

# LEARNING SUPPORT ANNUAL REPORT 2022 - 2023

## 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
- having mental health issues
- with specific learning difficulties
- requiring learning support/study skills
- requiring assessment for examination considerations
- requiring special examination considerations

It also acknowledges the changes in departmental staff and concludes with recommendations for the 2023/2024 academic year.

## DEPARTMENT CHANGES

New staff 2022/2023:

Sean Willis Learning Support Assistant

Emma Duell Assistant Learning Support Manager

New Learning Support Assistant due to start in September 2023, to replace Darcie Sutton following her appointment as Exam Access Arrangements Coordinator in March 2023

Lynsey Ganderton started in October 2023 on a temporary basis to provide additional supervision for the first year Supported Study sessions.

## 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 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 14 students who have an EHC plan and annual reviews are carried out with both student and parent/guardian attending and submitted to Local Authority within 14 days. There are three Local Authorities who we have liaised with in terms of current students and potential new starters. When reviews are completed, teachers are notified of any changes to the student’s individual needs via the portal and progress closely monitored and shared with SLT termly.

This academic year we have currently received 20 requests for a Placement directly from the Local Authority. The Local Authority often consult with us as 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. Initial admission interviews are continuing to take place remotely via telephone. For some applicants there have requests for either in person or Teams interviews and these needs have been accommodated by the Learning Support Manager and the Assistant Learning Support Manager. 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 the Summer term 2023.

The annual transition event for those students needing that additional support will be taking place in early July. Email invitations will be sent out to identified students.

## **LEARNING NEEDS OF STUDENTS:**

## **NEURODIVERGENT CONDITIONS**

The support that students require with neurodivergent conditions (inc. 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. Following on from the change in practice due to Covid, transition continues to be different, limiting the number of times students are able to come to college before they enrol ordinarily and this is where transition is individual and needs to be tailored where appropriate.

## **MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS**

The numbers of students who suffer with anxiety/mental health issues continues to rise, and this is having a significant impact on support and other pastoral services within 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 mental health. 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 Leads.

## **EXAMINATIONS**

Darcie Sutton has become the Access Arrangement Co-ordinator since March 2023 and takes responsibility for the coordination of students with access arrangements for exams. The positive relationship with Exams remains and we have continued to strengthen the communication between the departments. Andy May and Hollie Bennett continue to be instrumental in aiding Alison Finch (Exams Manager) to develop the process of allocating alternative room candidates and staff invigilation. Sam Bains, Exams Assistant, continues to work with the team to ensure correct set up of smaller rooms.

There are 421 students this year having access arrangements compared to 398 last year (including illness and injury), which is an increase of 23 additional students. Numbers continue to rise and this is a trend that will continue and is attributed to the increasing number of examined units in vocational subjects, the requests for provision of “smaller rooms” due to mental health conditions and a positive increase of awareness of various learning difficulties and ASD.

Formal exams have commenced as usual for the last two years. The impact of the increasing numbers in applied subjects like Criminology is seeing the Learning Support department having considerable involvement in formal exams during December and January (and mock exam weeks), when we are very much involved with Independent Study, one to one support sessions and in-class support, so it is very difficult to release staff to invigilate exams. 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.

Face-to-face assessments were carried out until the March 2023 deadline for making applications for exam access arrangements. During the summer term, the assessor began the assessment process for YR1 students who have either been identified during the academic year at college or identified at school.

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 now have a confirmed diagnosis of a learning difficulty, or that they are in the process of getting a medical diagnosis, which could be due to the increase of awareness of learning difficulties/disabilities. 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.

This year the Exact online screening assessment has continued to be used. The advantage of this is that multiple students can access this at the same session, allowing us to assess more students than we would previously be able to do and put on a group session which is far more time efficient for both the assessor and the students. Providing the college's assessor is present during the assessment to validate the process, two separate scores recording the speed of processing (reading comprehension speed and handwriting speed) can be used in Part 2 of the Form 8. During the assessment another short assessment has been completed with the students, the Single Digit Modalities Test (SDMT), so another score for speed of processing can be documented. This test will have to be changed, however, as it is now considered unreliable, and alternative assessments are currently being considered.

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 changed to March 21<sup>st</sup> this year. This 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
- Modified papers

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
- Smaller room and a separate room owing to anxiety/ medical conditions
- Cerium overlay
- Fidget toys
- Ear defenders (without Bluetooth enabled)
- Braille transcript

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.

\*Please see table further down for academic year figures

## **LEARNING SUPPORT**

One to one learning support continues to be very successful. We offer 40 minute weekly support sessions as well as lunchtime drop in sessions during the week (Tuesday to Thursday)

There has been an increase in the number of students referred for support this year; we have offered support to 204 students; 103 students have received regular sessions at least once a week and we have also provided one-off sessions to assist with study/revision skills and time management and prioritising their workload. Attendance on the whole has been good but we are still needing to regularly remind students of their allocated sessions and drop-in availability. We regularly receive no response from students who have been referred by tutors for 1-1 support.

## **AREAS IN LEARNING SUPPORT**

The Study Centre (room 1.17) remains very busy and a few of the vulnerable students use the student area on a daily basis. This space has evolved into an additional social space that some of our students access between lessons.

We continue to use 1.17 and 3.11 which have been invaluable to the department and used for one-to-one support sessions. At lunchtimes we staff room G21 (Monday-Thursday) and G3 (Friday) to provide our vulnerable students with a quiet space to consume cold food and drinks.

## **INDEPENDENT STUDY**

Independent Study has resumed this year and continues to be in room 1.25 for first year groups and the allocated computer rows in the LRC for second year students. All first years (unless studying Core Maths) and second years have one timetabled session per week. An LSA is allocated to register and support each group in room 1.25.

## **LEARNING RESOURCES CENTRE**

As of 2022 all Covid-related restrictions have been removed from the LRC. It is now operating as it was pre-epidemic. This means that there are 108 computers, 60 seats in the group study area and 20 seats in the silent study area. All of these areas are heavily used. Resource use has also increased significantly, with a particular increase in the use of eBooks with more than 15,000 uses in the year. Behaviour has generally remained good with some exceptions. Pressure on social space within college has increased LRC usage significantly as students struggle to find a place to go in-between their timetabled lessons.

This year several competitions were held, the most recent being related to the Coronation of King Charles III. Others were a collaboration with Equality & Diversity, including a Christmas Language Quiz to identify phrases for Merry Christmas in several languages. Displays continue to be cycled according to what is happening with the current (early May) one relating to Mental Health Awareness Week.

Current stock inventory is being reviewed with several departments having removed stock that was outdated, unsuitable or in poor condition. This year part of the LRC budget has been allocated for departments so they can update/renew stock, either as eBooks or in physical form. This is likely to lead to a reduction in overall number of items but an improvement in the usefulness and modernity of the LRC stock. Students have also been asked for recommendations, particularly for fiction which has led to an increase in reading.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION (LRC)**

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

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

Wednesday – 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 supervised by the LRC Co-ordinator and Learning Support Team.

- Computer area – 108 pcs
- Quiet Study - 16 tables with 4 chairs at each
- Silent Study – 20 tables - we normally recommend 1 student per table
- Quiet reading area – 9 seats

### **RESOURCES (LRC)**

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

Books 15192  
DVD 1043  
Music CDs 486  
VLe Books 59



We currently subscribe to 41 periodicals and 8 online databases of a variety of resources with Jstor, Hodder Education Magazines (renamed from Phillip Allan Archive).

eBook usage has increased by around 30%. E-resources are accessed via links on Moodle or the Portal and some teaching departments also embed links onto their own pages. 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.

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

SUPPORT AREA	Figures for 22-23	Figures for 21-22	Figures for 20-21
ASSESSED EXAM ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS	57	105	178
CERUIM OVERLAY ASSESSMENT	9	8	9
EXACT SCREENING ASSESSMENT	129	30	-
ONE TO ONE SUPPORT	204*	145	119
SPECIAL EXAM ARRANGEMENTS	421 Including illness and injuries	398 Including illness and injuries	302 Including illness and injuries
FULL-TIME IN CLASS STUDENT SUPPORT	4	2	4

*\*Please note that this figure includes students who have been contacted and offered one to one sessions who have not engaged with support.*

## 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 2023/24 ACADEMIC YEAR**

- Ensure all student documents are uploaded to the portal prior to students enrolling, and that staff are aware of where to access the information
- To liaise with library team at Hereford College to share good practice
- Continue to work with Student Services as changes are made within their team, to ensure successful student transition to further FE or HE placement, and Wellbeing & Mental Health Officer to provide holistic support for students experiencing mental health challenges
- Explore further the use of Claro Software (speech to text software)
- Access Arrangement Co-ordinator to define a clear process and time frame for access arrangement assessments and documentation.
- To continue to obtain data from student feedback regarding support provision.

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 2023