

# LEARNING SUPPORT ANNUAL REPORT 2020 - 2021

## 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 2021/2022 academic year.

## DEPARTMENT CHANGES

We appointed 4 full-time LSAs in September to replace hours lost within the department and to now staff the Independent Study sessions within the LRC (previously supervised by LRC staff). During the course of the year, and with changes resulting from Covid, and temporary suspension of Independent Study, two members of staff took on teaching contracts for part of their working week. Kate Bayley, LRC Co-ordinator, commenced maternity leave on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and Jodie Carey (LSA level 2) was successfully appointed to this position for maternity cover. Andrew Haynes's contract was extended until 2022. Chris Giles, who had temporarily been assisting with IT teaching, has now been offered a permanent teaching post so we will need to recruit an LSA level 2/ Independent Study Co-ordinator for September.

## 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 11 students who have an EHC plan, annual reviews are still taking place due to parents requesting face to face meetings which has caused delay. When reviews are completed, teachers are notified of any changes to their individual needs via the portal and progress closely monitored and shared with SLT.

This academic year we have currently received 9 requests for a Placement directly from the Local Authority and 3 of these requests have been agreed. The Local Authority often consult with us a college in their process of ruling out suitability of mainstream settings, hence the recommendation that we are unable to meet certain applicant's individual needs. 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 applications are submitted by students with EHCPs without prior consultation from the Local Authority. If this is declared on application, a second interview is arranged to allow the Learning Support Manager to contact the Local Authority and school SENCo.

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 all interviews have taken place (and are still taking place) remotely via a telephone interview. For some students needing that extra transition support, they have been offered a visit to the college to meet with the Learning Support Manager in May half term 2021. At the time of writing this report, Induction will be taking place in July, as well as a Pre-Induction.

## **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                      | Anxiety              |

## **ASPERGER'S SYNDROME AND ASD**

The support that students require with ASD can be 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. The complications with Covid restrictions has, at times, made this transition challenging for students, and adaptations have had to be made to the usual process we follow, such as individuals being invited in separately rather than a small Pre-Induction group.

## **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. Suitable training has been identified and due to take place in July. The involvement of the Learning Support department within safeguarding is certainly recognised by College, and the Learning Support Manager continues to act as one of the two Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead.

**\*\*We are expecting a significant increase in mental health concerns due to Covid restrictions and students having very limited opportunities to come into college and see the building\*\***

## **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. Andy May and Hollie Bennett continue to be instrumental in aiding Alison Finch (now Exams Manager) to develop the process of allocating alternative room candidates and staff invigilation.

There are 302 students this year having access arrangements compared to 249 last year (including illness and injury). Numbers are considerably up from last year and are attributed to the increasing number of examined units in vocational subjects, and also the requests for provision of "smaller rooms" due to mental health conditions.

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.

This year we have continued to see school and college closures and the decision again to stop formal examinations, and move towards centre rolling out formal assessments with Teacher Assessed Grades. As the formal assessments are being carried out with access arrangements in place, 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. 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. Looking to the future, conversations are taking place to see how to manage this evolving role.

## **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.

Assessments were carried out until the March 2021 deadline for making applications for exam access arrangements prior to the first lockdown being imposed. During the summer term, the assessor began the assessment process for YR1 students, who would have their first exams at the end of their Year 2, by carrying out interviews on Microsoft Teams in order to be able to collate the necessary information. This allowed face-to-face assessments to start taking place once the students returned to College in September with the appropriate risk assessment and social distancing in place to carry out the assessment, having consulted with other assessors in the MAT as well as Professional Associations. The guidance given; meant that the length of time for the assessment had to be reduced in order to comply, and that the focus was only on obtaining the necessary evidence to support an application for exam access arrangements on behalf of the student. This, however, also meant that the assessment would take place in two parts with the assessor continuing to interview students via Teams to form the picture of need. The number of face-to-face assessments taking place between September and January were frontloaded to see as many students as possible. During the second lockdown from January of this year – the assessor continued to carry out interviews using Microsoft Teams and then with the Principal's permission and with discussions with the Learning Support Manager, began to start carrying out face-to-face assessments again after the February half-term before the main body of students returned to College in March.

The number of assessments that have taken place over this last year would appear to have increased due to more students taking vocational subjects that now have an examined module which they did not previously have. Another factor that also would need to be taken into consideration is that a number of students have requested an assessment although they have not previously had one at school – on the grounds that they were told that they would have been assessed at their secondary school but this had not taken place because of the lockdown last year. For this reason, it has also not always been possible to access a student's original signed and dated Form 8 which could have been rolled forward for applying for exam access arrangements at the same level.

The assessment list continues to be staggered across the year with those students who have examined modules on vocational courses, GCSEs and L2 and L3 exams are assessed first and then in the summer term, the YR1 students who would expect to take their main exams at the end of their second year at GCE or Level 3.

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 but these have been part of the individual assessment this year as opposed to group assessments as in previous years.

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. However, the assessor sends out information advising students about this on request.

Access arrangements that must be applied for on-line include and must be applied for by the JCQ deadline which has been extended to March 31<sup>st</sup> this year and also allowed applications to be made past the deadline given the difficult circumstances that assessors faced when carrying out the assessments.

- 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 as well.

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

An assessment for exam access arrangements = 178\*

(\*this includes both the face-to-face as well as the interview on Teams )

Cerium overlay assessment = 9

## **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 119 students this academic year. This is slightly less than last year but we had to re-accommodate students after the implementation of the “emergency” timetable in October and the majority of one to one support being carried out by Teams. Drop-in support has not been in place due to Covid restrictions and reducing face to face interactions with students.

## **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 1.17, G21, 1.28 and 1.25, which have been invaluable to the department. 1.21 and 1.25 continued to be used for Core Support up until the timetable restructure. 1.28 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.

In addition to these rooms, we have had the use of 3.11 to alleviate the number of face to face one to one sessions in 1.17. This has been successful and insured the safety and the maintenance of social distance between staff and students.

## **INDEPENDENT STUDY**

This academic year, with the introduction of the emergency timetable, the decision was made that Independent Study would be suspended until further notice.

## **LEARNING RESOURCES CENTRE**

With the introduction of the emergency timetable in November, the LRC has become more of a working environment (as students are encouraged to only be in college when they have a lesson). Students have used the LRC and its resources either before their scheduled lessons or in-between lessons as some students use public transport and therefore cannot go home when not in lessons. This has had a very positive effect within the LRC, there is much less disruptive behaviour, heavily supported by the reduced numbers. Social distancing has meant less seating availability and the banks of computers are separated by portable screens that discourage conversations across the desks.

During the national lockdown (Jan 4<sup>th</sup> – Mar 8<sup>th</sup>), the LRC was open and supervised by members of the Learning Support Department, on a rota basis. This allowed vulnerable students, students who had no access to the internet at home, and students who were unable to work from home come into college every day to access their online lessons. Support was available at all times.

After March 8<sup>th</sup> wearing of masks in the LRC became compulsory and the students have complied with this in a very positive manner. It has enabled the LRC to remain open to students with no restriction on accessing resources or computers. The Silent study area at the end of the LRC is a popular place for those students who really need a very quiet space to study. They follow protocol very well in the silent study area and are respectful of other students who would also be in there. It is easily supervised as the glass partition allows members of staff to look through without having to open the door to check on behaviour and noise levels. The silent study area is also used between 8.20 – 8.45 as The Learning Support Department's meeting room in order to comply with social distancing rules.

There has been a much anticipated upgrade in the Library system (Heritage). We are at the end of a two week trial of their most up-to-date software called Cirqa, which, when completely rolled out will enable every student to search independently for all the resources that are available to them within the LRC, via an icon on their college user desktop. This will be promoted throughout the college's intranet and at the start of each year will be shown to all new students. A link to Cirqa will also be available under the drop down menu of useful links on the College's Moodle Page, allowing remote access. There is continued work on student awareness through the use of our displays at the front of the LRC. Our most recent display centres on Black Lives Matter, with one of our students using photos (taken from a local rally that was held June 2020) and quotations from participants to make a large display at the back of the LRC, in the Silent Study room.

New resource displays have been updated and these prove very popular with students and staff alike. The TV monitor in the Silent Study Room is being updated with weekly information on the services offered and the resources available alongside national events and celebrations.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION (LRC)**

LRC Opening Hours (Term time)

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

Tuesday – 8.30am-4.10pm



## **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.

Due to the Pandemic, reduced timetabling, social distancing and more recently, the required need to wear facemasks at all times in college, the LRC has responded by reducing the number of seated areas to allow the 2 metre distance rule whilst the students are able to study safely and in well ventilated areas. Between the rows of computers there are clear portable screens with hand sanitiser and disinfectant wipes at the end of every row. Students are asked to sanitise their hands upon entering and leaving the LRC and to wipe down their keyboards etc. before they leave. The nature of the LRC means that planned seating is impossible, but IT are able to track and trace students that have been in the LRC through their Log in history. Those students who are not at computers are seated at socially distanced tables. This has been very successfully implemented and the students are fully compliant with the LRC requests.

- Computer area – 104
- Quiet Study - 26
- Silent Study – 26
- Quiet reading area – 14 no longer active due to Covid restrictions

## **RESOURCES (LRC)**

Overall we have over 16.000 resources in the LRC, consisting of:

- 14638 Books
- 1044 DVDs
- 475 Music CDs
- 20 Chrome Books
- 32 VLE eBooks

In addition, we subscribe to 42 periodicals and 8 electronic Databases including Jstor, Philip Allan Archive and BBFS E-Books. E-resources are accessed via links on Moodle or the Portal 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.

## RESPONSE TO COVID-19

During the national lockdown between 4<sup>th</sup> January and the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021, the Learning Support Manager had a rota to cover the LRC to enable students identified as vulnerable to attend College. For some students, 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.

All LSAs 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 remained in regular contact with all LSAs via email and Teams.

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

| SUPPORT AREA                       | Figures for 20-21 | Figures for 19-20                     | Figures for 18-19                     |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ASSESSED EXAM ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS  | 178               | 110                                   | 80                                    |
| CERIUM OVERLAY ASSESSMENT          | 9                 | 4                                     | 6                                     |
| ONE TO ONE SUPPORT                 | 119               | 123                                   | 106                                   |
| SPECIAL EXAM ARRANGEMENTS          | 302               | 249<br>Including illness and injuries | 176<br>Including illness and injuries |
| STUDY SKILLS SUPPORT               | N/A               | 12                                    | 22                                    |
| FULL-TIME IN CLASS STUDENT SUPPORT | 4                 | 2                                     | 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 2021/22 ACADEMIC YEAR**

- Continue to work with Student Services to ensure successful transition to further FE or HE placement, or employment
- Development of Independent Study in its content and delivery with guidance and support from Graham Williams
- Explore further the use of Claro Software to support students with Dyslexia and associated difficulties
- Build stronger working relationships with school SENCOs
- Explore and implement a screening assessment for those students who have never been assessed previously and have a learning need (identified from the student or teacher referral)
- Streamline the Access Arrangement process and the management of this, in a designated role

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  
May 2021