and other learners, such as health and safety policies. These areas will be overseen by different teams within your college: **developing strong internal partnerships can therefore provide holistic and consistent levels of support for learners who are deaf/have VI** and allow a range of individuals to work as advocates for them.

Duties

FE colleges must adhere to legislation when it comes to providing support and services for learners who are deaf and learners who have VI. The two main pieces of relevant legislation are the [Equality Act 2010](#) and the [Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal \(Wales\) Act 2018](#) (often referred to as the ALNET Act).

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act is a UK-wide piece of legislation which *‘protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society’*. The Equality Act sets out nine protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy or maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

The Equality Act protects people who are deaf/have VI from being discriminated against under the protected characteristic of disability. The definition of a disability under the Equality Act is *'when an individual has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'* ([UK Government, 2025](#)).¹

Although disability is key to this guidance document, it is important to remember that, like all individuals, learners who are deaf/have VI are diverse and will have multiple protected characteristics which intersect across all of these (referred to as intersectionality).

The Equality Act protects individuals who are deaf/have VI who are in education or training in two main ways:

1. It entitles learners to reasonable adjustments.
2. It means education providers need to plan ahead and think about how they can remove any barriers that might disadvantage disabled learners, including individuals who are deaf/have VI.

Making reasonable adjustments means that for FEIs there is a legal duty to try to remove barriers for learners because of a disability ([Scope, 2024](#)). It must be noted that making reasonable adjustments is different to requirements to make buildings accessible, such as having disabled toilets ([UK Government, 2023](#)). Examples of making a reasonable adjustment include providing equipment or aids such as BSL communicators/interpreters ([Scope, 2024](#)) and for learners who have VI ensuring they are seated somewhere that accommodates their field of vision ([UK Government, 2023](#)).

The Equality Act does not set out what is 'reasonable', which allows for flexibility as every individual will have different circumstances, needing adjustments that would not necessarily be applicable to others. It is not possible to say what is reasonable for every situation, however there are factors that should be considered when deciding if something is reasonable or not for FEIs to do/provide, such as:

- The resources of the FEI, availability of assistance and the financial costs of making an adjustment
- The practicality of an adjustment
- How effective the adjustment would be in 'overcoming the substantial disadvantage' of the learner
- Health and safety requirements

¹ Long-term means lasting, or likely to last, for at least 12 months or for the rest of the individual's life and substantial is more than minor or trivial, for example it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task.

[\(Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2019\)](#).

'The Equality Act is the guiding legislation. It is really clear in terms of what FEIs need to do. It is clear what a disability is and the definition; the other part of this is the impact on daily life - it impacts in different ways at different stages and age-appropriateness limitations.' **Local authority representative.**

ALNET Act

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNET) (Wales) Act 2018 replaces the special educational needs (SEN) system in Wales). The additional learning needs (ALN) system supports learners from age 0-25. One of the key principles of the ALNET Act is that of person-centred planning, whereby the learner is at the heart of discussions and planning related to their support needs. Under the ALNET Act, FEIs have duties and responsibilities towards learners up to the age of 25 who have identified ALN, and colleges must designate an ALN coordinator (ALNCo) to manage planning and interventions around ALN ([Welsh Government, 2018a](#)).

Learners with ALN will sometimes have an Individual Development Plan (IDP), an important legal document which outlines what ALN a learner has and what additional learning provision (ALP) they need to access learning. IDPs have replaced statements and learning and skills plans (LSP) and these transfer with learners when they move from school into FE, with the aim of improving transitions between settings for learners ([Welsh Government, 2018a](#)).

It is important to know that not all learners who are deaf/have VI may have an IDP, and that learners over the age of 16 must consent to having one.

It may not always be possible to meet the needs of a learner who is deaf/has VI. Under the ALN Code/Act, colleges can therefore refer IDPs and learners to the local authority if it is thought to be 'unreasonable' for them to provide any specialised ALP needed.

Welsh language

The Welsh Government has set a target for there to be a million Welsh speakers by 2050 ([Welsh Government, 2017](#)). In 2025, the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act was passed with the objective of ensuring learners reach the end of compulsory school age as independent Welsh language users ([Senedd Cymru, 2025](#)). This may impact the number of Welsh language users attending FE and is likely to mean that colleges will need to consider Welsh language use and provision of additional Welsh language support for learners who are deaf/have VI in the future.

Under the ALNET Act, FEIs have an increased duty with regards to the Welsh language. [The Learning and Skills Act 2000](#) is amended to ensure education and

training for post-16 learners considers what is required in order to deliver ALP in Welsh, including the assessment of ALN ([Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal \(Wales\) Act 2018](#)).

Transition into further education

Planning in advance has been shown to help the transition into college go as smoothly as possible for learners who are deaf/have VI, their parents/carers and your support staff. Supporting learners who are deaf/have VI through their educational journey can include working with them from pre-enrolment all the way through transition points beyond FE and into employment or further training or higher education.

‘When a learner arrives on the first day they have to be supported in the right way. The communication between the local authority and FEI is really important, along with specific actions such as having opportunities to go around college with a specialist and understanding the rooms and how spaces work. Learners can then feel confident when they start.’ FEI representative.

Most learners who are deaf/have VI will transition into college from local schools. **These learners will often already have support in place from their time in school** via the local authority and this can be used to assist their transition, alongside the specialist support teams within your institution.

‘Parents are keen for local authority support to continue after transition, especially those with higher support needs. For learners with lower support needs they can be quite happy that the local authority is not as involved: they know college can contact the local authority if there is an issue, they know what they need and it is set up, but with the higher needs learners there is more concern about post-transition.’ Local authority representative.

Good practice - Working together

Collaborative working is critical to ensuring a successful transition from secondary school to colleges for learners who are deaf and learners who have VI. A local authority representative highlighted that local authorities and colleges sometimes hold *‘different information and knowledge’* so the sharing of this early on is key to ensuring there are no gaps in provision. A transfer plan developed with the learner, and sometimes their family, which includes accommodations needed and what learners want their tutors to know about them was considered to be a helpful tool by this representative.

Transition from school into FE can work best if the needs of learners who are deaf/have VI are understood in advance. Preparation can often begin when the learners are in school and can cover areas such as learner progress and aspirations, and support needs like specialist staff to assist with learning equipment. A formalised approach of pre-induction visits to understand these needs and aspirations and

prepare learners and staff for the start of the study period can be an effective way of delivering advice and support and can aid the provision of equipment.

Good practice - Early transition

The importance of an early transition period was emphasised by third sector representatives. Where possible, work and activities for learner transition should start early to identify things such as changes to technology, for example a college using Microsoft instead of Apple which a learner may have used in secondary school.

There are good practice guidance documents available to help you support learners' progress, aspirations and planning for the next stages of their education. An example is [the Curriculum Framework for VI guidance document](#).

Further important elements of transition planning are **Pupil Annual Action Plans and IDPs**. These documents act as guidance for schools/FEIs to support learners in their orientation, college life, access to examinations, course modifications or adaptations, sensory or mobility needs, plus ILS (independent living skills).

The document should cover access to the course and to course materials and equipment - i.e. what is needed and how will it be provided; who is going to take responsibility for this (for example, learner, tutor, support workers etc.); and when will it be put in place by.

The provision of suitable equipment can sometimes be challenging as what schools and colleges use can differ substantially. However, there are **examples in Wales of local authority teams allowing learners to use equipment from school for a period to ease transition** and allow time for the college to source the equipment themselves. Again, this can be planned in advance through collaboration between your college, the local authority and school and the learner.

'Learner voice is really important. Many learners do not want such obvious support as they get older, they may still get support but choose something more discreet.' **Local authority representative.**

It is important to note that there are challenges to providing this type of higher-level support. While all colleges should be able to provide equipment, additional support such as therapies or a QTVI² or QToD³ can be expensive. There is a current lack of funding and specialist staff at local authority level, which may require wider cross-college/local authority partnerships to address this.

² Qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment

³ Qualified Teacher of the Deaf

Not all learners will have school transition arrangements in place however, as some may have decided to attend college just prior to a new term starting, may be new to the area, or may be an older learner. Other arrangements will therefore need to be considered in these cases and will require dialogue between your institution and relevant support and academic staff, and the individual learner and their parents/carers (if relevant).

Supporting learners

At the core of further education is the opportunity for learners to become more independent, however learners who are deaf/have VI may require additional support to achieve this. Providing support to learners who are deaf/have VI to enable them to overcome barriers to accessing learning does not take away this independence but instead facilitates it.

Learner support checklists are useful tools that can assist you in determining the types of support required for each learner and what resources will need to be allocated to provide this. For example, NatSIP has created [UK-wide Frameworks](#) for scoring support levels to be used by local authority sensory support services, with separate frameworks for learners who are deaf and learners who have VI. The framework looks at degrees of deafness and distance/near vision as well as other factors that would affect a learner's support needs, such as the physical learning environment and the transition support which is required. Other examples include the [Specialist Deaf Curriculum Framework](#) produced by the British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (BATOD) and [the Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment \(CFVI\)](#) produced by RNIB.

Please see the information and resources section of this guidance for links to these documents.

General support for learners who are deaf/have VI

As detailed in the previous section, FEIs will need to provide reasonable adjustments under on the Equality Act 2010. Whilst learners who are deaf/have VI will have specific needs, there are several general areas of support that FEIs should have in place to support these learners. If a learner falls under the ALN Act and requires ongoing support from a specialist, they may have an IDP in place that is managed by the local authority and funds the specialist aspects of ALP.

The early identification of learner needs is vital for ensuring that appropriate support and provision is in place. FEIs should work collaboratively with the learner, their family, and their school as well as health and education staff (such as ALNCos), support staff within their FEI and the local authority, including specialists and social services (if relevant).

'It's all about getting the right people in the room together to start the conversations about what support will look like for that particular individual and it's a lengthy process. The individual is always at the centre of everything that we do. It is really important for us to be part of the transition, to build up that rapport with that young person because sometimes we can mediate

between the college and school, the VI team and the parents.'

FEI representative

Good practice - Weekly clubs for learners who are deaf

In one college, a weekly club is held for learners who are deaf allowing them to meet with others and attend helpful sessions, such as on wellbeing and online safety. Learners in Year 10 and 11 in secondary schools who will be transitioning into the college can also attend the weekly club so they can meet other learners and learn more about the college. Attending the club was seen to help with building confidence and provides learners with reassurance that they will be able to communicate with their peers when joining the college.

Learners who are deaf/have VI will of course have access to all of the support services the college has to offer such as centralised wellbeing services. As well as ensuring adequate academic and pastoral support is in place, FEIs should also look to encourage and facilitate peer support/learner-led support: attending an FEI is not just about gaining academic qualifications and experience but making new connections and developing social networks. This will help learners who are deaf/have VI feel engaged in the wider aspects of college life.

More widely, FEIs should take steps to review the general effectiveness of provision for learners who are deaf/have VI. Monitoring the retention, completion and attainment rates for these learners as part of ongoing data collection alongside consulting learners who are deaf/have VI directly can be ways to gauge the effectiveness of provision. Consulting learners can take a variety of forms, such as questionnaires and engagement events as well as learner voice groups and via learner representatives.

Various examples of way to support learners are included below.

- Engaging with local authority inclusion/sensory teams to ensure a continuation of support is in place before transition, with access to any necessary equipment and/or specialist staff.
- Ensuring the necessary equipment is in place ahead of the learner starting their course – conversations with the local authority/school may need to take place to arrange this.
- Completing an orientation exercise of the campus prior to learners starting their course so any reasonable adjustments can be made.
- Facilitating Habilitation specialists to conduct environmental audits of campus sites.

- Ensuring that key staff (for example, subject tutors, specialist staff, Habilitation specialists) meet with learners before they start their course, so they are aware of the practicalities of the course as well as the physical space of the campus.
- Reviewing learners' IDPs and sharing these amongst relevant college staff.
- Having a designated contact person to liaise between the FEI, local authority, school and the individual learner's family (if relevant).
- Producing learning materials in an accessible format available to learners in advance to enable full participation in class.
- Adapting resources/materials with the support of specialist staff to ensure they are appropriate and accessible.
- Providing varied resources/materials such as videos and audio description of slides/videos to aid accessibility for learners who are deaf/have VI.
- Recording classes using capture software whenever possible so learners who are deaf/have VI can easily refer back to lectures in case something has been missed.
- Providing note takers if required.
- Being flexible with timetabling where possible.
- Providing staff with professional learning opportunities to support their development, knowledge and skills in supporting learners who are deaf/have VI.

Exam access arrangements

As some courses will require learners to complete exams, the arrangements for these need to be given consideration regarding the needs of learners who are deaf/have VI.

Assessment processes will differ depending on the course and so it is important to consider and discuss the needs of the learner and the requirements of the awarding organisation as early as possible. When a learner enrolls, the FEI should in most cases already be aware of their needs and their IDP (if relevant). One-page profiles are helpful for staff to be aware of learners' needs and the tutors/lecturers, ALNCo, and exam officer should work together to ensure exam access and reasonable adjustment arrangements are in place. Discussions may need to be held with exam boards to ensure appropriate arrangements are organised and to check cut-off dates for modified papers. It is important to discuss exam arrangements with learners as early as possible as part of this process.

Learners who are deaf and learners who have VI will have different support needs for exams, and some arrangement examples are outlined below.

Good practice - Supporting learners who are deaf to take exams

In one college an example was shared of a learner who was deaf undertaking a degree-level photography course. The exam officer for the college worked with the examining board who agreed that the learners' coursework could be submitted through BSL.

Exam access arrangement examples

- A separate room with an invigilator and communicator if needed
- Modified papers
- Extra time
- Assistive technology such as magnification software or a screen-reader
- A reader
- A scribe
- A practical assistant to support learners in navigating complex exam papers
- An alternative assessment which meets the same assessment objectives
- More than one copy of an exam paper if a communicator is needed

Support for learners who are deaf

Good practice - Communication principles

Communication principles for learners who are deaf including removing distractions, ensuring appropriate lighting and being aware of facial expressions are important. Using clear language and avoiding idioms and colloquialisms is also important. An example of this is not using phrases such as 'it's raining cats and dogs' as this does not translate well with signing. One college representative explained '*We go back to communication principles like just making sure there's no distractions, making sure we are making eye contact, we're in good light, using appropriate facial expressions.*'

Staff should be aware of regional differences with BSL and how signs can differ between different BSL users. Although many learners who are deaf would welcome college staff communicating with them in basic BSL, it is important to remember that

lower levels of BSL will not be adequate for the level of study required in FE and that appropriate support should be put in place with qualified BSL communicators / interpreters or a Qualified Teacher of the Deaf (QToD) where deemed necessary to support a learner's needs.

In addition, learners who are deaf may use the 'deaf nod' with college staff, appearing to show understanding and not wanting to 'stand out' even if they have not understood what has been said to them. You and your colleagues should therefore be aware of this and check with learners that they have understood any information or instructions and be ready to provide clarification if needed. The term auxiliary aid covers both aids and services and could include:

- Radio aids
- Soundfield systems
- Assistance to make sure that hearing aids are working correctly
- A note-taker to provide written notes
- A communication support worker, sign language interpreter or lip-speaker

Key considerations for supporting learners who are deaf in the classroom

- Stand at the front of classrooms so that learners who are lip reading can see tutors clearly.
- Avoid standing in front of windows when speaking.
- Ensure learners are sitting where they can see the tutor clearly.
- Provide a BSL communicator/interpreter for parents/carers who are deaf to attend parents' evenings.
- Ensure staff are aware of auxiliary aids that learners may be using and how these will be used as part of classes.

Support for learners who have VI

Key considerations for supporting learners who have VI in the classroom

- Use 'headings' within the structure of documents with numbered or bulleted lists, for example from the 'Styles' menu in Microsoft Word.
- Use short, simple sentences with plain language and avoid using jargon/abbreviations in materials.
- Resources should meet a learner's needs in terms of font size, font type and colour of text and background. Provide a meaningful description of important images which are included in learning materials.
- Use the learner's name at the start of a sentence when addressing them.
- Check accessibility using the accessibility checker in software such as Microsoft Word or Microsoft PowerPoint.
- PDF documents should be produced from an original document containing editable text rather than an image; this will ensure compatibility with text to speech software.
- Provide verbal cues to indicate to learners that you are moving between slides.
- Avoid physically pointing at information and instead provide additional verbal instructions/explanations.
- Describe any written information which is not in the learner's notes, such as diagrams or mathematical workings which are written on a whiteboard.

Even with the provision of accessible notes in advance of lessons, teaching sessions can present barriers for learners who have VI. Staff with adequate experience can be challenging to find, for example braille specialists. QTVI can often share a 'Vision Profile', regarding individual learners who have VI and these can be used alongside the key considerations outlined below.

Good practice example: Site accessibility

A learner who had VI transitioning from secondary school to the college pointed out during a visit to the college that a post in the building was the same colour as a wall, which made it difficult for them to distinguish. The college painted the post a different colour from the wall which made it more visible for learners who have VI. The college representative explained that this simple environmental change made the campus more inclusive and safer for that visually impaired learner: *'...because I've not got lived experience, we've got posts that are the same colour as the wall. So, we've had things change where we've had a brighter background or the post is a brighter colour and it's really simple.'* **FEI representative.**

Professional learning for staff

Professional learning for college staff can contribute to addressing all aspects of supporting learners who are deaf/have VI. **It can help college staff understand and determine the relevance and accessibility of support for these learners to ensure their academic and personal progress.** Professional learning can also provide qualifications for staff to recognise their expertise and support the dissemination of knowledge and skills across college teams through mentoring and exchange.

Professional learning can also be provided to:

- Raise awareness of the needs of learners who are deaf/have VI
- Establish codes of conduct
- Develop an inclusive learning environment and teaching practice
- Develop structures for safeguarding and pastoral care for learners
- Help staff manage workload

Professional learning can range from the basics of general awareness to overcome stereotypes, teaching strategies, and introductory information about sign language to more advanced specialised training and qualifications.

‘Our approach has been that we provide training for individual departments or lecturers, and this is a good starting point for developing basic understanding and confidence levels.’ **Local authority representative.**

Professional learning can be sourced from a variety of organisations and networks, for example other FEIs, professional learning providers, higher education (HE), and employers (with a particular focus on the further progression of learners).

Colleges often have specialist staff within wider teams. There is value in making other staff aware of the specialisms of QToD, QTVI and other specialists (if available) within the college team/local authority and how they can be used to support learners in their subjects.

‘It can be more cost effective to tap into the existing expertise and aspirations of staff where possible. Local authority specialists will most likely have previously worked with learners who are deaf/have VI and will know their needs. Their presence will also reassure learners.’ **Local authority representative.**

It is worth noting that learners who are going to college will be undertaking courses with unique terminology so staff with specific training, such as a BSL communicator/interpreter, may be needed to support learners’ understanding and progress.

‘The college paid for speech and language training for staff and worked closely with a specialist agency to support a learner who had VI who was a

braille user. This approach enabled the young person to complete their course and this has given the college confidence and expertise.' **Local authority representative**

Having an allocated member of staff in the college whose role is to develop an understanding of learners' needs and coordinate working with services, such as SENCOM⁴ or other regional partnerships, could help wider college staff access support, advice and learning. This is an aspect for colleges to consider through formalising roles and responsibilities around this area.

⁴ The Sensory and Communication Support Service in South-East Wales.

Further information and resources

In addition to this guidance document there are many useful resources and websites that will give you more information about learners who are deaf and learners who have VI, their needs, and how best you can support them.

Accessing further information and resources will help to ensure that your college is well-placed to provide high-quality and appropriate support to your learners who are deaf and learners who have VI, leading to fulfilling and equitable learning experiences for them.

A clickable list of key websites and resources are provided below, including some which are designed for learners themselves.

Websites and resources for college staff

Learners who are deaf and learners who have VI

- [National Sensory Impairment Partnership \(NatSIP\): www.natsip.org.uk](http://www.natsip.org.uk)
- [Just enough Support \(NatSIP\)](#)
- [Additional learning needs: post-16 education guidance | GOV.WALES](#)

Learners who are deaf

- [National Deaf Children's Society \(NDCS\): www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk)
- [British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People \(BAToD\): www.batod.org.uk](http://www.batod.org.uk)
- [RNID: www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)
- [Hearing loss simulators \(NDCS\)](#)
- [Further education at 16+ \(NDCS\)](#) includes case study videos from deaf learners in FE
- [Deaf friendly teaching for further education staff \(NDCS\)](#)
- [Deaf works everywhere toolkits \(NDCS\)](#): resources for careers advice.
- [Supporting the achievement of deaf young people in further education \(NDCS\)](#)
- [Specialist Deaf Curriculum Framework \(British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People\)](#)

Learners who have VI

- [RNIB Cymru: www.rnib.org.uk/nations/walescymru/](http://www.rnib.org.uk/nations/walescymru/)
- [Best practice in supporting students with vision impairment \(University of Birmingham and VICTAR\)](#)
- [Reasonable adjustments in schools Wales 2024 \(RNIB and NatSIP\)](#) available in English and in Welsh

- [The Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment](#) (CFVI)
- [Transition guides: Bridging the Gap](#) (RNIB) resources and video guides (for professionals)

Website and resources for learners

Learners who are deaf

- [My deafness didn't stop me](#) (NDCS) role model profiles
- [Further education at 16+](#) (NDCS) with information and role model profiles

Learners who have VI

- [Adult Learning](#) (RNIB Cymru)
- [Your Future, Your Choice: Bridging the Gap, Supporting your transition from school and into adulthood](#) (RNIB Cymru)
- [Transition guides: Bridging the Gap](#) (RNIB) resources and video guides (for learners)

Appendix A

Teaching staff checklist (for use with newly enrolled or returning deaf/VI learners)

	✓
Person-centred planning	
Speak with the learner to know their preferences: how do they define their VI/deafness, what terms do they prefer to use?	
Familiarise yourself with the learner's needs and the support they require at college (for instance, viewing their IDP if they have one).	
Hold discussions with the learner (and their family if appropriate) and college colleagues about what you can do to aid their learning.	
Consider how you can integrate the learner's needs into your classes. Each individual is different, and support needs vary, work with your learner to identify what suits them best and review when necessary, through the academic year.	
Inclusive learning environments	
Check how accessible your learning spaces are and whether any adaptations are necessary.	
Be mindful of your own communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you easily visible within the classroom? • Are you speaking clearly and avoiding jargon? • Are learners who are deaf/have VI integrated in the classroom with their peers? 	
Ask specialists in the college or in networks and learners themselves for feedback on the learning materials you're using (slides, handouts etc.) to check they are accessible for learners who are deaf/have VI.	
Check your resources are suitable for everyone by liaising with specialists and learners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have accessible formatting and accessibility software for learning materials? • Do you use videos or audio clips which may need explaining or adapting for learners who are deaf/have VI? 	
Professional learning	
Access professional learning opportunities where available to become more informed about deafness/VI.	
Check whether learners who are deaf/have VI have any special equipment which you need to be familiar with to aid their learning. If necessary, seek out training or support to assist you with this.	
Networks and resources	

Connect with networks (internal or external) that can advise you in how to best support your learners who are deaf/have VI.	
Access resources to develop your knowledge and understanding of the needs of learners who are deaf/have VI.	

Appendix B

Overall considerations for colleges

	✓
Terminology	
Check that terminology is used consistently across the college.	
Ensure documentation uses the correct terminology.	
Person-centred planning	
Ensure conversations between staff and learners who are deaf/have VI are held to understand their needs.	
Networks and resources	
Assist staff to access support networks and resources.	
Consider whether support resources are made readily available to staff.	
Duties (Equality Act, ALNET Act, Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act)	
Ensure the college is compliant with required duties.	
Ensure that staff aware are aware of the duties.	
Transitions	
Develop/maintain collaboration with secondary schools – and where necessary, other support services and parents/carers - to support smooth transitions.	
Check college has the correct support equipment in place before learners' transition.	
Review college site accessibility arrangements.	
Supporting learners	
Consider setting-up peer support networks for learners.	
Facilitate learners joining other networks (internal or external to the college) through awareness-raising, promotion etc.	
Professional learning	
Ensure professional learning opportunities are in place and advertised to staff.	
Review the impact of the professional learning on staff and the learner experience.	



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