



Department
for Education

**EDUCATION & TRAINING
FOUNDATION**



ORGANISATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR WORKING WITH A LOCAL AUTHORITY (LA)

PAPER FOUR

Organisational arrangements for working with a local authority (LA)

Following the SEND reforms and the changes to the commissioning arrangements, organisations may find it challenging to liaise effectively, in a context where:

- **they work with several LAs, which have very different transition arrangements and expectations**
- **the communication channels and lines of accountability are under-developed.**

The following case studies provide examples of ways in which organisations, in different contexts, have responded to the challenges.

1

Wirral Metropolitan College: an urban GFE

Developing productive contacts with the local authority

The challenge for senior managers with the introduction of the SEND reforms, was to build on their previous contacts with Council and special schools so that their provision matched current and anticipated needs, and they could prepare young people with SEND throughout the organisation for their anticipated outcomes.

The college's strategy is to make sure someone from the college attends key partnership meetings at all levels. Wirral Council chairs several regular multi-agency groups, which the managers sit on, with an aim of ensuring SEND provision is effective across the borough. The SEND Reforms Overview Group consists of representatives from colleges, schools, health, social care, parents

and the SEND team in the local authority, with the aim of ensuring the reforms are fully implemented. A college manager also sits on the Local Offer sub-group, the Preparation for Adulthood sub-group and the Transition Operational group.

These multi-agency partnership arrangements have meant that the college managers and other professionals have been involved in all stages of transition and planning from Year 7 in schools. They have been able to anticipate and plan for the changing cohorts studying at all levels in the college, including a growing cohort of young people with very complex needs, by recruiting and training staff to meet the specialism required. They have also made substantial improvements to their premises to accommodate a variety of needs. By playing a strategic role in the development and writing of EHC plans, and the establishment of a post-16 decision-making panel, they have been able to adapt and expand their curriculum and levels of specialist support.

In addition to the attendance at the Council's partnership meetings, the managers have continuing dialogue with the SEND team in Wirral Council. Operationally, members of the ALS team in the college liaise closely with the EHCP coordinators in the council. At a more strategic level, the Director of Student Support communicates with the SEN Manager at the council very regularly (as a minimum, once per fortnight but often several times in a week). These discussions cover

strategic issues around costs, provision and planning, as well as operational issues around any particularly difficult or contentious cases.

As the number of referrals from Cheshire West and Chester Council increase managers have focused on building similar strategic relationships which have resulted in an increased number of enrolments from that area and has filtered down into strong operational partnerships regarding individual students.

2

Salford City College: a large GFE in an urban setting

Developing a structure for working with Local Authorities following the SEND reforms

The challenge for the managers was to develop a management structure that enabled them to simplify and streamline the communication channels and paperwork trails following the introduction of the SEND reforms. They found that members of staff were working with five LAs, all with

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Wirral Metropolitan College

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different arrangements. Managers identified that there were too few opportunities for exchange of information, and too much duplication.

The strategy adopted by the managers was to develop strong, meaningful relationships with the LAs, with an agreed annual structure for meetings. In order to arrive at this structure, managers invited key LA members, including the Principal Officer, SEN officer and caseworkers, into college to discuss the challenges both organisations encounter in completing and reviewing EHC plans. Through discussion, they have identified the LA structure and the key people to link with. This has enabled them to streamline the number of LA contacts and strengthen the way the process works.

These meetings provided an opportunity to explain to the LA staff involved in writing the draft EHC plans, how support is set up in college, what support is available to students and how the teaching and learning are structured and delivered. This then provided a framework for the LA to write outcomes for the young person. The arrangements are now simplified, with clear lines of responsibility for nominated managers and clear lines of liaison and accountability for each stage of the process, that articulate with the arrangements for support across the college.

Other structural strategies encountered by The Inclusion Circle team that have been seen to be successful:

a. A GFE college with multiple LA commissioners for SEND provision.

The managers adopted a strategy in which at least two members of staff, to include one senior staff member, attend key SEND meetings with the Councils. The members of staff in college attend monthly meetings to disseminate relevant information. This ensures that the knowledge about the Council and the key personnel is widely distributed, thus avoiding a situation where only one person knows what is happening.

b. A GFE college where there has been a constant change of the SEND official from the Local Authority

The managers adopted a strategy in which the current, interim, official was invited to spend a day in the college to go through all of the EHC plans and agree the expected outcomes. This meeting was arranged as soon as the interim official was appointed, to ensure continuity of understanding. The notes of the meetings identified the agreements reached. In this way, everyone, including any new LA official could be clear about what had been agreed, so that this could be picked up by any new official of college staff member.

REFLECTION

The responses of the LAs to the SEND reforms are particularly variable, and the case studies above provide examples of the ways in which a few organisations have responded to the challenges they face.

How confident are you that the liaison and communications with the LA are helpful in enabling young people to benefit from a programme that meets their needs?

- ☐ Very confident
- ☐ reasonably confident
- ☐ not very confident
- ☐ not at all confident

Where you are not sufficiently confident, what aspects of the communications are not working satisfactorily?

What strategies/interventions might you use to overcome these?

