

LEARNING SUPPORT ANNUAL REPORT 2023 - 2024

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
- with English as an additional language
- 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 2024/2025 academic year.

DEPARTMENT CHANGES

New staff 2023/2024:

Weni Agidee – Learning Support Assistant
Abby Taylor – Learning Support Assistant
Ruth Metcalf Smith – Learning Support Assistant
Tom Guise – Learning Support Assistant
Charlotte Bullock - Learning Support Assistant
Sacha Elsey - Exam Access Arrangements Assessor
Jayne Gould - Exam Access Arrangements Coordinator

Lynsey Ganderton continues 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 18 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 19 requests for a Placement directly from the Local Authority, with at least 3 further consultations anticipated. The Local Authority often consults 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.

In order to ensure a smooth transition between school and college, the Learning Support department plays a crucial role. Every student that applies 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 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 been 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 2024.

The annual transition event for those students needing that additional support will be taking place on Wednesday 26th June 2024. Email invitations will be sent out to the 59 students identified to date.

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.

MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

The numbers of students who suffer with anxiety/mental health issues continues to rise, and this has a significant impact on learning 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. Having a designated Safeguarding Officer in college has made the process for reporting concerns and getting advice clearer. The involvement of the Learning Support department within safeguarding is recognised by college and the Learning Support Manager continues to act as one of the four Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads.

EXAMINATIONS

Jayne Gould was appointed Exam Access Arrangement Co-ordinator in October 2023 and she takes responsibility for the coordination of access arrangements for exams. The positive relationship with Exams remains and we have continued to strengthen the communication between the departments. Andy May and Claudia Cole are instrumental in aiding Alison Finch (Exams Manager) to develop the process of allocating alternative rooms for candidates and staff invigilation. Sam Bains, Exams Assistant, continues to work with the team to ensure correct set up of smaller rooms.

There are 495 students this year having access arrangements compared to 421 last year (including illness and injury), which is a substantial increase. The number of students requiring support with exams continue to rise and this is a trend that will continue and can be partly 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.

Applied subjects continue to require significant involvement from the Learning Support department who have considerable involvement in formal exams and assessments throughout the year in addition to support provided during internal assessment weeks. Due to ongoing support required for high needs learners, providing support for students in exams and assessments has increased pressure on the department staffing resources.

Assistive Technology provision is being reviewed and discussions with other members of the MAT have been taking place to research and investigate potential ways in which this pressure can be reduced. The Exam Access Arrangements Coordinator and Exams Manager are also considering how to effectively use available staffing resources.

APPLYING FOR ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS FOR EXAMINATIONS

In addition to supporting students with their individual learning needs, a substantial part of the work of the Learning Support department is to conduct assessments for students who may need an application for exam access arrangements. Access Arrangements are pre-examination adjustments for students based on evidence of need and their normal way of working within college. Access Arrangements fall into two distinct categories: arrangements are delegated to centres, and arrangements that require prior JCQ awarding body approval.

Access Arrangements allow candidates/learners with special educational needs, disabilities, medical conditions, or temporary injuries to access exams/assessments without changing the demands of the assessment. For example, readers, scribes and modified question papers. These arrangements will differ for each student depending on their individual needs.

The upward trend in the number of students requiring assessment for exam access arrangements continues; this comprises two groups:

1. Students who have a record of approved exam access arrangements at their previous setting, who need to be reassessed due to previous assessments no longer being valid.
2. Students who have self-referred or been referred by their teachers who require access arrangements to be put into place.

The provision of exam access arrangements enables these students to access assessments without being disadvantaged by their learning needs. Teacher feedback is requested prior to assessments being conducted in order to establish the picture of need of the student's difficulties.

Sacha Elsey was appointed Exam Access Arrangements Assessor in October 2023 following the retirement of Sabine Gupta. In person assessments have been carried out up to the March deadline for submitting applications for exam access arrangements set by JCQ for the Summer 2024 exam series. Assessments of Year 1 students who are sitting exams in the next exam series are scheduled to take place during

the summer term. An increase in assessments being carried out this academic year has been possible due to having a full-time assessor within the department.

Vocational subjects with examined modules continue to contribute to the increase in the numbers of students being referred for assessment for exam access arrangements. Increasing awareness of specific learning difficulties is also leading to a rise in the number of students requiring assessment for exam access arrangements.

The assessment list continues to be staggered across the year, prioritising those students who have examined modules on vocational courses, and GCSE resit exams for assessment in the Autumn term, with students sitting exams in the Summer series being assessed during Spring term.

Under JCQ regulations for exam access arrangements, all assessments are required to be conducted by a qualified assessor with a Level 6 qualification who determines the appropriate assessments to be conducted. This year we continue to use the Exact online screening tool as part of the assessment process. Some assessments have been conducted with groups of students accessing it in the same session.

Those WSFC students who intend to apply for university, or HE courses, 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 must be applied for online by the JCQ deadlines and include:

- 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

The following centre delegated exam access arrangements can be put in place without making an on-line application:

- 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)
- Modified papers

These arrangements are subject to our existing exam policies and supporting evidence must be held on file for inspection purposes:

The JCQ requirements are reviewed and amended each year, so it is important that the assessments carried out meet the current criteria when submitting applications.

The need for supporting evidence from subject staff regarding usual way of working and picture of need continues to be a requirement for all applications for exam access arrangements. Requesting and collating the supporting evidence and overseeing the completion of the Form 8 for each student, as well as scheduling and conducting the assessments has meant additional demands on the time of the Exam Access Arrangements Coordinator and Assessor. A new system for booking assessments and sending out invitations to students has been trialed this year in order to increase attendance to assessments.

This year a Form 9 replaces the requirement to produce a note on file on headed paper for arrangements where a Form 8 is not applicable. This new form requires more in-depth information to be included than was previously needed and must outline the evidence of need and the arrangement(s) required for the candidate. The Exam Access Arrangement Coordinator is responsible for the process of completing the paperwork and submitting online applications where required.

*Please see table further down for academic year figures

LEARNING SUPPORT

One-to-one learning support continues to be offered to students who have an identified need. Learning Support Assistants provide regular timetabled support sessions in addition to a weekly lunchtime drop-in session. This provision is reduced slightly this year as a result of changes to the timetable structure. To combat the reduction in LSA time available we have offered shorter sessions to some students to ensure that as many people referred to us are offered some additional support.

Referrals for support are made to the Learning Support team by Pastoral Tutors, Teachers, Heads of Department, and Heads of Year, who are now requested to provide details of the individual areas of support required, and the need for support is also identified as part of the interview process. Occasionally students self-refer for additional support if they feel they would benefit from additional help.

Sessions are allocated based on priority of need; using information provided to us in student applications, diagnostic and medical reports, and summary assessment feedback.

Learning Support Assistants keep a record of attendance and the support provided at each session, individual learning plans are created, targets set, and feedback provided for EHCP reviews and Heads of Year meetings. LSAs liaise with teachers, parents and other college departments regarding student targets and any issues identified in sessions. They also work with the Learning Support Manager and Assistant Manager to update teachers regarding classroom adaptations.

In line with previous years, we have seen an increase in the number of students referred for support this year, with 218 students on the list for additional support; 159 students have been allocated regular sessions at least once a week, 33 students have been invited to attend the drop-in sessions, and we have also provided additional support to students within department workshops.

Attendance overall remains good, but as sessions do not appear on student timetables, many still require regular reminders of their allocated sessions and drop-in availability. We continue to struggle to engage many of the students referred for support by their tutors.

ADMISSION INTERVIEWS

All applicants declaring a learning support need or exam access arrangements on their application form are booked in for interview with Sara Payne, Emma Duell, or Jayne Gould. Interviews are conducted on the telephone or in person depending on individual student needs. We liaise with Helen Wright, Admissions Coordinator regarding interview bookings. Being involved in the interview process enables us to get to know prospective students and keep an accurate record of their support needs; this helps with planning resources for the next academic year.

PERSONAL EMERGENCY EVACUATION PLANS

During the Autumn term, Emma Duell took responsibility for overseeing the creation and implementation of Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) for students with a disability that may affect them in an emergency. This year we have identified 4 students requiring a PEEP.

Lift passes are now issued centrally by Tutorial Hub and the details recorded on a spreadsheet which is regularly reviewed to ensure we are aware of any students who may require assistance in an emergency/a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan.

In March 2024 several members of college staff, including members of the Learning Support team attended Evacuation Chair Training.

AREAS IN LEARNING SUPPORT

We continue to use rooms 1.17 and 3.11 which are vital to the department as quieter study areas for students and are used for one-to-one support sessions. 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 and is also used as a smaller exam room during external and internal exams and assessments. A small number of vulnerable students have been granted permission to use room 3.11 as a quiet space to study or 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. A Learning Support Assistant is allocated to register and support each group in room 1.25. The sessions are a valuable additional opportunity for LSAs to check in with students who are being supported by the department.

LEARNING RESOURCES CENTRE

There are 108 computers, 64 seats in the group study area and 19 seats in the silent study area. Usage of each of these areas for each timetable block has been monitored this academic year and the figures show that they are heavily used.

Resource use remains high, with an approximate 15% increase in the use of eBooks from last year. Behaviour in the LRC remains good and is monitored throughout the day by Learning Resource Centre staff and Learning Support Assistants, who are also on hand to provide support to students.

Pressure on social space within college continues to put pressure on the LRC. In some lessons students may struggle to find a place to study, especially when timetabled groups are booked in on the computer bays. We aim to limit class bookings in the computer bays to one group per session to limit impact on students seeking to study independently during their free periods. Some students continue to bring food and drink into the study areas despite reminders that it is not allowed.

This year several competitions were held in the LRC, including a reading challenge, Easter activities in conjunction with the Student Union, and a Christmas Quiz. Displays of resources and information are regularly updated to reflect national/international awareness days, celebrations, and specific points in the academic year, such as preparation for the transition to university and living away from home.

Current stock inventory is continually reviewed; outdated or damaged resources are removed to ensure the usefulness and modernity of the LRC stock. Students continue to be asked for their recommendations for new resources, with new stock displayed in the quiet reading area.

GENERAL INFORMATION (LRC)

LRC Opening Hours (Term time)

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

Wednesday – 8.30am - 4.10pm

The LRC is also staffed during some holidays to allow students to continue with revision/study.

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 (64 seats)
- Silent Study – 19 tables (1 student per table)
- Quiet reading area – 10 seats

RESOURCES (LRC)

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

Books 15259
DVD 1952
Music CDs 480
VLe Books 89

We currently subscribe to 41 periodicals and 8 online databases of a variety of resources with Jstor, Hodder Education Magazines.

We now subscribe to four subjects on the Massolit video lecture site (English Language, English Literature, Classics and Media Studies) and usage has increased by 170% compared to last year. The split is fairly even between the two English subjects and Classics, with Media Studies only being added in February 2024.

eBook usage continues to increase (up by approx 15%). We now have some eBooks that are in Epub format which can be translated into languages other than English, or read aloud which increases accessibility.

E-resources are accessed via links on Moodle or the Portal and some teaching departments also embed links onto their own pages.

We provide charging lockers for those students who want to bring in their own devices for use at college. These previously stored laptops for students to borrow and use in college. However, these have not been replaced following a decision by the IT team to take them out of action due to being old and outdated.

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 23-24	Figures for 22-23	Figures for 21-22	Figures for 20-21
ASSESSED EXAM ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS	85	57	105	178
CERIUM OVERLAY ASSESSMENT	36	9	8	9
EXACT SCREENING ASSESSMENT	185	129	30	-
ONE TO ONE SUPPORT	192*	204*	145	119
SPECIAL EXAM ARRANGEMENTS	495	421 Including illness and injuries	398 Including illness and injuries	302 Including illness and injuries
FULL-TIME IN CLASS STUDENT SUPPORT	5	4	2	4
PERSONAL EMERGENCY EVACUATION PLANS (PEEPS)	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 2024/25 ACADEMIC YEAR

- Continue to ensure that all relevant student information is uploaded to the portal prior to students enrolling, and that all staff are aware of where to access individual student and group information.
- To continue to liaise with the Learning Support and Library teams within the MAT to share good practice and resources.
- 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 assistive technology options and create a cost benefit analysis to ascertain if investment in assistive technology such as Docs Plus/Claro Software (speech to text software) would be a financially viable option to reduce staffing pressure and to ensure appropriate support is available for students in exams and assessments.
- Access Arrangement Co-ordinator to define a clear process and time frame for access arrangement assessments and documentation and to develop the tracking spreadsheet to ensure all student exam access arrangements are reviewed in time for their first external exams/assessments.
- To continue to obtain data regarding learning support provision via student feedback.
- Liaison with teaching departments regarding embedding adaptive teaching practices to support students with SpLD and disabilities, that will also benefit other students in their lessons.
- To develop a Disadvantaged strategy plan including current practices and targets for academic year 2024-25.

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 2024