

# WAKEFIELD AREA CASE STUDY

In Wakefield, we tested the Advisory Tailored Lists (ATLs) as part of the SEND and Alternative Provision Change Programme to help families make informed choices about education for children and young people with special educational needs. Choosing the right school or college can feel overwhelming, so the aim of ATLs was to provide clear, tailored information about suitable settings, making the process easier, fairer, and more supportive.

## Aim

At Wakefield, we want to make choosing the right school or college less stressful for families of children and young people with special educational needs.

**Our aim is simple:** to give families clear, personalised information about education options that truly meet their child's needs and aspirations.

Parents have told us that the placement process can feel confusing and overwhelming, leaving them unsure whether suggested schools or colleges are the right fit.

The Department for Education (DfE) asked us to test the **Advisory Tailored Lists (ATLs)** – a practical tool designed to provide clarity and reassurance.

By offering tailored guidance and supporting conversations about future pathways, the aim of the ATLs was to help families feel confident and informed when making these important decisions.

## What We Did

Choosing the right school or college can feel overwhelming for families of children and young people with special educational needs. To make this journey easier, we introduced ATL's – a practical way to give families clear, personalised options that match their child's needs and aspirations. Here's what we did to make it happen:

**Starting Point:** We began by offering Advisory Tailored Lists (ATLs) to parents and carers of children where specialist provision had been identified as the best option. Families were contacted by phone to explain what ATLs were and to see if they wanted to receive one.

**Adapting Our Approach:** When uptake was lower than expected, we listened and adapted. The focus shifted to young people moving into Post-16 education, where families often need extra support to understand the options available.

**Creating Helpful Resources:** To make things clearer, we developed a detailed guide for caseworkers. This included information on courses from both mainstream and specialist Post-16 providers, entry requirements, and levels from pre-entry to Level 3. It also outlined possible next steps to help families plan future pathways.

**Supporting Conversations:** These resources were used during SEND Post-16 drop-in sessions, giving families the chance to explore options based on their child's interests and aspirations. We also signposted families to college open events so they could see the settings for themselves.

**Working Together:** Collaboration was key. We worked closely with education providers to make sure the information was accurate and up to date, helping everyone plan more effectively.



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## Impact

Testing ATLs, particularly pre-16 did not have the desired effect. Parents reported that the process was not effective for several reasons:

- Parents reported that it was not helpful in terms of providing the clarity that they needed and most parents had already made a preference or decided on a school or setting before the ATLs process.
- The ATL list did not guarantee a place as consultation had not yet taken place. Schools could not confirm whether they could meet a child's specific needs until after receiving the full EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) for detailed review.
- Parents requested a more extensive list of schools, including out-of-area and independent schools.
- For post-16 options, parents welcomed the opportunity to discuss aspirations and next steps

Adapting the process to better support Post-16 transition needs has helped create a useful and practical tool that supports families in planning for the future.



## Challenges

We faced a number of obstacles along the way that helped us learn and amend our focus. Here are the main challenges we encountered:

- Some families initially declined ATLs because they had already chosen a preferred setting.
- Delays in receiving consent forms limited early uptake.
- Limited availability and suitability of preferred provision remains a challenge
- Feedback from schools indicated concern about being named on ATLs before formal EHCP consultations had taken place, limiting their ability to assess whether they could meet the pupil's needs.

## Next Steps

Although not every part of the pilot went exactly as planned – Wakefield will continue to use the post-16 tool developed of ATLs as part of our Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) support offer.

We aim to make this approach a core part of transition planning, providing every family with the guidance and personalised information they need to make confident decisions about their child's post-16 education.