

The development of the Telford College campus included the provision for skills for life for learners with disabilities. After the College was informed that funding had been withdrawn, it considered other ways in which to deliver this provision. The Oakdene development will be used to deliver life skills to students within the Directorate of Foundation Studies.

Oakdene is currently being looked at by Architects who are looking to transforming the property to meet the needs of the students who are currently studying towards various pathway courses through the Directorate. Many students on the Lifelong Learning Programme not only study a vocational pathway, but also personal development skills alongside their studies.

The idea behind Oakdene is to create a “real life” setting for students to be able to practice the theories that they have learned over a wide range of personal development skills from Personal Safety to Citizenship. The groups who are involved in consultations with the architects have looked at a range of different uses for the property, including it being used as a lunch room, a club house and somewhere that they can have some of their assessments as well as its primary use of being a setting to expand on the current Independent Living Skills courses.

Once Oakdene is up and running, it will be used as an extension of teaching areas, rather than to hold classes. Small groups will be able to look at the house in a real setting to learn about Independent Living Skills such as Personal Safety, Cooking, Road Safety and Home Security. The advantage of having a real life setting will mean that students are able to put the skills that they are learning about in the classroom to use in Oakdene so that they are transferable to their own homes. Ultimately, some of the students who have had the advantages of using Oakdene will be able to use the skills to live independently.

Students are being involved in all aspects of the Oakdene residence, from the layout that may need to be altered to best meet the needs of the students who will be using it, to the way it is decorated.

The property currently has three bedrooms and a family bathroom upstairs, with a kitchen, living room and dining room downstairs. There is also a small area outside. The house will need to be modified to meet the needs of the students who are going to be using it, which may include installing new technologies, such as sensor activated taps for those who have difficulties turning them on and off, as well as some of the doors being widened for wheelchair use, and a downstairs toilet being installed. Outside the property, students are keen on being able to grow some of their own vegetables, by converting some of the garden area into a traditional vegetable patch, as well as using the area for socialising. Horticulture students have already been nominated to ensure that the garden is well maintained.

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) is helping to fund the venture from the National LSIS Flexibility and Innovation Fund.