

## Case study 1

### Oaklands College

#### Management of Change

#### Learning/Student Support Assistant Co-ordination

### Background

Oaklands College is a large General FE College that includes a large and diverse discrete provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or learning difficulties; including those with profound and complex learning difficulties (at a dedicated centre), mental health needs, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Emotional and Behavioural Disorders and those who are preparing for paid employment. Classes are delivered across three campuses and in two satellites centres including a medium secure facility run under Home Office directives. Overall there are four hundred learners who are part of the College's LLDD provision.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Young Persons Learning Agency (YPLA) will confirm that there is no other General Further Education College in the UK providing a comparable breadth and range of curricula, which makes it unique in providing a truly inclusive educational experience for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

A significant proportion of learners travel from outside the College's normal catchment area because other providers are unable to offer a curriculum that meets their individual needs. There are a significant number of learners who have benefitted from the Improving Choice project – which originated in the East of England but now being rolled out nationally, which enables learners who would have previously had to go to out-of-county residential placements to access provision closer to home.

Within the general college over 900 learners are supported on a wide range of provision with a broad spectrum of learning difficulties and disabilities and including learners with literacy, numeracy or second language needs. The area has learners with complex learning requirements who have also benefited from the Improving Choice project and also includes those learners with learning difficulties who have progressed to mainstream; including supporting 'blended' learning with dual led mixed ability classes including those learners on the Autistic Spectrum. Support is delivered in a range of ways including in-class support by learning support assistants or by

communication support workers, one to one support and assessments by specialist support tutors and literacy, language or numeracy support staff. Learners may also receive assistive technology training or be supported in a small group or workshop setting.

## **The Issue**

Student support is provided by Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), who chiefly provide support to learners in mainstream college, and Student Support Assistants (SSAs) who typically provide discrete programme support, although inevitably the edges do blur where learners progress to mainstream.

The requirement for both Learning and Student Support Assistants has increased rapidly over the last three years causing concerns about sustaining the quality of support and ensuring that learners continue to receive a bespoke learning experience.

There was a drive within college to ensure that Additional Learning Support (ALS) funding was divided more evenly between mainstream and discrete LLDD provision which, together with an increase in the complexity of the learning needs of prospective learners on mainstream courses, led to a sharp expansion in the levels of staffing and volume of support within the college as a whole

In recent years the recruitment process for LSA/SSAs has resulted in increased applications from a younger age group, most of whom are graduates, more experienced highly qualified candidates and college learners who have gained a taste for support from working in SSA/LSA roles as part of their course or others who did not have any specialist experience but a desire to work within learning support.

The sheer size and rapid expansion of such teams, the diversity of their makeup and the more complex requirements of learners posed considerable challenges. LSAs/SSAs required development that was focused, supervision and support that was consistent and appropriate to need.

Overall there was a requirement for a change in order to continue delivering support that ensured responsiveness to learner need and resulted in a quality learner experience.

The above also gave the college the responsibility to nurture, skills match and support the new staff, whilst developing their skills, recognizing their roles and responsibilities and increasing their profile and status within the college.

## **The approach**

### **Recruitment**

Job descriptions were reviewed and revised to reflect accuracy of role and requirements.

Co-ordination roles were defined and appointments made.

Learners on vocational courses such as Public Services and Sports Studies were given opportunities to work supporting learners as part of their course and vacancies were promoted within the vocational areas.

Dual advertising campaigns/joint interviews between discrete and mainstream ensured consistency and correct placement of applicants.

Training needs were identified at interview to inform planning for the induction process, in order that the new cohort of staff were qualified in and aware of the essential elements of the role.

Cross college staff inset days were used to deliver a more tailored package of training, appropriate to need.

### **Induction and mentoring**

Specialised induction included clarity of role (booklets and packs specific to the areas, developed by the existing support staff to ensure requirements and expectations of the role, were clear prior to them starting and addressed as part of induction)

Initial staff development was delivered as appropriate and additional training materials/ guidance made available on Oaklearn (College VLE)

Mentoring partnerships were established as appropriate throughout the year.

Shadowing and peer observation opportunities were established early in the academic year and followed up, with outcomes disseminated to the staff team in order to share good practice.

Induction and mentoring was supplied by Advanced Skills Practitioners and more senior LSAs/SSA's.

Observation feedback sheets focusing on support were devised to monitor quality and recognize and inform good practice and used in addition to the corporate Observation of Teaching and Learning (OTL).

### **Staff development**

Development in addition to the corporate requirements was listed and a programme established. E.g. Approach training, epilepsy training, safe guarding, gastronomy and peg feeding, emergency tracheotomy care, administration of oxygen and suctioning, feeding awareness and of course lifting and handling.

Where possible existing staff delivered training; thus allowing for more immediate, cost effective delivery, with real life reference.

Learners were consulted and involved in development and delivery of training where possible.

New staff that came with a specialism/interests were encouraged to develop their talents appropriately e.g. a law graduate attended Disability Hate Crime course and in turn raised awareness at the college.

Vocational specialists were trained to deliver to college teams e.g.

Specialist training delivered by the physiotherapist, nurses practitioners and osteopath.

Shared staff development between mainstream LSAs and discrete SSAs and observations and peer mentoring were encouraged across different teams

All LSAs were given individual training sessions in Assistive Technology as appropriated to their experience and to the nature of the learners they would be supporting so that they could identify opportunities for using the technology and model its use to both learners and teaching staff in the vocational areas.

Existing staff in the team provided training for LSAs on working with learners with specific learning difficulties, deaf awareness, Mental Health Awareness.

Materials were developed by the staff team and shared on the college VLE

### **Co-ordination**

Co-ordinators were appointed from the already established staff team, drawing on their experience in the field.

Co-ordinators gradually assumed responsibility for the line management of the majority of SSAs/LSAs along with identifying and organizing training, mentoring, performance reviews etc.

Co-ordinators have also assisted in the assessments for applicants and work closely with staff in vocational areas as a vital point of contact whose expertise is recognized and valued.

### **Timescales**

The changes took place over the last three years and are still work in progress.

The increase and diversity of learner need continues to required responsive training programmes.

### **The outcomes**

The above development has resulted in a confident staff team, who have qualifications and 'field' experience able to meet the varying demands of a challenging cohort of learners.

The continued improvement in learners' support has reflected in the quality of delivery of teaching and learning throughout the college.

There is recognition of the value of support staff throughout the college which has raised both the profile and the status of the role; they are recognized as 'experts'.

The learners played a vital role in training the staff teams. The ethos of consulting learners at every opportunity to ensure their voices were heard was vital; offering a measure of the effectiveness of support provided.

There has been a gradual erosion of barriers between mainstream and discrete delivery which will offer opportunities for further development in the future.

LSA/SSA Induction packs have been shared with feeder schools for visiting staff on collaborative programmes to ensure clarity and consistency of delivery.

Feedback from outside agencies has been sought and fed back to teams to inform further training and possible sharing of good practice.

Accuracy of matching, skills, knowledge and experience has resulted in staff being placed appropriately with groups/individuals they really want to work with.

## Case Study 2



### St Elizabeth's College

#### A whole team approach to developing Individual Development Plans

#### Background

St Elizabeth's College is a residential Independent Specialist College for young people with learning disabilities and difficulties. Learners have a “waking day” curriculum which includes independent living skills, vocational work placements and embedded Skills for Life, delivered in context during the day and in the evenings as appropriate. The learners are tenants in their own accommodation and much learning takes place within their home setting. The learners are supported throughout the day by Independence and Curriculum Tutors, who lead on sessions such as Home Management or Shopping. The Independence and Curriculum Tutors are dual qualified, holding NVQs in Health and Social Care and at least Level 3 PTTLS. They are the equivalent to LSAs in other contexts. Senior Curriculum Tutors, who have full teaching qualifications, lead the formal college sessions, such as Media and Current Affairs as well as community based vocational sessions.

Each learner has a Key Tutor, who is an Independence Tutor, who is responsible for setting their learner’s Individual Development Plan (IDP) targets to cover the waking day curriculum and long term goals. They are supported by Senior Curriculum Tutors to set the targets and review progress. There has been significant staff training on setting SMART targets and using the targets to plan sessions that fully meet the individual needs of each learner.

Historically progress against the learners’ targets was commented on by Tutors after each session, by hand writing onto a document which listed out all of these targets. These comments were collated by the Senior Tutors in order to prepare Progress Reports, normally three times a year.

#### The Issue

During 2009 and 2010 tutors began to feedback to management that they were struggling with the amount of paperwork that this process involved. This occurred particularly during feedback discussions after session observations. Staff independently began to explore ways to improve the system. For

instance, one group of Independence Tutors designed another form and shared this with College Management.

In addition the Senior Curriculum Tutors felt that the current system for writing Progress Reports was too burdensome and did not accurately reflect the whole of the learners' experiences. During whole staff training in February 2010 all tutors were given the opportunity to feedback in general on the processes.

Overall it was felt that:

- Learners had too many targets;
- Targets tended to concentrate on Independent Living Skills, leaving significant aspects of the curriculum, such as community vocational work placements, without targets;
- Targets were often too specific, reducing flexibility in setting learning objectives;
- The written comments on targets were often repetitive, as there might not be anything new to say about how the learner was getting on against them;
- Summarising progress to write the content of reports was burdensome, as there were so many sheets of paper with several comments on each;
- The system would not support the introduction of Foundation Learning and accreditation for Independent Living Skills; and
- Therapy targets were on the IDP, but not always brought through to session planning.

### **How we worked to improve the system**

During May and June 2010 there was extensive work by the Vice Principal with the Lead Senior and Senior Curriculum Tutors regarding the processes and paper work around setting IDP targets and writing Progress Reports.

The aim was to increase the quality of formative assessment comments whilst reducing the amount of paperwork Tutors have to complete during the day and to improve the target setting. In addition we wanted to improve the ability for Key Tutors and their managers to track learner progress.

The key changes are:

- 1) Each learner has two IDP folders, one held at the College Academic Base and the other on the learner's bungalow;
- 2) Broader targets are now grouped into five areas: Independent Living Skills, Personal Development, Skills for Life, Vocational Skills and Health, Leisure and Community. There are more than 3 targets in each section;
- 3) Therapy targets and guidance are included at the front of the folders, so that they are easily accessible, using the same format as the other targets;

- 4) Tutors set Specific Learning Objectives at each session that allow for small steps towards the broader targets;
- 5) A formative comment is made on this sheet, which is kept in the folder, allowing Tutors to easily review on-going progress; and
- 6) Learner background information provided on a separate sheet, to include any information regarding learning styles or strategies.

The new documents are attached.

### **Key observation regarding managing change and responsiveness to tutors' feedback**

Crucial to the successful change in the system was Tutors' confidence in speaking to managers about their problems and management's willingness to listen and take on board these comments. Secondly Tutors' views were sought throughout the process. The idea of a folder and the final paperwork was suggested by one of the Senior Curriculum Tutors, not management.

There were two sets of staff training during which the new paperwork and processes were shared with the Independence Tutors. During these sessions, Tutors were able to feedback on their initial thoughts and several suggestions were carried forward into the final system. For instance, changing boxes to prompt Tutors to sign as well as date their formative comments.



## Individual Development Plan Front Sheet

**Learner's Name:**                      **Key Tutor:**

**Period:**            Oct 2010 to Jan 2011

**Date:** 25/10/2010

<b>No.</b>	<b>Independent Living Skills</b>
1.	Complete all tasks in home management to an acceptable standard.
2.	Store food appropriately (closing cupboard doors and paying attention to use-by dates and quantities).
<b>No.</b>	<b>Personal Development</b>
3.	Ask for help from staff when needed.
4.	Focus on the task in hand.
5.	Listen to staff/ learners and recognise other people's personal space.
<b>No.</b>	<b>Skills for Life</b>
6.	Use ICT to search for, select and use information
7.	Use written words and phrases to record or present information
8.	To recognise the value of notes and coins.
<b>No.</b>	<b>Vocational Skills</b>
9.	To work with others.
10.	To follow instructions to complete task
<b>No.</b>	<b>Community/Leisure/Health</b>
11.	Make a positive choice about how he occupies his free time (i.e. not the computer all the time).

# St Elizabeth's College Learner Individual Target Sheet

Name:

Date: November 2010

IDP No 1

**Curriculum Strand:** Independent Living Skills

**Target:** To complete tasks in my morning routine (e.g. getting dressed, brushing hair etc.)

Specific Learning Objective	Formative Comments	Date/Sign

**St Elizabeth's College**  
**Individual Development Plan**  
**Information Sheet**

<b>Learner:</b>	<b>Date of Birth:</b>	<b>Address:</b> Jubilee House
<b>IDP Number: 1</b>	<b>Period From:</b> October 2010	<b>Period To:</b> January 2011
<b>Key Tutor:</b>	<b>Senior Tutor:</b>	

**Long Term Goal:** To take a full part in the college programme and develop the skills and behaviours for future, adult-life.

**Pen Portrait:**

... is warm, confident and friendly and enjoys a range of leisure activities including bowling, cinema, swimming, football, music, dancing and parties. She has had a successful work placement at a local shop and enjoys horticulture and beauty.

... has significant needs, particularly in the area of communication. In general she is able to participate fully in learning activities, but at times she becomes frustrated.

... is an enthusiastic communicator even though she has a limited ability to "speak". She uses a range of strategies to communicate with others including actions, Makaton signing and finger spelling.

The Speech and Language Therapist reports that ... is reliant on context and visual clues to interact with others, take part in discussions and follow instructions.

**Key Assessment information: (eg Skills for Life Levels, Learning Styles, Additional Support Needs)**

.. has severe learning difficulties, communication difficulties, speech impairment, negative behaviours, dysplastic right kidney.

If she is under pressure she will find it harder and will put her head down and hide her eyes at times. In addition ... requires continuing support to develop her social skills as she can greet strangers inappropriately.

**Brief programme details**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Morning</b>	<b>Afternoon</b>
<b>Mon</b>	Cultural Studies Rm 1	Media Studies Rm 1
<b>Tue</b>	Drama	Sports and Games
<b>Wed</b>	Cultural Studies Rm 1	Home management
<b>Thur</b>	Media studies	Adventure Service Challenge – Rm 3
<b>Fri</b>	Shopping	Jewellery

<b>Therapy</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Time</b>
Speech & Language	Thursday	3p.m.
Multi-sensory		
Social & Personal Relationships	Wednesday	10.30 to 11a.m.
Occupational		
Psychology		
Physiotherapy		

Social Enterprises	Day	Time
Ash Vale		
Orchard Project		
Drawing Room		
Jewellery	Friday	p.m.
Owl		

<p>Additional relevant information</p>
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## Case study 3

### HMP Wayland/A4e

#### Training offenders to become learning support assistants

HMP Wayland decided to develop training so that offenders could become learning support assistants. They felt this would both enhance their own teaching and learning and also open up employment opportunities for offenders on release.

The A4e team marketed the course to prisoners, discovered there was interest, registered with the awarding body, utilised qualified teaching staff's specialisms and designed resources to meet the curriculum requirements whilst tailoring it for the environment.

This course has proved very successful in offering a 'life changing' programme for many prisoners. Students who have undertaken this course have all played their part in the Skills for Life Strategy in a variety of ways: by developing their own skills to support their peers within the classroom, workshop or through their contribution to the Toe By Toe<sup>1</sup> scheme. This will equip them with the skills to confidently support their children right through to GCSEs and Further Education, show future employers that they have developed skills in guidance, leading, presenting and supporting their colleagues in Literacy, Numeracy and ICT. The ALS qualification also adds to their skills set a wide range of soft skills such as empathy to work with vulnerable learners/adults, working in a front line role, mentoring, identifying learner's needs and appropriate behaviour in such a role.

Feedback from students, both candidates of the ALS and those receiving support through peer mentoring, has been excellent. The learners are supported more in Literacy, Numeracy and ICT by peers they feel comfortable with, can relate to and who have a lot of empathy towards them. The peer mentors have a good qualification that has opened progression routes, developed soft and hard skills as well as building on their own Literacy, Numeracy and ICT ability. The ALS course has also opened a progression route through to the PTLLS level 3 or 4 qualification and we hope to include the City & Guilds level 3 Advice and Guidance qualification to that progression route.

Many of the students who have achieved the ALS certificate undertake other relevant courses to provide them with the appropriate qualification and skills to use when they leave prison and wish to work with ex-criminals, alcoholics, offenders, young offenders, minority groups or drug users such as IT and Business enterprise.

The programme has benefitted from ongoing support from senior management both in the prisons service and in education. Those involved in it feel that, so long as the qualifications remain in place, it is sustainable, and would certainly recommend it to other providers in a similar situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Toe by Toe is a well-used reading programme specifically for learners with specific learning difficulties. Further information can be found at <http://www.toe-by-toe.co.uk/>

## Case study 4

### Sense Specialist College (Dereham Resource Centre)

#### What changes have you made or plan to make?

We have delivered 6 sessions (out of 10) of the C&Gs 7320 Award in Preparing to Support Learning – level 3 to 9 LSAs

#### What made you see that this change was needed?

CPD for our LSAs.

For the LSAs to realise how important their role is.

To give them an industry standard qualification plus many other advantages.

#### How did you go about instigating the change?

Delivered presentation to Senior management, gained their commitment.

LSA commitment.

Designed course.

Teacher commitment.

Were there any particular difficulties/barriers, or were there people who felt threatened by the change, and how did you seek to overcome these?

This took a year from the original discussions about the course to the first session being delivered. There were challenges all the time – getting people on board with the idea and fully committed was the biggest problem. Training costs were an issue but LSAs doing the course with no payment and in their free time.

#### What differences has the change made?

At the moment too early to tell – but the LSA group have bonded and work well as a team – they have learnt to reflect so this in itself will improve their LSA practice

#### How sustainable do you feel it is?

Long term – this course will be used throughout the college in different resource centres so will improve and impact on all LSAs. We will make it a prerequisite of LSA employment that they complete this course once they have completed their probation period.

**What specifically supported you in bringing about this change? e.g. any particular training or guidance document; support of senior management or colleagues; who were your allies etc.**

Had designed and delivered the course that is now used at Wayland Prison to train prisoners to be peer supporters in the classroom so knew the value of the course but this is the new award and I needed to change the course for a different group of LSAs. I developed the course for the specialist college I now work in with a colleague.

**Any advice you would give to others planning a similar change in their organisation?**

It is a really worthwhile course and a definite advantage is the LSA team will “bond” – work well together and as part of the course need to reflect on their supporting role in combination with learning objectives covered in the course.

It can be delivered in a “fun” way but can be difficult for LSAs who have not studied themselves for a while. A lot of course material to be covered in a short time – but will give the LSAs knowledge to go with the vast skills they need to work in our specialist area.

**Anything else you wish to add?**

As part of the workshops we attended – we had said that we were going to define the role of the LSA before, during and after the sessions – we will do this in the last session to bring the course to a conclusion.

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