

Learning Support Matters



Welcome to the second edition of Learning Support Matters, produced by the Learning Support Reference (LSA) Group.

The role of learning support is complex, varied and challenging. Many people doing this job will have different titles, roles and experiences. What they have in common however, is the capacity to make an invaluable contribution to the successful education of disabled learners. This newsletter has been produced by LSAs, for LSAs, and will support you in your role. Indeed, anyone working with disabled learners should find it useful and interesting. This edition includes an interview with a Principal from a GFE, provides examples of useful technology to enhance learning and independence as well as tips for managing behaviour. If you have any views, comments or ideas for future content we would love to hear from you, so please let us know by emailing: viv.berkley@lsis.org.uk

Contents - click on links to follow

	Page
1. Spotlight on policy	2
2. A Principal's take on the implications of the Green Paper	3-4
3. A peer visit to Beaumont College to find out about the use of technology to enhance independence and promote learning	5-6
4. Useful Link -New Occupational Standards for Supported Employment	6
5. Top free & low cost IOS (Apple) Apps and tips	7-8
6. Useful link -E-safety	9
7. Film review -Snow Cake	9
8. Book review - 'No One Told Me I was Deaf'	10
9. A learner conference day at Homefield College	11
10.Top Tips for managing behaviour	12
11. Approaches to supporting learners in a Work Based Learning context	13
12. A valuable insight into autism	14



Spotlight on policy

The Green Paper - the changes it will bring and the likely impact

Allie O'Brien ELS Project Director

In March 2011, the Government published its Green Paper Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability in which it set out its vision to support disabled children, young people and their families by making wide-ranging proposals to respond to the frustrations of both children and young people and those who support them. The Green Paper made proposals to radically reform the current system for identifying, assessing and supporting children and young people with SEN and their families. In May 2012 it published Green Paper Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability Progress and Next Steps a report which responded to the consultation, set out the progress made and identified the next steps in taking forward the plans, through legislation and in other ways. In this Spotlight on Policy we highlight some of the major changes and consider the implications for learning support staff and those they support.

Why make changes?

The case for change is strong. We know that:

- Too many children with SEN have their needs picked up late
- Young people with SEN do less well than their peers at school and college and are more likely to be out of education, training and employment at 18
- Statements/ Learning Difficulty Assessments do not focus on life outcomes
- Too many families have to battle to find out what support is available and to get the help they need from education, health and social care services; and What changes are being made?
- The key element of the reform is the introduction of a 0-25 Education, Health and Care plan (EHC). This is intended to create a more person-centred approach to planning and delivering learning, built around raising aspirations and resulting in a well-planned and supported route towards both immediate and long term outcomes. It should result in a stronger and more integrated assessment process which includes parents, children and young people, and a range of professionals.
- Local authorities with the support of schools, colleges and health agencies will be required to publish a comprehensive picture of the local offer. This should set out for parents and young people the full

range of local provision and support that is available to them regardless of their level of need.

- There will be a new duty for local authorities to ensure joint commissioning across education, health and social care for all children and young people. Parents of disabled children and those with SEN, and young people themselves, will have a legal entitlement to the option of a personal budget where they have an EHC. This should extend choice and control by enabling families and young people who want to do so to buy services themselves through direct payments.
 - There is an increased focus on long term outcomes, including work. To support this a Supported Internship study programme is currently being trialled in colleges to provide opportunities for young people with complex needs to gain employment.
- These changes are taking place in a context of wider changes, including raising the participation age, increasing the number of Academies; changes to qualifications, funding reforms and health reforms.

Implications for supporting learning

There will be a much greater focus on improving outcomes for young people, by providing personalised learning programmes which equip individuals for their future adult life and meet their aspirations. This will include a focus on work preparation, but also where appropriate the development of independent living skills. To support this, funding will no longer be attached to qualifications, but to the programme of study. This should mean that providers have greater freedom to develop programmes around an individual learner's needs, interests and aspirations. There is an expectation that the majority of programmes will include work experience where appropriate as well as elements of non-accredited study. It is likely therefore that a key element of the role could be related to supporting young people in the workplace. Where learning is not accredited, it will be important that providers can evidence progress and outcomes effectively. So your role in contributing to the assessment of skills on entry and as learners progress will be important.

To provide effective support it is vital that you understand what the learner's long term aims and aspirations are, his or her priorities for learning and how the elements of their programme which you support, will contribute to the achievement of those goals.

A principal's take on the implications of the Green Paper



This is an interesting time to be working with young people and adults with disabilities. Last year, the Government published its Green Paper Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability in which it set out its vision to support disabled children, young people and their families by making wide-ranging proposals to respond to the frustrations of both children and young people and those who support them.

Here *Richard Emptage* interviews *Teresa Kelly*, Principal of Abingdon and Witney College in Oxfordshire, to explore her response to the resulting challenges.

Abingdon and Witney college, among others, was involved in the Phase 1 LSIS clusters project commissioned by the DfE to facilitate the sharing of effective practice in relation to the seven themes identified within the Green Paper, and is now working on phase 2 of the project.

What can you tell us about the Green Paper project activity in your cluster?

The main project activity in Phase 2 is to concentrate on developing an independent living option that is integrated into the student's main programme between the ages of 16 and 24. Working with all the special schools and other colleges in Oxfordshire, the intention is that we develop a core independent living offer in partnership with Hereward College in Coventry which will enable young adults to experience living independently for a period of up to 6 months. Many of our students have the opportunity to experience residential activity – but this will be different in that it will aim to enable those young people for whom it is suitable and appropriate to experience living away from home for an extended period of time.

Within the college there has been much activity relating to the introduction of the Green Paper, but until we have defined the funding process to support a developing curriculum it is difficult to fully plan to deliver the aspirations outlined.

At the college we have always followed very detailed and well thought through individual learning pathways for our students on the Steps programme – and in essence this is what the Green Paper is promoting. This is why our provision is regarded so highly across Oxfordshire and beyond. The introduction of Study Programmes by the Educational Funding Agency (EFA) from next September supports this model for all young learners across the sector – but does restrict the time that students can follow these programmes in a way that could penalise students with learning difficulties and or disabilities.

The freedoms that the study programme model will bring are welcome but there is a danger that for some disabled students the challenge that they must have if they are to achieve could be overlooked. The students programme must be progressive and deliver progression – and a thorough and rigorous Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is essential to making sure that this happens.


How does the role of learning support contribute to securing better outcomes for disabled young people and adults?

This role is essential to providing meaningful and relevant education to young adult with learning difficulties. Without it – the provision would not happen. The very nature of the ILP demands that students are supported through their pathway by staff who are aware of the potential of the learner and are challenging him/her to achieve to their very best ability. In the majority of cases this requires individual work with students and their families and it is the support staff who must lead on delivering this initiative.

Given the challenges on the horizon, what are the implications for disabled learners and in particular for those who support them in a 'learning support' capacity?

There are two key challenges:

- The first is to bring in the support of other agencies in order to enable individual learning and life plans to be delivered.
- The second is developing an appropriate funding process that will support the aspirations set out in the Green Paper.



For those supporting the students in a learning capacity, it will be frustrating for them to see only a part of the learning and life plans implemented – should there be no input from other agencies. They may feel that they are only able to do part of the job – which is why we are working on developing a real independent living option through our own curriculum at the college.

What do you think contributes to ensuring that the learning support provided is effective and high quality?

Training – and the time to train. Also consistency for the student. To get the most progress out of the student it is better if there is a consistency in relation to his/her key support worker. Learning support workers need to understand the student and contribute to the development of the ILP. Thereafter there needs to be an input in recording progress and amending if necessary, the pathway set out. The Learning Support worker is often best placed to understand the detail of the students' abilities – what they respond to – how best they learn. If there is no partnership between the support worker and the teaching staff then an ILP can become somewhat meaningless. Teamwork is an essential pre-requisite for quality provision. At the college, all staff are identified as key workers for named students which enable staff to take ownership of the progress of our students. In addition, there is frequent and extensive CPD provided to staff who are also encouraged to build up a partnership where possible with parents and families.

The Green Paper places significant emphasis on supporting disabled learners to develop the skills they need to move into employment. How is Abingdon and Witney supporting disabled learners to develop employment skills?

Most of our Step 3 and Step 4 students undertake a period of work experience during their time with us and some of them progress into some form of employment – supported by the college. This employment is not always paid employment but does form part of their life pathway after they leave college. The college has also been involved in a number of supported employment schemes.

How can learning support staff contribute to that work?

In my view, this work would not happen without learning support staff. A true individual learning pathway will identify if work is a useful and realistic aspiration for an individual. If it is, in theory, the new study programmes and the Green Paper will support the principle of including these in a student's programme. However, with students with learning difficulties, the support required (for the employer as well as for the student) can be extensive and require 1:1 support over a long period of time.


The recent Ofsted report “Progression Post 16 for learners with learning difficulties” highlighted a lack of provision for post 16 learners, particularly for the most complex. How can further education providers like Abingdon and Witney ensure they have the skills to meet the needs of more complex learners?

We have been making provision for the most complex of learners for over 10 years and we have developed much expertise in this field. In addition, we have developed partnerships with the schools and other specialist providers who ensure that we have the capacity to maintain our specialism in this field of work.

We are just about to enter (Feb 1st) a formal partnership with our schools through a multi academy trust (The Propeller Academy Trust) which will aim to provide high quality provision for those with profound and complex needs from the ages of 2 – 25. This is a natural extension of the Propeller Social Enterprise project – set up three years ago – which provides a common transition curriculum across the schools and the college.

Finally, Abingdon and Witney College is planning to expand. How do you see the role of learning support aiding in this process?

I think that learning support teams will develop more in the role of key workers with a caseload of students that they are responsible for progressing through their ILP. Within this developmental context, I think that support workers will become more specialised either in the nature of the complex need – or in aspects of the curriculum (such as job support and independent living) or both. The role in the future will be less generic than it is now.



A peer visit to Beaumont College to find out about the use of technology to enhance independence and promote learning.

Members of the Learning Support Reference Group have been fortunate in being able to undertake peer visits as part of their role. Peer visits are an excellent way of exploring areas of professional interest and sharing effective practice. Here Clive Allan, from Mencap Dilston College in Northumberland, reflects on the benefits of a day spent at Beaumont College in Lancaster.



Preparing for the visit

I chose to visit Beaumont College, in Lancaster, because I knew that the college had been awarded 'Outstanding' by OFSTED, and that their effective use of technology was highlighted in the report. I hoped that the visit would broaden my knowledge of technology, give me an insight into how it can be used to engage learners and increase their independence and introduce me to new ideas and practices which I could apply in my own workplace.



Description of visit

The first discussion I had was with Rohan Slaughter, Head of Technology and Senior Management Team (SMT) member. Beaumont has over 100 learners, whose needs are more profound and complex than many of our learners at Dilston. The college makes significant use of Information Technology (IT) to support communication, enhance learning and increase independence. Despite the difference in learner cohort, many of the IT solutions are transferrable to my own setting. I was given a full tour of the college, visiting both classroom and residential environments and later an informative demonstration by an Assistive Technologist who explained how technology is personalised to match each learner's needs.

Reflections

What immediately impressed me about Beaumont College was the extent to which technology is effectively embedded across the curriculum. This is the result of a 10 year on-going strategy to invest in and expand the quality of provision in this area. The college's commitment to this is evidenced by the fact that an IT specialist sits on the SMT and is able to advise on the latest technology.

The IT provision is extensive and well planned; there are over 330 devices in the college many of which are mobile devices such as portable touchscreen technologies. This provision is maintained and developed by a team of 10 staff, consisting of a Manager, Assistive Technologists, Helpdesk Technicians and Network Technicians. Five of the team are also embedded within the teaching team. I was particularly interested to learn how the role of Assistive

Technologist has developed, through involvement in the "Wheeltop project", a three year partnership with BT, aimed at improving access to communication and other technologies for disabled people. This role was developed to ensure that the learner is at the heart of the design and delivery of functional, personalised, assistive technology solutions that are applicable to both curriculum and residential situations. The use of mainstream IT products, many of which are becoming increasingly affordable was also worthy of note. This included touch screen tablets and a system to allow learners to access computer networks without using the keyboard.



What I learnt

Visiting Beaumont College provided me with an example of a national Centre of Excellence for Assistive Technology practice and development. This has made me more proactive in seeking out mainstream solutions to enable learners to engage with IT. Many of the solutions were simple but effective such as the use of a touchscreen monitor to change television channel using a TIRA device. Another example was the use of an RFID reader and tag system that removes the need for a learner to unlock a computer using the ctrl, alt, delete buttons on a keyboard. I would need to speak to the IT specialist within my college to fully implement examples like these but I have gained awareness and the confidence to investigate IT solutions and the impetus to seek new funding streams.

Impact

The visit has had a significant impact. The increased awareness and confidence resulting from my peer visit will enable me to implement and encourage IT solutions within my own college. This in turn will lead to significant benefits for learners at my college, specifically in terms of overcoming communication difficulties. I have seen that improving communication through using mainstream software and equipment combined with effective practice has the potential to strengthen the learner voice and provide greater empowerment and independence in their lives.



Next steps

Moving forward it is clear that I should start by defining the nature of the challenge a learner faces in order to identify the most appropriate technological solution. This will require effective communication and the development of strong links with the technology, therapy and education teams within my college. I must also raise awareness of the possibilities that IT can provide within both classroom and residential settings. Raised awareness of the way IT can be used to produce positive outcomes will make it more likely that funding can be found. In collaboration with management at my workplace I am keen to investigate new funding streams for purchasing technology.

Clive Allan



Useful link...

New Occupational Standards for Supported Employment

You will almost certainly be aware of the [National Occupational Standards](#) developed for [Learning Support Practitioners](#) in January 2009, but you might not yet know about the recently published [National Occupational Standards for Supported Employment](#). The standards provide statements identifying the skills and knowledge needed by staff working in supported employment, i.e. people involved in providing personalised support for people with disabilities in order to enable them to both seek and retain employment. These staff may have a range of titles, including job coaches, employment advisers and employment support officers. As the Green Paper places increasing importance on preparing learners for future employment, through activities such as Supported Internship and models like those developed through Project Search, you may well find yourself supporting the young people you work with in the workplace. If so, these standards should be of use to you.

Allie O'Brien ELS Project Director

Top free & low cost IOS (apple) apps and tips



Here is a list of apps that can be used on iOS devices, iPad and iPhone. Where available for Android tablets and smart phones, this is also noted. Our thanks go to Trevor Mobbs from Beaumont College who was instrumental in creating this list and to Clive Allan from Dilston College and Derek da Silva from City of Bristol College who contributed additional apps and located the screen shots which illustrate them.

Communication Apps

Grid Player

iOS, FREE

www.sensorysoftware.com/gridplayer



This is a free app that comes with 3 complete communication grid sets which are free to use. If you want to edit them or create your own grids you would need to purchase the desktop software. It works extremely well and the app comes with British Acapella voices and SymbolStix symbols. Students with a limited range of motor skills, who find it hard to touch the screen, can access the grid using switches or pointing devices.

Dragon Dictation

iOS, FREE

www.nuancemobilelife.com/apps/dragon-dictation

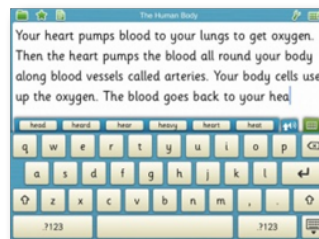
A voice recognition app through which you can create notes, status updates, texts, emails, etc. Also has a voice driven correction interface. This kind of app can be very useful for learners who have difficulty with the fine motor control required to type on the on screen keyboard. This app requires an internet connection to operate.

Clicker Docs

iOS, £17.99 / Clicker Sentences – iOS, £14.99

www.cricksoft.com/uk/products/apps/clicker-apps

2 apps to support learners with literacy:



Clicker Docs is a writing tool that provides differentiated support for learners of all abilities. It contains many of the familiar features of its desktop counterpart including word prediction, text to speech and Word Banks.

Clicker Sentences enables learners to create sentences from whole words, with picture support (from your photo library, symbol sets not included). A number of support options are available for learners at different literacy levels.

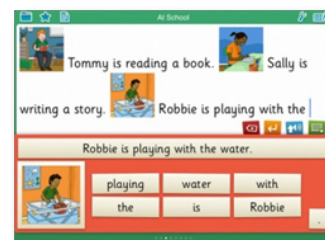


Photo Apps

Pictello

iOS, £13.49

www.assistiveware.com/product/pictello

A simple app for creating talking photo stories, with lots of uses. Social stories, talking books, sharing news, teaching narrative skills, visual timetables, task instructions, and much more can be easily created within the app. We have used it to great effect with learners on the autistic spectrum to assist with sequencing, for example by creating step by step instructions to enable learners to cook with increased independence.

iOS Tip: Capturing Screen Shots

If you want to capture evidence of a learner's work and progress, you can save an image of the current screen by pressing the home and power buttons simultaneously – you will hear a camera shutter sound. The image will now be saved to the camera roll on the device. To get the image on to a PC, you can plug the iPad in to the USB port and the pictures can be transferred via Windows Explorer.

@pps

Music Apps

Bloom

iOS, £2.49

www.generativemusic.com/bloom



Developed by musician Brian Eno, this app enables the creation of ambient soundscapes with corresponding visual patterns through simple tapping. Great for learners

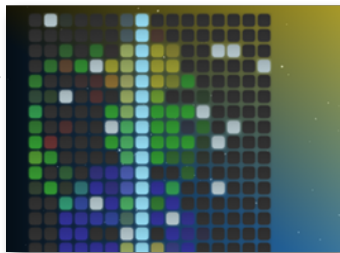
exploring cause and effect, or can be used in a group setting to create an atmosphere of calm.

Beatwave

iOS, FREE

www2.collect3.com.au/beatwave

This is a quick and easy way to allow learners to make instant music. Using a variety of sound effects create up to four layers of music that sound great and look smart, with a colourful interface too!

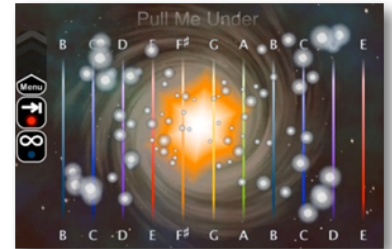


MorphWiz

iOS, £6.99

www.wizdommusic.com/MorphWiz

Can be used as a fully-fledged musical instrument, but at its simplest level is a great cause and effect app with a wide choice of presets, sounds and effects with impressive visual as well



As it is multi touch it can be used collaboratively between peers, or with a tutor. Audio can be recorded, so could provide evidence for a learner's portfolio.

Sensory Apps

Koi Pond

iOS, Android. FREE

www.theblimppilots.com



Look and listen to a pond full of tropical fish, it's relaxing and calming any time of the day. Additionally it is also very straight forward to use and as a sensory tool it is perfect and easy to engage with.

Fluid

iOS, FREE

itunes.apple.com/gb/app/fluid

This clever app turns your device into a liquid surface. Completely touchscreen interface and background music enhances the sensory experience.



Useful links

[Will Wade's website](#) contains lots of useful information on communication apps (267 of them at the time of writing): www.appsforaac.net

[Jane Farrall](#) also maintains a similarly useful list:
www.spectronicsinoz.com/article/iphoneipad-apps-for-aac

[Guided Access](#) is not an app, but a new feature in iOS 6 which enables the device to be locked in to one app by disabling the home button. Here is a useful guide about how to use it:
senclassroom.wordpress.com/2012/09/20/guided-access-ios-6/



Useful link...

...E-safety

Although technology has tremendous potential to transform lives and promote independence, it also presents challenges for organisations in ensuring the safe use of computers. The [East Midlands e-safety project](#) is a user friendly website designed by practitioners, which contains useful tips and exemplars. Launched last term, this could prove a valuable source of support for you as you seek to ensure your learners benefit from technology safely and appropriately.

Allie O'Brien ELS Project Director



Film review - Snow Cake

Viv Berkeley Programme Development Manager LSIS

Alex (Alan Rickman) is giving a lift to a stranger, Vivienne, who is on her way to visit her mum, Linda, when they are involved in a car crash in which Vivienne is killed. Alex decides to continue the journey to Linda (Sigourney Weaver), to deliver the presents that her daughter had bought for her. This beautiful, poignant film focuses on the relationship between Alex and Linda, who lives alone and has autism.

I have to admit to being a bit sceptical before I saw this film. I was worried that there might be too many clichés based on the characteristics associated with autism but that turned out not to be the case. Yes, Linda is focused on her kitchen being tidy, the door mat being in the right place and she informs Alex that she “doesn’t do social” but my attention was drawn to how others in the community treated Linda. This was particularly driven home to me in the ‘wake’ scene after the funeral when the neighbours were shocked that Linda wanted to dance.

This film reminded me of the importance in being accepting of difference. As Rosie Rutherford, an LSIS Associate once told me;

“We simplify the world around us by stereotyping, creating categories in which we assign people and their behaviours.....We are genuinely unaware of what our ‘normal’ is... until it is challenged perhaps by someone sitting next to us who sees the same things differently and has the discussion with us.”

This film, more than any other I have seen, drives home this message brilliantly.



Book review

‘No One Told Me I was Deaf’ by Frank Essery



Book Review by Em
Catchpole
Senior Curriculum Services
Support
City College Norwich

This small, 19 page book has an impact I am certain on anyone who reads it. Even as young child of six Frank clearly remembers the operation to try and correct his hearing and the after affects that made him vomit all day and hear voices within his head. These are the only voices that Frank would ever hear, as he was born deaf.

Frank describes the lonely, isolated experience of being left in a world of confusion resulting from a lack of appropriate support and guidance regarding his deafness during his childhood and school days.

Frank was only able to understand language and speech when he could clearly see the face of the person talking to him, without a hand or a beard to hide their lips. He thought everyone was like him and often found that due to his deafness the communication from adults in the school to be ridiculous and confusing. An example is when he was summoned to the Head Teachers office along with other boys and asked whether he understood why he was being reprimanded. After watching all the other boys nod in response, Frank was confounded as to why they were nodding to ‘Do you under-dance!’ Thinking he would need to dance for the Head Teacher was a humiliating experience. This was a typical example of how utterly confusing life for Frank was.

Frank grew up believing that he was useless and always behind in his learning, why would he ever think otherwise as he thought he was just like other children but in fact

‘No One Had Told Him He Was Deaf!’

Any form of language is essential for learning, but for Frank even signing, which he had tried in his younger years in school, was forbidden with a teacher assuring him if he used this again he would have ‘his fingers cut off’

It was during a medical at the Navy Recruitment Centre that the Navy Surgeon made Frank’s father aware of just how deaf he was - his father had never realised just what a silent world Frank had been living in.

It was the decision to send Frank to Doncaster College for the Deaf that enabled Frank to really and truly reach his full potential, to become confident and to feel respected and finally to be able to fully communicate with his peers through signing and lip reading. Frank was able to share news of the hearing world, debate deaf politics and have a major gossip about people around him!

This small 19 page book certainly made me think and reflect on how I could be a better communicator with a deaf person. From now on I will always ensure I look directly at the person, speak clearly and remember that Frank’s life experiences in his younger days were due to not being told that ‘He was Deaf!!’

A learner conference day at Homefield College

Finding out what learners really think about their programme can sometimes be challenging. This article explores the approach taken by one Specialist College to enable its students to understand the programme options open to them and to make and communicate meaningful choices about what they would like to do in the future.
Julie Plant Learning Support Assistant, Homefield College



Homefield College works with learners with learning difficulties, many of whom have autism and /or communication difficulties. In the past, when asking learners to express their views about their programme we have tended to rely on photos to support their understanding. Although the responses given have usually been positive, it hasn't always been clear whether this truly reflects the individual's view. We decided to try a new and interactive approach aimed at enabling learners to express their views about their current sessions more accurately and to make choices about future activities with greater understanding. A "Learner Conference day" was planned, to include practical examples / representations of the various programmes and activities the college can offer. "Session Taster Stalls" were set up to help learners to understand what each session involves, including activities, demonstrations from learners and the opportunity to talk with those who have experience of that session. The learners working on the stall demonstrated the activities, shared their views and experiences and contributed to displays and workshops. It was great to see how proud they were of their achievements and what good advocates they were for their favourite programme activity.



The activities on display included:

- Horticulture enterprise
- EBay [Sip & Surf/EBay assisted seller](#) and internet café in Loughborough
- [Barrow of Treats](#) café and sweet shop.
- Canteen
- HFC (Homefield College)-TV and Radio
- Woodwork enterprise
- Craft enterprise
- Small Animals
- Sports
- Work Experience

Evening and weekend activities such as camping, trampoline, football and first aid were also represented, with the latter proving particularly popular.

After having the chance to explore their options, learners were given the opportunity to indicate whether they would like to attend the session or not using yes / no voting cards. Those requiring additional support were given personalised stickers as an alternative voting tool.

A 'Big Brother' style sound proof booth, made by students, was also available so those who wanted to could record their views of the event on camera. Comments included:

"It was really interesting, encouraging learners to review what they do now and let them see what they could choose in the future."

"First aid would be really important and looks interesting"

"Have been able to try things I haven't done before, such as HFC-TV"

"It was fun and good"

The day was a great success - learners thoroughly enjoyed the experience. For many learners who have problems communicating or difficulty comprehending questions, the option to try activities proved invaluable.



Top Tips for managing behaviour



One of the key challenges in encouraging a good working environment can be knowing how to manage behaviour. Thanks to *Em Catchpole* and her team at City College Norwich who have suggested the following tips, which might be useful when dealing with specific types of behaviour:

Defiance – avoid confrontation – be non-confrontational. Talk to the learner outside the class about any barriers – is it fear related? It's the behaviour rather than the individual that's the problem.

Rudeness – don't be rude back – ask 'would you like to re-phrase that?'

Being withdrawn – get to know learner, have a private chat to get to know him or her and try to identify any underlying causes. Ask who he or she would like to work with.

Aggression – take the learner out of the situation. Know the triggers/signs – create agreed rules/ boundaries specific to the individual. Talk to the individual about what works for him or her.

Lying – could be an insight into how the learner would like things to be. Give him or her an exit strategy – are you sure? Talk to the learner privately.

Disruptive behaviour – have agreed set of rules and boundaries. Have a copy of the class rules – we've all agreed this. Remind learner of choices and targets to work towards. Use humour. It is worth considering if there is an underlying cause for the behaviour, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

Fighting – remember safety is of paramount importance – move others students to a safe place – and be ready to call for assistance / security if required

Swearing – remind the learner to use appropriate behaviour for situation – not appropriate for class.

Jacqui Burns works at Total People Ltd, a work based training provider situated in the North West of England, which supports around 4000 learners in a range of work based apprenticeships from Hairdressing to the Construction trades. The majority of learners require support with the development of social skills. She and her team have provided the following practical tips to encourage socially appropriate behaviour which you might find helpful:

1. Manage your own behaviour.
2. Be consistent, staff should act with one voice and give one message.
3. Keep your promises.
4. When Learner voices get louder in anger, lower yours.
5. Encourage learners to participate in the setting

of group rules which staff will re-enforce on a regular basis.

6. Focus on rewarding good work.
7. Pick your arguments carefully, don't sweat the small stuff.
8. Convince the group there is no place you would rather be and mean it.
9. Meet and greet the learners at the door
10. Smile

These are practical and useful strategies which can help promote appropriate behaviour. But what do you do if you are faced with a potentially challenging situation? *Allie O'Brien* draws on her experience of working with learners whose behaviours can challenge to suggest the following tips:

1. If there is a behaviour support plan, make sure you know what it is and apply it consistently
2. Always try to diffuse a situation with minimal intervention – your aim is to avoid a tense situation escalating into a challenging situation
3. Remember that behaviour is a form of communication – what is the learner trying to tell you?
4. Always be ready to listen – the individual might want to tell you what is upsetting them
5. Try using distraction - changing the subject/focus to things you know the learner likes can help reduce tension
6. Stay calm, and if you feel the situation is potentially dangerous, move yourself and others to a safe distance
7. Avoid prolonged eye contact as this could be perceived as threatening. Try lowering your gaze to the chest area, this way you will still be able to see what a learner is going to do.
8. Speak slowly and softly, avoiding long sentences or explanations
9. If behaviour is directed at you, don't be too proud to allow another member of staff to deal with the incident and leave the room as soon as they arrive to help
10. Avoid touching the learner, unless you know it will help him or her. It may not be interpreted as you intended

And finally.....

Leave plenty of time for the learner to calm down before you try and talk to him or her about what has happened- or you could re-ignite the problem

Approaches to supporting learners in a work based learning context

***Total People Ltd** is a work based training provider (WBL) situated in the North West of England. Previously South Cheshire TEC, it now supports around 4000 learners in a range of work based apprenticeships from Hairdressing to the Construction trades.*



Jacqui Burns - Total People

This along with a substantial Foundation Learning provision is run from sites in Crewe, Macclesfield, Burslem, Market Drayton and Telford, giving Total People the opportunity to support a varied group of young people with their chosen career.

Two of the staff from Total People, Gaynor Holland Senior Manager (Foundation Learning) and Jacqui Burns Curriculum Development Co-ordinator (Foundation Learning) joined the LSA Reference Group to represent the voice of staff supporting learners in a work based context. Both have found the contrasts between the job of LSA in an independent specialist college (ISC) or College of Further Education (GFE) and a Foundation Learning Tutor with Total People to be vast. Here Jacqui provides an account of her experience, both as a member of the LSA reference group and in terms of supporting learners in a work based training provider.

I have been attending the LSA Reference group for a while now and it has become very apparent to me that the role of LSA in a GFE or specialist college context is very different from that in a WBL context. My feelings were initially that perhaps I couldn't contribute to the conversation within the group as my experience was so different. Over time, it has become clear this couldn't have been further from the truth; as the conversation flowed I realised that I did have things to offer. As the LSA's talked about the range of disabilities and learning needs the specialist colleges/GFEs support, I realised that their learners seemed to arrive at their door with an already diagnosed condition. For example: I heard about some fantastic practice in supporting blind, deaf, and physically disabled young people as well as those on the autism spectrum. Although we have some learners with autism, I could remember perhaps two or three learners in the last ten years who had been blind or deaf. For the majority of our learners, the support required relates to developing social skills, in particular socially appropriate behaviour. This however can be very challenging. Our staff, generally referred to as Foundation Learning Tutors, can plan the most engaging session possible but it takes only one learner to behave inappropriately to take the whole group down a different path and prevent them all from engaging and learning.

To help combat this, tutors over the years have developed a range of strategies and sessions which can help to point learners in the right direction. It was the sharing of some of these strategies that my LSA colleagues from GFEs and ISCs found useful, as their client group is starting to change and they are experiencing similar challenges to us at Total People.

Specifically I gave examples from some of our Equal Opportunity sessions which are designed to encourage learners to talk positively about immigrant or gay members of society. I mentioned a Film called 'Fit' which is provided free of charge, complete with resources from the Stonewall website. There was also particular interest in a session we provide called 'The Baron' - basically a modern day fairy story in which the Baron tells the Baroness she can't go out for the evening. Now come on ladies, are we ever going to have a man keep us in? NOPE! Well neither does the Baroness. She sneaks out to meet her lover and it's then that the story unfolds..... and it doesn't end well for the Baroness. On completion of the story the group are asked to prioritise from 6 characters which is most to blame for her demise.

The learners are encouraged to have a discussion and then reach a joint decision that they all agree with. Whilst the discussion takes place the tutor makes notes of the comments coming from the group. You hear learners say of the Baroness things like; "It's her fault, she was unfaithful and he told her not to go out". They almost always assume her lover is male. Do you get the gist? On completion of the task, the tutor relays some of the comments back to the learners and plays devil's advocate to their views.

The third session we discussed was a trip to the slavery museum in Liverpool which is combined with a train journey from Crewe to Liverpool; a simple task for most, but by no means all of our learners. A visit to an oriental restaurant follows to experience foods from different cultures. This proves to be an effective way of demonstrating the benefits of multicultural living in our society and encourages the learners to think positively and not just to focus on what they see or believe to be negatives.

What I have learned from my involvement with the LSA Reference Group is that no matter whether you work at a GFE, independent specialist college or work based provider it is invaluable to share tips and strategies to support learners and colleagues alike.

A valuable insight into autism

by Kim McCall – National Star College



At the National Star College, we have been privileged to have witnessed, on two separate occasions, autism specific presentations from Professor Rita Jordan PhD OBE, and Ros Blackburn.

Professor Jordan's presentation on 'Current Understanding of the Autism Spectrum' was an in-depth insight into the categorisations of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the effects and problems it can bring into the education environment. She shared accounts of people she has worked alongside and how we could possibly overcome some of the barriers that we might encounter with our learners.

During her presentation she mentioned Ros Blackburn, a lady with autism that she has had the fortune to work alongside, sharing some of her experiences with the college.

Our Continuous Professional Development (CPD) team were able to arrange for Ros to come to the College and share her own experiences of life with autism, during a CPD week in September 2012.

Ros' presentation 'Logically Illogical – Information and Insight into Autism' gave an insightful account of her life with autism. She shared witty and heartfelt accounts of her education experiences and shared her views about how best to support learners on the autism spectrum.

Ros came across as a confident, skilled individual, presenting to a group of over 200 members of staff and holding everyone's attention. It wasn't until she mentioned that she has the help of a carer to assist with everyday tasks, and gave examples of her difficulties with social interaction, that you realised the real impact of her autism.

Her family made little or no exceptions for her autism and her mother once said 'never make autism the excuse but help the person overcome the problems caused by it.'

As LSAs, we know not to categorise learners into labelled boxes but to support everyone as individuals. The same can be said for learners on the Autism Spectrum. Although some learners may show similar characteristics, their actions and reactions can be very different and should be supported as such.

Getting to know your learners individually is vital. Maintaining an awareness of what each student enjoys and how to incorporate this into their sessions and learning environments, as well as understanding how structure, routine, predictability, consistency and stability are fundamental to their learning experience is critical to ensuring each student feels safe and can learn effectively.

The presentations from both Professor Jordan and Ros Blackburn were engaging and inspiring and of great benefit to our working practice with ASD learners and our own professional development. (If you are interested in Ros delivering a presentation at your work place, please contact her by post at the following address:

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