

Bromley College

Involving Students in shaping their own support

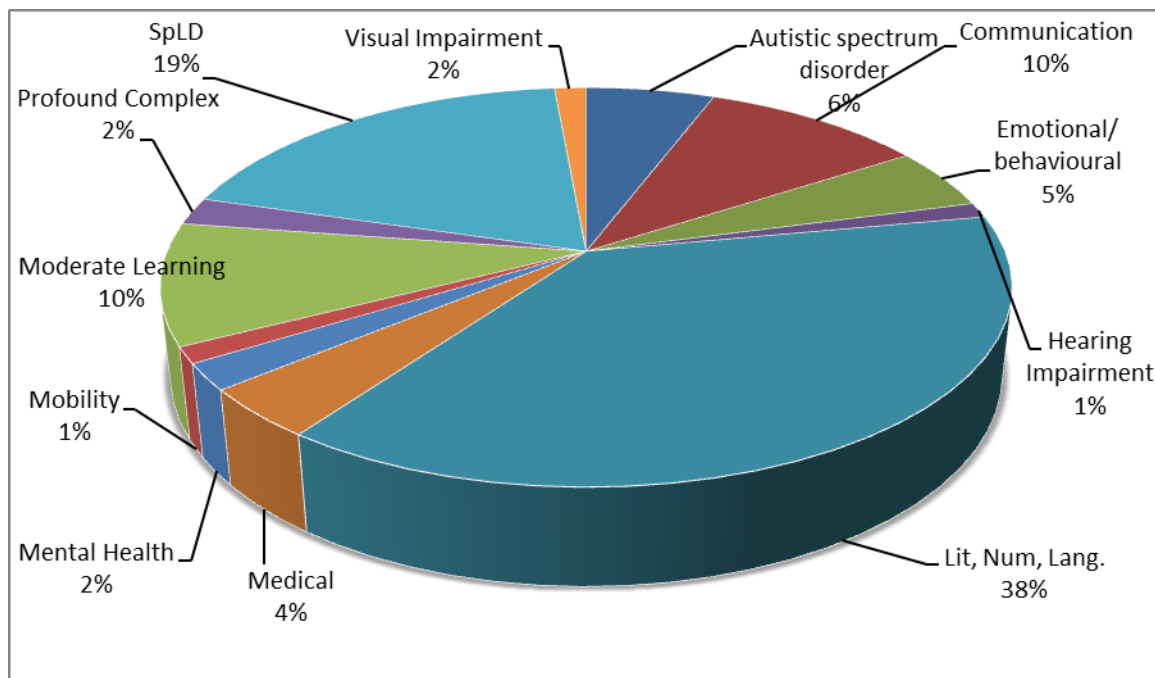
“How can I review my support?”



Bromley College

[Bromley College](#) is a general further & higher education college located on two sites in south east London. It offers a range of academic, vocational, apprenticeship and higher education courses with emphasis on skills and qualifications for work. The courses span a range of subjects from business studies to bricklaying, at many different levels, allowing students to begin their studies at many points of entry and study up to degree level. The London Borough of Bromley is a relatively prosperous area but with some pockets of local deprivation. Students travel to the college from across London with only 41% of 16- to 18 year-old students living in Bromley. About 54% of the students are White British, compared to over 90% of the population in the borough.

Learning support is managed centrally through the College Learning Inclusion Team made up of over 110 staff, some of whom are situated within curriculum teams. The team caters for the full range of support needs from moderate to profound/complex. A significant proportion of additional learning support provision is given to supporting Literacy, Numeracy and Language, compared to students with Specific Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities.



ELS resources/materials used

The wide ranging needs of students had meant there was unlikely to have been one single method or approach for helping them review their own individual needs. The college place great importance on empowering learner autonomy, self-advocacy and independence, and therefore one primary aim is to help students become proactive rather than passive recipients of their support. To this end, the tool adopted by Hartpury College¹ "*How can I tell my support worker what's working and what isn't?*" was seen to be both practical and flexible enough for students to adapt to suit their own changing needs. This approach involves on-going reflection and discussion between students and their support worker rather than the usual practice of the end of year questionnaire.

Staff were briefed initially to trial the resource as a straight forward review and evaluation exercise. The intention was to test out some broadly held assumptions about how students view their support, summarised by:

1. Students do not have strong or clear views of their support needs and they need help to identify these.
2. Students are the experts on their own support needs and can have strong and clear views, though they sometimes need help to articulate these.

Use/implementation of resources/materials

A student reference group of 11 students (5 male, 6 female, 7 white British, 4 black minority ethnic) and 7 learning support assistants (LSAs) was invited to trial the use of the Hartpury questionnaire (appendix 1). The students were selected from a range of vocational and academic courses and were broadly representative of the cohort of supported students including profound and complex to moderate.

Previously, the main method used to communicating student support needs to tutors and support staff took the form of a Learner Profile: A one-page pen profile of relevant information that impacted on the student's learning, attendance and achievement. This included such things as study support needs, personal commitments, and health issues.

To start a new approach, working individually with their own support, the students drew up an initial list of support preferences based on what they experienced in class. An example is provided in annex 1. In order to follow this up, approximately 30 minutes was given each week for them to meet their LSAs one to one out of class. Students would agree a preference of support in terms of being essential and/or less essential (appendix 2). In this way, over a period of two half-terms (approximately 10 weeks) they were able to both reflect on the different kinds of support being carried out and update their original list of support preferences. It soon became apparent the students' initial approach to this varied from being passive acceptance of a list largely prompted by the LSA to those who were quite vocally involved.

In time however LSAs found different ways of engaging students in the process. One student regularly updated her list of support preferences at home with her parents. Another used it as a way to express his needs to his peers.

By linking their list of support activities to a six weekly individual support review, involving their tutor and LSA, students were able to identify more clearly which of the support activities play a significant role in helping them achieve their learning aims.

¹ More information about this approach can be found in the report "[Involving students in shaping their own support](#)" produced by the South West region as part of the Enhancement of Learning Support Development work.

Summary of outcomes

Learner profiles that are drawn up at the start of the programme of support are now treated as a live document and updated regularly to capture and reflect the students' emerging needs. An individual support review has been adapted to integrate support with achievement of changing curriculum targets (appendix 3).

Students have been meaningfully engaged in the effectiveness of learning support at Bromley College and ideas developed on how to enable them to better identify and self- manage own their support requirements.

Using the "How can I tell my support worker what's working and what isn't?" resource has enabled students to successfully realise and communicate support preferences. It has provided a simple framework for both staff and students to take action and monitor progress they have made together.

Impact – the benefits

Students are now better able to discuss their support with staff and others. Staff are motivated through partnership working to assist enhancement of learning support and improve outcomes for students. The College Learning Inclusion team has replaced a hitherto audit-driven capture of learner views with this learner-driven system focussed on supporting learning, enabling students to make progress in self-realisation of their support needs. The LSIS resource provides a simple and practical tool for engaging students in their own support. One highly valued spin off has been improved partnership working between the learner, support and curriculum staff. Support is now better tailored to meet the needs of each learner as they progress through their programme.

Next steps and future plans

The project has informed the future harmonisation of additional learning support across the two college campuses. It anticipates an increase use of integrated data systems requiring live monitoring and regular updates of students changing needs.

This approach of continuous review and evaluation will be applied to all 1:1 supported students with the view to roll it out to all students receiving additional learning support for the next academic year. The college will now integrate these resources into its current goal/target-setting, teaching and monitoring learning processes for all students and thoroughly recommends that other providers engage supported students more directly in 'reviewing their own support'.

Case Study prepared by Steven Patmore, Bromley College

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