



Video 1: Learning Support: Specialist Support Instructor

My name is Helen and I am a Specialist Support Instructor working with students on the autistic spectrum at Weston College. I have been doing this role for two years and prior to that, I have had six years in class experience with learners with various conditions and learning difficulties.

The role of specialist support has been developed so that it's individuals who have studied their particular specialisms. Myself, currently, I'm a BA Honours in Education and Professional Practice, specialising in Autism, and also you need the experience alongside that which you get from in class working with young people, and for myself that has involved six years in class experience before moving on to become a Specialist Support Instructor.

So my role could be described as a cultural interpreter. I work with the students on one side helping them develop their skills to become independent individuals and succeed on their courses and in their life, and I also work with tutors to help them understand the needs of the students to develop more inclusive curriculums, activities, environments and things like that.

I provide 1:1 tutorials with students, where we spend time working on their skills for independence or we tackle issues that have come up in the week, we can do assignment work, we work on issues of self esteem and also an important part of the role is dealing with the day to day issues that come up with students. Things can happen at any point that can maybe cause them some anxiety or some upset, they come down and they've got someone they know really well. I work very hard to develop relationships with students and we develop our professional working relationship and if students have issues they can come down, we have an open door policy and there is always someone there to help them get back on track.

The other side of the role is working with the other staff or individuals who are involved with the students. This could be helping them to understand the student's differences and ways of really developing inclusive learning opportunities for them. This could be adapting tasks that they are working on, adapting activities, adapting the environment; it could also be supporting the tutors to help their peers to understand their differences. So, it's basically coming from an angle of really trying to understand the differences of your students, really getting to know them as an individual and recognising the barriers and challenges that are out there and why those barriers and challenges and where they come from, be it an organisational attitude.

It's the best job I have ever had, it's a very challenging job but it is certainly the most fun as well.