

**EDUCATION & TRAINING  
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Education  
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Foundation

**J.P.Morgan**

# **LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANTS**

# **IN FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**Guidance for Leaders and Managers**

## Foreword from The Education Endowment Foundation

The Education Endowment Foundation's mission is to break the link between family income and educational achievement. For post-16 settings, this challenge is particularly great. The most recent figures reveal that, by age 19, the majority (53%) of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds will leave education without the GCSE grades they need for further study, a high-quality apprenticeship, or a decent, stable job. Through collaborations with organisations like ETF, we aim to improve the outcomes of disadvantaged 16-18 year-olds in the core subjects of English and maths.

This report is designed to provide practical, evidence-based guidance to support further education institutions in maximising the impact of Learning Support Assistants. It is based on evidence from the EEF's Teaching and Learning Toolkit on how best to deploy, train and support Teaching Assistants in schools. We've worked with the ETF, and practitioners from across the sector, to adapt the original recommendations for post-16 settings. The report offers five clear and actionable recommendations, with ideas and strategies for how these can be implemented.

Through practical resources like this report, the EEF aims to support post-16 settings to use evidence to achieve the maximum possible benefit for young people from low-income backgrounds. As part of our work in this space, with the financial support of the JPMorgan Chase Foundation, we have also committed over £2 million to the delivery and evaluation of high-potential projects, which will generate much-needed evidence to support post-16 practitioners. The EEF is always on the look-out for evidence-based programmes to evaluate, and encourage all those in the sector to get in touch to discuss your ideas for improving support for students re-sitting GCSE maths and English. Please contact us at [info@eefoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@eefoundation.org.uk).

We are delighted to have partnered with ETF to produce this guidance report. It will, I hope, support an evidence-informed approach to further education which creates great opportunities for all young people, regardless of their family background.



**Sir Kevan Collins**  
Chief Executive  
Education Endowment Foundation

## Foreword from The Education and Training Foundation

In the Further Education sector, with an array of different job roles and titles, the position of a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) is particularly difficult to pin down. With many different roles, responsibilities, job titles and settings in which they work, this crucial part of our teaching and learning infrastructure is one that is easy to both misunderstand and use ineffectively. Research undertaken by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) shows that in structured settings and when well trained and supported, LSAs (or staff with similar roles) can have a noticeable impact on student attainment. Research in the post-16 Further Education and Training sector for this report has seen how, when used well, LSAs are able to empower students, enhance learning and be a positive force in an education provider.

This document, the result of a partnership between the Education and Training Foundation and the Education Endowment Foundation, is an attempt to learn from the excellent research led by EEF in the schools sector and apply this learning to the post 16 education landscape. Unsurprisingly, many of the lessons learnt resonate across the sectors, as well as there being some interesting differences between this and the guidance and research from which it has developed.

We would like to thank the Education Endowment Foundation for working with us to develop this guidance which builds on their work for schools, allowing us to share important learning with leaders, teachers and most importantly learning support assistants themselves. We hope it will prove a valuable contribution in changing approaches and improving learning for students across the sector.



**Paul Kessell-Holland**  
Director of Insights  
Education and Training Foundation

# Introduction

**The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) has developed this guidance report in partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). It is to help leaders and managers in the Further Education (FE) and Training sector make evidence-informed decisions about how best to design the Learning Support Assistant (LSA) role, and to deploy and support LSAs to improve learner outcomes across their organisation, setting and context.**

This guidance builds on the substantial research undertaken by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the subsequent **'Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants'<sup>1</sup>** guidance report published in the context of schools-based education. The original guidance report drew predominantly on studies that feed into the **Teaching and Learning Toolkit<sup>2</sup>** produced by the EEF. As such, it was not a new study, but rather an accessible overview

of existing research with clear, actionable guidance. Although the evidence base is still developing around the use of Teaching Assistants in schools, there is an emerging picture about how best to deploy, train and support them to improve learning outcomes for pupils.

To supplement the EEF evidence and to generate useful guidance for the FE and Training sector, the ETF undertook a small-scale research project examining the

role of LSAs across the post-16 sector. Outcomes of that research underpin this guidance, resulting in five recommendations for leaders and managers in FE and Training. These recommendations highlight the need for careful planning when rethinking LSA roles within the FE and Training sector. There is no 'one size fits all' solution; providers will need to arrive at solutions that draw on the research and apply them appropriately within their own context.

*This report has been supported by the JPMorgan Chase Foundation, the contents and opinions in this paper are those of the authors alone and do not reflect the views of the JPMorgan Chase Foundation, JPMorgan Chase & Co, or any of its affiliates.*

**1** Sharples J, Webster R, Blatchford P (2018) 'Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants Guidance Report'

**2** <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit>

## Learner and learning support roles

Organisations across the complex and multi-layered FE and Training sector often take an individual approach to the management of support provision. This guidance report aims to bring some coherence to the **Learning Support Assistant** role. The recent ETF/FETN survey (September 2018) gathered initial data to explore the nature and purpose of the different types of learning support roles across the FE sector. It found there are numerous support roles, recording a total of 59 different job titles across 130 survey respondents.

Two distinct categories, 'Learning Support' and 'Learner Support' emerged, which can broadly be described as follows.

### Learning Support

Learning Support refers to general and specialist roles, providing group and/or individual support that assist learning and development in the classroom, workshop or community. This is based on the findings of the

'Staff in Learning Support Roles: Survey Report'<sup>3</sup> that 'all Learning Support Assistants participating in this survey work with learners in the classroom undertaking a variety of tasks.' The report also noted that Learning Support job titles include, but are not restricted to: Learning Support Assistants, Academic Support Worker, Additional Learning Support, Learning Support Worker, Maths Learning Facilitator and Specialist Support Assistance.

### Learner Support

Learner Support refers to roles providing support to individual learners 'outside the classroom' to help learners progress and achieve. This often includes but is not limited to: tracking and monitoring progress, identifying barriers to learning and signposting for additional learning support, academic support or welfare needs. Job titles in this category include but are not restricted to: Personal Tutor, Progress Coach, Progress Learning Coach, Tutorial Learning Mentor and Pastoral Tutor.

This guidance focuses on improving the impact of **Learning Support Assistants** (LSAs). LSAs undertake a range of tasks including but not limited to assisting with:

- directly supporting teachers in class with academic/vocational delivery;
- supporting individual learners to improve their maths and English;
- supporting individual learners with challenging behaviour in the classroom;
- supporting individual learners with special educational needs and disabilities;
- supporting learners with English as second language;
- monitoring individual learner's progress during lessons.

This guidance uses the term 'teacher' to encompass the variety of teaching roles within the FE and Training sector i.e. practitioner, trainer, tutor and other teaching professionals. The guidance uses the term 'LSA' to refer to the variety of **learning support** roles within the sector.

# Recommendations

**This guidance consists of five key recommendations for leadership teams to ensure the maximum impact of LSAs can be realised, to help improve and transform learning outcomes in their widest sense. The recommendations are:**

## Recommendation 1

Ensure an organisation-wide approach to the role, purpose and contribution of LSAs to best meet the diverse needs of your learners, setting and context.

## Recommendation 2

Ensure Learning Support Assistants are deployed in ways that complement the teaching practitioner, rather than replacing them.

## Recommendation 3

Ensure Learning Support Assistants are given training and support for their specific role, to work effectively with learners.

## Recommendation 4

Ensure Learning Support Assistants are empowered to enable learners to develop the skills to manage their own learning.

## Recommendation 5

Ensure teaching practitioners are trained and supported to work in partnership with Learning Support Assistants to enable all learners to progress.



# RECOMMENDATION 1

Ensure an organisation-wide approach to the role, purpose and contribution of LSAs to best meet the diverse needs of your learners, setting and context.

**For learners to gain maximum benefit from learning support provision, it is necessary to consider a whole organisational approach when designing the role and deciding how best to deploy learning support. Involving learning support, teaching, management and governing teams in these decisions contributes to developing a shared understanding of the purpose and identity of learning support staff across an organisation. Inevitably, change takes time, and we would recommend taking at least two terms to plan, develop and pilot strategies on a small scale at first, before rolling out new practices across the setting.**

## 1. What does the evidence say?

Evidence<sup>4</sup> suggests that LSAs can make an important contribution to learners' progress in the FE and Training sector. However, research<sup>5</sup> also shows that decisions about how LSAs are **deployed** can undermine the impact they have on improving learner outcomes and developing learner independence. Senior leadership teams need to make deployment decisions carefully, so as not to inadvertently undermine the significant investment they have already made in their learning support workforce. Encouragingly, research does

suggest that organisations can make relatively straightforward changes that enable LSAs to work more effectively in ways that can have a potentially transformative effect on learner outcomes and progression.

Addressing how **LSA roles are designed, understood, structured and deployed** is a whole organisational leadership issue. The level of strategic planning, management and implementation of a supportive policy for the deployment and continuous

development of LSAs makes the difference between good and poor practice. Leaders operating across the FE and Training sector should rigorously define the role of LSAs and consider their contribution in relation to the drive for whole-organisational improvement. Their role should be defined alongside the role of the teacher with the responsibility of high-quality teaching for all learners sitting first, and foremost, with teachers.

<sup>4</sup> Sanders, A (2017) Strand 2: Develop and deliver CPD for support staff to improve progress in maths and English

<sup>5</sup> Sharples J, Webster R, Blatchford P (2018) 'Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants Guidance Report'

## 2. What you need to consider when implementing this recommendation

### Building a shared understanding

The starting point is to build a **shared understanding** amongst all learning professionals (i.e. governors, managers, teachers, assessors, observers, LSAs and learners) that low-attaining learners and those with SEND will receive **high quality** teaching by the teacher. The evidence suggests that these learners are most disadvantaged by current practices such as the dominant 1:1 model as it:

- places undue responsibility on LSAs to support learners with the greatest needs, often without adequate training;
- diminishes contact between the teacher and learner/s, putting them at a further disadvantage by separating learners from whole group teaching;
- can split supported learners from group and peer work; a valuable source of learning for most learners; and
- can encourage a pattern of dependence on LSAs, undermining learners' independent thinking and skills development.

Such practices and behaviours can become institutionalised, often unintentionally, narrowing the potential for deploying LSAs in more effective ways. Leaders must ensure clear expectations, adequate resourcing and effective monitoring to enable the needs of all learners are addressed, first and foremost, through excellent teaching. The starting point is clarity of the LSA role, relative to that of the teachers.

### Structuring the Learning Support Assistant Role

It is important to think about how the role of the LSA is structured in your organisation and how it interacts with and complements the role of the teacher.

For example, if leaders and managers are to ensure LSAs are deployed in ways that complement the teacher and not replace them (**recommendation 2**), then clear expectations must be established so all involved understand the pedagogical role of LSAs in relation to teachers. This will lead to better decisions about deployment, training and development, time provided for joint planning and ways of working. If LSAs are to help learners to develop independent learning skills, behaviours and attitudes and manage their own learning (**recommendation 4**), then the role must be rigorously defined to include this, and appropriate professional development put in place to support the development of such skills, knowledge and confidence.

### Models of Deploying Learning Support Assistants

It is important to think about how LSAs are deployed in your organisation. Having clarity on the role and purpose of LSAs will enable better deployment decisions.

For example, if teaching staff are to be trained and supported to work in partnership with LSAs to support **all** learners to progress (**recommendation 5**), then all staff must value partnership working between teachers and LSAs. Deployment decisions can help or hinder the practical enablers such as time or sharing of key information (e.g. schemes of work, lesson plans, assessment criteria, access to key curriculum information etc) which need to be in place.

The way LSAs are deployed (e.g. centrally, within curriculum areas or a bit of both etc.) will impact on what is possible on the ground. Such decisions will enable or hinder essential activities such as joint planning and review, joint CPD with teachers, critical reflection etc. This may mean rethinking how best to employ LSAs, who are often on sessional or part-time contracts, so that time to work with teachers to plan, review and work together becomes the norm. Or it may involve rethinking how LSA roles are structured and managed within the organisation.



## Points for managers and leaders to consider

### How confident are you that;

- you know what you want your learning support workforce/ structure to achieve?
- you know what success looks like when deploying your learning support workforce effectively?
- you are aware of, and can address the current challenges in your organisation in providing effective support?
- you have effective methods in place to quality assure learning support such as collecting the views of learners, learning support staff and teachers on the impact and value of the learning support being experienced?
- you have invested in training managers/coordinators of learning support teams to identify the most appropriate model/s for effective deployment of support staff?
- you have explored with such teams how best to maximise and assess the impact of learning support staff?
- support, teaching and management staff have a clearly defined and understood delineation of the role of the LSA?
- you and your team's decisions about LSAs are informed by the latest evidence about effective LSA deployment and development?
- support, teaching and management staff within your organisation understand the responsibilities of the LSA in relation to the teacher?
- organisational processes, systems and resources enable your teachers and LSAs to work together to plan for and review sessions?
- LSAs are not working solely with learners with SEND?



# RECOMMENDATION 2

Ensure Learning Support Assistants are deployed in ways that complement the teaching practitioner, rather than replacing them.

**LSAs are regularly deployed to work with learners who struggle the most, but these young people are often the ones who need teachers the most. An LSA is not a replacement for a teacher. According to the SEND code of practice<sup>6</sup> the responsibility for teaching, learning and assessment sits with teachers, and teachers should plan and teach sessions, so that they maximise the time they spend working directly with low-attaining learners and those with SEND. It is the teacher's responsibility to design and differentiate suitable tasks and develop learning materials for all learners.**

If LSAs do have a direct instructional role it is important they supplement the work of the teacher, and not replace them. The expectation is that the needs of all learners are addressed, first and foremost, through high-quality teaching and leaders and managers develop effective teams of teachers and LSAs who understand their complementary roles.

## 1. What does the evidence say?

LSAs need to be fully prepared for their role in the classroom, community or workplace and there are two key elements essential to enabling this. Firstly, teachers and LSAs need to understand the nature and responsibilities of their individual roles within this collaboration. Secondly, organisations need to provide time for LSAs and teachers to meet outside session time for planning purposes.

Natspec<sup>7</sup> highlighted that LSAs are not an adequate substitute for high quality teacher input. Such practices diminish the amount of contact between the teacher and learners with SEND, putting them at a further disadvantage by separating them from whole group teaching and valuable group work. Teachers and LSAs need to work in partnership to ensure that teachers are free to work directly with those learners most in need of their attention and input.

The value of a shared understanding and joint planning was identified

by Natspec from an inspection report for Beaumont College, an independent specialist college, judged outstanding in December 2009, which stated that *"Rigorous transdisciplinary assessment processes successfully inform the detailed person-centred learning plans.... Teachers provide very clear guidance for learning support workers and direct their work well."* Opportunities for both teachers and LSAs to engage in shared professional development programmes, was also identified as an activity that would enhance the effectiveness of the support team.

The findings by Natspec are further supported by a TTA funded teacher research project<sup>8</sup> carried out by Barbara Lund (Bispham High School Arts College, Blackpool). Her research found collaboration between the teacher and the LSA ensured that their different areas of expertise were used effectively. This proved particularly important in supporting each other when working

with students with challenging behaviour. Lund also noted effective collaboration depended on the teacher and the LSA overcoming the differences each perceived about the other's role and responsibilities, suggesting that a certain lack of clarity still exists in some quarters.

Lund also found during her research that, *"The LSAs were frustrated because they felt, and the teachers agreed, that LSAs could be more effective if time was available for joint planning with teachers"*. If insufficient time is allocated to enabling teachers and LSAs to come together for planning and feedback, the lack of communication makes it difficult for LSAs to prepare effectively. Subsequently this means that they may not know what content will be covered, what is expected in terms of learning, and what appropriate feedback should look and sound like. Consequently, learners do not receive the high-quality teaching that they are entitled to.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

<sup>7</sup> Natspec 'Enhancement of Learning Support' 2010 (page 35)

<sup>8</sup> The Teacher-Learning Support Assistant Role ([www.teach-tta.gov.uk](http://www.teach-tta.gov.uk), publication number 147/8-00)

## 2. What you need to consider when implementing this recommendation

If LSAs undertake a direct instructional role it is important to ensure they supplement, rather than replace, the teacher. The 'separation effects' can be mitigated by ensuring that learners who struggle most have no less time with the teacher than others. Rather than deploy LSAs in ways that replace the teacher, they can be used to enable teachers to work more with lower-attaining pupils and those with SEND.

Breaking away from a model of deployment where LSAs are assigned to specific learners for long periods requires more strategic approaches to 'classroom' organisation, as well as changes in attitudes and expectations.

Teachers need to scrutinise how they can make LSAs a more visible part of teaching during their whole-group delivery, for example by asking them to share learning outcomes with the whole group, or to demonstrate equipment or processes. LSAs are then more likely to be perceived as a support for all, rather than a few.

Where LSAs work with learners individually or in groups, it is essential they develop the skills to support learning, consistent with the teachers' intentions. This can include developing strategies where LSAs are encouraged to work with the rest of the group whilst teachers support those with SEND for a session. It could also include

LSAs undertaking learner related administrative duties to enable more teacher/learner contact. Where LSAs possess an appropriate degree of training, and have the necessary understanding, teachers may also wish them to participate in assessing skills and recording against targets.

During planning teachers can ensure LSAs have the essential 'need to knows' for that lesson i.e.:

- concepts, facts, information being taught;
- skills to be learned, applied, practised or extended;
- intended learning outcomes; and
- expected/required feedback.

## Points for leaders and managers to consider

### How confident are you that;

- all low attaining and SEND learners receive the appropriate level of teacher attention and input to help each individual to progress?
- your teachers know whether the type of session requires an LSA to be present?
- LSAs are used to best effect during each session, and are not relied on to sit with allocated learners to the detriment of those individuals' learning?
- LSAs and teachers understand the nature and responsibilities of their individual roles within this collaborative partnership?
- teachers and LSAs have the time to plan and communicate to support the learning of learners in the classroom, community or workplace?
- teachers have the confidence and abilities to plan sessions that will ensure all learners receive high-quality teaching and to make the best use of what the LSAs can provide?



# RECOMMENDATION 3

Ensure Learning Support Assistants are given training and support for their specific role, to work effectively with learners.

**FE and Training organisations should provide sufficient training for LSAs to ensure they are equipped with the essential ‘need to knows’ such as questioning techniques, learner self-scaffolding, and the organisation’s relevant policies and procedures. This can be through, for example, effective induction, in-house training and development or by providing access to specialist skills courses such as understanding dyslexia, sign language or managing challenging behaviour.**

## 1. What does the evidence say?

Ongoing training and development are essential if LSAs are to be confident in their role and well-prepared for the tasks they are required to undertake<sup>9</sup>. In the FE and Training sector where it is common to have a dual specialism (vocational/ subject and pedagogical), it is important that LSAs receive appropriate pedagogical training and specialist training for their specific role (e.g. dyslexia, sign language etc) and at times subject-specific training (e.g. English and maths.) For example, if a specific pedagogy is being used such as formative assessment or direct instruction, LSAs should be trained so they understand the principles of the approaches and the techniques required to apply it. They can then support the learners they are working with, but this must be appropriate to their role as an LSA (**recommendation 3**), and in line with how the role has been designed to meet the diverse needs of your learners, setting and context (**recommendation 1**).

One of the key findings from the Natspec Report<sup>10</sup> ‘Enhancement of Learning Support’ (page 34) was that CPD for LSAs does not always include enough emphasis on how to support teaching and learning. It highlighted the need for specialist training and an understanding of the impact of specific disabilities on learning. Furthermore, where training was provided it was often focussed on compliance rather than the specialist training and support that LSAs valued, suggesting that LSAs are not consulted on CPD. As one support staff member commented *“I would like more specialist training in areas of behaviour issues and health conditions/diagnosis that could impact on learning and how to support the learner most effectively”*.

Natspec identified one of the biggest barriers to development was time, with organisations often citing lack of time available. One local authority provider stated, referring to some Foundation Online Training which was being provided

for LSAs, *“We provide training for free, and even then, providers won’t always release them. They say they are short staffed, so they won’t let them come. Take this course, we haven’t got as many people seconded to it as we would like. The problem is, they haven’t got anyone to take their place if they let LSAs come, so they can’t release them even when we pay.”* This challenge was also identified by Angela Sanders<sup>11</sup> who noted respondents indicated that it is a challenge to release LSAs to attend training events. She proposed that flexible and innovative approaches to CPD should be explored. Alongside this, Sanders concluded that the learning support role has changed significantly over recent years and that it is even more imperative that training opportunities should be made available to support LSAs in their roles.

The EEF guidance report ‘**Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants**’<sup>12</sup> suggests that positive effects on learning are only observed

<sup>9</sup> Sharples J, Webster R, Blatchford P (2018) ‘Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants Guidance Report’

<sup>10</sup> O’Brien A, O’Brien K (2010) ‘Enhancement of Learning Support: the training and development needs of learning support assistants

<sup>11</sup> Sanders, A (2017) Strand 2: Develop and deliver CPD for support staff to improve progress in maths and English

<sup>12</sup> <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/making-best-use-of-teaching-assistants>

when Teaching Assistants work in structured settings with high-quality support and training, and in partnership with teachers. When these practitioners are used in more informal, unsupported

instructional roles, little or no impact on learner outcomes can be seen. Organisations could undertake a skills audit to collect details of their LSAs' qualifications, certifications, training, experience, specialisms

and talents. This would help to identify skills gaps, provide useful and relevant CPD opportunities as well as understand and deploy LSAs according to their strengths and expertise.

## 2. What you need to consider when implementing this recommendation

Do review your induction process for LSAs with existing learning support staff (and teachers.) Induction is a valuable opportunity to ensure that LSAs (and teachers) gain a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities, and to learn about the organisation's policies and procedures relevant to their role. To increase the impact of induction on your new LSAs' confidence and practice, learn from your current LSAs by asking them what helped and what hindered them when they first started.

Ensure systems are in place to help LSAs to reflect on their practice and identify areas for professional development through a structured appraisal process and create opportunities for them to discuss how they can improve their practice in a safe environment with others in their team. Make sure you are aware of the skills gaps and training needs of your LSAs. A skills audit to collect details of qualifications, certifications, training, experience, specialisms and talents can help with effective deployment, and can also help to discover skills gaps and identify appropriate CPD opportunities. Learning walks

can also contribute to identifying where training needs exist, as well as regular reviews with LSAs themselves.

Explore flexible and innovative approaches to CPD including online self-study modules, cascade modules, facilitated professional discussions, professional exchange networks, webinars, mentoring, work shadowing and buddy schemes, together with action research and team quality improvement projects. In addition, some LSAs have suggested that the use of online resources providing examples of effective practice would be useful.

## Points for managers and leaders to consider

### How confident are you that;

- LSAs receive appropriate, meaningful and role specific induction and opportunities for self-evaluation through a structured appraisal process?
- LSAs can access professional development opportunities which develop their pedagogical abilities as well as their ability to develop learners' independent learning skills and their ability/ capacity to manage their own learning?
- LSAs can access specialist professional development opportunities which develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in specific areas such as dyslexia, autism, challenging learner behaviours etc
- LSAs have access to a range of flexible CPD opportunities to meet individual training needs that negate barriers such as lack of time or staff shortages?
- LSAs are consulted on the type of CPD that would support them in their roles?
- you are aware of your support teams' skillset both individually and collectively, and this information is used to good effect when providing opportunities for relevant CPD?



# RECOMMENDATION 4

Ensure Learning Support Assistants are empowered to enable learners to develop the skills to manage their own learning.



**The variety of contexts LSAs work in within the FE and Training sector is diverse and complex, but research is clear that one of the areas LSAs can have a powerful impact on is helping learners to manage their own learning and develop independent learning skills. The gains can be both within their immediate session and longer term across their programme of study.**

## 1. What does the evidence say?

There is a growing evidence base<sup>13</sup> which states that the dominant model of allocating constant learning support to individual learners can be well-intentioned but unhelpful. Some learners can become dependent on 1:1 support<sup>14</sup> and feel they cannot manage without it. Others may rely on their LSA to mediate everything coming from the teacher and become dependent on the help from the LSA, rather than developing their own learning and independence skills. Cleveland and Redcar's **research**<sup>15</sup> highlights that learners' prior school experiences of learning support had often unwittingly encouraged learners to rely on LSAs to provide answers to 'classroom' tasks. Such expectations can be hard to change.

In contrast, other research<sup>16</sup> has shown that some FE learners do not like the practice of having LSAs allocated to them without discussion and can

feel powerless to challenge this "support", particularly if it was in response to what their parents/primary carers wanted. Learners can, in such situations, feel stigmatised and singled out. Both scenarios compromise learner independence and can lead to lower learning outcomes. By working in silo, teachers and LSAs can unintentionally undermine learners' independent learning skills, motivation and self-esteem without being aware they are doing so.

Research<sup>17</sup> suggests that improving the nature and quality of LSAs' conversations with learners can support the development of independent learning skills, which are associated with improved learning outcomes. Train and support LSAs to avoid prioritising task completion. Instead support them to help learners develop ownership of tasks by asking open questions and encouraging learners

to ask better questions that help them monitor and evaluate their own learning. Enable LSAs, through ongoing training, development and support from the teacher, to use evidence-informed strategies to help learners manage their own learning and develop independent learning skills.

Using such strategies to develop learners' self-regulation abilities can help learners to manage their own learning and develop independent learning skills and dispositions. The EEF provide a useful definition for self-regulated learning, breaking it down into three essential components.

- **Cognition** - the mental process involved in knowing, understanding, and learning.
- **Metacognition** - often defined as 'learning to learn.'
- **Motivation** - willingness to engage our metacognitive and cognitive skills.

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- 13** Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., Russell, A. & Webster, R. 2003-2009. 'The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) Project'
- 14** An Investigation into the Roles of Learning Support Workers in the Learning and Skills Sector, LSRC, 2006
- 15** McPartland C. (2018) "Synergy in Learning, Teachers and Student Support Assistants Working Together to Promote Learner Metacognition in Post-Compulsory Education", Teaching in Lifelong Learning.
- 16** Strand 2 Develop and deliver CPD for support staff to improve maths and English (ETF, 2017)
- 17** Radford, J., Bosanquet, P., Webster, R. and Blatchford, P. (2015) Scaffolding learning for independence; clarifying teacher and TA roles for children with SEN, Learning and Instruction, 36: 1-10

The **EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit**<sup>18</sup> concludes although most studies have examined the impact of metacognitive and self-regulation strategies on English or maths, there is some evidence from other subject areas, such as science, that suggests that the approach is likely to be widely applicable. The Education and Training Foundation's **Assessment for Learning Effective**

**Practice Guidelines**<sup>19</sup> (EPGs) also point to the importance of safeguarding learners' self-confidence and independence in learning by identifying capability and strengths, and importantly providing scaffolded guidance on next steps. Additionally, the guidelines advocate allocating sufficient time in sessions for learners to record and reflect on the purpose and personal

implications of their learning goals; monitor and evaluate their own progress and to seek help when needed. Importantly it recommends practitioners (both teachers and learning support professionals) allocate time to review and validate these. Utilising LSAs in this way could have solid gains.

## 2. What you need to consider when implementing this recommendation

**To ensure LSAs are empowered to enable learners to develop independent learning skills and the ability/ capacity to manage their own learning, it is essential to:**

- consider how best to train, support and quality assure learning support staff, so they develop their professional judgement to confidently adopt and adapt teaching strategies that encourage independent learning i.e.:
  - *avoiding prioritising task completion and instead concentrate on helping learners develop ownership of tasks;*
  - *giving learners the least amount of help first; allowing sufficient wait time, so learners can respond to a question or attempt the stage of a task independently;*
  - *intervening appropriately only when learners demonstrate they are unable to proceed;*
- *using open questions to encourage task ownership;*
- *developing skills such as self-scaffolding and supporting learners to ask themselves better questions that help them get better at managing their own learning; and*
- *avoiding over-prompting and spoon feeding.*
- provide training and ongoing support for LSAs to explore what self-regulation is, and how it translates into 'classroom' practice;
- discuss how LSAs can contextualise learning skills to the session and goals that learners are working towards;
- provide feedback to LSAs so they can identify which of their practices and behaviours support and don't inhibit learners' learning;
- provide time and space for teachers and LSAs to work together to plan, devise, test, review and adapt strategies to support learning; set targets and review learning goals for learners; and
- identify ways in which teachers can benefit from the important role LSAs can have in engaging and motivating learners, particularly in maths and English.

<sup>18</sup> <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-to>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf2568>

## Points for managers and leaders to consider

### How confident are you that;

- LSAs are equipped with the skills to contextualise concepts to learners' learning goals, encouraging and enabling learner independence?
- LSAs and teachers collaborate effectively to develop learning strategies and tasks that enable all learners to develop independent learning skills, behaviours and attitudes and manage their own learning?
- LSAs have the skills to engage in effective learning conversations and enable learner independence through relevant questioning techniques?
- LSAs have the skills to motivate and encourage learners to develop behaviours and attitudes that enable them to work independently?
- LSAs have the time and the skills to reflect on their practice and how it impacts on learner's independence and skills development?
- structures are in place to support teachers and LSAs to review and plan for sessions that enhance all learners' potential to work independently?



# RECOMMENDATION 5

Ensure teaching practitioners are trained and supported to work in partnership with Learning Support Assistants to enable all learners to progress.

**To have maximum impact teachers must work in partnership with LSAs, developing a strong working relationship for the benefit of all learners. If not, both parties can unintentionally undermine the very independent learning habits, dispositions and strategies they are striving to develop amongst their learners. Because the responsibility for teaching all learners is the teachers, it is important leaders and managers ensure that teaching staff are fully trained and supported in how best to work in partnership with LSAs. Teachers need to be confident in planning and directing the activities of LSAs in the classroom, workshop or community, as well as considering their views.**

## 1. What does the evidence say?

Very few teachers have had training or support to manage and direct the activities of the LSAs they are working with. Teachers can be unclear of what the intended function of an LSA is and what constitutes effective practice in the classroom, workshop or community. Consequently, teachers can leave LSAs to work in an unplanned and unstructured way with the neediest learners while they concentrate on the other learners, an approach that is often reinforced by funding formula or the prevalent 1:1 model of support.

Teachers need to make sure LSAs do not go into lessons 'blind' as this makes it difficult for them to be effective. Leaders and managers need to ensure teachers have time to communicate with the LSAs so

that they know what content will be covered, what is expected in terms of learning, and what appropriate feedback should look and sound like, and for whom. A range of evidence, including but not limited to Sanders's, Redcar and Cleveland's report and our survey, all reiterate the need for teachers to develop the skills and confidence to effectively direct the activities of LSAs working in their classrooms, workshops or community, so that they can make the best use of the skills of the support staff working with them.

A review of 2016 outstanding OFSTED inspection reports highlighted several emerging themes in relation to using learning support effectively to address challenges of new maths and English policies, including

classroom relationships, which is also applicable to other disciplines. Themes included the need for:

- a real sense of teamwork between teachers and LSAs;
- time to communicate, so that teachers can ensure that LSAs understand the lesson plans and how they relate to the individual learning goals of the learners that they are supporting;
- teachers need to listen to feedback from LSAs about how well learners are understanding what is being taught and where there are barriers to be overcome; and
- clear feedback to learners about how they are progressing, to help them take more responsibility for their own learning.

## 2. What you need to consider when implementing this recommendation

Leaders and managers need to train and support teachers; building their knowledge, skills and confidence in effectively directing the activities of LSAs. Teachers need to:

- understand how to work with LSAs effectively;
- effectively apply evidence-based strategies for working with LSAs to their own context; and
- understand how their working partnership with LSAs impacts on their learners.

To support this, it is important to ensure recommendations 1 and 2 are in place and to ensure that teachers can:

- (co)-design learning sequences and tasks in which LSAs are deployed strategically, to maximise the time teachers spend with learners who need their support the most;
- explain specific pedagogies being used so LSAs understand what they can do to support the activity and the intended learning outcomes for the session appropriate to their role;

- recognise, value and support LSAs to:
  - *persist with scaffolding learners' learning and encouraging independent learning skills; and*
  - *intervene appropriately only when learners demonstrate they are unable to proceed in a task.*

For some training run joint training for teachers and learning support staff, to help develop skills and more effective partnerships for the benefit of all learners.

## Points for managers and leaders to consider

### How confident are you that;

- teachers' induction process includes guidance on the nature and purpose of the LSA role?
- teachers have received appropriate training and ongoing development on how best to work with LSAs, so they are an integral part of their sessions?
- teachers can differentiate their teaching to meet the needs of the learners in their classroom, including those with special educational needs and disabilities?
- teachers understand the different strategies and accompanying behaviours that LSAs can use such as those associated with helping learners develop their own learning?
- teachers can recognise and provide feedback on helpful and unhelpful practices to LSAs they are working with?
- teachers regularly explain the essential 'need to knows' for the session to the LSAs they are working with?
- LSAs have access to the content that will be covered, the expected learning outcomes for the learner(s) they support, and what sort of feedback would be appropriate?
- teachers value and act on the feedback from LSAs about how well learners are understanding what is being taught and where there are barriers to be overcome?
- teachers listen to learners and LSAs as they work to improve practice?
- teachers and learning support staff have time to work together to plan and review collaboratively?
- processes exist and work well to gather learners' views of the support they receive, and collect their ideas about how you can best support them?

# Further reading

Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., Russell, A. & Webster, R. 2003-2009. 'The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) Project'

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McPartland, C (ETF, 2018) Synergy in learning: tutors and student support assistants (SSAs) working together to promote learner self-assessment

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O'Brien A, O'Brien K (2010) 'Enhancement of Learning Support: the training and development needs of learning support assistants

Radford, J., Bosanquet, P., Webster, R. and Blatchford, P. (2015) Scaffolding learning for independence; clarifying teacher and TA roles for children with SEN, *Learning and Instruction*, 36: 1-10

Sanders, A (2017) Strand 2: Develop and deliver CPD for support staff to improve progress in maths and English

Sharples J, Webster R, Blatchford P (2018) 'Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants Guidance Report'

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Wootton, S. (2018) Learning Support Assistant Project Survey Report, EEF/ETF



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