



Academic Skills – Foundations to HE Study

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Introduction and context

Enhancing Access and Participation is integral to Coleg Cambria's Higher Technical Skills; Strategic Plan 2024 - 2027. The Plan stipulates that "via outreach programmes, accessible pathways and student support, we will collaborate with local schools and communities to increase awareness of higher skills opportunities at Coleg Cambria, particularly targeting under-represented groups."

A key component of our higher technical skills strategy is the delivery of Access to Higher Education (AHE) Diplomas. The AHE Diploma is a 60 credit Level 3 qualification designed for adults wishing to enter higher education (HE). Coleg Cambria delivers the AHE Diplomas for Health Care and for Humanities and Social Sciences, the latter for progression to Social Work, Education, Counselling, Humanities and Social Sciences; these qualifications are awarded by Agored-Cymru.

To further support this area of strategic development, the College has established connections with [Reaching Wider](#) who, in partnership with colleges and universities across Wales, deliver a range of projects and initiatives designed to support ambitions and aspirations among under-represented demographics to progress through education and participate in higher-level study.

Academic Skills – Foundations to HE Study

This case study focuses on a Coleg Cambria initiative: 'Academic Skills – Foundations to HE Study.' In collaboration with Reaching Wider, this programme is developed and delivered by the College's Library & Academic Skills service providing a tailored programme of activities for all of our AHE learners. The minimum formal entry requirement for our AHE courses is a Level 2 qualification in maths or English. Since the majority of applicants are aged 19 and over, applicants are assessed on individual merit, with many having a range of experience to offer rather than formal qualifications. Applicants also tend to be returning to education after a break and are often balancing busy home and family lives while they study.

AHE learners are diverse in terms of age and background as well as other characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, disability, etc. Recognising the diverse needs of the participants, the comprehensive Academic Skills – Foundations to HE Study programme (the Programme) builds both learners' confidence and competence in their academic skills. This provides a foundation for supporting their studies while in College and, importantly, preparing them for the step from further education (FE) to HE. The Programme is delivered by highly experienced and qualified Academic Skills Coordinators and Facilitators who build rapport with the learners and often go on to support individuals throughout their entire college journey once the AHE programme has ended.

The Programme starts early during the induction phase of the AHE course. Regular sessions with College Progress Coaches are timetabled throughout the duration of the course but are additional to the main AHE delivery. Lunch is provided free of charge for learners' first session, which acts as an icebreaker and 'getting to know you' opportunity. Learners are introduced to digital skills essential for their college course, including effective use of digital technology and an overview of the College's artificial intelligence guidelines. The learners are also introduced to the wide range of resources provided by the Library & Academic Skills team, including those that are available electronically. These early sessions help to foster learners' sense of belonging to both the College and their peers. Later in the Programme, more in-depth, core academic skills are covered, including the nuances of academic writing, the risks of plagiarism and how to avoid them through appropriate academic integrity and referencing. Learners are supported to understand the importance of effective research and the need to be critical thinkers.

Throughout the ongoing sessions with Progress Coaches, learners are signposted to the College's referral system, which gives them access to the full scope of 1:1 support services the College offers. This includes ongoing academic support from the Library & Academic Skills team, but also other wider support networks provided by the Inclusion department and Learner Services. This wrap-around support gives access to wellbeing and resilience teams, specialist tutor support for any additional needs and further information services from Learner Services, such as finance and careers guidance.

A range of accessible platforms provide diagnostic tools and resources that support them to become independent. All the learner resources for the Programme are provided electronically and bilingually.

Impact

Approximately 150 AHE learners benefit from the programme annually and 2024-25 academic year marks the fourth year of the Programme. The numbers of AHE learners who benefited from the Programme for the last three years are provided in Table 1 including the proportion of each cohort that fall within priority groups identified by Reaching Wider (RW),¹ carers and care experienced learners.

Table 1: Learners benefitting from the Programme 2022-23 to 2024-25

	Total AHE learners	RW priority learners	Carers	Care experienced learners
2022-23	171	42%	22%	5%
2023-24	184	37%	17%	5%
2024-25	115	45%	19%	4%

¹ Reaching Wider prioritises young people and adults living in the bottom-two quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)

Impact reviews of the Programme have shown that out of a cohort of 184 participants, 107 (58%) received and went on to accept an offer of a university place.

Example participant profiles (anonymised)	
<p>Caleb is a 24 year-old, studying Access to HE - Health Care at the Deeside campus. Before starting college, he was educated in a private secondary school for those with an ASD diagnosis. Caleb left school when he was 15 due to mental health concerns, after being told he wouldn't be able to achieve any qualifications due to his ASD. When he was 21, he attended community classes run by Coleg Cambria and was successful in achieving qualifications in English at Level 2 and Maths (Level 1) which enabled him to progress to the AHE.</p> <p>Caleb told the Library team he worked with that, due to his ASD, he found the Foundations to HE Study sessions helped him add more depth to his coursework and the 1:1 environment was even more beneficial, as it supported his learning by breaking down the information.</p> <p>So far, Caleb has been receiving Distinctions on the AHE course and plans to study biomedical science at Aberystwyth University.</p>	<p>Carlie is a 35 year-old studying Access to HE - Health Care at the Yale campus. She returned to education after years of being in work. In the first Foundations to HE Study session, she expressed being nervous and unconfident in her abilities to complete the AHE qualification. However, throughout the sessions, her confidence has grown.</p> <p>Initial sessions looked at generalised academic skills and later sessions have focused in-depth on specific, targeted areas to help enhance Carlie's assignment output. Outside of group sessions, she has had several 1:1s with the Academic Skills Facilitator. These individualised sessions covered topics such as digital skills to create a poster, revision, assignment structure and referencing. Carlie received a Distinction for one of her assignments, but her feedback noted that her academic writing could use some support for university-level study, so this became a topic for more in-depth review.</p> <p>Carlie has since been accepted at Wrexham University and will start there in September.</p>

The Programme continues to go from strength to strength, and its success is largely down to the dedication and commitment of the Library & Academic Skills team who devise engaging activities and resources, deliver the sessions, source appropriate research material and directly support the learners in a 1:1 setting. Plans for the new academic year are already in discussion and the teams are eager to welcome the new learners.

Coleg Cambria is grateful to Reaching Wider which funds the Programme, ensuring all participants have equitable access to the appropriate resources to support their progression.

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](#).

