



Department  
for Education

EDUCATION & TRAINING  
FOUNDATION



# SOURCING AND PROVIDING SPECIALIST SUPPORT TO MATCH IDENTIFIED NEEDS

PAPER TWO

# Sourcing and providing specialist support to match identified needs

**Organisations may find sourcing and providing specialist support for students with SEND across their provision particularly challenging in an FE context in which:**

- **the number of students leaving school with EHC plans and entering Education and Training sector is increasing**
- **there is a requirement that managers use their 'best endeavours' to provide for students with identified needs who do not have agreed funding, and make 'reasonable adjustments' for them.**
- **a national increase in the numbers of students identified with autistic spectrum conditions and those with mental health needs, both of which require specialist knowledge and expertise**

Examples of ways in which organisations, in different contexts and remits, have implemented strategies and interventions to match the needs of students

1

**South Devon College, a large GFE serving the South Devon area, both urban and rural Development of specialist on-site in response to growing cohorts of students with mental health needs**

The challenge for managers at South Devon College has been the significant increase in the number of potential students arriving with high levels of anxiety and mental health needs, and who needed higher levels of support if they were to be successful whilst at college.

Having seen the previous success of allocating a dedicated specialist space for students with autism, the college adopted a similar approach for supporting students with mental health needs and high levels of anxiety.

After assessing the needs of the students, the managers introduced a Directed Study Centre (DSC) whereby students are introduced to the college and courses gradually, over an academic year, attending when they can. The fully trained DSC staff provide specialist support for the students who have designated days when they can attend the centre to follow a specially designed, generic course based on the broad skills associated with personal development and employability. Alongside the core course hours, English and maths form part of the curriculum and workshops are also introduced to enable the learners to develop social and coping skills by attending other workshops in the college, such as art or physical well-being.

Following its pilot year, the great majority of students moved onto full-time mainstream academic or vocational courses, forming support groups, and those who left were in a positive position in applying for paid or voluntary work in order to maintain their equilibrium and have access to community and local venues.

Many of those who progressed to mainstream provision continued to access mental ill health services throughout their course, as the DSC increased its reach to include

providing support across the whole college.

2

**Thornbeck College, an ISP, part of North East Autistic Society, and East Durham College a GFE**

Development of a reciprocal partnership, exchanging knowledge and specialisms.

The challenge for East Durham College (EDC) managers and the managers in Thornbeck College, North East Autistic Society (NEAS) was to strengthen the capacity and capability of both organisations to meet the needs of young people with autism and other learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the North East region.

The strategy adopted by the Principals of both colleges was the development of a partnership agreement which started in 2011, and continues to be based on shared values and reciprocal benefits. Both organisations retain their own identity and provide for their own cohorts of young people with shared staff development and work placement opportunities, including social enterprises at both sites.

The foundation level students from EDC attend NEAS for two to three days a week, where the curriculum is based on realistic work environments in subjects such as floristry, textiles and catering. In return EDC provides vocational training to NEAS staff, enabling them to become fully occupationally qualified, thereby gaining a dual specialism.

Working in partnership has enabled both organisations to improve the choice of quality learning opportunities and further develop innovative and collaborative learning, training, employment and independent living routes for learners.

3

### **Northern College, a Designated Adult College in rural setting**

Development of a specialist intervention team and local partnerships

The challenge for Northern College's managers was to provide support for an increasing number of students struggling with mental health issues and support needs including alcohol and drug addiction.

The strategy the managers adopted was based on their recognition that proactive intervention was crucial, and needed to be offered when the students required support. They funded an intervention team whose members underwent extensive training that encompassed bipolar disorders, schizophrenia, psychosis, depression, anxiety, personality disorder and preventing suicide. In addition, team members were trained in setting personal boundaries, domestic violence and dealing with harassment and bullying.

In addition, the managers make use of their strong outreach programme, so that both the college's community team and learning support department have established excellent links with

external specialist organisations in the wider community, including charities, publically funded organisations and links with the NHS. These are used for signposting learners to access partner support and to share expertise regarding how best to support learners with a very wide range of additional needs. Such partnerships are crucial in knowing where to refer learners who are in crisis that needs more specialist support.

Managers have found that the intervention team offers a unique kind of support for students to keep them in college and gives them support in circumstances where they might in the past have dropped out of the college.

4

### **Martec Training, an ILP specialising in motor trade qualifications, and a local GFE**

A partnership between an ILP and GFE to prepare students with SEND for transition to higher level courses in the GFE.

The challenge for Martec Training's managers was to find specialist support for a small group of trainees of 19 years, leaving special schools or college. They had previously had statements, but these had not been converted into EHCPs.

The strategy adopted by the manager was to approach the LA to request an EHCP. The level of need was not seen as sufficiently high, and this request was refused. Following an initial assessment in

relation to their own provision, the managers recognised that they did not offer the necessary accredited programme. They approached a local GFE and developed a partnership whereby the students were able to continue to study an accredited programme with the GFE, with specialist support provided by Martec Training.

This approach has established a partnership approach that enables students with an interest in the motor industry to spend a transitional year preparing for further vocational training at a higher level in a local GFE College. However, managers are aware of the need to ensure that individual funding better reflects the needs of students who do not have EHCPs.

5

### **The Sixth Form College, Birkenhead**

Implementing a mental health strategy

The challenge for managers in Birkenhead SFC, following an increase in the numbers of students with a range of mental health issues, including anxiety, panic disorder, stress and depression, was to extend its programme so that it was more holistic and better met the wider range of needs.

The college's psychology expert developed a programme known as bePART, which was developed in early 2016 and aims to educate students to be more 'positive, ambitious, resilient and thoughtful'. It is firmly based in psychological research and the practice of

mindfulness. The course covers five key topic areas: building resilience, diet and exercise, the importance of sleep, challenging negative thoughts and coping with stress, as well as a session on how students will take what they have learnt forward so as to assist them in their daily lives. In addition, students are provided with audio meditations to help cope with stress and aid sleep outside of college.

At the same time, BePART's creators have provided training for a number of staff at the college to ensure that eventually all students, with or without identified mental health needs, will be able to participate in the programme.

The course highlighted a range of issues such as the impact of students' poor diet, or use of energy drinks on their ability to focus and concentrate in lessons. As a result of this, the strategy was extended to modify the food on offer in the college canteen. It now offers a salad bar, healthy food options and fewer sugary drinks and sweets.

A partnership has additionally been established with the educational psychology department at Liverpool John Moore's University (LJMU) to ensure that the programme continues to develop well. Initial qualitative feedback from students highlights the importance of the programme in reducing stress, raising awareness of healthy eating and managing anxiety, particularly in relation to exams.

6

### **North Yorkshire Local Authority: a very large Community Learning organisation**

Developing learning for women and their children in a women's refuge, to support the development of mental well health.

The challenge for North Yorkshire managers was to provide a programme of learning in response to the impact of domestic violence on the health and well-being of mothers and children in their women's refuges.

The local authority staff have developed a programme of learning to support the development of resilience and confidence, and where appropriate, and literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. The initial learning takes place in the refuge, delivered by a teacher experienced in working with adults and children. The programme runs as a roll-on, roll-off delivery, to ensure that access is instant. The sessions focus on supporting mothers to provide structure and routine in the lives of their children, and to manage behaviour effectively. Within the sessions children of all ages are supported with their homework and/or behaviour. The teacher provides a role model in helping the children and supporting the mothers to provide the help and to manage behavioural challenges, that result from domestic abuse. Older children are supported to work cohesively with younger children. Basic literacy, numeracy and ICT are all integrated into the learning. Throughout the sessions

information is provided about further learning and qualifications, including literacy, numeracy and ICT where relevant.

The programme has been particularly successful in supporting mothers to develop confidence and mental resilience that has enabled them to progress successfully into more open learning environments.

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### **Truro and Penwith College: a GFE with a large rural catchment**

Development of a strategy to support students with complex autism on foundation courses

The challenge for the managers was to provide a programme of learning for an increasing number of students with complex autism, who needed a quiet environment with specialist surroundings, staff and support services in which to learn.

The managers adopted a strategy that enabled them to provide a programme that reflected the employment and independence pathways of the other Foundation

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*Managers have found that the intervention team offers a unique kind of support for students to keep them in college and gives them support in circumstances where they might in the past have dropped out of the college.*

Northern College

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Studies courses, but in an environment that was more tailored to the needs of the students as they transitioned from special schools to a large GFE.

Managers decided to base the provision in a less busy part of the college, with specially designed classrooms featuring a safe space, breakout room, sensory room, sensory garden and specialist, safe sporting area. Students are encouraged to become actively engaged within their wider community, reflecting the aspirations in their EHC plans.

Managers have found the strategy very successful in enabling students to be retained and to complete their programmes successfully, in a national context where students with complex autism often drop out in the first few weeks of programmes in mainstream organisations.

An additional strategy that members of the Inclusion Circle team have been seen to be successful.

An inclusive approach to training support staff in a CLS context.

In CLS organisations managers often find it challenging to provide additional support across their provision, particularly where it is part-time and in dispersed communities.

In one extensive county-wide CLS organisation, managers have adopted an inclusive approach to the training and upskilling of support staff. In many classes, students are either supported

by their own assistant, using personal budgets, or accompanied by care staff from residential homes. Managers have operated an inclusive approach whereby assistants and support staff are invited to attend the organisation's training courses in subjects such as the use of Makaton and autism awareness, as well as any English and maths courses that might be beneficial. Class tutors are also expected to provide role models in ways of working that meet individual needs and foster learning. In this way, the organisation is upskilling members of the local community, and encouraging an active approach to working with students in their daily lives, which extends beyond the college environment.

### REFLECTION

At this point it could be helpful to consider how far you are confident that, in your specific context, you're able to anticipate and plan for new areas of specialism, and have identified possible sources of specialist support, including partnerships.

- Very confident
- reasonably confident
- not very confident
- not at all confident

**What strategies might you adopt to increase your responsiveness to the changing priorities and to the sourcing of specialist support?**

