

LSIS Enhancement of Learning Support Project North East Strand

Unpicking the Velcro

Creative approaches to maximising independence



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An overview of the Enhancement of Learning Support (ELS) Programme

In January 2010 LSIS commissioned Natspec (the Association of Specialist Colleges) to explore the training and development needs of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and those who manage them across the lifelong learning sector. The first phase of the project, the Enhancement of Learning Support, involved talking to practitioners and learners and scoping existing work and expertise in order to make recommendations for future training and development activities. Drawing on all the initial research findings, the final report identified a series of recommendations, which were accepted by LSIS and used to form the basis of a national development programme.

The 2nd phase of the project has been jointly undertaken by Natspec and the Association of Colleges (AOC), between September 2010 and March 2011. 20 lead colleges, both General Further Education Colleges and Independent Specialist Colleges, were supported by nine specialist advisers. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and learning support staff have continued to be heavily involved in the latest project. It aims to improve the quality of learning support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across the learning and skills sector and to promote and enhance the important work of learning support staff.

The development programme, which finished in April 2011, has produced a series of reports and resources. This report is one of those. The remaining materials can be accessed via the [ELS Section of the Excellence Gateway](#).

Executive Summary

The Regional Project has enabled a wide range of providers to work collaboratively in order to explore how we can improve what we do to enable learners to be more independent. The feedback received from both regional events was very positive with all of the delegates commenting upon the value of having the opportunity of meeting other practitioners, from different organisations, in order to gain a higher level of understanding of what other organisations within the region do relating to supporting learners. Everyone involved in the project was eager to identify different ways of working and to try new things out. Staff from different organisations shared ideas and expertise in order to break down any existing barriers in order to develop working partnerships for the future.

The project provided a forum for practitioners to discuss how the existing structures and systems influence the provision of support and potentially discourage learner independence and to explore what changes need to be made in the future. As practitioners, we valued the opportunity to participate in this project as we felt our “voice” was being heard and that, at last, we had the opportunity to inform and influence change.

It was widely recognised that the present systems used to provide support for learners often put very limiting constraints upon how flexible the support could be in

terms of changing to meet the needs of the learner. The following points were identified as providing barriers to change:

Barriers to change

Factors that hinder the promotion of support that encourages learner independence have been identified. They relate to: funding; accreditation requirements; learner and parent expectation; LSA contracts and the availability of appropriate training and qualifications for LSAs.

- 1) YPLA funding applications for Independent Specialist Colleges (ISCs) require support needs to be identified in terms of 1:1 hour equivalents and restricts a more flexible approach to supporting learners. Once in place, support levels are difficult to change and arguably reinforce the “velcro” approach to support which we know from the literature is not always effective or appropriate.
- 2) Records required for audit purposes often restrict the use of more flexible approaches to support. As noted above, once support is in place it is difficult to change or reduce these levels of support. Time spent planning support is often hard to identify for audit purposes, yet this is vital if support is to be effective.
- 3) The funding of additional support, for example in ISCs, can lead to the provider depending on these levels of funding which if reduced could impact negatively on the financial viability of the provider. There is arguably no incentive to reduce support.
- 4) The requirements of the external accreditation, rather than the needs of the learners, often drive the learning. Some learners, particularly those with learning difficulties, are not always able to produce the written evidence that is needed in order to meet the requirements of the awarding body. With the advent of Foundation Learning, the use of accreditation will increase substantially, to recognise learning that was previously unaccredited. The combination of inappropriate programmes and difficulties producing evidence for accreditation purposes means that learners, particularly those who have cognitive impairments that result in them finding reading and writing difficult, will need a lot of support to generate evidence for portfolios, and providers therefore use ALS funding to pay for support staff to help learners meet the evidential requirements of awarding bodies.
- 5) Students and parents often have unrealistic expectations of the nature of support that is needed. Parents often request 1:1 support, even though this level of support is not necessary, or identify a need for daily support from a Speech and Language Therapist even though this may not have been provided at school. Changes to the nature and levels of support available can cause conflicts.
- 6) LSA contracts vary greatly and are often very inflexible. It is common for LSA contracts to include only time spent supporting the learner and may be “term time only”. Therefore, joint planning time with the teaching staff is often limited and sometimes impossible.

- 7) There is a lack of appropriate qualifications and CPD opportunities for LSAs in order to develop the skills necessary to provide effective support.

Factors that promote greater independence

- 1) A teamwork approach, where LSAs and teachers working together and where time is allocated to enable them to develop strategies to promote greater learner independence.
- 2) 'Thinking outside the box' breaking away from the 'traditional' models of support and using imaginative alternatives.
- 3) LSAs and teachers having access to a wide range of strategies means that they can be more flexible in their responses and this in turn leads to greater learner independence.
- 4) Ensuring that staff have the skills and receive appropriate training.
- 5) The trust and goodwill that emerges from effective teamwork.

Key Messages

LSAs

- You do not always have to be “seen to be” doing something in order to offer effective support. Observe your learners and identify the support they need based upon your observations.
- Small changes to support can be significant in enabling learners to be more independent in their learning.
- Significant impact can be achieved within short time scales.
- Think “outside of the box” and try new strategies.
- Build upon what the learner can do and never make assumptions about what they cannot do.
- Make sure the teaching staff you are working with fully understand your role and that you understand their role.

Managers of LSAs

- LSAs need the relevant skills in order to give effective support. They will need regular, relevant CPD in order to achieve this.
- LSAs need to work very closely with teaching staff. In order to achieve this, joint planning time is needed.

- LSAs need to be flexible and use a range of support strategies, including “stepping back” and observing learners. Take this into consideration when you are observing your staff.

Teaching staff

- You must make sure that LSAs fully understand your role and that you understand their role.
- You must work alongside the LSAs in order to plan effective sessions.
- Plan opportunities to observe learners in order to inform the support they need.

Organisations+

- Invest in the training and CDP of your LSAs.

Recommendations

Participants at the second event in the North East formulated the following recommendations.

National

- Introduce standardised nationally recognised qualifications and training at different levels for different roles.
- Establish a professional organisation for Learning Support Assistants.
- Agree nationally recognised job roles and a “title” for the role.
- Develop and disseminate standardised job descriptions, job roles and progression routes.
- Introduce standardised national pay scales.
- Consider the introduction of substantive/flexible employment contracts across the sector.
- Revise and simplify funding methodology to ensure that it allows providers flexibility to use resources as required in response to learners’ needs and reduce the audit requirements.

North East Region

- Encourage all providers to allocate funds to offer further regional events and activities, including specific LSA events, that allow for sharing experiences and networking.

- Ensure that everyone is kept informed of project and event outcomes.
- Encourage ‘buy in’ of senior management at organisational and government level.
- Staff development with recognised time for joint planning and recording included within contracts.
- Conduct learning support observation by suitably qualified and experienced staff.
- Provide a resource point/website/blog/forum.

Recommendations in relation to the Green Paper

- Review the funding methodologies and audit requirements to allow providers to provide support that promotes greater learner independence, without risking loss of funding.
- Support the Green Paper proposal that *“the regulatory framework moves quickly away from accrediting individual qualifications to regulating awarding organisations; removing the requirement that all qualifications offered to 14- to 19-year-olds fit within the Qualifications and Credit Framework and enabling FE lecturers and professionals to teach in schools, ensuring young people are being taught by those best suited”*.
- Undertake further work to establish effective partnership working, including Education, Health and Care, in order to support learners.
- Develop effective training and qualifications relating to supporting learners for both teaching and support staff either, as identified in the Green Paper for teaching assistants, or through the National Occupational Standards for Learning Support Practitioners.

Background and Introduction

The North East Regional Strand of the Enhancement of Learning Support project was led by Northern Counties College, an independent specialist college (ISC), and City of Sunderland College, a general further education (GFE) college. Both colleges provide specialist courses for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, many of whom have had Statements of Special Educational Needs or have attended a Special School. City of Sunderland College also has experience of providing support for young people to be able to access mainstream courses. The identified outcome was to produce:

“A report with further recommendations on the structural and system conditions that promote or hinder learner independence which can potentially provide future research evidence to the proposed comprehensive review of the SEN/LDD system and the Green Paper: Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability (2011).”

The main thrust of the project was to identify ways in which learners could become more independent in their learning by finding ways to reduce the “velcro model” of learning support in which, for example, individual and continuous 1:1 support can become a hindrance to learning. In addition, investigations took place to identify what factors hinder the unpicking of the velcro. The outcomes of the original research¹ were taken into account in which learners interviewed stated that, at times, they felt over supported.

Approach/Methodology

The lead providers for this Strand were:

- Northern Counties College, an ISC located in north Newcastle upon Tyne. The main contact person was Matthew King, Student Services Manager; and
- City of Sunderland College. a GFE with sites across Sunderland. The main contact person was Lesley Hall, Head of Supported Learning.

The lead providers together with specialist support Brian Simpson, formed the project team that planned and delivered the North East regional project.

The main aim of this project was to investigate the factors that promote and hinder learner independence. The research methods used were:

- reviews of literature;
- two regional events; and
- case studies.

Literature review

The first part of the literature review of four key documents was undertaken by one of the lead organisations, Northern Counties College. The aim of the literature review was to identify key features of support that had an impact on learning. The four key themes identified in the literature review were used as a basis for the first conference.

The green paper: *Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability* (2011) was published in March after most of the project has been concluded. However, the green paper has also been reviewed and is presented as the second part of the literature review.

¹ Amos, R. Finch, D. (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support the training and development needs of learning support assistants the views of learners*. Natspec

First regional event

The first of two regional events were held in Newcastle in November 2010. The event was entitled “**Seeking independence, the pursuit of inclusive learning**” and aimed to set the scene for the regional project. The two lead providers presented what inroads they had made to enabling learners to be more independent in their learning. The examples used were largely gained during development sessions, involving both academic and support staff from both lead organisations. Providers explored the meaning of the term “independence” in relation to their own learners/clients. As a result of this exercise it was agreed to use the term “less dependent” instead of “independent”, in recognition that some learners will never be totally independent.

Case studies

At the November event, providers were invited to plan relevant innovations, to be used with their own learners/clients. All providers taking part in this exercise were sent a Case Study Proforma (Annex 2) to record what they did, why they did it and what the outcomes and impact were. The lead colleges provided examples from their own practice, and the afternoon of the event was used to share experiences and discuss ideas.

Providers were asked to implement their plan and record the results in terms of effectiveness in reducing dependency upon “the usual” methods of support.

The proforma encouraged providers to take an analytic view of making change which involved them in considering: the context; the challenge; what activities they were to do to address the challenge; why they chose that approach; what the outcome was and what the impact had been.

Second regional event

The second event in January 2011 entitled “Unpicking the Velcro” focused on feedback from providers who had undertaken case studies about what they had done. It enabled the sharing of innovation and also focused on identifying what hinders the unpicking of the Velcro and what works. A “Whinge and Wow” approach was used; delegates were allowed a Whinge but only if that was balanced by a Wow. The second event concluded with the identification of recommendations that had both regional and national significance, included in this report.

Findings and outcomes

Literature review

Part 1: Four key themes that impact on the learning of all learners were identified through the review of key documents. They were:

- 1) The effectiveness of support provided;

- 2) The need for clearly defined roles for teaching and support staff;
- 3) The need for effective communication between teaching and support staff;
and
- 4) The skills and training of support staff.

The conclusion of the literature review states:

“the evidence indicates that learning support staff are often under skilled and lack knowledge to work most effectively with learners. They have insufficient time to work collaboratively with teaching staff to enable better planning and deployment. The role and responsibilities of teaching and support staff can be ill defined and therefore staff do not work to their potential. Finally the lack of knowledge and skills, the inability to meet and work effectively with teaching staff and the confusion in roles often leads to poorer outcomes for learners.”

The full review may be found in Annex 1.

Part 2: The Green Paper : Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability was published in March 2011. A key feature of the Green Paper is the development of a single assessment process and ‘Education, Health and Care Plan’ to support the Special Educational Needs (SEN) of individuals from birth to 25.

External accreditation and qualifications are identified as being potential barriers to learning with the Green Paper agreeing with the similar outcomes of the Wolfe Report². Inspection Reports and Ofsted Reports over the years have identified the imbalance of externally accredited courses that has been exacerbated by some providers believing that programmes had to be externally accredited in order to draw down funding, and the requirements of the external accreditation, rather than the needs of the learners, began to drive the learning. Some learners, particularly those with learning difficulties, were not always able to produce the written evidence that was needed in order to meet the requirements of the awarding body. The combination of inappropriate programmes and difficulties producing evidence for accreditation purposes meant that learners, particularly those with cognitive impairments that result in them finding reading and writing difficult, often needed a lot of support. Providers therefore began to use Additional Learning Support funding to pay for support staff to help the learners.

The issue here is one of teaching versus additional support. The Green Paper states:

² Wolf, A. (March 2011) *Review of vocational education – the Wolf Report*. London:DfE

“Too often the opportunities and support available to disabled young people and young people with SEN fall short of what they need to make a successful transition to adult life

Such poor planning of support is exacerbated by a lack of choice and opportunities for young people: for example, a limited choice of entry-level courses in further education that do not build on what has gone before, or prepare young people for life and work; poor quality work experience; and a lack of supported employment opportunities to help them prepare for, find and retain work. In addition, the transition from children’s to adult health services is often badly coordinated, which can lead to deterioration in young people’s health.”

It then goes on to identify the need to:

“ensure the regulatory framework moves quickly away from accrediting individual qualifications to regulating awarding organisations; removing the requirement that all qualifications offered to 14- to 19-year-olds fit within the Qualifications and Credit Framework and enabling FE lecturers and professionals to teach in schools, ensuring young people are being taught by those best suited”

The North East Strand of the *Enhancement of Learning Support Project* strongly supports this approach.

The issue of teaching versus additional support is also directly challenged in the Green Paper:

“teaching assistant time should never be a substitute for teaching from a qualified teacher. Too often, the most vulnerable pupils are supported almost exclusively by teaching assistants: their routine deployment to pupils most in need seems to be the heart of the problem. Pupils with the most need can become separated from the teacher and the curriculum.

This practice is not acceptable. Children with SEN need more, not less, time with the school’s most skilled and qualified teachers”

The Green Paper goes on to say that the emphasis must be on teaching and not support. Although the overall emphasis in the Green Paper is based on schools, the North East Strand of the *Enhancement of Learning Support Project* focused on the relationship between teaching and support in order to ensure learners are as independent as possible in their learning within the Learning and Skills sector. The Case Studies from the project identify different approaches and methods used by teachers that have been successful in enabling learners to learn more independently.

The training of teachers is identified in the Green Paper as being paramount in order to improve transition and access to post-16 learning:

“The Department for Education will work with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) to support the development of SEN and disability training for those teaching in colleges. As described in chapter four, this will also help to improve transition and access to post-16 qualifications and learning for young people who are disabled or have SEN”

The Green Paper proposes a national structure to develop teaching assistants and other support staff:

“We will launch an additional scholarship fund, open to the most able teaching assistants and other support staff, to enable them to build on their SEN support roles and develop their careers further”

The recommendations from the NE Strand of the *Enhancement of Learning Support Project* includes the development of appropriate qualifications and CPD opportunities for LSAs and, as such, is consistent with the above proposal in the Green Paper, in the context of post-16 learning as well as schools. The delay in formalising a national strategy of qualifications for LSAs through the National Occupational Standards for Learning Support Practitioners is a concern when the case for such a structure is overwhelming.

The *Enhancement of Learning Support Project* receives only a cursory mention in the Green Paper:

“LSIS is already undertaking to enhance further education sector support, resulting in a range of tools and resources”.

(A summary of recommendations related to this Green Paper is included in the recommendations section at the end of this report.)

Events

Providers attending these events were:

- 9 General Further Education Colleges;
- 5 Independent Specialist Providers;
- 1 School;
- 1 Work-based Learning Provider;
- 2 Private Providers;
- 1 Supported Living Provider; and
- 1 Youth Service Provider.

The range of job roles of delegates attending was:

- 14 Learning Support Assistants;
- 9 Teachers;
- 8 Managers; and
- A further 19 delegates did not disclose their job role.

(Annex 3 has a full list of project participants and contributors.)

The evaluations of the first event provided useful feedback. They commented positively on the lead colleges' case studies, describing them as '*great*' '*interesting*' and '*some fantastic information from the people involved.*' The opportunities to network and share practice were also singled out as valuable and one LSA stated, '*I look forward to applying some of the knowledge in my daily role.*'

One of the most successful aspects of the events was to recruit a large number of LSAs. Finding ways of enabling LSAs to feel valued was an important aspect of the approach. Consequently, a key feature of both events was the use of LSAs to facilitate each working group, note important outcomes and report back to the whole regional event. This was very effective, as it recognised the skills of LSAs, improved their self-confidence and provided them with opportunities they would not normally have in their working day. Those LSAs who were involved reported that the experience had had a very positive impact on their self-confidence.

The regional events brought together support staff, managers and senior staff from a whole range of organisations that would never otherwise meet. As a consequence of the Enhancement of Learning Support regional events, the NE region is hoping to hold an annual event to build on the work of the project. Organisations involved in the project are still continuing to work together and this is one of the major benefits of being involved. The AoC registration process was a hindrance in that some individuals found the process cumbersome and although eager to attend the conference were not prepared to sign up via the online registration process.

Comments from LSAs about the impact of involvement in the project included:

"allowing students to do more for themselves now"

"have made positive changes in my role to encourage students to be less dependent upon me"

"I'm reflecting more upon LSA role when working with students"

Tutors and managers said:

"Used the first event to develop a training pack around "stepping back"

"Have developed training to enhance learning support"

"A changed focus - less dependency"

“Have developed new ideas” “have shared resources”

They particularly valued the opportunities the project has offered to get together with others doing the same type of work, to discuss roles, to find out what other organisations do, to talk about solutions to different issues and to have in-depth discussions to inform and develop practice. They considered it had been *“a very worthwhile project,” “a real eye-opener” and “a great way to network”*.

Case studies

This section provides 16 case studies from five providers: two Further Education Colleges, two Independent Specialist Colleges and a Private Training Provider. Each of the case studies was from a provider who had changed their approaches to providing learning support during the course of the project.

The cases studies are presented according to themes which are:

- Strategies for reducing support

Case Study 1: Reducing staff direction

Case Study 2: Sign sharing - reducing dependency on a signer

Case Study 3: Reducing support with timetables

- Encouraging greater independence and control of support

Case Study 4: Encouraging learners to direct their support

Case Study 5: Promoting independent travel

Case Study 6: Promoting communication skills and social interaction

Case Study 7: Becoming less dependent - spending time alone

- Strategies for delivering support – supporting groups

Case Study 8: Group rather than individual support

Case Study 9: From whole group to small group support

- Supporting literacy

Case Study 10: learning mentor support for literacy

- Alternative ways of providing support

Case Study 11: Peer mentoring system

Case Study 12: Using signs and symbols for greater independence

- Staff training and professional development

Case Study 13: Accredited training for support staff

Case Study 14: Training staff to use augmented and alternative communications strategies

- Changing organisational structures

Case Study 15: Changing support staff structures

Case Study 16: Reorganising the delivery of support

Strategies for reducing support

The first three case studies all illustrate ways of reducing support in different contexts and with different forms of support. These are: reducing staff direction in an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) session, reducing dependency on a signer, reducing support given to learners with their timetables.

Case Study 1: Reducing staff direction, Northern Counties College

What was done?

We carried out an observation for 30 minutes on 2 students within our tutor group. The students are both at Entry Level 3 (the highest level we teach and support within the College) and they both started the College in September 2010. Both students rely heavily on staff direction to complete tasks and move between steps within a task. However it was felt that with alternative support arrangements they might be able to work with less support.

How was this done?

In an ICT session, working alongside the tutor, a simple 13 point step by step worksheet for the students to follow was created, including diagrams. The worksheet told the student everything they needed to know to be able create a poster. The students were told if they needed help at any point they needed to ask for it. An LSA who would be able to provide assistance was working at another workstation nearby.

What was the impact and difference made?

Student A was constantly seeking reassurance from Student B

Student B then asked for help and was praised for asking. At this point Student A was reminded he could ask for help if he needed it. He said he was O.K. but was constantly looking at Student B's work.

What were the lessons learnt?

Staff had assumed that because students are working at a similar academic level

then support needs will be similar.
Student expectations are that staff will support and direct them through tasks.
Much work will be required to break the cycle of dependency.

Case Study 2: sign sharing – reducing dependency on a signer, City of Sunderland College

What was done? A number of students in the same class as a deaf student were taught a range of finger spelling and BSL signs.

Why was this done? To improve the ability of the whole group to communicate with the student who is deaf as well as to lessen her dependency upon the Signer who offers 1:1 support at all times.

How was this done? Opportunities for Sign Sharing were identified in each lesson. The Sign Sharing was done by the Signer and the students. Over time, the students in the group became much more confident to communicate in the classroom.

What was the impact and difference made? The impact was that all the students in the group developed a basic understanding of an alternative communication strategy that enabled all students to be fully involved in all activities. The deaf student was able to communicate, at relevant times during the lesson, with the other students in the group without being dependent upon the Signer, significantly increasing peer to peer interaction. As the students became more confident and were able to use a wider range of signs the deaf student decided that she did not need the Signer to accompany her at break times. The student developed a much higher level of independence as she was able to communicate effectively with her peers and, as a result, spends her break times with her friends in the coffee shop in college. The Signer also now is able to have her breaks with her colleagues.

What were the lessons learnt? Where one student in a group uses an alternative method of communication they will never be fully integrated unless all staff and students in the group have the understanding and ability to communicate with them. Once this is achieved in the classroom this will carry over into social times.

Case Study 3: reducing support with timetables, City of Sunderland College

Can you do your timetable?

The context

The case study focussed on a small group of 6 Learn for Life Communication students aged between 19 and 54. The students are undergoing a Foundation Learning Programme as part of their studies and work in a structured environment. They have profound and multiple learning difficulties, and have limited expressive

and receptive language. Therefore, the students use alternative and augmentative communication techniques through pictures, symbols, signing and words, to reduce any anxieties, enhance confidence and build self esteem.

The challenge

The students are very dependent on the learning mentors to help them when doing their work, especially the timetable task, as historically there has been an expectation that the learning mentors will get the student's timetables and symbols out ready, rather than doing it for themselves. The learners are becoming very prompt dependent when going through the timetable. The idea now is that if the learners are encouraged to be more independent in the timetable task, this could be developed within other activities during their college programme; thus enabling autonomous learners.

What we did

- The tutor attended a staff development day, was briefed as to what the case study involved and had to think of an intervention to encourage learners to be more independent, this was to be carried out over two weeks.
- The tutor developed the timetable task over a two week period, and felt that if it ran over four consecutive lessons on a Friday morning and afternoon that would be an achievable intervention.
- Within the four sessions the students were split into two groups, one with four students and the other with two. The tutor worked with the group of four and a learning mentor worked with the other two. On the afternoon sessions the tutor worked with another learning mentor with the group of four. There was a small table at the front with the two students and a larger table at the back with four students. All learning mentors were briefed prior to the lessons about what was expected.
- The timetable task involved the students following a symbolised timetable using Sym Writer on the promethean board. Each student has an individual timetable - this is a laminated A4 board with their name on and velcro underneath. This is supported with small laminated Rebus Widgit symbols to stick on the board, so they can copy each symbol from the promethean board.
- All students were encouraged to get their timetable symbols and put them on the table in a line, so they could see each one and be ready for the timetable task.
- When students underwent the timetable task, the tutor stood at the front and typed each symbol on the promethean board and prompted them after each Rebus Widgit symbol with a makaton sign or gesture. The tutor then went to each table to check they had sequenced the timetable in the correct order.
- On the completion of the laminated timetable we went through it as a group, on the first week we all said what each symbol meant and all the students used

Makaton signing.

- On the second week as the students confidence increased, on completion of their laminated timetable, the tutor encouraged the students one at a time, to stand at the front and take the teacher role, and say the timetable to the rest of the group using speech and Makaton signing. This was to check student's comprehension and understanding.

Why we did it

With the students being in the same environment on the morning and afternoon lesson on the Friday, it was thought these lessons would be a great opportunity to encourage the learners to be more independent, especially the morning session with minimal support. The timetable is something the students do in every session and was, therefore, identified as an excellent task to trial the intervention, as it is something they feel safe in doing. The idea is that by gradually enabling them to do this more independently, this would possibly impact on other aspects of their learning.

The outcomes

- The timetable activity was quite a timely process but the students didn't feel pressured and went at their own pace.
- The students were more engaged in the lesson.
- Some students needed more prompting than others when sticking their laminated symbols on the board; over time this may be reduced with repetition of what is expected of them and enhanced confidence.
- The more able students in the group seemed to help the less able students complete their laminated timetables.
- All students worked as a team and were very patient and actively listened to each other when going through the timetable on the promethean board.
- Some students needed support when pointing at the symbols on the promethean board as they have difficulty with directionality.
- Students were proud of their achievement and congratulated each other on completion of reading the timetable on the promethean board; one student wanted to shake other students hands on completion.
- In the morning sessions the students were more engaged and completed their timetable and class work more effectively.
- In the afternoon sessions students became more tired and some needed more support to complete their timetable and class work.

encouraged to direct staff in specific situations.

Why was this done?

The students had expressed a desire to become more independent. Staff wished to evaluate if their desire for more independence could be generalised into all aspects of college life and not just in taught sessions where their physical disabilities limited their ability to be independent.

How was this done?

Students are encouraged to make their way to class at the end of break. While many left for their next lesson unprompted, Student A remained where she was as the other students left the room, and didn't appear to show awareness that this was happening. Student B was watching and laughing as the other students were leaving the room. It appeared that he was aware that he had to do something, but he did not request to leave the room.

Staff sat with both students and gave prompts:

"We stood and looked at the clock then at the student"

"We pointed out that the other students had left the room"

"We asked where they thought the other students had gone"

Student B then requested via his VOCA to be taken to class

This was repeated on a few occasions.

What was the impact?

- Students A and B are now aware that break is over and request to go to class.
- Students are much more able to direct own support.
- Student self-esteem has been raised. They are less dependent on others.

Case study 5: promoting independent travel, New College, Durham (NCD)

Introduction

College Links Asperger Syndrome Support (CLASS) is a partnership of four County Durham FE colleges and other related agencies. It is dedicated to creating and sharing good practice in teaching and supporting students with Asperger Syndrome (AS) or High Functioning Autism. The project is led by staff from the Learning Support team at New College and was launched to parents and professionals on 1st December 2009.

The project has four main aims:

- 1) The development of staff to support students with Asperger syndrome;
- 2) The promotion of support available to students with Asperger syndrome ;
- 3) The development of resources to support students with Asperger syndrome; and
- 4) The development of student support networks.

Support at New College Durham is student centred and each learner receives an individual support plan. One student who has benefitted from all of the developments outlined above is called Chris. Chris has given the college his permission to use him in this case study.

The context

Chris was on the “Pathways” course, part of a group of six students all with Aspergers syndrome together with other learning/behaviour difficulties. The group was supported by an assigned LSA who worked closely with Chris, particularly in IT, numeracy and literacy.

The challenge

When Chris first attended college he was unwilling to find his way from reception to his classroom and was heavily reliant on being met and escorted. His social skills were very poor which led to his isolation. He was a very quiet student who was reluctant to make any contribution in lessons. The challenge with Chris was to boost his confidence and make him much more independent.

What we did

Initially Chris was met at reception and on the way to the base room the LSA would “acquire” a reason to leave him. “*Chris, You know where you are going, I’ll see you there shortly.*” The remainder of his journey would be observed by another LSA. After a short time he was told “*Chris I can’t meet you. Make your own way to the base room.*” Again he was observed by an LSA. Chris was soon happy to find his own way, not just to the base room, but also between classrooms.

Chris moved to a mainstream course but was still reliant on his mother for travelling. A major breakthrough was made when Chris decided, with the encouragement of his LSAs, to take ownership and travel independently.

Initially Chris travelled by bus between the college and home accompanied by his mother until he was comfortable with the route. Then he was taken to the bus stop where he boarded the bus alone. Chris was met at the bus stop near college and accompanied the rest of the way. After class he would be met and taken back to the bus stop and was accompanied until the bus arrived. The bus was met by his mother at his home point.

Using the same tactic as when he first started, it was only a matter of weeks before

Chris was making his own way to and from college.

A lunch time social club was established, staffed by a lecturer and an LSA, to encourage the students across college with Asperger syndrome to meet in a quiet, safe and controlled environment. The attending students could eat lunch, access the computers and play games, "Uno", a card game, being the favourite. This club proved to be very popular.

Several trips were organised as part of the club. The students would meet at the college on a Saturday. Activities included a food festival and a trip to an Italian restaurant. They also went bowling after college on a weekday night. A major achievement for Chris was a Saturday trip to Durham. Chris travelled independently to Durham where he was met at the bus station. Together with the rest of the group he shopped before eating lunch and returning to the bus station where he left to travel home, again independently.

Why we did it

Independence is a major factor in life. It builds confidence and helps all of us reach our full potential.

The outcomes

In Chris` case it has helped him grow into a mature and confident young man, keen to pursue his studies and widen his options socially.

The impact

- Chris still attends NCD and is studying for a BTEC National Certificate at L3.
- No longer receives 1:1 support in class.
- He has made friends on his course.
- Chris is continuing his efforts to be independent.

Case Study 6: improving communication skills and social interaction, City Of Sunderland College

The context

Student B is studying AS Levels at Usworth Sixth Form Centre. He receives support on a 1:1 basis during all timetabled sessions and also breaks & lunches. Student B has a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorders which has a major effect on his social skills and also restricts his ability to attend college independently.

The challenge

To ensure Student B is able to access college independently and to achieve his chosen qualification. To improve his social skills to allow him to fully engage in his course.

What we did

Learning mentor (LM)

- To provide 1:1 support to enable Student B to access college environment.
- To encourage Student B to focus on building relationships with staff & peers.
- LM to introduce Student B to small groups initially and initiate conversation with peers.
 - LM to provide verbal prompts to initiate conversation.
 - LM to encourage Student B to participate in discussions.
- To gradually introduce familiar faces from class to widen circle of friends.
- LM to promote independence.
 - LM to gradually withdraw and observe to allow Student B to develop positive relationships with peers.
- LM & Student B to develop strategies together to keep focus/concentration levels in classes.
- Student B to access college independently.

Why we did it

Student B had not attended school and had not been able to follow a mainstream programme. LM to work with Student B to build up confidence and self esteem to enable student to access college independently.

The outcomes

- Student B has improved social skills and has started to build positive relationships with peers & staff. Student B is also accessing social areas independently, at quiet times.
- By encouraging Student B to interact with peers & staff he now has a wider circle of friends.
- Learning Mentor has gradually withdrawn from group discussions to allow Student B to engage in conversations.
- Positive development of communication skills which will increase job

opportunities.

- Support is gradually reduced however LM maintains contact at all times and observes from a distance to ensure Student B manages independently.
- By following smart targets in Students B's Action plan LM is able to track Student's progress.

The impact

- Builds confidence and self-esteem.
- Encourages Student to access college course independently.
- Positive development of communication skills.

Case study 7: becoming less dependent - spending time alone, Clervaux Trust

The context

Trainee R is a 20 year old male resident at the Clervaux Trust. R has been with the Trust for quite some time, having transferred from our sister college when his Education and residential programme came to an end there.

R has Autistic Spectrum Disorder, had a statement of Special Educational Need, has Behavioural and Emotional difficulties, ADHD and obsessive tendencies (OCD)

R lives with another trainee and a 'Home Maker' -this is a slightly different to supported living and the three occupants of the house live as a family unit.

R has regular contact with his family, and has good relationships with staff. R does not have a wide circle of close friends but socialises well, and enjoys taking part in any activities and excursions that are offered by the Trust. R is confident when dealing with the public, his behaviour is sociably appropriate, and he has been risk assessed as being capable of spending time out of the house alone, mainly to take part in his favourite pass time – Shopping!

When shopping independently R follows his risk assessments (which were developed with him) and is aware of the dangers and precautions he must take to minimise risk. R is 'road aware' and he always carries his mobile phone and 'checks in' with support staff regularly. R is aware that if he should get himself into a difficult situation he is to ring his support or ask an appropriate person for assistance (police officer/security guard) he is aware he must tell the appropriate person that he is part of the Clervaux Trust. R has a very good knowledge of Darlington, where he enjoys his shopping excursion and is also capable of independent travel.

The challenge

Although R has successfully shown his ability to shop independently, and has done so for some time, R feels anxious and uncomfortable about being in the house alone. If his support was to go into the garden, R would either join them or constantly 'hover' around the door or window, checking that they are still close by.

When asked about this, R states that he does not know why he feels anxious about being in the house alone, he says that he feels a 'little bit jumpy and nervous'. He would however like to be able to work towards spending some time alone as this will help him feel more independent.

What we did

We spoke with R and his Home Maker about the possibility of working towards R being able to spend time alone in their house. We decided together that working towards a goal was a good idea and as R loves watching DVDs and had a huge collection of films, R decided that his goal would be to be able to watch a whole Film alone in the house without worrying or becoming anxious (R's Home Maker had suggested this to R as he was concerned that if we set a 'time' that R may 'clock watch' and not enjoy his time alone).

We sat with R and made a 'programme' which involved building up 'independent time'. We started with short time scales, 5 minutes to begin, for each amount of time a task or activity was planned, so for example, for the first 5 minutes slot, R was to make a cup of tea whilst his Home Maker was nearby sorting the recycling in the shed and putting the bins out.

We built the time scales up; at half an hour the Home Maker is to wash his car on the street whilst R writes a letter to his sister. As well as increasing the length of time alone, we increased the distance of the Home Maker from the house, so at one hour the Home Maker goes to the local super market.

The programme is planned for a period of 6 weeks and the lengths of independence time are to be 'practised' and repeated before moving to the next level when R feels comfortable enough to move on. R has agreed on the time scale and hopes to achieve his goal, but we have explained that the time can be extended and it is important that he feels comfortable. A number of risk assessments have been carried out to ensure that the programme is safe for R.

The outcomes

We hope that R will enjoy taking part in the 'build up' to having independent time and also that he has a real sense of triumph when he reaches his goal!

The impact

R thinks that he will feel less dependent on his support team when he achieves his goal.

Strategies for delivering support – supporting groups

The next two case studies show how a change from 1 to 1 support, to providing support for groups, can help to reduce the stigmatisation and isolation that can occur when an individual is singled out for support. It also brings wider benefits to the whole group.

Case Study 8: group rather than individual support, City Of Sunderland College

What was done? A wider range of classroom management strategies were introduced in order to ensure that one student needing a very high level of support was fully integrated into an Entry level 3 Motor Vehicle class. The student was identified as needing a high level of support in the motor vehicle workshops and a Learning Mentor was assigned to work 1:1 with him. Instead of the Learning Mentor working only with the student with the identified need, the whole group were split into 2 smaller groups. The teaching member of staff worked with one group and the Learning Mentor worked with the other group during all practical sessions.

Why was this done? This was done because often students receiving a high level of support from a member of support staff can be stigmatised by other students in the group. The student in receipt of a high level of support can be embarrassed by this.

How was this done? This was simply done by ensuring that the teaching and support members of staff were both involved in the planning of the session so that they were both fully aware of their roles within the session. It was also very important to have a support member of staff with the correct skills and expertise to be able to support the group of students in the motor vehicle workshop. No additional resources were required.

What was the impact and difference made? Both members of staff agreed that the impact on the lesson was very positive. The student originally identified as requiring the high level of support received this within the group he worked with alongside all the other students in the whole group, who also benefited. As a result of working in this way, the student requiring the support was fully integrated within the group and worked alongside his peers rather than with a Learning Mentor. Support was given by other students in the group rather than the Learning Mentor who supported the small group of students throughout the session.

Case Study 9: from whole group to small group support, City Of Sunderland College

The context

This intervention originated from research being carried out which could identify how existing systems and structures within our department might affect the provision and

nature of the learning support we provide to our learners. In particular this area was chosen in response to much research examining the effectiveness of one to one in terms of support staff being “attached` to a single learner.” This research questions how included the learner feels when support is provided for the individual – in isolation as it were - as opposed to “support being provided for a group and for an individual in the context of the group”. As this second group approach had been proven to be more interactive and inclusive –this posed questions regarding the effectiveness of our own extensive one to one support. My students have moderate learning difficulties, some have specific learning difficulties and generally many have confidence issues.

They range from E1- L1 in abilities and their progress tends to develop along with their self confidence. Therefore all my lessons involve confidence building strategies.

The challenge

There has been a challenge in one of the groups taught over the last four weeks since a new learner with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) has joined existing group of learners. Despite a willingness from the learner himself, support staff, the learners in the group and myself to integrate our new learner in all group activities and learning- a problem re-occurred when his hyperactive behaviour led to him completing tasks ahead of others or losing concentration/focus when all other learners were still on task. The learner found `one to one` difficult at times sometimes removing himself to a quiet area when the support worker was attempting to re-focus him on another relevant task.

What we did

To address this problem it was necessary to change the model of teaching being used i.e whole group delivery into a small group delivery model in which learners were able to complete tasks in small teams at a faster pace with more interaction.

- Over two sessions in one week we would attempt to improve our new learner’s integration into the learning process by making learning more kinaesthetic and activities more stimulating/ moving at a faster pace.
- Firstly much thought went into teaming up the right learners i.e. who would work most effectively with who? Also working out who would be the right learning partner for who?
- Learners were told they were part of an experiment to find out how included they felt during the lesson.
- The second faster model involving new learning partners for the group was introduced as a fun element by giving pairs points for every timed task they completed before other pairs.
- Tasks were hands on involving each learner in turn such as facial expression game where all the group had to identify the emotion the person who was `on`

was communicating through their actions and facial expressions.

- Change games and activities from use of the promethean board, to role play, to use of cards equal opportunity for stating opinions.
- At the end of both types of teaching an evaluation was completed by every learner as to how included they had felt during the lesson.

Why we did it

We decided on this intervention to enable the learner to be more integrated in the session with less one to one support. Our new learner had routinely been excluded from the lessons in school which we wanted to avoid. As research had shown isolated support for an individual where support staff are “attached to a single learner , described as the `Velcro` model” leading to dependency- we were attempting to provide the learner and the group with a more inclusive and autonomous learning environment.

The outcomes

The outcomes of the intervention were as follows;

- Some learners did not feel included in the whole group delivery model;
- All learners did feel included in the small group delivery model;
- The learning environment was improved as faster paced /fun activities engaged all learners; and
- The new learner did not rely on “attached” support staff as much as activities more engaging and less need to be brought back on task.

The impact

The impact of this intervention was positive overall;

- The learner was able to stay in the classroom, as he has been kept on task by engaging activities;
- The rest of the group were more engaged as they were not being as distracted by the new learner;
- Teaching staff more focussed on learning rather than behavioural issues; and
- Support staff designated as one to one less frustrated by learner`s distracting behaviour.

Examples of students role play activities:



Supporting literacy

This case study illustrates how a learning mentor can provide individual support for literacy while encouraging the learner to become more confident and less dependent on support.

Case Study 10: learning mentor support for literacy, City Of Sunderland College

The context

Student A is a Level 3 motor vehicle mature student and receives support during theory and literacy classes for his diagnosis of dyslexia. Student A finds reading and writing problematic, especially reading his own notes. As a result he also lacks confidence to work independently, specifically on reading tasks.

The challenge

To ensure Student A achieves a pass grade in his literacy course he must be able to read aloud in class and complete a written assignment.

What we did

Learning mentor

- provided general support on a 1:1 basis, initially by asking Student A if he understood individual tasks. If he was unsure mentor was to provide further explanation in terms that were easily understood.
- Student A was encouraged to complete reading and writing tasks independently; however was also encouraged to ask for support if needed, for example

explanation or pronunciation of specific words.

- By completing targets in his action plan with the mentor, it was agreed Student A would always try and read words to himself first and then to the learning mentor.
- Student A struggled with self-esteem issues surrounding reading aloud in front of his class mates. As part of his action plan Student A would read to the learning mentor on a 1:1 basis three times a week to build his vocabulary and perfect his pronunciation.
- Student A was encouraged to carry on reading aloud independently, at home. The learning mentor would print off fairy tales which he could read to his daughter. He would copy down words he had difficulty understanding or pronouncing to discuss them with mentor during his next session.
- The mentor would scribe for Student A as well as him taking his own notes. This enabled him to develop hand-writing skills and improve spelling. If he problems understanding his own notes he could refer to the mentor's copy.

Why we did it: Student A had been attending college for two years previously and although he achieved well in his vocational subject he found it problematic achieving Level 1 in literacy. Support was provided in literacy and theory lessons, focusing on specific skills within literacy.

The outcomes

Student A developed skills in both reading and writing

- By practising reading aloud on a 1:1 basis, Student A became more competent and confident in his own abilities.
- His skills improved greatly which meant support could be gradually decreased to encourage independent working.
- The extra reading sessions enabled Student A to reflect on his own progress, building on his self-esteem and his self-perception.
- Student A was confident enough to read aloud in front of his peers, regardless of any mistakes he made.
- His peers also encouraged him to read in class.

The impact

- Builds confidence, self-esteem and self perception.
- Encourages independent learning and reflection upon own progression.
- Positive development of communication skills both verbal and written which will

increase job opportunities.

- Increases vocabulary.
- Improves spelling.

Alternative ways of providing support

In the case studies that follow there are examples of support provided by other learners acting as peer mentors and how the use of signs and symbols can decrease dependency on learning support staff.

Case Study 11: peer mentoring system, City Of Sunderland College

What was done? A number of students have been trained to act as Peer Mentors within Numeracy sessions. These students support other students in Numeracy sessions who previously received a high level of support from a Learning Mentor.

Why was this done? The Peer Mentoring system was originally introduced as a development activity to encourage those students who demonstrated that they were able to take responsibility, and had very good skills within the curriculum area of Numeracy, to provide support to their peers.

How was this done? The students to be trained were identified by a number of teaching staff. The students were then asked if they would like to be trained in order for them to support other students in Numeracy sessions. Once the students agreed, they attended the training sessions delivered by an appropriately trained member of staff. Timetables were looked at in order to identify relevant slots for the Peer Mentors to support in. Once students requiring support from the Peer Mentors were identified, the Peer Mentors were assigned. It is important for the Peer Mentors to be well trained and fully understand their role and responsibilities within the classroom. A dedicated member of staff ensures that the Peer mentors' own skills are of the correct standard prior to them supporting in lessons in order to ensure they are able to offer appropriate support in the Numeracy sessions.

What was the impact and difference made? Use of Peer Mentors has made a great impact upon those students receiving the support as well as those students trained to act as Peer Mentors. Teaching members of staff have commented upon how the Peer Mentors communicate ideas with the students they are supporting and how both groups benefit from this relationship. This has proved to be so successful that we are now using the Peer Mentors in a range of situations including developing independent travel training skills, Buddy Days and so on.

Case Study 12: using signs and symbols for greater independence, City Of Sunderland College

Context

We worked with 6 students aged between 19 -21 with average- to good communication skills, but poor literacy and numeracy skills. These students are on a Learn for life course to help develop independence in their everyday lives. They are not required to gain a literacy / numeracy qualification, but need to understand basic literacy and sequencing to use in their everyday lives. At present, they are learning about Personal presentation, road safety, shopping and cooking and so on.

After their twice a week cookery lesson, all students are required to remember the sequence of how to make an easy dish, and with support, copy a 5-6 stage recipe from the wipe-board, and file into their recipe booklets.

The Challenge

Over two weeks, I wanted my students to be able to use symbols and words to sequence a recipe.

I printed out the recipe using words & symbols, and cut sentences into strips. I then asked the students to sequence the strips into the correct order of how we made the food. I encourage them to work as a group to problem solve. After they were finished, we would feedback as a group to decide the correct sequence, giving student's time to rearrange sentences if needed.

What we did

I decided to try and use recipes from symbol world, and also use software which allowed me to type a word and a symbol would appear over the word to help with understanding.

- Firstly I recapped the sequence of cooking with the group.
- I then cut up the sentences and asked the students to put the recipe into the correct order, looking at the symbols and words.
- They sat in a group and then, decided upon the correct order.
- After agreeing on the correct sequence, they glued the sentences onto a clean piece of paper, then added their name & date and filed the recipe into their cookery book.

Why we did it

Because the students have limited literacy / numeracy skills, the use of symbols and pictures helped the student to understand words. The students seemed relieved not to have to read and spell words they didn't understand. It also gave the students the opportunity to problem solve within a group. In the past, the students always wrote

down the recipe from the wipe-board, but couldn't always read back what they had written! The students work was often difficult for staff to understand too. **Tutors and Mentors often had to handwrite the words on paper** to put next to a student in order for them to see clearly, as most students look at one letter at a time from the board which makes them dizzy and they end up writing on the wrong line or missing chunks out of sentences.

The feeling of completing a task without as much support can give students a lot of confidence.

The outcomes

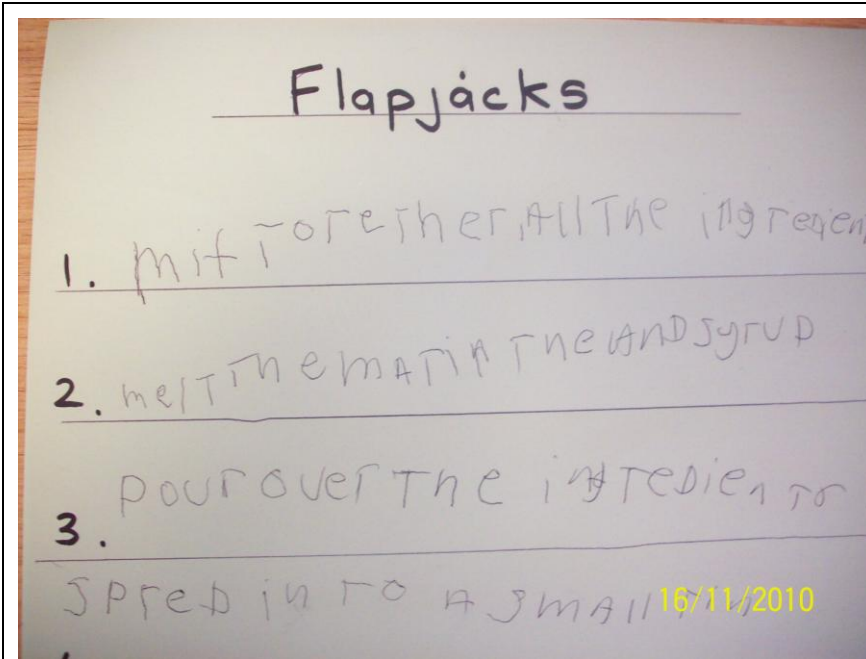
- Students were able to understand the process of cooking using the symbols.
- They worked well together, using question and answer to see if they could agree.
- Students only asked staff to check work at the end of the task as opposed to during.

The impact

- Students could work with less support.
- Poor memory recall improved with the use of symbols.
- Group discussion encouraged peer bonding.
- Gave tutor the opportunity to step back and observe.

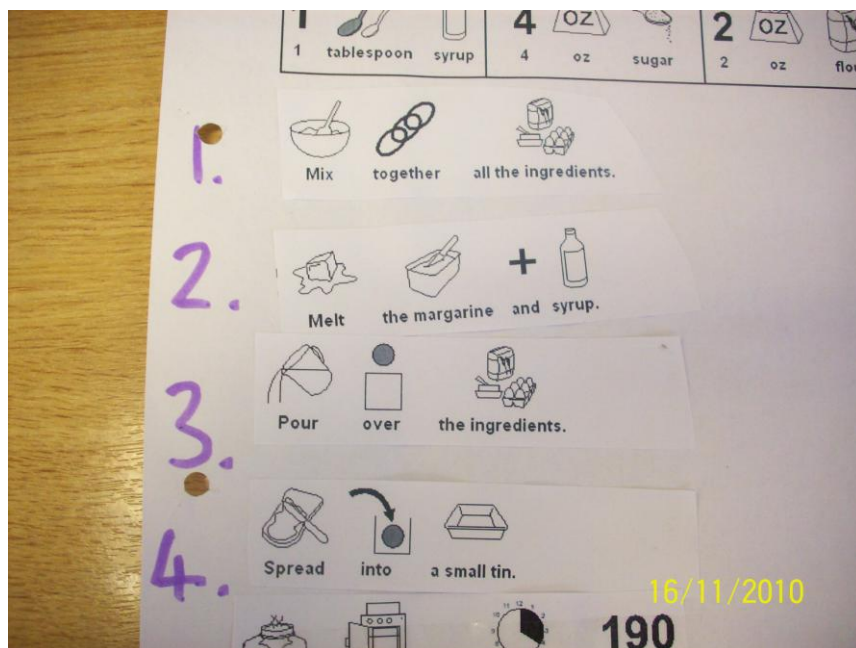
Supporting documentation

- Hand copied recipe.
- Student recipe using symbols and words .



Above, an example of work copied from the wipe-board.

Below, an example of sequencing a recipe using symbols.



Staff training and professional development

The need for LSAs to have access to appropriate training is one of the key themes that emerged from the literature review. The case studies illustrate training that organisations are providing. The first is a programme of accredited training and the

second is an example of specific training. It shows how teaching staff and LSAs have been trained to use augmented and alternative communications strategies.

Case Study 13: Accredited training for support staff, Northern Counties College

It is important that staff are consciously looking for , creating and exploiting opportunities to lessen the dependency of students. To do this well requires a high level of skills, knowledge and understanding, and this involves investment in training.

Northern Counties College have been seeking an appropriate course to enhance the skills of Learning Support Staff for some time. Following involvement in the ELS Project we have commissioned the South West Workforce Development Partnership in conjunction with West of England School and College to train a number of our staff to deliver the OCN Professional Development for Learning Support Practitioners Level 2/3 Award. We intend to commence the course for staff later this academic year.

A number of local GFEs are also interested in support staff gaining accreditation through this route.

Case Study 14: training staff to use augmented and alternative communications strategies

What was done? A number of teaching and support staff completed a range of training to broaden their ability to use a range of augmented and alternative communication strategies.

Why was this done? A number of students needed a high level of support when completing tasks involving reading and writing. By improving the knowledge and skills of the teaching and support staff to use a wider range of augmented and alternative communications strategies it was hoped that, over time, students would become less dependent on a high level of support to complete a range of activities.

How was this done? The local SALT team were used to deliver the training. Departmental staff with a high level of expertise carried out awareness raising sessions to demonstrate how specialist software could be used to amend and individualise resources as well as how students themselves could use technologies available to produce appropriate resources for themselves.

What was the impact and difference made? One member of staff decided to involve her students in producing their own recipes for a practical session in the kitchen. The students were supported to use pictures and symbols, to substitute for text, where necessary. Each student produced their own version of the recipe which they then used in the practical session. The impact was that, although it took longer for the students to produce their own recipe, during the practical session they were all able to work in a more independent way and individuals needed lower levels of

support throughout the session. Over time, students begin to think more for themselves and do depend upon a high level of support being available to them. The students begin to work at their own pace, instead of trying to keep up with others in the group. The more able students also began to help others.

What were the lessons learnt? Support does not always have to be given by a member of staff. With good planning, preparation and relevant resources, students will begin to be less dependent upon a member of staff.

Changing organisational structures

In some cases, thinking differently about the best ways of providing support has led to changes in the organisational structure of learning support. One example shows how a structural change in bringing together two teams of support staff has reaped benefits and in another case study a new role of 'learning mentor' has been introduced as a result of a review of how support is provided.

Case Study 15: changing support staff structures, City Of Sunderland College

What was done? The Head of Department of Supported Learning (teaching staff) and the Learning Mentor Manager (support staff) aligned the two staffing teams into one staffing structure. This was agreed with the Principal of the college. A common meeting schedule was produced and briefing sessions for all staff were added to timetables, after lessons, twice a week, Joint planning and CPD sessions also identified.

Why was this done? To improve the continuity of support for the students, to ensure teaching and support staff have time to work together to plan and review and to ensure effective CPD opportunities are available to teaching and support staff.

How was this done? These changes were only possible with the support of The Principal as it was necessary to amend the Learning Mentor's contracts and there were also cost implications. Both managers involved identified the benefits to the students when presenting their proposals to The Principal.

What was the impact and difference made? Staff developed a greater understanding of each others' roles because of closer working relationships. We were able to radically reduce the use of agency staff used to cover for Learning Mentor sickness absence as cover was arranged within the team. This gave continuity of support for the students as well as being much more cost effective.

What were the lessons learnt? Senior management support will make it happen! Where Support and teaching staff plan and work together the students benefit.

Case study 16: reorganising the delivery of support, Interactive Development

The context I work for a private training provider based in the North East of England. One of our contracts is to deliver Foundation Learning to learners with learning difficulties and / or disabilities (LLDD). This sub-contract is through the local City Council to deliver the specialist provision for the area. The partnership with the City Council is in its 13th year and earlier this year we successfully secured another 3 year contract.

The provision that we offer has changed dramatically in the past two years for a number of reasons. The introduction of the IFL and Lifelong Learning UK standards, the launch of Valuing Employment Now and the introduction of the Foundation Learning Curriculum to name but a few. The provision that we now run has transformed from a typically arts and drama based approach with some employability to very much the main focus and drive of the provision pivoting around employability and independence. The provision is now fully accredited and functional skills are embedded throughout.

Alongside this there has been for the past two – three years a reduction in the funding available. Unfortunately this has led to redundancies each year. The Additional Learning Support (ALS) funding has been most dramatically changed. Funding has fluctuated resulting in the teaching teams consisting of somewhere between one Tutor and one - three Learning Support Assistants (LSA's).

The demographic of the student body has changed significantly due to the mentioned changes above. The majority of our learners are aged between 19 and 25 years old (although our provision is accessible to all ages) and the typical entry level behaviour is that of entry level 2/3 – level 1.

The employment courses offer learners a base in general employability skills including CV and interview workshops. The learners then progress to a vocational area in which they chose from Practical Skills Office, Health and Social Care or Retail. The learners have an opportunity to complete a work placement in their area and work towards improving their Literacy, Numeracy and ICT skills with the opportunity to gain qualifications in one or all three functional skills areas.

The independence courses are intended to support learners in becoming more active in their communities and also to be more independent. They include units such as self-advocacy, decision making and rights and responsibilities. The learners also have the opportunity to gain a qualification in a functional skills area.

The challenge

Due to the above changes the organisation has had to look at how we support learners in a different way. Regardless of whether the learners are working towards employability or on the independence courses promoting independence within learning and the learners lives is a key priority.

What we did

Subsequently we have changed the way in which we look at our additional learning support. The first change that was implemented was the extension of their working day by an hour to allow for thirty minutes either side of the sessions for briefing / debriefing, resource development and support with paperwork such as witness statements for individual learners. Secondly a new role for ALS was introduced in the form of Learning Mentors. We currently have three Mentors who cover Employment, ICT, Literacy and Wellbeing. They form a part of Student Services which is designed to pinpoint and deliver support the support needs of the learners. The idea is that the Mentors run workshops and offer specialised 1:1 or small group work to ensure each learner is reaching their potential working closely with the Tutors.

The outcomes

By extending the LSA's working day it has enabled teaching teams to work more closely together and discuss the needs of the learners. More work through staff meetings is continuing to ensure that this is spent productively as at times priorities sometimes shift to ensuring the learning environment is tidy or putting resources away.

The impact

The introduction of the Mentor role has been a complicated one as a new way of working was rolled out. I am pleased with the results. It offers a career structure to LSA's that do not wish to move into teaching and we have specialised support in the areas that we need it. Again, we are still developing the post as joint planning is something that could be improved as at times the Mentors can work in isolation.

As an organisation we are very keen to develop the learning support role to ensure that the learners have the best support we can provide and to also ensure the staff feel valued and that their contributions are recognised as an important part of the learning process.

Summary

The Regional Project has enabled a wide range of providers to work collaboratively in order to explore how we can improve what we do to enable learners to be more independent. The feedback received from both regional events was very positive with all of the delegates commenting upon the value of having the opportunity of meeting other practitioners, from different organisations, in order to gain a higher level of understanding of what other organisations within the region do relating to supporting learners. Everyone involved in the project was eager to identify different ways of working and to try new things out. Staff from different organisations shared ideas and expertise in order to break down any existing barriers in order to develop working partnerships for the future.

The project provided a forum for practitioners to discuss how the existing structures and systems influence the provision of support and potentially discourage learner independence and to explore what changes need to be made in the future. As practitioners, we valued the opportunity to participate in this project as we felt our “voice” was being heard and that, at last, we had the opportunity to inform and influence change.

It was widely recognised that the present systems used to provide support for learners often put very limiting constraints upon how flexible the support could be in terms of changing to meet the needs of the learner. The following points were identified as providing barriers to change:

Barriers to change

Factors that hinder the promotion of support that encourages learner independence have been identified. They relate to: funding; accreditation requirements; learner and parent expectation; LSA contracts and the availability of appropriate training and qualifications for LSAs.

- YPLA funding applications for Independent Specialist Colleges (ISCs) require support needs to be identified in terms of 1:1 hour equivalents and restricts a more flexible approach to supporting learners. Once in place, support levels are difficult to change and arguably reinforce the “velcro” approach to support which we know from the literature is not always effective or appropriate.
- Records required for audit purposes often restrict the use of more flexible approaches to support. As noted above, once support is in place it is difficult to change or reduce these levels of support. Time spent planning support is often hard to identify for audit purposes, yet this is vital if support is to be effective.
- The funding of additional support, for example in ISCs, can lead to the provider depending on these levels of funding which if reduced could impact negatively on the financial viability of the provider. There is arguably no incentive to reduce support.

The requirements of the external accreditation, rather than the needs of the learners, often drive the learning. Some learners, particularly those with learning difficulties, are not always able to produce the written evidence that is needed in order to meet the requirements of the awarding body. With the advent of Foundation Learning, the use of accreditation will increase substantially, to recognise learning that was previously unaccredited. The combination of inappropriate programmes and difficulties producing evidence for accreditation purposes means that learners, particularly those who have cognitive impairments that result in them finding reading and writing difficult, will need a lot of support to generate evidence for portfolios, and providers therefore use ALS funding to pay for support staff to help learners meet the evidential requirements of awarding bodies.

- Students and parents often have unrealistic expectations of the nature of support that is needed. Parents often request 1:1 support, even though this level of support is not necessary, or identify a need for daily support from a Speech and Language Therapist even though this may not have been provided at school. Changes to the nature and levels of support available can cause conflicts.
- LSA contracts vary greatly and are often very inflexible. It is common for LSA contracts to include only time spent supporting the learner and may be “term time only”. Therefore, joint planning time with the teaching staff is often limited and sometimes impossible.
- There is a lack of appropriate qualifications and CPD opportunities for LSAs in order to develop the skills necessary to provide effective support.

Factors that promote greater independence

- 1) A teamwork approach, where LSAs and teachers working together and where time is allocated to enable them to develop strategies to promote greater learner independence.
- 2) ‘Thinking outside the box’ breaking away from the ‘traditional’ models of support and using imaginative alternatives.
- 3) LSAs and teachers having access to a wide range of strategies means that they can be more flexible in their responses and this in turn leads to greater learner independence.
- 4) Ensuring that staff have the skills and receive appropriate training.
- 5) The trust and goodwill that emerges from effective teamwork.

Key Messages

LSAs

- You do not always have to be “seen to be” doing something in order to offer effective support. Observe your learners and identify the support they need based upon your observations.

- Small changes to support can be significant in enabling learners to be more independent in their learning.
- Significant impact can be achieved within short time scales.
- Think “outside of the box” and try new strategies.
- Build upon what the learner can do and never make assumptions about what they cannot do.
- Make sure the teaching staff you are working with fully understand your role and that you understand their role.

Managers of LSAs

- LSAs need the relevant skills in order to give effective support. They will need regular, relevant CPD in order to achieve this
- LSAs need to work very closely with teaching staff. In order to achieve this, joint planning time is needed
- LSAs need to be flexible and use a range of support strategies, including “stepping back” and observing learners. Take this into consideration when you are observing your staff

Teaching staff

- You must make sure that LSAs fully understand your role and that you understand their role
- You must work alongside the LSAs in order to plan effective sessions
- Plan opportunities to observe learners in order to inform the support they need.

Organisations+

- Invest in the training and CDP of your LSAs.

Evaluation

The major impact of the project has been to allow staff from a range of learning providers to meet together, discuss their practice and consider the most effective and efficient ways to support their learners.

As noted above, the regional events brought together support staff, managers and senior staff from a whole range of organisations that would never otherwise meet. As a consequence of the success of the events, the NE region is hoping to hold an annual event to build on the work of the project. Organisations involved in the project are still continuing to work together and this is one of the major benefits of being

involved. The involvement of AoC in the registration process was a hindrance in that some individuals found the process cumbersome and although eager to attend the conference were not prepared to sign up via the online registration process.

The use of the case study approach worked well. By providing a template to work from, it enabled organisations to consider their practice in a systematic way: it focused minds. A major outcome of project was the opportunity to promote the value and worth of LSAs, to demonstrate that they are part of a team and the response of LSAs has, in turn, been remarkable.

Recommendations

Participants at the second event in the North East formulated the following recommendations.

National

- Introduce standardised nationally recognised qualifications and training at different levels for different roles.
- Establish a professional organisation for Learning Support Assistants.
- Agree nationally recognised job roles and a “title” for the role.
- Develop and disseminate standardised job descriptions, job roles and progression routes.
- Introduce standardised national pay scales.
- Consider the introduction of substantive/flexible employment contracts across the sector.
- Revise and simplify funding methodology to ensure that it allows providers flexibility to use resources as required in response to learners’ needs and reduce the audit requirements.

North East Region

- Encourage all providers to allocate funds to offer further regional events and activities, including specific LSA events, that allow for sharing experiences and networking.
- Ensure that everyone is kept informed of project and event outcomes.
- Encourage ‘buy in’ of senior management at organisational and government level.
- Staff development with recognised time for joint planning and recording included within contracts.
- Conduct learning support observation by suitably qualified and experienced staff.

- Provide a resource point/website/blog/forum.

Recommendations in relation to the Green Paper

- Review the funding methodologies and audit requirements to allow providers to provide support that promotes greater learner independence, without risking loss of funding.
- Support the Green Paper proposal that *“the regulatory framework moves quickly away from accrediting individual qualifications to regulating awarding organisations; removing the requirement that all qualifications offered to 14- to 19-year-olds fit within the Qualifications and Credit Framework and enabling FE lecturers and professionals to teach in schools, ensuring young people are being taught by those best suited”*.
- Undertake further work to establish effective partnership working, including Education, Health and Care, in order to support learners.
- Develop effective training and qualifications relating to supporting learners for both teaching and support staff either, as identified in the Green Paper for teaching assistants, or through the National Occupational Standards for Learning Support Practitioners.

Annex 1: Literature Review

As part of the Enhancement of Learning Support Programme (Strand 7), a review of key documents was undertaken, to identify common themes in providing support. To this end four documents were reviewed:

- Adult Learning Inspectorate (2006) Greater Expectations – The Adult learning Inspectorate review into provision for learners with disabilities Coventry: Adult Learning Inspectorate;
- Faraday, S. (2010) Enhancement of Learning Support: The training and development needs of learning support assistants, a literature review. NATSPEC;
- Learning and Skills Council (2006) Learning for Living and Work: Improving Education and Training Opportunities for people with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities – The Learning and Skills Council’s response to the report by Peter Little entitled Through Inclusion to Excellence (2006) Coventry: Learning and Skills Council; and
- OFSTED (2010)The special educational needs and disability review – OFSTED.

As the OFSTED and the Enhancement of Learning Support documents were the newest greater emphasis has been placed on their findings.

Four key themes emerged from the review that impact on the learning of all learners.

- 1) The effectiveness of support provided.
- 2) The need for clearly defined roles for teaching and support staff.
- 3) The need for effective communication between teaching and support staff.
- 4) The skills and training of support staff.

It is intended to look at each theme separately but to highlight where there are links.

Theme 1: The effectiveness of support provided

The literature shows a mixed picture of the effectiveness of support. This might partially reflect the tight definition of learning and learning support used in the Enhancement of Learning document. This clearly defines the support offered as leading to learning although the evidence cited sometimes acknowledges the work of a learning support assistant is much wider.

Lamb (2010) makes a number of suggestions as to why learners do less well when supported by learning support staff. He reports “a negative impact of learners’ progress when substituting Teaching Assistants (TAs) for teachers. He found a clear relationship between support from TAs and lower attainment and slower rates of progress in learners with special educational needs: the more TA support, the lower the attainment”. (Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010 p12). Missing from his analysis is, as Ofsted reported, that learners with special educational needs

“are disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds, are much more likely to be absent and achieve less well than their peers” (Ofsted 2010, p5).

Howes (2003) argues that “where support was provided in isolation to an individual, where a TA was ‘attached’ to a single learner, described as the ‘velcro’ model (Gershel 2005), it could lead to dependency, exclusion and stigmatisation ((Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010 p24). It could be argued that

“By providing individual support, attention was drawn to the learner’s inability to cope without support and may have an adverse effect upon the learner’s self esteem and ability to work independently.” (Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010 p24).

It could therefore be argued that the support could further impact on the learner’s ability to develop the skills needed *“to maximise their level of independence and activity in their community and in employment”* (Learning for Living and Work, p5).

In their review of primary education, Ofsted (2009) suggested 4 key strands relating to effective learning support. One strand suggests that in promoting more independent learners that support staff

- “showed interest – raising self-esteem by showing an interest in the learner.
- assisted individuals in educational tasks - providing support where the learner might be unable to perform a task, while avoiding stultifying or demeaning the learner.
- freed up the teacher to work with groups – allowing the teacher to work directly with learners who need particular attention.
- worked with outside agencies – such as speech therapists and educational psychologists.
- modelled good practice – in behaviour and learning.
- assisted learners with physical needs – intervention when help is necessary”.

(Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010, p17).

From the review and selected quotes it could be argued that the effectiveness of support has an impact on the learner’s ability to become more self reliant and move towards greater independence. This leads on to the second theme.

Theme 2: The need for clearly defined roles for teaching and support staff

The Ofsted report and NATSPEC literature review both highlight the importance of clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

In the section of the review relating to roles, the Enhancement of Learning Support review states plainly that “Clearly defining the role of the LSA is crucial and ensuring that all staff are aware of the respective roles of themselves and others is essential for effective practice.” (Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010 p26)

It goes on to quote Giangreco et al that “The lack of a clear role definition could create confusion and considerable role ambiguity. One possible consequence was described in the somewhat derisory terms as the ‘hoverers’ or ‘hinderers’ stance adopted by some support staff who were unsure of their roles.” ((Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010 p26).

Although it is clear that that defined roles and responsibilities are important Giangreco et al state that “Too many TAs continue to provide instruction and engage in other teacher type roles without appropriate training, professionally prepared plans, or adequate supervision. In some cases, particularly for students with the most severe disabilities, teacher assistants function as their primary ‘teachers’ and are often left to fend for themselves.” (Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010 p27). Research by the South West Workforce Development Project found exactly the same issues within the lifelong learning sector “There was a consensus that roles and boundaries between that of teachers and support staff were not clearly defined and that these roles were sometimes blurred with support staff being required to undertake functions which were the responsibility of the teacher.” (Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010p28).

It has been stated clearly that the boundaries between roles is blurred, that there is confusion over responsibilities with tasks that should be the responsibility of trained and qualified teaching staff being delegated to support staff who may well not have the underpinning knowledge, skills and abilities to carry out the task effectively. It could be argued therefore that support staff without the necessary knowledge and skills set could be barrier to learners reaching their potential.

Theme 3: The need for effective communication between teaching and support staff

The literature is clear that effective communication is one of the key drivers to success. Lamb (2010) states that “that in the majority of cases there was a lack of co-ordination between teachers and support assistants leading to less linkage into the curriculum and to the assessment of progress.” (Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010 p30). Groom (2006) suggests “Involving LSAs in a dialogue about lesson planning, for example, would not only inform the teaching assistant of the session objectives and the design of the session, but would ensure that they were aware of their proposed deployment and the nature of the support they were to provide.” (Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010 p31).

Despite the recognition of the clear benefit of sufficient quality time for joint planning and review “there was evidence of a lack of time and opportunity for teachers and teaching assistants to talk and plan together. Teaching assistants spoke of their concerns, pointing out that without sufficient preparation, they could go into sessions ‘on a wing and a prayer’ (Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010 p31).

“The results of a study by Blatchford et al (2004)⁹¹ confirmed the need for communication between the teacher and TAs, for example, about lesson plans and learning objectives, and a relationship within which TAs felt valued. Lee (2002)⁹² and Wilson et al (2003)⁹³ also found that there could be insufficient time for pre- and post-lesson planning by teachers and TAs and this limited the opportunity for joint planning and feedback to the detriment of all concerned. This raised an important issue about the practicalities of scheduling time to work together. Farrell et al (1999)⁹⁴ found consistent lack of planning time with teachers which they described as a key factor that could reduce the effectiveness of support staff.” (Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010 p32)

It could be argued that the challenge for managers is to find time in the crowded timetable for teaching and support staff to meet effectively.

Theme 4: The skills and training of support staff

Appropriate and effective training for learning support staff especially in the lifelong learning sector has long been problematic. The Ofsted Report (2010, p31) acknowledges that “the best learning occurred in all types of provision when teachers or other lead adults had a thorough and detailed knowledge of the children and young people; a thorough knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning strategies and techniques, as well as the subject or areas of learning being taught; and a sound understanding of child development and how different learning difficulties and disabilities influence this.”

Blatchford highlights that “less than half reported having qualifications which were relevant to their work and they were not likely to be trained for their direct interactive role with learners.” (Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010 p36). Lund (1999) “indicated that support staff would welcome training in differentiation as a pedagogical process and basic assessment techniques to assess the current level of ability and learning needs of the pupils with whom they worked.” (Enhancement of Learning Support, Faraday 2010 p36).

In conclusion, the evidence indicates that learning support staff are often under skilled and lack knowledge to work most effectively with learners. They have insufficient time to work collaboratively with teaching staff to enable better planning and deployment. The role and responsibilities of teaching and support staff can be ill defined and therefore staff do not work to their potential. Finally the lack of knowledge and skills, the inability to meet and work effectively with teaching staff and the confusion in roles often leads to poorer outcomes for learners.

Matthew King – Northern Counties College

22.09.2010

Annex 2: Case Study Proforma

Case Study: **Title for your case study**

Case study is a maximum of 2 sides of A4 in Arial 11, single spaced

The context: *set the context for the case study*

The challenge: *brief description of the challenge you were faced with*

What we did: *This is the activity you carried out to meet the challenge you were faced with. Identify what you did; use bullet points to give an indication of your timeline and the key stages. If another organisation wanted to carry out the activity they should get a sense of it from this section.*

Why we did it:

The outcomes:

Identify the key outcomes from 'what we did' as a series of bullet points

The impact:

Identify the tangible benefits of the activity as a series of bullet points.

Annex 3: Project Members and Contributors

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