



February 2023

Educational visits in further education colleges:

autumn 2022 insights

Introduction

This report summarises the findings from link inspector engagement visits and calls made to further education colleges between October and December 2022 with a focus on educational visits. The report is based on the information discussed during face-to-face and online meetings with senior leaders, middle leaders, visit leaders, teachers, and support staff. The focus for discussions was the current picture in relation to educational visits, including considering how colleges have responded to the recommendations that came out of the Estyn thematic [Review of education visits policies in further education \(Estyn, 2015\)](#). Colleges were also asked about the impact of educational visits for learners and also asked to share any further challenges or considerations.

This report is also available in Welsh.

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Current picture

In most cases, educational visits, including overseas trips, have returned to similar levels as pre-pandemic. This was gradual initially with certain areas and groups of learners being prioritised. For example, colleges prioritised learners needing to attend events or undertake activities outside of college in order to complete qualifications, and those who would benefit most from having access to these off-site educational opportunities, such as independent living skills (ILS) learners. Colleges are mindful of the additional COVID-19 related regulations and guidance, and plan for this accordingly.

Staff enthusiasm to engage in trips and visits varies considerably within and across colleges. Some staff have a real appetite to engage in trips and visits, whereas others express significant concerns around the scale of responsibility and the detailed processes that form part of the planning stages, though college leaders recognise the need for these processes. Where staff are keen to lead and take part in trips, the option to conduct a staff only pre-trip was cited as positive, as is the option to access appropriate training to help with preparation. There was no clear consistency in terms of how colleges compensate staff for leading and taking part in visits and there was an acknowledgement that, in many cases, there is a considerable reliance on goodwill. However, there was also a recognition from some colleges that this needs to be factored into the terms and conditions for staff and a few colleges are working with staff representatives to address this issue.

Responses varied in relation to visits in which third party organisations are responsible for the delivery and supervision of activities. Most colleges make clear the distinction between direct and indirect supervision in these visits.

A few colleges are still running the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme with associated trips such as residentials and expeditions, although others stated costs relating to staff training in relation to the award scheme can be prohibitive. In terms of events and trips arranged solely by external organisations such as university summer schools, colleges may be involved in awareness raising of such opportunities, but do not take on any of the associated responsibilities.

Response to our 2015 thematic review of education visits policies in further education

Overall, colleges have responded positively to the recommendations from our 2015 report. Some colleges stated that most of the recommendations in the 2015 review were already in place prior to the report being published. In other cases, providers used the report findings as a basis to review their visit policies and procedures and, as a result, have put in place detailed step-by-step guidance for educational visits taking into account each of the recommendations. In one case, a college brought in an external advisor to support with the review processes. All providers expressed confidence in the current approach and were able to share examples of how they had addressed some of the key issues. For example:

- codes of conduct are shared and signed prior to visits taking place, with specific sections in guidance and policies on expected behaviours
- colleges require learners and staff to adhere to a strict no alcohol policy during visits regardless of their age
- learners and staff stay in the same accommodation

In the best cases, the visit application and approval process is based on a risk rating depending on the type of trip and level of risk attached. Each visit will be defined as low, medium or high risk. For example, overseas or high risk is authorised by a vice principal or above. The higher the risk and impact, the more senior the sign off. However, in most cases the final sign-off is the responsibility of the health and safety team. In these colleges, the policies have been revised annually and most visits are low risk. Generally, the higher the risk the more supporting documentation and information is required, and many colleges have developed detailed guidance documents or handbooks in line with this.

Colleges have clarified the roles and responsibilities section of their guidance around the expectations, competency and knowledge of the party leader, supporting staff and learners. This included defining their level of experience. Staff are provided with regular updates and inexperienced staff are required to undertake initial training including, in some cases, to shadow or assist more experienced staff before leading visits themselves.

Impact for learners

Colleges recognise the value and positive impact of educational visits for all learners, in terms of enhancing their learning, personal and social development. Almost all colleges recognised and highlighted the particular benefits of trips and visits for the more vulnerable cohorts including ILS and other disadvantaged learners and those at risk of becoming not in education, employment, or training (NEET), with these groups accessing off-site activities within the locality of the colleges. The types of trips included community-based projects, outings to the beach, and visits to town centres with a focus on developing confidence and independence. Colleges identified that sport-related trips had many benefits for learners. Colleges have reintroduced domestic and overseas opportunities ranging from relatively local outward-bound activities to rugby trips to South Africa enabling learners to access new experiences and cultures. Learners also benefitted from numerous other trips and visits including academic-focussed trips to universities, vocational World Skills competitions, and enrichment opportunities such as a Harry Potter London trip. In all cases, providers shared the benefits, including course-related learning experiences as well as contributing to learners' wider personal and social development.

Opportunities to take part in trips and visits vary between different curriculum areas, resulting in learners on a few programmes enjoying several visits during their course, while others do not get the opportunity to partake in such activities. Access to opportunities to go on trips and visits, including overseas, is not consistent for all learners with many colleges commenting on the cost-of-living crisis and specifically how it is impacting on learners being able to access educational visits, particularly

those from low-income households. However, colleges cited existing and new funding streams, such as Taith¹ and their intentions to use these to ensure all learners have equitable access to overseas trips and other off-site activities. Language learners were also specifically mentioned as this is a cohort that missed out on valuable opportunities during the pandemic and therefore, they are expected to take advantage of future trips and visits.

Most providers do not gather formal trip-related feedback from learners, although informally learners share that the experiences are valuable and positive. Learners recognise the advantages in terms of the curriculum and their learning, but also the wider benefits including confidence building. In some cases, learners complete pre-trip activities to prepare them for what lies ahead, and in other cases learners deliver post-visit presentations to share their experiences. One college has an identified pot of funding that learners can bid for to use for their cohort, or for future groups to access visits. One college shared that learners had suggested that they would welcome more 'getting-to-know-you' type activities in the run-up to trips if they are going away with people they do not know well.

New challenges and considerations

There were a number of emerging issues identified. Firstly, colleges identified ongoing COVID-19 related considerations and the need to plan with these in mind, particularly in the case of international visits. Examples of points to consider included last-minute cancellations, proof of vaccination status, level of risk in certain countries, and protocols if staff or learners test positive while on a visit.

The impact of the UK leaving the European Union was also cited as being a new challenge, particularly in relation to external funding changes, passport validity, passport application processing time, and the impact on costs.

Finally, the cost-of-living crisis was also a common theme with colleges wanting to ensure that groups of learners who are highly likely to benefit from such opportunities, do not miss out because of cost. Colleges expressed their appreciation of additional Welsh Government funding that has been made available to support inclusivity, although concerns were expressed as to whether this will continue.

All providers shared that the current guidance is comprehensive, including that provided by The Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel (OEAP)² to help ensure educational visits and activities are safe. A few colleges identified that there was too much unnecessary variation in practices, procedures and documentation across Wales, and that more sharing of practice, or standardised national approaches led by Welsh Government would be helpful. Areas which could benefit from more standardised or common approaches included:

¹ Taith is a new programme enabling people in Wales to study, train, volunteer and work all over the world, while allowing organisations in Wales to invite international partners and learners to do the same in Wales - <https://www.taith.wales/>

² Website link to the OEAP National guidance - [National Guidance | \(oeapng.info\)](#)

- interpretation of regulations around minibus driving
- policies in relation to staff remuneration or time off in lieu for engagement in trips and visits
- initial and regular update training for visit leaders, senior staff with authorising responsibilities, and others involved.

Some colleges have submitted bids for additional funding such as Taith which is Wales' new international learning exchange programme designed to embed an international approach into education and curriculum. Where this funding is being accessed, there are plans in place to run a significant number of international learning exchange activities for learners and/or staff. However, some colleges have not applied for any of this funding yet.

Self-reflection questions to support FE colleges in relation to educational visits

- What plans are in place to ensure that all learners have equitable access to visits and trips given there may still be a cost even where activities are heavily subsidised?
- Are there plans to achieve a standardised or common approach across the sector in relation to:
 - minibus driving regulations
 - staff remuneration or time off in lieu for engagement in trips and visits
 - ongoing training for visit leaders, senior staff with authorising responsibilities, and others involved?
- How can post-trip evidence be gathered and analysed in order to establish impact on learners and inform future visit planning?