

Enhancement of Learning Support

Factors that contribute to effective management and deployment of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and learning support across the organisation

Factors that contribute to effective management of LSAs and learning support in the classroom



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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 development 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 development 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 on the Excellence Gateway](#).

Executive Summary

Project Background, aims and methodology

This report is one of five reports and nine strands of research and development known collectively as The Enhancement of Learning Support Programme that set out to develop and deliver a national programme to improve the quality of learning support for learners with additional needs across the FE sector.

The project aimed to identify where management policy and practice have, to date, positively impacted on the outcomes for learning support staff and for learners with difficulties and/or disabilities. It identified factors that contributed to effective management and deployment of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and learning support across the organisation and in the classroom.

The scope of the project was learning provider organisations in the lifelong learning sector, specifically: Further Education Colleges (FE), Adult and Community Learning Providers (ACL), Work-Based Learning Providers (WBL) and Independent Specialist Colleges (ISCs).

The project was an empirical study that adopted a mixed-methods approach including desk research, requests for case study contributions to exemplify effective practice, and telephone and face to face interviews.

A framework for collecting case studies was developed, derived from a review of recent research. Both the National Occupational Standards for Management and the National Occupational Standards for Learning Support Practitioners have been referred to throughout to set a wider context to the report. Case studies were collected from 15 organisations from across the range of learning provider types. An analysis of outcomes led to a report structured around five key characteristics of effective practice, which were:

A: A culture and ethos that values Learning Support

B: An established LSA workforce

Planning the LSA workforce

Appropriate recruitment

Effective induction

Effective deployment

C: Inclusive quality assurance and performance management systems

Quality assurance

Observation of Practice

Performance Management (supervision and appraisal)

Effective Management Information Systems (MIS)

D: Effective continuous professional development (CPD) and professional support

E: Effective working relationships

Between Learners, LSAs and Teachers

Effective assessment, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and support plans

Joint planning, review and evaluation

Effective use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and assistive technology

Support that empowers the learner

With other professionals and stakeholders

Conclusions and recommendations

The project concluded that there exist many examples of effective practice in the effective management and deployment of LSAs and learning support both across organisations and in the classroom. There was however little evidence that holistic, organisation wide effective practice is the norm.

The vitality and enthusiasm of LSAs and managers who provided case studies suggested that there was considerable scope for improvement and a willingness to learn and share with others. This was tempered by the very real pressures on providers, especially of time and resources, which, in some cases, presented an insurmountable barrier to participation in the project.

We recommend that:

- The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) produces a comprehensive map of effective practice into which all the Enhancement of Learning Support (ELS) projects are mapped;
- LSIS develops the web portal in the excellence gateway to provide clear signposts to resources between and beyond projects and between and beyond organisational boundaries;
- LSIS disseminates the outcomes of this project, encourages providers to share best practice and to promote professional recognition of the role;
- LSIS promotes the recognition of learning support as a tool for inclusion in any environment where learning takes place including work based learning, supported housing and independent living;
- LSIS recognises the need to promote and develop research and continuing professional development in learning support linked to the National Occupational Standards. This should include addressing the debate related to 'learning support' or 'learner support', complimentary and compensatory roles and the relationship between learning support and care;
- Providers audit their practice, use the examples in this project against which to benchmark their practice, identify areas for improvement and incorporate these into their development plans;
- Providers review their MIS capacity and practice to ensure that the impact of the work of learning support is included at every level of monitoring, evaluation and strategic planning;

- Providers develop appropriate CPD for Learning Support Managers and Senior LSAs to develop their management skills, knowledge and understanding;
- Providers encourage and support LSAs to engage in development activity and support groups including local and national networks across all types of organisation;
- Providers consult with LSAs to create systems that genuinely empower learners to manage their own support;
- LSAs review their practice and consider how they might improve their own contributions; and
- Teacher trainers and professional development providers ensure that all teaching staff have the knowledge and skills to work effectively with learning support assistants.

Background

This report is one of five reports and nine strands of research and development known collectively as The Enhancement of Learning Support Programme that set out to develop and deliver a national programme to improve the quality of learning support for learners with additional needs across the FE sector.

The rationale/commentary for this report was as follows:

Although the main focus of this work is around the CPD needs and practices of LSAs themselves it is important that colleges are able to take maximum advantage of a skilled LSA workforce, both in terms of how they utilise their skills across organisation and the practice of teachers in classrooms in order to achieve full benefits for learners. The South West Workforce Development Partnership led by the West of England College has developed Supporting the Learner Journey, an accredited CPD framework which is widely used across the region. This work will explore the extent to which the high focus on CPD for learning support staff has impacted on other aspects of managing learning support.

Sue Prescott and Angie Ward, the authors of this report, were members of the original team of researchers and writers of the Supporting the Learner Journey Continuing Professional Development framework for Learning Support Practitioners. They managed and delivered the follow up Continuation Project that established the accreditation of the framework with OCNSWR and produced a Training Pack and Power Point presentations with extensive delivery notes as support materials for the delivery of the framework.

The terms and definitions that were accepted for the project as a whole are as follows:

- Learning support is about enabling the learner to engage with the learning programme and providing personalised, identified support that will allow them to maximise their independence as a learner, achieve and progress;
- Learning support assistants have direct and regular contact with the learner (or group of learners) to facilitate their access to identified support, within the learning process and under the direction of the person(s) leading the learning;
- For the sake of consistency, the term 'teacher' has been used in this report to refer to all those employed in both sectors as teachers, lecturers, trainers or tutors. Support staff who fulfil other roles such as librarians, technicians, careers advisers were outside the scope of the review, as were the training and professional development required to provide specialist support in the Skills for Life areas of literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and also Information Communication Technology; and

- The generic term used in this report for the designated learning support staff is Learning Support Assistant (LSA). We accept that many different terms are used in as many different organisations; please read the report with your own terminology in mind to ensure that the major messages gained from the research remain accessible to you.

Introduction

In October 2006 the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) outlined their strategy to contribute to the government's ambitious vision to establish, by 2025, full opportunities and choices to improve the quality of life of all people with disabilities. The government also intended that all people with disabilities would be respected and included as equal members of society. The LSC recognised that the systemic and sustainable improvements needed to deliver their strategy could not be imposed upon the Further Education system; it had to be embraced through choice, so that they would become truly transformative. They asserted that it was vital that the principles of *Through Inclusion to Excellence*¹ and the aims of the Learning for Living and Work Strategy² become fundamental to all provider strategies and operational activity.

The initial studies conducted for the Enhancement of Learning Support project reported that although there was considerable opinion that Learning Support Assistants were effective in supporting teaching, learning and achievement in the learning and skills sector, there was until recently little evidence of impact to substantiate this fact. Robson et al (2006)³ reported that there was a widespread '*even an overwhelming*' view that LSAs were effective or very effective in a range of ways and in improving learner retention and achievement. They also commented on the difficulty in finding direct evidence of the impact. This project, along with the other projects in the Enhancement of Learning Support programme, set out to address these issues. By investigating, describing and analysing effective practice, where the impact of learning support was evident, this report seeks to provide examples that may be used to guide organisations towards more effective learning support.

¹ Learning and Skills Council (2005) *Through Inclusion to Excellence*, Coventry: Learning and Skills Council

² Learning and Skills Council (October 2006) *Learning For Living and Work: Improving Education and Training Opportunities for People with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities*. Coventry: Learning and Skills Council

³ Robson, J., Bailey, B. Mendick, H. (2006) *An investigation into the roles of learning support workers in the learning and skills sector*. LSRC.

Aims

The main aim of this report is to identify where management policy and practice have, to date, positively impacted on the outcomes for learning support staff and for learners with difficulties and/or disabilities. Specifically, the report aims to identify:

- Factors that contribute to effective management and deployment of LSAs and learning support across the organisation; and
- Factors that contribute to effective management of LSAs and learning support in the classroom.

Scope

The scope of the investigation was learning provider organisations in the lifelong learning sector, specifically: Further Education Colleges, Adult and Community Learning Providers, Work-Based Learning Providers and Independent Specialist Colleges. The target group of staff was LSAs, those who manage LSAs and members of senior management teams.

Methodology

The methodology adopted a mixed methods approach including desk research, online requests for contributions and telephone and face to face interviews to gather case studies of effective practice. A framework for collecting case studies was developed, derived from a review of recent research. Case studies were collected from 15 organisations from across the range of learning provider types. An analysis of outcomes led to a report structured around five key characteristics of effective practice.

Full details of the methodology may be found in Annex 1.

Findings: Factors that contribute to effective management and deployment of LSAs and learning support across the organisation and in the classroom

In this section the findings from the analysis of research reports are presented alongside the results of the empirical research. These are structured under five headings of the key characteristics of effective practice that developed out of the research process:

- A: A culture and ethos that values Learning Support
- B: An established LSA workforce
- C: Inclusive quality assurance and information management systems
- D: Effective CPD and professional support
- E: Effective working relationships

Each characteristic has an introduction drawn from the literature reviewed. It is mapped against the generic national occupational management standards published by The Management Standards Centre in 2008⁴ and the national occupational standards for learning support practitioners published by Lifelong Learning UK in 2008⁵ (where relevant). Some characteristics which cover a wide area also have subheadings. Each has a series of factors that contribute to effective management and deployment of LSAs and learning support across the organisation and in the classroom. These are illustrated with examples of best practice collected from a variety of teaching and learning organisations. The factors are summarised at the end of each section.

⁴ The Management Standards 2008 (<http://www.management-standards.org>)

⁵ Lifelong Learning UK National Occupational Standards for Learning Support Practitioners Final version approved January 2009 (<http://www.lluk.org>)

Characteristic A: A Culture and Ethos that Values Learning Support

“It is not surprising that the research confirms that arguably the single most important variable in promoting the effectiveness of learning support and the associated professional development activities is the values, ethos and management of the organisation. In the best organisations, the management culture reinforces the value and status of LSAs and this improves outcomes for learners.”⁶

The learning support workforce plays a key role in widening participation, opening up learning opportunities for learners who have been previously excluded, in particular learners with complex needs, and making organisations more inclusive. Previous research has found LSAs to be,

“very clear that they view themselves as professional and effective practitioners and would like to be valued as such.”⁷

According to a statement from Lifelong Learning UK it was estimated in 2003 that there were some 50,000 learning support and learning resource staff in the FE system. Learning support makes an important contribution to the retention, achievement and progression of learners.⁸

Local Authorities currently spend £3.45 billion on adults with learning disabilities, of which £660 million is spent on day services at a cost of £291 per adult per week. The Government is committed to achieving equality for all disabled people by 2025, as set out in *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*⁹ this includes the chance for all disabled people to get a job.

Local authorities will commission provision in the further education system to meet needs, and will need to ensure that the commissioning plans cover those with learning disabilities. The new funding body, the YPLA, will agree plans and aggregate these at

⁶ O'Brien, K., O'Brien, A., (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support: The training and development needs of learning support assistants. Findings and Recommendations* (www.natspec.org.uk)

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Supporting the Learner Journey Project Report for the Continuing Professional Development Needs of Learning Support Practitioners November 2007 – October 2008

⁹ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005) *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*,

national level to provide a strong overview of what is available, and where plans, provision and support need to be strengthened.¹⁰

In the light of these statements it is clear that learning support will be needed to fulfil the aspirations of all stakeholders. Crucial to the efficient and effective use of learning support is for the culture and ethos of an organisation to value learning support.

*“An inclusive culture where LSAs are valued and included and where they provide support for individuals in an inclusive way, in the group context, is one of the most important factors in promoting effective practice”.*¹¹

Valuing Employment Now recognised that the economic climate also means that there is little opportunity for new investment. Their strategy focused on more effective use of existing resources. Local authorities were encouraged to refocus some of their current spend on adult day services onto supported employment, and supported to use their new responsibility for funding 16–19 learning (16–25 for those subject to a learning difficulty assessment) to review and align provision.

The recommendations included the assertion that by 2011, many more citizens who are eligible for social care should have a personal budget, which can be used for employment support. The £19 million transition support Programme was set up to help local areas to improve the transition to adulthood for disabled young people. It also included the intention that all adults in England will be able to open and use a skills account, either online or with help from an adviser (through Next Step the adult careers service). Ultimately, the intention is that individuals would be empowered to take control of their learning, gain access to sustainable employment, and be supported to progress in their career and realise their talents in life.

These aspirations set a challenge for all organisations who offer opportunities for learning. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 and introduced, for the first time, measures prohibiting disability discrimination in the post-16 education sector. With the introduction of the Equality Act 2010 the current justification test is to be replaced. Education providers will have to meet a higher threshold to justify treating someone less favourably for a reason related to their disability. With this in mind the development of a culture and ethos that values learning support would appear to be essential if an organisation is intending to rise to this challenge.

¹⁰ Department of Health (2009) Valuing Employment Now

¹¹ Faraday, S.(2010) Enhancement of Learning Support, Training and Development Needs.

*LSAs play a key role both in making organisations more inclusive and opening up access to learning for groups previously excluded. Their wider strategic importance should not be underestimated within a policy context which promotes widening participation, particularly for learners with the most complex needs. The learning support workforce provides the means by which organisations meet their commitments to inclusion. It follows therefore, that their role, status, training and development is a priority, if we are to maintain and extend progress towards a more inclusive and effective sector.*¹²

Standards

Several of the generic national occupational standards for managers contribute to recognising the practice that can promote a culture and ethos that values learning support as an essential service within the learning environment. These include:

- B2 Map the environment in which your organisation operates
- B6 Provide leadership in your area of responsibility
- B8 Ensure compliance with legal, regulatory, ethical and social requirements
- B9 Develop the culture of your organisation
- B11 Promote equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion in your area of responsibility

This incorporates negotiating in many settings to ensure that specific learners' needs are recognised in all decisions made in relation to the learning environment; learning support is seen as integral to the planning of programmes of learning; support needs are incorporated into all delivery of learning and all assessments incorporate reasonable adjustments.

The following National Occupational Standards for LSAs can also provide guidance for best practice in promoting a culture and ethos that values learning support as an essential service within the learning environment:

Standard A:

AP 9 Provide learning support in a purposeful learning environment where learners feel safe, secure, confident and valued

AP 10 Promote, maintain and model behaviour that demonstrates respect for others

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

AP 12 Collaborate with and respect the contribution of colleagues and others

AP 15 Provide learning support that conforms to organisational and legal requirements

AP 16 Contribute, and encourage learners to contribute, to review of learning programme and of organization

The following case study examples exemplify current practice that contributes to effective management relating specifically to culture and ethos. They show how organisations recognise the role and work of learning support, its contribution to the fabric of the organisation and how it empowers learners to access fully the learning experience that they require to fulfil their aspirations.

Factor 1 Ensure the role of Learning Support Assistants is clearly recognised throughout the organisation

Previous research has shown that the role of LSA and how they are utilised can differ immensely between organisations. One of the barriers identified to learners accessing effective support has been that teachers and LSAs have been unsure of the LSA role and the boundaries and therefore have utilised LSAs ineffectively.

This case study example from a Further Education college clearly demonstrates effective use of guidance documents created by experienced professionals specifically to overcome this barrier.

Each role is understood by all areas of the college. The learning support manager is very experienced in both the delivery and management of support and has been very proactive in ensuring the role of support workers is clear to across the college.

For example: Creating and disseminating guidance documents on the role of the LSA and how to utilise them effectively. Clarity of the LSA role delivers a concise, message to learners who are accessing support. It also ensures consistent high delivery of support, impacting positively on recruitment, retention and achievement of learners with additional needs.

For details of these documents see:

- **Annex D:** The role of LSA; and
- **Annex E:** How to Effectively Utilise LSAs guidance document for Teachers.

The next examples from a Sixth Form College clearly illustrates how resources commonly used across the rest of the organisation can be adapted to be used within learning support, not only to make the role of LSA clear to the teacher and student, but to formalise the working in partnership. The fact that it was developed with full approval gained from the Senior Management Team by the Assistant Director: Student and Staff Learning Head of Services, who signs the agreement identified in the example, shows how well respected and valued the LSAs are and also how committed the whole organisation is to getting it right.

We set two Service Level Agreements (SLAs) that clearly set out to both students and teachers what they can expect from the LSAs in the organisation. (Please see Annex F and G.) We gained this idea through consultation with learners, teachers and LSAs, annual reviews and other sources like meetings and ad hoc contact.

SLAs are informed by the bi-annual student survey together with LSA and teaching staff's review of each other. They are agreed by the whole learning support team, circulated across college, put on our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) pages to be used as guidance for new and existing staff.

A key factor to the success of implementing the SLAs was having someone in charge of Learning Support within the Senior Management Team (SMT) with the 'clout' to promote and enhance the effective relationship between teachers/Heads and LSAs.

The main challenges that were overcome when implementing the SLAs were related to:

- **Misconceptions surrounding the nature of support and what each LSA does:** This was addressed by constantly advising the SMT of what is happening, keeping the profile of learning support high and promoting the fact that learning support opens up options and provides the key to inclusivity.
- **Not understanding the LSA role:** This was addressed by a member of the SMT work shadowing me for the best part of a morning, focussing on the role of LSAs. Afterwards he commented "Thank you for enlightening me on your role and the work of the department you manage". He later went on to ask how the College could support the work of LS more.

LSA's are given opportunity to reflect on their role and work as a team. Team meetings are informative and used for case study work; ideas and practice from colleagues to inform all. LSAs are also linked to specific areas, but not exclusively, as they are required to cover other areas and have insight in to support needed in any class/workshop situation.

Factor 2 Recognise the value of Learning Support Assistants and the support they deliver across the organisation

'Cinderella area' was used to describe LSAs at a National Conference March 2011. The Assistant Director of Student and Staff Learning at a 6th form College comments

“I would agree, but this Cinderella is most definitely going to the ball armed with her inclusive practice, targeted support and bag of strategies and knowledge, and dressed in experience!”

She added that the key to ensuring that LSAs are recognised and valued is to constantly be pro-active: involve the learners; the teachers; the Senior Management Team (SMT); promote and re-promote and keep everything in order – from the smallest e-mail to the largest educational psychologist report – and ensure that all staff working with each student are aware of the individual needs and requirements of all learners from exam concessions, to counselling, anger management, further assessment and so on.

The message is clear: do not give up – as the learners at the National Conference said,

“I need to be involved in my support as it is my life” and further, *“I would not be here without the support I get”*.

In order to empower all learners to fulfil their aspirations, it is imperative that LSAs are utilised effectively and that the value of the support they deliver is recognised. The following case study examples from GFE, ISC and Specialist Art Colleges illustrate how this is being achieved within their organisations:

Our learning support team has strong credibility across the whole organisation. Tutors in this college are experiencing up to 50% of their learners having additional needs. If they are struggling, the tutors know that we respond quickly and effectively. Our ethos is to work in partnership to empower the learners to access learning.

Our culture believes that learners require genuine ownership and control over the management of all aspects of their learning support. This works on the basis of informed choice at our college; learners are informed of the choices and options available to them and all the pros and cons of those choices are explored in relation to their individual circumstances and needs. Learners choose if the information the college holds relating to them is paper or IT based, what is included; who has access to it and how they wish to access, review and evaluate support. This is very empowering for our learners as we have found that they respond positively to being able to have

some control around the level of support they are accessing to ensure they are not over or under supported at any time. This really has enabled us to provide an equal playing field for all our learners; retention figures for learners recognised as having additional needs are a very positive 96.6%, on par with their peers retention figures of 93.5%.

A clear example of how a learning support manager can promote the a positive ethos for learning support by making LSAs feel valued from the very beginning:

Our learning support manager meets every new member of the learning support team for an informal discussion, she shows a genuine interest in why that person is interested in supporting learners and quickly identifies other skills and personal qualities they have to offer. She is quick to utilise these and offers excellent professional development opportunities resulting in a happy fulfilled team that feel valued and deliver highly skilled and professional support.

In this example, the college ethos is embedded in the quality assurance procedures where there are observations of learning support.

There is an ethos across college where performance management and review especially observations are perceived as genuine opportunities to celebrate success and focus on solutions for area of development.

Factor 3 Recognise contributions from Learning Support Assistants to inclusive practice across the organisation

Our research has found that learners are benefiting greatly from LSAs personal qualities, skills and knowledge being utilised effectively by teachers. LSAs are key to making organisations more inclusive and often bring extensive knowledge and transferable skills from previous employment, training and professional development and their own experiences. Where LSAs are valued, they are encouraged, empowered and enabled to access the professional development and training to recognise and celebrate their professional practice. The following examples from both Further Education (FE) and Independent Specialist Colleges (ISC) colleges illustrate the recognition of LSA contribution.

In our organisation we show that we value and respect what LSAs bring to the teaching environment. They develop relationships with learners which allow us to deal with issues and resolve situations with early interventions including signposting to appropriate staff.

Learning Support Assistants are given confidential information regarding learners. This demonstrates that LSAs are valued and trusted. Since the introduction of this information giving, behaviour management has improved as LSAs know the background and can use strategies passed on to us from other agencies.

Factor 4 Proactive Leadership committed to promoting, engaging and empowering LSAs

Essential to genuine inclusion is a positive culture and ethos where learning support is seen as an integral part of the organisation by everyone and has leadership commitment that is evident across the organisation.

Leadership commitment is not only about saying that LSAs are recognised and valued; it's about proving it by proactive consultation with the LSA workforce. Identifying what they need to be effective in their role, listening and being reactive to their observations and recommendations is important.

Leadership commitment is about developing effective recruitment; up to date job descriptions; specifications that reflect the LSAs current role; effective induction, deployment, training and development, networking and opportunities for shared practice, mentoring, MI system and providing appropriate supervision and appraisal in line with the rest of the organisation.

The quotation that follows confirms that the best way of achieving an ethos that values learning support is the active support of the leadership.

“Get commitment from the top and promote value for money, especially in current climate, by ensuring that the value to the organisation is understood, not just the value to individual learners.”

Our research found that the organisations that had leadership commitment and an ethos that values learning support could also contribute success stories that illustrate best practice under many other factors.

In short, if organisations focus on getting the culture and ethos for learning support right, the rest can follow.

Summary of factors that promote a culture and ethos that values learning support

Factor 1 Ensure the role of Learning Support Assistants is clearly recognised throughout the organisation

Factor 2 Recognise the value of Learning Support Assistants and the support they deliver across the organisation

Factor 3 Recognise contributions from Learning Support Assistants to inclusive practice across the organisation

Factor 4 Proactive Leadership committed to promoting, engaging and empowering LSAs

Characteristic B: An established LSA workforce

The case study examples exemplify current practice under the following sub-headings of characteristics that contribute to effective LSA management.

- Planning the LSA workforce.
- Appropriate recruitment.
- Effective induction.
- Effective deployment.

These relate specifically to establishing a learning support team that truly reflects the diverse needs of learners today and has been empowered and enabled to deliver high quality support that is quality assured and compliant with current legislation.

Standards

Several of the generic national occupational standards for managers can also contribute to the recognition of practice that can promote the establishment of learning support as an effective service within the learning environment. These include:

- A2 Manage your own resources and professional development
- D3 Recruit, select and keep colleagues
- D5 Allocate and check work in your team

Planning the LSA workforce

As identified in the Enhancement of Learning Support Report it has been very difficult to ascertain reliable numbers for LSAs employed in the lifelong learning sector. However it is widely recognized that the role, impact and training needs of learning support staff in the lifelong learning sector is hugely under researched.

It has also proved difficult to secure accurate information about the workforce profile, their qualifications and/or their employment characteristics. With one exception, the Learning and Skills Research Centre (LSRC) study by Robson et al (2006)¹³, no substantial research studies were found. Whilst workforce data is limited, it is clear from both the literature and the project research, that the workforce profile is incredibly diverse. Learning support teams are often a mixture of full-time staff, hourly paid staff and in some colleges, bank/agency staff. The research undertaken for the Enhancement of Learning Support project suggested that a significant number (just over half) of LSAs are hourly paid, and many are paid on term time only contracts, with implications for, and indeed impact, on access to training.¹⁴

The research conducted for the Supporting the Learner Journey Continuing Professional Development for Learning Support Practitioners project identified that the learning support role is generally perceived as supporting the learner and learning in a variety of contexts such as the classroom, vocational workshops, learning support drop-in areas, supporting individual learners and facilitating support with groups. These functions can also include physical care support and pastoral support. The key messages from the report also confirm the conclusions of Lifelong Learning UK (2007) which states that research has shown that employers wish to define the learning support role more clearly and to identify how the role can vary from one context to another. Practitioners also wish for clarity and opportunities to progress in their roles.

This disparate and disconnected workforce presents huge challenges in the management of learning support. It is clear that Recommendation 6 “Undertake research and develop systems to provide and maintain accurate workforce data” from the Enhancement of Learning Support Report¹⁵ is valid and essential to inform the development of an effective strategy when endeavouring to effectively manage the deployment of LSAs and learning support across the organisation.

¹³ Robson, J., Bailey, B. Mendick, H. (2006) *An investigation into the roles of learning support workers in the learning and skills sector*. LSRC.

¹⁴ O'Brien, K., O'Brien, A., (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support: The training and development needs of learning support assistants. Findings and Recommendations*

¹⁵ *ibid*

Standards

Unit D4: “Plan the workforce” from the National Occupation Standards for Managers can be used to explore the knowledge, understanding and skills required to increase competence in developing the learning support workforce.

The follow National Occupational Standards for LSAs can also provide guidance for best practice in exploring the knowledge, understanding and skills required to increase competence in developing the learning support workforce

AP 17 Evaluate and improve the effectiveness of own practice, identify own professional development and training needs, and take steps to address these

Our research has found that Learning Support Assistants from the organisations that have contributed are highly regarded and expected to have professional qualifications and/ or a measurable level of expertise and competence to enable them to support learners effectively to fulfil their aspirations.

Factor 5 Ensure that Learning Support Assistants are viewed as professional staff with appropriate skills, competence and qualifications

It is essential that the LSAs delivering support not only share the high aspirations of their learners but also have the appropriate skills, competence and qualifications to deliver the support required. They also require support from managers to achieve professional status:

“Our learning support manager is a great advocate of support staff to develop and reach their full potential.”

“Our organisation is positive in promoting professional development for LSAs”

These case study examples from a Further Education college demonstrate this factor:

LSAs are seen as professional staff and their job specification and recruitment reflect this. Advertising for recruitment is specific to which grade is required, higher grade support staff are expected to have professional qualifications not only in their vocational area but in their role of providing specialist support.

The Learning Support Manager states:

“We have the same expectation as all the other faculties. This is inclusion. If you were learning physics, you would expect the tutor to hold a physics qualification. Our specialist learning support instructors are qualified in their area of expertise.”

LSAs and Specialist Support Tutors that are recruited to support learners with additional needs are required to have a high level of specialism. For example, the

essential criteria for Specialist Support Tutor for Deaf/Hard of Hearing specified level 3 in British Sign language (BSL) as well as a qualification to degree level and a teaching qualification. The successful applicant also held a counselling certificate which has proved to be of great benefit when working with learners and teachers and enabling learners with hearing impairment to access counselling.

Factor 6 Implement a clear team structure and career pathway with a recruitment process that reflect this

The structure of learning support teams varies hugely between organisations but the principles of effective recruitments remain the same. As with any profession, employing staff who have the relevant skills, personal qualities and experience has a positive impact on the whole organisation. In the case of learning support, the retention and achievement figures have a huge impact on future funding and inclusion.

The following case study example from a Further Education college clearly identifies a recruitment process that recognises learning support staff as professionals; an integral part of the organisation, with a clear team structure and career pathway:

The learning support team is divided in to three different grades and there are very clear expectations of the qualifications practitioners from each grade must have:

- 1) LSA Generic Support: Ranging from a newly recruited member of the team, completely new to learning support or an experienced member of the team for whom it is currently appropriate to stay at this grade. Their role is to support learners with a wide range of additional needs across the whole organisation alongside the vocational tutor on a 1:1 or generic class support.
- 2) LSA Vocational Support: With a degree or relevant qualification in the vocational area in which they deliver support.
- 3) LSA Specialist Support: Having completed a Foundation Degree in Learning Difficulties and Disability or other specialist qualification they support learners with additional needs outside of the classroom environment in order to development strategies to overcome their difficulties. They work in partnership with personal tutors, other LSAs, support staff and other relevant agencies to ensure a consistent and collaborative approach.

Appropriate recruitment

As the role and requirements of learning support extends and expands, the need to recruit, induct and deploy Learning Support Assistants effectively becomes even more essential. The data analysed for the report *Enhancement of Learner Support: Learning Support Assistants – An Analysis of a 15,000 Workforce’ Using Data to Understand Workforce Trends and Implications* shows that LSAs are reasonably well-qualified, 41% having Higher Education qualifications, and 7% holding qualified teacher status (QTS).¹⁶ However the research conducted for the *Supporting the Learner Journey Continuing Professional Development for Learning Support Practitioners* project identified that very few learning support staff commenced the role with prior qualifications specifically in learning support. A very small number were identified as having transferred from school-based learning support with an NVQ Teaching Assistants qualification.¹⁷ This clearly illustrates the need for the development of recruitment processes and practices that highlight if not specific qualifications required for the clearly identified role then well defined transferable skills.

*“In describing effective practice, Ofsted (2010) confirmed the importance of a supportive professional culture that encouraged all staff to have high expectations of their work and to be held accountable for individuals’ learning. This meant that leaders needed to ensure that all the staff had clear professional status, were well trained and were deployed effectively”.*¹⁸

Unit D3 Recruit, select and keep colleagues from the National Occupation Standards for Managers can be used to explore the knowledge, understanding and skills required to increase competence in selecting an appropriate learning support workforce.

We found that the role of LSAs within the FE sector is often seen as generic, with LSAs often expected to have many transferable skills and the ability to support learners with a wide range of additional needs to complete study in both vocational and academic routes.

¹⁶ ELS Owen (2011).

¹⁷ *Supporting the Learner Journey Project Report for the Continuing Professional Development Needs of Learning Support Practitioners* November 2007 – October 2008

¹⁸ Faraday, S.(2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support, Training and Development Needs*

Factor 7

Recruit LSAs to suit the need of specific curriculum areas within the organisation

Our research show that learners and organisations are benefiting from recruiting LSAs that hold relevant up to date qualifications in the vocational area where they deliver support as well as LSAs that are experienced in delivering support or have proven, relevant transferable skills that can be developed during induction and CPD.

Our learning support team are recognised as having professional staff and their job specification and recruitment reflect this. During the recruitment process we specify:

- An expectation of LSAs to complete induction and on-going training and CPD;
- Build this in to job description and contract;
- Recruit LSAs who have L2 in Maths and English functional skills or have a commitment to achieving this as part of induction;
- Advertising for recruitment is specific to which grade is required; and
- Qualifications are offered through the organisation so there is a clear progression route for all staff to develop professionally.

The next case study example demonstrates how an organisation benefited from making changes in their recruitment process:

Construction was identified as an area of weakness for the delivery of learning support and a decision was taken to recruit a LSA specifically for this area. Practical skills and experience were included as essential criteria in the job specification. A male with many years' experience as a builder was recruited and this proved very successful. As well as being able to offer excellent learning support through his own practical skills, his ability to relate the learning to real life experiences, particularly health and safety provided a mechanism to manage behaviour that other LSAs had experienced as very challenging. There was positive feedback from teaching staff and the success rates of students in construction rose. When asked the key area for success in recruitment, the learning support manager commented:

“having a member of staff with current and real life experience in the vocational area of learning they are supporting in. An ability to support with practical areas as well as feedback and support for students to modify their behaviour to be acceptable for a job in the field that they would like to enter”

This positive experience opened up the opportunity for other staff with transferable skills to be considered as suitable applicants for LSA jobs. When the construction LSA moved on and they were faced with finding a suitable replacement, the manager of

learning support shared the following experience,

“An existing technician in the catering department identified an interest in working with students who display challenging behaviour and was encouraged to apply. He was the successful applicant and is now working as a LSA. He is supporting within construction and is timetabled to attend a construction course to gain a vocational qualification in the area where he is supporting students.”

This organisation regularly reviews their LSA job descriptions and person specifications as the role develops. As a result they have tailored the job descriptions and person specifications to ensure that they target the people they want for their LSAs.

The LSA role has recently developed to remain in line with legislative requirements and also because of the recognition and professionalisation of the role. We regularly review our LSA job descriptions and specifications to ensure they are in line with any new developments. For example, our job description clearly identifies that LSAs will be expected to personally mentor a minimum of two learners and, when appropriate, to ‘buddy’ one newly appointed LSA; such experience is desirable, but currently not essential. As a result, we receive applications from the types of people we are seeking to recruit and are developing a team of highly skilled and innovative LSAs who are as keen as us to harness their skills and develop professionally to ensure all learners receive the support they are entitled to.

Effective induction

There are standard areas of content that any organisation that is supporting learners who have additional needs will include within their induction processes: Basic Safeguarding, Common Induction Standards for those delivering personal care and a twenty four hour curriculum, equality and diversity, and health and safety to name a few.

Previous research has found that, with the absence of any standardisation of an induction for LSAs, the process can vary enormously. However, our research has found that organisations that include a full induction for all LSAs, tailored to reflect the role of the LSA with clear identification of how LSAs are utilised effectively across the organisation to meet the needs of learners accessing support, are benefiting from outstanding Ofsted reports. They are also benefiting from high levels of learner retention, achievement and success.

Factor 8 Develop an effective induction programme to be completed within a set period of time

The following case study examples from FE and ISC organisations demonstrate how effective induction is being established and implemented in their organisations. The first organisation has developed a comprehensive pack of information for LSAs that is

distributed to them as part of the induction process. The second example shows how shadowing and mentoring can be used for an effective induction.

No LSAs are left unsupervised with learners until their CRB check is cleared and they have completed a six week induction period that includes shadowing a more experienced staff member. Induction includes functional skills testing and support, if required, to achieve level 2; basic safeguarding and health and safety training in line with current legislation; input on the role of LSA; deployment; how to work with tutors; observation and feedback; basic awareness of learners additional needs.

There is an induction pack for LSAs to refer to that includes the following – some of the documents are included in this report:

- 1) The role of the Support Worker guidance sheet (Annex D)
- 2) Working effectively with Support Workers: guidance for Tutors and LSAs (Annex E)
- 3) An observation Proforma that must be completed within induction (Annex H)
- 4) Guidance and Information Sheet for LSAs: Why Keep a Reflective Log (Annex I)
- 5) Example of information given to LSAs at induction - ALS Statistics (Annex J)
- 6) Information sheet to collate LSAs hobbies and interest information
- 7) Staff Handbook
- 8) Information sheets regarding different learning difficulties to give a basic understanding

We have an intense induction process that takes place over two weeks, where LSAs are constantly shadowed and benefit from professional dialogue from a more experienced LSAs and Tutors across the college.

A learning support manager of an ISC stated that “Thorough induction, regular mandatory training and extensive Continuous Professional Development opportunities ensure the staff team possess the high quality skill level necessary to support the complex and varied needs of the learners at college.” The following case study example demonstrates an extended induction that incorporated a qualification. It was well received by their LSAs.

As part of induction all LSAs are expected to complete a Certificate in Learning Support at Level 3, developed and delivered by two colleagues from the education team and tailored to meet the needs of our college. The course is now in its second year and the LSAs see it as a positive opportunity to shape their practice. Feedback from participants from the first year was incorporated in to developing the materials for this current year's cohort. Course candidates attend for one evening per week during term time and the response from them has been very positive.

This case study shows what is expected of LSAs during and after a six month induction.

All LSAs complete a six month induction and are expected to complete a Personal Development Portfolio and a series of online e-learning modules to meet the standards expected by the organisation as well as legislative requirements.

At completion of induction our college would expect LSAs to take responsibility for the following:

- Mentoring 1 to 2 learners;
- Support newly appointed staff through Induction and Probation process;
- Individual Learning Plans and target reviews, tutorials, timetables, updates;
- College files;
- OCR/ALL Portfolios;
- Communication Profiles/Passports;
- Behaviour Support Plan summaries, plans and strategies;
- Transition visits;
- Parental/carer contact when required;
- To share updated targets and significant information with wider staff team; and
- To seek additional areas of responsibility i.e.: be responsive to information on staff notice-boards.

Factor 9 Include peer mentoring for Learning Support Assistants (and Tutors) from induction onwards

Effective induction programmes establish approaches to training and development, such as peer mentoring, which may be continued after the successful completion of their induction into their roles. In this example both LSAs and teachers benefit from the same peer mentoring process

New LSAs and tutors are given the same documents in their induction.

New tutors are paired up with tutors and/or experienced LSAs who have received high grades in their observations and positive feedback relating to utilising learning support effectively.

Each LSA has a mentor that takes them through induction and their support continues for the duration of their post.

Factor 10 Have the same expectations for all Learning Support Assistants, including those recruited through agencies

One of the difficulties of organisations using agency staff is the possible adverse effects it may have on continuity for learners and the impact of having staff who, potentially, may not have had the same induction as the rest of the learning support team. One FE College with 40% of learning support staff recruited through a national agency has turned this in to a positive attribute:

The agency required an interim review after 6 weeks, using a lot administration time and documentation that bore little relevance to the role of the LSA. The college and the agency worked closely in partnership to incorporate the agency requirements within the LSA observation form and this proved instrumental in developing and improving the induction process. It also raised the awareness of the LSA role within the agency, resulting in more suitable deployment and reinforced the expectation that all LSAs are required to complete Induction to enable them to deliver effective learning support and promote inclusion.

Observation is part of induction and this development ensured that agency staff accessed the same induction as their peers and all learners were receiving the standard of support required. Agency staff are expected to and do perform at the same professional level as permanent staff and this is reviewed and monitored after induction on a regular basis to ensure all learners are receiving appropriate and effective support.

Effective deployment

Our research has found that after a successful induction in to their roles, both teachers and LSAs benefit from ongoing peer mentoring. The case study examples below demonstrate how this is being implemented within 2 FE colleges:

Factor 11 Have a skilled, designated person responsible for co-ordinating the deployment of Learning Support Assistants

One of the main contributors to effective mapping of LSAs knowledge, understanding and skills to learners needs is the organisational skills and knowledge of the person designated to this task. Our research found that often it is deemed to be a main responsibility of the manager of the learning support team, who may or may not, have the appropriate management skills or training to enable them to undertake this mapping exercise effectively and to utilise the outcomes. Given the increasing demands on staff, they may also be struggling to achieve this as well as managing the operational day to day and often unpredictable challenges that occur in learning support provision. On the other hand, the task may be delegated to someone who has the organisation skills but lacks the knowledge and expertise to ensure that the learners' needs are fully met.

It is essential that the person designated to co-ordinate LSAs and other resources to meet learner needs has the skills, support from colleagues and systems in place to undertake this task effectively. The following case study example from a Further Education college clearly demonstrates the benefits of having a designated member of staff responsible for co-ordinating the resources identified through a central process and system:

Our Learning Support Team has specialisms in many areas such as Sensory Impairment (Hearing and Visual); Work Based Learning; Learning Difficulties and Disabilities; Physical Difficulties and Disabilities; Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD); Medical Conditions; Dyslexia and Mental Health. Effective deployment of support is at the forefront of our practice and is considered from the moment an application is received from a learner who may require support.

For example, when we receive an application from someone with a hearing impairment, they are invited to attend a meeting to discuss and assess their support needs. A learner led Learning Support Plan is developed, ready for when they start college, detailing personal data, learning aims and goals; support and resources such as equipment; British Sign Language (BSL) Interpreter: Sign Supported English (SSE); a lip reader; a note taker; communication aids and 1:1 support. It also details directions for tutors with tips for easier communication with the learner.

Each plan is entered and updated using a central management information system accessed by the Co-ordinator of Support, whose responsibility is to ensure that all the

resources for supporting that learner, including LSAs are booked and in place. This system works really well as it minimises room for error when resourcing learning support.

Factor 12 Work as a team to ensure effective deployment of Learning Support Assistants

Learners require the right level of support and should not be over or under supported. Our research found that where specialised support is required, other providers of specialist support are utilised and the deployment complies with current legislation. In some cases, the deployment of learning support staff is undertaken by a senior LSA who has some management responsibility. Where relevant information is held by more than one individual, then appropriate training and team work are important characteristics of effective deployment.

The following case study from a Further Education college exemplifies the benefits of having more than one person involved and good team work when conducting a mapping exercise of learners' support requirements and when deploying LSAs.

A dedicated Learning Support Programme Co-ordinator organises the mapping of learners support needs and requirements through a robust initial needs assessment process. The Staffing and Funding co-ordinator within learning support holds information relating to LSAs grade, qualifications, skills, knowledge and personal qualities including any hobbies and interests they have. They liaise closely with the learning support manager to identify the LSA who is best placed to support each individual learner or groups of learners.

For example; a Generic LSA experienced in supporting learners with autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) who has a keen interest in photography may be better placed to support a learner with ASC in media studies as opposed to a Vocational LSA with no experience in supporting learners with ASC.

The mapping and deployment of learning support staff is monitored and reviewed through observation and feedback. Working as a team to develop effective deployment of LSAs has had a positive impact on learner achievement and retention. The learning support manager identified a key factor in their success is the training and CPD she has received in both the delivery and management of learning support and effective deployment.

Summary of factors that contribute to establishing an effective workforce

- Factor 5 Ensure that Learning Support Assistants are viewed as professional staff with appropriate skills, competence and qualifications
- Factor 6 Implement a clear team structure and career pathway with a recruitment process that reflect this
- Factor 7 Recruit LSAs to suit the need of specific curriculum areas within the organisation
- Factor 8 Develop an effective induction programme to be completed within a set period of time
- Factor 9 Include peer mentoring for Learning Support Assistants (and Tutors) from induction onwards
- Factor 10 Have the same expectations for all Learning Support Assistants, including those recruited through agencies
- Factor 11 Have a skilled, designated person responsible for co-ordinating the deployment of Learning Support Assistants
- Factor 12 Work as a team to ensure effective deployment of Learning Support Assistants

Characteristic C: Inclusive quality assurance and performance management systems

The Enhancement of Learning Support Report identified that the delivery of LSA performance management and quality assurance faced several barriers:

“Cultural issues included managers and leaders not perceiving the need for support staff performance review; teachers treat support staff much as they do learners, forgetting that people have the ability to improve and develop. Discrimination was also a factor. Autocratic or ineffective leaders and a lack of management support could also present barriers. The nature of contracts – term time only, and the lack of paid time, release time or time developed to analysing needs were problematic, as were resources: funding or a budget for CPD, transport or paid cover when staff were out. Barriers related to training included the lack of an effective performance management system for all staff, irrelevant training – training that was not personal and the lack of availability of relevant course for support staff. Information and advice and guidance were also

identified as issues, with poor communications and being swamped by too much choice both cited as particular barriers.”¹⁹

This is further confirmed by the Supporting the Learner Journey Continuing Professional Development for Learning Support Practitioners report which identified that

“some institutions conduct regular reviews and use appraisal to identify training and CPD needs. However, there were examples of provision which tends to be ad hoc, reactive to support issues as these arise and which is not accredited.”²⁰

Quality assurance procedures that gather the views of learners give some insight into the type of practice and delivery that can have the most positive impact for learners. When asked about their views of effective support, learners typically talked in terms of personal characteristics i.e. the need to “be friendly, understanding”, “enthusiastic” “caring” “relaxed” and “patient and calm” In addition learners also highlighted the importance of knowledge. This knowledge did not need to be specific to a subject; more importantly the understanding and knowledge needed to relate to the impact of a disability not only on learning but to the individual. Performance management systems may be used to ensuring that LSAs exhibit or develop these characteristics.²¹

In terms of professional development, one of the biggest issues is that there is no central information point and a lack of easily accessible information for LSAs and those who manage them. In the schools sector, there is the Training and Development Agency website, with its comprehensive list of information for Teaching Assistants. Similarly, there is no professional membership association for LSAs in lifelong learning, such as the National Association of Professional Teaching Assistants (NAPTA) for TAs in schools which is a central resource.²²

The Enhancement of Learning Support Project includes

- Recommendation 1: Develop a web based portal to provide a common location for information and resources for LSAs and their managers. This will also support the development of a collective identity for LSAs and should improve practice by

¹⁹ Faraday, S.(2010) Enhancement of Learning Support, Training and Development Needs

²⁰ Supporting the Learner Journey Project Report for the Continuing Professional Development Needs of Learning Support Practitioners November 2007 – October 2008

²¹ O'Brien, K., O'Brien, A., (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support: The training and development needs of learning support assistants. Findings and Recommendations* (www.natspec.org.uk)

²² *ibid*

supporting the sector to share information more efficiently. This is likely to involve the development of a national organising body.²³

Standards

Details of the knowledge, understanding and skills that can be promoted to initiate and improve performance management and quality assurance in LSA practice can be found in the generic national occupational standards for managers. These include:

D5 Allocate and check work in your team

D9 Build and manage teams

D6 Allocate and monitor the progress and quality of work in your area of responsibility

D14 Initiate and follow disciplinary procedure

The follow National Occupational Standards for LSAs can also provide guidance for best practice that can be promoted to initiate and improve performance management and quality assurance in LSA practice:

Standard A:

AP 14 Maintain accurate records relating to learning support

AP 15 Provide learning support that conforms to organisational and legal requirements

AP 16 Contribute, and encourage learners to contribute, to review of learning programme and of organization

Standard B:

BP 7 Work in accordance with the quality requirements of the organisation in relation to assessment and monitoring of learner progress

Standard C:

²³ ibid

CP 4 Evaluate learner response to specialist learning support and use this information with colleagues in the planning of further support

Quality Assurance Systems

The White Paper 'Raising Expectations; enabling the system to deliver' (2008)²⁴ talked about 'introducing a clear framework for assessing performance which is common across all providers of post 16 education and training'. It suggested that this 'could build on the Framework for Excellence'. The primary purpose of the Quality Assurance System, subsequently introduced in 2010, is to support the continual improvement of the whole of the post-16 learning sector. It will enable all post-16 learning providers to ensure they are working to the same quality standards, and that they are rewarding and recognising excellence. It will be based on established systems and processes, but with greater clarity – for example, it will demonstrate how separate elements such Ofsted inspections and the Framework for Excellence (FfE) fit together.

Providers' own quality assurance procedures are underpinned by self-assessment, a process that supports their own work on quality improvement and is used to measure progress against its own mission and goals. The self assessment process includes data gathered from a number of sources including the observation of teaching and learning and MIS data. Guidance can be found at: [http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/Common-inspection-framework-for-further-education-and-skills-2009/\(language\)/eng-GB](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/Common-inspection-framework-for-further-education-and-skills-2009/(language)/eng-GB). The outcomes of self assessment are incorporated into providers' quality improvement plans. Inclusive quality assurance systems will ensure that learning support is fully embedded into all aspects of the system.

Factor 13 Incorporate support provided by LSAs into self-assessment reviews and quality improvement plans

Consistent and regular inclusion of the measurement of the impact of learning support and specifically LSAs contributions into the whole organisation self-assessment review is still rare. Some organisations have made progress in this respect. This example draws on several colleges practice to indicate some of the ways in which LSAs have contributed to self-assessment reviews (SAR) and quality improvement plans.

²⁴ The White Paper (2008) '*Raising Expectations; enabling the system to deliver*'

LSAs attend regular review meetings, as part of an annual cycle, to generate information for the learning support section of the SAR. They identify what they consider to be their strengths and areas for improvement. Their review framework requires that each area identified has evidence to substantiate its inclusion.

Evidence includes feedback from learners, online staff and learner satisfaction surveys, analysis of observations and learner achievement data. Comparisons are made in aggregated data by programme areas for learners who have received learning support and those who have not. One college has found that those who receive support have consistently higher achievement levels. This college is now investigating whether who provides the support and how has any bearing on successful outcomes.

LSAs and tutors discuss what they consider to be the priority areas for improvement and these are also considered with the learning support learner reference group. The outcomes are considered along with all the other evidence by the learning support quality improvement group which also includes LSA and learner representatives and targets are set. The remit of the group includes reviewing the previous quality improvement plans and targets.

Observation of Practice

Factor 14 Involve LSAs and build observation of learning support into existing quality assurance processes

The observation of teaching and learning is a well established and integral part of most organisations' quality improvement procedures. However, few organisations systematically observe the provision of learning support by LSAs as a distinct activity, although this is increasingly being recognised as important.

This example describes how a college developed an effective procedure for observing the support provided by LSAs. It illustrates the importance of involving LSAs in the process, seeking feedback from them and responding to what they say.

In 2008/9 LSAs at a Further Education college who were studying for the NOCN L2/3 Induction for Supporting People with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities identified that they required feedback on their practice in the classroom to feed into Performance Management Review (PMR.) An observation process was implemented for two years and LSAs fed back was really positive and linked to their CPD.

In 2010/11 LSA observation forms were developed by the learning support manager, her team and the Head of Quality, ensuring they were consistent with other forms and processes across the college for continuity and standardisation.

Feedback from LSAs and teaching staff across college has resulted in the observation grading being changed from outstanding; good; satisfactory and inadequate to

strengths evident and areas for development. When asked to comment what impact the changes have had on the learning support team, the manager commented:

“Observations are now seen as really positive; there is always room for improvement and opportunities to excel. As a result LSAs request and are observed in all the areas they provide support in, developing a wide range of skills and competence in delivering support across college and also in specialist areas.”

Evaluation of the observations and feedback has identified the need for specialist 1:1 work and tutorials to be observed as well. This was implemented in November 2010. The college has external reviews from the AoC and has recently had an Ofsted Annual Monitoring Visit, both were very positive.

The next case study demonstrates the benefits of observation of LSAs’ practice and the importance of making the time to ensure that LSAs feel valued and equal to the rest of the staff within the organisation:

Observations take a lot of time for the managers and senior LSAs to conduct but the feedback from LSAs has made it worthwhile. They find the process empowering and it makes them feel valued and equal. Learning support work can be very isolating as it is so diverse and you could be in an area of college where you are not with any other LSAs. Observations are a good way to touch base with the rest of the team; get feedback on your strengths; identify areas for development and where to access the support and CPD to develop further. All LSAs are observed a minimum of once per year but this college has adopted an open door policy on this.

The case study examples below illustrate how the FE and ISC colleges have successfully developed and implemented observation of learning support by building on effective practice that already exists within the organisation, involving LSAs and raising the LSAs awareness of national standards that relate to their role.

- Use the same report for LSAs as teachers, with an agreed action plan. Deliver LSA observation in a way that has equal value to the teaching system.
- Use statements from other resources and standards relevant to teaching and learning when developing observation tools. I found statements from OFSTED Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills from September 2009 useful. It helped the LSAs to make the Common Inspection Framework relevant to their role and develop their knowledge further. (Please see [Annex L](#)).
- Ensure LSAs understand why observations are being conducted and make the

process transparent and show LSAs all the documentation that will be used.

- Ensure that observations are conducted across roles: Generalists should observe some specialist; managers from other teaching and learning across the organisation to observe learning support staff or vice versa, to give a more objective picture.
- Widen the scope of those involved in observation to include staff such as those responsible for ALS, LLD, Learning Support co-ordinators, staff responsible for safeguarding.
- When conducting observations, give feedback promptly, within a set timescale and allow enough time. Feedback should focus on professional development and be delivered in a professional way, with no interruptions, to allow LSAs to see that that are valued.
- There is a circular process of observing a person and making a judgement about their performance, providing training to meet identified development needs, and then observing them again. Progress is measured through observation.
- Ensure that all staff conducting observations have full training and gather LSA feedback. The importance of investing time in training those staff who will be conducting the observations was clear. Having provided training for the LSA co-ordinator, she was given an opportunity to shadow the trainer who modelled the approach throughout the observation process. The outcomes for those trained were to increase their confidence and an offshoot was that it helped performance review.

The following case study from a Further Education college demonstrates how the LSAs were actively involved in developing the existing observation processes, the positive outcomes that came from the actual observations and the feedback provided by LSAs and teachers. It also reinforces the importance of involving and empowering LSAs.

An LSA observation checklist was devised with a framework for excellence that the same group of LSAs had previously devised through consultation and staff development (see [Annex K](#)) mapped in as pre-requisites for good practice. The importance is LSAs having ownership of any tools developed for their development was deemed essential. The following resources were also used and referred to in developing the checklist:

- 1) Observation tools of other colleges
- 2) Aide memoires from other colleges
- 3) Common Inspection Framework Sept 09
- 4) New Lifelong Learning UK overarching professional standards for teachers, tutors

and trainers in the lifelong learning sector

- 5) New Lifelong Learning Learning Support Practitioner training standards
- 6) LSA observation tools from other colleges
- 7) LSA checklists-Supporting Transformation Ltd

Over a two day period 16 LSA observations of 30 minutes took place across the college. The observations were notionally graded using the following grading criteria:

- A denotes highly developed practice with elements of good practice which should be shared.
- B denotes some good practice, with areas for development
- C denotes much development needed

Engagement of LSAs in determining the agenda was essential; it worked well because they had signed up to it.

Conducting the exercise of critically reviewing the skills and qualities required by excellent LSAs was particularly revealing and clearly indicated the need to refresh the vision of LSAs and revisit their roles and responsibilities together with training designed to help teachers understand how to work effectively with LSAs and develop their skills.

After the observations, training was delivered on the outcomes to every member of the teaching and support staff and the LSA excellence framework included in [Annex I](#), was developed further.

This example clearly illustrates leadership commitment as well as the benefits of involving other professionals in the development of observation tools while allowing LSAs to take ownership.

Attending a well established regional Peer Development Group for specialist colleges has been instrumental in the development of an effective observation system for LSAs. College Principals were actively involved and the group worked in partnership with an Ofsted inspector/ consultant to devise a standardised tool to use as part of a supportive and developmental process. The tool was piloted with LSAs within the colleges in June 2010; it did not include a grade judgement; however formal feedback from LSAs requested a grade judgement to be introduced in the future. LSAs identified that observations gave them a sense of being valued by the organisation. They also found that the SMART targets given in the action plan, such as further reading and research, attending specific training or a professional dialogue with a colleague, were realistic and

motivating.

83% of observations of LSAs indicated good practice and 17% indicated outstanding practice. The process feeds in to performance management and review, the SAR and impact measures on curriculum.

The final example for this factor demonstrates how managers have worked in partnership with quality assurance staff to implement quality practice within learning support across the organisation.

The changes in the induction process relating to observation were adopted across the college. Agency staff, in all areas of the organisation, are expected to complete an induction within a set period of time. The interim review requirements from the agency also ensure that the observations are reflective of the expectations of the work force outside the college/education arena.

Our teacher observation sheets were developed further to include a section on effectively utilising Learning Support Assistants.

Performance Management (supervision and appraisal)

Factor 15 Recognise the importance of Performance Management for all staff including LSAs

Performance management is a well established and integral part of most organisations' quality improvement procedures. However, fewer organisations systematically implement the same level of performance management, supervision and appraisal for LSAs as for other staff, although this is increasingly being recognised as important.

In one Further Education College, effective performance management was identified as one of the key factors in the success of the learning support team.

The manager said:

"I am effectively managed and have benefited from built in time for my own CPD and management training. This has enabled me to develop excellent management skills and abilities in Performance Management and Review (PMR)."

For example during observation of LSAs, where strength is identified, the observer feeds back how the strength was evident to them. They also identify areas for development that feed in to PMR, where targets and action plans are set and reviewed.

The following case study example demonstrates how effective performance review results in career progression for LSAs:

A recently appointed Manager of Skills for Life at an ISC began her career in an LSA role. She has benefited greatly from undertaking the CPD and training that is identified through the whole organisation approach to performance management. It is through these appraisals, as well as observations and feedback, staff development days, peer feedback; professional discussion with her line manager and effective action planning, that this manager was able to identify her strengths and areas of development and reach her aspirations within this organisation.

LSAs benefit from being involved in drafting and/or refining their own criteria for excellence. One FE College is exploring how this can be used to inform quality assurance and performance review procedures. This example shows how a staff development session with LSAs can empower them and yield a wealth of information that can be used in a number of ways. In this case it was used to develop an LSA led framework for excellent practice ([Annex I](#)).

A staff development session was held for LSAs where, in groups of four, they were asked to record key points on a flipchart in response to the following question:

‘What skills and qualities do you need to be an excellent LSA?’

The outcomes were used to inform the observation of learning support. This in turn has been used to inform CPD, PMR, and ultimately, the review of roles and responsibilities and job descriptions. The advantage of this approach is that LSAs have ownership of the process and it reflects their real life experience. It is an empowering approach that demonstrates one of the other characteristics of effective practice, namely that they are valued members of staff and the ethos of the organisation is one that seeks and values their contribution and involvement.

A further case study gives excellent examples of the positive and constructive use of observation and structured and effective performance management. This can have an impact on staff, learners and the deployment of learning support staff.

Learning Support Assistant observations are undertaken by the learner support manager and/ or specialist support Instructors. All have undertaken CPD in standardisation of the observation process and giving feedback.

Any lecturers or support staff that are new or have been identified through PMR as having an area of development relating to awareness of additional needs of learners and/ delivering, utilising and managing learning support are supported in the following ways:

- Through a buddy system with a peer who has a good understanding of learning support;
- By being allocated a very experienced LSA who is able to offer guidance of the learning support process;
- Through mentoring from Specialist Support Instructors; and
- By being given access to specific CPD that has been developed around the delivery of learning support.

An external review of provision by the AoC identified that the quality of learning support was not consistent throughout the whole college. Further exploration identified that not all tutors were utilising LSAs effectively due to a lack of clarity of the LSA role. This has been successfully addressed by the ALS Manager delivering a popular joint 'twilight sessions and inset staff development' for Tutors and LSAs called 'Outstanding in action', a participatory workshop where effective learning support is demonstrated as part of the delivery and experiential learning.

Observations provide an excellent mechanism for discussion and staff development around what is meant by effective deployment and use of learning support staff. For example: A Vocational Tutor was observed and achieved satisfactory, the main reason was the ineffective use of learning support as the lesson plan and context statement did not identify how learning support was planned for differentiation, LSAs were not utilised appropriately or effectively resulting in learners not being fully engaged to access learning. The tutor and LSA were offered mentoring and an action plan was set as part of PMR to receive CPD around differentiation and effective management of learning support in the classroom. Further observations have seen significant improvement in these lessons and due to the ethos of this college, this tutor has become a great advocate for accessing CPD and the positive differences it has made.

Effective Management Information Systems

Making effective use of management information underpins effective quality assurance. Our research found that organisations have benefited from developing their existing MI systems to incorporate the way that the learning support provision is delivered, reviewed and evaluated.

Standards

Several of the generic national occupational standards for managers can contribute to recognising the practice that promotes the analysis of collected data recording the effectiveness of learning support. These include:

E2 Manage finance for your area of responsibility

E8 Manage physical resources

E10 Take effective decisions

F10 Develop a customer focussed organisation

F12 Improve organisational performance

13 Manage quality systems

These incorporate decision making in relation to the allocation of all learning support related resources which consist mainly of people and equipment including assistive technology hardware and software.

The follow National Occupational Standard for LSAs can contribute to the practice that compliments the analysis of collected data:

Standard A: AP 14 Maintain accurate records relating to learning support

Factor 16 Develop tailored Management Information Systems

The following case study examples from an FE college and an ISC clearly demonstrate how MIS contribute to effective management of learning support.

A review of our MIS identified that the way we used data in a way that didn't fulfil all our requirements. The college IT manager had specialist knowledge in computer programming and development and set about a rewrite that consolidated the current process into tailor made MIS. All staff were consulted; their feedback was explored and incorporated into the new MIS where possible.

One of the key success factors was that the developer was a member of staff and was extremely approachable; people felt their opinions were valued. The system is still evolving and its development is organic, reflecting the needs of the learners and the current climate.

Our MIS is bespoke to the college and has been developed in order to ensure that it meets the needs of all stakeholders. A significant amount of information is held on the MIS and remaining paper based information is in the process of being transferred to the MIS in order to create a cohesive system.

Factor 17 Use Management Information Systems (MIS) to empower learners and for learners and staff to plan individual programmes and review and record progress

One college has developed an integrated MIS that enables learners to review their own support and to email a third party, with an LSA deployment alert system.

Over 30% of our learners in FE are supported, 14.5% have mental health issues and we have seen a 5% rise from last year. We identified a need for a system that enables learners to manage more of their own support on line. Our MIS is live and enables our learners to review and evaluate their support plans as well as email any changes or progress directly to four allocated members of learning support staff who are responsible for deploying LSAs. This has been an excellent way to overcome the barriers that learners have previously identified to reviewing and changing their own support. For example; if a learner felt that the LSA had been over or under supporting them there was no way for them to address this, other saying so directly or no longer accepting support. This system enables learners to email a third party that they can openly discuss any concerns about their support requirements, who can then diplomatically affect those changes.

The MIS also notifies the learning support manager if a learner has had a referral from submitting work. The learner is then contacted for an informal discussion to let them know about the learning support provision. This helps identify and meet support needs early on.

The following case study identifies the different ways in which a bespoke MIS is used to ensure consistency for learners, review and evaluate achievement, reinforce legislative requirements and enable LSA and managers to easily extract data for reports and evidence for funding.

Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) are initially completed by the administration team who collate data and set generic targets relating to health and safety, access and timetables. After four weeks the ILP is reviewed by the teacher, LSAs and key workers who work with the learner to identify ongoing individual targets, learning goals and action plans. The ILP has two sections as targets are driven by both the curriculum and the learners individual support needs to enable them to access all aspects of college life. The MIS enables all this work to be correlated into task lists for individual teachers, LSAs and key workers clearly showing the teaching and learning that needs to take place. This has proved immensely useful for cover staff to ensure continuity for learners. Access to the MIS is purely for staff from that college, it is modularised to ensure confidentiality and all Teaching and learning staff have the same access which makes the implementation of learning support seamless.

A traffic light system is used to monitor progress: A red cross for uncompleted tasks, yellow for review and green for completed or carried forward. Reviewing learner's

progress is simple, the first stage is to comment on and review what the learner has achieved already, the second stage is to set new targets.

The system takes both narrative and quantitative data and also enables soft outcomes for learners to be measurable; this is hugely beneficial for learners with complex needs to evidence their progress and achievements. All data is easily extracted for report writing relating to both vocational subjects and extracurricular areas, this impacts positively on resources like time and administration and gives accurate data as there is no room for error. .

This example from clearly demonstrates how MIS can be used by learners.

Learners are encouraged to evaluate their learning experiences, where the learner can do so in a meaningful way, after each session. LSAs either support the learners to enter their evaluations independently or act as an amanuensis by entering information into the MIS on their behalf. Similarly LSAs support tutors by entering information describing learning that has taken place against learner targets within sessions

Factor 18 Provide training and resources to support Learning Support Assistants to use the Management Information System effectively

For LSAs to contribute effectively to MI systems, they need to be trained, supported and provided with appropriate access to technology. The ELS project found that some LSAs were not confident in their use of IT and needed considerable encouragement and support. In the example below both time for administration and access to IT were issues that were overcome.

Our MIS is relatively new and the main challenges have been allocating administration time and providing a space for LSAs to access IT, as they did not have a staff room. This was remedied by allocating LSAs that work over three days a week with a laptop that they can log on with and providing an area of hot desks. LSAs on a 37 hour contract are timetables 30 hours contact time and 7 hours administration per week. LSAs manage this administration time themselves and this works well and they update the learners support plans; track contact time; how the learner was supported and review goals and targets.

The following examples exemplify how staff capability and confidence to use IT were the main barriers to overcome when implementing a new MI System.

- One of the challenges was enabling all staff to access MIS training, due to the shift patterns of the LSAs in Care. This was overcome by identifying and briefing small groups of key managers who then cascaded the training to LSAs at different times of the day. There was also some resistance to from existing LSAs who identified that they applied for the post initially as no IT was involved and they were scared of using computers. This is not the case when recruiting new staff as the workforce is changing and new staff often have the IT skills and knowledge required to use the MIS effectively after very little training. As an organisation we feel IT skills are crucial to effective support for learners and all LSAs are required to have or be working towards Level 2 in ICT functional skills.
- LSAs have viewed the new MIS as exciting and being involved has helped alleviate some of their fears around using IT. Not all the LSAs picked up how to use the system at the dedicated training sessions; this was recognised by their manager who built in time for more support until they were able to use it confidently.
- All LSAs are trained to use the MIS in order to ensure they have the necessary skills to use it effectively.
- There are computers in every classroom, linked to the MIS, to ensure progress and achievement can be captured in a timely manner after each session.

Summary of factors that promote inclusive quality assurance and performance management systems

- Factor 13 Incorporate support provided by LSAs into self-assessment reviews and quality improvement plans
- Factor 14 Involve LSAs and build observation of learning support into existing quality assurance processes
- Factor 15 Recognise the importance of Performance Management for all staff including LSAs
- Factor 16 Develop tailored Management Information Systems
- Factor 17 Use Management Information Systems to empower learners and for learners and staff to plan individual programmes and review and record progress

Factor 18 Provide training and resources to support Learning Support Assistants to use the Management Information System effectively

Characteristic D: Effective Continuing Professional Development and professional support

The research for the Supporting the Learner Journey found that all of the colleges and centres provided opportunities and access for their support staff to undertake training and qualifications. However, the view was widely held that many of the qualifications used did not match the role of the support staff which included the misdirected use of introductory teacher training qualifications. It also found that few institutions set the achievement of qualifications as a mandatory requirement. This was consistent with the findings of previous research which demonstrated that accredited LEA/Further Education College courses have lacked content relevant to the role of LSAs and that there are clear gaps between what has been taught and the contexts of the actual roles LSAs are required to undertake²⁵

This left continuing professional development as an ad hoc, ill focussed set of activities that could promote frustration and reduce motivation. In the Enhancement of Learning Support this issue was again picked up

“With regard to access to training and staff development for LSAs in FE, Robson et al (2006) Robson, J., Bailey, B. Mendick, H. (2006) An investigation into the roles of learning support workers in the learning and skills sector found it to be patchy. Some form of induction or shadowing appeared to be fairly common, as was the offer to participate in development activities. Managers suggested that LSAs who did not hold qualifications would be encouraged to work towards qualifications such as the City and Guilds certificate in learning support. However in practice, LSAs found it hard to arrange to attend training and were not paid to attend in some cases.”²⁶

The Supporting the Learner Journey Report confirmed that there was a widespread consensus that there was a need for an accredited qualification for learning support staff which would be flexible enough to cater for the range and variety of roles that support staff carried out.²⁷ Valuing Employment Now picked up on this need for

²⁵ Farrel et al., 1999

²⁶ Faraday, S. (2010) Enhancement of Learning Support, Training and Development Needs

²⁷ Supporting the Learner Journey Project Report for the Continuing Professional Development Needs of Learning Support Practitioners November 2007 – October 2008

appropriately trained learning support. They identified the intention of the Department for Business Innovation and Skills to encourage the relevant Sector Skills Councils to work with awarding organisations to develop qualifications for job coaching. They went further to include the assertion that the Department of Health would ensure that current work with Skills for Care on learning disability-focused qualification would be extended to include job coaching skills and knowledge, such as job carving and systematic instruction with the inclusion of training on gender stereotyping in career choices. They went as far as identifying how this would be funded through money used for additional learning support according to the circumstances of where the learning would take place.

This was further reflected in the Workforce Strategy for the FE Sector Lifelong Learning UK 2009 which stated

“To support staff in a changing and challenging environment, sector employers need to be committed to the personal and professional development of their workforce.”²⁸

In response to these issues the Enhancement of Learning Support Report highlighted that

“The location of CPD for LSAs within a consistent and coherent management structure was seen as crucial. Training alone is unlikely to bring rich rewards. Thus, effective professional development was likely to have a direct relationship to classroom practice and to build on LSAs existing skills and experience. Opportunities for reflection on practice, self appraisal and the sharing of ideas, expertise and knowledge with others would build and foster a culture that was essentially focused on developing and improving learning. Ofsted (2010) confirmed that in effective organisations the ethos was one where teachers and support staff were determined to learn from and work with each others.”²⁹

The report went on to make five recommendations related to the effective development of continuing professional development for LSAs. Namely

- Recommendation 3: Develop a Locally Based Network to coordinate CPD activities.
- Recommendation 7: Develop a virtual centre of specialist expertise.

²⁸ Supporting the Learner Journey Project Report for the Continuing Professional Development Needs of Learning Support Practitioners November 2007 – October 2008

²⁹ Faraday, S.(2010) Enhancement of Learning Support, Training and Development Needs

- Recommendation 8: Develop a career structure and progression pathway for LSAs in lifelong learning with relevant nationally recognised qualifications from Levels 2 – 4. Information about qualifications should be published on the LSA portal.
- Recommendation 11: Collate, develop and publish guidance and protocols on alternative CPD approaches such as shadowing, buddying and mentoring.
- Recommendation 12: Encourage the development of e-learning resources for LSAs and LSA managers. Existing resources should be identified and signposted on the LSA portal.

Relevant documents already available on [national archives site](#) such as Application Guides. Application guidance documents are produced through consultation with stakeholders and the relevant community of practice. They reflect a broad understanding of how national occupational standards should be applied for a particular context, group of learners or subject. For example;

- Using Technology for Learning Support Practitioners in the Lifelong Learning Sector
- Application Guide for Learning support for disabled learners
- Application Guide for Leaders and Managers to Lead the Effective Use of Technology in the Lifelong Learning Sector

Standards

Units from the National Occupational Standards for Managers can contribute to the development of skills, knowledge and understanding needed to design and promote the establishment of effective CPD opportunities for LSAs:

D7 Provide learning opportunities for colleagues

D8 Help team members address problems affecting their performance

D13 Support individuals to develop and maintain their performance

The following National Occupational Standards for LSAs can contribute to the recognition of the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to participate in effective CPD opportunities for LSAs:

Standard A:

AP 17 Evaluate and improve the effectiveness of own practice, identify own professional development and training needs, and take steps to address these

Standard C:

CP 6 Engage in professional development in specialist area(s) and in relevant learning support

Factor 19 Offer Continuous Professional Development based on performance management outcomes

Previous research has found CPD for LSAs to be sporadic, inadequate and not always derived from performance management. The following case study example from a FE College demonstrates how CPD derived from performance management and professional support contributes to the effective management of LSAs.

We developed learning support observations and appraisal processes, together with professional support, to focus in on areas for development for LSAs. Feedback and evaluation from the first round of observations identified a clear need for further staff development for both LSAs and teachers in the following:

For all LSAs:

Effective questioning to provide stretch and challenge and to support assessment for learning

Measuring individual progress and writing evaluative comments

Supported Learning: Epilepsy and health action planning

For all Tutors:

Planning for effective use of LSA (including their roles and responsibilities)

For all LSAs and Tutors

Autism/Aspergers awareness for cross college staff

Observation of learning support

Developing a LSA Framework for Excellence

A manager of learning support from a Further Education college described how she was instrumental in ensuring the LSAs she manages access CPD and professional support

“I started as an LSA over ten years ago and have used all aspects of my own experience to overcome the barriers to inclusion for learners by reflecting, identifying and campaigning for CPD for my LSA team.”

The college has outstanding status and the manager identified her own CPD, derived from effective performance management across the whole organisation as a key factor in the success of her team. Her CPD included management and leadership training as well as regular updates relating to specific additional needs of learners and generic teaching and learning.

Another learning support manager from a Further Education college has been instrumental in developing a Learning Support Certificate at level 2 and 3. It includes input on how to note take effectively for learners. *“I have worked for over sixteen years as a note taker and this is the first organisation that has offered me input on effective note taking”.*

This organisation offers other CPD opportunities to all LSAs.

All LSAs are given the opportunity to complete Preparation to Teach in the Lifelong Learning sector (PTLLS) after their six month induction. This is to give LSAs insight and knowledge of the processes involved in teaching and learning and how to plan effectively as well as promoting teaching as a career pathway. However, more recently LSAs who show enthusiasm and promise will be given the opportunity to complete PTLLS as part of their induction.

Factor 20 Involve LSAs and managers in the planning and delivery of professional development

Some organisations have developed effective strategies to ensure that LSAs can contribute to the planning and participate in the delivery of training.

The greatest challenge was making the most of the available time and ensuring LSAs were included in training days. LSAs timetabling is an issue as LSAs have little or no non-contact time. To overcome this, sessions were held first thing in the morning or at the end of day. Training programmes were redesigned to be delivered in small chunks of one hour, rather than longer sessions, which meant that activities had to be focused

and punchy.

Other suggestions were also offered:

- Engage LSAs in determining agenda;
- Actively involve LSAs, not just managers;
- Involve crucial staff such as the team leader;
- Professional discussion that takes place as part of their LSA performance management is very important, as one manager of learning support commented: *“We sometimes anticipate what their needs are but we always ask them what they think they need too; their own ideas are usually surprising but innovative!”*;
- Identification of common strands for training providing workshops to deliver the training, although it can be hard to get LSAs together. Experience suggested that over time, attendance grew;
- Spend time training staff well to develop their skills and confidence, especially in making judgements;
- Set up a system of communication upwards to managers; and
- Get commitment from the top.

The next case study examples reinforce the benefits of LSAs and teachers attending joint sessions of CPD.

LSAs are encouraged to access and implement professional development around strategies to support learners with communication needs, challenging behaviour and sensory processing disorders together with the teachers. It is no longer seen as purely the role of the LSA to manage challenging behaviour in the classroom and working in partnership is definitely more effective.

Recently Makaton training has been offered to all education team staff as part of a rolling programme. Teachers and LSAs are encouraged and enabled to access this together and work in partnership to implement it in their practice and to maintain a high level of consistent practice.

Factor 21 Provide Professional Development and Training that motivates Learning Support Assistants

We recently ran a pilot course City and Guilds Learning Support Practitioner Award and Certificate at Levels 2 and 3 and one of the benefits identified was that experienced LSAs developing skills alongside new LSAs. This helped address one of the barriers to LSAs attending CPD: motivating long serving experienced LSAs to attend and persuading them that more training and CPD is a positive and not a reflection of poor performance.

Also suggested were the following:

- Promote value for money, especially in current climate, by ensuring that the value to the organisation is understood, not just the value to individual learners;
- Build in time for moderation and assessment;
- Provide good quality of packs and resources to show that LSAs are valued;
- Use real materials - including learners' work and make it relevant and practical; and
- Spend time training staff well to develop their skills and confidence, especially in making judgements and providing positive and constructive feedback.

The following case study recognises the need to motivate LSAs to participate in CPD and training by giving them dedicated time or using free time effectively.

LSAs are allocated a specific number of hours per week of non-contact time (time in their working week that they are not deployed to work with learners; this is proportional. For example an LSA contracted for 30 hours per week would have 5 hours non-contact time.) These hours are to complete any administrative tasks like updating learner reviews; adapting resources; meeting up with planning sessions with teachers as well as CPD. All LSAs are allocated a specific two hours for CPD every Wednesday.

The excellent relationships between LSAs and their manager's coupled with effective communication with other staff across the organisation is key to developing opportunities for staff to access CPD. For example, when a supported learner is attending work experience the learning support staff know if they will be required or not as they are involved in the planning. LSAs are very proactive in identifying free time and we are reactive to this by using it to update LSAs in the delivery of CPD identified by them. We have many experienced staff in our team, such as a member of the Institute of Dyslexia, who has the skills and knowledge to deliver effective CPD on this ad hoc

basis.

Factor 22 Implement a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Framework for Learning Support Assistants

In the light of funding constraints, more than ever organisations are associating value for money with accreditation. Accredited CPD and training provides a career pathway and progression route for LSAs.

Supporting the Learner Journey is a CPD framework that has been specifically designed for LSAs and support staff supporting learners over the age of 14. The framework consists of 14 units, all accredited through NOCN at level 2 or 3. Unit 1 from the generic core is entitled: Introduction to CPD and Review and was developed to complement any existing Performance Management Review documentation and tools and enable managers to support their staff to put together a record of achievement that clearly demonstrates their strengths as well as any areas for development. This record of achievement documentation also enables a professional dialogue to identify record and monitor SMART targets and an individual progression route for future CPD.

The implementation of a CPD framework, such as *Supporting the Learner Journey*, provides a mechanism for LSAs to become reflective practitioners and have a professional dialogue with their managers and derive CPD from their PMR.

The next case study is from an LSA from an ISC where the LSA has a specialism in work-based learning and job coaching. It illustrates the value to an LSA of a framework for CPD that has been mapped against the national occupational standards.

Understanding how my job description and person specification matches the national occupational standards for learning support practitioners was useful in the introduction to the CPD framework. This is because I was able to identify the areas I needed to develop to perform my job most effectively. From this I was able to identify that 'Strategies for supporting learners with challenging behaviour' would be the most useful next unit. From completing an introduction to CPD and Review I was able to write short, medium and long term smart targets to identify what I would like to achieve in three years time.

The CPD framework makes you reflect on your own skills and experience. This helps you identify all the extra skills that you have that you didn't realise before. It also, through reflection on your own practice helps to identify the areas for improvement. For example, one such area for me would be assisting learners to achieve accreditation for vocational work experience by attaining a Level 1 Certificate in Retail Skills.

Factor 23 Enable LSAs to access peer support networks

There are many support networks for learning support staff across the country although they tend to involve predominantly teaching staff and learning support managers. LSAs are included in some of these. Forums specifically for LSA peer support are a rarity.

There is a long standing informal Learning Support Forum that is held every 10 weeks on a Friday afternoon 1- 4pm for any FE provider in the South West to host or attend. Forums like this provide an opportunity for LSAs and managers to:

- Share best practice;
- Share paperwork;
- Provide and receive informal peer support and mentoring;
- Arrange visits to other colleges; and
- Promote a non-competitive approach to sharing information and ideas.

The following case study examples illustrate the value of LSA peer support and the arrangements made in an organisation to promote peer support.

Some of our LSAs fed back that although they found the targets identified from observations useful, they felt daunted by them. They identified that they benefited greatly from accessing support from their peers. This resulted in two developments which will give effective support and empowerment to all LSAs to enable them to meet their individual targets:

- A draft proposal for an LSA peer support committee to be re-instated. This is still in the early stages of development; and
- The workforce development team with the college now offers coaching courses to all staff, including LSAs, to enable effective peer support to take place.

LSAs have a peer buddy right from induction. Among the feedback from recently appointed LSAs was the relief to have a buddy when you start work to ask all those questions you don't want to bother or are unable to access managers to ask. Peer buddying has also developed excellent team work between LSAs and a culture of

sharing best practice and that it's "OK to ask if you don't know!" This results in learners being supported consistently and effectively

The following case study illustrates the positive integration of peer observations with the recognition of the benefits for learners.

In order to promote reflective practice and peer support, the managers and co-ordinators of learning support work collaboratively to develop the "Learning Walk." LSAs are observed delivering support, both in class and 1:1, against learner's SMART targets. The observation was recorded and gave a snapshot of how each LSA was engaging with their learners, the rapport that had developed and how they were working with the learner to reach their personal goals. The recordings were analysed, elements of best practice were clearly identified as well as areas for development. LSAs identified as excelling on certain areas were matched to LSAs who were not so competent and the latter were invited to observe best practice and benefited from professional discussions with their matched peer, this raised their level of competence and feedback indicated that LSAs found this both supportive and empowering.

Learner Walk has been developed further by developing peer observations for LSAs to complete. Initially, this was difficult to implement as LSAs were reluctant to observe and feedback to each other. They saw it as negative and threatening until they received a staff development session with managers that empowered them to see peer observation as a positive way to gather knowledge and experience from each other and further access peer support to implement the practice themselves.

Feedback from the peer observations is collated and followed up with termly Good Practice Events facilitated by the Learning Support Co-ordinators. These events are to celebrate best practice and give input on any common themes for areas of development. One of the key challenges to overcome was the amount of time it took to develop this culture of peer support but the benefits it has brought to the learning support team and learners has been immense.

Factor 24 Promote Reflective Practice

Reflecting on what has happened is an excellent way to explore how to improve and develop practice and also celebrate achievements. This case study example illustrates how a Further Education college actively encourages reflective practice:

LSAs are given a guidance document on journal writing and reflecting at their induction (See Annex I) All LSAs are encouraged to become reflective practitioners, to capture ideas, identify and reflect on what happened and why, what went well and what could have been done differently. A log is also used for recording accurate information; celebrating successes; reviewing; helping LSAs own learning process and clearing the

mind of the stresses related to delivering support.

This document has been particularly useful for those undertaking the Foundation Degree in Learning Disabilities as critical reflection is part of the course. LSAs have fed back that they find reflecting particularly useful after a difficult session with learners they are supporting; when support hasn't worked as well as they have predicted; to reflect and identify what could have been done differently and why and as a useful tool for discussion with a peer and/or manager. This helps develop the delivery of the support in an empowering and inclusive way.

Summary of factors that promote effective continuing professional development and professional support

- Factor 19 Offer Continuous Professional Development based on performance management outcomes
- Factor 20 Involve LSAs and managers in the planning and delivery of professional development
- Factor 21 Provide Professional Development and Training that motivates Learning Support Assistants
- Factor 22 Implement a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Framework for Learning Support Assistants
- Factor 23 Enable LSAs to access peer support networks
- Factor 24 Promote Reflective Practice

Characteristic E: Effective working relationships

Between Learners, LSAs and Teachers

The working relationship between the learner, LSA and Teacher is crucial to the progress and achievement for the learner. The pattern for this can be set from the outset with appropriate and effective transition planning and implementation.

“The section 139(a) learning assessments that local authorities usually carry out through Connexions should be informed by an individual’s person centred transition plan. Children and young people with learning disabilities are six times more likely to have mental health problems than other young people (the

*Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities) employment will be emphasised as part of the road to recovery and a key motivational element in managing mental health conditions”.*³⁰

The ‘Life Chances’ report³¹ that, by 2025:

‘Any disabled person who wants a job, and needs support to get a job, should be able to do so’.

It continues by asserting that if real disability equality is to be achieved the default must be that everyone will have the chance to get a job of their choice, just as for non-disabled people.

The Learning and skills Council (LSC) spends almost £330 million on education and training for 19–25-year-olds with moderate or severe learning disabilities. Yet too little of this education leads to jobs. Even where colleges do provide good work preparation, this is likely to be wasted if people do not transfer quickly into employment.³²

The reason given for this is captured in the report [Valuing People Now](#) which identifies that lack of understanding and aspiration about what can be achieved sometimes leads to an assumption that people will be passive recipients of care throughout their lives, as opposed to people who can make decisions and live as empowered citizens in our society.

Valuing Employment Now asserts that we know from international evidence that it is possible for everyone to make an economic contribution. Everyone else involved in the lives of people with learning disabilities also needs to believe that work is both possible and desirable, and recognise their role in this: workforce training will be fundamental

Valuing People Now says that all young people with learning disabilities should have person-centred transition reviews and plans, so that they can plan for keeping healthy, where they want to live, a real job, and friends and relationships. Families and young people have said that many young people with learning disabilities are not achieving the same outcomes as other young people in education, jobs, and in having a good social life with friendships.

³⁰ Department of Health (2009) Valuing Employment Now

³¹ Prime Minister’s strategy unit (2005) *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*

³² Department of Health (2009) Valuing Employment Now

Transition plans need to show that young people and their families have had a strong voice at the review meetings, that they know what is positive and possible for the future, and that clear actions have been set in the areas of health, housing, jobs, friends and relationships³³.

This may prove to be a challenge for learners, LSAs and Teachers and they need to develop the use of techniques and technologies that will enable learners to progress and achieve in their chosen fields.

“A wide range of assistive devices make it easier for people with learning disabilities to get to work and do their jobs well. One example is the easy5 telephone. This compact phone allows the user to simply press a button for the person they want to call. As additional safety features, the call button can easily dial emergency services, and the phone has a remote tracking device. In Leicester City, a travel buddy who has a learning disability has been using the easy5 phone for the last two years. She has stored the numbers for her manager, her home and the person who is supporting her. This helps her to feel safe and do her job well.”³⁴

The Enhancement of Learning Support report picks up on this theme:

An example from Pure Innovations: Learning in a supported employment setting

In addition to work related training, input was provided to support him to learn to travel to and from work using a bus. Additional support in the workplace was also provided to ensure that he was prompted to take his breaks at the correct time.

It goes on to explain that LSAs who were effective at providing appropriate support as discreetly as possible were not only valued, but they were recognised as having a significant skill by the learners they support. The relationship between an LSA and a learner was powerfully described by one contributor as being “a partnership arrangement and not a one way process”.

This partnership working also works in the LSA and Teacher relationship;

³³ <http://www.valuingpeoplenow.dh.gov.uk/valuing-people-now/personalising>

³⁴ Department of Health (2009) Valuing Employment Now

“Ofsted (2010)10 confirmed that in effective organisations the ethos was one where teachers and support staff were determined to learn from and work with each others”³⁵

The Enhancement of Learning Support report identifies four recommendations to address and promote positive and effective relationships between learners, LSAs and Teachers:

- Recommendation 9 Review Initial Teacher Training and CPD specifications for teachers to ensure that they include working with support staff;
- Recommendation 13 Develop resources to support organisations in involving learners in identifying their own support needs;
- Recommendation 15 Explore the potential of technology for further promoting independence and identify best practice within the sector to reduce reliance on physical support; and
- Recommendation 14 LSIS and its partners to undertake further research to identify how existing structures and systems influence the provision and nature of support and potentially discourage independence.

Standards

Several of the generic national occupational standards for managers can contribute to identifying effective practice in the management of the delivery of learning support in the classroom. These include:

B8 Ensure compliance with legal, regulatory, ethical and social requirements

B11 Promote equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion in your area of responsibility

C1 Encourage innovation in your team

E11 Communicate information and knowledge

E12 Manage knowledge in your area of responsibility

This can include the systems and procedures used to consolidate all the informing assessments experienced by learners; reasonable adjustments designed to enable

³⁵ Faraday, S.(2010) Enhancement of Learning Support, Training and Development Needs

access to learning; progress reporting and action planning with learners and assessing achievement and completion.

The following National Occupational Standards for LSAs can contribute to identifying effective practice in the management of the delivery of learning support in the classroom:

Standard A:

AP 3 Develop and maintain effective relationships with learners that promote learning

AP 4 Communicate effectively with Learners

AP 12 Collaborate with and respect the contribution of colleagues and others

Standard B:

BP 1 Contribute to the planning of learning support that is inclusive and meets curriculum requirements

BP 2 Contribute to the planning of learning support that meets the needs of individual learners and groups and enables them to progress towards their identified learning objectives

BP 3 Contribute to the negotiation and monitoring of individual learning objectives

BP 4 Support colleagues in the development and application of assessment methods

BP 5 Promote learning through questioning and constructive feedback and involve learners in feedback activities

BP 6 Encourage learners to share responsibility for assessment of their own learning

The case study examples that we received from both GFE and ISC has enabled us to illustrate the following factors that contribute to effective management of Learning Support Assistants related specifically to relationships under the following headings:

Effective assessment for Planning Personalised Learning

Factor 25 Conduct full and detailed assessment for Planning Personalised Learning

Developing personalised planning for learners only happens as a result of a full and detailed assessment of learners. Our research found that the terminology used and content of plans varies across organisations and sectors. It can include developing Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) Learning Communication and Behaviour planning (LCB) Individual Student Programme Planning (ISPP) and support plans. Our research also found that practice relating to this factor also varies and can but does not always include the role of the LSA in the process. The principal of the learner being at the centre of the process remains the same throughout.

In Independent Specialist Colleges other professionals are heavily involved due to the complex needs of the learners. In Further Education colleges, managers or senior LSAs have often completed the task and then cascaded the information to the LSAs that are directly delivering the support. However, in both areas it is becoming more accepted that LSAs are an integral part of developing personalised planning with learners. This is reinforced by the Learner Voice clearly stating that learners want to be in control of their own support and want personalised attention from the LSAs they will be working with.

The following case study includes extensive details of the development and delivery of effective planning of personalised learning. Although this example originates in an ISC many of the elements of the assessment should be considered by other providers to ensure that they are implementing a thorough assessment process that considers all aspects of a learners learning experience.

We identified that the transition from school to our college varied from excellent to really poor and set out to develop a fair, effective and consistent transition and assessment process for learners regardless of where they came from.

Historically the assessment of learners' needs was completed by managers prior to the learners arriving, did not involve LSAs and it was identified that information was not always effectively communicated to the LSAs who were delivering the support. We developed a new process and ran a pilot initially involving a small group of LSAs. Feedback and evaluation were incorporated in to a revised structure, namely the Baseline Assessment and Transition Programme that consists of the following:

- Programme Front Sheet - A pre-admission assessment and transition front sheet with the learners contact details, parent/carers details and the LSA assigned as personal mentor throughout their stay at college;
- Baseline Assessment Blank Forms (Annex M) - LSAs to record information gathered and identify a support plan that ensures a smooth transition and on-going support;
- Baseline Assessment practical observation form (Annex N) – A holistic and very full

assessment for LSAs to complete along with the Curriculum Co-ordinator and all other professionals involved with the learner;

- Example of Transition Book for Incoming Students (to be produced for individual learners to include photographs of the learner's named mentor, the co-ordinator, and a range of learners participating in college activities, to be added to as the transition programme progresses and presented to the learner on the first assessment/transition visit); and
- An Assessment Checklist to for named LSA mentors and curriculum co-ordinators to follow.

A Transition Programme and book for Student Leavers are currently being developed

LSAs will continue to be involved in transition, assessment, planning and implementing learning support in this way. The pilot has been really successful and two learners have recently completed their first planned one day per week transition visit to the college.

Key success factors are:

- Joint working of LSAs and Curriculum Co-ordinators;
- Shared responsibility;
- Establishing LSAs as personal mentors has strengthened partnership work with other stakeholders;
- Management recognising and utilising LSAs many transferable skills; and
- LSAs feeling empowered and valued.

The following case study example illustrates how ILPs and support plans are essential to ensure the delivery of effective learning support by all LSAs and support staff to enable learners to access a waking day curriculum at an ISC.

To ensure that learners receive consistent levels of high quality staff support across education and support teams across the waking day curriculum, the college has ensured that ILPs and support plans provide clear educational guidance and protocol guidance for support that describes how the learners prefer to be supported and the best and safe practice involved in their support. Education colleagues including LSAs and support staff colleagues are provided with training and access to this information on the MIS and this ensures that learners are supported to excellent standards.

The next case study, also from an ISC, illustrates the benefits of having LSAs that are practiced and skilled in assessment and personalised planning that includes working in partnership with other professionals. Not all learners require assessment that involves

all these professionals, but this example does highlight the range of professionals whose input may be required and the depth and breadth of the assessment process.

Effective assessment by LSAs leads to an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that clearly identifies the support needs required to be delivered together with the strategies and resources that will enable the learner to reach their aspirations.

All our learners are assessed in English and Maths and it is often these assessments that identify learners with undiagnosed additional needs who are then enabled to access support throughout the duration of their course.

Assessments include those undertaken by Tutors, LSAs, Occupational Therapists (OT), Behaviour Assessors (BA) and Speech and Language Therapists (SLT) and pre-placement assessment takes two days to complete.

All learners take the English Speaking Board communication examination. From this we establish that learners range from milestone 8 to Level 2. All the information is collated and funding applied for through YPLA.

For example: Some learners arrive with diagnosed speech, language and communication needs (SPLC) and some are identified as having communication needs through our assessments. Those learners receive therapy from SLT who also advise on effective strategies. Strategies are also assessed, delivered and reviewed LSAs whose specialist training in this area enables them to contribute to the initial assessment process and on-going reviews.

The outcomes of the assessment process should contribute directly to a detailed individual learning plan with specific learning targets with the identification of the appropriate support required to achieve them.

Joint planning, review and evaluation

The case study examples that we received from both GFE and ISC colleges has enabled us to illustrate the following factors that contribute to effective management of Learning Support Assistants related specifically to learning support delivered in the classroom. Working together in planning and delivery is identified as crucial,

“Team work, communication and trust - the teacher and LSA work together on fine tuning the lesson planning, knowing who is responsible for what and talking through any possible glitches.”

Factor 26 Work together to develop and deliver specialist learning support

The following example shows an LSA fully involved in the planning and implementation of specialist learning support.

I am an LSA in an ISC and have been using my professional development in therapeutic input to develop sensory stories to deliver a multi-sensory experience to some of our learners. Initially I have a discussion with the class teacher to agree on an appropriate story or theme, individual targets and outcomes. The story is delivered as a whole group session weekly throughout a term. It works well because it is delivered at the right pace, is repetitive so the learners can anticipate future events as well as being extended as the term progresses.

I identify targets for individuals at the beginning of each term and these are then broken down into smaller weekly targets which are assessed at the end of each session. The activity is successful when the targets are set appropriately, reviewed regularly and achieved. A major contributor to the success of the use of these stories is to have support from other LSAs working in the group. I need them to engage and support the learner during the session to promote a holistic learning experience for them. I also need them to be enthusiastic and encouraging to all learners. Another major contributor to achieving a successful outcome is to have each session well prepared.

This next case study example highlights the benefits and results of LSAs and teachers implementing specialist learning support together.

Some tutors and LSAs have achieved accredited CPD in Eiklan Speech and Language Support for Post 16s and this has enhanced the working relationship for both parties, providing common ground for regular professional dialogue to take place between LSAs, tutors and Speech and Language Therapists to plan, review and evaluate the delivery of specialist support for learners with communication needs.

As a result both LSAs and Tutors are able to:

- Able to understand and communicate more effectively with learners;
- Able to communicate with each other more effectively;
- Apply theory to understand and respond effectively to behaviour;
- Have a greater understanding of SPLC and confidence in delivering and implementing support strategies such as giving more time; total communication, differentiation, visual aids, ICT, Blank level assessment; comic strip conversations, social stories etc.; and

- Use tools to monitor, review and evaluate.

The following example demonstrates effective working together to develop and deliver specialist learning support between the LSA and a specialist support provider.

We have a Sensory Support Specialist allocated to specific learners here for ten hours per week. He supports the transition process for learners with the LSAs who are going to be supporting them. The specialist support is often front loaded and involves lots of guidance and professional dialogue with the LSA who will be delivering the on-going support. This has proved very effective and the LSAs are developing specialisms in sensory support that benefit all learners being supported at the college.

Factor 27 Work together in assessing and reviewing learning to inform delivery

This example demonstrates how the process of reviewing learning identified a particular need, provided the support required and developed an effective approach that could be employed more widely.

Review and evaluation of learning support identified a need for a strategy to support a learner with hearing impairment to learn the meaning of words in the context of the subject they are learning. For example, the word stress has different meanings in psychology and sociology. The learner was getting frustrated and demoralised. The LSA with specialist knowledge developed a glossary with the learner that showed the different meaning of words in different contexts together with the BSL sign. This really boosted the learner's confidence and having something individually tailored to her needs made her feel valued and supported, she soon got back on track with her course work. This is now being developed further and glossaries are being developed for learners struggling with terminology in other subject areas. The use of these for other learners is being more widely explored.

The next two examples illustrate how LSAs work together with their LSA peers, teachers and learners to embed specialist support within an ISC.

I have specialist training and hold a Gym Rep 2 qualification and develop exercise classes for learners. LSAs take my lead and embed the practice I have demonstrated with the learners and as I have specialist training I am always present, this continuity is of great benefit to the learners. LSAs and teachers also review the learning and provide feedback for me that is instrumental in developing delivery of this specialist learning support.

This was a regular timetabled dance class, planned and structured by the tutor and discussed with the LSA for 5 students rehearsing for a performance.

The session started with a recap on previous session and a group discussion on the dance routine so any problems could be recognised before the actual rehearsal. I ensured that all the learners participated in the discussion and were aware of Health and Safety issues on the stage delivering the specialist support required to enable them all to run through the performance. The session ran smoothly as all eventualities had been considered and planned for. All the learners/dancers became more confident as the routine was rehearsed, requiring less support to remember their steps and producing a better performance by the end of the rehearsal time. Joint session review and evaluation identified learner development and confirmed a successful session. A key factor was the tutor and LSA working together on fine tuning the lesson planning, knowing who is responsible for what and talking through any possible glitches.

Factor 28 Work together to evaluate learning support and implement new strategies

It is imperative that the learner, teacher and LSA communicate effectively. The following case study exemplifies the importance of having a system for effective communication to identify and respond to and rectify support that has not been effective.

A deaf learner identified that their communicator was signing too fast, triggering a review of their support with the LSA who has specialist knowledge in this area. The support plan was updated to include instructions for the communicator to sign a little slower and to allow for eye breaks. The LSA followed this up with the teacher, who also accesses the support plan, and they reviewed and evaluated the support together. It was identified that part of the issue was that the course was an access course, with a very fast paced delivery. The teacher was advised by the LSA and built the eye breaks in to the lesson plan. Another outcome from this evaluation highlighted the need for the learner to have cultural references as deaf learners have a different culture. The learner was taught a strategy by the LSA where they jot down a cultural reference to remind them of the meaning of words and terminology used regularly in their course.

Below is another example to illustrate the importance of working in partnership; to constantly evaluate and review the delivery of support that results in an effective strategy being implemented to enable the learner to achieve.

One learner was performing really well in her work placement and was being assessed using the task of laying a table. During the assessment she continuously failed the task, becoming confused and withdrawn. A review led to her language level being assessed and the questions used in assessment were modified to an appropriate level

and the LSA and tutor working collaboratively: Visual prompts and objects of reference were used to prepare the learner for the assessment i.e.: Instead of asking her to list what should be on the table, they held up a knife and said “you need a (show knife and learner said the word) and a?” (learner said “fork.”) Supported by the LSA, the learner created strategies for remembering words and understanding what was being asked during assessment. The learner soon passed and her confidence has grown.

Factor 29 Provide support that promotes independence and empowers learners

Our research identified that outstanding and high grade organisations encourage learners to take responsibility for managing their own learning and support, whether the support is provided by LSAs or other professionals.

A manager of learning support commented;

“Our learners are actively encouraged to manage their own support. Support is often front loaded and delivery is around getting that learner up to speed with accessing all aspects of college life and learning. As the learners confidence builds and they get used to college and implementing the learning strategies we have showed them, they require less support for a while but may hit a new barrier and require more again for a while. Learners are included in decision making about their support, rather than being told about it.”

The following case study examples illustrate the importance and benefits of enabling learners to do this by having a culture that supports this ethos and implementing support strategies that genuinely empower them.

- The Communication Passport is developed with the learner in an accessible medium of their choice. I.e.: pictures; symbols; writing; photos; objects of reference. It contains information about the learners to enable them to introduce themselves; their aspirations and achievements so far; communicate their preferences relating to all aspects of the waking day curriculum and social life, including how they choose to be supported. For example: a learner may state in their passport that they don't like it when people answer for them or that they require up to 3 minutes to think if you ask them a question.
- Learners are also given coloured cards to identify and communicate easily and effectively if they have or have not understood or require support. Red is for “I don't understand”, green is for “I understand” and amber is for “I need help”.
- Using assistive technology enables LSAs to develop and promote independence and empower the learners. For example: learners that require support with memory

and organisation benefit from a handheld device programmed with lists of vocabulary relating to their curriculum; individual timetables, targets, living skills together with videos and photos to use as visual prompts.

- Learners identified that they were having problems tying the aprons used in the work place as many of them have poor fine motor skills. They stated that they didn't want to have to have help with the aprons and would prefer to change the design to something they could use without support. They were involved in choosing and purchasing a tabard and have gone on to use them fully independently.

Effective use of ICT and assistive technology that supports and empowers learners

Factor 30 Use social networking technology to access learning support

The next case study example demonstrates how one college is developing ways for their learners to access support by building on what they know to be familiar concepts used to keep people connected socially in a way that conforms to the organisations e-safety policy:

We have a student portal that enables our learners to access a live chat facility with LSAs through accessing a Meebo account. This is relatively new and we have found that it is being regularly used to access support and information from the learning support team. We have learners who are experiencing agoraphobia; medical conditions or mental health issues that mean they are accessing learning virtually and therefore need to access learning support in the same way. Meebo is instantaneous and allows the learner to remain anonymous and communicate any concerns openly. Meebo is used within the guidelines of the organisations e-safety policy.

Factor 31 Use assistive technologies regularly and appropriately

Our research found that LSAs knowledge relating to assistive technologies range from none to extensive. Use of technology to deliver support can contribute to innovative teaching & learning which further help develop independent living & working skills. The following case study example from an ISC demonstrates how LSAs have been instrumental in exploring and developing awareness of assistive technology with learners and also shown learners how to implement strategies that support their own learning using assistive technology and trouble shoots any problems with them, promoting independence at all times:

In consultation with the learners we decided to increase our use of mobile technology to enhance learning. Our ultimate goal, as with anything, is that it had to be real, practical and enhance the independence and work related skills of our learners. Already we had made huge strides with M-Learning; HDMI- connecting laptops to TVs in residential houses ; digital cameras ;flip cameras; podcasts, and even Wii consoles has contributed to improving spatial awareness and co-ordination skills within a gaming context. Our aim was to develop the learner net and buy a hand held device for each learner that enables the student to read e-mails or access the Internet wirelessly and independently.

Learner voice representatives were given the option to trial a small sample of hand held devices and chose the one that maximised accessibility for them:

<http://accesstechnews.wordpress.com/2009/09/16/new-archos-5-internet-media-tablet-does-it-all/>

The key benefits we have gained from achieving success in the use of assistive technology in this way are:

- Learners have an involvement in the process and develop IT skills;
- It allows for session content to be pushed out to all learners - collectively as well as individually;
- Staff are trained to use and maintain devices and update information;
- It has led to innovative teaching & learning which further help develop independent living & working skills;
- We won an innovation in mobile learning award 2010; and
- We have been heralded as an exemplar practice by JISC for our outstanding commitment to safeguarding and linking this notion with our learners' transition into work and independent living.

The next example illustrates how assistive technology is empowering learners with additional needs to access the same technology as their peers, to overcome obstacles such as written and oral assessments and to evidence achievement and information required to inform appropriate transition.

A new initiative that has been recently introduced within the college is that of an 'e portfolio' system, separate to the MIS, whereby learners are supported to develop electronic portfolios evidencing their achievements in learning. These are in their chosen format such as symbols; written words; audio files and visual records and are used within annual review meetings. Currently in the first phase of the development it is the final intention that the 'e portfolios' can become a tool to demonstrate a learner's progress and achievement to external stakeholders and be used to more effectively

support 'on exit' transition to post college providers.

Summary of factors that promote effective working relationships between learners, LSAs and teachers

- Factor 25 Conduct full and detailed assessment for Planning Personalised Learning
- Factor 26 Work together to develop and deliver specialist learning support
- Factor 27 Work together in assessing and reviewing learning to inform delivery
- Factor 28 Work together to evaluate learning support and implement new strategies
- Factor 29 Provide support that promotes independence and empowers learners
- Factor 30 Use social networking technology to access learning support
- Factor 31 Use assistive technologies regularly and appropriately

Effective working relationships with other professionals and stakeholders

Valuing Employment Now recognised the need for an all agency approach to supporting learners with difficulties and disabilities. It identifies the introduction of a new employability Hub which would focus specifically on people with complex needs. The Government also intended to promote information from the voluntary and private sector about successful approaches. It also detailed how the DWP intend to encourage closer join-up of services by making it clear that providers need to work closely with external parties such as social care organisations and education providers to support the transition of disabled customers onto the programme.

The report promotes strong partnership working at local level that helps individuals to discover what they want to do for a living and develop a plan, or includes it clearly in existing plans, to include this aspiration and suggests that the self employment route can be particularly suitable for people with more complex disabilities.³⁶ The Supporting

³⁶ Department of Health (2009) Valuing Employment Now

the Learner Journey Continuing Professional Development for Learning Support Practitioners Continuation Project promoted the development of a community of practice through the trainer programme and the website. Evaluation feedback asked participants “How will you take this forward in your work place and build up a community of practice?” An enthusiastic reply confirmed

“I have started already! Links with colleagues and neighbouring colleges and liaising dates to pool resources and put on training.”

Supporting the Learner Journey Project Report for the Continuing Professional Development Needs of Learning Support Practitioners November 2007 – October 2008

Valuing People Now says that all people with learning disabilities and their families should have greater choice and control over their lives. This means that local authorities, partners and other service providers need to reshape and redesign their systems to give people with learning disabilities and their families more control over the support they get.³⁷

However the Enhancement of Learning Support report identified that although networks do exist, these do not typically operate at LSA level. They found that managers and senior workers sometimes attended network meetings although they had little experiences of these networks facilitating the sharing or comparing of practice. It found that a network of Learner Support Managers has been established in the South West which has been running for 3 years and is attended by at least 10 FE colleges and one sixth form college, although not currently including any ISC representation. It meets once a term and is clearly valued by those attending. More than one manager spoke positively of the network meetings as an important means of reducing their own sense of isolation by providing a support network of like minded colleagues:

“It is really good to talk to people doing the same role and to have the opportunity to share practice.”³⁸

³⁷ <http://www.valuingpeoplenow.dh.gov.uk/valuing-people-now/personalising>

³⁸ O'Brien, K., O'Brien, A., (2010) *Enhancement of Learning Support: The training and development needs of learning support assistants. Findings and Recommendations* (www.natspec.org.uk)

This need for networking across all services and within learning support is clearly a developmental need. The development described in Recommendation 1 (detailed below) from the report could go some way to addressing these issues.

- Recommendation 1: Develop a web based portal to provide a common location for information and resources for LSAs and their managers. This will also support the development of a collective identity for LSAs and should improve practice by supporting the sector to share information more efficiently. This is likely to involve the development of a national organising body.

Standards

Several of the generic national occupational standards for managers can contribute to identifying effective practice in the management of the delivery of learning support in the recognition of the need to build effective relationships not only in the specific learning environment but also in the wider learning community and beyond to include personal carers and/or family members. These include:

D2 Develop productive working relationships with colleagues and stakeholders

D12 Participate in meetings

D17 Build and sustain collaborative relationships with other organisations

The follow National Occupational Standards for LSAs can contribute to identifying effective practice in the management of the delivery of learning support in the recognition of the need to build effective relationships not only in the specific learning environment but also in the wider learning community and beyond to include personal carers and/or family:

Standard A:

AP 7 Work with colleagues with appropriate expertise to identify and address the language, literacy, numeracy and ICT needs of learners

AP 12 Collaborate with and respect the contribution of colleagues and others

AP 13 Communicate relevant information about learners to others with a legitimate interest

Standard B:

BP 4 Support colleagues in the development and application of assessment methods

Standard C:

CP 5 Support learners, colleagues, and others in the selection, development, use and evaluation of resources in providing specialist support

The case study examples that we received have enabled us to illustrate the following factors that contribute to effective management of Learning Support Assistants related specifically to relationships not only in a particular learning environment but also in the wider learning community and beyond to include personal assistants, carers and/or family members.

Factor 32 Promote effective communication between LSAs and stakeholders within the organisation

Our research found that a key factor to successful and effective learning support that involved other stakeholders was effective communication and this seems to happen more when everyone is situated on site. The next case study examples from both FE and ISC colleges illustrate the benefits of having other professionals as part of the staff team, such as easy access to meetings; professional dialogue; effective sign posting; less waiting time for learners, particularly if they are in crisis and the development of personalised planning. In the following case studies the importance of effective communication has been recognised and LSAs are fully involved.

LSAs are part of an onsite trans-disciplinary team and work in partnership with teachers; specialist nurses; speech and language therapists; occupational and physiotherapists and behavioural management specialists. LSAs are integral to the team and are not separated from other staff in the organisation.

Our organisation has Education Psychologists and Counsellors as part of the staff team. They link and work closely with LSAs who specialise in dyslexia support and support for learners with mental health issues.

Effective communication within faculties in this organisation is achieved by LSAs having opportunities to attend meetings and be involved in curriculum planning sessions. They are kept up-to-date with all information regarding the faculty.

Factor 33 Promote effective communication between LSAs and stakeholders outside of the organisation

The first example below illustrates some of the links one college has with organisations that are able to offer advice and guidance on specialist support required by their learners. LSAs with a specialist role take the lead in maintaining communication.

The structure in our learning support team recognises the specialism our LSAs have in Sensory Impairment and they have specific responsibility in ensuring they are networked with other professionals and working in partnership with other agencies such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) and Action for Blind People (AfB). These organisations are very supportive in our local area and offer information and advice to us and our learners. Our college takes turns in hosting regular meetings for other organisations with learning support teams and the RNIB to gain up to date information and share best practice of how to support learners with sensory impairment. In addition:

- We link with external agencies for advice and guidance, such as MIND and The Dyslexia Association; and
- We work closely with the Connexions service, particularly during learners' transition from school to further education.

This example illustrates the effective part played by LSAs in supporting parents and to mediate in communications with them.

LSAs have developed parent groups for parents of learners with impairment. This was in response to one parent initially; who identified that there was no network of support for parents once their children entered FE and was keen to set something up. This has been identified as a challenging time by parents as they feel they have lost the control over their child's education and learning support that they may have had in school.

One learner started a course at college and due to effective advice and guidance that raised their aspirations higher, realised that they were on the wrong course and wanted to change direction. This caused some friction at home. The parent was reluctant to visit college but was able to access support from the parents group. This empowered her to attend some cultural mediation (the opportunity to explore the similarities and differences between school and college culture) with her son at the college and the issues were resolved.

In this example the LSA works with another professional to design a programme to implement and disseminates the information about it to her peers.

I work as a LSA in an ISC and have specialist knowledge in therapeutic input. Following initial assessment by their Physiotherapists, some learners are able to benefit from sessions in the school gym. I meet up with the Physiotherapists and their learners and together we go through the suitability of each piece of equipment and complete an induction. I am then able to meet up with the learners on a weekly basis and guide them through their exercise routine in a controlled and safe manner. Having this consistent communication and input from physiotherapists enables me to achieve success with the learners by making the session fun and keeping learners motivated. It also empowers me to cascade information relating to the benefits and importance of exercise to staff across the organisations as well as parents and carers and this supports positive outcomes for all.

Factor 34 Recognise the contributions Learning Support staff can make to other areas of the organisation

LSAs can make a wider contribution to the organisation than directly supporting learners. These two examples illustrate the valuable contribution LSAs have made to health and safety and through the learner voice committee.

One of the best training days I delivered was a fire evacuation session. I gave the LSAs wheelchairs, mobility scooters, crutches and placed them in areas they were not familiar with. I then asked them to evacuate the building. They came back with an alarming number of issues which our health and safety and fire officers took on board. I then followed up and then fed back the information. The LSAs felt really valued, listened to and it improved our fire procedures. As an exercise it was well worthwhile.

The Learner voice committee is facilitated by LSAs and is now in its third year. There is one representative, nominated from each of the eight residential houses that learners reside in during their time at college. The agenda is set by all learners' in house meetings and involves decision making relating to all aspects of college life. Learner Voice feeds in to the organisations Self Assessment Report (SAR) during the year.

At the end of each academic year all staff and learners receive the SAR. Two learner friendly versions have been created, the formats identified through learner voice committee - one is a film made with learners and the other in easy read.

Everyone is given the opportunity to feedback on the SAR using whatever format is accessible to them. Senior management see learner involvement as an integral part of managing learning support within teaching and learning.

Summary of factors that contribute to effective working practices with other professionals and stakeholders

Factor 32 Promote effective communication between LSAs and stakeholders within the organisation

Factor 33 Promote effective communication between LSAs and stakeholders outside of the organisation

Factor 34 Recognise the contributions Learning Support staff can make to other areas of the organisation

Conclusions and Recommendations

There are many examples of effective practice in the effective management and deployment of LSAs and learning support both across organisations and in the classroom. However, these examples tend to be isolated and the difficulty in gaining access to such practice, experienced in this project, was symptomatic.

There was little evidence, that holistic, organisation wide effective practice is the norm. We found that best practice has been recognised, clearly defined, exemplified and disseminated in those organisations where effective management is recognised as essential in learning support. This is supported with effective CPD for learning support seniors and managers where they are given the opportunity to gain the skills, knowledge and understanding related to management and the opportunity to achieve management qualifications.

This project report attempts to provide evidence of effective practice that can be used to promote coherent and constructive development in the management of learning support across the organisation and in the classroom.

The vitality and enthusiasm of LSAs and managers who provided case studies suggests that there is considerable scope for improvement and a willingness to learn and share with others. This is tempered by the very real pressures on providers, especially of time and resources, which, in some cases, presented an insurmountable barrier to participation in the project.

Our analysis has led us to define five broad characteristics of effective practice and more than 30 contributory factors. Although comprehensive we do not claim that this is the complete list. We suggest that the factors offer clear statements for guidance in the development of policies, procedures and practice that can contribute to the improvement of learning support services and the integration of the work of learning support into the effective management of organisations.

We recommend that:

- LSIS produces a comprehensive map of effective practice into which all the Enhancement of Learning Support projects are mapped;
- LSIS develops the web portal in the excellence gateway to provide clear signposts to resources between and beyond projects and between and beyond organisational boundaries;
- LSIS disseminates the outcomes of this project, encourages providers to share best practice and to establish a meaningful title for the role so that it is recognised as genuinely professional;
- LSIS promotes the recognition of learning support as a tool for inclusion in any environment where learning takes place including work based learning, supported housing and independent living;
- LSIS recognises the need to promote and develop research and continuing professional development in learning support linked to the National Occupational Standards. This to include addressing the debate related to 'learning support' or 'learner support' complimentary and compensatory roles and the relationship between learning support and care;
- Providers audit their practice, use the examples in this project against which to benchmark their practice, identify areas for improvement and incorporate these into their development plans;
- Providers review their MIS capacity and practice to ensure that the impact of the work of learning support is included at every level of monitoring, evaluation and strategic planning;
- Providers develop appropriate CPD for Learning Support Managers and Senior LSAs to develop their management skills, knowledge and understanding;
- Providers encourage and support LSAs to engage in development activity and support groups including local and national networks across all types of organisation;
- Providers consult with LSAs to create systems that genuinely empower learners to manage their own support;
- LSAs review their practice and consider how they might improve their own contributions; and
- Teacher trainers and professional development providers ensure that all teaching staff have the knowledge and skills to work effectively with learning support assistants.

References

Enhancement of Learner Support: Learning Support Assistants – An Analysis of a 15,000 Workforce' Using Data to Understand Workforce Trends and Implications

Glynn Owen Association of Colleges March 2011

[http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/Common-inspection-framework-for-further-education-and-skills-2009/\(language\)/eng-GB](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/Common-inspection-framework-for-further-education-and-skills-2009/(language)/eng-GB)

Farrell, P., Balshaw, M. H. and Polat, F. (1999) *The Management, Role and Training of Learning Support Assistants* London: DfEE publications

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Annex A: Methodology

The methodology adopted a mixed methods approach including desk research, online requests for contributions and telephone and face to face interviews.

From the outset it was agreed that we would take a case study approach to the empirical research for this report. To complement this we agreed to include findings from recent research to set the context for the empirical findings.

Using case study and reported practice has not only given validity to the findings but has also given organisations the opportunity to showcase their best and outstanding practice.

Designing the Data Collection Tools

Data for analysis was collected from a number of sources: web-based documentary data, including a 2010 Report on the Training and Development Needs of Learning Support Assistants and a supplementary review of relevant literature; Valuing People Now; Valuing Employment Now; reports from the Continuing Professional Development Needs of Learning Support Practitioners Project and the subsequent Continuation Project. After reviewing recent research and based on personal experiences, including those gained from the completion of the Supporting the Learner Journey Continuing Professional Development framework for Learning Support Practitioners, we compiled two lists of factors that we considered captured the areas of exploration needed for the report.

After discussion with our specialist support we refined the lists and designed both the request for contributions and the Case Study Data Collection Proforma (see Annex C). The request for contributions document was refined once more to include some minor amendments and the final document (see Annex B: Request for contributions) was distributed.

Framework for data collection of effective practice factors

Factors that contribute to effective management and deployment of LSAs and learning support across the organisation

- 1) Clearly established and understood role in the context of teaching and learning.
- 2) Appropriate LSA recruitment and induction
- 3) Mapping of LSA's knowledge, understanding and skills to learner's needs for effective deployment.
- 4) Promotion of effective working relationships between LSAs and other stakeholders

- 5) Promotion of LSA peer support networks
- 6) Effective performance management within the organisational system
- 7) Continuing professional development derived from effective performance management
- 8) Quality assurance processes that measure the effectiveness and impact of learning support
- 9) Management information system that records, monitors and analyses effectiveness of learning support relating to recruitment, retention and achievement of learners
- 10) Promotion of the value of learning support within the culture of the organisation

Factors that contribute to effective management of LSAs and learning support in the classroom

- 1) Effective working relationships that contribute to team working that includes LSAs, teachers and learners
- 2) Effective management of the LSA's contribution to the initial assessment process and ongoing review
- 3) Individual Learning Plans used actively by all to effectively support learners
- 4) LSAs and teachers working together in planning, reviewing and evaluating delivery
- 5) Effective use of ICT to promote and support learning and record progress and achievement
- 6) LSAs providing support that promotes independence and empowers learners towards their long term aspirations
- 7) LSA's reflecting on own practice to contribute to the evaluation and development of delivery and to inform performance management.
- 8) An effective system and supply of appropriate resources to support learning.

Although the list appeared to be clear, the responses of those questioned suggested that some aspects of the document were confusing. Their reactions also suggested that they could not see the relevance of some aspects. As the data was collected it became apparent that there were two significant influences on these responses. One was that many of those questioned only saw learning support in the narrow confines of the learner and the classroom and were uncertain whether they were delivering good or best practice. The other was that so little of the wider management processes and

practices existed that they were not recognisable as relevant to learning support. However, once a discussion was under way examples of good and best practice were uncovered and have been included in the findings.

Data Collection

The empirical data was collected from responses to email requests for contribution through many different networks; structured telephone interviews (a copy of the Case Study Data Collection Proforma is included in Annex C); group interviews with staff during a regional event and one to one interviews as appropriate and when the opportunity arose.

Both documents were disseminated through the network of the Enhancement of Learning Support Programme and were included on the dedicated website. They were also distributed through previously constructed networks from the Supporting the Learner Journey development project. The forms were also taken to 2 regional events where both written and oral accounts were gathered. The majority of the case study material was gained from intensive telephone and face to face interviews.

Distribution Details

Locally

60 Named contacts at Further Education establishments from the Working in Partnership group used in the research for the Supporting the Learner Journey Framework. These include the charities Action for Blind National Autistic Society, Royal National Institute for the Blind, Lyndridge Care and Mencap with a view to gaining contributions from the sector delivering specialist provision where care and learning are less segregated.

66 learning support assistants who participated in the Supporting the Learner Journey Framework trials and pilots

5 Higher Education establishments

1 Independent Arts College

All members of Devon and Cornwall Training Providers network

1 work based job coach from a charitable organisation

1 specialist IT support tutor that travels round colleges specifically to engage learner with VI.

6 Elklan Speech and Language Support Tutors

All who attended the South West Regional Event on the 15th of November and Request for contribution documents e-mailed to all on the organiser's contact list

12 attendees at the Inclusion Forum at Learning South West

Nationally

All ELS project leads in ISCs and FECs and Specialist Support for regional activities with the request to disseminate Request for Contribution and the case study data collection tool

All the contact people for regional events identified on the Natspec website were emailed with the request to disseminate the Request for Contribution and the case study data collection tool to all the delegates at or after their event.

The project Specialist Support called for contributions at two London regional events

The ELS project director provided contacts and followed up others

From the Effective Learning Support: The key to quality and success Conference

Outcomes

15 organisations made 49 contributions

One work-based learning coach from a charitable organisation

One Independent Art College

One 6th Form College

Five Independent Specialist Colleges

Six General Further Education Colleges

One Partnership college – GFE and Specialist Provision

Two organisations demonstrated an interest and gave their contact details at the South West regional event but did not respond to follow up phone calls or emails.

One organisation informed us that their Principal would not agree to them contributing

Five organisations identified an interest in contributing but did not respond to follow up phone calls and emails to the learning support managers or named staff from the organisation.

Collecting examples of good and best practice proved to be extremely time consuming. Many contacts either did not engage or, having been contacted once, became unobtainable. The reasons for this could be many but generally it appeared to be caused by the pressure of work load and time constraints. With the charitable organisations that combine care with learning it may be seen that learning support is

still seen as something that is a bolt on and that learners only access it while they are in college and purely for the time they are there.

Face to face discussions with people at conferences and targeted requests, following up contacts recommended by specialist support, project team members and the advisory group, were by far the most successful methods of making initial engagements. The most successful way to establish useful case studies proved to be through persistent telephone calls and following up time and time again to gather the information and documentation needed.

Source of final contributors

Four from Project Managers (2 personal contacts; 1 Inclusion Forum; 1 from cold calling a GFE with an excellent Ofsted Report)

Three from the SW Regional Event: One was written at the actual event, two organisations contributed at a later date through a mix of email and telephone consultation

Three via the ELS project director

Two via the project specialist support.

Three from the Effective Learning Support: The key to quality and success conference

When able to, many contributors relished the opportunity to share their practice and showed pride in their achievements. There were a few examples of practitioners being unsure of how much they were able to share their practice due to restrictions imposed by their organisation's perception of the competitive market in FE. However, we were able to obtain case studies to be able to offer illustrations for all the identified factors.

Compiling the Results

All the case studies were reviewed to consider:

- a. Type of provider coverage
- b. Themes/characteristics coverage
- c. Region//Location spread
- d. Strength of Evidence

We found that we had gathered a good spread of types of provider having ensured that we would include examples of Further Education Colleges, Adult and Community Learning, Work-Based Learning and Independent Specialist Colleges although predominantly the case studies were based in FE or ISC organisations.

The collected case studies contributed to best practice examples for the majority of the factors. Areas where further requests for contributions were required were the use of Management Information Systems, effective use of financial resourcing, peer support networks and LSAs and teachers planning, delivering, reviewing and evaluating in partnership. These case studies were collected through targeted requests to known organisations and individuals.

The greatest challenge was ensuring that all types of providers were included and that we had contributions from across the country. As with data collection, this was achieved through persistent telephone calls and following up time and time again. The willingness to contribute was challenged at this point because, as we needed to gain detail and confirmation of permission to publish, we yet again hit the pressure of work load and time. We found that contributors were happy to talk about their practice but struggled to find time or motivation to read through our records to ensure that we were capturing an accurate picture of their practice. However, all case studies used have been agreed.

Structuring the Findings in the Report

Having devised an initial list of 18 factors to be explored we recognised that the report needed to be constructed within a coherent and accessible structure. After considerable discussion and extensive writing and rewriting we established five key characteristics of effective practice used as headings with sub-headings where appropriate. These headings are intended to reflect discrete areas of management responsibility while reflecting an overview of the structure and practice within the majority of organisations.

A: A culture and ethos that values Learning Support

B: An established LSA workforce

Planning the LSA workforce

Appropriate recruitment

Effective induction

Effective deployment

C: Inclusive quality assurance and information management systems

Quality assurance

Observation of Practice

Performance Management (supervision and appraisal)

Effective MIS

D: Effective CPD and professional support

E: Effective working relationships

Between Learners, LSAs and Teachers

Effective assessment, ILPs and support plans

Joint planning, review and evaluation

Effective use of ICT and assistive technology

Support that empowers the learner

With other professionals and stakeholders

We agreed that a key feature of this report would be clear statements highlighting the factors illustrated in examples that had contributed to effective management and deployment of LSAs and learning support across the organisation and in the classroom. We agreed to anonymise the case studies in the body of the report for ease of scanning while acknowledging all the contributors in a separate section to ensure they gain recognition for their practice.

The National Occupational Standards for management have been referred to as a framework for best practice and these are referenced to provide specific details of knowledge, understanding and skill pertinent to competent management.

The National Occupational Standards for Learning Support Practitioners have also been referred to as a framework for best practice in learning support.

Finally, we drew conclusions from both the findings from the data collected from research reports and recommendations and the results of the empirical research to highlight future areas for research and development.

Having two writers compiling the report proved to be both challenging and supportive. Having very experienced and knowledgeable support also proved both challenging and supportive. The discussions demonstrated how different our styles are and how we can view the same issue or data in very different ways but through thorough and wide ranging discussions clear and detailed action plans were achieved. We also enjoyed the intellectual sparring and creative process that resulted in the final report.

Annex B: Request for contributions

Final version of the Request for Contributions document

The Enhancement of Learning Support Project



Are you delivering teaching and learning in the post 16 sector?

Request for Contributions

We are looking for contributions to form into case studies to illustrate our report on effective practice as part of the Enhancement of Learning Support Project www.natspec.org.uk. Do you have interesting stories that relate to any of the following headings? Would you like the opportunity to publicise examples of your best practice?

We need stories from all types of delivery including GFE, work based learning, specialist colleges, sixth form colleges, private training companies and offender learning.

If you think you do please e-mail Angie on award@westengland.ac.uk or ring Sue 07971385121 giving us your contact details and/or a summary of your story. Alternatively please feel free to complete and return our Case Study Data Collection Proforma.

Section 1

Factors that contribute to effective management and deployment of LSAs and learning support across the organisation

1. Clearly established and understood role in the context of teaching and learning.
2. Appropriate LSA recruitment and induction
3. Mapping of LSA's knowledge, understanding and skills to learner's needs for effective deployment.
4. Promotion of effective working relationships between LSAs and other stakeholders

5. Promotion of LSA peer support networks
6. Effective performance management within the organisational system
7. Continuing professional development derived from effective performance management
8. Quality assurance processes that measure the effectiveness and impact of learning support
9. Management information system that records, monitors and analyses effectiveness of learning support relating to recruitment, retention and achievement of learners
10. Promotion of the value of learning support within the culture of the organisation

Please Turn Over

Section 2

Factors that contribute to effective management of LSAs and learning support in the classroom

1. Effective working relationships that contribute to team working that includes LSAs, teachers and learners
2. Effective management of the LSA's contribution to the initial assessment process and ongoing review
3. Individual Learning Plans used actively by all to effectively support learners
4. LSAs and teachers working together in planning, reviewing and evaluating delivery
5. Effective use of ICT to promote and support learning and record progress and achievement
6. LSAs providing support that promotes independence and empowers learners towards their long term aspirations
7. LSA's reflecting on own practice to contribute to the evaluation and development of delivery and to inform performance management.
8. An effective system and supply of appropriate resources to support learning

Thank You

Annex C: Case Study Data Collection Proforma

The Enhancement of Learning Support Project

Report 3 - Case Study Data Collection Proforma



Describe your practice including What, How, Who, When and Why it works well.
Identify how you know it works well and the evidence that confirms this for you.
Highlight what you see as the key factors to achieving success.
Describe the challenges you experienced and how you overcame them.
What advice do you have for others? (top tips)

Thank You

Annex D: The role of the LSA Guidance Document

NB: This example is using the term support worker instead of learning support assistant

Learning Support - The Role of the Support Worker

The tutor has the responsibility to ensure that appropriate programmes are being planned, followed and monitored. The support worker is expected to work under the guidance of the tutor and meet the needs of individual learners or groups of learners.

The support worker can work one to one with learners or with a small group of learners, they should not be used to photocopy or cover sessions. The role of the support worker will vary from session to session and it is important that they are informed of their duties from the start in relation to the different learners or sessions.

It is frequently the case that support workers are 'thrown in at the deep end' with no clear idea of what is expected of them. This leads to confusion and the feeling of being undervalued, which results in the students not receiving their support and therefore not meeting their individual needs.

Causes of confusion

- Lack of background information on learners or course.
- No 'named' person to relate to, too many people telling the support what to do.
- Breakdown in communication between support worker and tutor.
- Lack of joint planning and trust.
- Unclear expectations of support staff.
- Support worker is unclear on how to work with learners.
- Assumptions that the support worker has specialist knowledge.
- No 'goals' set for the learners.

This can be prevented by effective communication between the tutor and support worker so they are clear on:

- The ground rules for working with the students;
- The plan for an individual learner or group of learners; and
- Building an effective professional relationship with the support worker.

Tutor's Role in Working with a Support Worker

The tutor has a key role to play in managing the support worker and it is helpful to consider the following aspects:

- Ensure that the support worker is clear about roles and responsibilities;
- Provide opportunities for planning and discussion;
- Make clear and realistic requests; and
- Value the support worker as part of the team.

Using an In-Class Support Worker to provide Inclusive Learning

- Encourage learners to settle at the beginning of the session. Remove coats, bags on the floor, pens and paper out ready to work.
- Integrate late learners into the session without disruption to the rest of the group.
- Encourage learners to concentrate and listen to verbal explanation – taking notes if necessary which can then be photocopied for students with Specific Learning Difficulties.
- Encourage learners to listen to the tutor during verbal explanations and help with explaining tasks. Encourage learners to respect each other's ideas and suggestions.
- Support learners with their literacy during written task. It may be necessary to scribe for some learners. This may also include adjusting their spelling, supporting them in looking up words, or spelling words for them.
- Support learners in focussing on tasks. Reiterate, explain, and discuss tasks to be carried out in order to aid understanding. Walk around finding out what they are doing, guiding discussion back to the work being carried out.
- Provide a presence within the class by regularly walking around checking on learner progress and encouraging learners to remain on task especially if the support is generic in-class. Work with small groups of learners when identified by the tutor.
- Guide learners throughout tasks. This may include providing ideas, discussing points with learners and raising additional questions. Ensure learners are paying attention to detail.
- Ensure the learners have the resources they require. This may sometimes require photocopying or differentiating a resource.

- Encourage learners to respect each other's personal space and possessions. As well as college property. This includes encouraging learners to clear up resources after task and use bins provided.
- Place yourself strategically. This may include sitting next to disruptive learners or in between quite verbal learners. This will have the effect of quietening them down without causing any disruption to others.
- Ensure you discuss learner behaviour and learner issues with the tutor that day, during break or once the learners have left the session. Communication with the tutor is a valuable tool to ensure that the learners experience consistency.
- Support the tutor in maintaining a consistent approach to discipline. Once ground rules have been agreed, encourage learners to abide by them and take responsibility for their behaviour. (Adult environment, expect appropriate behaviour within the classroom).

Annex E: How to Effectively Utilise LSAs Guidance Document Example for Teachers

NB: This document uses the term support workers instead of LSA and Tutors instead of Teachers

Working effectively with Support Workers

An effective and professional relationship between a Tutor and the Support Worker is imperative for promoting successful inclusive practice within the classroom/workshop etc. During a teaching session the Support Worker will work under the guidance of the Tutor and Support Workers should not be expected to be seen as the learners' 'minder'. The Support Workers do not have sole responsibility for the learners with additional support needs and this only creates a barrier between the learner/s and his/her peers.

It is frequently the case that Support Workers are, 'thrown in at the deep end' with no clear idea of what is expected of them or their role within each session. This can lead to confusion and the feeling of being undervalued; consequently the learners are not receiving the support.

The Tutor has a key role in establishing an effective working partnership with the Support Worker and the following needs to be put into place:-

- Ensure that the Support Worker is clear about the session they are supporting and the learners within the group. You will need to provide the Support Worker with a Session Context Statement and Learner Profiles.
- Provide the Support Worker with a Scheme of Work and Assessment details.
- A Lesson Plan needs to be provided which clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Support Worker within the session and what is expected of them.
- The Tutor and Support Worker need to be seen by the learners as equal and it is imperative that the Support Worker is valued as part of the team and this is clearly demonstrated throughout the teaching session.
- Establish and maintain an effective professional relationship with the Support Worker.
- Establish and maintain an effective communication system with the Support Worker. There must be opportunities for a reflective discussion regarding the planning, progress and feedback of the learners' learning and behaviour. This will enable the Tutor and the Support Worker to together develop strategies for working with the learners.
- The Tutor must direct the Support Worker to enable them to respond to situations as they arise within the session.

- Ensure the Support Worker has access to the Faculty/Course Moodle sites - this in turn provides an important resource tool for the Support Worker e.g. Course Handbook, Course Calendar etc.
- The Support Worker can support the Tutor in delivering aspects of the session and differentiate materials for the next session if appropriate.
- The Tutor should not assume that the Support Worker has specialist knowledge but there are teams of Specialist Staff who can be contacted for advice and guidance on their learners' learning difficulties.

Further information on the referral system for learning support, Specialist Support Areas and how we can support you in ensuring inclusive practice is applied please contact the Learning Support Office.

Annex F: Example Service Level Agreement – teaching staff, support for learning

Name of Head of Service:

Date:

Review date:

The Learning Support team aims to support student achievement at (*Name of organisation here*)

You can expect the team to:

- Assess and diagnose effectively students needing learning support and create support packages;
- Work with students effectively and appropriately both in-class and in structured group and 1:1 sessions – where need requires;
- Monitor all students receiving support and use the College academic performance procedures as required, and to complete reviews and attend progress review interviews as appropriate;
- Develop and extend the range of support strategies they use, create guides and facilitate training sessions to support teachers;
- Enhance working relationships with Departments and individual teachers to improve collaboration, course planning and delivery;
- Provide a named link person for each Department who attends Department meetings;
- Facilitate Examination Access entitlements;
- Track all referrals and have a three working day turnaround from receipt of referral and exemplar work to the decision re potential support;
- Work with students to empower them to become independent learners;
- Keep all student data, including SEN, both confidential and secure; and
- Demonstrate a firm commitment to equal opportunities and a safe, effective working environment.

We expect teachers to:

- Ensure that students appreciate learning support as being part of their learner journey and encourage students to work with their LSM or teacher and attend all sessions;

- Share your scheme of work and lesson plans and to keep the team up-to-date with any room changes, or other alterations to the course;
- Collaborate effectively and respect our role as learning support for students;
- Make use of the resources, training and other strategies or support offered; and
- Work with us to create an effective and holistic learning experience for students.

Please note that this is a summary; there is a document entitled “Working Together” which can be obtained from the managers of Learning Support:

Name and contact details here.....

Annex G: Example Service Level Agreement – learners, support for learning

Name of Head of Service:

Date:

Review date:

The Learning Support team aims to support student achievement at (*Name of organisation here*)

The Support for Learning team aims to support and guide students to achieve their potential and also to afford them the opportunity of targeted learning support for their diverse learning needs, disabilities and difficulties and also promote their independent learning.

YOU CAN EXPECT:-

- The support for learning team to ensure that you are supported and assessed as appropriate to your needs;
- Help to enhance your literacy, communication and study skills;
- That the staff will work with your subject teachers to ensure that your support relates to your course as well as take account of your learning needs;
- An effective learning environment for your learning support;
- A firm commitment to Equal Opportunities; and
- That the team will make your learning needs of paramount importance, affording you respect for your needs and individuality.

WE EXPECT YOU TO:-

- Ensure that you attend sessions for assessment or diagnosis;
- Attend all workshops, or advise why you are unable to attend in advance;
- Complete any work set by the learning support team;
- Handle any resources provided and equipment with care;
- Return any items you have been loaned at the right time and when asked;
- Treat the learning support staff with respect; and
- Use the support you have been offered, whether it is in-class and/or a workshop, as part of your learner journey to help you achieve your potential and learning goals.

This is a summary of the key aims of our service level agreement with students. If you wish to have further information, then please contact(*Name and contact details here*)

Annex H: Learning Support Observation Proforma Example

NB: This organisation is using the term Support Worker instead of LSA

Support Worker :	Employment Status : FT/PT College/Agency	Observer :	Date of Observation :
Session/Course : Level : Entry/L1/L2/L3/HE	Location of Session :	Time of Observation :	Course/Session Tutor :
Number of Students in Session :	Group : 14-16/16-18/19+/Mixed	Number of Students on Learning Support Register :	Learning Support Register No :

S	Strength	E	Evident	AfD	Areas for Development
---	----------	---	---------	-----	-----------------------

Please Tick	S	E	AfD	n/a	Comments
Inclusive Practice / Differentiation					
Interaction / Communication / Rapport with Students					
Interaction / Communication with Tutor					
Identification and knowledge of individual learning needs					
Subject knowledge					

Use of strategies to promote independent learning					
Providing Students with effective support / guidance / encouragement					
Areas of Strength / Good Practice :					
Areas for Development : Recommended Action :					
Support File/Documentation :					
Overall / Additional Comments :					

Observer Signature:

Support Worker Signature:

Annex I: Example of guidance on keeping a reflective log



The Topic: Journal Writing

What is a Journal?

As Ron Klug (2002: 1) has put it – 'a place to record daily happenings'. However, as he also says it is far more than that:

A journal is also a tool for self-discovery, an aid to concentration, a mirror for the soul, a place to generate and capture ideas, a safety valve for the emotions, a training ground for the writer, and a good friend and confidant.

It is also easy to see why many resist writing and keeping journals. We might not see ourselves as the sort of person who writes about our lives and experiences. We may not know how to start, or where we can find the time to engage in such writing. It might be that we resist writing journals because it is something that others require or expect of us - such as when undertaking a course or working in particular fields.

The benefits of writing and keeping a journal

The first and obvious use of writing a journal is that helps us to remember something later; it is a record to look back on (Holly 1989: 8).

It may be that we do not have time to work out what is going on right at this minute - keeping a note in a journal helps us to recapture the moment later so that we may look at it more deeply.

It may also be that we need to remember to do something e.g. write a letter on behalf of someone we are working with. We jot the task down - and then when we have time we can look back at our journal or organizer and pick out the tasks we are left with.

The act of putting pen to paper (or finger to keyboard) engages our brains. To write we have to think. Mary Louise Holly argues that when we 'capture our stories while the action is fresh', we are often provoked to wonder 'Why do I do this?' or 'Why did this happen?'

Journal writing encourages engagement and reflection.

Writing a journal stimulates thought - it allows us to look at ourselves, our feelings, and our actions in a different way. By writing things down in a journal the words are now 'outside' of us

Writing things down in a journal also allows us to 'clear our minds'. Having made a note of something we can put them on one side for consideration or action at a later point.

Last, and certainly not least, making journal writing part of our routine means that we do actually take time out to reflect on what might be happening in our practice and in our lives generally (Rainer 2004).

A good starting point is to use four basic elements:

- **Description** of the situation/encounter/experience that includes some attention to feelings at the time;
- **Additional material** - information that come to our notice or into our minds after the event;
- **Reflection** - going back to the experiences, attending to feelings and evaluating experience; and
- **Things to do** - the process of reflection may well lead to the need to look again at a situation or to explore some further area. It may highlight the need to take some concrete actions.

Is there a 'best' or 'correct' way of producing a Learning Log?

Not really, the log should be relevant to you and your job/studies/role/activities. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way of producing a Learning Log. Perhaps the three key questions when engaging in the process of producing a Learning Log are:

- Am I being honest with myself?
- Is this a useful process for me?
- Is this helping my own process of learning?

If the answers are 'yes' then your Learning Log is correct and right for you. If the answers are 'no' and you have genuinely asked yourself some of the questions previously mentioned then perhaps a Learning Log may not really be of much use to you.

References:

Holly, Mary Louise (1989) *Writing to Grow. Keeping a personal-professional journal*, Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann

Klug, Ron (2002) *How to Keep a Spiritual Journal. A guide to journal keeping for inner growth and personal discovery* (rev. edn.), Minneapolis: Augsburg.

Rainer, Tristine (1978, 2004) *The New Diary. How to use a journal for self-guidance and extended creativity*, Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher Inc. cited in *Writing and Keeping and Journals*[online]available from http://www.infed.org/research/keeping_a_journal.htm [accessed 19september 2010]

Annex J: Example of Information given to LSAs at Induction

Additional Learning Support Statistics

In Learning Support we aim to meet the ongoing and diverse needs of the student body. We continue to develop a multi-disciplinary approach and strong partnerships with a variety of agencies including the Educational Psychology Service, National Autistic Society, RNIB, and Connexions etc. This allows us to work proactively and ensure support for students is appropriate and inclusive.

Retention, Achievement and Success of learners receiving learning support

Year	Learners	Retention	Achievement	Success
04/05	797	88%	93%	81%
05/06	810	78%	79%	62%
06/07	664	84%	84%	71%
07/08	525	95%	80%	76%
08/09	582	94%	82%	77%
09/10	795	89%	86%	77%

We have outlined below procedures for accessing Learning Support for students and relevant learning support information.

Learning Development Referrals

A referral for Learning Support can be made through a number of channels:

- School referral/Connexions;
- Pre entry identification (During interview);
- Enrolments / Admissions;
- Screening Assessment (BKSB and Ann Arbour);
- Self referral; and

- Tutor referral.

Referrals can be submitted throughout the year and personal tutors are required to complete a Learning Support Request Form (ILP3)

Assessing the Student's Needs

- Once referred, an appointment is arranged for the learner to have an Initial Needs Assessment (INA) to establish the support requirements;
- During this process students who need further assessments are identified;
- These additional assessments may include; Specific Learning Difficulties e.g. Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Aspergers, Sensory impairments etc. ; and
- These will identify specific support recommendations and any necessary exam concessions.

Process for students identified as needing support who don't take it up

The strategies in place to monitor the progress and meet the needs of the students not in receipt of support are as follows:

- Partnership working between faculty staff and learning development staff to ensure the student/s are still supported and able to be successful;
- Learning Development staff will help course tutors to differentiate students work and their approach to working with the student. This will be mainly carried out by the Specialist Support Instructors;
- Workshop based sessions that capture students who will not attend 1:1 sessions; and
- An increased in in-class support to covertly support these students.

Annex K: A Framework of Excellence developed by LSAs

This was developed during a staff development session for LSAs at a Further Education College

Framework for excellent LSA practitioner	
SKILLS	QUALITIES
Experience and Qualifications	Patience
MOVEON training	Communication –in all ways and using PECS, Wldget, OOR, Makaton, SSE, BSL
Constructive feedback	Good body language
Personal development	Sense of humour
Being able to reflect	Positive attitude
Interpersonal skills	happy
Life skills	Approachable
Signing	knowledgeable
Organisational skills	Enthusiasm
Correctly pitched	Empathy
Adaptable	Sensitivity
Listening	Caring
Awareness of student/needs	Good sense of humour
Listening	Good role model

One step ahead	understanding
Observational skills	Empowering
Assessment	Adaptable, flexible
Knowledge/skills of subject	Initiative, resourceful
Literacy and numeracy	Positive attitude
Specialist training	Ability to stay calm
Counselling skills	High expectations
Correct training for the task in hand	Team player
	Non judgemental
	Problem solver
	dedicated
	Think outside the box
	Promote independence
	Positive about the organisation
	proactive
	Forward thinking

Annex L: Useful guidance for devising observation checklists for LSAs

Taken from the OFSTED Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills from September 2009 starting from page 51

B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?

Evaluative statements To make their judgments, inspectors will evaluate the extent to which:

- learning and assessment activities are linked to initial and current assessments and related activities to make sure they build on and extend learning for all learners (T)
- interesting and appropriate teaching and learning methods and resources inspire and challenge all learners and enable them to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding (T,L)
- technology is used effectively to promote and support learning, where appropriate (T)
- staff have appropriate skills and expertise to provide good-quality teaching, learning, assessment, and information and support services for each learner (T)
- assessment of learners' performance and progress is timely, fair, consistent and reliable (T)
- learners receive constructive feedback on their progress and how they might improve (T)
- learners receive help to develop literacy, numeracy, language and key skills to support the attainment of their main learning goals (T)
- learning, teaching, training and assessment promote equality and support diversity. (T)

Further guidance Inspectors should take into account, where relevant:

Making judgements on teaching

- the use of initial and diagnostic assessment to provide an accurate basis on which to plan an appropriate programme of work (T)
- how well staff work with learners to develop individual learning plans that are informed by initial assessment, meet learners' identified learning goals and which are reviewed and updated regularly (T)

- the planning of individual learning sessions with clear objectives that are understood by learners and that can be adapted to reflect the progress of learners (T)
- the use of activities in sessions that motivate and engage all learners, whatever their age, ability and cultural background, and which are suitably demanding (T)
- the progress made by learners during sessions and in the medium and long term (L)
- how well teaching meets individual needs (T)
- the quality and safety of learning materials and learning resources, including specialist and/or adapted resources and practical settings (T)
- the role of work experience and employment in learning (T)
- the adequacy and quality of e-learning (T)
- the monitoring and review of learners' progress in literacy, numeracy, language and key skills, including that work is marked carefully, with correction of spelling, grammatical errors and inaccuracies (T)
- that assessment is fair, accurate and carried out regularly (T)
- how well achievements towards learning goals and qualifications are recorded and accredited (T)
- how effectively staff use materials and teaching methods that are sensitive to, and promote, equality of opportunity and good race relations (T)
- how well staff plan sessions to take account of meeting the needs of different groups of learners fully (T)
- how staff maximise opportunities in sessions and within all learning contexts to promote equality of opportunity and awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity. (T)

Making a judgement on learning from a snapshot

- the planning of individual learning sessions with clear objectives that are understood by learners and that can be adapted to reflect the progress of learners (T, L)
- interesting and appropriate teaching and learning methods and resources inspire and challenge all learners and enable them to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding (T,L)
- how well staff work with learners to develop individual learning plans that are informed by initial assessment, meet learners' identified learning goals and which are reviewed and updated regularly (T)

- the progress made by learners during sessions and in the medium and long term (L)
- learners receive constructive feedback on their progress and how they might improve (T, L)

Standards/attainment criteria relates to A Outcomes

- Learners attend and are punctual.
- the extent to which learners are involved in and contribute to their learning in learning sessions, group and project work.
- the extent to which learners' behaviour promotes learning and development.
- learners' development of additional, relevant employability skills which may include:
 - additional qualifications and experiences in the workplace, literacy and numeracy skills, broader skills relevant to learners' career aims, such as communications, teamwork, leadership, taking responsibilities, problem solving and commitment.
- Learners use safe working practices in learning and at work.
- Learners are on track to succeed against individual targets.

Annex M: Example of assessment and transition document

Baseline Assessment and Transition Programme

Please keep this form with other assessment and transition notes

Student:	D of B:
Name of Current Provision:	

Student Support Contact Details		
Contact:	Name:	Telephone and/or Email:
Parent/Carer (ICE)		
Residential Care Worker		
Teacher		
Advocate		
Named LSA Mentor		
Curriculum Co-ordinator		

Additional Information Required for Assessment Process	
Copies of Documents Requested:	Staff sign and date when received:
Latest Annual Report	

Communication Profile/Passport	
Behaviour Support Plan	
Health or Medical Guidelines	

Additional Information Required for Transition	
Consent for photographs to be taken by college staff for use in transition process	Signature of Parent/Guardian/Carer:
Discussion with parents/carer regarding instigation of bus-pass and benefit entitlement prior to enrolling at college	
Details of times required to return to current provision when visiting college for collection by parent or taxi	
Equipment needed for visits to college such as swimming gear, Wellingtons (depending on sessions to be accessed)	
Assisted Communication System used by student (PECs, Objects of Reference etc)	

Programme for Planned Transition Visits

Date/Time:	Staff Involved:	Venue (school, home, College):
<i>Continue if Extended Programme Required</i>		

Annex N: Baseline Assessment Form

Practical/Observation

Time scale <i>(date assessment comments commenced and completed)</i>	
Learner name	Staff name
Special skills and attributes <i>Please indicate here any special attributes or skills that the learner has.</i> <i>Comment if appropriate on levels of particular achievement, for example art, physical abilities, numeracy, practical skills etc.</i> <i>Indicate how the learner might utilise these skills, whether formally or informally.</i> <i>Specific interests should also be mentioned as these may lead to possibilities for work experience and other opportunities.</i>	

Priorities for learning:

Work Experience

Indicate any work experience undertaken and the duration.

Please comment on the suitability of any work experience or difficulties faced.

Record social skills demonstrated in the work environment.

Priorities for learning:

Vulnerability

Please indicate any particular areas of vulnerability the learner may have.

Please specify if the learner has specific fears or phobias, awareness of strangers, personal safety etc.

Record any health, medical or dietary vulnerabilities and action taken or planned.

Does the learner have any food allergies or is there other important information available relating to food and drink, e.g. PICA, excessive drinking etc?

Is punctuality and/or attendance an issue?

Priorities for learning:

Communication

Communication - Receptive

Does the learner respond to his/her name, no or stop?

Does s/he have the ability to listen?

Does s/he have an understanding of what is said?

Give examples of situation where the learner has understood – was this based on understanding of verbal language, and/or the context, the visual prompt or other, such as familiar routine?

Can s/he understand one or more instructions?

Is joint attention established?

Does the learner need time to process language?

Does s/he understand future or past rather than here and now e.g. tomorrow, next week, later, yesterday etc?

Does s/he understand negatives and pronouns?

Does the learner recognize when s/he hasn't understood and communicate this to others?

Priorities for learning:

Communication - Expressive

Record the learner's repertoire and use of words, vocalizations, gestures.

Does the learner offer and maintain eye contact?

Is echolalia evident?

Include examples of spoken language, if appropriate.

How does s/he relate to others (familiar and unfamiliar peers and staff)?

Does s/he indicate yes and no? Record method such as head or eye movements.

Does s/he make requests? Record how such as pointing, leading, asking.

Can s/he give instructions or directions?

Does s/he initiate conversation or interaction and how?

How does s/he gain attention?

Does s/he have understanding of turn taking in conversation?

Can s/he ask or indicate the need for help or communicate if in pain?

Does s/he use a system to support expressive communication such as signs, symbols, PECs, objects of reference, photos etc?

For learners with 'good' spoken language, evaluate the extent to which this is used in a socially appropriate fashion; is it superficial, related to specific topics, phrases often repeated?

Priorities for learning:

Participation and attention

To what extent does the learner participate and for how long?

What motivates the learner to do so?

What is distracting for the learner?

What is her/his attention span?

Give examples of when the learner's attention and participation is at its best and poorest.

Priorities for learning:

Behaviour

Describe any behavioural issues the learner may have; include passive and inappropriate behaviour and any behaviour which could be physically threatening.

What are the circumstances in which it occurs and what triggers it?

What function do you think it serves?

What strategies have been effective to either prevent or support the behaviour?

What should be avoided to minimise the risk?

Is a behaviour support plan used?

Is further external assessment recommended?

Priorities for learning:

LEARNING STYLE

Strategies to support learning

Are there any physical factors which may impact on learning e.g. mobility issues, hearing or visual impairment, epilepsy or medication?

How does this impact, and what can we do to support?

Do we need to make any adaptations to support the learner's access to the curriculum?

Does the learner respond well to visual prompts?

Can the learner work in a group or does s/he prefer to work 1:1?

Does s/he need structure and routine?

Can s/he understand the timetable and structure of the day?

How does s/he manage changes?

Does s/he need regular changes of activity?

Does s/he need clear language and time to respond?

Do you need to check understanding?

What does s/he like and dislike? What is rewarding or motivating?

Does s/he learn best by doing?

Environmental factors – e.g. does the learner work best in a quiet environment, without too many people?

INDEPENDENCE

Personal care

Is the learner fully independent?

If not, when does s/he need support?

What support should be offered?

Can s/he find and use the toilet appropriately (including privacy, refitting of clothes, hand washing etc)?

Does the learner need support with eating and drinking?

Does s/he take care of appearance?

Are there general hygiene issues?

Comment on learner's ability to select appropriate clothing and fit such as overalls, aprons, shoes etc.

Comment on learner's ability to use fastenings where appropriate e.g. zips, buttons, laces etc.

Are there any issues around clothing, e.g. the learner refuses to wear socks or may only wear certain items?

Does the learner take appropriate action in response to changes in temperature or weather – e.g. fit warm clothes in winter, go indoors if raining?

Priorities for learning:

Community

How does the learner respond to going out?

How does s/he respond to crowds?

How does s/he respond to noise?

Are there particular issues e.g. fear of dogs, obsession with babies etc?

Does the learner have road safety awareness?

Is s/he aware of danger?

How does s/he respond to unfamiliar people?

Is s/he able to use public toilets?

Can s/he use public transport?

Does the learner have an understanding and application of social behaviour such as queuing, paying for an item, turn taking, making choices, ordering food and drinks etc?

Does the learner stay with the group?

Are there any issues relating to transport, e.g. use of minibus, fear of specific modes of transport? C

Please comment on community/transport supervision requirements; identify any risks such as use of safety belts?

Priorities for learning:

Non structured time

How does the learner respond on arrival and when going home?

Does s/he have a specific routine?

Does s/he know where things go, e.g. coat, bag, personal possessions?

Can s/he learn to navigate around buildings and grounds?

How does s/he manage at break times and lunchtimes? Comment here on activities, interaction and location – is there anywhere s/he goes?

Does the learner recognize and respond to changes in the day e.g. moving from sessions to breaks and from breaks to sessions?

Can s/he indicate choices about drinks and food? Make drinks and food? Find coat etc if going out?

Priorities for learning:

Numeracy (practical observation of functional skills)

Does the learner have one to one correspondence with objects and numbers?

Can s/he count by rote, with understanding to 5, 10 20 or over (specify approximately)?

Does the learner have coin recognition and understanding?

Can s/he use money when in the community?

Does the learner have understanding of weighing and measuring?

Does the learner have understanding of positional vocabulary e.g. above, below, left, right, up down etc?

Does s/he have understanding of the passage of time through the structure of day, familiar routines, timetables, calendar, days of week, months of year, today, tomorrow, yesterday, past , future, before after

Can the learner tell the time – digital or analogue?

Please comment on learner's ability to manage own time, when appropriate.

Can s/he sequence tasks and activities?

Is the learner aware of concepts such as colour, shape, size (big, bigger, biggest), half/whole, full/empty etc?

What score or award has the learner achieved at P Levels, Entry Level etc?

Priorities for learning:

LITERACY

(practical observation of functional skills)

Reading

Does the learner have understanding that print carries meaning and of conventions of reading e.g. left to right?

Does s/he recognise that marks on paper carry meaning?

Does s/he recognise signs, symbols, photos and/or words (specify repertoire)?

Does s/he recognise signs in the community?

Does s/he recognize own name?

Can the learner interpret instructions e.g. how to plant seeds (written, symbolic, photographic)?

Where learners can read, attach sample. Comment on comprehension of text as well as ability to decode.

What score or award has the learner achieved at P Levels, Entry Level etc?

Priorities for learning:

Writing

Can the learner hold a pen or pencil?

Can the learner form any letters accurately (where appropriate include a sample of writing)?

What is the size and legibility of hand writing?

Does s/he use lower and upper case letters appropriately?

Does s/he use punctuation and grammar?

Can s/he spell accurately?

Can s/he draw and colour?

Is s/he right or left handed?

What score or award has the learner achieved at P Levels, Entry Level etc?

Priorities for learning:

SUBJECT SPECIFIC SKILLS

Please give a clear picture of the skills, knowledge and understanding the learner has on entry to the college.

Give examples to support your observations.

Comment on learner's practical skills, her/his understanding of related vocabulary, use of specific tools and equipment.

Is a risk assessment required as matter of priority?

Does the learner respond well and enjoy this skill area?

Is it a suitable or appropriate learning activity for the college environment?

Could this be a possible vocational area for the learner?

Has the learner acquired any qualifications such as Asdan, OCR/ALL, CQCs etc?

Priorities for learning:

Recommendations for the Future:

Where is the learner likely to transition to (such as residential care, supported living, home)?

What level of support should be in place?

Comment on possible areas for lifelong learning, further work experience or employment opportunities.

Annex O: Final list of characteristics and factors that contribute to effective management and deployment of LSAs and learning support across the organisation and in the classroom

Characteristic A: A culture and ethos that values Learning Support

- Factor 1 Ensure the role of Learning Support Assistants is clearly recognised throughout the organisation
- Factor 2 Recognise the value of Learning Support Assistants and the support they deliver across the organisation
- Factor 3 Recognise contributions from Learning Support Assistants to inclusive practice across the organisation
- Factor 4 Proactive Leadership committed to promoting, engaging and empowering LSAs

Characteristic B: An established LSA workforce

- Factor 5 Ensure that Learning Support Assistants are viewed as professional staff with appropriate skills, competence and qualifications
- Factor 6 Implement a clear team structure and career pathway with a recruitment process that reflect this
- Factor 7 Recruit LSAs to suit the need of specific curriculum areas within the organisation
- Factor 8 Develop an effective induction programme to be completed within a set period of time
- Factor 9 Include peer mentoring for Learning Support Assistants (and Tutors) from induction onwards
- Factor 10 Have the same expectations for all Learning Support Assistants, including those recruited through agencies
- Factor 11 Have a skilled, designated person responsible for co-ordinating the deployment of Learning Support Assistants
- Factor 12 Work as a team to ensure effective deployment of Learning Support Assistants

C: Inclusive quality assurance and information management systems

- Factor 13 Incorporate support provided by LSAs into self-assessment reviews and quality improvement plans
- Factor 14 Involve LSAs and build observation of learning support into existing quality assurance processes
- Factor 15 Recognise the importance of Performance Management for all staff including LSAs
- Factor 16 Develop tailored Management Information Systems
- Factor 17 Use Management Information Systems to empower learners and for learners and staff to plan individual programmes and review and record progress
- Factor 18 Provide training and resources to support Learning Support Assistants to use the Management Information System effectively

D: Effective CPD and professional support

- Factor 19 Offer Continuous Professional Development based on performance management outcomes
- Factor 20 Involve LSAs and managers in the planning and delivery of professional development
- Factor 21 Provide Professional Development and Training that motivates Learning Support Assistants
- Factor 22 Implement a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Framework for Learning Support Assistants
- Factor 23 Enable LSAs to access peer support networks
- Factor 24 Promote Reflective Practice

E: Effective working relationships

Between Learners, LSAs and Teachers

- Factor 25 Conduct full and detailed assessment for Planning Personalised Learning
- Factor 26 Work together to develop and deliver specialist learning support

- Factor 27 Work together in assessing and reviewing learning to inform delivery
- Factor 28 Work together to evaluate learning support and implement new strategies
- Factor 29 Provide support that promotes independence and empowers learners
- Factor 30 Use social networking technology to access learning support
- Factor 31 Use assistive technologies regularly and appropriately

With other professionals and stakeholders

- Factor 32 Promote effective communication between LSAs and stakeholders within the organisation
- Factor 33 Promote effective communication between LSAs and stakeholders outside of the organisation
- Factor 34 Recognise the contributions Learning Support staff can make to other areas of the organisation

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