

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

**Student Voice: The Role of the Learning Support Assistants
within offender education: can they enhance the teaching and
learning offer?**

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EDUCATION AT HMP DOVEGATE (SERCO)

- Category B prison in rural Staffordshire
- Broad curriculum offer vocational/non vocational
- Last Ofsted report: Grade 3 requires improvement
- Education in North College – Main population
- Education in South College – Vulnerable students
- Therapeutic prison – Therapy plus Education
- 40 tutors in the Education Team
- 4 administrative assistants

Learning Support Assistants (LSAs)

- Opportunities for students (inmates) to become Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) in classrooms and workshops in the Education provision.
- Students need to have achieved levels 1 and 2 in Numeracy and Literacy, be an enhanced prisoner, record of good behaviour, recommended by a tutor or member of staff. Undertaken studies in the course/class they want to help out in.
- If the students do not pass the above criteria they are given a role of Learning Mentor until they have completed their level 1 & 2 in Numeracy and Literacy, this is a training role.
- These students are offered the PTTLS Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning course to enhance their skills to help out and be more prepared in the classroom and workshop setting.
- By mutual agreement between LSAs and tutors they are allocated to different classes and workshops to gain experience and this should be linked to their future employability plans.

DUTIES OF THE LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANT (INMATE)

- Assist the tutor with the teaching/learning experience.
- Help individual students on a one-to-one and group setting.
- Display a pro-social attitude and be a role model.
- Mentoring and supporting learners.
- Keeping records up to date as required by the tutor.
- Enhancing the classroom environment on a regular basis.
- Attending the Level 2 Peer Mentoring course and the Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTTLS) course and other courses when required.

THE LSA STUDY

- To explore from the LSA perspective, their views about their role; the value they felt they added in enhancing learning opportunities and their views on how they felt their role could be further developed to support the enhancement of teaching and learning for the institution.
- **ETHICAL FRAMEWORK** – of the British Education Research Association 2011 and Nottingham Trent University Code of Ethics (2013). The HMP Dovegate ethical framework was also adhered to in the design of this research project.
- 9 LSAs agreed to participate in the interview which took between 10 and 20 minutes duration. Field notes were made during the interviews. Analysis of the collected information was undertaken thematically.
- Detailed field notes were made during the interviews. Analysis of the collected information was undertaken thematically.

Benefits/Limitations – the role of the LSA

BENEFITS

It is a comfortable atmosphere.

As an offender, understand the stresses of prison life.

Common ground with other learners.

Status – support for teachers.

Valued – by teachers and learners.

To advise people.

LIMITATIONS

Length of session; no breaks in class times.

Education - £1.50 per session; £3.50 as LSA.

Nice to help people learn

When I was sentenced I lost everything, by being an LSA can reconnect with self, given an opportunity, a second chance.

I was invited by the teacher to do a mentor course

Asked to think about becoming an LSA by teacher

Self motivated and willing to learn

Willing to learn – self motivation

I was chosen to do the role by the teacher

I get along with people

LSA
FEEDBACK &
COMMENTS

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Developments for the role

- To work with teachers to develop lessons.
- Mentor meetings with teachers to discuss issues.
- Group sessions.
- Development of the value of listening to people.
- Creation of space for conversation and discussion.

PERSONAL GROWTH, AMBITIONS AND FUTURE EMPLOYABILITY

- Ability to interact
- How to 'push' people
- Development of confidence
- Positive attitude
- To empathise
- Development of patience
- Working and dealing with different people
- Recognition of the value of education – following experience of compulsory education where expelled repeatedly
- Keen to achieve qualifications for future employability.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

- The value to the student (inmate) of being and Learning Support Assistant helps the student to progress in furthering their qualifications, helps with re-categorisation decisions throughout their prison sentence, helps with employability skills for future release back in society.
- Supports the teachers and the class which is paramount in the lower level classes where more one-to-one support is required.
- Studying the L2 Peer Mentoring and PTTLS qualifications helps with future employability skills.
- All the Learning Support Assistants were participating to help students and tutors and not for monetary gain of the payment from the prison.
- Need to ensure we have regular Learning Support Assistant meetings to develop their role.
- Need to ensure the role is linked for future employability.

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