



Supporting learner progression

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Background

The National Enrichment Programme Enhanced (NEPE) is an innovative co-designed initiative to support Welsh further education (FE) learners progress into higher education (HE) or employment. Created by the Open University (OU) in Wales, the NEPE aligns with Welsh Government's Renew & Reform: Post-16 and Transition Plan, aiming to improve educational experiences and outcomes for Welsh learners. Central to the programme is the goal of supporting learner progression, helping learners to thrive throughout their academic journey.

The NEPE places collaboration and innovation at its core, partnering with six FE colleges across Wales: Bridgend College, Coleg Cambria, Cardiff and Vale College, Coleg y Cymoedd, Coleg Gwent, and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai. The programme leverages the OU's OpenLearn platform, providing learners with access to a wealth of self-study resources and virtual workshops to enhance academic abilities, boost personal development, and support overall wellbeing.

Coleg Gwent's Approach to NEPE

This case study explores Coleg Gwent's approach to delivering the NEPE, how the programme was tailored to foster learner progression and the impact and benefits to participants.

Coleg Gwent embraced the NEPE as an opportunity to complement and enhance their existing HE courses. Focusing on transition and progression, the College ensured learners were supported at every stage of their academic journey. Integrating OpenLearn resources into curricula, created a holistic approach to learner development, addressing both academic skills and personal wellbeing to support student progression.

Targeted support was provided at various stages of learners' HE journey from Level 4 to 6. This enabled learners to successfully navigate the transition into HE, progress through their studies, and achieve positive outcomes in both academic and personal development.

Key Categories and Approach

Coleg Gwent identified three key stages within the NEPE, to support learners at different points in their academic progression:

1. **Are You Uni Ready?** This stage provided HE applicants, with the following OpenLearn resources prior to enrolment to aid successful transition:
 - Exercise and Mental Health
 - Writing Critically and Structuring Your Essay – Academic Study Skills
 - All My Own Work – Exploring Academic Integrity
 - Succeed With Learning.

2. **On Track and Thriving** resources helped learners feel prepared and confident as they commenced Level 4 study and provided continued support for learners ensuring they stayed on track and successfully progressed through their studies. The OpenLearn resources included:
 - Exercise and Mental Health
 - Time Management and Study
 - MSE’s Academy of Money
 - Effective Communication in the Workplace

3. The third stage of the approach is to prepare Level 5 and 6 learners for the next phase of further study or employment. **Next Steps to Success** resources helped learners develop critical academic skills and promote personal wellbeing, supporting their long-term academic and professional progression. The resources included:
 - Exercise and Mental Health
 - The Importance of Interpersonal Skills
 - Conversations and Interviews
 - Personal Branding for Career Success.

This final stage helped learners build essential skills for the transition into employment or higher-level academic study, ensuring they were well-prepared for their next steps.

Support structures and implementation

Coleg Gwent created two new Progress Coach roles to ensure effective NEPE delivery. These coaches were vital in supporting learners, raising awareness of available resources, and offering both individual and group support. They also developed user guides to help learners and staff navigate the OpenLearn platform, further enhancing the student experience.

Coleg Gwent implemented the programme in April 2023, initially focusing on 2023-2024 HE applicants. Returning learners were introduced to the programme during their induction in September 2023. In total, 403 HE learners at Coleg Gwent participated in the NEPE, benefiting from tailored resources that helped them progress through each phase of their academic journey.

Achievements and impact

The NEPE yielded significant benefits for both learners and staff at Coleg Gwent. Offering tailored support at each key point in the HE journey has resulted led to improved academic skills, increased employability and wellbeing and strengthening of personal development and resilience.

- ❖ **Improved Academic Skills:** Learners reported enhanced numeracy and literacy skills, with OpenLearn resources helping them prepare for the academic challenges of HE study.
- ❖ **Increased Employability and Wellbeing:** Learners developed essential skills for managing their studies and future careers, such as time management, mental health, and career development.
- ❖ **Personal Development and Resilience:** The programme supported learners in developing self-awareness, resilience, and confidence, which are crucial for progression through HE and into the workforce.

Through this comprehensive approach, Coleg Gwent has not only supported student progression but also contributed to the overall development of a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Staff at Coleg Gwent found OpenLearn to be a valuable tool, enhancing curriculum and providing high-quality teaching materials. The College's participation in the NEPE also led to the successful validation by a professional body, further demonstrating the programme's impact on institutional development.

“ A service that is vital to the learners, it is a safe space for them to develop and fine tune their skills both academically and socially.
Karina Geddes, Tutor ”

“ This project has been a pleasure to deliver; due to the wide range of topics it covers. I find there is something available for every course we deliver at Coleg Gwent.
Jessica Mckie, Tutor ”

“ The NEPE project is allowing learners to develop their knowledge base around employability as well as subject specific topics.
Hayley Jenkins, Tutor ”

“ The NEPE project will continue to support our learners with the essential skills that are needed in real life situations. This is a really positive resource for us that can be we linked to our modules and industry standards, thank you.
Ginnie Bateman, Tutor ”

This case study has been produced and shared as part of the Medr-funded QAA Cymru project: Enabling learner progression into and within higher education.

Find out more about the project on the QAA Cymru [website](#).

