

# LEARNING SUPPORT ANNUAL REPORT 2019 - 2020

## INTRODUCTION

This report describes the progress made in the provision of support for students at Worcester Sixth Form College who have learning support needs. It summarises the support given to those students this academic year, many of whom have required the services of the Learning Support Department:-

- with physical disabilities
- having sensory impairment
- with medical conditions
- having mental health issues
- with specific learning difficulties
- requiring learning support/study skills
- requiring assessment for examination considerations
- requiring special examination considerations
  - Support in place during Covid- 19

It also acknowledges the changes in departmental staff, and concludes with recommendations for the 2020/2021 academic year.

## DEPARTMENT CHANGES

There has been a change within the Senior Leadership Team and Graham Williams Senior Leader for Student Progress is Line manager for the department. Weekly meetings have remained in place and Graham has been keen to assist and give advice where needed. His input in with behaviour management has been useful and the team have been able to offer insight into other departmental processes, giving him time to reflect and then discuss possible solutions. So far it has proven to be a positive area of change.

One full time member of staff left the department and another full time member moved to be a pastoral tutor for 4/5 of her timetable remaining in the department for 1 day per week. Due to this, the position of Core Support Co-ordinator was re-advertised within the department and Chris Giles was appointed to this role. Two temporary LSA's were appointed one of which left in February. Andrew Haynes who has been a teacher and pastoral tutor previously at College stepped in at short notice and covered from the end of February until March 20<sup>th</sup> to allow for recruitment to take place. We are currently in the process of recruiting two permanent LSA's, this has been delayed slightly due to Covid-19.

## EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE (EHC) PLAN PROVISION

The process of responding to the Local Authority "Request for a Placement" within a fifteen day period remains the same. In this period the Learning Support Manager gathers information from both the Case Worker and current SENCo to establish suitability of a place of the individual request. This is also discussed with the Principal of the College and a provisional statement of the learner costs is agreed. This information is then emailed to the Case Worker on their proforma, where we have to make a decision at this point if we feel we are able to offer a place of study.

We currently have 8 students who have an EHC plan, annual reviews have taken place and teachers are notified of their individual needs via the portal and progress closely monitored and shared with SLT.

This academic year we have currently received five requests for a Placement directly from the Local Authority and one of these requests have been agreed. As in previous years it is likely these will not be the only students applying to College who have an EHCP. We have found over the years that very few requests are sent and students with EHCPs often come to us without us being named as the named provider (found in Section I of the EHC).

With regard to ensuring a smooth transition between school and College, the Learning Support department plays a crucial role. Every student who wishes to apply to the College has the opportunity to declare if they have a learning need, a disability, or a medical condition that may affect their learning, when completing their application form. If a learning need or disability is then declared, it will be arranged for the prospective student's interview to be with the Learning Support Manager or Assistant Learning Support Manager, so their needs and the suitability of their desired programme of study can be discussed further. For those who do not explicitly disclose information of a learning need, they may have this included on the school reference where the school makes that disclosure. Helen Wright who works within Admissions is very thorough and communicates this to the Learning Support Manager along with the reference so we have a record. Due to Covid-19 some interviews are taking place remotely and the Learning Support Manager and Assistant Manager are continuing to process the applications for whom disclosures have been made.

At the time of writing this report it is still unclear as to when students will be able to come into College due to lockdown. A conversation has taken place with Graham Williams and it has been agreed that in the unlikely event of Pre Induction and Induction going ahead transition support will be offered at Course Confirmation for the identified students.

## **POTENTIAL MEDICAL AND LEARNING NEEDS OF STUDENTS:**

### **MEDICAL ISSUES**

Thorough checking of medical conditions took place again this year and, as in previous years, a large number of medical problems were identified. They are as follows:-

Anorexia	Heart conditions
Asthma	Mental Health Issues
Allergic reaction (adrenaline required)	M.E.
Diabetes	Migraine
Epilepsy	OCD
Hearing impairment	Panic Attacks

### **DYSLEXIA**

The number of students assessed for exam access arrangements due to having been previously been identified as being dyslexic or having slower processing needs has increased. 152 appointments for assessments have been allocated up till March 20th which is an increase in the

number of assessments that have been offered. These reflect that more of the vocational subjects, such as BTEC, CTEC or OCR have now an examined module as part of the awarding body's requirements than last year. If a student has an existing Form 8, is taking GCSEs and we are able to verify the assessor, then we are able to use these Form 8s. This has allowed an increasing number of Form 8's have been rolled forward in this way for students entering the November GCSE Re sits and so these students would not need to be assessed until they progress onto a level 3 course as the application for exam access arrangements made would be for the level of exams that they are taking that year. Support continued to be offered on a one to one basis or in the form of study skills through drop in support or an allocated session. Recommendations given in the reports inform the Learning Support Assistants and Teachers, about how the student can best be supported. Use of assistive technology continues to be available, and we have the use of laptops to loan to students on a full or part time basis. With developments in technology the department has trialled the use of reader pens with a number of students having used reader pens in this year's exams. As well as this the department has looked into linking up with another VI Form College within the MAT to see whether it could benefit from having access to Claro Software. The use of CLARO Software for reading and which can also be used within an exam context has been investigated. A college wide license would allow this to be available on the college network thereby making it inclusive to all students.

## **ASPERGER'S SYNDROME**

Our enrolment for students with Asperger's Syndrome has again seen success this academic year. The support they require is complex, as no two students have the same support requirements. These needs are assessed with both the student and their parents/ guardians at the point of interview, so arrangements can be put in place for the September start. EHC plans have also assisted with ensuring that the transition is as smooth as possible and ensuring that required provision is put in place prior to enrolment.

sixteen students are supported this year that have Asperger's Syndrome; the majority of these have additional conditions such as OCD, anxiety and other mental health conditions.

## **MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS**

The numbers of students who suffer with anxiety/mental health issues continue to rise, and this is having a significant impact on support and other pastoral services in College. Due to the nature of one to one support and the professional rapport that develops, learning support assistants are increasingly on the receiving end of some very sensitive student disclosures. Although all members of staff are aware of what to do/ who to contact in the event of such conversations, the implications of having to deal with safeguarding concerns for staff has raised the awareness for further training in conjunction with the strong relationship we have with the College's counselling team. The involvement of the Learning Support department within safeguarding is certainly recognised by College, and the Learning Support Manager is now trained and acting as one of the two Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Continued close work has taken place between learning support and pastoral staff within College, and we promote the services and groups that are available to students for example Art Therapy and the counselling services.

## **EXAMINATIONS**

The Assistant Learning Support Manager continues to take considerable responsibility for the coordination of students with access arrangements for exams. The positive relationship with Exams remain, and we have continued to strengthen the communication between the departments. Due to the new MIS system, certain exam processes have had to be adapted from previous years, but despite this, Andy May (IT) has been instrumental in aiding Alison Finch (Exams Officer) to develop the process of allocating alternative room candidates and staff invigilation that is not so dissimilar to last year. This has been hugely appreciated as the process has been, in previous years, very labour-intensive. There are 249 students this year having access arrangements compared to 176 last year (including illness and injury). Numbers are considerably up from last year and are attributed to the increased number of examined units in vocational subjects, especially Criminology which is a new vocational subject for 2019-2020.

With the unprecedented government decision on the 18th March 2020 to close schools/ colleges and suspend exams this summer due to Covid 19, we will not have to overcome the annual challenges we have with staff to invigilation ratio. However, if exams were to commence as usual, it is worth noting that we continue to see a rise in demand for alternative exam room access, and staffing numbers for these exams are continuing to be problematic due to reduction in number of LSAs and staff available to invigilate. We would have had to rely heavily on external invigilators as we have in previous years, provided by the Exams Officer (either existing members of staff or specific exam invigilators). It is important to mention that exam involvement is no longer exclusive to the summer series, but extends to November resits, December and January exams, the college mock exam week and controlled assessments, making the organisation, co-ordination and provision of access arrangements an increasing challenge. This Autumn in the coming academic year there may also be the opportunity for students to take the exams they were expecting to take in the summer. This is obviously still very much unknown at this point in time but is worth considering as a possibility and logistically how will this happen and the impact on staffing.

As Ofqual has agreed that subject staff are now allocating grades, all students who have access arrangements and were taking exams this summer have been contacted via email to confirm their access arrangements and know that staff are aware of this information also.

## **APPLYING FOR ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS FOR EXAMINATIONS**

A substantial part of the work of the Learning Support department in addition to supporting students with their individual learning needs, is to carry out assessments for students who may need an application for access arrangements with regard to examinations. Applications for access arrangements can be made on the grounds of a substantial impairment that has an adverse effect on the student's everyday life. This is primarily for dyslexia or specific learning difficulty related to processing speeds for handwriting and or reading but can also include co-occurring conditions

such as Autism, Asperger's syndrome, ADD and ADHD as well as dyslexia and dyspraxia. It also covers medical conditions such as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

Students with mental health conditions also need to be considered for access arrangements. These arrangements will differ for each student depending on their individual needs. There continues to be an increasing number of students for whom an alternative room has had to be put in place due to mental health conditions, for which supporting medical evidence had to be requested. In view of this increased demand, the Learning Support department has had to ensure that the request for medical evidence has been consistent for all students who have requested to take their exams in an alternative room.

The number of students who have required an assessment has been increasing over the last few years and these can be divided into two groups. Those students, who have had a previous history of assessment and have had previous access arrangements for exams, will now need to have an updated assessment as the approved access arrangements are only valid for 2 years. The second group of students are those who have not been previously assessed but are aware that they have difficulties, for example, with reading or that their speed of processing is much slower than their peers and that they are unable to complete the exams within the time allowed. The provision of exam access arrangements will then enable these students to achieve their potential in line with their peers. As required by the current JCQ regulations subject staff are consulted regarding a student who is to be assessed and asked for their feedback on the student's difficulties within the classroom. There has been an increased number of students requesting to use a word processor for exams due to poor handwriting. The assessor has carried out handwriting assessments in order to get the required information to make an application for these requests. For this academic year the number of full diagnostic assessments have decreased but we have also got an increased number of students redoing GCSE exams. The assessment list has been staggered this year as this is the first year that there have been no AS exams and so first year students who have previously had exam access arrangements will be assessed in the summer term so that their application for exam access arrangements for the following year can be made in September for 2019/20 exams. This would also apply to those students who have been referred for an assessment due to concerns about their progress. In these instances, if a student has a previous assessment from their school and we can access the original signed and dated Form 8 from a verified assessor, we are able to reapply for access arrangements and use the information from school. This is potentially one of the reasons why the number of assessments carried out this year is lower than last year.

Those WSFC students who intend to apply for university or HE courses, will require a more detailed assessment report that includes an assessment for underlying ability as well as the range of assessments that are carried out for exam access arrangements. We no longer offer this assessment in college and students will need to access this externally.

Access arrangements that must be applied for on-line include and must be applied for by the JCQ deadline in February:

- Reader
- Scribe
- Additional time of 25%

- Additional time of 10% for use of bilingual dictionary (but must show that the learning difficulty exists in student's first language and is not due to poor English language skills)
- Additional time of more than 25% and up to 50%
- Additional time of more than 50% (must be applied for directly to the relevant awarding body, with a detailed 'picture of need' to substantiate the application)
- Practical Assistant
- Oral language modifier

Exam access arrangements that the Centre can put in place, without making an on-line application, but will still need to have supporting evidence for the access arrangement include:

- Use of a word processor
- Supervised rest breaks
- Prompter
- Separate room owing to anxiety/ medical conditions
- Cerium overlay

The JCQ requirements may be amended each year so it is important that the assessment carried out meets the current criteria. One of the requirements is to have supporting evidence from subject staff regarding the learning support offered and whether they would support access arrangements being applied for. Collating this supporting evidence, plus the completion of the Form 8 for each student who has been assessed, has meant additional demands on the time of the assessor as well as carrying out the assessments. A covering letter on headed paper continues to be needed if a Form 8 is not applicable. This states the need, evidence and access arrangement for that candidate. As with previous years, the Assistant Learning Support Manager has continued to co-ordinate and implement this process. A word processor policy remains, and in addition there is now the requirement for a centre letter for the use of a reader also.

Over this academic year the number of assessments that have been carried out include:

Full diagnostic assessment (continuous 3 hours) = 110

Handwriting assessment (1 hour) = 20

Cerium overlay assessment = 4

## **LEARNING SUPPORT**

One to one learning support continues to be very successful, and we continue to divide the 85 minute lessons into two 40 minute support sessions, meaning there are nine available support sessions in the day. We have supported 123 students this academic year, which is more than last year (108 students). Drop-in support continues to complement the support available as a more flexible and accessible approach, there have been 13 students who have regularly accessed this support.

## **AREAS IN LEARNING SUPPORT**

The Study Centre remains very busy and a few of the vulnerable students used the student area on a daily basis. This room is closed at break time to allow for staff briefings and to encourage students to access other areas of the college.

We continue to use G21. 1.21 and 1.25, which have been invaluable to the department. 1.21 and 1.25 continues to be used for Core Support and due to its quiet surrounds, has really encouraged an atmosphere conducive to learning. 1.25 can also be accessed as a prayer room during lunchtimes, and located next to washing facilities and toilets. G21 continues to be positively received by students and other members of staff, and it is recognised as an area of quiet study for individuals and small groups. This continues to be utilised by the more anxious and vulnerable students. Although there has been an increased staff presence in the room this academic year when staff absences occur we have to prioritise other areas which can mean that there is not always a staff member present. Having an increased staff presence from last year has improved the behaviour and reinforced for the use of the room.

## **CORE SUPPORT AND SUPERVISED STUDY**

As an integral part of the College mindset, students are timetabled sessions in addition to their chosen subjects in order that they can develop their subject knowledge and understanding, study skills and numeracy skills. For first year students this amounts to one 85 minute period per week of Core Support. This takes place in a dedicated classroom in which each student has individual use of a computer with essential software including Microsoft Office and internet access. During this time students will complete work set by subject teachers. For most subjects this is according to a schedule, devised by the subject teacher, uploaded at the

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beginning of the year to the Core Support Moodle page. A Level 2 Learning Support Assistant (LSA) will supervise each of these groups and encourage, support and assist students with any aspect of the work that they can but in most cases it is with generic study skills, organisation and time management, accessing learning resources and proof reading. The LSA maintains a safe and positive learning environment and signposts/facilitates access by students to other services offered within the college as relevant, including further involvement with learning support.

For second year students this amounts to two 85 minute periods: one in a dedicated classroom with some access to computing facilities (timetabled as Core Support), a second in a designated area of the Learning Resource Centre (LRC) which is timetabled as Supervised Study and each student has dedicated access to a standard college computer. There are many similarities between Second Year Core Support / Supervised Study and First Year Core Support: students complete work set by teachers although for second years there is more emphasis on independence and students are more free to decide what they will work on. There is a greater use of written workbooks and past papers, rather than reliance on Moodle. Level 2 LSAs supervise Core Support, the LSA maintains a safe and positive learning environment and signposts students to other services offered within the college as relevant; for second years this will be more focussed on activities directed to post-college destinations including university and apprenticeships. Signposting is predominantly to support from tutors and Student Services with UCAS applications, careers and work experience. Learning Support Managers facilitate Supervised Study where most students are working almost entirely independently.

Core Support and Supervised Study are timetabled for the full 85 minutes and students are encouraged to use the whole period but only the first 60 minutes is compulsory. Students are allowed to move their timetabled block if it is inconvenient with respect to other aspects of their timetable, transport and extra-curricular activities, and especially if requested by a tutor. Students that study subjects where access to software, equipment and materials are not available in the designated rooms (e.g. Computing, Art, Photography and Music) may spend the period working independently in a subject classroom under the supervision of the subject teacher after signing in with their supervisor.

The co-ordinator and Learning Support Manager regularly liaise with Heads of Year, Heads of Department and teaching staff - and attend meetings where appropriate - to gain feedback from departments, discuss progress of the programme and to answer any queries relating to Core Support and Supervised Study.

## **LEARNING RESOURCES CENTRE**

The LRC still continues to be an area that is well used by students and is a supportive environment. Where timetabling allows, the increased presence of the Learning Support team to assist in the supervision of the LRC throughout the day has had a positive impact on study and has helped reduce noise levels and minimise disruptive behaviour exhibited on occasion by students. Behaviour management training undertaken by staff last academic year has enabled us to implement a more consistent approach to challenging undesirable behaviour within the LRC and has generally improved consistency for students in terms of knowing what behaviour is expected. Unfortunately, however, installing a self-registration system for year two supported study sessions has meant less staff presence in the centre and as a consequence increased use of LRC as social area by students this academic year. This has required more staff presence this academic year to ensure that student activity remains purposeful and is not disruptive to other students trying to work. This has been a challenge due to the varied demands on staff time, but we have put additional staffing in place where timetables allow for this. A visit to the library at Hereford Sixth Form College enabled Sara and Kate to see how the library staff there manage their various study areas and we were particularly interested to visit 'The Cloisters', their silent study area which is separated from the main library by glass doors and in which students work silently with staff checking on the area regularly to ensure this is maintained. A plan has since been made to section off our silent area in the LRC in a similar way to improve silent study space for students. This



was due to be completed over the Easter holiday but has had to be postponed due to the recent college closure. It will be a priority to get this put in place once we have returned to college and the hope is that having this separate dedicated silent study area will discourage students for using the space for social activity and make the LRC a quieter and calmer space for all students.

The LRC Co-ordinator continues to maintain our e-learning provisions to ensure this is easily accessed from the College Gateway, ensuring that the LRC Moodle page is up to date to enable students and staff to access specialist search engines quickly and efficiently. There has been some work to increase student awareness of available resources through use of displays at the front of the LRC. Our Library assistant updates the displays regularly to coincide with 'celebration' days, weeks or months such as Mental Health Awareness day, International Women's day and Black History Month. Resources such as books, periodicals and DVDs are selected for the celebration display to highlight their availability to students and encourage their use. Kate continues to liaise closely with teaching staff to update resources within the LRC, ensuring that they are in line with the specifications being taught in college and teachers support our work by letting their students know what is available. We continue to work with the English and Languages teams to house and distribute their set texts to students. This has the multiple benefit of encouraging students to come into the LRC regularly for their books and providing a systematic approach to set text management by having them catalogued on the library management system. We have also added to our book collection this academic year to include a small 'Well-being' section including books that have been recommended by staff from the counselling team. Learning support staff read and reviewed many of the titles over the summer holiday in order to be able to advise students where needed. We hope that by providing these titles as part of the library catalogue, students will have access to high-quality advice and guidance for mental health difficulties that they can access themselves discreetly.

Liaison with teaching staff and outside agencies has continued this year to improve support available to students. Notably, Kate worked closely with Matt Hall and a link Librarian from the University of Worcester to arrange and deliver a session on research and referencing to those students undertaking the Extended Project Qualification this academic year. This took the form of a session for all EPQ students in the hall in which students were reminded what resources are available in the LRC and at The Hive to support them with their studies for EPQ, and advice was given about best practice for research and referencing. This session was a success in that it enabled us to reach all EPQ students in one go to provide support and information, and a number of the students involved have told us that they found the session useful, many of them seeking follow-up support in the LRC about using the electronic resources and referencing their work. In addition, Kate has continued to visit individual classes around college upon request from teachers to provide targeted advice and support about making the most of the LRC resources. Sessions for Year Two History students and BTEC Health and Social Care students have been particularly successful, having been targeted for particular pieces of coursework. This is something we intend to continue with and hopefully roll out to more courses over the next academic year.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION (LRC)**

### **LRC Opening Hours (Term time)**

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday – 8.30am-4.30pm  
Wednesday – 8.30am-6.30pm

We aim to open as much as possible over the college holidays but days and times vary. Details are made available to staff and students the week before the start of the holiday.

## **STUDY SPACE (LRC)**

The LRC is the largest study area within college and the main port of call for those students wanting to complete work in their free periods. It is run by the Learning Support Team. We also have an area dedicated to A2 Supported Study sessions which run every 85 min lesson. In addition, rows of computers are bookable throughout the week for teachers wanting computer access for their students during lessons. We have a large quiet study area which is monitored by staff throughout lesson times to ensure students are working quietly. We also have a small silent study area which is screened off from the main part of the LRC. Room LRC 4 is used for group study and can be booked by groups of students for this purpose, it is also regularly used for various staff meetings.

- Computer area – 104
- Quiet Study – 76
- Silent Study – 12
- Group Study (Bookable) – 20
- Quiet reading area – 14

TOTAL – 226

## **RESOURCES (LRC)**

Overall we have over 15,000 resources in the LRC, consisting of:

- 14,226 Books
- 1035 DVDs
- 457 Music CDs
- 20 Chrome Books

In addition, we subscribe to 42 periodicals and 12 electronic Databases including Jstor, Philip Allan Archive and BBFS E-Books. E –resources are accessed via links on Moodle and some teaching departments also embed links onto their own pages.

As well as the 104 networked computers in the LRC, students can also borrow a Chrome Book for use inside the LRC. We also provide charging lockers for those students who want to bring in their own devices for use at college.

## **INDUCTIONS (LRC)**

LRC inductions for groups of students are available upon request from teaching staff and offer both general information about use of the LRC and subject specific information. We also visit various classes throughout the academic year including EPQ groups to present information and advice about resources, research and referencing.

## ADULT STUDENTS

This year adult students have continued to frequently access academic/learning support and have required a variety of support:-

Assessment for extra time during Examinations

Equipment loan

Learning support

Maths/Support

Mental Health support

Study Skills support

As announced earlier this academic year, the College will no longer be admitting adult learners onto courses, and this provision will cease as of August 2020.

## RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Learning Support Manager has had a rota to cover the LRC to enable students identified as vulnerable to attend College, this has not been required for the whole duration as needs have changed. The Learning Support Manager has worked closely with the DSL to carry out welfare checks weekly via telephone to all students who have an EHCP. Risk assessments were completed for these 8 students and submitted to the Local Authority on 24th April following guidelines from the Government.

All LSA's unless required to cover the rota within the LRC are working remotely and continuing to contact the students that they support on a one to one basis. Some students have required more support than other with tasks such as proof reading and time management as the lack of structure has proven challenging.

The Learning Support Manager is in regular contact with all LSA's via email and Zoom. Working pattern has changed to 5 days per week to ensure available if required.

Please see below figures for Academic and Learning Support for this academic year:

SUPPORT AREA	Figures for 19-20	Figures for 18-19	Figures for 2017-18
ASSESSED EXAM ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS	110	80	113
CERUIM OVERLAY ASSESSMENT	4	6	6
ONE TO ONE SUPPORT	123	106	103

SPECIAL EXAM ARRANGEMENTS	249 Including illness and injuries	176 Including illness and injuries	280 Including illness and injuries
STUDY SKILLS SUPPORT	12	22	80
FULL-TIME IN CLASS STUDENT SUPPORT	2	4	4

## FUNDING

The funding Worcester Sixth Form College receives will be based on a national funding formula for its core provision, and additional funding will be for those with special educational needs. The funding is not ring-fenced and included with the main allocation in a single line' budget. For students requiring support exceeding the nationally prescribed threshold, the Local Authority should provide additional top-up funding. Students with an EHC will have a particular level of funding assigned to them and this can be obtained through the Local Authority as requested.

## TARGETS FOR 2020/21 ACADEMIC YEAR

- Continue to work with Student Services to ensure successful transition to further FE or HE placement, or employment
- Development of Core Support in its content and delivery with guidance and support from Graham Williams
- To become more involved in any training that is delivered to staff regarding student's individual needs
- Review use of study spaces within the LRC, in particular creating a more separate silent study area
- Produce student case studies for all students that have and EHC Plan
- Explore further the use of Claro Software to support students with Dyslexia and associated difficulties
- Build stronger working relationships with school SENCOs
- Move back to a model of carrying out initial assessments for first year students enrolling onto courses

The Learning Support department continues to be conscious of the ever-expanding specific needs of the students, and endeavours to be efficient and use innovative practice to ensure it is cost effective. The College will meet the changes in education by tailoring the support offered and making it relevant to current legislation.

Sara Payne

Learning Support Manager

April 2020