



Enhancement of Learning Support

The training and development needs of learning support assistants

The views of learning support assistants and their managers

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Flexibility and Innovation funding

Incorporating a Short Report on Learning Support in Offender Learning Settings by John Gush

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction to the Enhancement of Learning Support

“The views of learning support assistants and their managers” reports on one part of a larger project, the Enhancement of Learning Support, commissioned by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, (LSIS) and undertaken by the Association of National Specialist Colleges, (Natspec). The overall aim of this project was to explore the training needs of learning support staff and those who manage them across the sector, scope existing work and expertise and use the resulting information to make recommendations for future training and development activities.

The project was conducted by a team of seven researchers and a project administrator (Annex 4) who have worked closely together to share information and discuss implications for future work. The methodology used adopted a mixed methods approach including desk research, an online survey, semi structured telephone and face to face interviews, visits and focus groups. Data was gathered across a limited period (January – March 2010), timescales were tight and we recognise that the resulting information could not be comprehensive. It is clear there is a good deal more to find out. Although small in scale, we believe this is nonetheless an important piece of research, as it expands our understanding of a significant and valuable part of the workforce which we know from the literature review has been hugely under researched until now.

The Enhancement of Learning Support project initially used the term “**learning support practitioner**” to reflect the terminology present in the National Occupational Standards (NOS) currently being developed by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) for this group of staff. However, both field research and the on line survey undertaken as part of this project have clearly revealed that this is not a term which is widely used or indeed recognised by many of those working in the sector. Accordingly, throughout this report we use the term “**learning support assistant**” (LSA) to refer to those staff who have direct and regular contact with the learner (or group of learners) and whose role is to facilitate their access to identified support, within the learning process. These staff are not on a teaching or training contract; rather they work under the direction of the person(s) leading the learning. We recognise that providers use a wide variety of titles for staff supporting learning, which may include; learning support assistant, teaching assistant, learning support worker, learning support practitioners, learning facilitators, educational support worker and enablers and other terms not listed here.

It is perhaps helpful to make the distinction between “learning support” and “learner support”. “Learning support” is essentially about enabling the learner to engage with the learning programme and providing personalised, identified support that will allow learners to maximise their independence, to achieve and to progress. This project focuses on learning support and the role of the learning support assistant as defined

above. It does not cover learner support, which is about enabling the learner to participate by overcoming potential barriers. Learner support provides funding (e.g. for childcare, transport) and services (e.g. guidance, benefits information, counselling) which enable the learner to access the appropriate learning environment. The project does not therefore cover the staff who support these functions, nor those such as librarians and technicians whose work does not focus on providing this support to individual learners.

This report contributes to the Enhancement of Learning Support Project by exploring the training and development needs of learning support assistants and those who manage them across the lifelong learning sector. It has sought to find out what assistants want, identify approaches to training and development which have worked, and those which have been less effective, as well as identifying any barriers. Consideration has also been given to exploring existing partnerships and networks at national, regional, local and organisational level with a view to identifying how these might be integrated, expanded or further developed as a basis for supporting the training and development of learning support assistants.

What Learning Support Assistants and their Managers say about their training needs and how to support them

Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) play a highly significant role in widening participation, facilitating inclusion and broadening the capacity of local services to support learners with additional needs. We know, however, that the role, impact and training needs of learning support staff in the lifelong learning sector is hugely under researched. The voice of the learning support assistant, and indeed the learners they support, is noticeably lacking amongst existing research.

“The review found that literature on the professional development of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) was extremely limited, therefore evidence from the school sector was examined to learn lessons from the experience. Even so, the voices of support staff and learners in research were noticeably absent.”
Faraday, S (2010)

This report seeks, albeit in small scale, to address this gap by talking directly to LSAs, those who manage them, about their training needs and how best these might be supported.

Scope and Methodology

The scope of this report is learning provider organisations in the lifelong learning sector; these were predominantly Further Education Colleges (FE) and Independent Specialist Colleges (ISCs), but also included both Adult and Community Learning (ACL), and Work Based Learning (WBL). In determining the scope we recognised that information relating to the training needs of LSAs had already been gathered in part of the South West region for a Learning and Skills Council funded project to develop training materials <http://swwdp.org.uk/contents/supporting-the-learner-journey.html> . We also acknowledged that significant research exists in relation to the role of teaching assistants in the schools sector.

This report has therefore largely focussed on providers in the North West, adopting a hybrid form of opportunity sampling. It incorporates the views of LSAs and their managers elicited through the questionnaires, and the findings from the on line survey and the literature review commissioned to support the wider project. The target group of staff was LSAs and those who manage them. Field research has been undertaken with 10 LSA managers, and focus meetings were held with a total of 53 LSAs, using semi structured interviews. Copies of these can be found at Annexes 5 and 6. Information was also gathered through telephone interviews with Skill, NIACE, AoC, Natspec, and Greater Manchester Learning Provider Federation (GMLPF) (Annex 7). The organisations contributing to this report are identified in

annex 2. Follow up from these interviews and meetings led to further internet based research.

The research has also drawn on 3 interviews with WBL learning providers and interviews relating to CETT for Inclusive Learning and the Karten Centre. We recognise however that further work to explore the specific training needs of the work based sector would be beneficial. In addition, a short report on Offender learning is included at Annex 8. Offender Learning has been reported on separately because of the considerable difference in organisational delivery and structure which exist in this sector.

Survey

An online survey was conducted throughout the duration of the project which elicited 374 responses in the LSA questionnaire and 138 responses for that aimed at LSA managers. Although there were a total of 372 respondents to the LSA questionnaire, some of these clearly fell outside the workforce group we were seeking to identify. Accordingly, responses were filtered by those who used the word "support" in their job title. Responses which clearly indicated that the respondents' main role was not learning support were also excluded. This produced a subset of 247 responses who clearly differentiated their role as being learning support, and it is these results we have used to interpret findings. It is worth noting here that the vast majority of LSAs completing the questionnaire were from Further Education Colleges (79.70%), followed by ACL (9.60%), ISCs (5.70%) with work based learning making up the smallest proportion at 5%.

The survey included a mix of open and closed questions, for which respondents were required to select from a predetermined list. Although there was some element of interpretation in ascribing responses to categories, the main purpose of the survey was to increase the capacity of the project to capture the voice of practitioners within the sample. Although arguably the results included in this report should only be seen as indicative, the direct quotations provide a powerful exposition of the key themes and issues facing this group of practitioners.

Findings

Roles and Functions of Learning Support Assistants

As noted previously, although the term Learning Support Practitioner is used within the NOS for learning support staff, it was clear in interviewing LSAs that it is not the mostly commonly used term to describe those staff who support learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the learning and skills sector. This was confirmed by the questionnaires completed by LSAs, with the most common title being “assistant” at 46% followed by “worker” at 40%. The term “Learning Support Practitioner” accounted for only 4% of those surveyed. In a work based learning context, the role of staff performing this function is quite different, as is the terminology used, which is typically “training adviser”.

Interviews suggest that the majority of LSAs in Further Education Colleges have cross college support roles and functions, are part of Additional Learning Support (ALS) teams and are often based within Student Services. ALS teams may comprise of LSAs, together with specialist teachers who provide specific support for learners who have, for example, autism, dyslexia and sensory impairments. Learning support teams often include administration officers who collect and manage the ALS evidence for funding purposes and technical specialists who support the learners’ use of adaptive technology and equipment.

One college interviewed has three separate learning support teams, each with their own manager: a central team of support staff who support learners who have a range of learning support needs but who do not have learning difficulties and/or disabilities; a team of LSAs who specifically support learners on specialist programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; a team of qualified teachers who support the literacy and numeracy support needs of learners. In WBL, the role of the training adviser is usually primarily to support the literacy and numeracy needs of learners. LSAs in Independent Specialist Colleges and Adult and Community often have cross college support roles.

LSAs are managed mainly by middle managers, although the LSAs in one Independent Specialist College are managed by the Principal.

The table below summarises the numbers, role, and contractual arrangements of LSAs within the sample. It begins to illustrate the diversity of role and the breadth of experience and skills required by LSAs, which has clear implications for the training required.

Roles of Learning Support Assistants

College A	70 ALS staff including 45 LSAs; specialist teachers; specialist support officers - visual support, physical access ; community support workers; carers; learning support officer - mentors and manages LSAs; learning support co-ordinator - timetables, logistics, logging staff dev; learning support funding officer
College B	2 contract staff; 4 bank staff; rest hourly paid; Dyslexia specialist; Autism specialist; Literacy and Numeracy specialists; behaviour management specialists; LSAs support LLD/D; 2 co-ordinators (one for each site) - cover supervisor, day to day management of team; funding. 3 F/T staff conduct ALS assessments
College C	35 support staff; learning facilitators; mentors; vocational trainers - have vocational skills; 2 specific tutors for lit/num and dyslexia support; ADHD specialist; ASD specialist; JAWS tutor
College D	150 LSAs both residential and curriculum; 2 roles – day and residential; both roles facilitate learning
College E	10 support workers – hourly paid
College F	15 college staff plus approx 20 Protocol agency staff; specialist lecturers; learning support co-ordinators; learning support admin assistant; learning mentors; VI specialist; HI specialist; EBD specialist; mental health specialist; physical; communication; ASD specialist; dyslexia and dyspraxia specialist; Lit/num specialists
College G	17 LSAs across the college - inclusion workers - but not for LLD/D provision; autism specialist; VI specialist plus equipment support
College H	15 LSAs

The majority of LSAs in the sample interviewed provide 1:1 support for learners. Some LSAs indicated that they can also support two or three learners in a group and that when that happens the rest of the group also ask them for help. This practice was recognised in the literature review as being effective in promoting inclusion and supporting social interaction amongst learners. One LSA manager said that an

important role for LSAs in the college is to assist tutors to support learners. The ability of LSAs to stand back at appropriate times to enable learners to be more independent in their learning is seen as an important skill and enables LSAs to observe. Interviews with LSAs did identify that this can, at times, cause issues with tutors who feel that if the LSA is “doing nothing” they should not be in the session. LSAs sometimes find it difficult to explain to tutors why they are standing back and that for some learners, particularly for those who have mental ill health, the presence of an LSA is a stabilising presence for the learner and is part of the support process. On the whole, LSAs are not expected or asked by tutors to “teach” learners. However, LSAs indicated that this could, and on occasion, does happen. There is a trend for providers to develop more specialist LSAs who have specific knowledge in, for example, a vocational area or IT.

Learning support teams are often a mixture of full-time staff, hourly paid staff and bank/agency staff. The majority of LSAs are hourly paid. Some colleges use agency bank support staff who are not directly employed by the college.

None of the LSAs or LSA managers interviewed identified personal care support as a function of the LSA role. One college has it written into LSA contracts that they will not lift or carry learners. Those learners who do require personal care support bring their own care support worker with them. This was confirmed by the survey findings, which ranked personal care as the least important training priority.

The table below illustrates the key functions identified by LSAs and those who manage them.

Functions of Learning Support Assistants	
College A	Mainly 1:1 support across most areas of the college including Lit/Num support; listening; observing; all ALS staff have the same job description
College B	LSAs support LLD/D, care, mobility, Lit/Num; schools 14-19 Diplomas; FL land based L/N; behaviour management - in all classes + lunchtime; 1:1; small group within a group; group support; pre-entry to L3 but mainly to L1
College C	1:1 and general group support (Entry to L1); mentors - in and out of classrooms - more specific support; 1:1 Work experience; lunch room
College D	1:1, group, at break and lunchtime; house staff support at weekends and is mostly 1:1 and 2:1; also support tutors -

	getting things ready, clearing up, making resources
College E	Mainly note taking; reading; use of IT equipment; mobility support; meal time support; advocacy; NOT Res support; support from Entry to Diploma level; Do not do manual handling - this is specified in the contract
College F	Mainly 1:1 across all areas of the college; travel training; work placement support
College G	Mainly 1:1 across all areas of the college

Conclusions

- There is clarity amongst LSAs and LSA managers that support is being provided to the learner and not to the tutor
- The role and functions of LSAs is not always understood by tutors
- Most learning support teams include specialist support teachers
- The majority of LSAs in the sample are hourly paid and some colleges regularly use agency bank support staff
- LSAs tend not to provide personal care support for learners

Qualifications - Learning Support Assistants' Responses

The LSAs interviewed were asked what nationally accredited qualifications they were expected to achieve, and responses included:

“NVQ 3 in Care is offered - not sure if we have to do it”

“None because nothing suitable is available to date; L2 C&G 9259/7 Adult Learning Certificate is offered as part of Skills for Life cross college training – but we don’t have to do it”

“NVQ Care up to L3 is mandatory; autism qualification through University of Cumbria - one module; it is expected that LSAs have C&G Certificate in Learning Support”

“Literacy and Numeracy in supporting adult learners L1 to L3”

“All LSAs do L2 Lit/Num National tests or come with those qualifications. Encouraged to gain the following but not expected - NVQ (ITQ); L2 C&G 9297 Cert in Learning Support; L3 IAG”

“Most have degrees already and specialist vocational qualifications. All have to be L2 Lit/Num or equivalent; BSL Level 3 if supporting HI; get a pay bonus if gain ECDL”

A similar variety of responses is reported in the survey results, which found that NVQ 2 or 3 in health and social care was the most common qualification (35%), closely followed by NVQ 2 in Learning Support (30%). One work based learning provider noted that they have three grades of training advisers, linked to experience and qualifications. The entry level training adviser is typically new to the sector, has a smaller case load and does not work in a specialist role or support those with specialist needs. The second level is expected to have related occupational skills and qualifications which would enable them, for example, to assess retail skills in a work context. The third level is technical or qualified professional with specific areas of responsibility, and typically these relate to literacy and numeracy, and are supported by appropriate professional qualifications.

It is clear that there are difficulties in identifying appropriate qualifications which fully address the needs of LSAs. As one survey respondent put it:

“I find it difficult to find to find a suitable course that is aimed at providing support at FE level. Course are either aimed at schools or adults”

Another commented:

“There is not a lot for people who want to make a career out of supporting adult learners with special needs. The accreditation seems to push you down the teaching route. Supporting should be just as valued as teaching. You need to be just as skilled as the teacher to be an effective support. There doesn't seem to be any clear route for qualifications in this field.”

Qualifications - Learning Support Assistant Managers' Responses

LSA managers were asked what nationally accredited qualifications are provided for LSAs that they were expected to achieve:

“Piloting L3 in Learning Support (Ascentis - OCNW) - with 10 LSAs”

“None - waiting for LLUK National Occupational Standards to come out. 2 LSA co-ordinators doing Preparing to Teach Award in house - useful for LDD and staff cover”

“Nothing from the college”

“LSA Qual through local FE College; 4/5 LSAs attend - didn't know the name of the qualification but it is very generic and not specific enough”

“C&G 7321 up to 2 years ago; nothing at the moment but in 2010/11 hoping to go with Ascentis L3 Cert in Learning Support”

“NVQ 2 Care”

“Use teaching qualifications as an alternative since not a lot out there for LSAs; this is OK for folk who want to go on to teach but not OK if someone wants to increase Learning Support skills and/or become an advanced practitioner”

“Nothing at the moment - all staff suitably qualified”

“None”

There was an alarming lack of correlation between the responses of LSAs and those of their managers. Whilst NVQ Level 3 in Care and Level 2 in Literacy and Numeracy qualifications were the most common qualifications identified by the LSAs interviewed, almost half of the LSA managers interviewed indicated there were no requirements in their college for LSAs to gain specific, or indeed any other qualifications. All LSA managers were concerned about the lack of appropriate qualifications for LSAs working in the learning and skills sector. Many indicated that the qualifications for Teaching Assistants in schools are readily available but they are not appropriate for LSAs working in colleges.

The development of LLUK National Occupational Standards for LSAs (http://www.ukstandards.co.uk/Find_Occupational_Standards.aspx?NosFindID=4&SuiteID=1636) is viewed positively by both LSA managers and LSAs and would provide a career structure not currently present. One LSA manager did suggest that LSAs may end up with more qualifications than tutors.

Conclusions

- There is a big variance in expectations relating to LSAs gaining nationally accredited qualifications. Neither LSAs nor LSA managers are satisfied with the current range of qualifications available and consequently tend to focus on Care qualifications and Literacy and Numeracy qualifications.
- Both interviews and survey data indicate that a significant minority of LSAs are undertaking a care qualification as their main accreditation route although this does not reflect their main responsibility. This may reflect the regulatory environment associated with residential provision.

- The development of LLUK National Occupational Standards for LSAs is viewed positively
- Some LSA managers would rather wait for these NOSs rather than search around for other qualifications that may or may not provide the right match to support the LSA role

Training Received by LSAs (including induction, CPD and entitlement) - Learning Support Assistants' Responses

All LSAs interviewed indicated there was an induction programme for new LSAs. In the main this induction was the same as for other staff and was a general college induction. There was little specifically on the role of the LSA and nothing on how to support teaching and learning. Most LSAs had a period of shadowing colleagues for between two and three weeks. This was perceived to have been of value by the majority of respondents. It is worth noting here, however, that while the practice of shadowing is common place in induction, it is not typically a feature of ongoing development and CPD. It is also significant that the main focus of the majority of induction programmes related to compliance issues such as Health and Safety, Safeguarding and Equality and Diversity. This was also the case in the survey data, where the overwhelming majority reported a series of training activities that can be broadly categorised as compliance. LSAs in the sample indicated that colleagues who started at the college after the beginning of the academic year may not routinely receive an induction. A number of the LSAs spoken to thought the use of DVD materials showing good LSA practice would be very useful at induction.

A residential Independent Specialist College has a comprehensive induction programme that is mandatory for all newly appointed LSAs who work in the residential learning environment; it includes 7 days training covering restraint, manual handling, first aid, food hygiene, epilepsy, and safeguarding, followed by 10 days shadowing in the houses. There appeared to be no specific induction training, however, provided to LSAs when their role expanded to providing support in the more traditional setting of the college.

It is important to note here, however, that a number of LSAs interviewed had been in their role for many years and could not easily remember their induction. This may affect the validity of aspects of the information supplied and the degree to which it is representative.

The majority of LSAs interviewed indicated they had CPD opportunities, if employed by the college, and were well supported by managers. Most colleges have staff training periods, normally at the beginning and end of the college year, and LSAs are

invited to attend. Some hourly paid LSAs are paid to attend this training but the majority are not and consequently choose not to attend. Agency staff do not attend training.

One LSA indicated that training and development was not available for LSAs because they were not teaching staff. A group of LSAs in another college said *“there is lots (of training) for curriculum staff but not so for LSAs since they are business support staff and they don’t get training”*.

In some providers there is a broad range of CPD opportunities for LSAs but there appears to be no mandatory aspects of CPD that LSAs have to do, nor is there an entitlement to training. Little formal joint training for LSAs and teachers takes place in relation to their respective roles and responsibilities, although the value of this is widely recognised in the literature.

“Central to the success of professional development was the fostering of a collaborative culture where there was a strong emphasis on working together across the organisation to share good practice and to develop problem solving strategies to improve teaching and learning. 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)¹ confirmed that in effective organisations the ethos was one where teachers and support staff were determined to learn from and work with each others.” Faraday 2010

¹ Ofsted (2010) op cit

CPD for LSAs tends not to include how to support teaching and learning. On the whole LSAs feel their role is not understood by teachers and this can be problematic.

Range of Induction and CPD opportunities for LSAs includes:

- First Aid at Work;
- Safeguarding;
- Equality and diversity;
- Travel training;
- Epilepsy;
- Positive approaches to managing challenging behaviour;
- Crisis intervention (non-violent);
- Autism;
- Food hygiene;
- Health & Safety;
- Mental health:
- Dyslexia:
- JAWS;
- Supporting Vulnerable Learners;
- Customer Care;
- Evacuation training;
- Deaf awareness;
- Braille

LSAs indicated that whilst they may have CPD opportunities, very little of it leads to external accreditation.

Training Received by LSAs (including induction, CPD and entitlement) - Learning Support Assistant Managers' Responses

It is worth noting that the same focus on compliance was found in the responses of LSA managers when reporting induction for LSAs. They commented that LSAs typically receive the same induction as other new colleagues, that is, general induction to the college and Health and Safety. Specific induction relating to the LSA role is primarily shadowing of a colleague over the first two weeks that may also include a degree of mentoring. Independent Specialist Colleges (ISCs) and Third Sector Organisations have a more thorough induction programme for new staff and LSAs are included in this. Safeguarding, Health and Safety and Equality and Diversity are often mandatory elements of induction in ISCs. One Third Sector Organisation has developed an induction e-learning package covering assessment and planning. Most LSAs do it and there is a positive response from staff.

Overall, both the survey results and analysis of findings from interviews indicate that there is little in induction on the role of the LSA and or indeed how to support teaching and learning.

Whilst the comments regarding expectations for qualifications show variance between LSAs and their managers, responses from LSA managers about CPD were very similar to those of the LSAs interviewed. LSA managers indicated the main challenge is to find training and development that is relevant to the LSA role. Much of the external training is however school based and not relevant to the learning and skills sector. Some managers have developed their own training packages as indicated above and this is often relates to the learning needs of learners in their college. Senior college managers do not appear to recognise the need for, or importance of, formal training and development for LSAs.

Both LSAs and their managers identify the relationship between LSAs and teachers as being very important but no evidence was identified through meetings and interviews that joint training takes place.

Overall, very little training of LSAs has taken place on Valuing Employment Now or Foundation Learning and there is very little awareness of either of these key initiatives, although some awareness-raising about Functional Skills had taken place in one college.

Conclusions

- Induction for LSAs tends to be general and not specific to the LSA role or how support links to teaching and learning
- Typically, the main focus of induction is on training related to compliance
- Independent Specialist College have a more thorough induction for staff and this includes LSAs
- There is potential for the broader use of an induction e-learning package for LSAs
- There is the potential for the development of DVD materials of good LSA practice
- There is an overall lack of formal CPD structure for LSAs and no entitlement
- Access to induction and ongoing CPD is hugely variable within the sample. There is no specific and nationally agreed entitlement and training for hourly and agency support staff is often extremely limited and in some cases non-existent.
- CPD typically focuses on mandatory training around issues such as care, safeguarding and health and safety. There is limited evidence of systematic training around how to support teaching and learning and /or to promote independence, which are arguably the central elements of the role
- CPD does not systematically include joint training with teachers, although the vast majority of respondents indicated they felt this would be beneficial, a view which is well supported by the literature.
- Much of the external training identified was perceived to be school based with limited relevance to the learning and skills sector. Providers are tending to address this by developing their own training packages, specific to the needs of their organisations and their learners.
- CPD tends to focus on awareness raising and rarely leads to external accreditation
- LSAs who report they feel well supported typically have managers who have the experience, knowledge and understanding that training and development is not only important for LSAs but also appreciate that it needs to be well planned
- There is limited evidence that LSAs are receiving training in relation to Valuing Employment Now and/or Foundation Learning

- There is a lack of strategic planning of LSAs' training and development by senior managers

Implications for Practice

- It is clear that there is a need to raise the awareness of senior managers in the learning and skills sector of the value of formally recognising and supporting the training and development needs of LSAs.
- Joint training for teachers and learning support assistants around teaching and learning, as well as the specific needs of those they work with would be extremely valuable

Training Methods and Approaches - Learning Support Assistants

Learning Support assistants were asked to draw on their experience of training and development to identify approaches which they feel are or would be most effective in supporting their development.

Responses

The table below summarises the responses. It is interesting to note that the main training methods and approaches identified by both LSAs and LSA managers as being appropriate were very similar. These included:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training incorporated into, and reflect by, their working practice and not just be theory based. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting others doing the same role to share experiences and learn from each other |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of the impact of training should take place through observations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shadowing, mentoring and peer observation |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group interactive learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • e-learning for some elements but not for all the training |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers need to be included | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tap into the skills, understanding and knowledge and experience that LSAs have |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short units that build over time to increase flexibility and enable LSAs to build the qualification over time and at their pace | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A blend of approaches needed |

Conclusions

- The importance of ensuring that training is relevant and directly related to LSA working practice was strongly identified.
- A mixed blend of training methods and approaches is perceived to be of greatest benefit to LSAs
- Alternative approaches to training, such as shadowing, mentoring and peer observations were also identified as being effective although responses suggested that access to this was often limited.
- Short units of learning that LSAs can built up over time are more responsive to need and enable easier access to learning for LSAs
- The value of joint training with teachers was noted
- Although our research suggests that many LSAs have limited experience of mixing with one another for training, it was clear that opportunities to meet and learn from others doing the same job were perceived to be extremely valuable.

Training Needs (including gaps and barriers) - Learning Support Assistants' Responses

In both interviews and within the survey, respondents typically highlighted the need for specialist training, and the impact of specific disabilities on learning. The survey comment below is typical;

"I would like more specialist training in areas of behaviour issues and health conditions/diagnosis that could impact on learning and how to support the learner most effectively".

The main areas of training need identified by LSAs interviewed were:

- mental health
- coping with challenging behaviour
- autism
- diplomacy training
- vocational knowledge and understanding. For example, knowing specific vocabulary and
- safeguarding;
- a protocol on how to behave with students
- a choice of specialisms within a unitised approach
- how LSAs and teachers can work together

- language
- confidentiality issues
- Base level of how to support plus specialist knowledge - former must not be at expense of latter

It is interesting to note that in completing the survey, a number of respondents focused on the importance of communication and joint working to support effective practice. As one respondent put it:

"Any amount of training cannot suffice without the opportunity to discuss situations with somebody more experienced who can advise on a 'best approach' and this is not always possible due to time constraints."

Barriers to development

Responses from both interviewees and survey respondents overwhelmingly demonstrate that the single biggest barrier to development for LSAs is time.

Barriers identified revolved almost entirely around LSAs not being able to be released for training because of hourly contracts, the lack of time available for training and the lack of training opportunities because of their low status within the organisation. One group of LSAs said they were not allowed to have the same training as teachers:

"teachers had training recently on Profound and Complex Needs. We asked if we could go but were told the training was only for teachers and yet we work with profound and complex learners every day".

Training Needs (including gaps and barriers) - Learning Support Assistant Managers' Responses

When managers in the survey were asked if they felt there any were gaps in training and development opportunities for LSAs, the proportion of those indicating there were was high at 72%. The content of those gaps identified by LSA managers were very similar to those indicated by LSAs. The need for more specialist training was again identified, with one survey respondent commenting:

"Our LSA's are highly skilled and experienced in supporting specific disabilities i.e. visual impairment; hearing impairment; physical disability; autism; behavioural difficulties; mental health for which there are limited

nationally accredited qualifications. I had attended LLUK consultation events when they were devising the new LSA qualification at L2 & 3 & had hoped that the additional modules would recognise the diversity of LSA experience. I am very disappointed that this is not so."

The benefit of working alongside others and CPD in addition to partly qualification led training was also noted:

"Opportunities to update and extend expertise. Increased opportunities to observe and work with peers"

The overriding **barriers** to LSA training were reinforced:

- Not being able to release LSAs
- Too many LSAs who are hourly paid or agency
- The low status of LSAs often excludes them from training
- No career structure for LSAs

We know that within the schools sector, the workforce reform agenda has had a significant impact on both the professionalisation and skills of the workforce. Teaching Assistants in school have a clearly identified entitlement to both induction and annual CPD. The role has further developed to include that of the more senior Higher Level Teaching Assistant, whose role includes working with groups and whole classes for a certain period and providing supervision for pupils in the absence of the teacher normally timetabled for that class. There are clearly identified qualification routes to support both roles and also an obvious career structure for those seeking progression within the role of the TA.

Conclusions

- The low status of LSAs and lack of career structure inhibits their involvement in training
- The mandatory requirement for training and development for TAs has been hugely significant in professionalising the role. Given what we know about the difficulties in releasing LSAs, it is likely that national training and development of LSAs will not happen on this scale unless their attendance is assured as a result of LSA qualifications becoming mandatory

Implications for practice

- The development of a career structure for LSAs in the learning and skills sector

will support the professionalisation of the role and the skills of those undertaking it.

- There are clear benefits to making LSA qualifications mandatory in the same way TA qualifications have become in the schools sector and teaching qualifications have become in the learning and skills sector

Impact of Training including Quality Assurance

The majority of LSAs and managers interviewed indicated that there is formal observation of learning support. This is often part of the college formal observation of teaching and learning, although some LSA managers specifically focus observations on learning support. In some cases, the outcomes of these observations can lead to LSAs receiving, for example, mentor support and/or additional training. However, given the evidence so far about the variability on access to training, particularly for hourly paid and agency staff, it is clear that the link between observation and training to support development is at best inconsistent, and, our findings would suggest, overall, underdeveloped across the sector. Feedback from respondents suggests that the focus of observations tends to be on what LSAs **do** rather than the impact of learning support on learning. There is little to suggest that the quantity, quality and /or impact of LSA training and development is evaluated either formally or informally.

LSA appraisal and supervision are common place and are often informed by the outcomes of observations and feedback from teachers and learners.

Responses to how the effectiveness of learning support is evaluated

College observation policy have included LSAs for last 4-5 years; observation checklist - good cross ref to National Standards; observation support records; learners' voice; SAR; achievement data

Formal Observations - focus on LSA and Tutor relationship; all tutors do evaluation of LSAs; LSAs evaluate tutors; learner forums give feedback re LSA effectiveness and gaps; learner success rates; no formal appraisal as yet

Formal observation in line with T&L - graded. This has gone down well with LSAs - informs training and development, plus post observation action plans

Formal observations of LSAs - action planning plus training and development if needed

Annual Quality Reviews; T&L observations - LSA work observed at the same

time. Observers trained to know what they are looking at and what to look for
Planning to conduct formal observations ideally linked to T&L observations;
supervision by team leader plus fortnightly team meetings; appraisal

Conclusions

- Formal observation of LSA practice appears to be widespread
- This is not however, systematically or consistently linked to training and development to support LSAs to develop practice
- In addition, there is insufficient evaluation of the impact of LSA training on outcomes for learners

Training for LSA Managers - Learning Support Assistants' Responses

Learning support assistants were asked about what skills and training they felt it was important for their managers to receive, in order for them to be able to do their job effectively. The responses tended to concentrate on the need for LSA managers to have and develop good interpersonal skills. Appropriate skills, knowledge, understanding and experience of the learning support role and the needs of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were identified as being essential for LSA managers. Some LSAs thought that LSA managers need to have a background of being an LSA themselves and need to have contact with learners. Counselling and listening skills were also thought by some LSAs to be important to “*deal with LSA stress*”. Knowledge of funding was seen to be important, with the manager being “*well connected to networks*”.

Training needs of teachers were also identified in the context of the relationship between teachers and LSAs. While some indicated teachers were very supportive of the LSA role, others had less positive things to say:

“they don’t understand the intensity of support”

“teachers can think an LSA presence is an imposition and don't always understand why they are there”

“teachers need to be aware of the range of disabilities and often they are not”

It is clear, in analysing all the responses, that there is a sense that teachers are not necessarily well trained in working effectively with LSAs, and this may account for the variation in skills and practice.

Tutors do not appear to be aware of how to utilise support effectively. Many have admitted that they don't have the confidence to direct support staff. There is confusion over what 'support' means. Many tutors seem to absolve themselves of responsibility when a support worker is present.

Training for LSA Managers - Learning Support Assistant Managers' Responses

Managers of learning support assistants were asked about what training they had received or felt would be beneficial in supporting them in their role. It is worthy of note that the majority of LSA managers interviewed and responding in the survey indicated that they had received little, or no, training to do the job. The range of responses included:

"I learnt on the job"

"Same as everyone else with no real professional development opportunities"

"LSA managers are not seen as managers, rather as co-ordinators, therefore do not have the same opportunities"

"This is a weak area at the moment"

"Not had any - training needed in managing people"

"Had very little at moment. I need advice and guidance on assessment and observations"

All LSA managers attend courses and conferences on issues such as funding and inspection but none interviewed had been on any courses advertised that were related to their learning support management role. One LSA manager identified "Make a Difference" Catalyst training and Pacific Institute Training as being very good.

When asked what training they would like, LSAs managers said:

- funding
- managing budgets
- policy and practice
- prioritising
- safeguarding
- set up and manage projects

- managing multi-disciplinary team
- H&S
- risk assessment
- managing change
- assessment
- development work
- managing people
- disability conditions
- recognising quality

Conclusion

- The training of LSA managers to support them in the role of managing learning support assistants is very under developed
- A need for teachers to undergo training to help them understand the LSA role was identified

Implications for practice

- In addition to the development of National Occupational Standards for LSAs, there would be merit in developing training and training materials to support teachers in working with LSAs, perhaps as part of ITT, and to support managers in managing LSAs.

Partnership and Networks

In addition to exploring the relationships between LSAs and teachers, and opportunities within organisations for staff to network, this report has also explored the networks which exist at national, regional and local level. The previous section established that the provision of joint training for teachers and LSAs to work together is limited, and that, whilst LSAs value opportunities to mix with others doing the same role, lack of regular access to training and the impact of hourly and agency contracts inhibits their ability to do so. The next section outlines what learning support assistants, their managers, and member organisations had to say about networks.

Findings

The most significant finding is that although networks do exist, these do not typically operate at LSA level. The majority of related network, at local and regional level are attended by LSA managers, and at national level, by senior managers and principals. Although the value of these is clear, the potential for access and rolling out training direct to LSAs is less so. Indeed, the survey data in particular, suggest that opportunities for networking even within their own organisation were often limited.

When asked to rate networking opportunities with other LSAs doing the same role from other organisations, however, 40 % rated them as poor. The picture was similar when asked to rate more generally opportunities to network with other practitioners working with learners with learning difficulties and disabilities from other organisations, where once again 40% rated this as poor. One respondent commented

"I am not aware of any local or regional networks. My only (brief) contact would be with Agency workers and occasionally another LSA from a different branch of the same company"

Regional Learning Support Networks

There are examples of active regional networks that include FE colleges and Independent Specialist Colleges but all of them are for learning support managers and not LSAs. The Greater Merseyside Inclusive Learning Network meet once a term and LSAs can attend and sometimes do attend when the meeting is at their college. However this is not a regular occurrence. The meetings predominantly focus on learning support management, strategy, inspection and funding issues. A network of Learner Support Managers has also been established in the South West. This has been running for 3 years and is attended by at least 10 FE colleges and one sixth

form college, although it does not currently include ISC representation. It meets once a term and is clearly valued by those attending:

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

In addition to the opportunity to meet formally, the networks have fostered more personal connections to support the sharing of practice and information on a more informal level. For example, the manager interviewed identified that she currently has an issue about examination concessions, and through the connections made has been able to arrange visits to two other colleges to observe their processes. Although predominantly attended by the managers of LSAs, other staff are welcome to attend and it is not unusual for LSA managers to bring colleagues along from time to time. The North West, South East and East Midlands Learning Support Networks are similarly manager focused. The role of LSAs in supporting teaching and learning is not a key feature of these network meetings.

Some regional networks are supported and facilitated by organisations such as AoC in the North West, but the majority of networks appear to be more ad hoc with learning support managers meeting across a region because “it is a good idea”. One manager mourned the demise of Local Authority networks:

“regional networks have gone. Our regional ALS network is organised by the Director of Inclusion at one of the colleges. It is ad hoc, not formal and for managers”.

Managers interviewed indicated the value of meeting with other learning support managers to share experiences and practices. 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. One manager said *“we meet once a term and it is invaluable”*.

On the whole, learning support managers feed back the outcomes of network meetings if they think it relevant for LSAs. This is mainly around ALS funding and inspection outcomes. LSAs interviewed were generally not aware of the networks but did say that their manager would feed back learning support issues from meetings s/he attended. LSAs said that even if the regional learning support networks were for them, attendance would be problematic since they can't be released, or allowed the time, to attend internal meetings let alone regional meetings.

Some learning support managers thought the networks could be used to support LSA training and development but recognised the challenges are considerable. Release of LSAs to attend internal meetings within providers is difficult. To release LSAs to attend regional network meetings for training would be virtually impossible.

One learning support manager said “*it could be used to deliver training but challenge is to get LSAs together in one place*”. The geographical size of a region can limit attendance for managers let alone LSAs. One manager said that he had to think carefully about the value of travelling two hours each way for a network meeting even if it is once a term. “I am not going to go from Cheshire to Blackpool for a 2 hour meeting” However, a manager in a national organisation felt that training for LSAs should be regionally based.

The lack of formal structure in the networks could inhibit their development to support training and development for LSAs.

Conclusions

The use of existing networks for learning support managers has limited potential for supporting and delivering the training and development of LSAs. Key factors include:

- Difficulty in releasing LSAs to attend
- Travel distances
- Current networks meet too infrequently to effectively impact on the training and development of LSAs
- At best, networks are used to cascade information and practice back to LSAs by managers

E-mail and Virtual Networks

E-mail and virtual networks and forums for LSAs are under developed and, if they do exist, are hard to find. Much time is currently needed to dig around in websites and perhaps come across a forum by chance. During the research, a forum for LSAs in a Local Authority was found by accident and then could not be recovered once the researcher had moved on to another web page. Some professional development organisations are developing e-mail forums for members and support staff pages on websites (see below) but those found are in early stages of development².

Meetings with LSAs elicited a mixed response to the suggestion that they could possibly share practice and learn from other LSAs through e-mail and virtual networks. The majority were not overly enthusiastic, citing that they had problems knowing how to turn a computer on let alone using “chat rooms”, although others could see potential benefits of virtual networks.

Conclusions

- E-mail and virtual networks are under developed and, if they do exist, are hard to find.
- LSAs would need training to feel comfortable and confident to use virtual networks

Local Authorities

Networks tend not to be formally linked to LA structures, nor do they have any formal accountability or reporting and communication lines to LAs. Consequently, they do not inform LA planning or strategy in relation to 14-19 (25) year old learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Some LAs are developing holistic 14 – 19 (25) strategies and services for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that could incorporate, develop and support training for LSAs currently in the post 16 sector. For example, Sheffield LA, with support from Yorkshire and Humber LSC Learning for Living and Work Pathfinder Funding, is developing cohesive 14-25 provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across the city called *My City Learning*. This has been a three year project and a cross city LDD working group has been established representing providers and key agencies and organisations from which a commissioning group will be identified. Sheffield LA is committed to developing and commissioning co-ordinated cross city provision. One aspect of the development is to provide appropriate and relevant training for staff. The LA has a well recognised CPD programme for Teaching Assistants in schools. It would appear that Sheffield LA has systems and procedures in place for training that could be expanded to include training and development for LSAs across the lifelong learning sector.

Conclusion

The Sheffield LA *My City Learning* initiative could provide a potential model for supporting training and development of LSAs in the lifelong learning sector

Implications for Practice

- The potential for supporting the delivery of LSA training and development through evolving Local Authority structures and strategies such as *My City Learning* in Sheffield would merit further investigation.

Over the last two years, a project in Greater Merseyside has been actively developing a Sensory Service for learners with sensory disabilities. The project is supported by RNIB/Action for Blind People and funded by the LSC Region. The Sensory Service is in its early stages of development and is beginning to:

- Set up a referral system for learners wanting to use the Service
- Loan specialist equipment and training learners in how to use it
- Collect information about support organisations in Greater Merseyside
- Meet employers to find out how we can help them
- Collect information about work experience opportunities
- Trial approaches to assessments
- Look at work mentoring and job coaching schemes

Training sessions focusing on how best to support learners with sensory disabilities in Greater Merseyside have been delivered to Connexions managers and advisers, and to Work Based Learning assistants and strategic managers. The Sensory Service will also have a role in training staff to support learners who have sight or hearing loss, including LSAs, who could also have a key role in delivering additional learning support through new roles job coaching, support in the workplace and travel training.

The project is currently at the stage of working with the LAs across Greater Merseyside to jointly commission the work of the Sensory Service thereby embedding the service within 14–19 (25) strategy and planning.

Conclusion

The Greater Merseyside Sensory Service model could also be applied to training and developing LSAs to support all learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and not just learners with sensory disabilities

Implications for practice

Investigate further the potential for the Greater Merseyside Sensory Service model to train and develop LSAs

The Karten Centre Network

The Karten Alpha CTEC Trust (Karten Trust) was established by Ian Karten, MBE, in 1997 to improve the quality of life and independence of people with additional needs by acquiring and learning skills through computer-based education. It now has 84 centres across the United Kingdom, as well as centres in Southern Ireland

and Israel. It has established “The Karten Network” - a network of IT centres for disabled people. The centres are funded through the Ian Karten Charitable Trust, with the purpose of improving the quality of life and independence of adult people with congenital or acquired physical, cognitive, sensory, learning disabilities or mental health problems. The Karten Centres aim to provide a supportive learning environment, preparation for employment or a more independent life, together with access to the latest in adaptive computer technology, and are located in a wide range of host organisations. Because the focus is on the needs of those with disability, irrespective of context, the network of centres operates very much across sector. The Karten network is keen to share good practice as well as providing information, through the website and with the support of the network development manager, who is able to connect centres in order to exchange ideas and develop practice. It is for example, currently working to develop the website’s capacity to hold learning materials and/or training materials.

CETT for Inclusive Learning

The CETT for Inclusive Learning (CETTIL) is one of eleven national Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Training, set up as part of a government initiative three years ago. CETTIL is a partnership organisation, whose lead partner is Northumbria University. Its members represent a wide range of providers including higher education, general further education, specialist colleges, adult and community education, work based learning and offender learning.

Unlike many other CETTs, the focus has always been around the inclusion agenda, and in particular working with learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities. It has actively promoted networks and the sharing of best practice between organisations. A number of interviewees for example, cited the value of training facilitated through CETTIL around supporting teaching and learning. The CETT in many respects sees its role to act as a “networker / facilitator”, putting organisations who have training and development needs in touch with other organisations with skills and resources in that area. In addition to the formal connections made through training events and so on, it has also facilitated enhanced relationships between providers to such an extent that the principal of one organisation was willing to attend a partnership meeting with Ofsted inspectors to support the inspection process for another college. It has also developed a number of on-line frameworks and guidance to support organisations to share best practice, such as “Tips and Hints” and “Case Studies”. These can be accessed by following the hyperlink www.cettil.org.uk

Professional Development Organisations

Research beyond telephone interviews and meetings with providers identified other existing or developing networks that may have potential to support the training and development of LSAs. The following were found late in the research for Strand 4 and there was insufficient time to make further investigations

Professional Development Centres (PDCs)¹ predominantly support the training and development of staff in Skills for Life and teacher training qualifications. Haringey PDC also has a range of courses aimed at school staff. There is a support staff page and the website is developing a Support Staff Forum link.

The Regional Professional Development Planning Services (PDPS)³ are active in eleven regions across the UK. The PDPS training focus is on Skills for Life and teacher training.

The National Association of Disability Practitioners⁴ (NADP) is the professional association for disability & support staff in Further and Higher Education and has an email forum for members. No providers interviewed were members of NADP and so it has not been possible to gauge whether the forum is used by LSAs, for what purpose and to what effect.

Conclusion

National and regional professional development organisations may hold possibilities for supporting the training and development of LSAs.

Implications for Practice

Investigate further the potential for supporting the delivery of LSA training and development through professional development organisations such as Professional Development Centres, Regional Professional Development Planning Services, the Karten Centres, the CETT for Inclusive Learning and the National Association of Disability Practitioners.

1. http://www.haringey.gov.uk/index/jobs_and_training/hals/whatishals/list_of_other_education_services/pdc.htm

³<http://www.talent.ac.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=787>

⁴ <http://nadp-uk.org/>

Annex 1 - Steering Group

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The project would like to thank the senior managers, learning support assistants and their managers in the following colleges and organisations for their time, enthusiasm and commitment in contributing to this report.

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Greater Merseyside Learning Provider Federation

Karten Network

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Liverpool Community College (GFE)

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MacIntyre (3rd Sector)

Natspec NW Region

NIACE

Northern College (ACL)

Protocol Skills (WBL)

Pure Innovations (WBL)

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This report has also drawn on the literature review produced by Sally Faraday as part of the Enhancement of Learning Support Project.

Annex 3 - Project reports

Enhancement of learning support: the training and development needs of learning support assistants

Findings and recommendations

The views of learning support assistants and their managers

Training and Development Opportunities

The views of learners

What learners think (easy read version)

Literature review

Resource bank

Annex 4 - Project Team

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Annex 5: Questionnaire for LSAs

For LSAs -Training needs

Date of Interview:

Provider(s):

**No. of LSAs:
M'steam**

Range of Learners Supported: Discrete

1. What qualifications/training are currently used/provided?

1a What role(s) do you fulfil in your organisation? (preliminary question to set the context)

1b What are the main areas of your role – e.g. 1:1 support, group support, behaviour support, communication support, contribution to assessment, planning and recording, support in the workplace/for employment other?

1c What training did you receive when you started (induction)? What else, if anything, would you have liked?

1d What nationally accredited qualifications are you expected to achieve?

1e What CPD in-house training have you had (with prompts)? Mandatory (e.g. first aid, manual handling etc) and practice (eg teaching & learning, self assessment, etc)

1f Have you had any specific training in relation to Valuing Employment or Foundation Learning? (If yes, explore what and impact)

1g Do you have examples of effective training materials and resources and/or staff with expertise in training/ professional development for LSAs?

1h If yes, would you be prepared to share these/ discuss this in more detail with my colleague (get details)

2. Focus and Impact of training

2a Has the training just been for LSAs or has it been with other staff such as tutors?

2b Has the training you have received supported you in your role? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?

2c Are there any changes you might like to suggest to improve the quality of the training you receive – to content or delivery?

2d Has the training included the relationship between your LSA role and the role of tutors?

2e Please identify any significant gaps in your training.

2f How do you think these gaps might be filled? (E.g. formal qualifications, CPD opportunities, e-learning, mentoring, coaching other?)

2g What methods approaches have been most effective in supporting you to acquire skills and understanding (is it through training, or working alongside others etc.)

2h What methods of delivery have you experienced and which do you prefer and why e.g. courses (day, half day, weekly etc) working alongside others, e-learning, mentoring, shadowing, observation, etc)

2i What do you feel would be the best approach to support your professional development?

2j What areas would you like it to cover? Are there any areas where you feel most in need of support?

2k What training do you feel is important for staff who manage you (Managers and teachers)?

2l Do you feel the tutors you are working with know how to use you to the best effect?

2m What opportunities do you get to network with other staff doing the same role and how?

2n Do you feel you receive appropriate guidance about what you do and how you do it?

2o Are there any entitlement /access issues to training? If so, what are these?

2p If it is a residential provision, please also explore the impact of compliance training component for staff working in residential provision

2q Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time

Annex 6 : Questionnaire for LSA Managers

For Managers -Training needs in relation to LSAs

Date of Interview:

Provider:

Manager Position:

1. What qualifications/training are currently used/provided?

1a What role(s) do LSAs fulfil in your organisation? (preliminary question to set the context)

1b What do you think are the training needs of LSAs?

1c What training do you offer for LSAs- at induction and what CPD? Is it mandatory?

1d Which nationally accredited qualifications do you provide?

1e Do you have examples of effective training materials and resources and/or staff with expertise in training/ professional development for LSAs?

Yes/No

1f If yes, would you be prepared to share these/ discuss this in more detail with my colleague (get details)

2. Focus and Impact of training

2a How do you allocate training? i.e. how much, who gets it, any difference between part time and full time staff?

2b How do you decide the focus (or priorities?) for training?

2c Do the training and qualifications you currently provide meet all the professional development needs of LSAs?

2d If not, what do you think are the gaps in training and development for LSAs? What improvements might you suggest – to content or delivery?

2e How do you think these gaps might be filled? (E.g. formal qualifications, CPD opportunities, e-learning, mentoring, coaching other?)

2f What do you think are the training implications of Valuing Employment for LSAs- any new roles e.g. job coaching, support in the workplace, travel?

2g What about with regard to Foundation Learning?

2h How does professional development of LSAs strike the balance between learning support and learner support?

2i How do you evaluate the performance of LSAs and use that to 1) inform training 2) evaluate the impact of training?

2j What if any are the barriers to training - are there any workforce characteristics that are relevant (e.g. FT/PT staff etc)

2k What training is available for staff who manage LSAs- tutors and managers?

2l Is time allowed for tutors and LSAs to liaise and if so how much?

2m What are the key issues you feel training should address for managers of LSA?

2n How should training be delivered? e.g. meetings, courses, e-learning, manuals, shadowing, advanced practitioners, other? (Any difference for managers v LSAs?)

2o This piece of work will result in a training programme for LSAs. What delivery model do you think is most effective?

2p What regional networks are there?

2q What is their focus?

2r What do you think could be done to expand these to support training?

2s If it is a residential provision, please also explore the impact of compliance training component for staff working in residential provision

2t Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time

Annex 7: Questionnaire used to explore networks

1. What networks currently exists?
2. Which providers are included?
3. Who is network for – managers, practitioners, LAs?
4. Are LSAs included? If so how?
5. Is there a separate strand for LSAs? If yes, how does it work? If no, could there be?
6. How does it work? What is the focus? Formats – electronic?
7. Is the network currently being used to deliver training? If so, what?
8. Does the network link formally with LA strategic/partnership groups?

Annex 8 - A Short Report on Learning Support in Offender Learning Settings



Enhancement of Learning Support

The training and development needs of learning support assistants

A Short Report on Learning Support in Offender Learning Settings

John Gush

March 2010



Flexibility and Innovation funding

Contents

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General background, provision for learning in prisons

There is a range of arrangements for learning and skills development in all prisons. The number of prisoners who engage in learning activities differs between prisons and prison categories but overall about half of all prisoners take part in learning in one form or another.

In order to understand the way in which additional learning support is made available for offender learners it is necessary to present a brief overview of the arrangements for learning and skills provision in prisons.

Learning activities for adults in custody can be provided in a number of ways, including:

- By the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) provider which is funded by the LSC / Skill Funding Agency. The provider will be a college of further education or private provider whose staff use prison premises to deliver a range of courses.
- Within the non-OLASS "purposeful activity" that takes place in the prison. This can include industrial workshops and catering facilities. These activities are managed by prison staff.
- In sessions arranged with voluntary sector providers, for example the Shannon Trust, who support the "Toe by Toe" reading scheme.

Each prison also has a Careers Information and Advice Service (CIAS) funded by LSC / Skills Funding Agency. This element of OLASS offers information and advice about learning and future employment options.

All prisons have a Head of Learning and Skills (HoLS) who is responsible for the strategic overview of all learning that takes place in the establishment. Some HoLS have additional responsibilities e.g. resettlement, re-offending reduction or employment.

By comparison with the general population, the prison population contains a significantly higher proportion of people with poor basic skills, low qualification results and a history of unemployment. Current OLASS policy is for the primary focus of learning to be around the reduction of re-offending and the development of employability skills to support that end.

There are a number of structural barriers to the delivery of learning provision in prisons, all of which are currently being addressed with varying levels of success. Predominant among these are:

- competing priorities for a prisoner's time which can lead to poor attendance in learning sessions
- the movement of prisoners between establishments which can make it difficult for offender learners to build a learning relationship or to complete courses
- difficulties with sharing information between and within establishments regarding a prisoner's progress (being addressed by the MIAP Learner Plan).

Initial assessment, the ILP and the provision of learning support

When an offender begins a sentence, or is transferred to another establishment they are offered an induction. The OLASS Careers Information and Advice Service advisers contribute to the induction by providing information about all learning opportunities within the establishment and options for access to the labour market in the area of release.

During the induction the OLASS learning provider will carry out an initial basic skills assessment where one is not already available, and will formulate an individual learning plan (ILP).

The Managing Information Across Partners (MIAP) Learner Plan is established at this stage. The MIAP Learner Plan holds high level information about an individual's initial basic assessment scores, short and long term goals and participation in learning activity. The purpose of the Learner Plan is to avoid repetition and duplication as well as any resulting demotivation. The MIAP Learner Plan is a secure web based facility that allows all approved OLASS providers in custody to access up to date information about a learner's progress.

Additional information that can support the delivery of learning is provided through the LSC funded "Hidden Disabilities Questionnaire". This gives indications of possible dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit disorder, and a number of other conditions which can hinder success in learning, de-motivate the learner and sometimes lead to dysfunctional behaviour. Use of this tool has been recommended as part of the most recent OLASS contract in custody.

Where a need is identified for learning support to enable the offender learner to make progress, this will be included in the ILP developed by the OLASS provider. The OLASS provider's contract includes the delivery of learning support as

appropriate to the individual's need. There is a field within the MIAP learner plan that records whether an offender learner has received additional learning support in the past, either before or during a prison sentence.

Two Ofsted thematic reports were published in January 2009 on the delivery of learning and skills to offender learners with both short and long sentences. The report focusing on offender learners with short sentences makes specific reference to additional learning support and concludes that

The provision of additional learning support is too variable. In prisons, learning support assistants are not always available and there is no automatic offer of support for those identified as having dyslexia or severe learning difficulties. In one prison in the survey, little assessment of the needs of those with learning difficulties took place, particularly those with dyslexia. The prison had no measures to assess the impact on offenders of additional support or the progress learners made. By contrast, the education contractor in another prison had secured additional funding through the European Social Fund to provide additional learning support in the classroom with a dedicated team of six tutors providing classroom assistance. In a third prison there was particular emphasis on additional learning support in the workshops through the delivery of literacy and numeracy provision by a large learning support team.⁵

The current project survey has found a similarly varied picture regarding the availability and style of learning support available to offender learners.

Learning support in offender learning settings

Availability

The information presented here is the result of a short survey in the form of a questionnaire that was completed by the HoLS in five prisons. Additional information was gathered in interviews with three other HoLS, an Ofsted inspector and a senior LSC staff member responsible for implementation of the MIAP learner plan. All the information was gathered in March 2010.

The general sense amongst the respondents was that learning support was valuable and in far too short supply. When asked what he would like to see in regard to

⁵ Ofsted, Jan 2009, Learning and skills for offenders serving short custodial sentences

learning support, one of the HoLS replied “we just need much, much more of it” and another wrote the following:

“I used to work in schools. In a typical school you would have a large SEN department with a senior manager plus up to 20 Learning Support Assistants. In prison, where the percentage of learners with “special needs” is probably 10 times as high as that in the typical school described above, there is very little provision. This needs to change.”

In response to the question about the availability of learning support, one of the questionnaire respondents stated that learning support was always available when it had been identified as needed. The other four respondents said that it was only sometimes available.

Respondents expressed various degrees of frustration with the overall structure under which provision for learning is made available in prisons (one HoLS referred to a “stand off” situation with the learning provider regarding who has responsibility for prociding learning support). The general mood, however, seemed to be one of resigned acceptance of a difficult situation and a determination to make the most of it and to provide the best possible outcomes for the learners.

What is learning support?

There was little clarity from the interviews or the questionnaire responses as to what constitutes learning support. One HoLS, when asked about learning support, spoke with pride about the delivery of 1:1 functional skills embedded into the training offered in vocational workshops (e.g. hospitality and catering, brick laying and plaster work, painting and decorating). These sessions are delivered by the OLASS provider’s trained tutors and proved very effective.

When pressed as to whether there were any learning support assistants active in his prison as described within the current project he concluded that there were not⁶. Another HoLS wrote in a similar vein:

It is difficult to be precise as there is no formal Learning Support structure - by that I mean there is no funding in the OLASS contract to employ LSAs. At xxxx xxxx, I have built 'outreach' into the curriculum; as a result, there are a small team of teachers who are not timetabled in the normal way, but are

⁶ The project definition of Learning Support Practitioners was included in the questionnaire rubric: those staff who 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.

free to move around the prison providing support to offender learners in all areas - including on the wings, in the work place, in class and in vocational training programmes.

Another HoLS stated that their support is “provided by peripatetic tutors working 1:1 with learners in their workshops”. On the other hand, the Ofsted inspector reported that overall she saw good provision of learning support in the OLASS provision. She made the additional point that as the classes are often small (not infrequently the more so because of poor attendance) individual attention is regularly available. In her experience, learning support was rarely available in the non-OLASS provision.

Training for learning support

Given the lack of clarity about the nature of learning support, i.e. whether or not the term encompasses discrete tuition delivered in an embedded approach in the context of a workshop session, the response to the question about training for learning support assistants should be treated with some caution. The question suggested a number of possible delivery styles for training and asked if these took place at all, occasionally or regularly. Most of the respondents reported that what training there was only takes place occasionally, and one HoLS used the free text box to report on recruitment and delivery problems in his education provision.

Peer mentors

All respondents reported on the way that other offenders can often provide very effective support, although there was considerable difference in the emphasis that was placed on this strategy. One HoLS expressed it in the following way

“What works best” in custodial settings is prisoner mentors e.g. Toe by Toe, Classroom Assistants etc. Logically, the answer would be to spend what little money there is available on upskilling this talented workforce that can overcome some of the traditional barriers that many offenders have (i.e. they didn’t like school / formal learning) but they are happy to learn from their peers.”

Another reported that “Peer advisors work in the area of ‘Toe by Toe’ and Housing Advice. Peer support workers in Vocational Training Workshops including: Catering; Electrical Installation; Barbers; Painting and Decorating”. Some said that these kind of arrangements were loose and informal, whereas others reported a more structured approach with one prison arranging for their mentors to take the PTTLS qualification. The Ofsted inspector reported that in some prisons mentors are widely

utilised in a range of areas including IT support as well as literacy and numeracy. She mentioned one establishment where they are identified by marked tee shirts and commented that specially formulated short qualifications would be of benefit both to the mentor as well as to those receiving the support.

Conclusion

The arrangements for learning support in prisons are very variable with those responsible making the most of the available resources in a range of innovative ways, the utilisation of peer mentors being reported as particularly effective. There is a general feeling that more support would be of benefit to the offender learners and there is a recognition that training for learning support is only occasionally available.

Annex 8a -The Questionnaire

The Enhancement of Learning Support

Offender Learning Questionnaire

Natspec is one of a number of key national partners working with the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) to implement a sector led approach to quality improvement across the sector. Natspec's focus is to develop a national programme of CPD to improve the quality and management of learning support for learners with additional needs across the FE sector.

In order to fulfil this remit Natspec is keen to gain a better understanding of the way learning support is provided in prisons and across the offender learning sector.

Please could you help by completing this questionnaire and returning it to me by email.

Any information you supply will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be shared in a way that could make it attributable either to you or to your organisation.

Please contact John for any further information on this project. Thanks.

John Gush

Name of person completing the questionnaire Role

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Name of establishment Date

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Roughly how many offenders does your establishment serve? Up to:

50	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000

Roughly how many of those offenders take part in learning activities? Up to:

50	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000

Is learning support available for offender learners in your establishment?

(Learning support is defined as provision that enables the learner to engage with the learning programme and provides personalised, identified support that allows them to maximise their independence as a learner, to achieve and to progress.)

Never	Sometimes, when identified as being needed	Always, when identified as being needed

In what kind of programmes is support available?

	Y / N	Please provide some details
Foundation learning		
vocational skills		
Functional skills		
Skills for life		
other		

Who provides learning support in OL settings in your prison?

	Never? Occasionally? Regularly?
Learning Support Assistants (i.e. those staff who 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.)	
Learning mentors (i.e. prisoners who, with or without specific training, support other offender learners)	

Others (please describe)	
Please add any other information to help us understand how learning is supported in your establishment	

Please could you say something about the comparative availability and deployment of learning support in these three pairs of provision?

	None	Details
YOI		
Adult		
Short stay		
Long stay		
Provision that is in scope for OLASS		
Provision that is out of scope for OLASS		

How is the requirement for support identified and assessed?

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What training or CPD is available for LSAs or others who offer learning support in your prison?

	None	Occasional	Regular	Details
Mentoring				
Shadowing				
Observation				
E-learning				
Formal qualifications				
One off training courses (external)				
One off training courses (in-house)				

Paper based resources-handbooks	based e.g.			
Meeting practitioners	others			

Please add any further information that will help us to understand the issues around the provision of, and training for, learning support in your prison

Thank you for your time