

More than Courses - Alternative Approaches to Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Guidance and protocols to support the use of alternative approaches to continuing professional development - mentoring shadowing, buddying and “learn and share”

West Midlands Region



Enhancement of Learning Support Project

September 2010 – March 2011

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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 implementation 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 implementation 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

This report and the associated resources have been developed and produced by the West Midlands Region between October 2010 and March 2011 as part of the Enhancement of Learning Support Implementation Project, conducted by Natspec and AoC on behalf of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and with the support of JISC TechDis.

The project aimed to produce guidance and protocols to support the use of alternative approaches to CPD such as shadowing, buddying and mentoring. The resulting resources for four alternative approaches: mentoring; shadowing; buddying and 'learn and share' meetings, have been produced using a mixed-methods approach. This included drawing on the experiences and views of practitioners through two regional events, and examining existing web-based information,

conducting surveys and interviews with delegates, and formulating, sharing and reviewing draft guidance through workshops, two conferences and with the LSA reference group.

Outputs

Guidance documents to support four approaches:

- [Mentoring](#);
- [Shadowing](#);
- [Buddying](#); and
- [Learn and Share Meetings](#).

Each of these guidance documents explains what the approach is and offers advice on how you might implement the approach. The guidance also includes supplementary resources including information sheets, proforma and PowerPoint presentations that may be downloaded, amended to meet your own requirements and used.

The whole suite of documents for this and indeed all the resources developed as part of the Enhancement of Learning Support project are available from the [ELS Section of the Excellence Gateway](#)

We introduced delegates to the following JISC TechDis resources, which were loaded onto a memory stick

- **Staff packs** - A stand alone staff development pack which looks at the range of inbuilt accessibility tools in both Windows and Word.
- **Accessibility Essentials** - This is about creating and using documents in electronic formats and how to personalise their view in terms of font size, font type etc. It also has really useful tips like how different Views in Word give completely different accessibility benefits and how PDFs can be transformed in three clicks to a personalised view, even reading the content out loud.
- **Free Assistive Software** – a suite of applications to enhance and facilitate learning and teaching. They include text to speech software which can convert any amount of text to an MP3 format, presentation tools to enhance the use of a presentation and mind mapping software to facilitate organisation and planning.
- **Sim Dis**- An excellent interactive overview of some of the barriers experienced by people with disabilities. A good way of either updating personal professional development or helping train colleagues.

In addition, the memory stick included a video by Lisa Featherstone and Alistair McNaught to introduce the resources and a link to an on line accessibility survey.

The contents page from the memory stick provides links to the JISC Techdis resources listed above.

In order to benefit fully from training and development, it is important that time is taken to reflect on what has been learnt and the implications for practice. Although there has not been scope within the confines of this project to produce guidance documents relating to reflection, we have drawn on the Institute for Learning (IFL) tools for reflection, to support participants to reflect on their experiences of taking part in the regional event development work.

Key Findings and Conclusions

- Currently, much of the training available for Learning Support Assistants focuses on compliance, which does not always support the training and development needs of LSAs in supporting learning and promoting independence.
- There is a wealth of expertise and knowledge within organisations, but providers do not always have effective mechanisms in place for sharing these.
- There is more to training and development than courses and qualifications.
- Alternative approaches to CPD, such as mentoring shadowing, buddying and “Learn and share” meetings can provide an invaluable way of formalising the sharing of relevant information to support effective practice.
- LSAs value context based alternative approaches to training such as buddying, mentoring, and shadowing.
- It is important that LSAs are provided with support, time and opportunity to reflect on their training and development experiences, and the implications for practice.
- Technology can play an important role in supporting LSAs to access CPD.
- Developing skills and confidence in using technology requires both access to technology and time to practice – a “hands on” training day, can be very valuable.
- Alternative approaches to CPD can be both cost effective and relatively easy to implement.

Recommendations

For Learning Support Assistants (LSAs)

- Find out what alternative approaches are available in your organisation, for example, buddying, mentoring, learn & share.
- If you are an experienced member of staff, volunteer to become a mentor or buddy, to shadow or to be shadowed.

- If you are a new member of staff, ask for a buddy and /or mentor.
- Use [the four guidance documents](#) to help you understand what alternative approaches to CPD, such as shadowing, mentoring, buddying and learn and share involve and how you might contribute.
- Understand more about how to use technology to support your learners and your own CPD by using the JISC TechDis resources.
- Make the most of training and development activities by finding some time to reflect on your training and development. Share what you think with colleagues and managers to make future training more effective and relevant. Use the [reflective journal](#). It will help you get started and save you time.

For organisations

- Review the alternative approaches your organisation currently offers and consider providing buddying, shadowing, mentoring and /or learn and share, if these are not already available to LSAs.
- Save time in implementation by using the [guidance documents](#) to support you in establishing the systems you need.
- Invest time and resources in the training and development of your LSAs, as highly skilled LSAs enable your organisation to be inclusive and also improve outcomes for learners
- Shadowing, mentoring, buddying, and learn and share are staff development tools that improve outcomes, are valued by staff and are cost effective. Get more impact from your training budget by formally including these in your overall training and development plan and allocating a proportion of both time and resources to alternative approaches to CPD.
- Gather evidence about the benefits for your organisation by undertaking a small pilot. Once you can measure the impact, roll it out.
- Support improvement in quality and outcomes by making time for learning support assistants to meet and share ideas about effective practice.
- Improve staff skills and confidence in using information learning technology (ILT) by making time for them to practice – a “hands on” session can be really valuable.
- Establish and or use partnerships to facilitate collaborative CPD and the sharing of effective practice, and ensure these provide opportunities for LSAs to meet, share practice and train with other LSAs doing similar roles in different contexts. Consider the use of conferencing technology to reduce travel time and make it easier for staff to share ideas and practice.

For Government bodies and support agencies

Continue to promote the status, training and development and value of learning support assistants by:

- Supporting the development of partnerships to facilitate collaborative CPD and the sharing of effective practice, and ensure that these provide opportunities for LSAs to meet, share practice and train with other LSAs doing similar roles in different contexts;
- Supporting the professionalisation of the role by encouraging the development of appropriate qualifications and an effective career progression route alongside the use of alternative approaches to CPD.; and
- Promoting the training and development of learning support assistants, by encouraging providers to use a range of methods which includes alternative approaches to CPD such as those exemplified in this report.

Introduction

This report and the associated resources have been developed and produced by the West Midlands Region between October 2010 and March 2011 as part of the Enhancement of Learning Support Implementation Project, conducted by Natspec and AoC on behalf of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and with the support of JISC TechDis.

In January 2010, LSIS commissioned the Association of National Specialist Colleges, (Natspec) to explore the training needs of learning support assistants and those who manage them across the sector, scope existing work and expertise and use the resulting information to make recommendations for future training and development activities. A series of recommendations were made, details of which can be found in the overall project report "[Finding and Recommendations](#)¹" (O'Brien and O'Brien 2010). The recommendations were accepted by LSIS and used to form the basis of a national implementation programme.

The implementation programme has been undertaken jointly by Natspec and the Association of Colleges (AOC). The project delivery has been designed to maximise practitioner involvement in the design of the key outputs in order to ensure that they have relevance and add value.

To achieve this, two lead colleges with relevant expertise and skills, one Independent Specialist College (ISC) and one College of Further Education (GFE) were identified in each of the regions, to work in partnership to deliver a significant

¹ O'Brien, A. and O'Brien, K. (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support The training and development needs of learning support assistants. Findings and recommendations*. Natspec

proportion of the outcomes, using regional network events as a cornerstone for gathering evidence, testing ideas, generating, piloting and evaluating resources. In the West Midlands, Derwen College has been working in partnership with Walford and North Shropshire College (WNSC).

The West Midlands region was charged with producing guidance and protocols on alternative approaches to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) such as shadowing, buddying and mentoring.

Background and Rationale

Learning support assistants (LSAs) play a highly significant role in widening participation, facilitating inclusion and broadening the capacity of local services to support learners with additional needs. To be an effective learning support assistant requires a high degree of knowledge and understanding, and may involve a range of complex skills such as supporting communication, using specialist technology and adapting resources.

One of the most significant findings to emerge from the original research was the sheer complexity and diversity of both the workforce and the roles that learning support assistants fulfill in a vast array of different contexts, with attendant implications for future training and development planning. Learning support teams are often a mixture of full-time staff, hourly paid staff and in some organisations, bank/agency staff. There is huge variation in the level of qualifications, skills and experiences of LSAs both on entering the profession, and as a result of ongoing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) once employed, ranging from little if any entitlement to training, to investment in training and development to foundation degree level.

The initial research undertaken and the literature reviewed identified one common theme; that all organisations, individuals and learners described the practice of learning support for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities as being first and foremost about promoting independence. It was therefore both surprising and disappointing to discover that where training is available, it typically focuses on activities that could be broadly categorised as “compliance” related, covering areas such as health and safety, safeguarding, and equality and diversity with limited attention to the core role of supporting teaching and learning and promoting independence. Managers of learning support assistants reported a similar picture. (O’Brien and O’Brien 2010)²

The initial research also suggested that training often lacked relevance for two main reasons. Firstly, because it is not always planned on a sufficiently detailed understanding of what LSAs say they need to do their job. Secondly, because it was not explicitly linked to the needs of people being supported.

² O’Brien, A. and O’Brien, K. (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support The training and development needs of learning support assistants. Findings and recommendations*. Natspec

When asked what training activities they had found useful, LSAs indicated more context based development activities such as shadowing, mentoring and buddying. However, these typically only happened at induction, and were not always available at LSA level. (Simpson 2010)³

Aim of the Project

The aim of this project strand was to work with practitioners across the sector to develop and publish guidance and protocols to support providers in implementing alternative approaches to CPD such as shadowing, buddying and mentoring.

Methodology, approach and findings

This section integrates the description of the methods used with the reporting of the outcomes and findings from each aspect of project activity. The approach taken in this project was to draw on practitioner expertise and experience to develop resources and materials that have practical relevance and add value. The resources have been produced using a mixed-methods approach. This included drawing on the experiences and views of practitioners through two regional events; examining existing web-based information; conducting surveys and interviews with delegates; and formulating, sharing and reviewing draft guidance through workshops, two conferences and with the LSA reference group. The two regional events were the cornerstone for gathering information, testing ideas and sharing practice and reviewing resources. Two events were planned, the first for November 2010, to gather feedback on the draft resources and the second, for January 2011, to allow practitioners the time to review, use and comment on developing resources and approaches between events. Unfortunately the first event had to be postponed, due to poor weather and was re-scheduled for early January 2011, restricting the amount of time available to participants to review resources.

Project Team Composition and Communication

The project team consisted of five members, details of whom can be found in Annex 3. Derwen College and Walford and North Shropshire College (WNSC) already had effective partnership working in place. There are well established links between senior managers and the two colleges had already undertaken joint activity including Peer Review activities, joint training events and the sharing of expertise.

In addition, Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire is fortunate in having a well-established professional development partnership. The aim of The Three Counties Professional Development Partnership is “collaborative CPD where it adds value”. The partnership comprises 16 colleges and two HE organisations plus a network of over 100 other delivery organisations. This association provide an ideal network to promote the project. Given that we wanted to plan and deliver two regional events, in order to draw on the views of practitioners it made sense to draw on the experience of the professional development partnership manager and

³ Simpson, B. (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support The views of Learning support assistants and their managers*, Natspec

administrator, both of whom joined the project team. To ensure the project team incorporated the views of LSAs, it also included an LSA manager from WNSC and a learning support assistant from Derwen, as well as Derwen's partnerships and projects manager.

Derwen College has a national catchment, and to support contact with stakeholders who may live some distance from the college, has excellent video conferencing facilities. Although the initial planning meeting and two further meetings took place face to face, the bulk of the planning meetings were undertaken through videoconferencing, significantly reducing travel time.

Pre-event information

The project team was keen to ensure that any developments took account of the views of practitioners and felt that it was important, in order to inform the planning of the regional events, to establish participant's views and experiences of existing training and development activities. A pre-event questionnaire was designed and sent out to all registered delegates, an example of which can be found in Annex 4, which includes a summary analysis of responses. The outcomes were used to plan the events.

Findings from pre-event questionnaires

Of the 52 questionnaires sent out, 16 were completed and submitted prior to the event. It was clear that all those who had experience of either shadowing, mentoring and/ or buddying felt it was beneficial, and that the vast majority of those who didn't, felt it would be of value. This confirmed the findings of the initial research. All respondents who indicated that they would be willing to share their experiences of particular types of approaches to CPD were contacted by email initially and followed up with phone calls, where appropriate.

Twelve of the sixteen respondents had experience of team or group meetings to share ideas and best practice as part of a formal structured programme and the vast majority of these (11) found these to be very beneficial. Respondents also overwhelmingly indicated that where opportunities to work informally with peers to share ideas and best practice existed, these were of benefit.

The use of information technology or e-learning was less common amongst the sample, with only approximately a third (five) indicating that they used e-learning to access CPD, of whom only three felt it to be very beneficial. There was however some support for this approach by those with no experience of it, with seven respondents indicating they thought this could be of value.

Although this does not tally with our findings from the earlier research findings about the value LSAs attributed to their experiences of courses, the respondents in this small scale sample were very positive about the more traditional training courses they had experienced with approximately 75% (twelve) identifying that they had found these to be very beneficial. It is worth noting that support for internally delivered courses was stronger than for those delivered by external providers, although, given the size of the sample, this is not statistically significant.

The team was also keen to explore barriers to training. The table which follows summarises the responses:

Barriers to CPD			
Barrier	Does not present a barrier	Presents some barrier	Presents a significant barrier
Funding (4 no answer)	3	7	2
Cover to be released to undertake CPD activities (1 no answer)	7	6	2
The nature of my contract i.e. term-time only (1 no answer)	11	3	1
Time to undertake CPD activities (1 no answer)	2	12	1
Something about attitude but I don't know how to express it (5 no answer)	6	2	3

It is clear that the most significant barrier to funding was seen to be time, followed by funding, and then the provision of cover to release staff for training.

Pre-event preparation

The methodology involved the planning of two regional events to gather views and information from practitioners. We agreed that it would be helpful to generate some draft guidance on which delegates could comment, at the first event. We would then ask them to use some of these approaches between events and feedback to us at the second event so that final touches could be made to the resulting materials.

The first research activity was to review existing information sources and resources in order to provide a sound foundation for the project. This included drawing on existing practice in mentoring shadowing and buddying, using a combination of web based research and action research. The specialist support contacted all of the pre-event survey respondents to explore practice at their organisations, by email initially and received nine responses from 3 organisations.

Findings from pre-event preparation

Although this totalled nine individual respondents, it reflected the practice of only 3 organisations, as in two of the providers it was clear that the practice of both shadowing and mentoring was well established. It is worth noting however, that in one college, the practice of mentoring is both more formalised, and better established for teachers (particularly trainee teachers) than it is for LSAs and at the other, although well-established as a process, it has yet to be expanded to include LSAs.

Examples from Practice

Following an initial email, a follow up phone call took place with three delegates from three separate providers. The case studies below explore the key features of their practice in relation to mentoring as an alternative approach to CPD.

The examples that follow demonstrate that techniques and protocols for mentoring are well developed in some organisations and can be used effectively with different staff groups for different purposes. There is also an example which demonstrates the positive impact that mentoring support can have for learners. These approaches are reported to be successful by the practitioners who have shared them, are valued within their organisation and have had a positive impact on self-confidence). Currently they are not used as frequently with LSAs as with other groups but there is clear potential to do so.

Independent Specialist College – Derwen

Mentoring for trainee teachers

The college operates a number of different approaches to mentoring. The most common is for staff on teacher training courses at university. This approach is quite formal, and the mentors are made up of staff who have previously been on the course, or who are fully qualified and experienced teachers and mentors, with up to date professional training and practice. The role is largely focussed on providing support with the academic element of the course, and the frequency and nature of support is determined by the university with whom the mentee is registered. The process and documentation which support this process is also provided by the sponsoring university. As part of the role, the mentor will undertake observations of the mentee and vice versa. Any staff who are undertaking further academic training, such as a specialist qualification in learning difficulties and or disabilities, a Masters or a degree, are also provided with a mentor.

Providing support to trainee teachers is quite time consuming and staff undertaking this role are required to undertake a mentoring qualification.

Mentoring for staff new to a role

Staff new to their role are provided with a mentor. This mentor helps the staff to settle into the college, understand their role, and is available to a range of staff including LSAs and personal tutors. Mentors are allocated within departments. It is often much more of an informal role than that described above, more akin to buddying in some instances. The role of the mentor is referenced in the staff development policy, and there is a mentoring agreement, but the documentation associated with the process is largely informal and meetings are on an “as and when required” basis. Staff undertaking the role of mentor, volunteer to do so, and although they can choose to access a mentoring qualification, they are not expected or required to do so. There is some variation in the way that different departments within the college implement and manage the mentoring system, which reflects not only difference in management style, but also variation in roles and associated

expectations. The length of mentoring support is determined by need “*some people settle in more quickly than others, particularly depending on role and experience before they arrive*”. (Manager of mentoring course)

In addition, Derwen College provides new teaching staff with the opportunity to undertake peer observations (shadowing). This enables the new member of staff to see a range of different teaching styles. They have the opportunity to both observe and be observed and constructive feedback is given.

The college has also developed the role of senior practitioners – an experienced practitioner who provides guidance and support to less experienced staff. Staff are able to self-refer to gain advice about a particular concern or area they would like to develop. However, the senior practitioners do put on lunchtime meetings, which are available to teachers and LSAs aimed at sharing effective practice. College data, plus informal feedback gathered at the regional event, would suggest that these are valued by all staff.

Learner Mentoring (Example 1) Derwen College

In addition to providing mentoring for staff, Derwen college has also established a peer mentoring system for learners, which is an entry level course, written by the college and accredited by OCN. The college had identified that each year, despite detailed pre-entry assessments; they were losing a number of students early in the term, who seemed to be finding it hard to settle in, and despite the best efforts of staff, were not responding well to the support put in place to help them adjust. It was felt that the provision of support by peers could be valuable and a peer mentoring system was established.

The system has now been running for 3 years and has proved tremendously successful. New entrants who are struggling to settle in are allocated a mentor. The mentors are volunteers, usually third years, who have expressed an interest in being a mentor and have enrolled on the mentoring course. They undertake role play and are supported to explore what it involved doing the role, and work towards achieving the mentoring qualification as they practice their role. Areas covered as part of the course include:

- Personal and safety boundaries;
- Role of a mentor;
- How to deal with challenges and issues;
- Confidentiality;
- Safeguarding;
- Difference between befriending and supporting;
- Skills and qualities associated with being an effective mentor; and

- Communication skills – including active listening.

Mentors and mentees sign a mentoring agreement, and the mentors sign a supervision agreement with the supervising tutor.

Peer mentoring has been hugely successful, both for mentors and mentees. The number of students leaving the college in the first term because they have not settled in has dropped significantly, and the mentors report gains in confidence and feel a sense of achievement, as well as having the opportunity to get their skills recognised through an award. The college in question brought some learners to the second regional events to talk to us about their experiences, and the delegates were very positive about it, with many expressing an interest in establishing a similar system in their own organisations.

Peer Mentoring for Learners (Example 2) Walford and North Shropshire College

The lead General Further Education College (WNSC) also has a peer mentoring scheme for learners in place. As part of the second event, two of their peer mentors, plus the member of staff who supports them, provided an input about how the process works, the benefits and the impact.

The scheme has been in place for two years now and has proved to be very successful. The peer mentors are volunteers, who feel they have something to contribute. Prior to taking up the role, peer mentors undertake initial six week training. This includes topics such as child protection and confidentiality, as well as undertaking role play to support understanding and skills in the role. They also complete a Level 1 safeguarding course. The college has developed a number of resources to support peer mentors in their role, including “aims and objectives”, “steps to good listening”, and “blocks to good listening”.

The learners are clear about their responsibilities. At the event they were able to talk with clarity about the role. They recognise that it covers a range of areas including encouraging individuals in their studies, helping with peer support, time management, and revision.

They talked about the need to be both accessible and approachable. To support learners in recognising who the peer mentors are, they wear tops and sweatshirts, so they have a visible presence.

A key element of the training has focussed on supporting peer mentors to understand what they can deal with and what they should refer on. Peer mentors meet regularly with the person who manages the programme. They sign confidentiality agreements, and are familiar with the college’s other support services, so they can, where appropriate make referrals. They recognise that their role is not to give advice but to listen and share experiences.

The peer mentors were passionate about their role and about the impact they have, recognising that it involves raising aspirations, empathising, listening and empowering individuals to make choices and decisions. They also acknowledged

that being a peer mentor has been a positive experience for them, providing valuable experience, as well as increasing self-confidence, and are confident that the experience will support them in their future lives.

A log is kept of all mentoring sessions, which is useful for evaluating the impact. The college is confident that the system has impacted positively on retention. Although it is a GFE, as a land based college it also has a residential component. As a result, it has worked hard to ensure that it can provide peer mentors who are both residential and non-residential. There are clear protocols however about when and where meetings can take place to secure the well-being of all involved and to ensure that it does not infringe on the personal life on the mentor.

Delegates responded very positively to the input from the peer mentors and it was clear that a number were interested in establishing similar systems in their own provision. The college has kindly provided **examples of some of the materials that have been developed to support the peer mentoring programme.**

Staff mentoring - General College of Further Education - Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology.

Pat Wilcox is the Programme Leader for Additional Learning Support at Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology. She oversees the provision of support across two campuses and manages a team of 6 Additional Support Co-ordinators (ASCs) and 10 Learning Facilitators.

Last year the college ran a one year, Level 2 mentoring course for staff, taught by one of the college's advanced learning coaches. Pat felt it was beneficial for her and some of the Additional Support Coordinators to undertake the course in order to enhance their support role. The members of the course provided mentoring for both students and staff during the year in order to develop their practice. The course focused on the development of reflective practice, appropriate questioning techniques, active listening, understanding learning styles and the use of inclusive practices. Through her participation on the course, Pat has developed a range of **high quality tools and resources** to support her practice, which she has kindly agreed to share. Although these were originally designed for use with tutors, they are arguably appropriate to any mentoring within an educational context including mentoring for LSAs.

The benefits of mentoring have been shown to have an impact on the mentor, the mentee and the organisation as a whole. Pat feels that as a mentor:

'I benefitted particularly by gaining a better understanding of people, saw an improvement in my communication and listening skills which has impacted positively on my practice, and appreciated the two way support afforded by a mentoring relationship'.

The mentee has the opportunity to focus on a particular area of their role and improve confidence, extend their knowledge of the organisation, tackle any issues of stress with workload and have someone to give a 'listening ear'. The benefits recognised at college are that there is now a group of trained mentors who can

provide continuity for staff, and that, along with the initial mentoring provided for new staff, this will contribute towards a strengthened and supportive organisational culture.

Although there is currently no formal mentoring scheme available to existing LSAs, this is something Pat hopes to implement in the future.

The college also provides opportunities for tutors and LSAs to undertake peer observations. As most tutors work within a certain area, they are encouraged to go and observe someone outside their area, and look for examples of effective practice, including alternative approaches and methods which they have not tried before which might be useful in their own practice. Peer observations, or shadowing opportunities, are not restricted to teaching sessions, but can be used to develop any aspect of practice. For example, some LSAs have observed a dyslexia tutor assessing a student, and afterwards were able to gain advice about approaches to working effectively with students with dyslexia, and had the opportunity to talk through the recommendations for support.

Web and desk based research – literature review

Research method

The specialist support undertook some web-based research to explore existing practice. A list of references and useful links can be found in Annex 5. This included literature, sites and examples from within education, and outside. The practice of shadowing for example is well developed in the field of both medicine and social work. The purpose of the literature review was not to summarise the research at an academic level, but rather to draw on it to inform the development of materials to support the implementation of mentoring, buddying and shadowing.

Findings

Whilst there was a wealth of literature relating to mentoring, both within education and outside, less was available relating to either shadowing or buddying.

There was however some useful and relevant literature in social work, for example, which clearly could be related to an educational setting:

“The most important requirements are that students focus on the service users’ experience and that they shadow the work of experienced practitioners. The expectations of the practitioners are that they provide opportunities for students to observe direct practice with service users. At its most basic, shadowing provides students with an opportunity to observe ‘social work in action’. They have the space to ask questions, make comparisons and reflect on their experience and that of service users. They are required to be active

learners but without the same responsibilities they will have in practice placements. Le Riche (2006)⁴

As part of their learning social work students are required to keep journals giving an account of their learning. Le Riche cites the work of Simmonds (1998) who argues that one of the central advantages of learning from being in the observer role in educational settings is that it encourages the development of reflective capacity in practice. It is worth noting here, that whilst teachers and tutors in further education are encouraged to be members of the Institute for Learning (IFL), and as such are expected to record and reflect on their CPD experiences and the implications for practice, the same level of expectation is not consistently applied to LSAs.

In medicine

“The perceived benefits of shadowing represent a process of learning how to behave and act in a new environment as a learner begins to perform a new role” Jones et al⁵ (2006)

As noted previously, there is a wealth of research within the field of education relating to mentoring, although most of this relates to the mentoring of new teachers by more experienced teachers and none was found which related specifically to LSAs. This would confirm our findings within the region – whilst a number of organisations do have established mentoring systems in place, few of these are consistently available to LSAs.

A further finding was also confirmed by the literature, that there is some confusion regarding terminology and what is meant by mentoring. It was clear in reviewing the literature relating to mentoring, that one of the greatest challenges relates to agreeing exactly what it is we mean when we use the term “mentor”. In researching the role, it is possible to come across a range of terminology, including coach, mentor, peer mentor and counsellor. A study by NFER⁶, makes a distinction between mentoring and coaching, defining mentoring as chiefly being concerned with ‘growing an individual’ both professionally and personally.... linked with professional and career development, and is somewhat characterised by an ‘expert–novice’ relationship” while coaching is defined with a narrower remit, and seen as relating to specific areas of performance and job outcomes. However, both anecdotal evidence gathered via the regional events and some of the literature would suggest

⁴ Le Riche, P (2006) *Practising Observation in Shadowing: Curriculum Innovation and Learning Outcomes in the BA Social Work* Social Work Education Vol. 25, No. 8, December 2006, pp. 771–784

⁵ Jones, A, Willis, S.C. McCardle, P and O’Neill, P. (2006) *Learning the house officer role: reflections on the value of shadowing a PRHO* Medical Teacher, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2006, pp. 291–293

⁶ Lord, P. Atkinson M. and Mitchell, H. (2008) *Mentoring and Coaching for Professional: A study of the research evidence. NFER*

that this distinction is not always clear, and that there is some potentially some blurring of roles. A Wang et al 7 (2010) for example refer to three distinct types of functions: psychosocial support (such as counselling, friendship), career-related support (such as, coaching, sponsorship), and role modelling.

For the sake of simplicity, we have chosen to use a definition which provides a consensus amongst the literature of what mentoring is, and which we hope is relatively self-explanatory.

“The pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with someone with less skilled or experienced with the mutually agreed goal of helping the less skilled person to develop their work related skills, knowledge and understanding. The relationship is centred on the development of skills, confidence and competence and is often referred to as a “learning conversation”. West Midlands Mentoring Guidance 2011

We found limited literature about the role of buddying, although what we found was positive about the benefits and impact. This comment, from an article focussing on mentoring, does however make interesting reading, suggesting that there are benefits to the nature and impact of support which can derive from more naturally occurring and therefore informal arrangements:

“Despite the potential benefits of formal mentoring programs, research suggests that formal mentoring relationships provide fewer mentoring functions to mentees than informal mentoring relationships..... This may occur because formal mentoring relationships are typically much shorter in duration and are formed based on organizations’ attempts to match the mentor’s and mentee’s shared interests or the mentee’s development needs, rather than mutual identification and attraction between the mentor and the mentee” Wang et al 2010⁸

The research points to the benefits not only for those being mentored, but also to the mentee, and indeed to the organisation. This was certainly confirmed informally amongst both the delegates at the second event who have experience of mentoring colleagues, and the “learner mentors” who presented on peer mentoring schemes established at their organisations – all of whom indicate that involvement in mentoring had contributed to self-confidence.

There is widespread agreement within the research that effective mentoring has a number of characteristic which might broadly be categorised as:

⁷ Wang, S. Noe, R.A and Tomlinson E.C (2010) *The Role of Mentor Trust and Prote´ge´ Internal Locus of Control in Formal Mentoring Relationships* Journal of Applied Psychology © 2010 American Psychological Association 2010, Vol. 95, No. 2, 358–367

⁸ Wang, S. Noe, R.A and Tomlinson E.C (2010) *The Role of Mentor Trust and Prote´ge´ Internal Locus of Control in Formal Mentoring Relationships* Journal of Applied Psychology © 2010 American Psychological Association 2010, Vol. 95, No. 2, 358–367

- Providing emotional and psychological support, and making mentees feel accepted and included;
- Making time for mentees, for example by having regular meetings and being 'available' for informal discussion at other times; and
- Allowing mentees an appropriate degree of autonomy to make decisions and to develop their own approaches.

It is interesting to note that furthermore, one of the most valued aspects of the work undertaken by mentors was lesson observation (both of and by the mentee) with subsequent opportunity to discuss the experiences and processes involved. (Hobson et al 2009)⁹ This would certainly provide support for the idea of both shadowing and peer observation.

Research also suggests, other things being equal, mentoring is more likely to be effective where mentors are provided with either additional release or non-contact time to help them prepare for and undertake the mentoring role. Additionally, it is further facilitated where timetabling allows mentors and mentees to meet together during the school day. This finding obviously has significant implications for use with LSAs for whom non-contact time is scarce.

Given the support for alternative approaches to CPD within the literature, it is perhaps surprising that these are not a more prevalent part of an organisation's approach to training and development. The literature identified a range of benefits, not only to individual but also to organisations. The research suggests that the use of such approaches enables organisations to:

- Draw on the expertise which exists and facilitate the sharing of best practice across the organisation;
- Support the professional development of new staff and staff new to the role;
- Aid recruitment and retention of staff;
- Contribute to the culture of a learning organisation;
- Promote team working;
- Provide effective CPD at relatively low cost. It is also relatively easy to implement – on site, no travel, and can be built in around staff schedules; and

⁹ Hobson, A.J, Ashby, P. Malderez, A. & Tomlinson, P *Mentoring beginning teachers: What we know and what we don't*. Teaching and Teacher Education 25 (2009) 207–216

- Provide CPD activity which is centred on the needs of both the staff team and the organisation, and therefore which is highly relevant and context specific.

Outputs - Four guidance documents

As noted above, a combination of desk and action based research was used to identify key factors of effective practice in relation to shadowing, mentoring, and buddying and the outcomes of this work formed the basis of the draft documents. The purpose of the guidance was to create relatively simple documents, in an accessible and editable format, which could be used by organisation to implement and or to formalise procedures for each or any of these approaches, if they are not already sufficiently in place and or embedded.

In addition to shadowing mentoring and buddying, discussion with practitioners had identified a further alternative approach to continuous, professional development, which, whilst given various names in different organisation, we have chosen to refer to as “Learn and Share”. This is not a well-established process in education, in the same way as perhaps mentoring is, although there are parallels in other professions.

“Learn and Share” can arguably be defined as a professional development tool which involves bringing staff together to share practice, experience and challenges in a semi structured environment with a view to developing, skills knowledge and understanding across the organisation. Although there is limited research relating to this, anecdotal evidence would suggest that a number of providers engage in this sort of activity, although they may have different names and slightly different practices. The process involves sharing practice and experiences with colleagues and engaging in an open dialogue or peer review to establish learning points and future actions to improve individual and organisational performance.

Drawing on a combination of desk and action based research, the project team produced some draft guidance for mentoring, shadowing, buddying and learn and share, along with some associated supporting documentation. Each of the guidance documents covers in simple terms:

- What it is?
- Why might you do it?
- Who would be involved?
- When might it be done?
- Where might it be done?
- How might it be done?

The ‘how it might be done’ section in particular was designed to provide organisations with a relatively straightforward blueprint as to how they might go about establishing the practice in their organisation, if it does not currently exist.

In undertaking initial research, we also discovered that while a number of organisations have systems in place, there are often informal and are not always effectively supported by documentation which would, for example, enable them to demonstrate the process and impact effectively to external stakeholders.

Accordingly, in addition to the initial guidance, we also produced the following:

- A shadowing activity development plan and log;
- A mentoring log;
- A mentoring agreement;
- A mentee development plan; and
- An Introduction to Mentoring PowerPoint – to introduce the concept and process to would be mentees.

The draft documents were shared with the delegates at the regional events, as well as with contacts at Weston College, MacIntyre and Abingdon and Witney Partnership College (MAP) and SENSE . These were amended in the light of feedback and are now available in **final versions** along with some **examples of effective practice** gathered from participants.

Use of Reflection to support CPD

Reflective practice is recognised by most professions as being key when it comes to improving one's professional practice. Although it has not been possible, within the scope of this project to produce guidance documents to support the use of reflection there is readily available guidance within the sector which can be drawn on to support practice. The Institute for Learning (IFL) for example has highlighted the process of reflection as being central to their vision of raising the performance of teachers in the lifelong learning sector, and provide much useful information to facilitate this process. Although much of this has been designed for tutors rather than LSAs, it can easily be used to support reflection irrespective of role or context.

As noted previously, the literature clearly identifies the benefits of reflection as a crucial element in CPD. Teachers and tutors are used to reflecting on training and development activities and typically log these and record their reflection with IFL. However, although some LSAs are members of IFL, this is not typically the case.

We have already identified a huge variation across the sector in relation to access to training and development for LSAs. Whilst clearly some form of reflection would be an integral and essential component of a Foundation degree for example, in the initial research (Simpson B. 2010) ¹⁰also found that there are some LSAs, typically on agency and/ or contracted hours only contracts who have little if any entitlement

¹⁰ ¹⁰ Simpson, B. (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support The views of Learning support assistants and their managers*, Natspec

to training. Anecdotal evidence gathered via the regional events would suggest that a significant proportion of LSAs had not received any formal training relating to effective reflection.

LSAs also fulfil a 'professional role' and it was felt that no matter what type of CPD they undertake whether it be the more traditional INSET, buddying, shadowing, or mentoring, or on-line learning as a means of accessing CPD, in order to gain maximum benefit they need to reflect on what they have learned, how they can apply it and what impact any changes to practice have had. As a result, as part of the first training event, we decided to include an input on reflection. It has also been recognised that reflecting with someone else and learning from the experience of others has significant value. Therefore we put these two ideas together and presented delegates with suggestions as to how they might encourage, support and record reflective practice through 'learn and share' meetings.

The input on reflection was based on [Gibbs model of reflection](#), and also, as noted above, drew on the approach to reflection outlined by IFL. There are examples of the blank and completed reflective diary used at the [first event are available](#) as well as some examples of [reflective diaries completed by delegates](#) as part of their between event development activity.

Use of e-learning technology to support CPD

The pre-event questionnaire, as noted previously had identified that a relatively small proportion of our sample had had opportunity to experience CPD through the use of e-learning technology. The initial research did however reveal some effective examples of this in practice (Faraday 2010¹¹), such as “Foundations for Growth” developed by the Priory Group and used by Farleigh College Frome. (O'Brien 2010¹²)

In addition, research into training and development by LSAs, reflected not only diversity within the population, but also a variation in the level of the skills and confidence in using technology. The learners we had spoken to however, had clearly identified the importance of the effective use of information technology in supporting both their learning and independence.

Furthermore, a key finding of the literature review undertaken for the initial research, and a wider finding of the whole Enhancement of Learning Support project, has been the need to widen the traditional view of learning support beyond that which it is often associated with, of direct support. There is a role for this clearly, but both the

¹¹ Faraday, S. (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support The training and development needs of learning support assistants. A literature review.* Natspec http://www.natspec.org.uk/fileadmin/Natspec_ELS_lit_review.pdf

¹² O'Brien, A. and O'Brien, K. (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support The training and development needs of learning support assistants. Findings and recommendations.* Natspec

learners spoken to as part of the initial research (Amos and Finch 2010¹³) and the literature (Faraday 2010) suggest that this is not always the most appropriate model of support:

In a review of evidence on the impact of support staff, Howes (2003)¹⁴ concluded that the way in which support was provided led to either inclusion or exclusion. Where support was provided for a group and for an individual in the context of the group, promoting interaction between disabled and non-disabled learners, it led to inclusion. In contrast, 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),¹⁵ it could lead to dependency, exclusion and stigmatisation. Although support staff were appointed to support learners, they could paradoxically inhibit their social relationships. (Faraday 2010)¹⁶

As a project team, we recognised the huge role that information technology can play in facilitating access to learning, not just for learners but also for staff. We were therefore keen to provide delegates with an effective means of accessing CPD, perhaps in short bursts.

We wanted to raise awareness amongst LSAs of the potential for using computer based resources, not only as a means of training and development, but also as an activity which could be undertaken in situations, where perhaps unexpectedly, a learner may not need direct support, thus providing a limited amount of "available time". We see this as a means of not only enhancing the skills and confidence of LSAs in using technology, but of using time effectively to facilitate training and development in flexible and potentially quite short chunks of time.

The Enhancement of Learning Support project has, over all aspects of the work, received outstanding support from JISC TechDis, who have provided input into a number of regional events, as well as providing access to numerous relevant and accessible information technology based resources. We therefore worked closely with them to identify a range of resources which we felt would be of relevance to the

¹³ Amos, R and Finch D. (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support The training and development needs of learning support assistants. The views of learners. Natspec.*

¹⁴ Howes, A. (2003). Teaching reforms and the impact of paid adult support on participation and learning in mainstream schools. In *Support for Learning • Volume 18 • Number 4 • 2003* pp147-153

¹⁵ Gershel, L. (2005). The special educational needs coordinator's role in managing teaching assistants: the Greenwich perspective. In *Support for Learning • Volume 20 • Number 2 • 2005* pp 69-70

¹⁶ Faraday, S. (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support The training and development needs of learning support assistants: A literature review. Natspec*

delegates. These were uploaded onto memory sticks and made available to all delegates registered for the first event. The resources included:

- **Staff packs** - A stand alone staff development pack which looks at the range of inbuilt accessibility tools in both Windows and Word;
- **Accessibility Essentials** - This is about creating and using documents in electronic formats and how to personalise their view in terms of font size, font type etc. It also has really useful tips like how different Views in Word give completely different accessibility benefits and how PDFs can be transformed in three clicks to a personalised view, even reading the content out loud;
- **Free Assistive Software** – a suite of applications to enhance and facilitate learning and teaching. They include text to speech software which can convert any amount of text to an MP3 format, presentation tools to enhance the use of a presentation and mind mapping software to facilitate organisation and planning; and
- **Sim Dis**- An excellent interactive overview of some of the barriers experienced by people with disabilities. A good way of either updating personal professional development or helping train colleagues.

In addition, the memory stick included a video by Lisa Featherstone and Alistair McNaught to introduce the resources and a link to an on line accessibility survey.

The memory stick [contents page includes links to the JISC Techdis](#) website and related resources. A copy of this can be found in Annex 6.

Events

First Event

As noted above, the initial research had identified that a lot of training for LSAs typically focuses on compliance. Very little is targeted specifically at the “real job”. When asked what training they had found useful, LSAs indicated alternative forms of CPD such as shadowing, mentoring and buddying. It also revealed however, that typically these were only available at induction, and rarely continued beyond. Feedback from managers provided a very similar picture

We had also identified the importance of reflection and the potential of information technology for CPD activity.

At the first event we therefore planned to explore these ideas through three workshops, operating as a round robin

- Learning from informal settings- the use of reflection.
- Learning through technology –using JISC TechDis resources via the memory stick.

- Learning from colleagues- sharing the draft resources developed for mentoring, shadowing, buddying and “learn and share”.

Delegates were asked to identify at least one approach which they might use/pilot/review between the first and second event and, having undertaken some form of development activity, provide feedback at the second event.

Second Event

At the second event, we took feedback from the delegates, shared experiences and also provided an input from learners at two different colleges (an Independent Specialist College and a Further Education College) about the successful implementation of a peer mentoring scheme, by student, for students. In addition, we were fortunate in having an input from Lisa Featherstone, at JISC TechDis, who provided information about some straightforward and simple technology resources which can be used to support learners. The focus of our strand has been one of ensuring that CPD is relevant and directly linked to the training and development needs of CPD, using alternative approaches to CPD as a means of addressing this. We were therefore fortunate to have an input from Kevin O’Brien from the SE region, which had been developing an online tool linked to the National occupational standards, the purpose of this tool is to enable LSAs to identify their skills, confidence and development needs, at an individual level, by working, often in facilitated groups to complete the on-line profiling tool.

Event outcomes and evaluation

The first event was due to take place on 30th November 2010. In terms of attracting delegates this was successful. Prior to our first planned event, we had 52 delegates signed up, of which two were from WBL, and we had representatives from all sectors, as the table below shows. As noted previously, a list of participating organisation can be found in [Annex 1](#). Our thanks go to all the delegates who attended the regional events for their enthusiasm, professionalism and valuable feedback.

By Provider	Registered	Attending 1 st event	Attending 2 nd event
Number of attendants	52 for first event 43 for second *	30**	40**
Number of Independent Specialist Colleges	10	6	5
Number of GFE	15	5	8
Number of Sixth Forms	2	1	0
Numbers of work based learning providers	1	1	0

Number of adult and Community	1	0	1
By Delegate	Registered	Attending 1st event	Attending 2nd event
Learning Support staff	25	14	16
Tutors	8	5	6
Managers	19	9	10
Other	LSIS -1 JISC TechDis- 1 Learners – 5 Educational Consultant -1	Total – 2 LSIS- 1 Educational Consultant -1	Total - 8 LSIS -1 JISC TechDis- 1 Learners – 5 Educational Consultant -1

**The total number of delegates registered exceeded 52, at 68, but after being unable to attend the first event largely due to poor weather, a number of those registered said they would no longer be attending the second event. The number 43 reflects the number of delegates who had confirmed they would be attending the 17th February second event.*

***These numbers do not include the project team (5)*

We used a combination of direct and indirect marketing, with some personal emails to established contacts, and were pleased to hit the target of 50% attendance by LSAs. However, we were very unlucky with the weather. A forecast of heavy snow all day resulting in us having to postpone our first event, and although we were able to re-schedule and provide information about the new date on the day we cancelled, the change in date not surprisingly meant that some of those registered were no longer able to attend. We are really fortunate in having great support from a project administrator provided by one of the lead colleges and she was able to confirm that at least 40 of the delegates originally registered intended to come to the rescheduled event.

On the re-scheduled date, however, yet again we were hit by heavy snow – from 7.30 until 9.30 there were blizzard like conditions, and this clearly had an impact on people just at the time when they would have been setting off, taking numbers on the day down to 30. An analysis of data not surprisingly shows that those who didn't attend had the greatest distances to travel.

This was not only disappointing, but presented a significant challenge. We had planned for delegates to review materials between events, and also wanted to ensure that people, not able to attend the first day, were able to access the resources prior to the second. Providing a catch up event for non-attendees was judged to be impractical within the timescales and so we decided to make a short video. This included a brief introduction by the specialist support, followed by an input by each of the workshop presenters. The link to this, and a memory stick containing all the resources was sent out to every registered delegate. In addition all

the resources and the video were uploaded onto the West Midlands page of the Natspec website.

The second event took place on February 17th. It was clear however, that despite the video and the provision of memory sticks, a numbers of providers were disinclined to attend the second of a two day event, when they had missed the first day. Eight of the providers, a total of 17 delegates, who had registered for the first event, but had not been able to attend, indicated they would be unable to attend the second day. This brought our expected numbers down to 35. An active marketing campaign then took place, and we attracted 5 new providers, reflecting 12 new delegates, which was very pleasing. However, one of the original providers received notice of inspection immediately prior to the event, and another 5 from 3 different providers, were not able to be released due to staffing shortages. This brought our expected numbers down to 43, and 40 actually attended on the day.

Evaluations

The feedback from both events was very positive. We collected 26 evaluation forms at the first event, from 30 delegates, and 28 from 40 at the second. An analysis of overall satisfaction indicated that for both events, 96% of those attending judged the event to be good or better.

Comments for the first event were very positive overall, with the following quotes being typical.

“A very informative day - Very useful information on the data stick and a great chance to talk to people from other colleges”

A couple of delegates commented that the room was a little cold, that they would have liked advance notice of car parking charges and that the arrangement for lunch did not fully support networking.

In response, for the second event, we sent delegates parking permits in advance, spoke to the venue about the room temperature and moved lunch to a different building. We also built in more time for discussion into the workshops.

Development activities between events

Clearly our numbers attending the first event were heavily affected by the snow, and this reduced the sample of potential “practitioner reviews” from the anticipated 52 to 30. The 30 delegates attending represented thirteen organisations, twelve of which indicated which activity/ies they would be undertaking between the events. Four chose to undertake “learn and share” meetings, three said they would undertake reflective journals; four said they would look at some of the draft guidance and three said they would look at the materials on the memory stick.

The planned timescales between events (just over two months) were already very tight, and the need to reschedule the second event, meant that participants only had just over 4 weeks to undertake any form of development activity, and fully implementing a system such as shadowing and mentoring was simply not possible.

As the snow had interrupted our first event, and also impacted on numbers for the second event, we had a higher preponderance of “new delegates” at the second event than we had initially anticipated – fourteen in total. This has clearly affected the degree to which the materials could be affected piloted and used. Nonetheless, it was pleasing to learn that so many of the original delegates had undertaken some form of development activity and found the approach they had used/reviewed to be of value.

Shadowing

In discussion it was clear that there was significant support for the practice of shadowing – practitioners clearly see the value, with one delegate for example, commenting “shadowing would have helped me when I was new”. As a result of the project, one college has introduced a shadowing system as a pilot. Another, which already had a shadowing system in place, reported that the process and associated documentation was relatively informal and they will be trying some of the paperwork in order to formalise the process. Time was short between the events, and although delegates were positive about the process the tight timescales had clearly impacted on implementation. One college, for example, that already had peer observation available for tutors, clearly recognises the benefits for LSAs, and would be keen to introduce it, but is still struggling to overcome some of the attendant challenges: “I feel we should clearly try and do this with LSAs now, but we have hit a stumbling block with the issue of timetabling.”

Reflective log

There was overall support for the idea of using some sort of log or diary to reflect and the four providers who had done so were positive about both the experience and the impact. One organisation has for example developed a reflective log based on the IFL model which it is using with new members of staff to find out what their experiences are.

Another provider has shared their reflective journal papers across both sites and encouraged staff to use them, but was not in a position to feedback on either take up or impact at the event. A further college has introduced the reflective diaries to a number of LSAs and nine of which submitted individual **anonymised reflective diaries**, two of which are included as examples.

Mentoring

Clearly to implement and evaluate a mentoring system would require much longer timescales than those available to us within the confines of the project. Nonetheless, two of the colleges had reviewed the mentoring paperwork and made minor suggestions for amendments. Another provided some **high quality materials from existing practice** which are very valuable, and could be applied to LSAs although they had previously only been used with tutors. One college has shared the mentoring paperwork with managers and has agreement in place to implement mentoring as a pilot from September 2011. Drawing on the mentoring paperwork,

another organisation has introduced personal development plans for LSAs which they hope to complete within 6 months.

Buddying

One college has reviewed the buddying paperwork and has planned to implement it with new staff members from April 2011. Another provider has introduced a buddy system and reports that it is working well. A questionnaire has been sent out to participants to ask for what improvements could be made to the process, and they are currently awaiting feedback on these. Although the buddying system has been successful, the delegate reported that it had been difficult to get Management involved in this area, and identified practical challenges associated with time.

Learn and share

There was tremendous enthusiasm for the idea of “learn and share” and following the first event, four providers have introduced “learn and share meetings” and report that these are very effective.

“The meetings are very empowering – sharing and talking – it has really helped working with some student issues”

In addition, a further organisation, Pershore College, which had effectively been undertaking informal learn and share meetings but had no formal records of it, has, as a result of the project, formalised the process. They have developed a log to keep a record of learn and share meetings, which they have kindly agreed to share, and now plan to review the process and impact more consistently.

Two colleges said that while there was tremendous support for the idea of a learn and share meeting, in practice, releasing staff to attend and finding common times when staff are available to gather was problematic. As a result they had independently arrived at the idea of setting up an on-line forum. Another college will be introducing a blog as a means of sharing information and supporting communication.

Memory sticks

The evaluations indicate that the JISC TechDis input was highly valued. Delegates were also very positive about the materials on the memory stick. Six delegates had used the memory stick to support CPD, and in one organisation an entire afternoon had been given over to using the memory sticks with a group of LSAs as a CPD activity. This had proved particularly successful, with staff relishing the opportunity to “have a go” and is something the provider in question planned to repeat. Amongst the group, there was recognition of the value of this, and a number of providers expressed an interest in undertaking a similar session.

Summary

The challenges of time, coupled by the impact of weather on the project has clearly affected our ability to robustly test the materials. Nonetheless, it is clear that there is

clear support for the idea of alternative approaches to CPD, and the development of draft guidance was both welcomed and valued. Being involved in the West Midlands regional development activities has definitely caused people to review their practice and give more thought to the training and development of LSAs than has perhaps previously been the case. The following comment is typical:

“This is what I want my CPD to be about. We need to do an audit and introduce an in depth induction procedure, including shadowing, buddying and mentoring”

There was also recognition of the value of joint training *“what we need is joint training with tutors.”*

A number of providers attending the regional events identified that they already have effective systems in place to support alternative approaches to CPD for teachers. They have now recognised that these could be adapted and offered relatively easily to support LSAs. The main infrastructure is in place, it is simply a matter of prioritisation and implementation. As a direct result of participating in this project we are aware of at least three providers who are now actively reviewing their approaches to CPD to ensure that these opportunities are consistently being made available to learning support staff.

Impact

As part of the evaluation form, delegates were asked to comment on the impact of being involved in the project. Of the 25 who completed this section of the form, 19 indicated that it had, 4 indicated that they felt that the impact was pending and only 2 indicated that it had not. Their comments would however suggest that this is a function of timescales rather than anything else, with one commenting *“Not yet- the project is just being set up”* and another saying *“not yet but feel it will eventually”*

The table which follows provides a transcript of the comments received.

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>YES – Have looked at current processes and how these can be adapted/developed. In the process of developing and shadowing programme for new staff.</i>• <i>Useful information to pass onto SMT and Quality Team.</i>• <i>Plan to use it to identify areas to build on; a list of action points.</i>• <i>Looking into changing structure of support workers, improving development at our organization.</i>• <i>Have some good resources to take back to share within my team especially the dyslexia coordinator.</i>• <i>Will provide opportunities for developments.</i>• <i>I have not been involved in project from the beginning but have picked up some valuable hints, tips of good practice about approaching CPD.</i>• <i>Prompted me to find out from LSAs at my college what they find useful/works well and have a say in how we can improve and move forward.</i>• <i>I have encouraged people to get together and discuss problems.</i>• <i>Learning about IT Resources, sharing approaches and good practice.</i> |
|--|

- *I will adopt practices to the benefit of staff and learners, work with my managers to incorporate these.*
- *Learn and share started, will implement peer mentoring.*
- *Encourage a more analytical approach to CPD.*
- *It has allowed me to feel more involved and my expressions and opinions regarding these two events have been recorded and acknowledged.*
- *I have been looking at developing the paperwork to support shadowing and mentoring of new staff, which will take place after half term. I have also been involved with other staff to look at the resources.*
- *Gained useful information from workshop.*

Findings and Conclusions

The following represents a summary of the key findings gained through a combination of desk and action based research, substantiated by feedback and input from delegates, collected via the regional events.

As noted elsewhere, currently, much of the training available for LSAs focuses on compliance, which does not always support the training and development needs of LSAs in supporting learning and promoting independence. We know from talking to LSAs that what they value is context based alternative approaches to training such as buddying, mentoring, and shadowing.

It is clear, both within the literature and from the regional events, that there is a wealth of expertise and knowledge within organisations which can be usefully and effectively shared through alternative approaches to CPD, such as mentoring shadowing, buddying and Learn and share. We referred to it as “The Gold in your coffee cup conversations.” By this, we were referring to those often snatched and informal conversation between staff which can be the source of incredibly useful and sometimes “practice changing” information. Despite the value of these, organisations do not always have effective mechanisms in place for sharing these, or indeed for recognising the value and capturing the impact. Learn and share meetings can provide an invaluable way of formalising the sharing of relevant information to support effective practice. We know that facilitating time for these can still be problematic and although a number of organisations had embraced the idea with enthusiasm, one delegate commented,

“People have still been having discussions over coffee as there is not enough time to hold meetings.”

There is more to training and development than courses and qualifications. Clearly there is a place for qualifications and LSAs do want to be recognised professionally and valued for their role, and clearly achieving a qualification is one way to achieve this. However, the early research (O’Brien 2010)¹⁷ revealed that there although there

¹⁷ O’Brien, A. and O’Brien, K. (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support The training and development needs of learning support assistants. Findings and recommendations.* Natspec

are a galaxy of qualifications and accreditation routes, very often there was not a clear rationale why providers chose one route over another. Often the only route currently open to LSAs is a teaching qualification and/or a literacy/numeracy qualification. Alternative approaches to CPD, such as mentoring shadowing, buddying and “Learn and share” meetings can provide an invaluable way of formalising the sharing of relevant information to support effective practice. Given that we know that LSAs appreciate context based approaches to CPD, it is important that providers not only offer a range of CPD options, but recognise and value the impact such approaches can have.

If, however LSAs are to take full advantages of the training and development opportunities provided for them, it is important that they are provided with support, time and opportunity to reflect on their training and development experiences, and the implications for practice. We also know, from the original research, that time to meet, plan and train alongside tutors is also an important element of securing effective practice.

Technology can play an important role in supporting LSAs to access CPD. Developing skills and confidence in using technology requires both access to technology and time to practice. As an outcome of attending the first event, one provider had arranged a ‘hands on’ training day, for LSAs, enabling them to practice and develop skills and confidence in using some of the resources loaded onto the memory stick. The provider reported that this was very well received by staff and a further session is planned.

Alternative approaches to CPD can be both cost effective and relatively easy to implement. Although the research indicates, for example, that mentoring is most effective when staff are provided with time to undertake the role, the cost is for staff time. There are no external course costs or travel expenses or time. Activities such as a learn and share meeting can be built into the day. They can be highly effective at cascading both effective practice, and cascading any training as well as providing a forum to discuss and agree strategies for addressing areas for development or issues and concerns. As noted previously, there are also potential saving in terms of both staff retention and staff skills.

Recommendations to support the use of alternative approaches to CPD

For Learning Support Assistants (LSAs)

- Find out what alternative approaches are available in your organisation, for example, buddying, mentoring, learn & share.
- If you are an experienced member of staff, volunteer to become a mentor or buddy, to shadow or to be shadowed.

- If you are a new member of staff, ask for a buddy and /or mentor.
- Use the four [guidance documents](#) to help you understand what alternative approaches to CPD, such as shadowing, mentoring, buddying and learn and share involve and how you might contribute.
- Understand more about how to use technology to support your learners and your own CPD by using the [JISC TechDis resources](#).
- Make the most of training and development activities by finding some time to reflect on your training and development. Share what you think with colleagues and managers to make future training more effective and relevant. Use the [reflective journal](#). It will help you get started and save you time.

For organisations

- Review the alternative approaches your organisation currently offers and consider providing buddying, shadowing, mentoring and /or learn and share, if these are not already available to LSAs.
- Save time in implementation by using the [guidance documents](#) to support you in establishing the systems you need.
- Invest time and resources in the training and development of your LSAs, as highly skilled LSAs enable your organisation to be inclusive and also improve outcomes for learners.
- Shadowing, mentoring, buddying, and learn and share are staff development tools that improve outcomes, are valued by staff and are cost effective. Get more impact from your training budget by formally including these in your overall training and development plan and allocating a proportion of both time and resources to alternative approaches to CPD.
- Gather evidence about the benefits for your organisation by undertaking a small pilot. Once you can measure the impact, roll it out.
- Support improvement in quality and outcomes by making time for learning support assistants to meet and share ideas about effective practice.
- Improve staff skills and confidence in using information learning technology (ILT) by making time for them to practice – a “hands on” session can be really valuable.
- Establish and or use partnerships to facilitate collaborative CPD and the sharing of effective practice, and ensure these provide opportunities for LSAs to meet, share practice and train with other LSAs doing similar roles in different contexts. Consider the use of conferencing technology to reduce travel time and make it easier for staff to share ideas and practice.

For Government bodies and support agencies

Continue to promote the status, training and development and value of learning support assistants by:

- Supporting the development of partnerships to facilitate collaborative CPD and the sharing of effective practice, and ensure that these provide opportunities for LSAs to meet, share practice and train with other LSAs doing similar roles in different contexts.
- Supporting the professionalisation of the role by encouraging the development of appropriate qualifications and an effective career progression route alongside the use of alternative approaches to CDP.
- Promoting the training and development of learning support assistants, by encouraging providers to use a range of methods which includes alternative approaches to CPD such as those exemplified in this report.

Annex 1: Provider Acknowledgments

Our thanks go to all the delegates from the providers/organisations listed below for their contributions and enthusiasm

Birmingham Metropolitan College	Queen Alexandra College
City College Birmingham	Regent College
City of Wolverhampton College	Royal National College for the Blind
Derwen College	SENSE
Glasshouse College	Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology
Homefield College	Shrewsbury Sixth Form College
Jisc TechDis	South Birmingham College
JLT Training	South Staffordshire College
K & A Associates	Strathmore College
Loppington College	Telford College of Arts and Technology
LSIS	Walford & North Shropshire College
MacIntyre Charity	Walsal College
*MAP College	Weston College
Pershore College	

*MAP College is MacIntyre Abingdon and Witney Partnership College

Annex 2: Individual Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the individuals below who provided us with time, support and expertise.

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Marjorie Featherstone, Derwen College

Kirsty Griffiths, Peer Mentor, Derwen College

Joan Hickman, Derwen College

Jodie Hughes, Peer Mentor, Derwen College

Sam Mayhew, Weston College

Alistair McNaught, JISC TechDis

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Dan Purton, Peer Mentor, Walford and north Shropshire College

Ann Ruthven, LSIS

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Annex 3: Project team

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Walford and North Shropshire College

Annex 4: Summary analysis of pre-event questionnaire

West Midlands Alternative Approaches to CPD pre-event questionnaire

Name: Organisation: Job Role: Contact email

I am happy/not happy for my email address to be shared with other participants to support the development of a regionally based community of practice.

We are very keen to gather practitioner views and experiences and also to share existing effective practice. Where you mark with an 'X' to indicate that you have experience of a particular approach and particularly where you feel it has been beneficial, could you also please mark with an 'X' to indicate whether you/ your organisation might be prepared to share that experience/practice with us. This might be a chat on the phone, or allowing us to share your documentation.

Formal/Structured CPD Methods						
(Please mark with an 'X' as applicable)	I have no experience of this method of CPD but think it:		I have experience of this method of CPD and think it is:			
Type of CPD	would be beneficial	would have little benefit	Very beneficial	of some benefit	not beneficial	I would be prepared to share my experiences/practice
Working with a mentor as part of a formal structured programme	8	1	5	2		3
Working with a buddy as part of a formal structured programme - (2 no answer)	6	2	4	1		2
Shadowing a colleague as part of a formal structured programme (1 no answer)	8		5	2		4
Shadowing a learner as part of a formal structured programme (1 No Answer)	8		6		1	

Peer observation (2 No Answer)	4	2	7	1		5
Please add any other formal methods that you can think of and respond as above						

Informal/Less Structured CPD Methods

(Please mark with 'X' as applicable)	I have no experience of this method of CPD but think it:		I have experience of this method of CPD and think it is:			I would be prepared to share my experiences/practice
	would be beneficial	would have little benefit	Very beneficial	of some benefit	not beneficial	
Type of CPD						
Team or group meetings where you share ideas and best practice as part of a formal structured programme (1 No answer)	3		11	1		4
Working informally with peers to share ideas and best practice (1 No Answer)	2		12	1		
Networking with others outside your organisation face-to-face (2 no answer)	7		6	1		1
Undertaking action research (3 no answer)	11		1	1		
Networking with others outside your organisation on-line (2 no answer)	9	1	3	1		
Please add any other less formal methods that you can think of and respond as above						

IT Based CPD Methods

(Please Mark with 'X' as applicable)	I have no experience of this method of CPD but think it:	I have experience of this method of CPD and think it is:
--------------------------------------	---	---

Type of IT based CPD	would be beneficial	would have little benefit	Very beneficial	of some benefit	not beneficial	I would be prepared to share my experiences/practice
Accessing on-line courses (e-learning) (1 no answer)	7	3	3	2		
Using forums or social networks (3 no answer)	6	1	3	3		
Using video or teleconferences (2 no answer)	6	5	2	1		
Please add any other methods that you can think of and respond as above						

Our initial research has suggested that often the focus of traditional training is compliance related. Please complete the table below, giving us an indication of the key focus of the formal training courses you have attended.

Traditional Training						
(Please Mark with 'X' as applicable)	I have no experience of this method of CPD but think it:		I have experience of this method of CPD and think it is:			
Type of CPD	would be beneficial	would have little benefit	Very beneficial	of some benefit	not beneficial	Please indicate the focus of training attended
Attending traditionally delivered 1-day or half-day courses delivered in house as part of your organisation's staff development programme (1 no answer)	1		12	2		Replies typed at the end of this page .
Attending traditionally delivered 1-day or half-day courses provided by an external organisation (1 no answer)	1		10	4		Replies typed at the end of this page.
Accredited courses which lead to a qualification (1 no answer)	1		11	2		

Please consider the barriers outlined below and respond as to their significance in accessing CPD

Barriers to CPD			
Barrier	Does not present a barrier	Presents some barrier	Presents a significant barrier
Funding (4 no answer)	3	7	2
Cover to be released to undertake CPD activities (1 no answer)	7	6	2
The nature of my contract i.e. term-time only (1 no answer)	11	3	1
Time to undertake CPD activities (1 no answer)	2	12	1
Something about attitude but I don't know how to express it (5 no answer)	6	2	3
Please add any other barriers that you feel exist and respond as above			

CPD Sessions relating to support learners with disabilities not being made mandatory.			1
Staff having to travel from different sites to take part in CPD activities		1	
In house staff members delivering CPD activities		1	
Logistics of organising and implementing training for team as a whole due to the size		1	
Duplication of information given of CPD		1	

Please add any other information or comments about barriers to CPD below:

Thank you for taking the time to complete and return this form. Your responses will be invaluable in helping us plan the day and develop resources. We look forward to working with you.

Answers to Type of CPD

Special needs/internal training specific to college.

Some training is organised by myself/line-manager for Learning Support staff and some is compulsory in house.

Awareness training on Autistic spectrum conditions, Mental Health, VI/HI, how to access teaching resources related to additional support needs.

Special Needs

Voluntary and compliance related

Annex 5: References and Useful Links

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CILIP Mentor Scheme Guidelines and Associated documents

<http://www.cilip.org.uk/filedownloadslibrary/qualifications/mentor%20scheme%20guidelines%20080806.pdf>

<http://www.cilip.org.uk/jobs-careers/qualifications/cilip-qualifications/mentor-scheme/pages/mentoringguidelines.aspx>

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Middlesex University (2005) *Work Shadowing*
http://www.mdx.ac.uk/Assets/work_shadowing.pdf

O'Brien, A. and O'Brien, K. (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support The training and development needs of learning support assistants. Findings and recommendations. Natspec*

People First *Useful Information on introducing a buddy system*

[http://www.people1st.co.uk/webfiles/Apprenticeships/Young%20Apprenticeships/Employer%20Docs/Useful Information on Introducing a Buddy System.pdf](http://www.people1st.co.uk/webfiles/Apprenticeships/Young%20Apprenticeships/Employer%20Docs/Useful%20Information%20on%20Introducing%20a%20Buddy%20System.pdf)

Saca, S. (2009) *How can mentoring and buddying schemes aid integration into the host society? (The Netherlands)*

http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/files/pdf/pmi/buddying_holland_report.pdf

Skills for Life Improvement Programme. *Mentoring in Education: The mentor as critical friend*

http://sflip.excellencegateway.org.uk/PDF/D2-1%20Coaching%20&%20Mentoring%20handbook_V3_240107_HTFINAL.pdf

Simpson, B. (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support The views of Learning support assistants and their managers, Natspec*

Teachers Development Agency (TDA) *The National framework for Coaching and Mentoring*

<http://www.tda.gov.uk/cpd-leader/support-tools/mentoring-coaching-framework.aspx>

Annex 6: Contents page for memory stick with links to Jisc TechDis resources



Try it out!

Training resources from JISC Techdis

These resources are local versions of the resources that can be found on the JISC TechDis website. That means that you **don't need Internet connectivity to access these** – so long as you can plug your USB stick into a computer you can do a bit of on-the-job training!

Link to the resource on the memory stick	Potential benefits to LSAs / learners
Accessibility Essentials 1 (Office 2003 version)	This is about reading documents in electronic formats and how to personalise them in terms of font size, font type etc. It also has really useful tips like how different Views in Word give completely different accessibility benefits and how PDFs can be transformed in three clicks to a personalised view, even reading the content out loud. This link is for organisations with Office 2003 or earlier.
Accessibility Essentials 1 (Office 2007 version)	This is about reading documents in electronic formats and how to personalise them in terms of font size, font type etc. It also has really useful tips like how different Views in Word give completely different accessibility benefits and how PDFs can be transformed in three clicks to a personalised view, even reading the content out loud. This link is for organisations with Office 2007 or earlier.
SimDis	This resource is an excellent interactive overview of some of the barriers experienced by people with disabilities. A good way of either updating your own staff development or helping train colleagues.
StaffPacks	These include a range of training modules aimed at different roles within an organisation. Each module has a presentation complete with teaching notes, icebreakers, activities etc. Key modules for LSAs include Accessible e-Learning; Benevolent Bill - What Microsoft® does for Accessibility; Dyslexia and the Use of

	Assistive Technology and Introduction to Assistive Technology within a Learning Environment.
WatchWords	Created by deaf learners and tutors at Sussex Downs College, this is an excellent resource for raising awareness of issues affecting deaf learners. An interactive resource full of practical guidance and videos of good and bad practice.

You can also self assess your department's awareness of some of the resources that help make a difference to learner experiences using our online accessibility self evaluation at <http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/oases>. *You need an Internet connection to do this survey.*

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