

## Section 2 Learner Support Evaluation Report (Jane Hill)

### 1. *Aspire* Aims and Objectives

- Create a physical centre in the heart of the campus to provide fulltime and part-time professional learners with specific learner support for dyslexia, independent study and numeracy skills.
- Provision of effective numeracy, study skills and dyslexia support, including IT based resource:
  - Increase number of disabled students (and diagnosed on course).
  - Increase in 1:1 support for students.
  - Achievement for disabled students relative to non disabled students.
  - Increasing student satisfaction with Learner Support.
  - Extend the resource base and activities of the maths support to enable it to reach all students in the natural and social sciences disciplines.
  - Increase number of students accessing general study skills support.
  - Introduce IT resources to complement the tutor support.

### 2. Evaluation of Achievement

***Objective: Create a physical centre in the heart of the campus to provide fulltime and part-time professional learners with specific learner support for dyslexia, independent study and numeracy skills***

Prior to the *Aspire* project the Learner Support Team was located in the library and facilities were very limited with the 3 tutors sharing an office and only one room was available for the delivery of 1:1 supported sessions. The office was located adjacent to the open computer access area which did not allow for discreet access to the services. Some of the administration was undertaken by Registry situated in the main building with other administration aspects undertaken by the Learner Support Tutors.

Moving to the *Aspire* Centre has transformed the image and professionalism of the Learner Support Team enabling the team to develop and expand services. Feedback was very positive from a survey in June 2007<sup>1</sup> when disabled students using the service were consulted. The report concluded 'There is unanimous appreciation of the efforts made by the Learner Support Team in welcoming, encouraging and supporting learners to overcome their difficulties particularly on a 1:1 basis but also in groups'. Students also indicated that the new facilities were a major improvement which had encouraged them to use the service therefore overcoming a perceived barrier of lack of privacy.

Together with the appointment of a fulltime administrator, the Learner Support Team has been able to provide a 'one stop' shop for students with disabilities in terms of screening tests, diagnostic assessment, study needs assessments, maths support and support in applying to the Disabled Students' Allowance. (This is first time that dyslexia, numeracy and study skills support had been located in one building). In the *Aspire* Centre each of the four tutors has an individual room resulting in the provision of a discreet but accessible service.

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<sup>1</sup> Learner Support Survey June 2007

**Objective: Increase number of disabled students (and diagnosed on course)**

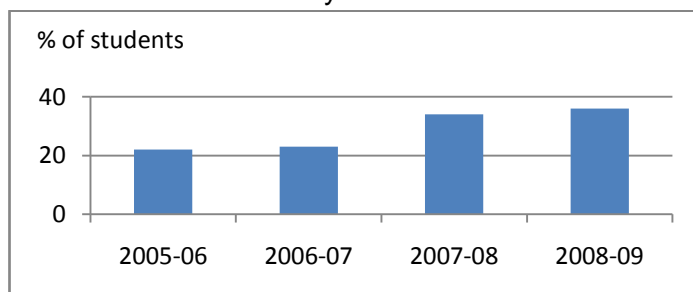
**Performance Data**

	<b>Actual 05/06</b>	<b>Actual 06/07</b>	<b>Actual 07/08</b>	<b>Actual 08/09</b>
Numbers undergraduate students with a disability including dyslexia	222	241	267	308
Number of students diagnosed with dyslexia while studying on their course	16	29	37	39
% of total students with dyslexia who have been identified as a result of screening	22%	23%	34%	36%

Between 05/06 and 08/09 there has been a 39% increase in students disclosing a disability. This figure has been in line with the increased intake of undergraduates over this period but the new facilities have enabled Learner Support to meet the demands of increased support requirements.

Prior to starting their course at Harper Adams, students are invited to disclose if they think they may have dyslexia and are offered a dyslexia screening test on arrival. During induction all students undergo a dyslexia self assessment questionnaire and selected students are offered a further screening test. In addition, students often self refer or are referred by a tutor for a screening test. The success of this screening is evident as there has been a 14% increase in students being identified at some point on their course since 05/06 as outlined in Graph 1 below.

Graph 1: % of total students with dyslexia who have been identified during their course



**Objective: Increase in 1:1 supported study skills sessions for students**

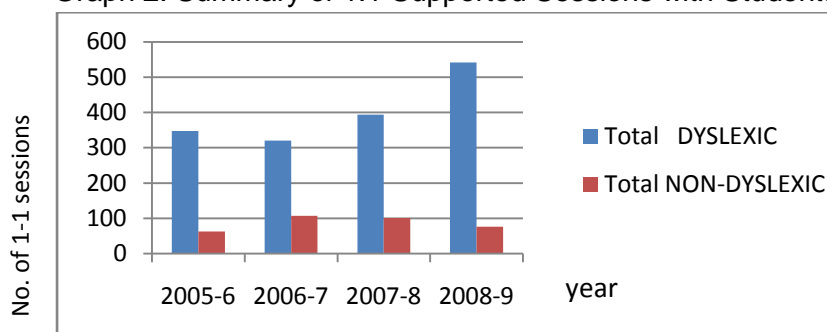
Students with dyslexia are eligible to receive 1:1 study skills support to help develop strategies to support their learning and UK students receive funding for this support through the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). The sessions are 50 minute slots and all the tutors have dyslexia teaching qualifications. Other students can also access 1:1 study skills support but the majority of the sessions undertaken in the *Aspire* Centre are with students with dyslexia.

### Performance Data

	Actual 05/06	Actual 06/07	Actual 07/08	Actual 08/09
Total numbers of 1:1 supported sessions undertaken	411	428	495	618
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of 1:1 sessions undertaken with dyslexic students</li> <li>• % of 1:1 sessions undertaken with students with no disabilities</li> </ul>	85%	75%	80%	88%
	15%	25%	20%	12%

Graph 2 below outlines the increase in 1:1 supported students over the past 4 academic years. Overall, there has been a 47% increase in 1:1 supported sessions.

Graph 2: Summary of 1:1 Supported Sessions with Students



In 08/09 there was a small reduction in students without a disability coming for 1:1 support. One explanation may be that overseas students in previous years who came for 1:1 support are now being supported by the English Language Team also located in the *Aspire* centre. There has been a steady increase in dyslexic students coming for 1:1 study skills sessions.

In 05/06, 64% of students with dyslexia who attended sessions attended less than 5 sessions/year, however, by 2009 this figure has reduced to 47% with a corresponding increase in students attending more than 5 sessions. This would indicate that dyslexic students have found the service beneficial. Students attending these sessions have an individual learning plan drawn up as part of the student's strategies to manage their dyslexia in HE.

The majority of students attending the 1:1 sessions in 08/09 were first year students (41%) with the numbers decreasing to 16% in final year indicating that students have developed strategies to enable them to become more independent in their learning.

#### **Objective: Achievement for disabled students relative to non disabled students**

In 2005, data indicated that honours degree students with disabilities achieved at the same level as other students in terms of progression and final award. However, there was a difference in achievement of disabled students in FdSc programmes. This analysis was undertaken manually and work is now underway to enable this data to be produced annually in a report format from the SITS system.

**Objective: Increasing student satisfaction with Learner Support**

**Performance Data**

	<b>Actual 05/06</b>	<b>Actual 06/07</b>	<b>Actual 07/08</b>	<b>Actual 08/09</b>
Student satisfaction with learner support <sup>2</sup>	70%	73%	72%	75.7%

Student satisfaction with the Learner Support service based on annual course monitoring feedback indicates that there has been around 6% increase from 05/06 to 08/09 in excellent or above average ratings. The Learner Support Survey in April 2005<sup>3</sup> highlighted concerns of students regarding the location of the Learner Support Team in the Library. Students felt that the location beside the open access computer area did not encourage students to use the services who would like a more confidential environment. However, in the Learner Support Survey June 2007<sup>4</sup>, students indicated that this was no longer an issue and they were very positive about the discreet but accessible service now available in the *Aspire* Centre. Students also indicated that they appreciated a central booking system via the Learner Support Administrator which was an issue raised in April 2005 when students had to book appointments via a Learner Support Tutor in between their sessions with students.

**Objective: Extend the resource base and activities of the maths support to enable it to reach all students in the natural and social sciences disciplines.**

A series of mathematics and statistics support leaflets have been produced and made available in the *Aspire* Centre over the span of the *Aspire* CELT which have proved very popular with students from all disciplines. Support for students on courses other than engineering has expanded to include topics covering maths, statistics, accounting and project support. This support has been provided via group tutorial sessions and on a 1:1 basis.

**Objective: Increase number of students accessing general study skills support**

In addition to the 1:1 supported sessions, study skills support has been provided to all students via:

- Resources on Moodle
- Paper based resources in the foyer of the *Aspire* Centre
- Group Workshops (in the first term these workshops are linked with the Academic Professional Development Module). The workshops are held at lunchtime and are 'drop in'.

The workshops cover topics ranging from report writing, referencing to exam and revision techniques.

**Performance Data**

	<b>Actual 05/06</b>	<b>Actual 06/07</b>	<b>Actual 07/08</b>	<b>Actual 08/09</b>
Number of study skills workshops	22	20	18	16
Number of students attending these study skills workshops	61	52*	77	74

\*in addition 9 in-class workshops were also held at the request of Senior Tutors

<sup>2</sup> Based on excellent and above average ratings from Annual Course Monitoring

<sup>3</sup> Learner Support Survey April 2005

<sup>4</sup> Learner Support Survey June 2007

Since 05/06 there has been a 21% increase in students accessing the workshops. In 07/08 there were a significant number of mature 1<sup>st</sup> year students attending the workshops. Some students do attend more than one workshop but this is not always the case. Evaluation sheets indicate that students have found the informal and practical nature of these sessions beneficial. In-class sessions have also been provided at the request of Senior Tutors and students have also booked small group appointments.

### ***Introduce IT resources to complement the tutor support***

Accessibility Software (MindGenius – a mind mapping tool and TextHelp Read and Write – a screen reader) has been installed on all student computers across campus. A leaflet has been produced outlining the benefits of the software and how students can access the programmes. All Learner Support staff have been trained on accessibility software.

Six case studies have also been produced. The case studies have focused on how students use accessibility software as support strategies. Students interviewed for the case studies made the following comments:

- 'I use mind mapping software to help jog my memory. .... I use inspiration for the majority of my assignments.'
- 'I have always had the problem of writing down something completely different in my head. I am going to be dramatic but Dragon Naturally Speaking has completely changed my life – I can pick out what I want to say from my notes and it types it down.'

A staff training session was undertaken to highlight the strategies students with disabilities employ based on the case studies. The case studies also form part of the annual disability training session for new academic staff.

### **3. Unintended Outcomes**

- Liaison with the local Life Long Learning Network. The Learner Support Co-ordinator acted as an adviser to a project which reviewed study skills support for HE students and in particular students from a vocational background.
- Liaised with member of staff from SCAT to help prepare a list of questions around learner support for investigation as part of her trip to the community colleges in Connecticut, USA. During her visit the Learner Support Team participated in a video conference with staff from one of the community colleges to discuss issues in common.
- Participated in an initiative through the Regional Support Centre (RSC funded by JISC) to produce a case study with a student reviewing a piece of software produced by Accessibility Apps. In addition, a further video was produced in conjunction with JISC highlighting accessibility issues surrounding students using VLEs. The clip was then made available on the JISC website.
- Sharing of good practice regarding dyslexia screening with Manchester Metropolitan University
- The maths support tutor piloted an HE dyscalculia screener developed by Loughborough University as part of a national trial.
- A dyslexia screening service has been provided for students taking AMTRA exams. This is a fee paying service and depending on the results of the test, students may be eligible for extra time in their AMTRA exams only. This is an arrangement only with HAUC and students are advised, if appropriate, where they can undertake a full diagnostic assessment. This service was introduced to take into account that the

AMTRA students are part time and many are mature learners and unlikely to have current evidence of an SpLD.

- Liaison with an academic member of staff to produce an alternative form of assessment taking into account his disability. The student has produced a DVD instead of a written report to meet the assignment outcomes. This work has also involved the technical expertise of the e-learning team.

#### **4. Contribution to Overall Themes**

***Create a physical centre in the heart of the campus.....*** Location of Learner Support in the *Aspire* Centre has very much enabled the team to provide a professional 'one stop shop' service to students. Feedback from students indicated that they valued discrete access, individual rooms, improved facilities and the service being located in one place<sup>5</sup>. Additional services have been developed to take account of part time students which include the provision of screening to assess part time AMTRA students to have extra time in their examinations.

#### ***Fellowship and Staff Development Programmes...***

- Over the period of the project staff have attended 73 days of staff development in addition to 3 staff achieving a post graduate certificate in teaching students with dyslexia.
- The Learner Support Co-ordinator has undertaken a range a staff development activities including disability awareness training for new staff, amanuensis training and Learning & Teaching Forum sessions. A total of 24 sessions with 222 people attending have been delivered.
- In conjunction with Nicky Hunter (Senior Tutor for the Countryside courses), Jane Hill (Learner Support Co-ordinator) is currently undertaking an *Aspire* Fellowship entitled 'What is the range of assessment feedback provided by staff at Harper Adams University College and does the feedback help students to feedforward and improve their education skills?'

#### ***Harness Imagination and Creativity...***

The Learner Support Team has supported two *Aspire* Fellowship Awards submitted by Wolverhampton University and Worcester SFC.

- Worcester Sixth Form College has undertaken a pilot project entitled 'Supporting Learning through Technology' to assess the effectiveness of using a Z-pen as a tool to facilitate learning for students with study skills needs and specific learning difficulties.
- Wolverhampton University are investigating the important indicators of student progress for dyslexic students with a view to producing an Individual Learning Plan template that could be used by others in the sector.

#### ***Support Staff to disseminate their evaluation findings....***

Sarah Parsons, Learner Support Tutor is registered as a part-time research student with the Mathematics Education Centre at Loughborough University, working towards a PhD in Mathematics Education. She has presented papers at several conferences – please see the following link for further details:

<http://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/groups/engineering/profile.cfm?id=107>

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<sup>5</sup> Learner Support Survey June 2007

## 5. Extent of Collaborative Working

- Through the *Aspire* research fellowships, links have been made with Worcester 6<sup>th</sup> Form College and Wolverhampton University.
- Due to the increase in profile academic and support staff have often 'called in' to the *Aspire* Centre to discuss disability/study skills issues and how students could be supported.
- Sarah Parsons, Learner Support Tutor is registered as a part-time research student with the Mathematics Education Centre at Loughborough University, working towards a PhD in Mathematics Education. She has presented papers at several conferences – please see the following link for further details  
<http://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/groups/engineering/profile.cfm?id=107>
- The co-location of different departments ie Careers, Placement and English Language in the *Aspire* Centre has increased liaison between staff providing a more holistic student centred support.

## 6. Key Achievements of Work

There has been a significant increase in the support offered to students since the Learner Support Team relocated to the *Aspire* centre. This new location has increased the profile of Learner Support and enabled it to provide a more professional service in a discreet but accessible environment. The concept of a 'one stop shop' has encouraged students to use all aspects of the service and in particular it has proved to be a very suitable environment for students to book and utilise 1:1 support sessions. Anecdotal evidence from current students indicates that the service Learner Support provides is the one of reasons students choose Harper Adams.

Feedback from a recent survey<sup>6</sup> of service users indicated that overall students were very positive and they felt that the LST encouraged and supported learners to overcome their difficulties, was well organised, worked efficiently and communicated exceptionally. The Learner Support Team was short listed in October 2009 for a 'THE' award in the category 'Outstanding Support for Students' recognising the support delivered to students across the institution in a holistic manner.

## 7. Impact after the *Aspire* Programme

The Learner Support Team has developed greatly over the period of the *Aspire* programme and the legacy of these changes will continue after June 2010. The increase in staffing and improved facilities in terms of individual rooms and a room dedicated for dyslexia screening will continue to be funded/provided. From September 2010, the Learner Support Team will be located in the new student services building and the increased provision of accommodation in the *Aspire* centre has formed the basis of the new facilities allocated on the top floor of the building. The success of the *Aspire* project played a major role in the decision to allocate resources in the new building on a similar basis to the provision in the *Aspire* Centre. The increased profile and professionalism of the Learner Support Team resulting in increased use of the service will be the main legacy after the *Aspire* programme.

## 8. Key Messages

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<sup>6</sup> Learner Support Survey June 2007

The *Aspire* Centre has played a key role in developing liaison with academic members of staff to help support students with disabilities and the provision of study skills support for all students. Referrals have increased with staff suggesting to students to 'pop across to the *Aspire* Centre to see what support they can offer' as opposed to saying 'go and see Learner Support in room.....' This 'branding' has increased the profile of Learner Support Team resulting in an increased number of students accessing the services.

With the move of the Learner Support Team in September 2010 to the new student services building, careful consideration is required as to how the success of this brand name can be transferred. Would it be possible to transfer the name '*Aspire*' /or develop a new name to represent the services (Learner Support, Careers, Placement and English Language Support) which will be located on the top floor of the new building to ensure that we continue to build on the success and reputation of the *Aspire* project.