

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

**FINAL REPORT ON THE OTLA PHASE 7 (ENGLISH) PROJECT – DOES
INTEGRATING ADDITIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT AND COACHING
INTO LESSONS IMPROVE ATTENDANCE AND OUTCOMES?**

Petroc

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For further information regarding the OTLA Phase 7 (English) programme and this project go to <https://ccpathways.co.uk/practitioner-research/otla-7/>.

The programme was delivered on behalf of the Education and Training Foundation by -



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Contents

Final report - Does integrating additional learning support and coaching into lessons improve attendance and outcomes?.....	2
Appendix 1 – The project team	9
Appendix 2 – Learner survey results	10

Final report - Does integrating additional learning support and coaching into lessons improve attendance and outcomes?

Petroc

This project was designed to look at the use of Additional Learning Support (ALS) within the college and how we could make this more effective, in combination with the expansion of the instructor role, a change we introduced last academic year in our GCSE English lessons to help learners engage with their taught session content.

Summary

The use of instructors to support GCSE English resit learners was something we saw success with through our OTLA 6 research project, where we explored the impact of coaching through the implementation of the VESPA model (Oakes and Griffin, 2017). By using and adapting VESPA principles to suit the needs of our learners, we were able to gain a better understanding of what learners needed in order to succeed in their GCSE English lessons. VESPA looks at Vision, Effort, Systems, Practice and Attitude and we looked at how to help learners improve these skills through instructor-facilitated coaching sessions as an addition to their subject-specific lessons. This time, we were interested in expanding our research to include Functional Skills (FS) and GCSE maths, as results in these subjects have tended not to be as strong as they were for English GCSE.

Petroc is a large FE college in a rural location with campuses across Mid and North Devon. There are around 2,000 learners at Petroc studying maths and English and these are made up of Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 learners studying both FS and GCSE. The pass rates for GCSE maths and English are above national average but this is something that we are always striving to improve. The project involved our instructors and ALS support staff as well as the maths and English teaching staff.

Rationale

Why the need for change?

- National average pass rate for GCSE resits is around 30% for English and 22% for maths. This means that 70% of English and 78% of maths learners currently fail year on year. This statistic is incredibly demotivating for both learners and staff and something needs to change.
- Repeated failure can cause a lack of confidence in learners - we have noticed a reluctance to take risks with English and there is often a barrier in moving beyond the basics in maths. There is often a fixation on the unfairness of 'failing' and learners can be unwilling to learn from failure and move forward.

- Learners who are motivated can often lack the study skills required to revise effectively. There is a 'Learned helplessness', (Seligman, 1970) where learners will copy material down but do not know how to organise this for themselves into revision notes. As Miller discusses in 'Avoiding Learned Helplessness' (2015) we needed to remove the over scaffolding for learner responses and instead help 'to scaffold the process of self-direction.'
- We were aiming to improve the uptake in ALS for learners who needed extra support. In the past we had found that the stigma of attending extra sessions would be off-putting to learners. Having these appointments in a separate building with an unknown ALS tutor also often meant that the uptake of ALS was not as successful as it could have been. Some learners also lacked the study skills required to progress with their education and we wanted to see the impact of combining the knowledge gained from the previous project around the instructor role and the study skills with the change in ALS delivery on learner engagement and achievement.
- We were also looking to improve communication between the ALS staff and the English and maths curriculum staff in terms of weekly content delivery to make the session more meaningful.

Approach

This year, when timetabling, an ALS tutor was matched to a specific teacher, and accessed the lessons as part of the class. As the term developed, the ALS tutor, instructor and the teacher then regularly met to discuss intervention needed and identify learners that would be offered support. Breakout rooms were used while online delivery took place so that the learner and ALS tutor could go and discuss any part of the session that the learner had struggled with. As the ALS staff member was a familiar part of the session, learners became far more likely to request this extra support as the stigma to it was removed, due to them seeing it as part of the lesson, rather than as additional work. The learners saw this as part of their core delivery and an opportunity to access extra help rather than a confirmation of their continued failure. This new delivery, combined with the impact of the VESPA and coaching activities in the instructor sessions, saw many learners become much more independent with their learning. Embedding ALS in this way also meant that asking for help could be reframed as a strength rather than a weakness. We decided to take a flexible approach to this method of support and delivery, to recognise that each learner is different and has different needs.

GCSE English- Learning behaviours qualitatively and quantitatively measured indicated apathy for returning learners as pass rates fall by 3% overall. The cohort of returning learners includes a higher percentage of disadvantaged learners and boys studying at Level 2 for the second year. Learners enrolled on Level 3 demonstrated strong value added, suggesting that systems and practice were stronger. The achievement gap for disadvantaged learners is broadly in line with 17/18 data but

there is a widening of the achievement gap for Level 1 disadvantaged learners. Implementation of VESPA will address and promote clear expectation of Vision, Effort, Systems and Practice. The application of study skills (systems and practice) will also address the attainment for SEN learners studying GCSE. Although the gap hasn't widened, work is still needed to address the existing attainment gap. We looked to address these by incorporating ALS intervention into the classroom to be accessible to all.

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

In addition to working on the mindset of the learners, we also found that we needed to work on the mindset of some staff members. Teaching during a pandemic with such a large GCSE cohort has meant that we have moved most of our delivery online in order to accommodate such large numbers safely. This has meant that staff have had to negotiate online learning via Google Meet as well as embed the ALS into their lessons. For some staff this has been seamless and the utilisation of the staff with breakout rooms and general support has been positive. For other staff it has meant that they have become fixed on a reluctance to embrace more change and have found it harder to reflect on their teaching practice, meaning that valuable opportunities to respond to learner need could be lost.

Some ALS staff reported that:

'the atmosphere between classrooms is very different, I don't feel like I am being as fully utilised in some classes as I am in others.'

Building confidence and CPD around reflective practice would be something to bear in mind for any centres wanting to bring changes to the organisation, particularly with team members who have been with the organisation for a considerable amount of time and may be resistant to change. The danger with this can be that the ALS staff members are not fully given the opportunity to support learners in the moment, meaning that the chance for maximising learning opportunities are lost.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

What we have found this year with the ALS intervention embedded within the classroom is that the ALS staff themselves have found their work much more impactful as they are fully aware of what is happening in the classroom and are able to respond more directly to learner need rather than having a separate appointment where the learner spends some of the appointment time explaining the work for that week. The collaboration has led to ALS staff feeling more involved and empowered and as an integral part of the lesson.

ALS staff have commented that:

'I have found this new way of working has meant that I am more involved in the maths curriculum and am able to support the learners in a more robust way'

'Being in the lessons every week means that I am able to get to know the learners far better than I would from a short appointment every week. It means that I can build on their confidence from prior learning I have seen in the classroom to help motivate when covering trickier topics.'

Having had such success with this model, this is something that we will continue to develop at Petroc, with plans to look at offering embedded ALS intervention across other curriculums within the college.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Although we do not have final achievement data for the GCSE groups, early indications show that for the focus groups, attendance has improved significantly with the English group showing 84% overall attendance, with 81% of learners having 80% attendance or above. For maths, the results are similar, 91% overall attendance with 80% of the students having 80% or above. These figures are particularly noteworthy this year where the pandemic has had a negative impact on attendance generally.

Learners from the GCSE English focus group were generally positive about their experience of studying English at Petroc and felt that the ALS, and Instructor sessions had helped with their motivation and understanding of the subject.

Learners identified that *'the bond between you and the teacher also matters'* and it was also noted that the relationship between the two teachers is also important, with one learner commenting, *'the two teachers complemented each other.'* When asked how they felt about studying GCSE English at the start of the course they reported:

'I feel happy when studying GCSE English here.'

'At first not good at all but after a couple weeks, very happy.'

75% of learners reported that they felt they had benefited from the extra support with the ALS in the classroom, and even those who did not particularly enjoy English as a subject, felt that the dynamic between lecturer and ALS staff had enhanced their learning experience:

'I like how the lessons were always interesting as I dislike English, boring personally, but Kate and Katy always found a way to make it interesting.'

Learners also felt that the instructor sessions continued this support:

'they have increased my motivation'
'[instructors have] helped keep me on track and motivated to pass this year.'

When asked how they felt about GCSE English at the end of the year, the learners reported positively:

"same way I felt to begin with extremely proud of how far I have come"
'Happy and confident'
'better than I did last year'

Learning from this project - Does integrating additional learning support and coaching into lessons improve attendance and outcomes?

Taking part in this project during a pandemic has been a massively rewarding and interesting experience. The general mindset of the learners has been fairly low, the impact of the cancelled exams last year and the uncertainty of whether the GCSE exams would run this academic year, which was the position we were in when we started the project. All this uncertainty has left learners feeling incredibly unsettled and anxious about their education and futures. This meant that we were in a different position at the start of the project than we had originally thought but we felt that making the changes with the learning support and incorporating it with the VESPA and coaching were even more important for the learners as their confidence had taken a real hit. Seeing the trust built with the support staff and the learners was brilliant and learners who may not have previously accessed ALS were confidently asking for extra feedback. We had assumed that it would be mainly Level 1 and Functional Skills learners who may need the extra support, as these were the learners with the lower grade profiles, but we found that learners across all levels and vocational areas were happy to access the support, which has led to an increase in progress made across the academic year.

Learners also made specific comments about their appreciation of support they have received this year.

'Michelle and Julie are very good at their job, thank you for all the help.'

The increased motivation and confidence seemed to move beyond the English and maths and translate to all learning experiences with feedback such as:

'It has encouraged me to do better with all my classes after seeing how well I was doing in English'

'the motivation I got continued through to help in other sessions.'

'maths has helped me a lot this year as I have actually gotten a lot better at it and it's helped me become more disciplined and hardworking.'

Learners also reported that they felt proud of their achievements and had more of an understanding of their learning.

'Absolutely proud of myself. I think I never seemed to listen and wasn't motivated in previous years which led me to fail. I'm really proud of what I've been able to achieve this year.'

'I feel it was challenging year but I feel I have tried my best and with Kate's guidance I am happy that I have given the course 100%.'

Learners who regularly accessed the ALS support and coaching in lessons began to steadily make progress in their assessments throughout the year and had more confidence to take risks with their learning which enabled them to access the higher bands in the mark schemes.

One thing we have learnt with the project is that communication and relationships are key, having the right pairing of ALS staff and lecturer means that the support staff fit seamlessly into the lesson and become an extension of teaching, rather than something that is bolted on. Where these relationships have been positive, we have seen the learners flourish, both in confidence and in progression throughout the course. We have had some resistance from a small number of staff who see the addition of ALS in the classroom as a negative reflection of their ability, rather than as something to enhance their teaching and outcomes. We also realised that we needed to be flexible with our groups as different groups needed different types of support and a 'one size fits all' approach was not entirely successful. This is where the communication between staff became vital and where those staff who had been resistant to change seemed to struggle. For the next academic year we would look at some CPD around this to help staff to have more tools to be able to be flexible in meeting the needs of the learner.

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Appendix 1 – The project team

Project Role	Name	Job Role
Project Lead	Kate Bentley	
Deputy Lead	Michelle Atkinson	
Project team	Joanne Byrne	
	Nicola Braund	
	Katy Longley	
	Julie Bukowczan	
Project Mentor	Catherine Gray (ccConsultancy)	
Research Group Lead	Claire Callow (ccConsultancy)	

Appendix 2 – Learner survey results

Learner feedback on maths & English this year.

The learners who engaged with the ALS and instructor sessions have been broadly positive, with 84% of the maths learners surveyed reporting that the ALS helped them gain extra feedback and 75% of English learners reported the same. Where the learners did not access the support in class, they have commented that this is because they felt they had the support from their lecturer and therefore did not need the ALS.

Both the lecturers in the focus groups felt that they were able to facilitate differentiated support due to the ALS member of staff being in classroom. Learners identified that *'the bond between you and the teacher also matters'* and it was also noted that the relationship between the two teachers is also important, with one learner commenting: *'the two teachers complemented each other.'*

Learners also made specific comments about their appreciation of support they have received this year:

'Michelle and Julie are very good at their job, thank you for all the help.'

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'Absolutely proud of myself.'

'I think I never seemed to listen and wasn't motivated in previous years which led me to fail. I'm really proud of what I've been able to achieve this year.'

'I feel it was challenging year but I feel I have tried my best and with Kate's guidance I am happy that I have given the course 100%'

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