



Enhancement of Learning Support

The training and development needs of learning support assistants

Training and Development Opportunities

Sally Faraday

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Acknowledgments

Our thanks go to the Steering Group which has supported and guided the project (Annex 1) and to the organisations, providers, representatives, learning support assistants, managers and learners (Annex 2) who have so generously contributed their expertise and ideas. Information about the other reports which form part of the project documents is at Annex 3

Executive Summary

This report is a part of the '*enhancement of learning support*' project which explores the training needs of learning support assistants and those who manage them, across the lifelong learning sector, scope existing work and expertise and use the resulting information to make recommendations for future training and development activities.

The main aim of this report is to identify the range of professional development activity currently provided for and undertaken by learning support assistants and learning support assistants managers from across the lifelong learning sector. The methodology adopted a mixed methods approach including desk research, an online survey, interviews and visits.

A significant overarching finding of this project was that the diversity of LSA role and contexts in lifelong learning means that one size does not fit all. The availability of materials for training is only one part of the picture.

Effective professional development for LSAs encompasses a wide range of strategies and approaches and a framework for professional development, within which the many existing opportunities could be located to form a coherent and comprehensive whole.

LSAs need to be actively involved in developing any programmes of support.

The culture and ethos of the organisation - how inclusive it is – and the value and status the leadership attributed to LSAs were crucial factors in supporting the professional development of LSAs. Without the support and commitment of leaders, training would be of limited value.

There is currently no central information point resulting in a lack of easily accessible information for LSAs and those who manage

Implications for practice

- **There would clearly be some value in identifying an appropriate organisation to host an information base for LSAs and develop, in consultation with LSAs, such as a single central web-based resource (web-portal) for LSAs, modelled on the TDA and NAPTA websites. Consideration could usefully be given to where this might be located.**

A systematic evidence base about LSAs is lacking.

- **There would be some value in collecting workforce data for LSAs nationally to provide a baseline about their profile (include all 6 aspects of equality and diversity), qualifications, and employment characteristics (full/part-time, permanent/short term).**

- **It would be helpful to collate all existing research and other documentation specifically about LSAs in lifelong learning, building on the literature review in this project and commission research to address gaps. Maintain a central database in the LSA web-portal.**
- **It is clear that the voice of the LSA is under represented in the literature. It would therefore be vital to establish a ‘reference group’ or groups of LSAs to be involved in shaping all developments related to LSAs**
- **A national LSA survey of a representative sample of LSAs possibly modelled on the national learner survey could provide useful information to supplement existing information about this valuable workforce**

The professionalisation of the workforce has led to national occupational standards, and a career pathway with a progressive range of qualifications. Despite this there is a scarcity of appropriate qualifications for LSAs and a lack of appropriate training for teachers in working with support staff in ITT or CPD and for LSA managers.

- **A progression pathway for LSAs in lifelong learning with relevant nationally recognised qualifications from Levels 2 – 4 would support career progression as well as training and development opportunities.**
- **There is a need to encourage the development of specific LSAs in lifelong learning qualifications; ensure that their relevance and effectiveness is evaluated and publish the information about qualifications on the LSA portal.**
- **This research has identified a need to review ITT and CPD specifications for teachers and LSA managers to ensure that they include working with support staff.**

Many organisations offered reasonably comprehensive induction. Although some LSAs are encouraged and supported to undertake externally accredited qualifications, much CPD for LSAs is delivered in-house and follows on from induction. There was an identified need for CPD in both general ‘core’ and specialist areas. .

- **It would be helpful to develop from best practice and publish on the LSA web-portal a series of ‘packages’ including: induction; generic CPD and specialist CPD. Each package could contain a menu of content and a range of different supporting resources, including signposts to published resources.**
- **An organisation audit tool similar to that produced by the DfEE (now DCSF) guidance**

<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DfES-0148-2000.pdf>), and a checklist for teachers on working with LSAs, such as the TDA self study task and checklist for LSAs (http://www.tda.gov.uk/teachers/sen/training_resources/pgce_programmes/selfstudy.aspx) could usefully be developed and included in the portal.

- **The direct involvement of LSAs in the delivery of CPD should be encouraged**

The importance of training teachers and LSAs together, with a strong focus on learning, cannot be over emphasised.

- **It would be useful to develop from best practice and publish on the LSA web-portal a programme and supporting resources for process-based CPD. This could perhaps be developed from the Coventry Adult Service model. Consideration could then be given to wider dissemination and national rollout.**

Much professional development for LSAs takes place outside of formal training settings. The reported barriers of lack of time and resources for formal training could be addressed though the use of other approaches. Shadowing was most commonly used during induction and organizations described schemes of buddying and mentoring, including peer mentoring. E-learning is a potentially useful tool for CPD although both benefits and drawbacks were identified

- **The collation, development and publishing of guidance and protocols on alternative CPD approaches such as shadowing, buddying and mentoring would be useful.**
- **The development of e-learning resources for LSAs and LSA managers should be encouraged. Existing resources should be identified and signposted on the LSA portal.**

Introduction to the Enhancement of Learning Support

Training and Development Opportunities 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 assistants 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) 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 assistants, 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 as a learner, 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 '*Training and Development Opportunities*' contributes to the Enhancement of Learning Support Project by exploring the range of professional development opportunities and resources currently provided for and undertaken by learning support assistants and those who manage them across the lifelong learning sector.

Background and Aim- Training and Development Opportunities

Aim

The main aim of this report was to identify the range of professional development activity, opportunities and resources currently provided for and undertaken by learning support assistants and those who manage them across the lifelong learning sector. Professional development activity was defined as ranging from informal, in-house support, to packages of training materials, including online learning materials and externally accredited training, provided primarily by colleges and Higher Education Institutions.

Scope and Methodology

The scope of the investigation was learning provider organisations in the lifelong learning sector, specifically: FE colleges, ACL, WBL and ISCs. The target group of staff was LSAs and those who manage LSAs.

In this project, data for analysis was collected from a number of sources: web-based documentary data, including a supplementary project to review relevant literature and to identify resources/materials for professional development; responses to an email request for information through networks; responses to an online survey of 292 LSAs and 55 LSA managers; six semi-structured telephone interviews (a copy of the topic guide is included in Annex 5) and interviews with five staff during one college visit plus data was also included from a further seven interviews and visits conducted as part of the wider Enhancement of Learning Support project.

Findings

Documentary data

The literature review gives a detailed account of the documentary data reviewed as part of this project and should be read alongside this report. The review of literature examined more than 100 documents from web keyword searches. Different document types included: research reports; articles; books; policy documents; training courses; guidance documents; training resources and materials produced to support the professional development of LSAs.

There was a wealth of literature related to Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) in schools, perhaps due to the earlier development in that sector of workforce reform and national occupational standards leading to nationally accredited awards at a range of levels. The need for professional support – induction, line management, appraisal and CPD – and for career progression has been recognised and a qualifications structure has been in place for some time. Some of the main findings relevant to this report are as follows.

There was a lack of any substantial evidence base of literature about LSAs and their professional development in the lifelong learning sector. However, evidence from the school sector, where there had been a parallel experience in professionalising the LSA workforce, provided some useful insights, despite the significantly different contexts.

The values, ethos and culture of organisations, how inclusive they were, had a significant effect on the impact of LSAs and the effectiveness of professional development activities for them. There were key themes evident in the provision of support for LSAs: including LSAs in the process of developing programmes for professional development; understanding inclusionary practice and valuing diversity; the need for clear clearly defining the role of the LSA, including generalist and specialist features; the importance of teachers and LSAs working together to plan, prepare and review learning; a far greater emphasis on teaching and learning in LSA training; the importance of communication and interaction and managing challenging behaviour; and the need for teachers to be properly prepared to work with LSAs.

The literature suggested that effective professional development for LSAs encompasses a wide range of strategies and approaches and a framework for professional development, within which the many existing opportunities could be located to form a coherent and comprehensive whole.

Professional development opportunities included qualifications. There were many at national qualifications framework (NQF) Levels 2 and 3 and foundation degrees at Level 4 although mainly designed for support staff in schools and the lack of

relevance was widely reported. There were very few designed specifically for post-school learning, where they existed they were mainly accredited by OCNs. Effective support included a range of CPD activities of which courses and qualifications were but a part. Other strategies included: work shadowing; coaching or mentoring; project work; visits; sharing information; online learning ; peer support; action learning or learning sets; observation; staff meetings; in-house briefings or training and local training programmes.

The potential barriers LSAs in lifelong learning might experience in engaging in CPD are not well understood, although they might include cultural issues to do with: leadership and support for LSA training; resources such as time and funding for training; training related barriers included the lack of an effective performance management systems, irrelevant training and lack of information, advice and guidance, personal factors such as family commitments and attitudes to learning derived from lack of confidence or negative previous experiences of learning.

Some resources and materials were examined, designed specifically for the lifelong learning sector. These included a variety of resources which are described in more detail in a separate resources report: a CPD framework developed for the SWWDP; an OCN accredited award being trialed in the North West by Ascentis (OCN Wales); an online learning introductory resource for LSAs developed by MacIntyre, an independent specialist providers and a teaching and learning observation tool for LSAs. There were also materials developed by providers for use in-house, often customised to their particular contexts and requirements. Some of these resources confirmed the importance of involving LSAs in setting the agenda for their own development. A further major gap was the lack of resources for teachers and those managing LSAs, preparing them to work effectively, in partnership with LSAs, under the direction of the teacher.

Survey

An online survey was conducted throughout the duration of the project which, at the time the data was analysed for this report, elicited responses from 292 LSAs and 55 LSA managers. There were two surveys, one for LSAs and another for LSA managers. LSA managers were asked a series of questions related to LSAs and a second set of questions referred to themselves. Since respondents were contacted through networks, it was unlikely that the survey was completely representative of LSA workforce, but nevertheless it provided an indication of LSAs' and LSA managers' views on particular topics.

The questions reported below from the survey were mostly open questions and respondents were not required to select from a predetermined list. This means that there is some element of interpretation in ascribing responses to categories, so the results below should be seen only as indicative. The responses are generally ranked in order. Some respondents provided responses in more than one category.

Learning Support Assistants professional development

Qualifications - Learning Support Assistants' responses

LSAs provided 244 responses to the question: *What nationally accredited qualifications have you completed or are you expected to achieve?*

- The highest number of responses suggested that LSAs hold or were required to gain NVQs in learning support at levels 2 and 3.
- There were also a high number of references to teaching qualifications, although the distinction between whether these were already held or were a requirement of the post was not possible to determine.

Learning support	
NVQ Level 3	54
NVQ Levels 2	40
City and Guilds 9297 Certificate in Learning Support	22
TA Level 2	7
TA Level 3	4
City and Guilds 7303, 7321 educational support workers	4
Foundation degree in learning support	4
NVQ level unspecified	4
Ascentis L2/3 Preparing to support learning	1
Teaching	
PTLLS	33
BA/Degree	27
Cert Ed	18
PGCE	13
Diploma	10
City and Guilds Cert in teaching Literacy/Numeracy 9284	9
DTLLS	5
MA	3
Functional skills	
Level 2 Maths/numeracy	27
Level 2 English/literacy	27
Level 2 ICT	7
None	20
Other	
First aid	12
Medication (NCFE)	10
BSL	10
Food hygiene	9
Safeguarding (NCFE)	6
Makaton	5
OCN visual impairment	4
Assessor awards	
A1 Assessor Level 3 NVQ in Vocational training route	6

Qualifications - Learning Support Assistant Managers' responses

There were 88 responses to the question: “*What nationally accredited qualifications do you expect your LSAs to achieve?*” These responses show a similar pattern to those of LSAs, as might be expected, although managers seem to suggest functional skills and learning support qualifications have a higher level of importance than teaching qualifications.

Functional skills	
Level 2 Maths/numeracy	20
Level 2 English/literacy	20
Level 2 ICT	4
Learning support	
NVQ Levels 2/3 NVQ Level 3 Health and Social Care (Children & Young People)	12
City and Guilds 9297 Certificate in Learning Support	12
NVQ Levels 2/3 unspecified	10
LSA unspecified	5
City and Guilds 7303, 7321 educational support workers	3
Ascentis L2/3 Preparing to support learning	2
City and Guilds 3681 Health and Social Care Award	1
Foundation degree in learning support	1
Teaching	2
PTLLS	6
CTLLS	4
PGCE	4
DTLLS	2
City and Guilds Cert in teaching Literacy/Numeracy 9284	1
Cert Ed	1
None	4
Other	
BSL	6
LDQ	3
dyslexia	3
Makaton	2
OCN visual impairment	2
NCFE certificate in Equality and Diversity	1
Assessor awards	
A1 Assessor Level 3 NVQ in Vocational training route	1

Induction and CPD - Learning Support Assistants' responses

There were 265 responses by LSAs to the question “*What training did you receive when you started (induction)? Please list*”.

The topics included in the table were offered in response to an open question, it

therefore relies on LSAs to remember what happened in induction. It is unlikely to be reliable, although it does indicate that compliance issues featured particularly strongly and/or were most memorable. There appears to have been little on the role of the LSA or how to support teaching and learning.

College/organisation induction	
Equality and diversity	67
policies and procedures	36
ethos and values	6
Compliance	
health and safety	100
safe moving and handling	74
child and vulnerable adult protection	55
fire safety/evacuation	41
safeguarding	25
first aid	31
medication	25
food hygiene	18
epilepsy	11
Methods of support in induction	
shadowing	7
mentoring	1
Disability/learning difficulty specific	
challenging behaviour	34
autism (10) Aspergers (12)	22
Deaf/hearing impairment	10
dyslexia	5
learning disability	3
mental health	2
visual impairment	5
Other	
IT training	18
in-class support	13
communication	6
literacy, numeracy, language	1

A similar range of topics was also included in response to a question about CPD although at this stage there was a greater emphasis on the role of the LSA, supporting learning and support for specific forms of disability/learning difficulty.

Induction and CPD - Learning Support Assistants’ Managers’ responses

There were 44 responses by LSA managers to the question, “*What induction*

training do your LSAs receive? Please list”.

College/organisation induction	41
policies and procedures	12
equality and diversity	8
ethos and values	3
Compliance	
health and safety	16
safe moving and handling	13
safeguarding	11
child protection	10
fire safety/evacuation	10
first aid	9
medication	5
Methods of support in induction	
shadowing	19
mentoring	13
Disability/learning difficulty specific	
autism (8) Aspergers (4)	12
challenging behaviour	9
dyslexia	5
learning disability	2
mental health	2
visual impairment	2
Deaf/hearing impairment	2
Other	
literacy, numeracy, language	5
the role of LSAs	4
in-class support	3
communication	3

A very wide range of other topics or activities was also mentioned in one for two responses, including: crisis management, IT/data security, driving, food hygiene, epilepsy, learning styles, assessment, person centred planning, appraisee skills, and activities such as peer consultation, observation and buddying.

When asked about the CPD that was undertaken, a very similar pattern emerged of a very wide range of professional development activities. The main difference was a greater emphasis on disability/learning difficulty specific CPD.

In relation to induction, LSAs often indicated that they had received a relatively comprehensive package of introduction to the organisation and basic compliance training and others indicated that that this had allowed them to feel confident,

“Company introduction, manual handling, fire safety, health & safety, equality & diversity, boundaries, POVA, first aid, food hygiene, infection

control, reflect, behaviour, ECM”

“College Induction Moving and Handling, Equality and Diversity, Safeguarding, Effective Classroom Support, Health and Safety, Clamping, First Aid at Work”

“Moving and Handling, Eating and Drinking, Role of the Learning Support, Assistant Safeguarding, Deaf Awareness, British Sign Language, First Aid, Administration of Emergency Medication, Safe Handling of Medication, Learning and Disability qualification, Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety, Behaviour Management, Autism Awareness”

“One week of intensive induction training which included: Tour of campus, Moving and handling, Adult and Child Protection overview, Eating and Drinking - from SLT, Communication training - from SLT, Intro to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), Health and Safety, Fire safety, Tissue Viability and Continence - nursing department

“I received full training to allow me to feel confident in my job role.”

A small number of others indicated a less satisfactory experience, they stated that they had received ‘very little’ or ‘no’ induction,

“thrown in at the deep end”

“minimal - given a notebook, informed who the student was and the room number. Things are much better now!”

“none - given the staff handbook”

“None, asked to go to the lesson and ask what type of support the student required”

“just a short conversation about what might be required of me”

“given leaflets on how best to support students with a specific learning difficulty.”

While some responses indicated that the induction was not specific to the role, others commented on shadowing or support from others or a combination of training and other support strategies,

“very little relevant to the job role at the time, more geared towards general college policies and procedures”

“I received support from experienced members of the team”

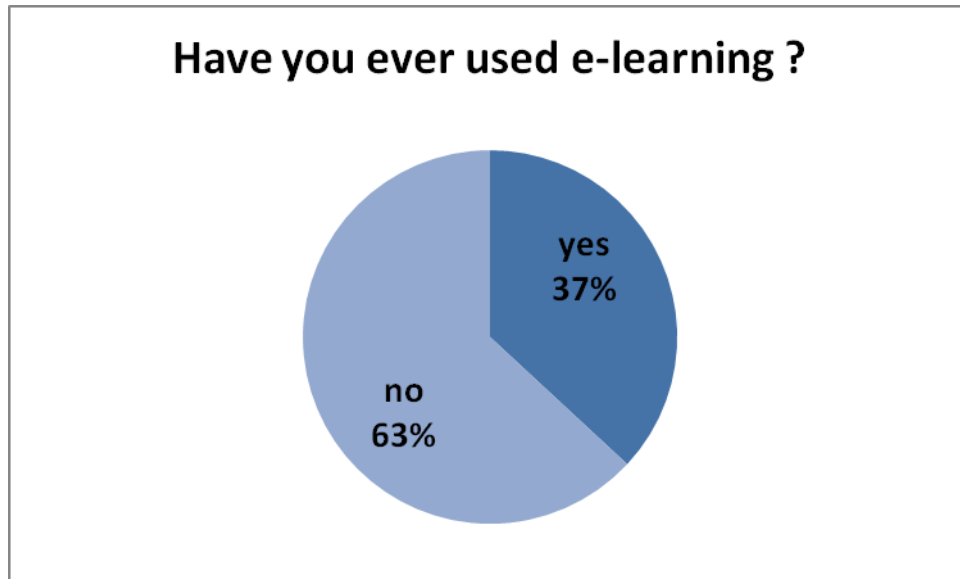
“Staff induction. Shadowing”

“Aspergers Training Support Training Shadowing Staff”

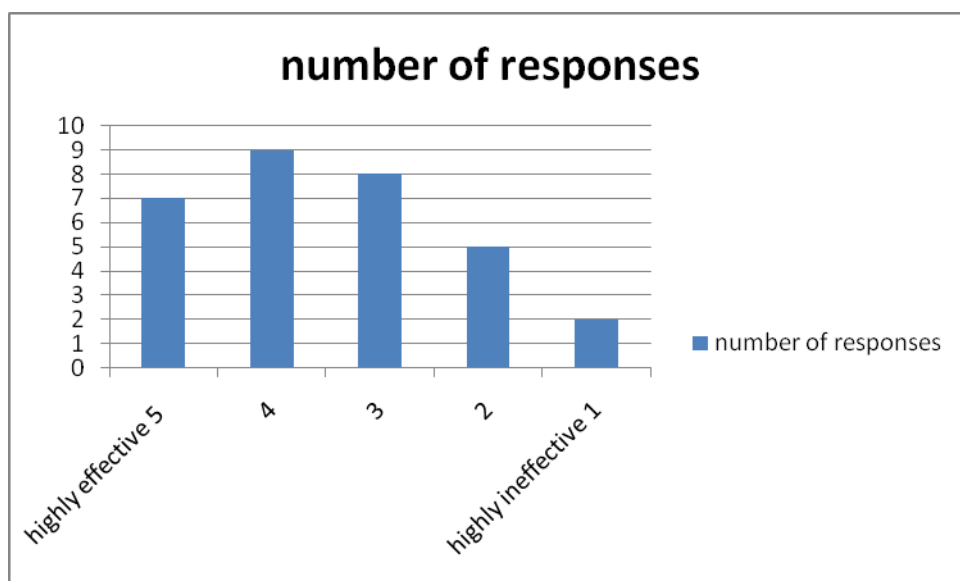
“Moving and handling, Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity, POVA, Swallowing, Behavioural training, Effective learning support, Mentoring”

e-learning - Learning Support Assistants’ responses

LSAs were asked the question, “Have you ever used an e-learning programme for your professional development?” There were 144 responses, showing that slightly more than a third of LSAs had used e-learning.



When asked to rate the effectiveness of e-learning on a five point scale from 5 highly effective to 1 highly ineffective, the responses showed a spread of views with an overall view that it was thought to be more effective than ineffective.



When asked to comment on their responses, those LSAs that had rated it as effective often referred to developing their own ICT skills and ECDL rather than using e-learning as a means of CPD and some added certain qualifying statements,

“Did the ECDL before working here - it was useful and effective.”

“It was Effective in expanding my specialist skills in IT (ECDL)”

“ECDL was very useful as I supported within the IT department”

“Can be very effective providing it is readily available, fast and working efficiently.”

“Can do at own pace”

Foundations For Growth- this is a very good and interesting e-learning facility. Unfortunately it is not recognised outside of PRIORY.

Some expressed a willingness to try, or presented a mix of views

“Could be effective, would like to try.”

“I feel e-learning is beneficial, however sometimes it is hard to keep motivated and also the knowledge gained can be forgotten”

Others were more critical of the particular programmes they used,

“Poorly targeted. A multiple choice test at the end where the correct response is often subjective or very imprecisely framed.”

“Some of the current in house e-learning tends to be patronising!”

“Educare...was a click and search exercise which did not give opportunity for discussion or correctly check understanding. The only thing of merit is its convenience”

Some suggested that they preferred other ways of learning and made reference to their own preferred styles of learning,

“I find it better to learn with other people rather than on my own and in a hands-on kinaesthetic mode of learning with the students and/or staff.”

“Do not like it, too impersonal and rigid.”

“E-learning makes one box fit all and does nothing for the dynamics and individual needs we all require.”

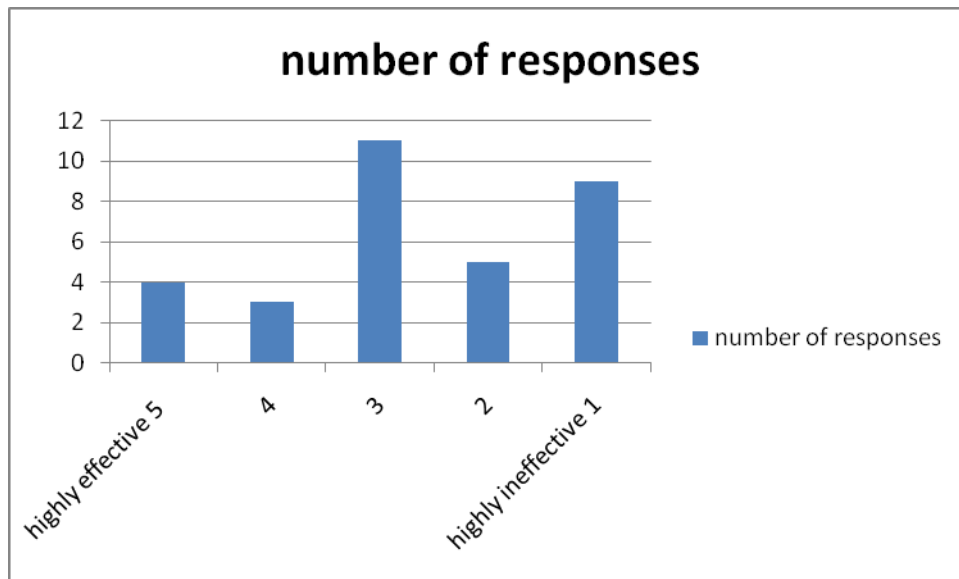
Learning Support Assistant Managers’ professional development

There were 33 responses to the question: *“What nationally accredited training have you completed or are you expected to complete by your employer? While 42 responses indicated that teaching qualifications were a requirement, there were far fewer respondents (26) who mentioned management qualifications.*

Teaching qualifications	
BA/B Ed	9
Cert Ed	9
MA/M Ed	7
full teaching qualification	6
City and Guilds 7301 (2), 7302, 7303/1, 7401, 9485,	6
Advanced Diploma	5
Management qualifications	
NVQ Level 4 (9), Level 5 (3)	12
ILM, Levels 3 (4), Level 5, (1) no level (2)	7
NVQ Level 3	6
BTEC	1
Assessor and verifier Awards	
D32, D33	5
None	2

A range of specific qualifications also received mention. Teacher of the Deaf and a qualification in Dyslexia were each mentioned twice. BSL, Literacy, Numeracy, Challenging Behaviour, Certificate in Learning Difficulty and Disability, Disability Equality and Visual Impairment were all mentioned once.

LSA managers were asked about their induction: *“Please rate the extent to which your induction was effective in supporting you in your role as a manager of Learning Support Assistants.”* The following chart indicates that induction into the role of LSA manager is not highly rated, although it is possible that if asked about induction in general, the responses may have been different.



LSA managers commented,

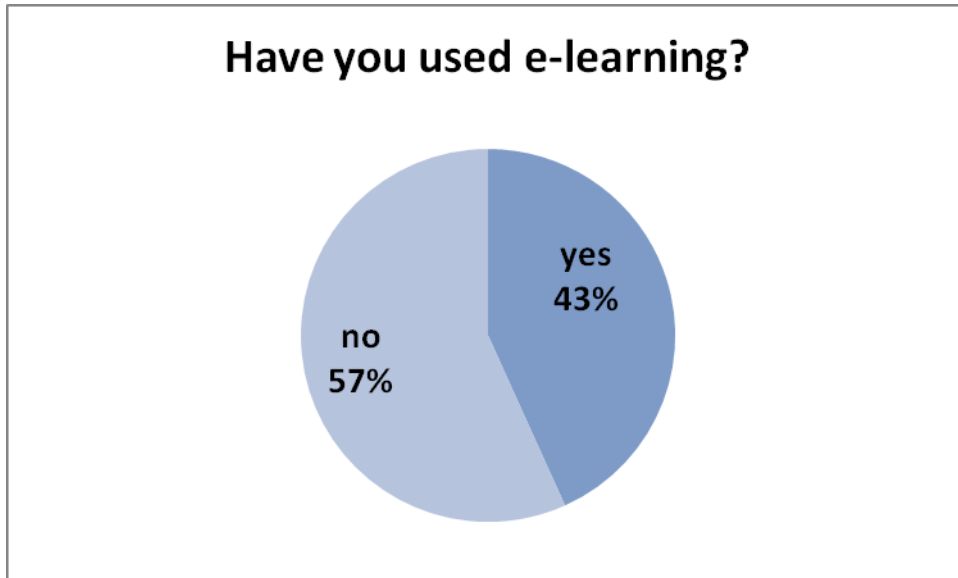
“My role was completely new, however I have received huge support from my line manager as well as the LSA time, who are, quite frankly, excellent!”

“Didn't exist when I came to role but is now implemented.”

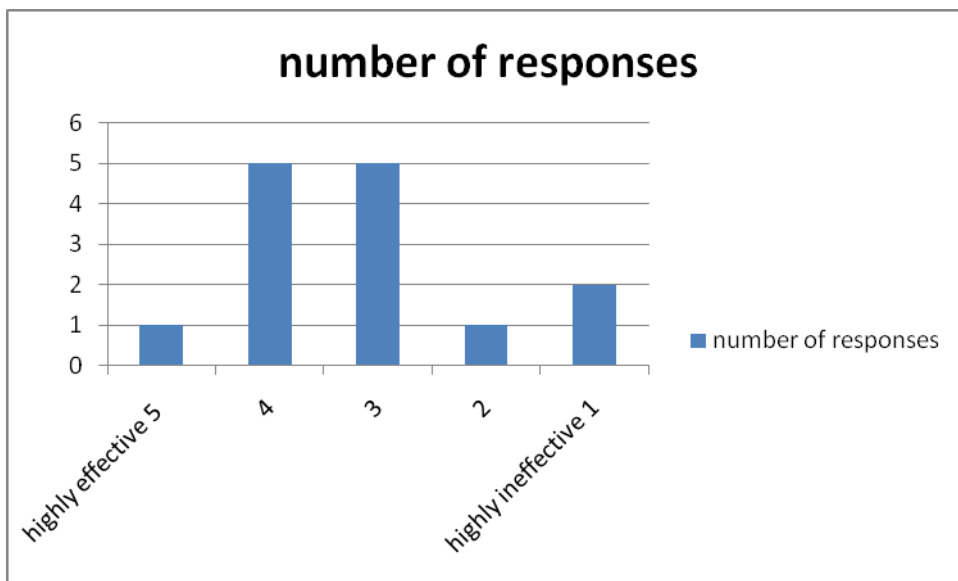
“No formal managers training for this. Based on experience of being a tutor.”

e-learning - Learning Support Assistant managers' responses

LSA managers were asked the question, *“Have you ever used an e-learning programme for your professional development?”* There were 37 responses, showing that rather less than a half of respondents had used e-learning. Although the proportion is slightly higher than with LSAs, in both cases more of those who replied had not used e-learning.



When asked, “How would you rate e-learning as a tool to support your development?” There were only 18 responses to this rating scale and these again showed a mixed response.



As with LSAs, respondents’ comments suggested some reservations and a preference for more experiential methods.

“LSIS Safeguarding and Safe Recruitment - able to complete at own pace - review of previous training but excellent to test out knowledge”

“Need time away from daily work to use e-learning tools and this rarely happens”

“Depends on the content”

“I am more inclined towards experiential learning”

Interviews and visits

Induction: professional development activities undertaken

- A specialist college provider described the induction programme for LSAs. There was a full 2 week induction up front. It covered general things including an introduction to the college and safety compliance issues, plus some curriculum introduction e.g. in skills for life. After the initial induction, a second phase of foundation training took place between a month and six months later. This played an important role in establishing the underpinning values and ethos of the organisation.
- This was echoed by a GFE college interviewee who indicated that induction;

“tends to be ‘full on’ and intensive. There is much they must cover to comply with the law, so there is an intensive programme alongside the college induction.”

In this college, induction also tended to blend in to CPD, whereas the LSA got to know the learner(s) they were working with, the specific skills they would need became identified.

- In the specialist college context, there was a greater emphasis on care, because of the national minimum standards, not evident in other providers.

Continuous professional development

- The content of CPD was very wide ranging. In one GFE college with a large number of learners with profound and complex support requirements, CPD covered a wide variety of activity; updating on legal compliance, very learner centered activities, briefing on wider policy issues such as disability hate crime and the law, BSL, training offered by nurses and physiotherapists and ‘specialist training delivered by experts for example, on ‘Approach training’ in how to get out of potentially harmful situations without restraint and training on autistic spectrum disorders.
- One technique used in developing the content of a programme of professional development was to ask LSAs to shadow learners,

“To develop the course they started with a student shadowing exercise and then developed the course from it, starting with values. LSAs mostly did the observations and were very empowered by it.”

The resulting programme covered the following content areas:

- valuing knowledge and expertise
 - collaboration and team working
 - role description and understanding
 - pedagogy and support for learning – there were issues about the training received by LSAs to enable them to contribute to planning and assessment
 - Communication – this was described as vital and there was not enough on e.g. augmentative and alternative communication, contingency sensitive environments, development and use of communication dictionaries and passports
 - person centred plans
 - practical issues - such as the management of breaks and understanding the role of LSAs. LSAs are paid to be with the learner and are not there as ‘friends’.
- The importance of LSAs understanding their contribution to teaching and learning was also a key finding. Interviewees stressed the move to focus more on teaching and learning and spoke of the effective progress that had been made.
 - In terms of different methods for providing support for LSA, teachers and LSAs working together and joint training were frequently mentioned,

“encourage teachers and LSAs to train together, that is the key, in house training with teachers and assistants together.”

- As well as in-house and external training, providers mentioned buddying, mentoring and job shadowing as valuable ways of developing skills. Peer mentoring was also mentioned because it provided the opportunity to observe others’ practice. Shadowing was identified as a very useful strategy that was found to be particularly effective when staff were new.
- A provider cautioned that LSAs were ‘*trained to death*’ they were routinely training and undertaking refreshers.

“What we don’t have is something which pulls together their role in supporting learning – an underpinning of attitudes and values is really important. If they don’t have that, they don’t see the significance of every little thing they do. E.g. personal care – learning can happen as much in the toilet as in the classroom. They need to transfer that understanding across everything they do”

Qualifications

- Finding accreditation that was relevant and matched the job description and what LSAs actually did in practice was a real challenge.
- An interviewee described a Foundation Degree that had a strong emphasis on all aspects of diversity, inclusion and social justice. This would be a useful tool for beginning to address the gap in relation to equality and diversity, expressed by some providers.
- Many LSAs were encouraged or expected to take teaching qualifications, whether or not they saw their career pathways leading them towards teaching. There was one example in a GFE college of where they employed most LSAs on a 0.8 contract, reflecting the hours attended by most learners, and encouraged LSAs to take on a part-time teaching role in the college for the remaining hours.

Part-time sessional LSAs

- No interviewees indicated that full time and part time LSAs were treated any differently with regard to professional development, with the exception of a proportionately lower expectation of attendance at and entitlement to training. The issue of time could also be more acute for those working part-time.

Those who manage LSAs

- Different tiers of management were identified in relation to managing LSAs. Strategic level management at executive level, middle level management with performance management responsibilities and every teacher had a management role in relation to LSAs in their classes.
- LSA managers needed to see themselves as managers of change,
“The problem is not seeing themselves as managers of change but as administrators and troubleshooters. They need to understand what brings about change and to have strategies to help them do it. What is getting in the way and what you could do to reduce barriers - use of force field analysis.”
- Another interviewee confirmed that the support needs of LSA managers who have a supervisory role goes beyond administration and needed to include training in management and leadership generally available.
- A major gap was identified: the training of teachers to work with LSAs.

“Teachers are not taught to work with others – work effectively. When they do think about how to work effectively with their support staff, it makes them think about their own planning and teaching. They have

the dynamic of LSAs and learners too. The new generation have had experience of TAs in the classroom and see it as a given, they are very open to it.”

- Another identified gap was at management level, beyond functional areas such as performance management. It concerned personal effectiveness for managers: emotional intelligence in management and how to respond to peoples’ needs.
- A training need was identified in both ACL and GFE contexts. It was of training for both teaching staff who managed LSAs and LSAs themselves and in working with care staff directly employed by learners through direct payment, whose primary role was seen as care rather than learning.
- A frequently mentioned issue was that teaching staff did not understand how to work with LSAs and to manage the learning environment.

“Teachers don’t know how to work with support staff....The observer noticed that more often than not, LSAs were not being properly utilised”. (the interviewee did training with a mixed group of teachers and LSAs)

“There is a need for more effective work with teaching staff. Teaching staff don’t always manage support staff well – it can be quite daunting. They (LSAs) have got the skills and can add to the lesson.”

There was also a problem expressed when teaching staff conversely left LSAs with too much responsibility.

“LSAs are sometimes left with too much responsibility. They are left to record learning - highly technical skills – many record only what they see, which is activity only, already in the lesson plan. I can’t criticise them for that. It’s not their role, they are given too much responsibility.”

The training need was identified as common to both teachers and LSAs, and interviewees indicated that teachers did not get enough of this. They could be intimidated by experienced LSAs, especially if they were new to the profession.

What works well

- A culture of valuing the knowledge and expertise of all staff and a shared culture, ethos and sense of purpose. Many interviewees spoke of the importance of including culture and values in their professional development programmes. One frequently reported finding concerned the value attributed to LSAs and their own confidence and self-esteem

“If LSAs are seen to be marginalized or undervalued, the learners they work with will be too. It is an integral part of the ethos.”

An interviewee also indicated that ethos and attitude were critical,

“We feel currently that there is a little way to go in staff seeing learners as independent, autonomous people, having a genuine respect for what they have to say.”

The negative impact of failing to value and support staff was also reported,

“Some organisations don’t invest in their learning support staff and it shows, they (LSAs) don’t know what they are doing.”

- Joint training between teaching staff and LSAs, especially where they explored their respective roles in trusting environment.

“Staff learn a lot by working alongside one another.”

One interviewee spoke of a project where learners had to come with a tutor and LSA. The idea was to build up a partnership between the tutor and LSA – who were often very separate in GFE. The training aimed to enable participants to see it as a ‘tripartite’ relationship. In this setting LSAs often ran their own workshops. They didn’t differentiate between roles in training.

- Giving teachers and LSAs time to plan together was a characteristic of effective practice. Opportunities for joint planning need to be structured in and to be seen to be important.

“What worked best was when the teacher and LSA collaborated on planning and had clear targets for learners to work towards. It didn’t work if LSAs were brought in without experience and training and didn’t understand what they were expected to do.”

“LSAs are often very familiar with ILP targets and behaviour strategies. It works best when lesson plans record what each individual is going to learn. We would expect that to be communicated effectively to LSAs and they would know what was expected of them.”

“If we want quality, we’ve got to give it time.”

- Being reflective about practice, this made LSAs more confident and empowered and provided a technique they could use with learners. As a provider indicated,

“Reflection seems to be something that is hard to do as part of their own practice, but so essential. They need to analyse every step of what they do against what they are learning in training.”

A two stage model of reflection was reported by an interviewee, similar to that promoted by IfL. It focussed not only on the need to reflect, but also on *how* to reflect.

- TAs in the school sector were encouraged to keep portfolios of evidence for NVQs from induction onwards. Any training activities between formal training sessions could be recorded and it set a precedent for future training. A college encouraged every staff member to keep a CDP file, including LSAs, and they were encouraged to reflect on their practice when they had supervision.
- Some providers indicated that teaming up with other organisations to share expertise and experience worked well and they would like to see more of it. One provider indicated that they,

“would like to see more needs based local training, some kind of programme put together with other colleges, being able to learn/link into different environments with other people doing the same job. Many staff won’t have come in with a lot of experience, so if we are not careful, what they know and think will be based solely on their own college. What they need is wider experience. Do it locally.”

The need for locally based training was confirmed by another interviewee who suggested that many LSAs had chosen this as a way of fitting around family commitments.

- In talking to partners, one professional development provider indicated that here was no need to create new resources; the need was to make public and easily accessible what already existed. Dissemination was the key issue.

What was least effective

- The lack of management support to carry through the outcomes of professional development
- Where accredited courses existed and they didn’t match the role
- Some specialist training resources which tended to focus too much on ‘theoretical’ aspects of disability/learning difficulty i.e. what causes, for example dyslexia, rather than practical strategies for LSAs to provide support.
- In relation to e-learning, an ACL provider indicated that LSAs don’t like doing e-learning. Some chose the job specifically because it was ‘hands on. They were more likely to undertake in-house or locally based training than travel to train. Another interviewee suggested that it was hard for LSAs to be motivated with e-learning. They would find time for activity that was set in time, but would find it hard to build into time that is not already set aside.

- Training that was insufficiently contextualised to reflect the needs of learners. An example given was of skills for life training that did not take account of the impact of sensory and physical impairment.

Barriers

- The relevance of professional development programmes was a common barrier. As an interviewee suggested, quite simply,

“where there is a problem with the relevance of the training for LSAs, include LSAs in the team.”

- Interviewees indicated that some LSAs lack confidence in their own learning ability. They were nervous and anxious about their own learning. They could talk about what they did, but had no confidence in writing it down.
- Some LSAs needed to develop their own ICT skills to be able to fulfill their roles; many support strategies are dependent on ICT skills.
- Time for training was mentioned and a provider indicated that when time was limited, dealing with compliance ‘*legal stuff*’ tended to take priority. One professional development provider said that practical delivery issues were a barrier,

“It is difficult to get LSAs to go anywhere unless managers support their professional development. If it’s not compulsory, it’s not high priority....they paid LSAs to attend if they weren’t working or the college for cover if they were.”

To address the time for training issues, a provider indicated that when training was not on a working day for part-time staff, the college would be flexible about the day and offer time of in lieu although they could not afford to pay staff to attend.

“We provide training for free and even then (organisations) won’t always release them (LSAs). They say they are short staffed....The problem is they haven’t got anyone to take their place if they come, so they can’t release them even when we pay.”

- Lack of time for sharing planning. A strategy suggested for overcoming this was to design sessions in such a way that review and planning became an integral part of each session.

Resources to support professional development

It was clear that many resources and materials were available to support the professional development of LSAs (less so LSA managers) and some examples of these are included in a separate report, “Resource Bank” . They tended to fall into

various categories: those designed for LSAs in lifelong learning, for TAs in school or for support staff in general; qualifications and award specifications; courses and training programmes whether accredited or not covering the general support staff role, specialist support areas or a combination of both; published text books and on-line resources including websites. Within this small scale project it has been possible only to explore the scope of the resources available. The richness of the resource uncovered suggests it warrants further development.

No attempt has been made to assure the quality of any of the examples included, although some have clearly been subjected to rigorous quality assurance processes. Nor does inclusion in this document imply recommendation.

Other issues

- One interviewee indicated that the range of skills for LSAs who support learners on work placements was different because the LSA would be on their own (with the learner on placement) in the workplace, without the direct support of a teacher.
- There was an emerging issue concerning staff employed to provide support to an individual, often through direct payment and ensuring that when in the classroom they would provide support in an appropriate way. The same issues also applied to staff employed through agencies, especially where responsibility for the training of these staff was located elsewhere.
- Role boundaries were also an issue and could be particularly sensitive when dealing pastoral or personal support,

“knowing when to be a listening ear, not a counsellor.”

- There was a Unison sponsored ‘skills for schools’ website which was very popular and could be expanded and developed for college staff. At the moment there is nothing to indicate what training is available.

Conclusions and Implications for Practice

A significant overarching finding of this project was that the diversity of LSA role and contexts in lifelong learning means that a single approach, resource, course or award will not meet all identified needs: one size does not fit all. The availability of materials for training is only one part of the picture. Effective professional development for LSAs encompasses a wide range of strategies and approaches and a framework for professional development, within which the many existing opportunities could be located to form a coherent and comprehensive whole. LSAs need to be actively involved in developing any programmes of support.

Another crucial factor in supporting the professional development of LSAs was the culture and ethos of the organisation – how inclusive it is – and the value and status the leadership attributed to LSAs. LSAs have historically been undervalued and the language of support – ‘use’ ‘utilisation’ implies an instrumental and marginalised view of LSAs rather than as integral members of the staff team. Without the support and commitment of leaders, training would be of limited value.

There was no central information point and a lack of easily accessible information for LSAs and those who manage them, unlike the TDA website with its comprehensive list of information for TAs. There is also no professional membership association for LSAs in lifelong learning such as the National Association of Professional Teaching Assistants for TAs in schools which is a central resource.

Implications for Practice

There would clearly be some value in identifying an appropriate organisation to host an information base for LSAs and develop, in consultation with LSAs, such as a single central web-based resource (web-portal) for LSAs, modelled on the TDA and NAPTA websites. Consideration could usefully be given to where this might be located.

A systematic evidence base about LSAs is lacking, e.g. workforce data and role descriptions. There is very little research evidence on their deployment, effectiveness and impact on learning or professional development. Within this project a web-based survey of LSAs and LSA managers was conducted and the response indicated that it could prove an effective data gathering and feedback mechanism.

- **There would be some value in collecting workforce data for LSAs nationally to provide a baseline about their profile (include all 6 aspects of equality and diversity), qualifications, and employment characteristics (full/part-time, permanent/short term).**
- **It would be helpful to collate all existing research and other documentation specifically about LSAs in lifelong learning, building on**

the literature review in this project and commission research to address gaps. Maintain a central database in the LSA web-portal.

- **It is clear that the voice of the LSA is under represented in the literature. It would therefore be vital to establish a ‘reference group’ or groups of LSAs to be involved in shaping all developments related to LSAs**
- **A national LSA survey of a representative sample of LSAs possibly modelled on the national learner survey could provide useful information to supplement existing information about this valuable workforce**

The professionalisation of the teaching workforce in lifelong learning and of teaching assistants in schools has led to national occupational standards, recognition of different ‘levels’ e.g. associate teachers and higher level teaching assistants and a career pathway with a progressive range of qualifications. There is a recognition that not all LSAs will necessarily want to progress although there is some evidence from this project that some LSAs are being encouraged and supported to undertake qualifications.

Despite this there was a scarcity of appropriate qualifications for LSAs and the relevance of many existing qualifications has been called into question. Qualifications for TAs in schools are designed for different contexts and lifelong learning teaching qualifications, although useful for their focus on learning, are inaccessible because LSAs are not responsible for the planning and delivery of learning in their roles. Some qualifications and qualification frameworks are now beginning to be developed and trialled for LSAs in lifelong learning. There was also some evidence that LSAs wanted to learn locally.

A major gap identified was the lack of appropriate training opportunities for teachers in working with support staff in ITT or CPD and for LSA managers.

- **A progression pathway for LSAs in lifelong learning with relevant nationally recognised qualifications from Levels 2 – 4 would support career progression as well as training and development opportunities.**
- **There is a need to encourage the development of specific LSAs in lifelong learning qualifications; ensure that their relevance and effectiveness is evaluated and publish the information about qualifications on the LSA portal.**
- **This research has identified a need to review ITT and CPD specifications for teachers and LSA managers to ensure that they include working with support staff.**

Many organisations offered reasonably comprehensive inductions to LSAs although some did not. Organisations indicated that they continue to develop their own resources to support induction. There is scope to develop an induction 'package' for LSAs, building on best practice in the sector, with resources suitable for customisation in different contexts, to include: introduction to the organisation, values, culture, ethos and attitudes, understanding inclusion, the social model of disability and equality and diversity; issues of safety and compliance; the role of the LSA; teaching and learning, the impact of impairment on learning and how to support learning, communication and managing challenging behavior; working in partnership with teachers; maintaining a professional development portfolio; introducing reflective practice; shadowing, buddying and mentoring.

Although some LSAs are encouraged and supported to undertake externally accredited qualifications, much CPD for LSAs is delivered in-house and follows on from induction. There was an identified need for CPD in both general 'core' areas and to enable LSAs to develop specialisms, for example, in dyslexia support, ICT or communication. Specialist CPD for LSAs needs to focus on practical strategies for supporting learning.

There were some examples of where LSAs were involved in the delivery of training for their colleague LSAs and for teaching staff and managers and this brought a range of benefits and enhanced the status and value of LSAs.

In addition to core and specialist CPD there is also a need for regular updating and briefings on, for example, new initiatives, policies and procedures. The content of CPD currently undertaken by LSAs tended to mirror and build on those areas introduced during induction.

- **It would be helpful to develop from best practice and publish on the LSA web-portal a series of 'packages' including: induction; generic CPD and specialist CPD. Each package could contain a menu of content and a range of different supporting resources, including signposts to published resources.**
- **An organisation audit tool similar to that produced by the DfEE (now DCSF) <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DfES-0148-2000.pdf>), and a checklist for teachers on working with LSAs, such as the TDA self study task and checklist for LSAs (http://www.tda.gov.uk/teachers/sen/training_resources/pgce_programmes/selfstudy.aspx) could usefully be developed and included in the portal.**
- **The direct involvement of LSAs in the delivery of CPD should be encouraged**

The importance of training teachers and LSAs together, with a strong focus on learning, cannot be over emphasised and there is merit in developing a process-based joint CPD programme, generated from the specific concerns of the teachers and LSAs for delivery within an organisation or across groups of organisation within a locality. This could build on best practice, e.g. the Coventry adult learning programme.

- **It would be useful to develop from best practice and publish on the LSA web-portal a programme and supporting resources for process-based CPD. This could perhaps be developed from the Coventry Adult Service model and consideration could then be given to wider dissemination and national rollout.**

Much professional development for LSAs takes place outside of formal training settings. The reported barriers of lack of time and resources for formal training could be addressed though the use of other approaches. Shadowing was most commonly used during induction and organizations described schemes of buddying and mentoring, including peer mentoring.

E-learning is a potentially useful tool for CPD although it was not that widely used - our survey found slightly more than a third of LSAs and less than a half of LSA managers. The benefits were in offering convenience, greater flexibility and the opportunity to work at your own pace, although some drawbacks were also reported. It depends on access to and skills in using technology and some people prefer more interaction and experiential methods. There were some interesting and innovative developments and these could be encouraged and disseminated.

- **The collation, development and publishing of guidance and protocols on alternative CPD approaches such as shadowing, buddying and mentoring would be useful.**
- **The development of e-learning resources for LSAs and LSA managers should be encouraged. Existing resources should be identified and signposted on the LSA portal.**

Annex 1 - Steering Group

Alison Boulton: Natspec (Chair)

Viv Berkeley: Niace

Andrew Chiffers: Farleigh FE College, Frome

Mark Dale: Portland College

Graham Jowett: Treloars College

Joy Mercer: AoC

Anne Price: David Lewis College

Ann Ruthven: LSIS

Helen Sexton: National Star College

Caroline Smale, Henshaws College

Haydn Thomas: West of England College

Ruth Thomas: Derwen College

Barbara Waters: Skill

Annex 2 - Contributors

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.

Beaumont (ISC)

CETT for Inclusive Learning

Dilston College (ISC)

Institute for Learning (IfL)

Lufton College (ISC)

Macintyre (3rd Sector)

Mencap (3rd Sector)

NAPTA

Newham Local Authority

NIACE

Northamptonshire County Council

Northern Counties College (ISC)

Nottingham Trent University (HE)

Oaklands College (GFE)

Supporting Transformations

West of England College (ISC)

Weston College (GFE)

Worcester Sixth Form College

This report has also drawn on the literature review produced 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

Project managers:

Alison O'Brien

Kevin O'Brien

Project team:

Richard Amos

Sally Faraday

David Finch

John Gush

Brian Simpson

Project Administrator:

Maria Coulson

Annex 5 - Interview questions

Enhancement of Learning Support - Learning Support Assistant Training Project

Opportunities and Resources

Overall aim of the project

- To develop a training programme for learning support assistants and those who manage them, across the full range of contexts in the lifelong learning sector

The project seeks to identify:

- The training and development needs of LSAs and those who manage them
- **Existing professional development opportunities undertaken by a) LSAs and b) those who manage them**
 - **at induction**
 - **for continuing professional development**
 - **to achieve qualification and career progression**
- Existing networks at national, regional and local level and how they might be developed to deliver training for LSAs and those who manage them

The focus of this report is to identify what existing professional development opportunities are undertaken by LSAs in relation to:

a) Induction

1. What is the *content* of induction for LSAs?
2. What *delivery methods* are used?
3. What *materials* are used?
 - Are they developed in house? If so, could we have a copy?
 - If not, which materials do you use and where are they from?
4. What are the most and least effective aspects of induction?
5. What are the gaps? How could they be filled?

b) Continuous professional development

6. What content areas does CPD for LSAs cover? General? Specific?

7. What *delivery methods* are used for CPD?
 - Individual support, describe
 - mentoring, describe
 - job shadowing, describe
 - group sessions, describe
 - on-line material, describe
 - other, describe
8. What *materials* are used?
 - Are they developed in-house? If so, could we have a copy?
 - If not, which materials do you use and where are they from?
9. Are any aspects of CPD *accredited*? If so, which? By which awarding bod(y/ies)?
10. Do they relate to the national standards? If so, which standards? And how?
11. What are the most and least effective aspects of CPD?
12. What are the gaps? How could they be filled?

c) LSA qualifications

13. Are all LSAs expected to hold or work towards qualifications?
14. Which qualifications do LSAs undertake? At what level(s)?
 - What is the name of the award(s)? Why did you choose this award?
 - Which awarding body is it accredited by?
 - Roughly what content does it cover?
 - Is it offered in-house or externally? If so, by whom?
 - For awards that are competence based, how do you ensure that LSAs meet the performance criteria? What training/experience do you provide? What methods do you use?
15. Does/do the qualification(s) relate to the national standards? If so, which standards? And how?
16. Which aspects of qualifications are considered to be the most and least relevant and useful? Why?
17. What are the gaps? How could they be filled?
18. What is the career pathway for LSAs?

Part-time/ sessional LSAs

19. Are the opportunities for *part-time/sessional* LSAs the same as for full-time staff? If not, how do they differ? Why?

Those who manage LSAs

20. What existing professional development opportunities are undertaken by *those who manage* LSAs that are different from/additional to those described above? Describe the difference.
21. What are the most and least effective aspects of professional development activity for those who manage LSAs?
22. What are the gaps? How could they be filled?

General

23. Do you know of any other organisations that have particularly good professional development opportunities for LSAs?
24. Do you have examples of effective training materials and resources and/or staff with expertise in training/ professional development for LSAs?
25. If yes, would you be prepared to share these/ discuss this in more detail?
26. Are there any other training materials, packages or courses that you or others have found particularly useful? If so which?
27. Is there anything else you would like to add?