

Enhancement of Learner Support: Learning Support Assistants -

An Analysis of a 15,000 Workforce Using Data to Understand Workforce Trends and Implications



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In partnership with



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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 implementation 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 implementation programme, which finished in April 2011, has produced a series of reports and resources. This report is one of these. The remaining materials can be accessed via the [ELS section of the Excellence Gateway](#).

Executive Summary

‘Enhancement of Learner Support’ is a major research project to identify how the effectiveness of learner support in post-16 learning might be improved. This paper forms background to the wider project and is the first significant analysis of the Learning Support Assistant (LSA) workforce in England. It reviews the need for learning support, analyses data on LSAs, and draws tentative inferences for policy.

‘Learner support’ is viewed here as support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Statistics about such learners are imperfect, but suggest that around one learner in eight in the sector has learning difficulties and /or disabilities.

England’s 15,500 LSAs are part of the mechanism for learner support. Their number has grown rapidly, almost doubling since 2002/03, influenced by legislative pressure culminating in the Equality Act, 2010, and by a relatively benign funding regime. But expansion almost ceased in 2009/10 and anecdotal evidence suggests that numbers are now falling.

LSA numbers vary greatly across different types of provider. No LSAs are recorded as working in Adult and Community Learning (ACL) or in Work-Based Learning (WBL) providers outside colleges. Over 80% of all LSAs work in General and Tertiary Further Education Colleges, where they form 6% of the workforce. In Independent Specialist Colleges (ISC), however, which deal, in the main, with learners with the most profound needs, LSAs form 27% of the workforce.

The great majority (79%) of LSAs are women, and by ethnicity 88% classify themselves as 'White British'. LSAs are more likely than the sector workforce average to have a disability. LSAs are slightly younger on average than the sector workforce because they are more likely to be aged under 30, and less likely to be 55 or older.

The data show that LSAs are reasonably well-qualified, 41% having Higher Education qualifications, and 7% holding qualified teacher status (QTS). These findings elicited surprise from specialists in the research project and merit further investigation.

LSAs are overwhelmingly (86%) part-time workers, and 25% work on contracts amounting to less than one-tenth of a full-time equivalent. They are more likely than the workforce average to be on casual, agency or fixed term contracts; nonetheless 59% are on permanent contracts.

The abrupt change from rapid expansion in LSA numbers to probable contraction will require providers to manage LSA resource carefully to improve the efficiency of its use and to continue to meet statutory duties to learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities, and to the LSA workforce. Better use of the existing skills of LSAs and more coordinated management of a largely part-time workforce are likely to be central elements of this endeavour.

Adult and Community Learning and Work-Based Learning providers may need to provide learning support for their learners, but often do so without a cohort of staff who are identified as LSAs in the traditional sense. There is a need to reflect on whether LSAs could help in those sectors, and if so how this could be accommodated within the funding regime; and on what colleges and others can learn from approaches to the provision of support in WBL and ACL.

The data upon which this report is based do not raise issues of confidentiality or data protection, but are not published. There are no readily available data on LSAs. This is a significant gap in the data available to those in the post-16 sector (although those in the sector can access data through the Online Analytical Processing or 'OLAP' system – see main text) and the wider public. It should be remedied by online publication of data of the kinds in the body of this report.

Introduction

In Autumn 2010, the Association of National Specialist Colleges (Natspec) and the Association of Colleges (AoC) were commissioned by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) to investigate how learning support in England's post-16 learning sector might be enhanced through better management and otherwise.

The main methods used in this important study included regional and national events across England and other forms of consultation, and the development of profiling and other tools intended to improve, for instance, the organisation and management of learner support.

Much learning support is provided by Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), though Work-Based Learning (WBL) and Adult and Community Learning (ACL) providers employ few if any people with that job title. Lifelong Learning UK were responsible until March 2011 for gathering data on the sector's workforce, including LSAs. From April 2012 LLUK's responsibilities move to other organisations, primarily the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS). Lifelong Learning UK have published some very limited data on LSAs, but have more available through their private Online Analytical Processing (OLAP) ¹tool.

This report uses OLAP data and the findings of the regional events and other material to review the extent and pattern of LSA provision. It has been prepared by AoC contracted staff working within the project team.

There are over 15,000 LSAs in England, representing a significant proportion of the post-16 workforce, and yet, apart from the 2006 LSRC publication into the role of learning support workers in the learning and skills sector, (Joscelyn et al 2006) there has so far been almost no analysis of patterns of provision. The lack of reporting, analysis and research about LSAs is marked. This report is a first step in filling that gap.

The report begins by reviewing learning support, the requirement to provide it and the forms of learning support (Sections 2-4). The core of the report (Section 5) is an analysis of OLAP data on LSAs, over time and by variables such as gender and highest qualification. Finally, in Section 6, some possible policy implications of the analysis are briefly discussed.

Learning support

Learning support, in the sense used here, is closely connected with learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, on the reasonable hypothesis that many learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities will need support beyond that offered to other learners.

The expression 'learning support' may be used in other contexts. For instance, there are over 3,000 Learning Support Technicians in England's post-16 sector, and their main function is to provide technical support for ICT, agricultural equipment, machinery and the many other forms of technology used in the sector; and support may be provided for learners who have no learning difficulties and /or disabilities but a history of poor attendance or behaviour. We provide a few basic statistics on Learning Support Technicians, but the analysis concentrates on Learning Support Assistants.

¹ ¹ OLAP Reporting is a free online analysis tool which helps further education sector employers who have submitted data to benchmark information about their own workforce against that of the sector and/or the local community.

The requirement to provide learning support

Providers in each setting covered here, colleges, including specialist colleges, Work-Based Learning providers, and Adult and Community Learning providers have always sought to do their best for all learners, but perhaps especially for learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities. In the past, however, the extent of their obligations was not always clearly defined. Now, however, the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995, as amended by DDA Part 4 (2001) which placed a duty on education providers, and the Equality Act, 2010, have brought legal obligations to learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities within the scope of the civil law.

It can, of course, be difficult to judge what support is needed by a particular learner. In 2009/10, Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data identified around one funded learner in every eight in the post-16 sector as having learning difficulties and /or disabilities (and more, perhaps many more, may have unrecognised learning difficulties and /or disabilities), and this surprisingly high proportion is a sufficient indication that many learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities have some relatively mild difficulty or disability. The basic legal requirements are not to discriminate against disabled learners but to make 'reasonable adjustments' in respect of the difficulty or disability. This is often, and despite the extensive guidance available,² a question of judgment: for instance, does a learner with a moderate degree of dyslexia need, perhaps, a counselling session and extra time in exams, or more intensive support? Professional opinions differ in particular cases and although the vast majority of reasonable adjustments entail very little cost, the differences may have large resource implications.

Forms of learning support

Where learning support is delivered through staff (rather than, for instance, through the provision of specialised equipment), it is delivered largely by:

- 1) teachers³ using their own skills to support learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities. Teachers may be expected to have some relevant skills, though not of course the skills needed to support learners with every type of difficulty or disability, and they may lack the time in class or other contact settings to offer appropriate support to some learners
- 2) Learning Support Assistants working directly with learners: their contact with the learners may range from an LSA attending a few classes and in those classes supporting several learners to constantly accompanying a learner throughout his or her study time.
- 3) teachers benefiting from learner-specific advice from others with specific skills, such as professional experts in particular types of difficulty or disability, or, more rarely, Learning Support Assistants. The suggestion here is that the teacher receives advice away from the contact setting and is then able to offer

² See for instance <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/new-equality-act-guidance/equality-act-guidance-downloads/>

³ This term is used here as a collective expression for teachers, lecturers, tutors and others with responsibility for learners.

appropriate support to the learner in question without there being, necessarily, any contact between advisor and learner

The abilities of learners vary greatly, and on a continuum, from very able people to people with profound and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is, however, an administrative bifurcation, for instance for funding purposes, between learners identified as having a learning difficulty and/or disability and those not so identified.

The number of learners identified as having learning difficulties and /or disabilities is large, around 557,000 in 2009/10⁴, representing around one in eight of all funded learners in the sector. Most of these learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities are in Further Education Colleges; a substantial minority, perhaps around 30%, are in Work-Based Learning, though some of these are in WBL within Further Education (FE) Colleges. Relatively small numbers are in Adult and Community Learning, though doubtless ACL numbers amongst the over-25s are much greater; and few (some 3,600) are in specialist colleges, though, of course, those few include many with profound difficulties and/or disabilities

Identification is significant, for instance because it may enable a provider to attract additional funding for learner needs from the funding agencies, notably the Young People's Learning Agency and the Skills Funding Agency, and because it may impose *prima facie* responsibilities on the provider in connection with the Equality Act, 2010.

The identification of learners as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is imperfect, relying as it does primarily on self-classification. For some learners, it is possible that a learning difficulty and /or disability may be unidentified. Conversely, a learner may be incorrectly identified as having a mild learning difficulty and /or disability. In addition, the impact of a learning difficulty or disability can vary hugely between individuals, so that two people who on paper at least appear to have the same "diagnosis" may have very different levels of skills and hence require significantly different levels of support.

The connection between learning difficulties and /or disabilities and learning support is reasonably obvious. Responsibility for learning is ultimately shared between teacher and learner. In many instances, the teacher will be able to meet the needs of learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities, in class or other contact settings. For instance, a learner with a mild hearing impairment may simply need to sit close to the teacher and the teacher may need to make occasional checks to ensure that the learner has heard sufficiently well. Sometimes, however, a learner with learning difficulties and /or disabilities may require specialist expertise or equipment or substantial amounts of contact time, and it may be impractical for the teacher to provide all that is needed. In cases like this, 'learning support' may be appropriate. The support may be no more than advice to the teacher and/or the learner from an appropriate professional, or the provision of simple equipment. But it may be attendance either some or all of the time by a Learning Support Assistant in class, which, plainly, is a resource intensive.

⁴ ILR data from The Information Authority (www.theia.org.uk)

The advertisements presented in the box below are intended to illustrate what in practice LSAs are called upon to do:

Examples from typical job descriptions for Learning Support Assistants in Further Education Colleges

Learning Support Assistant

'To provide support and welfare assistance to students with learning difficulties, disabilities and ESOL and entry level learners. Duties include assisting teaching staff in deciding appropriate teaching and learning strategies as well as working with students in completion of college work. You will have excellent interpersonal skills, be organised in your approach to work and be able to demonstrate good IT and administrative skills' (*John Ruskin College*)

Learning Support Assistant

Providing in-class support for students with a range of additional learning needs, either on a one to one basis or in small groups, you'll help to develop their literacy, numeracy and study skills and in doing so raise their retention and achievement levels. You'll need to adopt a flexible approach to your work and you'll need to maintain accurate progress records and reports as you support students in achieving their learning goals and life ambitions. (*Stoke-on-Trent College*)

Senior Learning Support Assistant

The Senior Learning Support Assistant manages the team of contracted and agency Learning

Support Assistants as well as providing support in teaching sessions. The purpose of the role is to ensure that individual students are provided with a positive and supported learning experience and to ensure that the learning support team is managed effectively. The postholder will be responsible to the Head of Area Adult Learning Difficulties and /or Disabilities provision and will be responsible for the following duties:

- Work with the Head of Area to timetable a pool of Learning Support Assistants and co-ordinate their programmes of work; and
- Liaise closely with academic and support staff in the Academy for Foundation Studies and Skills for Life to aid the development of a strong support team for students with special educational needs. (*Bournemouth and Poole College* (description truncated)).

Analysis of OLAP data

Introduction

In this section, we review the Online Analytical Processing tool (OLAP) as the main source of data on Learning Support Assistants, covering first the growth in the number of LSAs in recent years, and then analysing the LSA workforce in 2009/10 by type of provider, gender, ethnicity, disability status, age, qualifications held, and terms of employment.

Introduction to OLAP data

Lifelong Learning UK publishes '*Further Education College Workforce Data for England: an Analysis of the Staff Individualised Record*', the most recent edition being for 2008-2009. Although this is 46 pages in length, its general nature, covering the entire FE workforce, means that it contains little information on Learning Support Assistants. The report provides two relevant statistics, namely that there were 15,128 learning support assistants and 3,471 learning support technicians employed in the sector in 2008/09, a total of 18,599 people. A breakdown by gender is provided, but there is no commentary and no further analysis.

Extensive further data are available through Lifelong Learning UK's password-protected Online Analytical Processing tool (OLAP), but from a public policy perspective the paucity of **published** data is striking. LSAs represent a significant component of provider costs and may, moreover, be vulnerable to reductions in public expenditure. Policy analysts and the wider tax-paying public may feel that more information than this should be published.

OLAP offers access to aggregated data from Staff Individualised Records (SIRs). SIRs contain extensive detail on the characteristics, status etc of every member of staff in the sector (leaving errors and omissions to one side). OLAP is password protected and access to it is primarily for the use of contributors of data (mainly providers) and sector bodies. Access is also offered to researchers, for instance for this project. Access operates at two levels at least. For instance, this project does not enjoy (and has not sought) access to data on individual providers. Data are also suppressed, on confidentiality grounds, when the number of staff in a particular data cell is small. Confidentiality suppression can 'bite' surprisingly early: it is, for instance, not possible to analyse LSAs by provider type and ethnicity other than for the numerically preponderant General and Tertiary Colleges.

The SIR has categories for learning support assistants and learning support technicians. Some analysis has been conducted on the two categories taken together, but this report focuses on LSAs. It should be noted that there are minor numerical differences between the published source and OLAP, but they are not significant for our purposes.

The OLAP data used relate mainly, and except where noted, to 2009/10, the electronic data being at the time of writing available for that year, even though the published source mentioned above was available only for 2008/09.

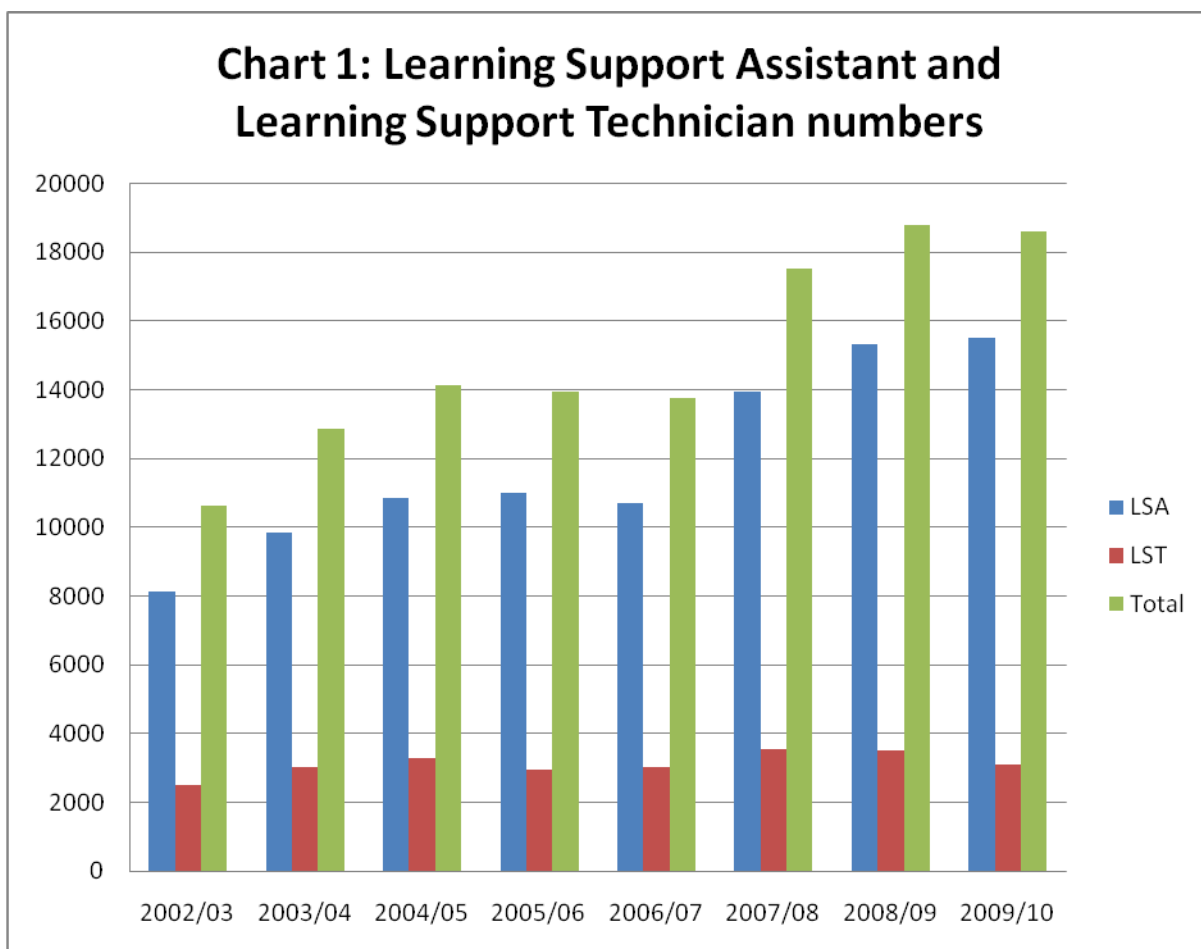
Growth in LSA numbers

Table 1 and Chart 1 show the rapid growth in LSA numbers since 2002/03, and for comparison the more moderate growth in LST numbers. Growth in LSA numbers was especially rapid in two two-year periods, 2003/04-2004/05 and 2007/08-2008/09. In the period 2007/08-2008/09 an additional 4,600 LSAs were recruited representing growth of some 43% in that short period. As we discuss in Section 6, growing pressure to demonstrate effective provision for learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities doubtless offered an impetus for this expansion.

The pace of expansion slowed greatly in 2009/10, to 1.3%. Whilst expansion also slowed in 2005/06 and there was actual contraction in 2006/07, it seems likely that there will now be a period of, at best consolidation, and possibly of contraction given planned reductions in public expenditure. Again we discuss this further in Section 6.

Table 1: Growth in the numbers of Learning Support Assistants and Learning Support Technicians									
	2002/ 03	2003/ 04	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08	2008/ 09	2009/ 10	Average g
LSA	8116	9841	10844	10990	10713	13960	15302	15506	
Growth		21.3%	10.2%	1.3%	-2.5%	30.3%	9.6%	1.3%	9.7%
LST	2500	3026	3291	2959	3034	3543	3495	3085	
Growth		21.0%	8.8%	-10.1%	2.5%	16.8%	-1.4%	-11.7%	3.0%
Total	10616	12867	14135	13949	13747	17503	18797	18591	
Growth		21.2%	9.9%	-1.3%	-1.4%	27.3%	7.4%	-1.1%	8.3%

Source: OLAP, 2009/10



Source: OLAP, 2009/10

Analysis by type of provider

OLAP analyses by the following provider types:

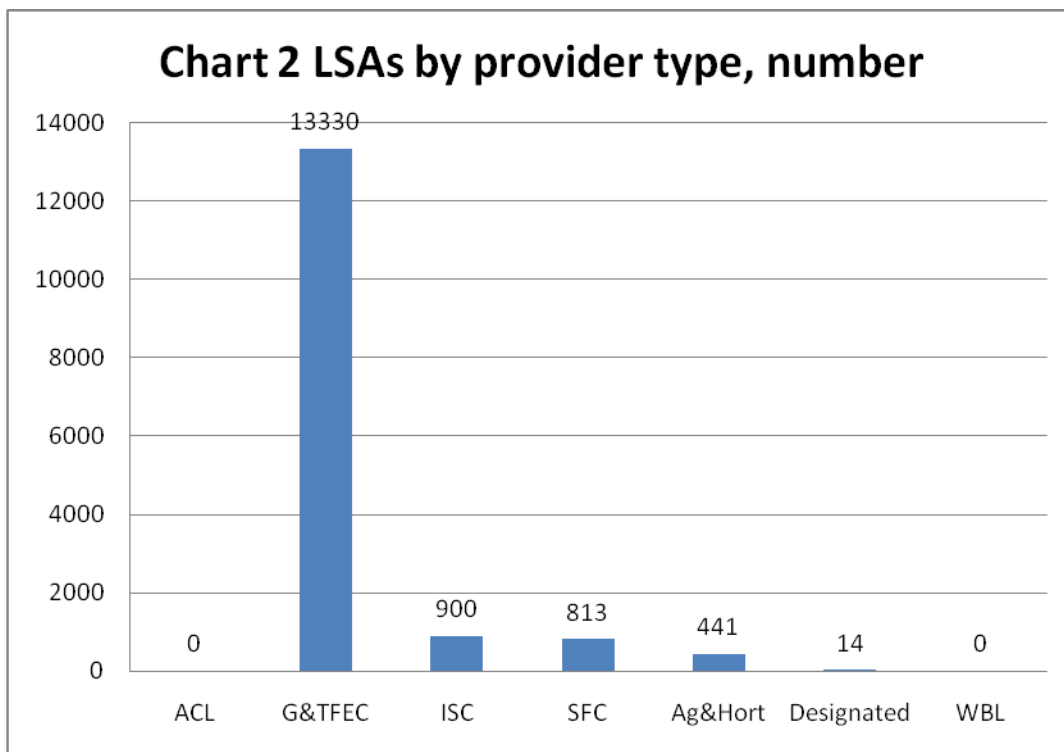
- Adult and Community Learning;
- General FE Colleges including Tertiary Colleges;
- National Specialist Colleges, more usually called Independent Specialist Colleges;
- Sixth Form Colleges;
- Specialist Colleges (Agriculture and Horticulture);
- Specialist Colleges (Art, Design and Performing Arts);
- Specialist Designated Colleges; and
- Work-Based Learning.

No LSAs were identified as working in either ACL or WBL. The most obvious reason for this is that the SIR does not require (or allow) providers in those sectors to

describe staff as LSAs (the college variant of SIR does allow this). It seems probable that across the large number of providers in ACL and WBL, there are at least a few LSAs. However, we know from the regional events held within this project that numbers of LSAs in WBL and ACL are very small.

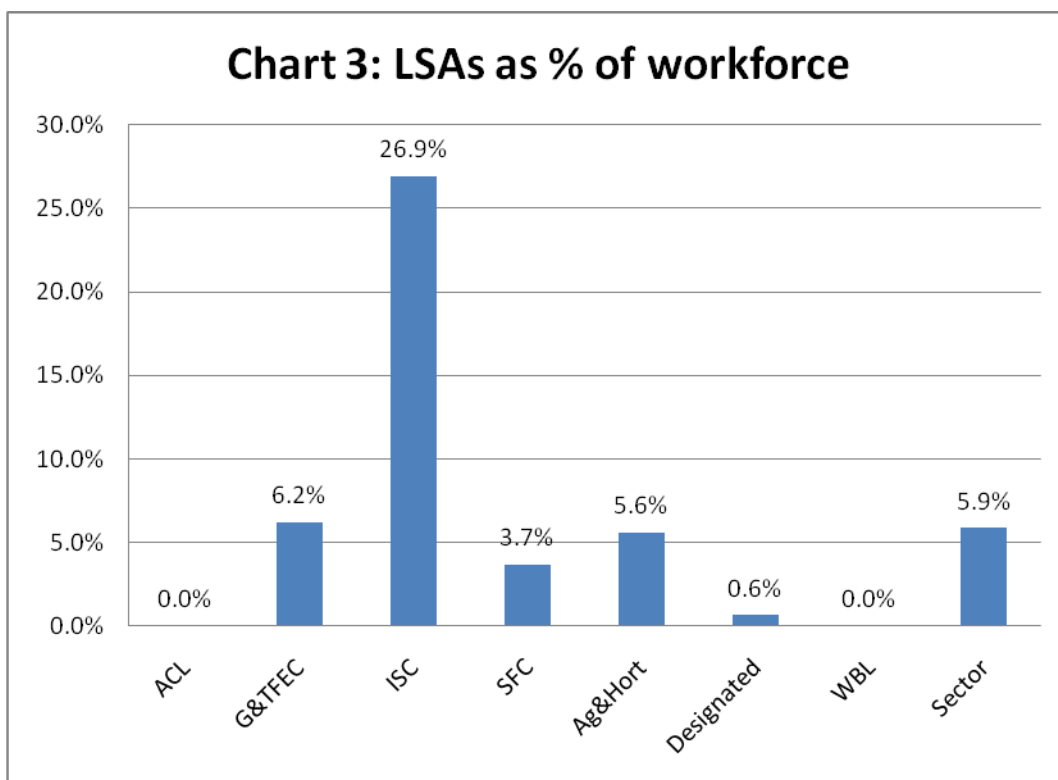
Numbers of LSAs in Art, Design and Performing Arts Colleges and in Specialist Designated Colleges are small and OLAP routinely suppresses data relating to them to avoid disclosure of individual data. So, in our analysis below, there will be little reference to them separately from the sector as a whole; and indeed for some variables analysis is possible only for General and Tertiary Colleges.

Eighty-six per cent of all LSAs worked in General and Tertiary colleges, colleges that account for 81% of the entire sector workforce (LSA and non-LSA). General and Tertiary Colleges are thus even more predominant as employers of LSAs than their preponderance as employers within the sector would suggest.



Source: OLAP, 2009/10; number Art etc colleges is not disclosed but fewer than ten

The position is different if percentage of workforce is considered. In General and Tertiary colleges, LSAs make up 6.2% of the workforce, but the figure is as high as 26.9% at Independent Specialist Colleges, where almost all learners have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and, by definition, require high levels of support. The sector average of 5.9% is, for obvious reasons, close to the General and Tertiary figure, but is reduced by zero percentages in ACL and WBL.



Source: OLAP, 2009/10

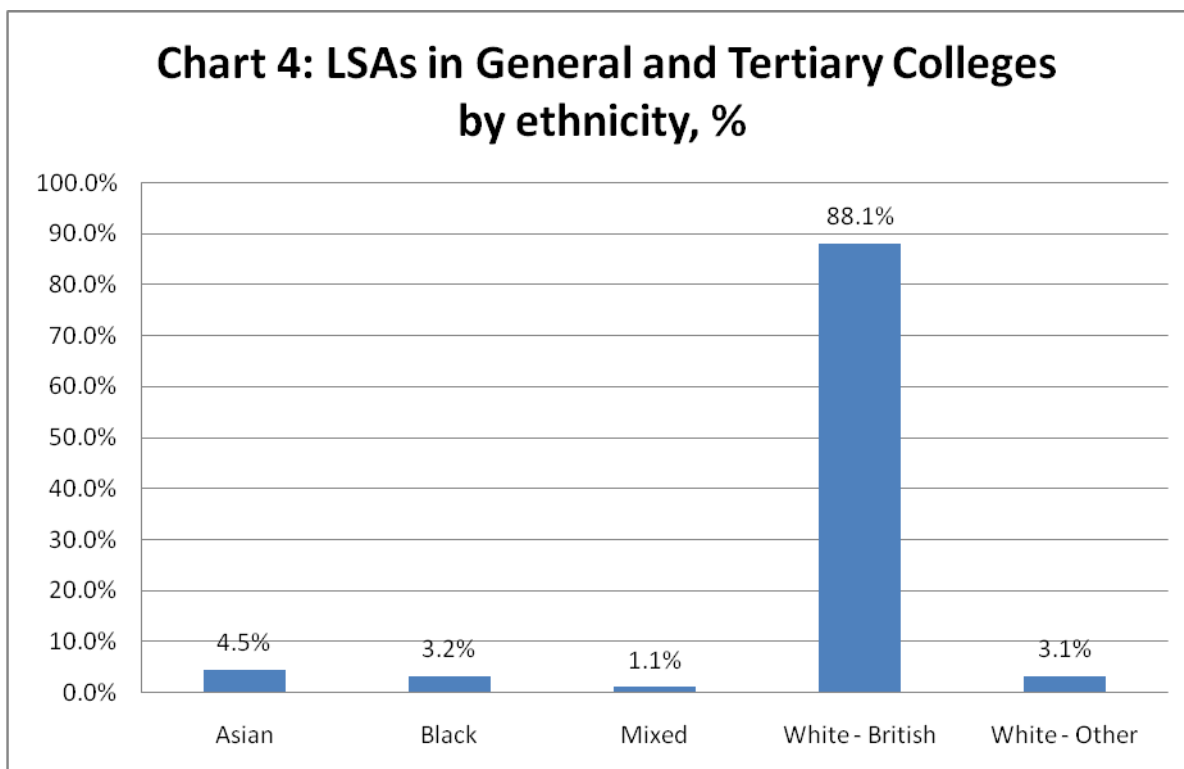
Analysis by gender

The sector workforce is predominantly (63.6%) female and this is even more true of LSAs (79.1% female). Female LSAs are, perhaps unexpectedly, especially predominant in Agriculture and Horticulture Colleges where they make up 86.2% of LSAs. Female predominance is less (68.8%) in Independent Specialist Colleges.

Analysis by ethnicity

Using broad ethnic groupings, the LSA workforce corresponds closely to the sector workforce in terms of ethnicity. LSAs may be fractionally more likely than the workforce as a whole to classify themselves as 'White British' (82.9% did so as against a sector average of 81.4%), but even this small difference may result from differences in the percentages of 'not knowns'.

OLAP identifies just 78 LSAs of non-white ethnicity working other than in General and Tertiary Colleges, though OLAP has suppressed very small further numbers to prevent disclosure of identities. The analysis for General and Tertiary Colleges, excluding 'not knowns' etc is presented in Chart 4.



Source: OLAP, 2009/10

Analysis by disability

Preliminary note: figures in this section exclude about 9% of the workforce who were classified as being of 'unknown' disability status on the SIR return, and also exclude much smaller numbers who 'preferred not to say'. It is impossible to estimate the significance of these exclusions but they are likely to mean that the percentages below somewhat under-state the extent of disability amongst the workforce and amongst LSAs.

3.2% of the sector workforce are identified by OLAP as having a disability, a figure that rises to 9.0% at Independent Specialist Colleges. The percentages are greater amongst LSAs, 5.3% of whom are identified as having a disability. As for most variables, this average for all LSAs is necessarily close to the average (4.8%) for the numerically preponderant General and Tertiary Colleges. The figure for LSAs at National Specialist Colleges is 9.7%, though this figure and the corresponding figures for other provider types (not presented here) should be treated cautiously, as there are just 130 LSAs with identified disabilities outside the General and Tertiary Colleges, most of whom are in the Independent Specialist Colleges.

Analysis by age

Analysis of age is possible only for General and Tertiary Colleges, National Specialist Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges and Agriculture and Horticulture Colleges. LSAs are generally a little younger than the workforce average, but in Agriculture and Horticulture Colleges they are older than average.

Table 2: Mean ages of LSAs and of whole workforce		
	LSAs	Workforce
General FE College incl Tertiary	44.0	45.6
National Specialist College	40.1	42.8
Sixth form college	43.0	46.0
Special college - Agriculture and horticulture	46.1	42.6

Source: calculated from OLAP data for 2009/10; estimation has been used to calculate means from the age ranges provided by OLAP.

The mean ages tabulated above risk concealing important differences across the age bands. OLAP classifies employees into five-year age bands (except that the under-25s, and the over 60s each form a single band). Slightly lower mean ages result from LSAs being markedly more likely than the sector workforce as a whole to be aged under 30, and markedly less likely to be aged 55 or more. The anecdotal view that LSAs tend to be 'middle-aged' has an element of truth in that almost exactly half of all LSAs are aged 45 or over, but the sector workforce as a whole is even more 'middle-aged', 54% being 45 or over.

Qualifications

Highest Qualification

OLAP provides data on the highest qualification held by workers in the sector, though for about 20% of the sector workforce, and 24% of LSAs, the information is not available because it is not recorded on the SIR.

The position where recorded is shown in Table 3. A high proportion of people in the sector are lecturers or the equivalent in non-college settings, so it is not surprising to find that 64.6% of the workforce overall have HE qualifications (National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 4 or above). It is perhaps more surprising to find that as many as 41.5% of LSAs are qualified to this level.

On the other hand, in the sector as a whole, 8.1% of the workforce have no qualifications (or only Level 1). They may be manual workers, or perhaps older workers in administrative jobs who left school when qualifications did not have the

same importance as they are afforded today. It is, however, troubling that as many as 11.7% of LSAs lack qualifications beyond NQF Level 1.

Table 3: LSA and Sector workforce by highest qualification level		
	LSAs	Sector
No formal qualifications or Level 1 only	11.7%	8.1%
Level 2	21.0%	10.7%
Level 3	25.9%	16.6%
Level 4 or 5 (typically, an HE qualification below degree level)	16.8%	22.7%
Level 6 (typically a first degree)	19.1%	28.8%
Level 7 or 8 (typically a masters or other higher degree)	5.5%	13.1%
	100.0%	100.0%

Source: OLAP, 2009/10

Qualified Teacher Status

The SIR offers an opportunity to record whether an employee has qualified teacher status (QTS) on various definitions. It also offers the opportunity to state that QTS is not relevant. Obviously, QTS is not relevant for, for instance, administrative workers. LSAs are, however, not a clear-cut category. QTS is arguably not relevant because there is no requirement for an LSA to hold that status, which is not designed for LSAs. On the other hand, one may reasonably assume that in working as LSAs qualified teachers will find their teaching skills advantageous in their LSA work.

For around 72% of LSAs, employers gave the response that QTS was not relevant. But for a further 16.3% of LSAs, status was identified (the balance of LSAs were in the 'unknown' category). Amongst the 16.3% where status was identified, just under half (7.0%) were identified as having QTS, whilst 9.3% were identified as not having that status. Amongst those with QTS, the great bulk held QTS in the sense of being qualified to teach in state schools, whilst smaller numbers were, for instance, 'Qualified Teachers, Learning and Skills'.

It appears therefore that significant numbers of LSAs are qualified teachers: at least the 7.0% of all LSAs just discussed and an unknown further number amongst the large group (72% of all LSAs) whose employers said that their QTS status was not relevant.

It is, on the face of it, strange to find so many qualified teachers working as LSAs, not least because average salaries for LSAs are so much lower than salaries for teachers or lecturers. Anecdote suggests that for some qualified teachers, an LSA post is either (a) an early career post to gain experience in teaching (broadly

considered) prior to taking a teaching or lecturing post or (b) a late career post, perhaps as a result of early retirement arrangements precluding teaching or lecturing posts or (c) a way of continuing to work in the general field of education but in a less demanding role. It may be that LSAs with QTS are a resource that could be more effectively deployed in the management of learning support.

Full time and part-time working, and terms of employment

OLAP records the numbers of people working in the sector by the proportion of full-time that they work. Some people work more than 100% of full-time, perhaps working for several providers. These above-full-time workers accounted for 0.8% of the sector workforce, but for about 2% of LSAs. However, the proportion of above-full-time workers reached 20% of all LSAs in National Specialist Colleges. Moreover these LSAs were typically working for 141%-150% of full-time, rather than just slightly over full time. There may possibly be some classification or other data error here, but taking the data at face value there seems to be a real risk of over-work amongst these individuals.

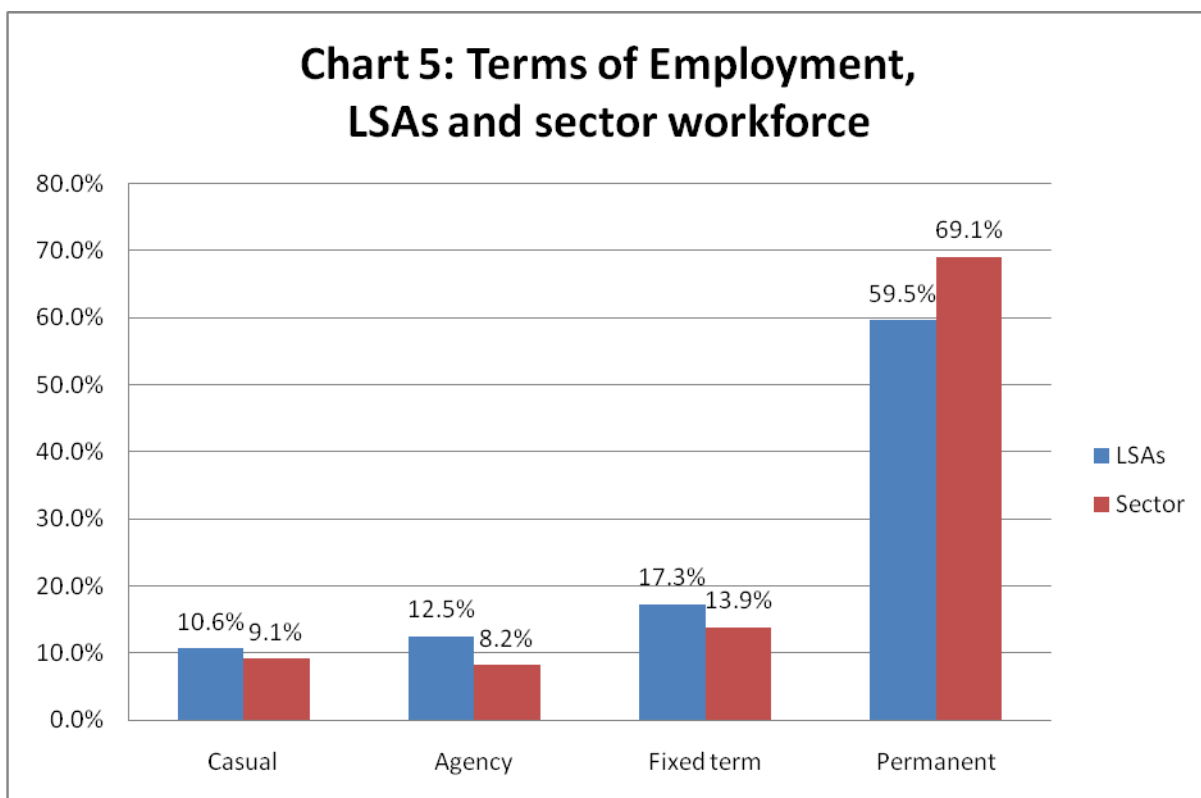
Leaving aside above-full-time workers, the extent of part-time working is much greater amongst LSAs (86% of all LSAs) than amongst the sector workforce generally (59%). In Specialist Colleges, however, the proportion of part-time LSAs (59%) was the same as the sector workforce average.

In the sector workforce and amongst LSAs, there is widespread use of extremely small fractional arrangements. In each case, around 25% of employees worked for 10% or less of full time, and this group of 25% was about equally divided between those who were classified as working 0%⁵ (sic) of full-time and those who were classified as working from 1% to 10% of full time.

The management of large numbers of part-time workers is plainly an important issue for the sector as a whole, but perhaps especially for LSAs, where the cadre of full-time LSA colleagues to whom part-timers might look especially for support is so much smaller as a percentage of the total.

OLAP classifies workers by their terms of employment as casual, agency, fixed term or permanent staff (there are also negligible numbers of self-employed staff and 'unknowns'). The chart below makes clear that LSAs are more likely than the sector workforce generally to be casual, agency or fixed term staff. Even so the bulk (59.5%) of LSAs are on permanent contracts. It appears likely that the lower than average proportion of permanent workers amongst LSAs is associated with their greater tendency to work part-time.

⁵ OLAP works in whole percentages, so someone employed for say six hours in a year may be closer to 0% working than to the next available option of 1%



Source: OLAP, 2009/10

Policy Implications

The main purpose of this report has been to summarise data relating to LSAs. So far as we are aware, this is the first time an exercise of this kind has been undertaken, and it forms an important basis for policy planning in respect of this substantial workforce. This short concluding section offers some preliminary thoughts on policy relevant points from the data.

The number of Learning Support Assistants in the FE sector grew by almost 10% a year between 2002/03 and 2009/10, rising from around 8,000 to 15,500. However, the rate of expansion slowed markedly, to 1.3%, in 2009/10.

An important cause of the expansion might have been the greater legal duties placed on providers in respect of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities consequent upon the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995, and the Equality Act, 2010. Expansion was, however, under-pinned by what, by the standards of 2011, was a relatively favourable funding regime for the sector.

At the time of writing (March 2011), numerous providers had begun to announce redundancies as a result of changes to funding arrangements necessitated (it is claimed) by the state of government finances. Redundancy announcements tend to refer to headline totals of staff without identifying separately any LSA redundancies.

It might be thought that LSAs are to some extent protected from redundancy by legal duties. There is, however, sufficient scope for interpretation of those duties to mean that LSAs may indeed be subject to redundancy in the same way as other provider staff. Although this is no more than a hypothesis at the moment, for which there is as yet no statistical evidence, it is reasonable to expect that the numbers of LSAs will turn out to have fallen in 2010/11 with further falls to come. On this hypothesis the quantum of support available to learners from LSAs, as measured in millions of person hours per year, will fall.

It seems unlikely, on past trends, that the demand for support from learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities will fall; and it will be correspondingly challenging, with falling resource, for the sector to continue to meet demand. Improved management and efficiency may be part of the solution. This may mean a greater role for LSA managers, such as the Senior Learning Support Assistant post advertised by Bournemouth and Poole College (see earlier in this report). It may also mean greater use, under appropriate contractual arrangements, of the managerial and other resources already present within the LSA workforce, for instance the particular skills of those LSAs who are qualified teachers.

Conceivably too, there may be a need for more effective deployment of the LSA resource including sharing, between learners, of LSAs, and greater use of LSAs and others to advise teachers on how they, rather than necessarily LSAs, can better support learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities.

If LSA numbers do indeed shrink, colleges and others will need to assess carefully how they can nonetheless continue to meet their statutory obligations as employers under the Equality Act, and will need too to ensure that redundancy procedures, where necessary, do not inadvertently discriminate against women, given that LSAs are, even more than the sector workforce as a whole, overwhelmingly female, and against people with disabilities, given the higher proportion of people with disabilities amongst LSAs.

At the Enhancement of Learning Support Project regional events, colleagues from Adult and Community Learning and from Work-Based Learning providers emphasised that whilst they had to deliver support for learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities, they were seldom in a position to employ LSAs. Although a deteriorating funding regime may make this difficult, the sector funding agencies may wish to examine the adequacy of the funding they provide for support and how this is reflected in the learner profile and the recruitment and success of learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities compared to non-disabled learners.

The data analysis in this report has not hitherto been publicly available. The importance of the LSA workforce leads us to suggest that analysis of at least the level of detail provided here should be made regularly available in an appropriate format by the successors, in this respect, to LLUK.

Glossary

ACL	Adult and Community Learning
AoC	Association of Colleges
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILR	Individualised Learner Record
ISC	Independent Specialist Colleges
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSIS	Learning and Skills Improvement Service
LST	Learning Support Technician
Natspec	Association of National Specialist Colleges
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OLAP	(LLUK's) OnLine Analytical Processing tool
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
SIR	Staff Individualised Record
WBL	Work-Based Learning
YPLA	Young People's Learning Agency

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